

The Millennium King Arthur:

**The Commodification of the
Arthurian Legend in the 20th Century**

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that the content of this thesis is my own work and that all sources used in its preparation have been acknowledged.

Signature.....

Date

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents who would be astonished and delighted at this unusual undertaking by their son.

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The author particularly acknowledges the stimulation and encouragement of his supervisor, Dr. Rachel Bloul.

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Abstract

The prophesy that King Arthur will return has come true. This legendary icon of Western civilization lives again in the popular culture novels of contemporary and futuristic literature. While the king's personality has changed little since Malory, the monarch is now often found as a superhero in new world settings: he has become a Celtic space traveller among the stars, a modern politician fighting corruption, a WWII fighter pilot, a battler of aliens, and even returns as a teenage boy.

Wherever he goes, King Arthur encounters a variety of personalised evil opponents from his medieval past as well as futuristic aliens and monsters. The authors and publishers of Arthurian popular culture have commodified the Arthurian legend, turning the king into an Americanised romantic superhero who overcomes his opponents but mostly fails to meet the reality of modern socio-economic challenges.

The king has a limited understanding of what constitutes evil in the modern world so that despite his worthy character as a role model, his grasp of action required to overcome injustice constitutes a major shortcoming. The reasons for this are sought among the authors and publishers that produced these novels, and among the literary critics and the sociological literature focusing on the linkages between literature and society.

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Introduction

King Arthur has left Avalon, is alive and is among us now. Future worlds and lands of fantasy will all witness the return of the king as prophesied. This thesis reviews Arthur's current and future literary reincarnations and asks how he has weathered the centuries since he first came to our attention. The complexity and variety of stories surrounding Arthur's legend cannot possibly be captured in a brief summary, yet an outline of the major elements of the legend is necessary prior to discussing current versions.

Core Legend

The legendary King Arthur was conceived in a plot engineered by the wizard Merlin whose price demanded the child be given to him for adoption. This was the beginning of a long relationship with Merlin as Arthur's protector and advisor. The young Arthur first proved his status as King by withdrawing his famous sword Excalibur from an anvil embedded in a large boulder, a sword later claimed from the Lady of the Lake and ultimately returned to her as Arthur lay dying.

A major threat to Arthur arose when the enchantress Morgan, his half-sister, seduced him with the resulting birth of their illegitimate son, Mordred. Merlin had warned Arthur that if Mordred lived he would become the king's mortal nemesis. Nine months later, Arthur's response was the premeditated mass murder of all newborn males in his realm by putting them out to sea. Only Mordred survived. The sin and guilt of incest and infanticide haunted King Arthur ever after.

A second threat to Arthur's early reign was the intense rivalry among competing petty monarchs who challenged Arthur's hegemony. After

many bloody battles, Arthur defeated his rivals, subdued the invading Saxons and became the first overall king of a unified Britain. When Arthur married Guenevere, her father gave him a Round Table and 100 knights but she gave the king no heir.

During a temporary peace in the conflict with the Saxons, the castle Camelot was built on a hill overlooking the Isle of Apples. Peace was never long lasting, and in some versions of the story, King Arthur went to war against the armies of Europe, defeated them and was crowned Emperor of Rome. Adding to the complexity of the plot, Queen Guenevere became romantically involved with Sir Lancelot du Lac, her favourite knight who was loved by Arthur as well. This tragic relationship with strong political overtones was never resolved. King Arthur could never escape the Queen's infidelity with Lancelot, a situation endlessly embellished by numerous authors and scholars. The Knights of the Round Table, also concerned over the lack of an heir to the throne, urged Arthur to discipline or abandon Guenevere. They were sent on quests to discover the miraculous Holy Grail. The discoverer turned out to be Lancelot's son, Galahad, from his marriage with Elaine.

When King Arthur was away on the invasion of France, Mordred seized the throne of Britain and would have forced Guenevere to be his queen had she not escaped. Hearing of this, the king returned from abroad to battle Mordred's forces. In hand-to-hand combat Mordred was killed by his father who himself was mortally wounded by Mordred. After Excalibur was returned to the lake of its origin, four Queens took Arthur by boat to the fabled land of Avalon. According to some chroniclers, Arthur was not killed, but will return again in time of need.

Hic iacet Arthurus Rex quondam Resque futurus

The death of Arthur ended the tragedy of Camelot. Without a strong leader with vision and armies to combat the continued invasions of Saxons, the realm fell into tatters. Guinevere went into a convent where she died, while Lancelot became a hermit and, according to some accounts, went mad.

It will be clear from even this brief summary that the character of King Arthur was a revered leader of men who excelled on the battlefield in numerous British and European campaigns. His vision of a unified Britain free of foreign invaders, his success in bringing this about however temporarily, and the magic of Camelot are all elements that have surrounded this heroic figure for generations. In the core legend King Arthur does not doubt his identity or role at court or on the battlefield. Whether or not King Arthur was a mythic warrior presiding over a utopian Camelot, or a failed indecisive King whose inevitable downfall was brought about by the sin of incest and infanticide is still being debated. Regardless of the 'truth' in the matter, the legend survives to be examined and re-examined by scholars in several disciplines.

There are a number of significant issues appearing in contemporary reconstructions of the legend that are quite different from the core legend and which deserve brief mention. The major challenges confronting the king previously mainly arose in the form of rival kings, invading Saxons, the political instability and grief caused by the love affair between Guenevere and Lancelot. Note that these very real threats are human as opposed to the decidedly evil Morgan and Mordred together with non-human beings such as demons or aliens. The confrontation Arthur has with these opponents is not structured in terms of good versus evil as is often the case in later reconstructions. Finally, the Arthurian legend is based on a mythical reformulation of the Middle Ages with associated trappings of the court, Christian values and those of heroism, loyalty,

honour and chivalry. The early Arthurian has a more complex social context embracing the action than is given by contemporary authors.

Popularity, Persistence and Evolution of the Legend

There has been an enormous increase in the popularity of Arthurian fiction in the post-war period, especially since the 1980s. (See Raymond H. Thompson's Introduction to *The Return From Avalon*, 1985.) The focus of this thesis is on this limited period of about 25 years only. During this time, new versions of the Arthurian have grown to meet the burgeoning demand for science fiction and particularly for fantasy. The current popularity of the legendary monarch is beyond dispute as he can be found in film, television productions, popular literature and even musical comedy. How do we account for this popularity when the king must compete with all manner of comparable heroes and superheroes such as The Phantom, Superman, Batman, Spiderman as well as larger than life characters in westerns, detective fiction, space opera and others? There is something about the Arthurian legend, drawn mainly from the Middle Ages, that resonates deep within us as it reflects universal themes of good vs. evil, heroism, honour, love, loyalty, shame and betrayal.

The popularity of the Arthurian legend also results from the stature and character of the mythical figure that King Arthur has occupied in literature and public perception. The King of all Britain has been regarded as an ideal military leader and ruler over a nearly utopian society symbolized in the court of Camelot. It was Nennius who was responsible for shaping King Arthur as the patriotic British Christian warrior, the victor in the battle of Badon, and the defender of his nation. The circumstances surrounding Arthur's 'death' adds to the mystery that includes belief in a secular saviour who will return in a time of need, a common feature in several reconstructions of the legend.

The impact of the Arthurian legend on the British public particularly and on Western literature cannot be exaggerated. Elizabeth Jenkins puts it well when she writes:

The development of the myth, the pertinacity with which people have held to it, been eager to repeat and add to it, and see in it a reflection of their own interests and needs is like nothing else in our history (Jenkins, 1975: 214).

Archaeological and historical studies do not reveal the existence of a 5th or 6th century king known as King Arthur at the time he was thought to exist. The familiar legend of Arthur is actually based on a variety of literary productions from British and French sources in the Middle Ages. The earliest significant source in the development of the legend appeared from the pen of Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century. It was Geoffrey, in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, who first introduced the characters of Merlin, Guenevere and Mordred for example. The best-known Arthurian saga however is that of Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, published in 1485. Malory combined the English chronicle tradition with French romances that introduced the character of Lancelot du Lac for the first time and established the tragic love affair between Lancelot and Guenevere. There is no monolithic, integrated agreed-upon version of the legend, but rather a multiplicity of tales producing a variety of Arthurs and interpretations of his character. These recreations are still proceeding, with some taking the form of historical fiction and others ranging from modern fiction to the genres of science fiction and fantasy.

The writing of Arthurian fiction goes well beyond mere entertainment, however. Hoffman and Carley, contributors to *Culture and the King*, see the legend as being used to reconfirm a culture's self-perception and even help to bring about shifts in self-perception (See Shichtman and Carley, 1994:7). Stephen Knight's *Arthurian Literature and Society* (1983) has demonstrated how the Arthuriad has been structured by shifting social

conditions and used to promote particular political purposes. Certainly the cultural values at the time of writing are reflected in reformulations through the centuries, varying with the origin of the authors, their motives and biases. Academia is full of Arthurian scholars in many disciplines who have helped keep the legend alive and demonstrated the social and political functions of the Arthurian legend. Steven Knight, for example, has made us aware of the need to examine the ruling forces in each period of Arthuriana to see how the cultural support-system of the time related to different forms of authority in power in current versions of the legend.

Methodology

The image of King Arthur in most of these novels departs dramatically from the legendary image, and also from expectations of what a contemporary Arthur might be like. The reasons for this will be found in the pages that follow. Briefly, the stature of King Arthur has degenerated as he becomes absorbed into popular culture. The authors and publishers of mass-marketed modern Arthuriana have provided the monarch with only a simplified, commodified version of the legend.

One would hope that a modern King Arthur would offer the vision of a better future embracing the values of his past and those of Camelot. None of this happens. Instead we are offered a caricature of the former king whose main concern is thwarting evil demons, some of whom have returned as villainous criminals. Significant real threats to society are largely unrecognised or ignored. In addition, our image of the 'traditional' King Arthur includes his leadership of a band of knights, whereas in this and future worlds the Round Table stalwarts have largely disappeared, as has any evidence of real leadership despite a few exceptions.

Have we given up on King Arthur and his ability to ‘hold back the Darkness’? What accounts for this debasement of one of Western civilization’s most enduring icons and what meaning can the king have for us today? The following pages will show what has happened to the king and suggest the reasons for it.

A search was undertaken to identify all popular mass-marketed novels and related material of the last 25 years that featured King Arthur. The search was restricted to post-World War II Arthurian literature. There are several reasons for imposing this limitation. The first was to bring up to date several aspects of the Arthurian literature review by Raymond Thompson in his book, *The Return From Avalon* published in 1985, and to avoid any duplication with this book. Thomson’s publication included Arthurian literature with broad settings in the Dark Ages, High Middle Ages, contemporary society, science fiction and fantasy together with coverage of the entire Arthurian legend and details on its many characters.

The type of novels in the present thesis are more restricted and focused than those in Thomson’s book, not only in terms of the time settings of the novels but also in type of content. The novels in this thesis date from the cut-off of Thomson’s book, about 1979, and are focused entirely on novels with contemporary, future and otherworld settings. No ancient or historical romances are included.

The public has a fascination with variations on the Arthurian legend that take place in the Dark and Middle Ages, so in response some authors enjoy writing recreations of the legend based on the cultural differences found there. On the other hand, there is a price to pay. There are lessons to be learned from an analysis of a contemporary and/or future Arthur faced with issues within our own society and in future worlds. There are

also revelations to be found in the influence of contemporary and future societies on the character and role of the past monarch. Among these are sociological themes dealing with leadership, current threats to society, and the role of women and the mass marketing of King Arthur as he enters the cultural field of popular culture.

For the above reasons, novels set in the ancient past are not included among the novels selected and the summary reviews of the novels selected emphasize features relevant to a sociological analysis so they are necessarily brief. The present concern is mainly concentrated on the development of the central iconic figure of King Arthur himself in order to show how the king adapts to new cultures far different from his ancient past, the evolution of Arthur's character, his motives, relationships and confrontation new types of challenges.

The selected novels fall into three broad groups: 1) those located in our own, contemporary society which were expected to demonstrate how King Arthur faced familiar challenges to our own world; 2) those with the action set in the future, expected to reveal significantly different societies than those found in the 20th century and to show how this impacts on the character of King Arthur and 3) science fiction, science fantasy or fantasy novels that can be described as science fiction, fantasy or science-fantasy revealing a context of unbounded imagination and innovation.

In addition to avoiding duplication with Raymond Thompson, the thesis is designed to project a sociological enquiry into this and future worlds expected to reflect concerns we experience in our own society. From this gleaning of the literature, we may come to entirely different conclusions from Thompson and others.

Contemporary, science fiction and fantasy Arthuriana is in itself a new genre within the field of cultural production and the mass-marketing of literature with its associated vested interests. This is an important feature arising from the data base of 23 Arthurian novels and a further reason for selecting a contemporary approach.

Textual analysis is not applied to a single text in this thesis but rather to the entire group of texts. The approach is more sociological than literary and the interpretation of these texts is of two types: 1) a comparison of themes among the 23 novels selected, and 2) a comparison of the Arthurian legend in historical accounts, with Arthurian literature in the latter half of the 20th century. The issue of historical context is particularly important in terms of cultural production and readership.

It will be seen by this approach and consistent with the application of textual analysis, there is no single text that can be said to be more accurate than any other, nor are claims of 'quality' relevant since all novels considered are equal entries into the data base. It should also be clear that the methodology used does not lend itself to semiotics.

Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, published in 1485 by William Caxton, was a major publishing event in England at the time. This was a very early publication in the English language and proved to be very popular. Caxton was active in translating and publishing a wide range of books aimed at what A.R. Myers writes was Caxton's conservative public (p.250). *Le Morte D'Arthur* was England's first work in poetic prose and became established as a living classic to the present day.

Myers also tells us that Malory's stories were superior to the general mediocrity of English literature in the late fifteenth century, apparently intended for a popular audience (252). It is seen here that even in the early

years of English publishing there were two markets for books just as there are today. Today however both cultural production for the mass media and consumers of the media are enormously different when compared with the late 15th century when media culture was less pervasive. This is a subject that will be taken up in following pages.

The libraries of the Australian National Library, The Australian National University, and the Australian Capital Territory were canvassed in the search for material. In addition, local and international booksellers were contacted and many of the books identified were purchased together with several significant reference works and materials. Journal articles and other leads were found on the Internet that contains an academic website called Arthuriana, and an Internet discussion group entitled Arthurnet. The assistance of interested friends and academics also played a part.

The search for material produced 23 novels that met the criteria, most of them mass-marketed paperbacks from the mid-1980s. Each of these books is summarized in the following chapters. There cannot be a strict dividing line when it comes to science fiction, science fantasy and pure fantasy. Unfortunately very little hard-core science fiction featuring King Arthur has been produced. The focus of the analysis is on the character and role of King Arthur himself and does not attempt to assess the recapitulation of the entire legend. Finally, no novel (with one exception) is included in which a proxy for King Arthur is the major character.

The group of 23 books cannot claim to be exhaustive but they do comprise all mass marketed novels available from the sources mentioned, and are representative of the current crop of Arthuriana in these categories. These books vary enormously in terms of literary 'quality' but assessment of 'quality' is not a major objective. Most, if not all the books qualify as adult fiction. Limitations of space prevent inclusion of detailed

comments or reviews from academics or literary critics, but readers interested in pursuing the subject further are encouraged to consult the bibliography.

Literary scholars may dismiss this body of mass-marketed literature on the grounds that these paperbacks lack substance or deviate too far from serious Arthuriana. The approach taken in this thesis is that these novels constitute a legitimate body of sociological data that has significance as we examine the relationship of this type of literature to our society today. In particular, it shows how the alteration of the Arthurian legend meets popular demand for action-oriented stories. Finally, this literature embodies values that are linked to the economic and social status quo insofar as these examples of popular culture are a reflection of social demand as well as instruments in the creation of that demand and the perpetuation of the social values they contain.

As sociological wealth has been found in past transformations of the Arthurian legend, so it is now as Arthur returns today, in the future, and in fairyland. It must be stressed that these 23 novels constitute the primary data and source material on which the thesis is based. Twentieth-century Arthurian novels offer a body of work within cultural production, being part of the study of literature and society. As in the case of any literary production according to cultural studies, these novels contribute to the social meanings of literature and its relationship to cultural consumption, social control and power among other things. It is quite clear for example that this secular, individualized and commodified Arthur is indirectly associated with contemporary Western capitalist values and dominant political themes.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. It begins with summaries of the novels under consideration. This is followed by analysis and

conclusions of the major themes. Analysis is not applied to each book separately but to the group as a whole for comparisons of significant themes and issues. Current sociological theory leads to a better understanding of the underlying meaning and significance of these examples of contemporary popular culture.

It is the position of the writer that sociological research and analysis can and should be both empirical and politically engaged. By empirical is meant that conclusions and hypotheses arise from observable data and politically engaged means that conclusions are related to issues or problems of significance to contemporary society. While it may appear on the surface as a frivolous undertaking by the author, the thesis addresses issues of communication and reality that are central to contemporary society. This orientation helps to explain the somewhat deviant assessment of the role and legacy of King Arthur.

This thesis aims at answering a number of questions raised by the gleaming of modern Arthuriana.

- How is the Arthurian legend transformed in contemporary novels?
- How successfully does King Arthur adapt to societies in the future and in fantasyland?
- What identity or identities does King Arthur assume and how are these different from his past?
- What are the effects of the commodification of Arthur and the legend at the hands of authors and publishers who dominate the mass market? What is the impact of public expectations, a reading public used to romantic superheroes in graphic novels or acting out witless arcade-games?
- How do contemporary Arthurian novels reflect current society and social concerns, particularly social evil?

- Modern Arthurian novels are exclusively found within mass-marketed popular culture. How does this affect the legend and Arthur himself?
- Who are the authors and publishers of Arthurian novels and how do they affect the legend?
- What is the sociological significance of contemporary Arthurian novels and what political values are embodied in them? What values are knowingly or unknowingly promoted by the authors of these novels?
- Who are the women in King Arthur's life and what influence do they have on his behaviour?
- What meaning does King Arthur have for us today? If the image of King Arthur differs significantly from his image in the past, what accounts for the changes in this icon of Western culture?
- What are the effects of the commodification of the legend at the hands of authors and publishers who dominate the mass-market? What is the impact of the expectations of the public used to romantic superheroes in action-oriented films, computer and arcade games?

These questions arose in part at the outset of the research but they were modified as the work progressed as it became apparent that both the legend and character of King Arthur had undergone substantial transformations. Of course one would expect that a modern Arthurian monarch would not mimic his past character entirely, yet what has happened in the evolution of King Arthur is much more basic. This can be seen in the similarities among the novels reviewed. Considering his past characterizations, it would be expected that in returning, Arthur would necessarily accept challenges or threats within contemporary society that produce stress or disequilibrium of the social fabric.

Why does the image of King Arthur in most of these novels depart so dramatically from the image of the past and also from expectations of what a contemporary Arthur might be like? There are several answers to this in the pages that follow. Briefly, the stature of King Arthur has degenerated as he becomes absorbed into popular culture. The authors and publishers of mass-marketed modern Arthuriana have provided the king with only a simplified, version of the legend. The genre of literature termed 'sword and sorcery' describes what has become of the classic myth. This transformation of the iconic monarch of Camelot says much about the role of the media in the production of images in our society.

Chapter 1 will take up the legend of King Arthur in contemporary literature and its relationship to our society.

Chapter 1. King Arthur, Literature and Society

The sociology of literature has not generally been a major interest among sociologists. A review of mainstream professional sociological journals failed to uncover serious articles dealing with the sociology of novels compared with more empirical studies or problem-based topics. Wendy Griswold, writing in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, charges that the problem is a lack of structure in the field of sociology of literature which she describes as a “non-field” (Griswold, 1993:466). This lack of interest is a real loss to sociology for as this thesis will demonstrate, mass-marketed popular culture novels are a rich source of insights into our contemporary society.

The study of literature and society now includes the genre of popular culture where 20th century Arthurian novels are located. The novels selected for this thesis can be considered an empirical case study within a theoretical framework of concepts provided by Pierre Bourdieu and his followers. This major contemporary sociologist is said to have made “the most successful attempt to make sense of the relationship between objective social structures and everyday practices” and brings cultural analysis into the center of sociology (Webb:2002vi).

Bourdieu’s major contribution to the field is an empirically based work, *‘Distinction’*, a study of concrete social phenomena based on extensive survey data. This study reveals Bourdieu’s theoretical underpinnings that stress a focus combining both social structure and individual action. Bourdieu makes the distinction between ‘pure taste’ and barbarous taste and shows that among his respondents, “taste classifies and classifies the classifier”. Bourdieu demonstrates in *Distinction* that preferences in literature are closely linked to social origin, occupation, family and education. The placement of different positions in the social system are

thus linked to different social classes and class fractions which Bourdieu calls habitus, i.e. the dispositions and distinctions produced by the absorption of values and dispositions by these different classes. In terms of literary preferences, there is a social hierarchy of consumers whose tastes are a marker of their class.

Bourdieu concludes from his study in *Distinction* that there are two-types of cultural production: restricted and large scale. Large-scale production and consumption includes the products of popular literature such as the 23 Arthuriana novels presented here. These works would be associated with the educational level of consumers according to Bourdieu and Habermas. How this comes about is explained by Habermas:

Indeed, mass culture has earned its rather dubious name precisely by achieving increased sales by adapting to the need for relaxation and entertainment on the part of consumer strata with relatively little education, rather than through the guidance of an enlarged public toward appreciation of a culture undamaged in its substance (Habermas 165).

In present day society of America and Australia, this close association with educational level seems unlikely with rising educational levels and the growth of the middle class, all of which blurs rigid class lines. Such production needs the widest possible demand in the market place, hence the so-called middle-brow consumption of art and literature depends on a large-scale public demand.

It is argued in this thesis that an analysis of Arthurian literary productions of the late 20th century contribute to the social meanings of literature through its relationship to Bourdieu's concepts of cultural production, cultural consumption, social control and power. Culture has been penetrated by the commercial media seeking profit through the dissemination of commodities. The Arthurian legend, including King

Arthur himself, is one such set of commodities illustrating this penetration.

This argument will be elaborated and illustrated in following chapters.

One of Bourdieu's central concepts that assists in interpreting contemporary Arthurian novels is that of the cultural field.

A cultural field can be defined as a series of institutionalised, rules, rituals, conventions, concepts, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy and which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities (Webb p.43-44).

A cultural field is Bourdieu's way of representing sites of cultural practise, of which the production of popular Arthuriana is one such field. Cultural production within the cultural field has an important influence on the creation of national identity through images that define us and our values, an influence that will be taken up in later pages. Cultural production is linked to the field of power and associated economic, cultural and symbolic capital. The role of the publishing industry, taken up in later pages, is one such example embedded in current Arthuriana.

Bourdieu reveals in *Distinction* that cultural consumption is a way different class factions identify themselves, asserting in one case a superior status which consciously or unconsciously strives to become a dominant class, thus making culture a part of class politics and responsible in part for social reproduction. Literary Arthuriana can be compared with the commodified king produced for mass consumption, an example of taste paralleling class distinctions. The field of restricted literary production is associated with "high art" which is not found in mass-produced Arthurian literature nor does it appear in this thesis.

Arthurian popular literature of the late 20th century may be approached from several perspectives but this and the next chapter outlines the analytical context of the thesis within the sociology of the novel of popular culture. It is important to understand the cultural context of the Arthurian story in the past as well as today, particularly in terms of the changing character of Arthur himself as he reflects the changing parameters of contemporary society. As Joseph Campbell has written, the hero evolves as the culture evolves.

In Pierre Bourdieu's major work, *Distinction*, cultural analysis is brought into the center of sociology for the purpose of analysing the dynamics of social domination (Seidman, 2004: 152). Among his basic concepts is the notion of cultural capital and consumption. Cultural consumption, for example, is a way different class factions identify themselves and assert a status within society that makes culture a part of class politics. In the case of modern Arthuriana, the expectation is that readers of popular culture action novels are unlike readers of classic Western literature or the authors of the Booker prize. The appearance of Arthur in the 'high culture' of Malory is clearly to be distinguished from the commodified Arthur in recent science fiction and fantasy.

King Arthur is usually first encountered through one of the many recitations of the legend that surround this character and carries him forward to the present day. A legend is an oral or written narrative of human actions thought to have taken place within human history. It has the ring of 'truth' about it as the action could have been possible. The critical term here is human, for King Arthur always appears as definitely human – he has no supernatural powers, performs no miracles and usually represents the power of Good over Evil in protecting society from a variety of threats.

Legend must be distinguished from myth with which it is often confused. Myths are usually associated with the supernatural, are believed to explain natural events, the creation of human kind, are usually sacred and involve a deity or deities. Many legends and narratives passed down orally from generation to generation may have mythic content.

The study of myth and legend can reveal much about the image of King Arthur. Joseph Campbell is especially perceptive in describing the history and characteristics of mythical heroes. King Arthur shares many of these characteristics yet differs in several respects. The mythical hero or heroine has usually done something that goes beyond the normal range of human achievements and experience, someone who has given their life to something beyond the self (Campbell, 1988: xviii). In today's popular novels, King Arthur never completely fulfils the role of the mythical hero whose adventures involves tests of strength, ordeals, trials or sacrifices. As we shall see, the contemporary Arthur is a purely secular individual whose purpose is not aimed at spiritual achievement nor creating a better society. In fact, in contrast to the mythical hero as characterised by Campbell, King Arthur is not a founder of a new age or a new religion or a new way of life (Campbell, 1988:136).

There is an absence of concern with spiritual or Christian values, and with perhaps the exception of *Avalon*, the individualized King lacks the moral authority one would expect. Arthur's only answer to representatives of evil is found in militant combat and not in conflict resolution.

The newly emerging King Arthur as a product of popular culture is found within cultural studies which explores the relationship of literature to society. The antecedents of sociological interest in popular culture begin with the controversy stirred up by the work of F. R. Leavis and Raymond Williams which developed into the field of cultural studies. Leavis

believed that the industrial revolution resulted in cultural decline associated with the production of mass marketed fiction as a popular commodity. Leavis distinguished the high value of “literature” from popular “fiction”, what became referred to as elite or high-brow literature as opposed to aesthetically poor mass cultural forms produced for a profit.

Raymond Williams demonstrated the value of searching for social meaning in the popular arts, an undertaking which came to be known as cultural studies and extended to popular culture. Williams and his followers thus dissolved the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. According to one commentator, Andrew Milner, “the move from literary to cultural studies can in fact be read as one from a modernist to a postmodernist discourse about culture” (Milner, 1996: 58).

Locating this thesis within the framework of popular culture avoids involvement in the somewhat sterile controversy over the respective merits of elite and popular literature. A more productive and sociological approach to literature and society includes some authors who apply a functional view to the role of literature in society. Some are critics who speculate that popular literature provides escapist fare for the masses, acting as an distraction from personal and social problems and/or reducing anxieties for example. Or, perhaps Sinclair Goodlad is right when he argues that while social solidarity used to be maintained by religious ritual, it is now maintained in part by popular literature and drama (Quoted in Hall, 1979:96).

This brief sketch in this and the previous chapter is aimed to show that the appropriate analytical home for contemporary, mass-produced Arthurian literature is within postmodern cultural studies, specifically through the analysis of popular culture which embraces the social

meanings of literature, its origins, relationship to power, social control, cultural consumption and the commodification of legends and characters such as King Arthur. For this reason, analysis of the 23 novels under examination excludes a structural or textual approach nor will semiotics and hermeneutics receive treatment. It must be admitted however that as a cross-disciplinary field of study, cultural studies can hardly qualify as a discipline in itself since it contains sociology, social theory, literary theory as well as cultural anthropology! Just as there is no clearly defined subject area, cultural studies lacks its own principles or methods.

Significant influential writers contributing to an understanding of the contemporary Arthurian literature in this thesis have been Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Pierre Bourdieu, Lucien Goldmann, and John Storey. Among the more recent reviews of sociology and literature are the works of John Hall and his book, *The Sociology of Literature*, and Andrew Milner's *Literature, Culture and Society*.

As sociologists began to focus on the function of literature as it reflected society, particularly its socio-economic aspects, the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools incorporated Marxism into cultural studies, leading to a new look into the sociology of culture. Stuart Hall, Director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies for 15 years, argues that only by tracing the connection between cultural meanings and social conditions can the ideological role of these meanings emerge (Seidman, 2004: 137). These meanings are not to be found in elite culture but appear in books, movies, television and popular music. The influence of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci on the Birmingham School is acknowledged as is his position that class domination does not flow only from economic and political power, but also in the effort to make the culture of the ruling groups dominant. The concept of "hegemony" was applied to this process. As Seidman writes, "the Birmingham School

sought to develop a tradition of critical social analysis that would be empirical as well as politically engaged” (Seidman, 2004:140). This thesis can be considered an empirical case study in this tradition.

The work on social class by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu supports this position further. Bourdieu locates cultural products, such as literature, directly in the realm of social conflict and power relations. Seidman writes that the overriding impulse of Bourdieu’s work is to bring culture into the center of sociology for the purpose of analysing the dynamics of social domination (Seidman, 2004:149).

A volume on cultural consumption by John Storey also follows this line with attention to postmodern cultural identities. He writes that:

What we consume reveals a great deal about who we are, who we want to be and how others see us. Cultural consumption is perhaps one of the most significant ways we perform our sense of self (Storey, 1999: 136).

This raises the issue of who it is that brings forward the Arthurian legend into the 20th century through mass-produced paperbacks, films and paperback novels?

One of the most influential theorists on the sociology of the novel is Lucien Goldmann who, as a critic of bourgeois society, applies a type of economic determinism to the form of the novel. Goldmann’s view is that production for the market, a characteristic feature in an individualistic society, is revealed on the literary plane in the form of the novel. Thus, there is a rigorous correspondence between the form of the novel and man’s relation to the market society (Goldmann, 1975:7). Both Goldmann and Bourdieu stress the interaction between the financial and cultural sectors of society, with Bourdieu finding a correspondence between literary forms and cultural hegemony. In the study at hand, no single

novel demonstrates this feature, but the group as a whole will do so as will be seen in the pages that follow.

Unfortunately, a review of recent mainstream professional sociological journals failed to uncover much interest in, or articles dealing with, the sociology of literature or the novel. The topic has nearly dropped out of sight in favour of more empirical studies or problem-based topics. Wendy Griswold, writing in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, charges that the problem is a lack of structure in the field of the sociology of literature which she describes as a “non-field” (Griswold, 1993:466).

Mary F. Rogers supports this conclusion, writing in a work entitled *Novels, Novelists and Readers*:

In the aggregate, literature has usually gotten second-class treatment in the hands of sociologists – treatment different from that accorded to religion, law, science, and other worlds where print and codification are central. As a result, the sociology of literature has estranged literary critics and stymied its own development (Rogers, 1991:14).

This is a real loss to sociology for as this thesis will show, popular culture novels can be a rich source of insights into our contemporary society. The next two chapters will introduce King Arthur into a new era and begin to summarize his most recent appearance in contemporary novels. These appearances as mass-marketed paperbacks show features not present in previous accounts and begin to suggest how the king has changed.

Chapter 2. King Arthur Returns To Contemporary, Future, and Other Worlds

Although this thesis is based on novels of the 20th century, the Arthurian Legend has antecedents stretching back to the 6th century. This brief sketch of the early sources is important to connect the present evolution of the legend to the works that established the iconic monarch in Western minds. The early fragmentary texts connecting a figure such as Arthur to the early history of Britain were written by Christian monks beginning with Gildas (about 540), Bede (about 731) and Nennius in the 800's. These sources help to set the scene but are hardly confirmed historical documents. None of these texts reveal or authenticate a historical King Arthur who remains a hidden mystery to the present. In addition, there have been no archaeological remains attributed to a King Arthur from the 6th century to the present day.

The Welsh monk Nennius wrote *History of the Britons* which includes the first and only historical account of Arthur's military career. Twelve battles are recorded, ending with the battle of Mons Badonious and its presumed victor in which a war leader, the *dux bellorum*, has been identified with Arthur. This was the beginning of the legend containing his lifetime reputation ensuring a special place in the memory of the British people (Barber, 1986: 24).

Hundreds of years after Nennius in the 12th century, an English cleric named Geoffrey of Monmouth produced his *History of the Kings of Britain*. This book is generally acknowledged as the greatest single contribution to Arthurian historical romance. Drawing on a variety of sources such as Welsh and French romances, the material on Arthur occupies about one third of the *History*. Geoffrey has created a national epic dear to the hearts of the British and taken up by succeeding authors for 600 years after his

death. According to Richard Barber, up to the beginning of the 19th century, it was Geoffrey's *History* rather than Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* that established the English conception of King Arthur.

Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain* is as much imagination and romance as it is factual history. Nevertheless we find the main ingredients of King Arthur's colourful epic including the role of Merlin in Arthur's arranged conception in Tintagel, the battle hardened warrior in the campaigns against the Saxons, the glory of the Camelot Court and his marriage to Guenevere. After a period of peace, King Arthur begins campaigns that result in the conquest of Ireland, Iceland, and large areas of northern Europe. His march on Rome, in retaliation for a demand for tribute, was interrupted by the news that his son Mordred had revolted and captured the Queen, and King Arthur returned to Britain. In the final hand-to-hand combat with Mordred, Mordred is killed, Arthur is fatally wounded and taken to Avalon from whence he is expected to return. These are a few of the legendary elements that continue to find their way into recent recitations of the story.

Recounting all the sources used by Geoffrey, including the contributions from Celtic mythology coming down from the oral tradition, and the French romances in particular, is a major task but those interested can find material in the bibliography or references included there.

Sir Thomas Malory added to the legend in a publication originally consisting of eight separate books. Malory is thought to have been born in 1410. The Caxon edition of 1485 brought Malory's compendium together in a single volume. *Morte D'Arthur* sees the incorporation of Lancelot and the Grail Quest into the story from French sources. Malory emphasized the elaboration of Arthur's court including the Knights of the Round Table, the theme of chivalry and the knights' code of behaviour.

Malory's definitive early work has been followed by innumerable books, poems, epics, romances and films up to the present day although there have been periods when popularity waned. The Celtic revival probably stimulated interest in Arthur who is mentioned in Celtic sources. Among the more recent novels concerning King Arthur are those by M.A. Bradley, M. Stewart, T.H. White and M. Twain. To pursue this topic further, the reader is referred to Raymond Thompson's *The Return From Avalon, A Study of the Arthurian Legend in Modern Fiction*.

Most classical and contemporary sources on the Arthurian legend depict a figure that would be familiar to us today. In fact, they are partially responsible for the stalwart model of masculinity familiar to the public. The king is regarded as physically strong, handsome, battle hardened and a leader of men. These traits together with his numerous exploits make him ideal material for a starring role within media culture, a popular icon identified as one among many superheroes. This characterization of King Arthur continues to the present time and is found in nearly all the novels under consideration in this thesis.

This portrayal of Arthur, although widely shared in the media and literature, is not universal. Sara Douglass, even though she describes King Arthur as 'the epitome of chivalric monarchy', works to undermine this popular image with evidence that points to the king's indecisiveness and moral weakness among other things. Putting up with the continued adultery of Guenevere and her inability to produce an heir is said to be Arthur's the most serious fault, reflecting badly on his personal and political position (Douglass, 1999:292).

Cultural production is inevitably linked to cultural consumption, two of Bourdieu's central concepts. In this chapter we encounter the media in its

many manifestations, which have penetrated culture in such a way that few can escape the tentacles. In the case of King Arthur, the commodified legend together with the monarch himself can be found in film, television, and radio as well as in contemporary novels. In the case of a recent popular film, 'Arthur', there is even a fan club.

King Arthur of today's novels shares many of the characteristics of popular superheroes who have a following in the form of organized fandom, but there is no such collectivity associated with King Arthur except for an official authorized website for the film 'Arthur', which is set in the 5th century. This is because King Arthur is not a pop idol such as a musical popstar or comic character, nor does he have a following among readers or viewers as do Harry Potter, Star Wars or Lord of the Rings, with their extravagant media productions that link the literature and/or movie with retail commodities. There is one popular newspaper and comic book hero however, Prince Valiant, a Knight of the Round Table, who performs courageous deeds during the time of King Arthur in the middle ages.

Serious followers of the King Arthur legend do have an academic journal, *Arthuriana*, and an Internet discussion group called Arthurnet. (See references in the bibliography.) In addition, it is likely that contemporary popularity of King Arthur has been stimulated by the revival of Celtic mythology including the claim of King Arthur's Celtic origins. This popularity has led to a commodified and consumable product, a part of media culture characterized by Kellner as an industrial culture based on mass production and dependent on large-scale markets for profit. Items within media culture are often those which have undergone commodification. Wikipedia provides an explanation of the process in everyday language:

The transformation of goods and services into a commodity and used to describe a process by which something which does not have an economic value is assigned a value, something previously untainted by commerce is modified for the market, transformed for the market into a relationship involving buying and selling (Wikipedia).

A significant book concerning media culture has been written by Douglas Kellner who writes:

A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their everyday identities (Kellner, 1995:1).

Though commodification did not begin with the literature surrounding King Arthur which has a noble history, but the explosion of Arthurian publications for the market is a relatively recent phenomena. In Marxist terms, commodification of a product results from the penetration of capital into cultural production (Terry Lovell in Storey, 1998:476).

It is clear that popular Arthurian literature has entered media culture as one of the commercial commodities produced within this system. Authors of recent Arthurian novels are not overly constrained by adherence to earlier legends based on British or Welsh chronicles or on French romantic sources. Authors of contemporary or future settings of the story have had the freedom to vary the character of King Arthur as well as his location in time, place and social milieu. The result is the appearance of a multiplicity of transformed Arthurs with not all of them sharing the characteristics of the 'traditional' or 'classical' king of popular perception.

There are also features among many of the mature Arthurs that resemble his image of the past, features shared with stories of many heroes in current and classical fiction and mythology. The hero or superhero is thus stereotypically human, a white male who is the epitome of masculine

vigour and prowess, physically strong and morally superior. He has special powers but they are limited.

Having said this, we may well ask what types of Arthur come into view today? There are essentially three which can be identified: 1) The Battle Warrior; 2) The Reformer; and 3) Other and New Age. These types will be found in the book summaries in later chapters.

Regardless of type, the plot of heroic stories within the current Arthuriad is essentially the same. Society is threatened by a disruptive, dangerous and powerful menace. A superpowered hero arises or is called upon to counter the threat. The bulk of the story follows a progression through a conflict between the hero and the villain representing Good and Evil. The final phase of the story is the restoration of social order.

Just as an analysis of western films such as *Shane*, and the group of Ian Fleming's spy novels, similarities of plot structure are discovered in contemporary Arthurian novels. The principal components are as follows:

1. The Return of King Arthur

The return from Arthur's entombment is usually brought about by Merlin for a purpose.

2. The Mission

Something endangering society recalls Arthur to overcome the threat.

3. Relationships

There are only a few significant relationships that enter into the plot. These are Merlin, Guenevere, Morgan, Mordred and one or more of the knights.

4. The Threat and Ensuing Conflict

The most important relationship of Arthur is that with his evil foil, Arthur's binary opposite, whether human or non-human. The resolution of this conflict often constitutes the major focus of the plot, with Good overcoming Evil in the end.

5. Departure and Ending

Following the victory over the evil protagonist(s) is the final departure of Arthur from the scene. This is an important element in the 'original' legend that is dramatically changed in modern reconstructions. The manner in which the contemporary Arthurian novels end is quite different from the mysterious departure to Avalon, and is expressive of a different set of public expectations and values. In these novels, Arthur and Guenevere walk hand in hand into the sunset to live happily ever after. This happens in *Arthur, King, Avalon, The Return of Merlin, Knight Life, One Knight Only, The Dragon Rises* and *The Darkest Road*, (the third book of *Fionavar Tapestry*). There is no tragedy here, only happy, uncomplicated endings. A different situation entirely obtains when Arthur disappears without Guenevere and resumes his incarceration or doom in *Camelot 3000* and *The Keltiad*.

As a fighter, King Arthur has no peer and his prowess is well exhibited in many of the novels reviewed. Specifically we see Arthur in the warrior role in *Arthur, King, Camelot 3000, Debt of Ages, The Dragon Rises* and the *Fionavar Tapestry*. Although the Arthur of *The Keltiad* shares the qualities of a battlefield warrior, he is much more than this since he is also a leader of men, diplomat and governor. It is in this role as warrior that King Arthur again appears as hero or even superhero.

Most classical and contemporary sources on the Arthurian legend depict a figure that is the stalwart model of masculinity that we know today. This identity, together with his numerous exploits, make him ideal

material for production within cultural media, a popular icon recognizable as one of many superheroes. This characterization of King Arthur continues to the present and is found in nearly all the novels under consideration in this thesis.

A relatively new type of king appears, though rarely, in the form of a Reformer. Not content with overcoming the immediate evil opposition, whatever form that may take, this Arthur recognizes institutional or environmental threats to society and accepts responsibility for correcting them. These Arthurs are professed, dedicated visionaries up to a point. We find Arthur as Reformer particularly in *Avalon*, *Knight Life*, *One Knight Only*, *The Wyrms Trilogy*, and to a certain extent, *The Keltiad*.

Finally, there is a residual 'Other' type of King Arthur, that is more difficult to characterize. One problem is the young age of Arthur in the two books by Cochran and Murphy and *The Third Magic* by Cochran alone. The boy Arthur cannot be expected to share the characteristics of an adult even though he shows the promise of maturity, especially in his decision to live in the real world rather than return to the ghostly Camelot with the Knights. In addition, this Arthur, unlike all the others, rejects his role as king or leader in *The Third Magic* and adopts an entirely personal, individual and selfish role for his future life. In some senses, he can be regarded as a creature of postmodernism or New Age. The best example of a New Age Arthur who finally finds empowerment is of course in *The Return of Merlin*.

No discussion of King Arthur's identity would be complete without mention of another residual category. In some tales such as *The Dragon Rises* and those in which Arthur is a time traveller, the king takes over the body of another individual or is reincarnated as Arthur reborn, not as a reborn king but as something else. The category 'Other' also includes a

small group that could be called a reigning monarch in today's world such as is found in *The King* and *The Quest of Excalibur*.

It is apparent that not all Arthurs are heroic in stature, but most are personally courageous in their binary opposition to personal and social threats from individuals or monsters. It is also to be noted that in these contemporary reconstructions, King Arthur is always and without exception, a worthy or noble individual, none of whom exhibit a negative personal character trait. There is no meanness, jealousy or petty behaviour on their part.

One consistent theme running through the current Arthurian novels is the nature of the King's return which incorporates a purpose or mission to perform, often at a time of need as outlined above. Merlin is usually a central factor in these plots for several reasons. He has been an advisor and companion to the king for many centuries and is often responsible for bringing Arthur into the present or taking him into the future. In addition, Merlin frequently defines Arthur's mission, the reason for his return. In this role, Merlin is an initiator of action as well as being Arthur's protector, especially when the need calls for magical intervention. King Arthur usually, but not always, takes Merlin's advice.

A few examples will illustrate the above points. In the book *Arthur, King*, Merlin is desperate to retrieve his sacred book which has been stolen by Mordred. The book will enable Merlin to know the path to the future and unless Arthur can find the book, it is capable of doing irreparable harm in the hands of Mordred. In the process of retrieving the book, Arthur becomes the saviour of Britain in the air war and saves the life of the British king.

In Lawhead's *Avalon*, Merlin is political advisor to Arthur as well as using magic in combating Moira. Despite having aged backwards to a boy of eight, Merlin tells Arthur that he must return because the public needs him. In *The Broken Sword*, it is Merlin who wants Arthur to bring back the old gods but in *The Third Magic*, Arthur rejects Merlin's attempt to return him to his former role as monarch. In *The Return of Merlin*, it is Merlin who is responsible for explaining the nature of evil and the value of empowerment.

These novels do not have the social complexity or psychological depth of some previous renderings of the legend. The only novels in which there is significant interest and/or tension in the relationship between Arthur and Guenevere are in *Camelot 3000* and *The Dragon Rises*, *The Keltiad* and *Fionavar*. Lancelot is absent except in *Fionavar*. It should be noted that in all cases, Arthur's relationship with Guenevere ends happily, except perhaps in those cases in which Arthur disappears, possibly to return.

It is clear that contemporary authors of Arthuriana are less successful in dealing with the complexities of today's culture and society (or future and fairyland) compared with those authors whose stories are set in the Dark Ages or the High Middle Ages. There are several reasons for this, but among the foremost is the constraint imposed by the limits of a single volume. This is the reason the depth of characterization and relationships are comparatively more satisfying in the trilogies. It is somewhat surprising however that given the free scope to imagination by speculative fiction that more is not made of this advantage. From a sociological point of view it is disappointing for example that we do not find King Arthur dealing with future science and technology and its social impact.

We turn now to summaries of the novels grouped into each respective time frame, and to Arthurian literature outside the form of fiction. The Arthurian novels will be presented in two major groups: 1) Those with present day or contemporary settings, and 2) Those in which the action takes place in future and/or fantasy worlds – science fiction or fairyland. It is expected that the nature of these dramatically different time periods and societies will present King Arthur with significantly different challenges with corresponding differences in his behaviour.

Chapter 3. King Arthur Arrives In The Contemporary World

In reading these novels with modern settings, it is almost as if King Arthur appeared among us today. The culture and society he finds himself in is the society familiar to us – its infrastructure, technology, social relations and cultural values for example. One would expect that the king's identity, formed in the Dark or Middle Ages, might be very different today, and that the challenges that he encounters will be far different than those of his past. How will the king cope and adapt to these different conditions? Given the strength of his character in past descriptions, one would expect he would adapt fairly quickly and successfully to modern society, especially if he arrives with the help of Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table.

In his previous incarnations, Arthur's mission stressed the value of justice, so we would expect the king to seek ways of overcoming the many injustices present in today's world. In particular, how will King Arthur define and attack the problem of evil and other threats to our society? We would also expect he may turn his attention to a range of contemporary problems such as poverty, drugs and the environmental degradation of the planet. Will stories of a present-day Arthur reflect contemporary problems and anxieties such as those growing out of the Cold War, Vietnam War or tension in the Middle East?

What form of leadership will appear in today's Arthur and how will the community react? It could be expected that in a world with few guideposts there may be a longing for a strong, honourable and courageous leader such as Arthur, the saviour who comes again in the time of need. What groups in society will the king support and what

vision of the future will he hold out for us? Insofar as the legend undergoes modification, what are the reasons for this? What forces or pressures in our society will impact on the nature of the legend? What elements are continuing that ensure the continuity of this icon of Western civilization?

It will be interesting to see what elements of the ancient Arthurian legend will be brought forward, and what new elements are added. What of the Knights, Guenevere, Lancelot and Camelot? At the end, will King Arthur remain with us or return to his past? Some of these questions of a general nature will be met again in a discussion of King Arthur in science fiction and fairyland.

Knight Life by Peter David.

Knight Life is a slick, light-hearted mass-marketed spoof of King Arthur in which Arthur returns to modern day New York where he is eventually elected Mayor. The story line is rather thin, but there are humorous twists and punch lines one would expect from an author such as Peter David. For example, Excalibur appears in the hand of the Lady of the Lake rising from a pond in Central Park. Despite the noble bearing and motivation of Arthur, the author's political orientation and cynicism regarding politicians and the voting public is apparent.

Morgan Le Fey has been awaiting centuries for the emergence of Merlin from his cave where he has been imprisoned. It finally happens that Merlin is able to escape as an eight year old boy having aged backwards through time in his cave. About the same time we learn of the dysfunctional relationship of a young woman, Gwen, with her parasitic and brutal partner, Lance. As for the five and a half-foot Arthur, he is dumped in full armour on the streets of New York. Quickly recovering, he retrieves Excalibur from a pond and meets up with Merlin who gives

him a full and fictitious modern identity including an American Express card. Merlin convinces Arthur that the time is ripe for his return to lead the public who needs him. Any hesitation as to Arthur's role and mission is overcome when he later decides to run for the New York mayoralty. Soon after opening his campaign office, Gwen appears looking for a job and not surprisingly, Arthur is romantically smitten with her.

King Arthur is portrayed as a true innocent in some ways – naive, trusting and honest. He is tutored by Merlin and is a quick learner. He is good looking, has charisma, good stage presence, relates well to crowds and is quick on his feet when questioned. In his campaign for Mayor, he depends on volunteers, not a party, but is assisted by Merlin, Gwen and Percival who has lived on in the guise of a large black man. King Arthur narrowly wins the election for mayor of the city.

King Arthur runs a very successful campaign that demonstrates his leadership and surprisingly rapid adaptability to 21st century culture and society. He uses the media creatively and gains public approval when he rescues two children from a burning building. His political presentations are unusual in being very different from the polarized positions of left and right politics.

Although different, Arthur's pronouncements on issues of the day are vague and basically he asks the voters to trust him. An example is capital punishment – the king advocates that the family survivors of murder victims decide whether the culprit should get the extreme death penalty, so in essence Arthur accepts capital punishment.

Inclusions of persons and objects from Arthuriana are minimal. Confronting Arthur is the evil Morgan Le Fey and her son Mordred, a common feature in these novels. Planning for the destruction of Merlin

and Arthur, the vicious Morgan blackmails Gwen to make it possible for Morgan to steal Excalibur. She captures Merlin as well but the furious Gwen, using magic to summon a demon, overcomes Morgan with Merlin's help. After quarrelling with Gwen over her betrayal about Excalibur, Arthur proposes marriage and is accepted. At a ceremonial jousting meet, Mordred poisons Arthur who finds the strength to overcome his rival who, with his mother Morgan, is defeated.

One Knight Only by Peter David.

One Knight Only may be regarded as a sequel to *Knight Life* by the same author. The book should be termed 'realistic fantasy', for the setting is mainly contemporary U.S.A. but wizards, monsters, magic and shape shifting intrude as well as levitation, spells and the evil eye. The book, unlike its predecessor, generally lacks lightness and humour and is a blatant attempt to cash in on the current anxiety over the U.S. war in Iraq.

There are many parallels between this war and the conflict in *One Knight Only*. King Arthur has become President of the U.S. and bears some similarity to George Bush in terms of rhetorical justification for war-time decisions and actions. Both are, or have been, engaged in bombing campaigns against Islamic terrorists, Bush in Iraq, President Arthur against unspecified terrorists in a fictitious country, Trans-Sabal. There is a bombing in New York City reminiscent of the attack on the Twin Towers. The assassination attempt on President Arthur's wife Gwen mobilizes the hatred of the American public. President Arthur is up against a foe named Sandoval whose character bears close resemblance to that of Saddam Hussein. Sandoval's hatred of President Arthur and all Americans springs largely from the death of his wife and child from a U.S. bombing that destroyed their home. There are ideological reasons as well that mirrors the rhetoric of Osama Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and other Islamic terrorist groups.

One Knight Only appears to take place in the very near future. The institutions and ritual of the U.S. presidency, the White House, and Congress are those in place today. After a stint as Mayor of New York, King Arthur has been elected President of the U.S. as an Independent whose major characteristics are those of charisma and honesty. Although Arthur appears well adapted to life in the 20th century, he is somewhat uncomfortable with contemporary society and is nostalgic for the culture of one thousand years ago from which he emerged after being immobilized in a cave by Merlin.

Arthur is deeply ambivalent toward contemporary American society and shows a preference for a more authoritarian approach to decision making. On the one hand he is very impatient with the legal and bureaucratic restrictions on his person and his Presidency in addition to being somewhat cynical about the shallowness and fleeting attitudes of the public. On the other hand King Arthur identifies positively with the democratic values inherent in the U.S. constitution, the Office of the President and the egalitarian way of U.S. life. Despite being personally authoritarian in nature, Arthur attempts to hide this knowing it is not the best way to achieve his ends. Despite his success in finding compromises that satisfy conflicting parties, his aristocratic past finds him often wishing that he could deal with issues more directly and 'man-to-man'.

King Arthur's human relations are open and straightforward. In the case of Gwen they are particularly tender and protective. She describes his main features as strength, fortitude, quiet dignity, vision and doing the right thing. She objects to his endless call to what he regards as his destiny that takes priority before all else, especially personal happiness, but this is finally achieved in the end and presumably will go on forever

Throughout *One Knight Only*, King Arthur has two conflicting objectives: one is the avoidance of harm to civilians or bystanders and next is the care and protection of his beloved Gwen who is near death after being shot by an agent of the terrorist Sandoval. Arthur is faced with a cruel dilemma – when, in a position to slay a powerful monster in human form, Basiliskos, he is offered a deal by this adversary. Basiliskos will either cure Arthur’s suffering wife of her wound, or permanently and publicly dispose of the terrorist Sandoval, thereby avoiding a widening of the war against Trans-Sabal demanded by the public. There is a price to be paid however – in choosing the destruction of Sandoval, Arthur must resign the Presidency of the U.S. Arthur accepts the deal wishing to avoid the slaughter of war, so he does resign the Presidency. Subsequently, Gwen is taken to the magic island, one form of the Grail Cup, and her health is restored. She and Arthur retire together in the closing pages.

Arthur comes to question his destiny and complains he has forever done what was expected of him and asks, “when am I entitled to attend to my own desires, to what I want to do for myself.” Gwen knows better and says, sadly, “never” and reminds him they are creatures of destiny.

The Grail plays a significant part in *One Knight Only* but it has no religious significance. The cup has the power of life and death and is used to restore Gwen. The secular nature of the Grail Cup is consistent with the lack of any religious overtones whatever in the story, aside from scattered references to “the gods” and Arthur’s one reference to the cup as having belonged to “our Lord”.

The morality and principal values embodied in the book are those associated with the characteristics of the main antagonists that up to the final chapter are almost entirely worthy or entirely evil.

Although Sandoval is the acknowledged leader of a group of terrorists, Sandoval is made out to be thoroughly evil as is the temptress Basiliskos who turns Sandoval into a winged serpent at the end. In other words, King Arthur only deals with personified evil in individual confrontation.

The author uses elements of the Arthur legend largely for his own didactic purposes for his sympathies are clearly those opposed to the Bush war in Iraq. The book adds little to Arthuriana other than the curious spectacle of King Arthur's position as President in contemporary pop fiction settings.

Arthur, King by Dennis Lee Anderson

Arthur, King is a rollicking, action-packed, uncomplicated story in which King Arthur is catapulted into the 20th century by Merlin to save Britain during the early stages of World War II. The narrative opens in two simultaneous time periods. In one, London is under bombing attack by the Luftwaffe, while in the 5th century, a wounded King Arthur awakens in the cold mud of Cornwall, his head stunned and bloody.

Arthur mourns the loss of Excalibur and cries out for Merlin as he loses consciousness. The king has been wounded by Mordred who has taken the sword as well as possession of Merlin's wondrous book. Merlin transports Arthur to the 20th century during the Battle of Britain, telling the king he must return Excalibur to its rightful time period and recover the book that foretells the future up to a point.

The action in *Arthur, King* follows three main lines: Arthur's participation in the RAF's Dragon Squad of Spitfires; Mordred's equivalent service in the Luftwaffe, and Arthur's romance with a medical doctor appropriately named Jenny. These lines are developed separately but also brought together from time to time, particularly Arthur's conflict with his son

Mordred. Merlin appears occasionally as an old man and in the shape of a raven.

For the most part of the book, Arthur is not nearly as successful as Mordred in adapting to the new world. Not surprisingly, he has great difficulty in coping with 20th century language and technology. He complains to Merlin "I'm lost in the fog of these strange times. I have trouble finding my own way through each day. What do you want of me?" Merlin teaches him to read and to fly, but he crashes two fighter planes, is captured by the enemy and almost beheaded by a guillotine in a French village. Mordred on the other hand, becomes the rising star of the Luftwaffe when his plan to blanket bomb British civilians and bomb Coventry Cathedral is accepted by Goering. Lieutenant Arthur King cannot prevent the bombing of London or Coventry but he thwarts Mordred's plan to assassinate Winston Churchill and the British king.

Early in the story, Arthur meets the doctor Jenny with whom he is immediately smitten. Jenny treats him when he becomes badly wounded and their romance carries through the book to the very end when Arthur persuades Merlin to make it possible for Jenny to go back to his own time with him. Considering his past, Arthur's sophomoric passion for Jenny is hardly credible.

There are two sides to Arthur's character in this story. The first lasts almost the entire book and shows a bumbling, hesitant warrior from the past with only a vague idea as to his objective or how to attain it. Merlin is sometimes required to save him when he gets into serious trouble. Towards the end of the book, the 'true' Arthur emerges as a physically powerful, sword-wielding individual, confident now in his purpose and courageous to the point of foolishness. He eventually reclaims Excalibur and Merlin's book. This Arthur is no leader of men however. He is finally

successful in individual exploits but never takes command of a group of fighter pilots for example.

Arthur's nemesis, Mordred, says he comes from a place beyond death. Although he has no Merlin to assist him, he has other skills. Being the offspring of the witch Morgan Le Fay, he has inherited her hatred and ruthlessness. He also has the ability to cast spells to take over human souls which he does in assuming the body and name of a Nazi fighter plane commander. Although he is not responsible for the Nazi war machine or its political masters, Mordred corrupts them further, ignoring the rules of war.

Apparently successful in his endeavours during most of the story, Mordred ultimately fails in his grand plan. The bravery of the Spitfire pilots result in such heavy losses to German aircraft that Britain achieves supremacy of the air war, forestalling a cross-channel invasion. In the final confrontation, Mordred vanishes into the abyss after being struck by a dagger thrown by Arthur's American friend.

Dennis Lee Anderson has done enough homework to include a number of symbolic links to Arthur's Camelot. Aside from Excalibur, the Spitfire group is called Dragon Squadron and it has a round table forum. The Spitfire's engine is of course the Merlin, as is the name of the local pub. Arthur discovers a suit of armour that belonged to him once and identifies the breastplate as from the House of Pendragon.

There are no surprises in terms of social structure, ideology or values. This is Britain under siege with Churchill instilling the values of sacrifice to save the nation and the monarchy. While it is clear that the pilots of the Spitfires are the real heroes of the book, Arthur moves through the story with his own personal agenda. When his mission is accomplished he

returns to Camelot with Jenny with no suggestion that he has a further role to play in contemporary time.

Avalon. The Return of King Arthur by Stephen R. Lawhead.

The novel *Avalon* opens sometime during the 21st century at a holiday resort in Portugal. Edward, the dissolute Ninth King of Britain, takes up a pistol and blows away the side of his head. The scene then shifts to Scotland where James Arthur Stuart, estate manager and former army officer is in the midst of a dispute over his claim to his father's estate, Blair Morven. While driving home one night he investigates a fire on Ween Hill and encounters a mysterious Mr. Embries. Embries convinces James it would be to his advantage to meet in London for a couple of days to which James reluctantly agrees. The meeting leads to the revelation that not only is James the rightful heir to Blair Morven, but also, due to heretofore secrecy concerning his birth, he is actually the Duke of Morven and thus the rightful heir to the throne of Britain. This is later confirmed with a package of documents left to him by his parents.

The time frame and social context of the book *Avalon* is so like our own as to be indistinguishable. Action takes place in the very near future aside from flashbacks to an Arthurian past. Current political, social and economic problems of today are all reflected in a future Britain. The state of the British monarchy has led to an even more deplorable situation such that respect for the monarchy has nearly vanished. The action of the story takes place at a time when the Prime Minister and his British Republic Party is working furiously to bring about the end of the monarchy that has been degraded by a number of previous incumbents. The Prime Minister is a cynical, power-hungry manipulator of the media. A campaign is underway to win success for a referendum and legislation known as Magna Carta II which would result in the Devolution of

Monarchy. The PM's ultimate aim beyond this is to have himself installed as the country's first President.

Political manoeuvring and bitter rivalry builds as friends of James coalesce around a new political party, the Coalition To Save Our Monarchy led by a Lord Rothes. Allied with this group is Embries, now revealed to be Myrddin. Myrddin sets the scene in a Time-Between-Time enabling James to fully recall his previous life as King Arthur. Myrddin grows enormously in stature as he brings James to his real but unrecognised identity. The stunned James calls on God at this revelation and Myrddin says to him:

You are right to call on God. He is your righteousness and your strength, and you will have need of both in the days to come. Without God there is no King (Lawhead, 1999:150).

Myrddin then formally asks James to accept his destiny as sovereign King, to which James agrees.

James' claim to the throne is hotly disputed by his political rivals. In addition to the political opposition to James' claim, an element of pure fantasy enters the picture in the form of the evil and seductive sorceress, Moira. She murders the director of the Royal Heritage Preservation Society in an attempt to steal documentary proof of James' inheritance, and later murders Lord Rothes.

Overcoming his doubts about assuming the royal mantle, James and his supporters arrange for the public declaration of his authority and reign. Following a widespread media release of his intentions, James delivers a stirring address on television opposing the Act of Dissolution in which he outlines his hopes for a future Britain. After this, public opinion swings to James as his credentials are widely accepted and he again triumphs in a challenging television interview. It all looks like clear sailing, especially

after the New Year's announcement of his engagement to Jenny (who else?). The Prime Minister has other plans however and initiates a smear campaign in the press with false allegations concerning James' service record. The fickle pendulum of public opinion now swings against James.

Before his murder, Lord Rothes was successful in building parliamentary support to force a vote of no confidence in the government. This gives James, as the Crown, authority to dissolve parliament and call for general elections. After the death of Lord Rothes, the furious Myrddin goes to Glastonbury Tor to defeat Moira who is revealed as the sorceress Morgian.

At the Speakers Corner at Hyde Park James addresses the public. Before he can begin his speech, he is attacked by skinheads dressed in black leather, armed with iron bars, chains and pit bulls. James bravely wades in against them and although wounded, defeats them almost single-handed. In the process he saves a small child from attack by the pit bulls, all recorded by TV crews present to cover his speech. He is able to deliver a few stirring comments before being taken to hospital.

James is now a hero and public support again swings back in his favour. The Church rallies to his cause; he marries Jenny and is crowned king in Edinburgh as the crowd shouts "Arthur! Arthur!" In the dramatic conclusion, there is an earthquake, Morgian makes a final attack and is killed as Llyonesse rises from the sea off the coast of Cornwall.

The character of Arthur is well-drawn and convincing. He is portrayed as physically attractive, strong, courageous and once convinced of his destiny as future king, focused and decisive. This Arthur meets challenges head on and while he listens to Myrddin's advice, he makes his own decisions. Myrddin may be a kingmaker behind the scenes but

James is very much his own man. Despite his strong belief in the institution of the monarchy and the proper role of the king, Arthur departs from the traditional role of aloofness from the public. There are many other differences that make this Arthur a thoroughly 21st century man and contemporary king. Once he embarks upon his mission to defeat Magna Carta II, his character becomes that of a modern political candidate running for office. He goes out to meet his public in every corner of the nation, uses the media, especially television, to express his views and rally support. Because of his humble origins, Arthur is a man of the people with whom he identifies rather than with a privileged aristocratic elite.

If it were not for brief episodes of pure fantasy, *Avalon* could be described as a contemporary political novel somewhat resembling the American television series “The West Wing”. There is no attempt to re-create Camelot in terms of structure or characters in the story. nor as a vision towards which to work. Only Myrddin, Moira and Arthur have any recollection of previous lives in the Arthurian saga. Mordred does not appear as such and there are no knights or roundtable unless friends and the party to restore the monarchy can be regarded as the symbolic equivalent. Lancelot is also absent.

Avalon stands almost alone as a distinct type of contemporary Arthuriana – the return of a robust Arthur coping well with today’s political world. This book has all the trappings of an airport thriller, being fast paced with an ideal-type hero as role model, the classic conflict between good and evil, sleazy political manoeuvring, public manipulation and assassination by unscrupulous politicians. All that is lacking is a dollop of explicit sex, which we are fortunately spared. The courtship of James and Jenny is short and devoid of eroticism.

Although there is a minimum of Celtic or medieval lore or symbolism in *Avalon*, there is enough to establish continuity with the Arthurian legend and with Arthur's past life. Myrddin Embries is the wise counsellor who was at Arthur's side in his past life and is there again in contemporary Britain. While James is reborn as Arthur, Embries has never died and has been waiting for Arthur to surface once again. More than counsellor however, Myrddin is a consummate organiser and arranger of events. Without his knowledge, contacts and other resources, Arthur would never have succeeded in this future world. Arthur's bride Jenny he calls Gwenhwyar in a moment of crisis and the seductive enchantress Moira or Morgian is present representing the forces of darkness. Mordred does not make an appearance. Excalibur is not a prominent feature and the Grail Cup is absent.

In one sense, good and evil are sharply contrasted in Lawhead's book. In a departure from other works of this type however, contemporary threats to Arthur and the integrity of Britain are also institutional and arise from the degraded monarchy, corrupt politicians, lack of altruistic and visionary leadership and consequently the apathetic public. It is this widespread cynicism, despair and secularism that Arthur strives to overcome. It is significant that although Arthur promotes ancient philosophic and religious values, his conservatism is future-oriented reform and is not a retreat to the past. Arthur's response to these socially dysfunctional threats to a future Britain is thoroughly modern. A key element in *Avalon* is the focus on the role of James in advocating change in the character of the monarchy and other political institutions. As a somewhat isolated Scottish rural resident, James is initially unaware of the urban blight that has overwhelmed London or the hopeless expressions on the faces of its citizens. It is not only personalized threats that Myrddin and James confront in this future Avalon but the internal threats eating at the core of Britain's political institutions.

The feature that sets *Avalon* apart from other novels of future Arthuriana is the way it plunges James/Arthur into the midst of political and social change. Britain's crisis that recalls Arthur is a crisis of spirit. A petrified monarchy, and an ineffective government with cynical, self-serving political leadership confronts James who sets out to change all this. He taps into a public that has a latent eagerness for change and a leader with vision to bring it about. Although public opinion is manipulated in a rather simplistic and unrealistic way, *Avalon* is in part a detailed case study of how political coalitions under the Westminster system can bring about massive political reform and social change.

The Forever King by Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy.

In our own era, a ten year-old boy named Arthur finds a hollowed lump of metal with magical healing properties. Soon after finding the cup, Arthur is identified as heir to a property in England and decides to go there to claim it. During his journey, the boy and his aunt Emily are befriended by an elderly Mr. Goldberg who turns out to be none other than Merlin. A former FBI agent and alcoholic named Hal enters the scene and is identified as the faithful Galahad, Arthur's protective guardian. Hal uses a surprising knowledge of ancient England to win a trip to London where he meets Arthur and his aunt Emily for the first time. Hal befriends Arthur who is often in need as he is terrorised by the Saracen Knight Saladin and his agents.

The action in *The Forever King* takes place mainly in the south of England near the Hampshire border. For most of the story, Arthur is a normal ten year-old boy from Chicago, caught up in a struggle he does not fully understand. He is forced to mature quickly however and in the end shows awareness, courage and other qualities of an intelligent adult. Throughout the story, the psychotic and amoral Saladin is searching for

Arthur's cup that he once possessed himself. This cup, understood to have come from outer space, is centuries older than the Christian era but has associations with Christ's Last Supper and has the power to cure wounds and confer immortality.

The UK property Arthur inherits turns out to be the site of Camelot with a mythical castle inhabited by the ghosts of the Knights of the Round Table. Arthur is kidnapped by Saladin who uses him as bait to obtain the Grail Cup from Merlin, but Arthur is finally rescued by Hal. Excalibur is discovered during the final battle on the site of ghostly Camelot and Saladin finally meets his end. After the battle, Arthur seals Excalibur in the stone where it was found.

When Arthur acknowledges his true identity and role, Merlin urges him to remain in the ephemeral castle with his ghostly knights. Arthur however decides to remain in the real world to prepare for his destiny. Realising he would learn nothing of the real world if entombed in Camelot, Arthur tells Hal: "I'm ten years old, Hal. Whatever I'm going to do with my life, I've got to become a man first."

Although set in contemporary times, *The Forever King* is about a reborn Arthur still to be and who is yet to fulfil his destiny. Only at the end of the book does he realise and accept his status and future role. *The Forever King* is a very innovative and well-crafted novel that draws selectively on various elements of the Arthurian legend and brings them down to the present. The former FBI agent, Hal, is awakened to his new status as Galahad, committed to Arthur's protection. The evil nemesis Saladin has a Mordred-like role and his thugs have a parallel but negative role to the Knights of the Round Table which are only present as ghosts on special occasions.

In one sense, this book is about the history, rediscovery and quest for what becomes the Grail Cup. Large sections of the book involve the history of Saladin and the cup that he possessed for many centuries after murdering its original owner. After its plunging to earth in a meteor shower, the small cup is refashioned into the larger drinking vessel used by Christ at the Last Supper. The powers of the cup however are inherent in itself and not due to any religious associations. Curiously, the powers of the cup can be wielded for good or evil by any possessor, as is the case with Saladin who is determined to recover the cup after it was lost and then accidentally found by Arthur. As it is in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* where Frodo refuses to keep the One Ring for fear of its corrupting power, Arthur also refuses to keep the Grail Cup even though it would ensure his indestructibility and longevity.

There is relatively little Celtic or medieval lore in *The Forever King* until the closing pages when Excalibur is rediscovered and Camelot mysteriously rises from the ruins of an ancient castle. Merlin is capable of using magical spells but rarely does so. He does enable Arthur and Hal to pass between the real world and the ghostly castle where the full panoply of Arthurian knights is found within. There is some confusion concerning the reality of the Round Table Knights who appear on rare occasions.

Although a fantasy with some magic elements, the heroes of the piece must depend on their own native intelligence and personal resources. Despite his youth, the boy Arthur makes decisions that lead him to eventual recognition of his previous role as king. He shows determination and courage during the ordeal of his kidnapping by Saladin and is not afraid to stand up to Merlin.

The philosophic underpinning and values of *The Forever King* are similar to T. H. White's book, *The Once and Future King*. These are expressed in the following thoughts of Hal:

And justice was what Arthur had stood for, back in the days when injustice was the rule of law. That, Hal understood at last, was what had kept the legend of the once and future king alive. Not charisma, not victory, but justice had been the shining light that Arthur brought to the darkness of the world (Cochran and Murphy, 1992: 386).

The Broken Sword by Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy.

The Broken Sword is a rich, complex and ambitious sequel to *The Forever King* by the same two authors. Although the story depends on the Arthurian legend and the role of King Arthur, he is not the main focus of the story that nevertheless embraces him. More dominant than Arthur himself is the contemporary Merlin and his nemesis Thanatos. Both their histories stretch back sixteen centuries as does the spirit of King Arthur. The magical cup that featured so prominently in *The Forever King* continues to dominate this book since it is in the possession of either Arthur or Merlin and thus is sought by the evil sorcerer Thanatos and his minions.

The significance of *The Broken Sword* is to be found in its elaborate religious philosophy and satanic rituals. This feature is unlike any of the other books with the exception of *The Return of Merlin*. Both share concepts that could be linked to New Age ideas despite their ancient roots among the Vedas or Buddhism. In addition, the treatment of good and evil is also unique to modern Arthuriana.

Arthur and Hal, the reborn Galahad, travel to Tangiers in search of Arthur's Aunt Emily. The sorcerer Thanatos is also there in search of the cup that surfaces when a former U. S. President is assassinated but restored to health by the healing powers of the cup. A young girl,

Beatrice, enters the story and is befriended by Arthur and Merlin, all of whom are attacked by Thanatos. Arthur, Beatrice and Merlin escape via a ship leaving for New York City, but Thanatos learns of its destination and arranges for them to be attacked on the wharf by his thugs. Two other characters in the story, Kate and Zack are also on the wharf. Kate is there because she has been corrupted by Thanatos and ordered to obtain the cup. Kate, Zack and Arthur's group go to Zack's building which he has named the Center for Cosmic Consciousness.

Unknown to Zack, Thanatos has created a coven of black magic in a hidden basement where the climax of the book takes place. Thanatos is about to make a ritual sacrifice of Kate when Merlin, who has been captured and cruelly bound up, is able to magically intervene with the help of his spiritual mentor, The Innocent. Kate is saved, the black magical powers and its followers are overthrown and the building collapses. Thanatos is finally defeated but Merlin survives and with Beatrice leaves for Cadbury Tor to hide Excalibur. Zack rebuilds, relocates and renames the Center for Cosmic Consciousness where he cements the cup in a pool of water. Arthur is now free to fulfil his destiny for which he has been brought back into the world by the ancient gods and Merlin.

This brief sketch outlines the contemporary story in which a young King Arthur is involved. Arthur is still only 13 years old and far from being the principal initiator of action. As in *The Forever King*, Arthur is essentially responsive to the threats of Thanatos as he seeks the cup. Arthur eventually becomes aware of his birthright and destiny as he evolves into adulthood and presumably a third volume.

The old gods are also responsible for Arthur's original emergence into the world many centuries ago. It is these gods and their priestess, The Innocent, who bring Arthur back into the present together with Merlin

who is released from his entombment in a cave to become the counsellor and protector of Arthur. After the death of King Arthur many centuries ago, the old Celtic gods recognize the need for Arthur to return to the real world. There have been basic changes in the world and the gods also foresee that the time of their own departure is near at hand. The final blow against them is struck by Thanatos and his coven who destroy the Druids in a bloody massacre at Mona. Although murdered by Thanatos, the spirit of the gods are awaiting Arthur's return, telling Taliesin it was his destiny to nurture the king who is to be the fulcrum on which the lever of the gods will rise again. The gods set Taliesin the task of helping a great king to change the world. There is no specific vision of a future world nor how to change it. It is a curious omission that the rise of Christianity and its historical impact is absent from the story and from speculation.

Arthur's age in the present volume prevents him from taking a strong leadership role in the fight against Thanatos. He has already decided he must remain in the real world and as in the past, he again rejects possession of the cup and its powers.

In the past, the threat to King Arthur's position came from several sources: his own indecision; Gwenivere's infidelity or presumed infidelity; Lancelot's betrayal; and the manoeuvrings of the petty kings thirsting for political power. Finally, there was the overwhelming desire of Morgan to become Queen of Britain for which she would sacrifice anything. This is a much more complex set of circumstances compared with contemporary times in *The Broken Sword* which has only the evil Thanatos to contend with. Arthur is only able to meet this threat indirectly for the major burden falls on the robust Hal who recruits the 12 Knights, and the magic of Merlin who is assisted by The Innocent. Arthur, using the magic of Excalibur finally overcomes Thanatos.

The forces of Light are those springing from the Celtic gods and from something mysteriously referred to as the "All That Is". The purpose of the cup is somewhat unclear despite its being the creation of the gods. Perhaps philosophically this symbolises the freedom of mankind to do good or evil.

The philosophic or religious wisdom handed down by the gods stands in sharp contrast to either Christian dogma or modern secularism. This being so, the behavioural implications of the teaching are rather ephemeral. A summary of the beliefs as voiced by The Innocent and Merlin could be outlined as follows. The world is in constant change. There is no beginning and no end, only cycles or the Wheel of Time. Arthur is entering a new cycle, The Millennium, and his destiny is somehow to save the world. Part of every person is eternal and is reborn life after life. All gods, good and evil, are the same but there is only one god. (We will encounter somewhat similar New Age philosophy in *The Return of Merlin* by Deepak Chopra.)

***The Third Magic* by Molly Cochran.**

The Third Magic is the final novel in a trilogy that could be called Arthur Reborn. It consists of a narrative set in the present time linked to a series of historical flashbacks with other lengthy interpolations. The history of Excalibur extends as far back as 1275 B.C.E. for example, and the days of Camelot are integrated into the story as significant background. Arthur's problems with the Dark Age petty chieftains, the infidelity of Guenevere, the disloyalty of Lancelot, and Arthur's illness and death are a necessary prelude to understanding the contemporary action. This action begins with the first novel in the trilogy, *The Forever King*, followed by *The Broken Sword* which is a mandatory read in order to interpret *The Third Magic*.

The narrative of *The Third Magic* is perhaps less interesting than the issues raised concerning the identity and character of King Arthur as he appears in multiple time periods. His identity is inseparable from his presumed destiny as foreseen and arranged by Merlin.

Arthur Blessing is now 18 years of age, living on a farm with the 12 Knights in South Dakota. After an absence of four years, Merlin appears on Arthur's birthday saying the time has come for Arthur to reclaim his destiny. As the knights leave for a motorcycle rally, Arthur and Merlin begin preparations for Arthur's new life with a Vision Quest. At the same time in the small upstate New York village of Dawning Falls, the magical cup has been buried in a stream and a house built over it. The water flowing over the cup has magical curative powers and its reputation has spread so far that thousands of people are visiting the site. Arthur's Aunt Emily, learning of this phenomena, realises it must be the work of the cup and goes to work in the office to manage the flow of visitors.

Arthur develops real doubts over his double identity as a reborn king and a normal 18 year-old teenager who has been brought into the present by Merlin's magic. These two elements of his character do not fit together comfortably, causing Arthur confusion and anxiety. Much to Merlin's chagrin, the stress causes Arthur to flee from having to confront this duality. The confusion in Arthur Blessing's mind concerning his self-identity arises in a dispute with Merlin during the Vision Quest over his presumed destiny. Merlin tells Arthur that Arthur Blessing does not exist, that his life as King Arthur was left unfinished because he was killed by magic, and it was now time to fulfil his destiny. Furthermore, he tells Arthur, his birth and destiny were arranged by forces beyond Arthur's control. This news dismays Arthur who announces he wants the freedom to live out his own life as Arthur Blessing. Unable to accept Merlin's view

of his future, Arthur literally runs away. Thus, the vision cannot be realized. Arthur rejects it as he rejects the destiny Merlin tries to promote.

Eventually Arthur meets up with the knights again at Dawning Falls, the site of the cup where an apparent miracle takes place. The public has already made Arthur into something of a saviour and now begins calling him the returned Christ or Messiah.

Other characters now enter the plot. Arthur meets the girl Gwen for the first time although both have shared dreams of one another and are aware of their past lives as King Arthur and Guenevere. A freelance psychopathic assassin named Titus enters the scene. When he reaches Dawning Falls, Titus's companion shoots Hal who is suspected of being an FBI agent. We are led to believe Titus carries the soul of Morgause within him. As the story unfolds, Titus recognizes the power of the cup and in order to obtain it, blows up the house over the stream and steals the cup. Titus has visited Miller's Falls previously and unknowingly fathered a daughter named Gwen. When Titus murders both Gwen and her mother, Arthur is able to revive Gwen, but an ugly crowd gathers and turns against him, some calling him Satan. Merlin appears on the scene and rescues the group consisting of Arthur, Gwen and the Knights. They all magically walk through a wall of rock and appear at Glastonbury Tor for the denouement.

Titus escapes with the cup to England but the cup is lost at sea. He travels to Glastonbury Tor where he kills Arthur (for reasons never explained). Confusion reigns for the main characters at the end of *The Third Magic* for there appears to be alternative outcomes or alternate histories. Despite the mayhem and murder at the Tor, there are happy endings for Arthur, Gwen and Hal. Years later and after many adventures, the cup surfaces in Brazil in the hands of a baby.

Hal has also been plagued by doubts as to the real and preferred identity of Arthur Blessing and castigates Merlin with the words:

Did you really think he'd be the same person he was sixteen hundred years ago? He's already lived that life. He needs another. His own life, not the perversion you've dreamed up (Cochran, 2003:230).

Arthur reflects the same sentiment talking with Gwen, saying he doesn't really have a life of his own. "Actually" he says, "I'm just somebody's magic trick, living out someone else's last days" (Cochran, 2003: 381).

The *eminence grise* Merlin has clearly failed by assuming he knows what is best and denying Arthur his freedom to choose his own destiny, whatever that might be. The tension between the sage and his pupil is something new in the Arthurian saga, reflecting the current trend towards individualization. The Innocent understands all this and advises Merlin to let Arthur go. She reveals that Arthur Blessing now recognises his responsibilities to right the wrongs committed in the past, that is, to forgive Lancelot, Guenevere and Merlin. She tells Merlin it was Arthur's love that mattered to him; not their betrayals.

Arthur also recognises his responsibility to his friends and guardians and the need to end the living legend. In the end he again pulls Excalibur from the rock at the Tor and says to the knights, "with this, I send you home" and gives the knights their freedom. The legend is ended as Arthur Blessing is murdered, but the cycle of rebirths continues for Arthur, Gwen and Hal who live again happily in Chicago in what appears as an alternate ending to the story.

The absence of any leadership role by Arthur grows out of his inability or unwillingness to accept his role as king in his current life and thus his lack

of objectives. The young Arthur Blessing, with doubts about his role as king, shows little interest or capacity for leadership. There are several other reasons for this. Hal and not Arthur is clearly the operational leader of the Knights although they recognise Arthur's status as king and their responsibility to protect him. Next, it is clearly Merlin who makes most significant decisions, although Arthur does not always follow them.

Arthur has a degree of charisma when it comes to dealing with the public but he is not convincing or successful in getting his message across. Once the focus of the crowd's adulation, Arthur does not overcome their fury when they turn against him and even dismisses the public as not being worthy of the power he has been given. His rejection by the public is said to be consistent with the pattern of rejection of every Messiah in history, thus again identifying Arthur with Christ.

The priestess Innocent is quite understanding and sympathetic to Arthur's dilemma, and does not harbour any doubts about his true nature or destiny. This is one more example that wisdom resides in The Innocent, not in Merlin. She sees Arthur as extraordinary, finite but not immortal. He is not quite human either because of Merlin's magic. She tells Merlin to stop trying to orchestrate events and let Arthur go so he can make his own life choices. Innocent, Hal, and even Gwen voice the underlying philosophy of *The Third Magic*. All three say in one way or another, you are what you are, you do what you can and what you have to do. The supreme value is thus freedom of choice. The importance of the freedom of self-identity is a modern characteristic unique to this novel.

A recurring feature in *The Third Magic* is the concept of the cyclical nature of time. Everyone is born and reborn, so all the events in the Arthurian legend have happened previously. On the other hand, the consequences of

one's choices appear in subsequent lives, which could be seen as the effect of the force of karma.

There are three types of threat preventing the boy Arthur from achieving his destiny, if by destiny is meant accomplishing broad social and political goals. The most important of these is Arthur's age and confusion over his identity, for he is unable to set objectives and take on a leadership role expected of one with his powers. The second type of threat is an external one in the form of the psychopathic killer, Titus. A third threat to Arthur Blessing is the fickle public that, after first adulating Arthur, turns against him when he apparently fails to perform as they think he should. *The Third Magic* does not examine the broader question of society-wide threats to social equilibrium and the body politic such as those confronting King Arthur in the past.

The King by Donald Barthelme.

It is the time of the Second World War. Nearly the full panoply of major characters in Malory's rendering of the Arthurian legend is brought forward in Barthelme's satire, *The King*. This book consists of a series of short chapters based on dialogue among the cast, humorous dialogue with a satirical, ironic bite. Using somewhat quaint, archaic language, the dialogue is a commentary on Britain's conduct of World War II. As would be expected, anachronisms abound.

King Arthur appears in only a few of these sketches and is portrayed as a rather eccentric buffoon. He is feeling his age, is worried how he will be remembered in history so the king becomes obsessively involved in preparing his own obituary for the *Times*. The oft-cuckolded Arthur is very aware of his queen's infidelity, going even beyond Lancelot for her fun. This king is a man of honour, nostalgic for the past values of a

happier time. He refuses to build the Bomb, (referred to as the Grail), on the grounds that it is “not a knightly weapon” and immoral.

A reporter tells the King that Churchill says he is an anachronism. Although the king has no respect for Churchill, he tends to agree with this assessment. There are sharp references to the class structure and racism, reinforced by radio propaganda and racism promoted by Lord Haw Haw and Ezra Pound whose broadcasts are parodied. The king is revealed as an aging elitist burdened with his office. He describes his role as follows:

Finally and in sum, abstracting and essentializing are what a king does, and I will continue as the humble servant of the British people as long as the great public continues to honour me with this sacred trust (Barthelme, 1992 :81).

During the action of the book the monarch is mainly absent in the field. When Mordred is left in charge by the Queen who goes a-Maying, he assembles forces to oppose the king, including the mining of many major government buildings. King Arthur knows of Merlin’s prophesy that Mordred will kill him, but he tampers with the wording of the prophesy so that he will survive the final battle. Eventually Mordred is said to flee to Germany to become a Nazi.

The King is a richly written, witty, humorous and biting satire on contemporary morals in a time of war. The figure and legend of King Arthur is put to imaginative use and a new and different aspect of the monarch is revealed.

The Quest of Excalibur by Leonard Wibberley

The Quest of Excalibur is a delightful spoof of the Arthurian legend. The satire pokes fun at the English class system, the royal family, over-regulation by the bureaucracy and almost everything but the English countryside for which the author has a deep fondness.

The plot involves the return of King Arthur to modern day Glastonbury where he becomes involved with a local ditch digger and the spirit of Sir Timothy Bors, two hundred and seventeenth Count of Weddon and Earst, who has just died. The ditch digger and the spirit of Sir Timothy meet a fully armoured King Arthur who appears simply because they wished for him. All three decide to go on a quest to find Excalibur and pile into an ancient Rolls Royce to take them to the Abbey. The scene shifts to the British royal palace where the princess Pamela is unhappy with her role and decides to flee the castle, finding the means to do so by hiding in a panel van driven by an American student of her own age. Eventually they meet up with Arthur and company and spend the night at the Abbey. The plot degenerates into farce and ends rather sadly for the Princess and the American who must choose between love and duty.

King Arthur does not figure prominently in the story although he maintains his true identity, dignity and dress code. He is far from being a buffoon and in the midst of this ludicrously amusing tale he demonstrates authority and wisdom.

There are occasional touches of Christian symbolism in the Quest. At the conclusion for example, the King intervenes to quote legal, religious and moral authority of the bygone era from which he hails to refute the deadening bureaucratic regulations that are used to threaten the freedom of the princess.

In the end, the physical form of the King and Sir Bors disappear but their spirits remain to haunt the old house at Glastonbury.

The Return of Merlin by Deepak Chopra

The Return of Merlin is a modern story embracing elements of the Arthurian legend in one of the most distinctive and controversial

productions in this group. Deepak Chopra, known by some as a New Age Guru, has applied his philosophy to a contemporary setting of the legend in which Merlin is the major actor in the piece. He occasionally appears visible but more usually in disguise, often speaking through his apprentice Melchior who narrates the story.

Dr. Deepak Chopra is a prolific writer of books on New Age health and healing including *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*. *The Return of Merlin* is his first novel. This debut into fiction incorporates his wisdom throughout the story for Chopra is quite explicit in directing the reader's attention to the hidden levels within his book. He says for example, "*The Return of Merlin* is about waking up the wizard that sleeps deep within all of us". He reminds us that the different characters in the book represent roles we are all said to play and closes his introduction as follows:

In each of our lives, there are moments when we rise to a privileged place, where everyday acts take on mythical meaning. When humanity cannot make that ascent, we exalt it in legend, and that place is called Camelot (Chopra, 1995:v).

Chopra draws from a variety of sources for elements of his plot. Modification of tales and symbolic objects are taken from the Mabinogion, Chrétien de Troyes and from Malory. These include the white stag, black crows, shape-shifting and sacred objects such as the Grail Cup and Excalibur. All these objects have explicit symbolic meaning. For example, Alkahest, the Philosophers Stone, is said to represent Merlin's enclosure, pure knowledge and metamorphosis while the true name of Excalibur is said to be destiny. It only remains to be said that the book is pure fantasy – delightful, humorous and sometimes ponderous if the New Age philosophy is not taken seriously.

Action within *The Return of Merlin* is made up of separate but linked events rather than a continuous linear story line. Mysteries abound

throughout the text, making both understanding and a neat summary of the story difficult. As the narrative opens, the reader is taken back to an earlier age and introduced to Merlin and his apprentice wizard, Melchior. In a dramatic scene, Melchior has shifted his shape into that of a Black Panther and witnesses the horrific brutal death of a white stag by a band of knights under the command of Mordred's lieutenant. The slaying of the white stag proclaims that Mordred's newfound magical powers have become equivalent to those of Merlin. Mordred is now so invincible that his magical and military prowess brings about the destruction of Camelot and the death of King Arthur.

The scene shifts forward fifteen centuries as Melchior awakens as a dragonfly in a contemporary English market town located 30 miles from the Welsh border near the site of Glastonbury and Merlin's cave. Two boys discover a body in a roadside ditch, an event that embroils a young police constable, Arthur, and his colleague Katy. At about the same time, a young student in a nearby school discovers the long lost sword Excalibur in a marsh. Nearby a wife searches for her husband, a specialist in ancient British lore, who recently disappeared. While searching for him she finds a small stone with the words Clas Myrddin scratched on to it. This is the philosopher's stone Alkahest.

The roadside body of an apparently murdered elderly local resident is taken away by ambulance but the body mysteriously disappears and actually returns from the dead to be revealed as none other than a reconstituted Merlin. In one of several linked sub-plots, the two boys who discovered the body follow Merlin deep into the woods. Here they enter a web of time and witness the killing of the white stag, the fall of Camelot and are told of the reappearance of evil into this world. The nature of time is a major theme throughout the *Return of Merlin*. Merlin, who lives backwards in time, goes to great lengths to explain time to the two young

boys who have difficulty in grasping the concept. According to Merlin, there are multiple strands of time forming a web that extends into eternity. Thus there are an infinite number of versions of the same event such as the fall of Camelot. It is this characteristic of time that permits entry into the web to witness or experience different versions of any one event.

Elsewhere Morgan le Fay makes an appearance along with Merlins' nemesis, Amberside. This local resident and tarot reader is later revealed as none other than Mordred who has made a pact with the "Evil One", thus earning immortality.

A group calling itself the Court of Miracles is made up of persons on the fringe of society who oppose Mordred. The group includes a tramp that turns out to be a reborn Lancelot and a mysterious Lady in a Green Hat. They make Arthur their King and when the members of the Court come together at a gypsy camp they are confronted by a dragon from which Arthur inexplicably flees. Eventually the Lady in the Green Hat is revealed as Merlin in another of his disguises. In the grisly denouement, Mordred is overcome together with his mother Morgan le Fay. Not surprisingly, Katy, who has been possessed by Morgan, finally emerges as Guenivere to be reunited with Arthur. The two boys and the restored murdered and missing man obtain possession of the three sacred relics. These are the Grail Cup, the stone Alkahest and of course Excalibur. All are taken to Tintagel where the sea accepts them on the incoming tide.

The immortal Merlin has been waiting many centuries for the return of Arthur. When he identifies the young constable as King, Arthur has no immediate recollection of his former existence and does not enter the picture with a mission to perform. It is Merlin or his assistant who are the main actors in the story while Arthur is largely backstage, not only in

terms of action but also because of his character. Not until the story's end does he achieve full recollection of his glorious past. In this sense he is more human than in some other characterisations. Although Arthur is eventually recruited in the fight against Mordred, this Arthur is far from having a strong character or leadership skills. He is often unable to understand what is happening to him or the events around him. He is a rather bland, normal young man, initially showing little signs of maturity. He is hesitant to the point of timidity, not even exhibiting courage or strength of character in the crisis with the dragon. Chopra has undoubtedly deliberately portrayed Arthur in this fashion for reasons outlined below. It is only at the end of the book that Arthur realises his true self and recognises an inner core of peace that he identifies with the Grail.

Merlin and company remain in contemporary times at an undistinguished but historic British town near the Welsh border, a town with many hints of its location in the midst of the Arthurian locale. Broad issues involving the local social structure or distribution of wealth and power are not addressed. Some social and economic problems are hinted at but the overarching focus of the book is the nature and source of evil. It is here that the complexity of *The Return of Merlin* is revealed for this is no simple-minded battle of good and evil in which individuals embody these concepts. True, good and evil are expressed most dramatically in the characters of Merlin and Mordred, but the meaning of these concepts go far beyond this. One of Merlin's main objectives is to show how individuals must be awakened to themselves, both the light and dark sides of personality, and how awakened individuals must band together in a collective to defeat dark forces. Going beyond individual psychology, the philosophic lessons are essentially spiritual ones that relate to the source of evil. The awakening is entirely personal in one sense, but insofar

as overcoming the forces of evil is beyond the individual, a like-minded collective is required.

Merlin emerges as the dominant force with his assured objectives, magical powers and the strong motivation that supports his actions. His character is matched by that of Mordred who is also a consummate wizard but represents all that is dark and negative, reflecting the compact that he has made with the "Evil One". Both Merlin and Mordred are competing to control the future. Merlin, who has recently been released from his enchanted imprisonment urgently tries to overcome Mordred who now has the ability to "tear open the future of time".

The Return of Merlin is the story of a wizard working behind the scenes to awaken others to the threat of Mordred, of evil personified. Many of the actors in *The Return of Merlin* are ordinary people who undergo a character transformation. Several are contemporary reborn reincarnations of persons who had life in an Arthurian time. They may have momentary or permanent knowledge of their previous lives and come to recognise their relationship to others similarly transformed. Not all the characters come to recognise their previous identities within the Arthurian legend however. One example is the character of Katy who seduces Arthur when her body and soul is taken over by Morgan le Fay. In the end however, Katy emerges as Guenivere who through the centuries has been the protector of the Grail Cup.

Each of the many characters in *The Return of Merlin* could be described individually, but far more important are the relationships that evolve into the Court of Miracles. This community can be seen as a modern and symbolic equivalent to the Round Table although its members are not combatants in the usual sense. The single purpose of the Court of Miracles is the defeat of Mordred and what he represents. Here again is

the classic conflict between good and evil, although good and evil becomes badly blurred at the end of the story when Merlin says:

I am going to tell you the secret of conquering evil. You are the evil. When you can face that, all monsters dissolve into the mist (Chopra, 1996:394).

It should be noted that the battle between good and evil is entirely among characters in the story that are rarely involved in the wider community. The collectivity found in the Court of Miracles is the only group defending and perhaps representing the larger community. Note also that the threat comes largely in a magical form that can be countered by magic but more importantly by recognition that the threat is not reality but illusion.

Unlike many of the other works examined in which the opposing forces striving for political power are led by a strong, charismatic hero, *The Return of Merlin* is concerned with individual and collective empowerment – the key to salvation in the struggle against the forces of darkness. The resolution of the conflict with Mordred is through the Court of Miracles made up of a community of persons somewhat on the fringe of society, each of whom represents some aspect of the character of Merlin. In *The Return of Merlin*, questing involves both individuals and groups in the search for the sacred and symbolic objects necessary to defeat the opposition.

It all comes together in the collective Court of Miracles which ultimately defeats Mordred. The resolution of the tale is thus the triumph of a group, not that of an individually strong leader. Merlin points out that the success of the Round Table was the love that King Arthur inspired in the knights, not Arthur's power. Thus it would be inconsistent that Chopra's Arthur emerge as a dominant and forceful leader. Arthur apparently becomes transformed into a different person and is made King by the

group. (This seems odd in one way for he has shown absolutely no leadership or other qualities previously.) This group that has found empowerment through the assistance of Merlin is a necessary requirement to save the future.

Although there are overtones of Christianity in the book, the faith is not being promoted and formal religious dogma and symbolism are absent for the most part. The sacred objects do not derive their power from any divine source, but consistent with the philosophy of the book, their power comes entirely from the beliefs imputed to them. All have symbolic value as in the case of Alkahest as the alchemist's stone of metamorphosis.

The Return of Merlin is the most original and innovative novel in this genre. Deepak Chopra has gathered together an interesting set of characters, some of whom have a double identity – being transformation of characters from the Arthurian past that re-emerge in the present. The author has cleverly democratised the Arthur legend and underpinned it with New Age philosophy for contemporary readers. Although a sometimes frustrating read due to a confusion of reality and illusion and shifts in identity, the effort is generally successful and ends on an optimistic view of the future. Few of the other works examined go beyond telling the story, nor do they become directly concerned with issues of ethics or morality as in *The Return of Merlin*.

Conclusions to Contemporary Settings

From whence comes Arthur? For the most part, the time of Camelot in the High Middle Ages is the era from which King Arthur returns to the present or future. The society into which Arthur emerges is barely different from our own, i.e. a familiar and mainly middle-class world with no unusual features aside from fantasy elements embodied in Merlin's magic and the presence of characters from Arthur's past. Arthur's contact with society is very limited for the most part.

King Arthur re-emerges into this and future worlds largely with the help of Merlin who not only commands the magic to perform the transition but also has an objective for Arthur to carry out. In some cases, Arthur is reborn and identified by Merlin who has been waiting several centuries for him to appear.

The character of Arthur in most of these novels differs little from that in his legendary past although there are interesting exceptions such as the elderly buffoon in *The Quest of Excalibur* and the boy Arthur in *The Forever King*. With the exception of *The Return of Merlin* and Arthur as a boy, the mature king is a robust individual with little or no self-doubt as to his mission or role and how to perform it. This is essential to his role as leader which he has no hesitation in adopting. After his return to life, the king has little problem in adapting to the present society no matter how different it is.

In some reconstructions, Arthur is nostalgic for the simpler old days when problems were dealt with more directly. As New York Mayor and U.S. President, he has a very personalized approach to contemporary issues. Arthur objects to and often rejects the complexities of the modern world. Arthur favours direct action when he is personally involved, but is much more sophisticated when it comes to political manoeuvring. When the king becomes associated with a political party, he is still mainly an individual heroic figure with a following based largely on his charisma. He is protected by his knights in the Cochran novels, but in no case does his inner circle fall away as it did in Camelot.

The acceptance of his identity is a major factor in Arthur's character and adaptability to his new life. As a politician, Arthur becomes a commanding figure, as one would expect of one with his antecedents. He is courageous, pragmatic, and optimistic about his mission for the future.

These leadership qualities earn him the respect of the public even though they sometimes turn against him. The public accepts Arthur but he has relatively little contact with them nor are they of much assistance in his mission. His following is not made clear in *Knight Life* and *One Knight Only* although his electoral success must be based on something.

From one perspective, Arthur is involved in time travel, jumping from centuries in the past to the present day. It is as though an Arthur of today is projected forward to the year 2600. It is surprising therefore that Arthur does not have more difficulty coping with modernisation and all that implies. That this is not a problem is due to devices used by the authors of these books. The problem does not arise in the Cochran novels since Arthur is born into this world and his past slowly unfolds, or is revealed to him as in *Avalon* and *The Return of Merlin*. In *Knight Life*, Arthur is able to keep informed of the outside world while he is immobilised in his cave by Merlin, who also later instructs him in the ways of the 20th century. It is only in *Arthur, King* that Arthur finds it difficult to understand what is a new world for him. In this novel, as in many of the others, Arthur first appears as an innocent in coping with modern language and society. This is a feature that lends itself to much humour.

The way in which Arthur comes into this world is closely associated with his identity. Only in *The Third Magic* is his self-identity a serious problem for him. In *The Quest of Excalibur* and *The King*, Arthur maintains his dignity and full identity as monarch. In *Avalon* and *The Return of Merlin*, Arthur is somewhat slow in coming to the realisation that he has had a noble past. As a mature politician however, Arthur has no doubts as to who he is, or was, and accepts this in *Arthur, King* as well.

The most significant personal relationship in these novels is that between Arthur and Merlin. There are several reasons for this. It is Merlin who

brings Arthur into this world and remains with him as adviser and guardian. Although sometimes a figure of humour, he is generally taken seriously by Arthur even though his advice is not always followed.

Evil takes a one-dimensional form in these novels for it is almost always embodied in the form of individuals who may or may not have come from the ancient past to thwart Arthur. For example, Morgause (Morgan) and Mordred are characteristically demonic, while Saladin, Thanatos and Titus are human beings but no less a dangerous threat. In addition, these creatures often have support groups such as Saladin's thugs and Thanatos' coven. Being completely amoral killers they often appear more effective than Arthur. A different form of threat to Arthur or his mission is that of corporate or collective evil that is not only a threat to him personally but to his mission and to society. The nearest examples of this form of evil are that of the Nazi Luftwaffe as it responds to Mordred's aerial terror tactics, or the terrorists in *One Knight Only*. This form of evil is largely absent from these novels and will be discussed further in the final conclusion. Another kind of evil is revealed in *The Return of Merlin* in which Merlin reveals the secret of overcoming evil from within.

Contemporary novels are relatively free of strong religious orientation or symbolism. There is a sharp contrast between those that adhere to what could be termed 'traditional' values, i.e. either Christian values or values based on Christian ethics, and novels with a secular or New Age orientation that may borrow from eastern philosophic sources. *Avalon* is an example of Christian orientation, as one would expect in a society based on the British monarchy. At the same time, Merlin pays homage to the old Celtic gods that are also prominent in *The Third Magic*. These less traditional philosophies embrace reincarnation, individualism and self-empowerment. This issue of cultural values, or rather their absence, is associated with the absence of any spiritual quest or vision for the future.

The king is mainly concerned with defeating whatever enemy is immediately present. In these books, Arthur's objective is to defeat the enemies of truth and justice thereby saving the core values of Western civilization. For the most part, Arthur keeps alive the traditional values in response to societies showing signs of corruption, crime and injustice. In this, Arthur is in good company with his media counterparts in popular culture such as Superman, Batman, Spiderman, western cowboys and officers of the police and the FBI.

In previous reformulations of the Arthurian legend, the entire cast of characters re-enact the basic plot with subtle or not so subtle differences. In the contemporary emergence of Arthur, this is not the case. A better description of Arthur's return would be to recognise that there are several Arthurs involved, or several Arthurian personalities who return but without the legendary plot. Arthur returns with Merlin to fight evil and injustice. He usually meets up with Guenevere and they go forward into a new life without the distraction or disloyalty of Lancelot and his affair with Guenevere. Without this interpersonal tragedy, all ends happily.

The themes carried forward in these novels contribute little to the character of King Arthur which is modernized and displayed in contemporary settings. *The Return of Merlin* puts a new twist on the philosophic meaning of the legend, and those searching for a spiritual and/or symbolic interpretation of the legend may wish to consult the volumes by Diana Durham and Derek Boyce.

In most cases Arthur has a mission from which he does not deviate and from which he is not often tempted to deviate. His courage and honour is never tested, nor is he tempted to violate his standards although he is sometimes confronted with cruel choices. This is a major element in

ensuring King Arthur's continuing reputation in Western iconography. After completing his mission, his 'exit' if any, from today's world is dramatically different from his 'death' in the familiar legend, a major modification.

The returned King Arthur is largely indifferent to, or unaware of, broad socio-economic problems on the same scale he contended with in the past such as forging national unity and defeating the Saxons. This difference may arise from the perception of authors and publishers that the public prefers escapist fiction that acts to distract the reader from reality. It remains to be seen whether these same features will appear in Arthurian novels of the future and fantasy.

Chapter 4. King Arthur Emerges In Future and Fantasy Worlds

Fantasy generally involves or includes the supernatural, while classic science fiction avoids this. The presence of magic usually defines a story as fantasy, while science fiction may contain things we know don't exist, but can occur within the context of science and realism (LeGuin and Attebery, 1993, p.28-9.) In the novels under consideration, there is often a mixture of the two, creating a category of science fantasy. Due to the unfortunate paucity of Arthurian hard-core novels of science fiction, those identified as such will be introduced along with those of fantasy. It must be said that authors of Arthuriana are not principally science fiction writers in the classic sense such as Isaac Asimov, Philip K. Dick or Orson Scott Card.

Many of the questions, expectations and themes introduced previously will appear again and will not be repeated here. Science fiction and fantasy however offer some new twists in the Arthurian legend. Authors of science fiction have the opportunity to exercise their wildest imagination in projecting King Arthur into unimaginable worlds of the future and fairyland. We would particularly expect science fiction writers to use some of the classic science fiction themes of this genre – space drives, robotics, galactic and time travel, parallel universes, human mutation, teleportation and battles among gigantic armadas ranging across immense distances. How will King Arthur respond to contact with benign or malignant alien creatures found in multiple universes or parallel worlds in time?

How will the legend be modified in future worlds? Will the secular orientation of contemporary Arthuriana give way to new forms of spiritual or religious ways of life in the future? We would expect at least

experimental models of society will evolve, and quite apart from the technological marvels expected, will Arthur find that humankind has evolved into something completely different and if not, what of future forms of society, of social relations, gender and the role of women compared with today? Will there be doomsday scenarios or utopias such as a new Camelot rising out of the ashes of the past? Will ethical values, the legal framework and individualism continue along with the current rampant consumerism? Considering the past history of humankind, it is unlikely that conflict and evil would be eliminated but it could take different forms, posing new threats for King Arthur to deal with.

The expectation is that future and fantasy worlds will be significantly different from Arthur's home territory. Major challenges and threats will go beyond those found in contemporary accounts with more powerful monsters possessing advanced technology to match anything Arthur can command. In such cases, we would expect that Merlin would make an appearance with his bag of spells and incantations, especially if Arthur is again confronted with his old opponents, Mordred and Morgan Le Fay.

As these worlds evolve, so does the character of King Arthur himself. The king may assume the partial identity of another person or even his body. He may or may not always be recognizable as the mythical king which raises questions concerning his own identity for he may or may not be aware of his monarchical past. Throughout all these departures from our world, we will also expect to find some continuity in the character and role of King Arthur. What are the core elements that ensure the validity of this mythical hero?

Finally, what psychological baggage will Arthur bring with him as he enters these new worlds of science fiction and fantasy? What changes in character and behaviour can be expected as the king responds to new

challenges? What kind of world will Arthur try to create, and what will he leave behind as his legacy? Will Guenevere appear again and what roles do women play in future fantasy? The books summarized in this genre will reveal or ignore these expectations, speculations and questions. These are important issues as the answers will reflect not only on the characteristics of the authors but also their orientation towards our future as Arthur is found on these alternative worlds, providing intriguing insights that such speculative literature can provide to sociologists as well as admirers of the Arthurian legend.

Camelot 3000 by Mike Barr and Brian Boland

Camelot 3000 is a prime example of a science fantasy novel set in the far future. This fast moving space-age soap opera is very colourful, very violent and very American. As one of the first graphic novels ever published, this book by Mike Barr and Brian Bolland is a first in many other respects as well. *Camelot 3000* was originally a series of twelve individual chapters which were then combined into a single graphic volume. It is said to be the first comic book for mature readers, and the first by DC Comics to be published on high-quality paper that highlights its excellent artwork, which is a dramatic accompaniment to the story. The action is vividly portrayed, the characters are well drawn and very expressive. The semi-nude females are quite fetching and offer a contrast to the fully armoured males. The aliens are appropriately ugly and horrifying.

The Arthurian legend and characters are taken from Malory but projected into the third millennium. The story itself is an interesting future recreation of the legend with extensive modification in the cast of characters that appear in a surprising new set of relationships. Although deceptively simple, the twists and turns of the plot have an unexpected depth considering its comic book origins. For this reason a plot summary will be worthwhile. The summary follows the sequence of chapters.

As the story opens, alien invaders from outer space are blitzing London. Tom, a young man fleeing from the holocaust, reaches Glastonbury Tor where he is chased by the aliens to within the recesses of the Tor where he finds a crypt. After uncovering and reviving King Arthur, together they fight the aliens. Arthur and Tom then leave for Stonehenge to find Merlin who is imprisoned there by a witch. Meanwhile, somewhere in North America, United Nations Commanding General Joan Acton is also involved in fighting the aliens. In addition to the problem of alien invasion, it is explained that the overpopulated world is short of food and water. Centuries previously the world's nations decided against space exploration, hence technological development was stalled and there was no defence against the aliens when they invaded. Arthur and Tom release Merlin. They all go to the Salisbury Down Nuclear Plant to retrieve Excalibur that is thrust up from one of the tanks by a female arm. Excalibur immediately disappears however, only to reappear embedded in a huge anvil on top of a large rock that emerges through the floor of the United Nations General Assembly Hall.

Outside the UN Assembly, a protest crowd has gathered so the authorities call in Neo-men to control them. Neo-men are criminals and undesirables who have been genetically changed to loyal, virtually brainless servants of the corrupt powers that run the UN. Arthur fights and defeats the Neo-men, spreading hope throughout the world. Arthur declares himself king as he withdraws the sword from the anvil causing the people to rejoice. At United Earth Defence Supreme Headquarters, Commander Joan Acton meets up with Arthur, Merlin and Tom. She is awakened by a kiss from King Arthur who recognizes her as Queen Guinevere. Merlin explains her soul has been reincarnated in a different body and Guinevere now remembers her previous lives. The team travels to Jules Futrelle's asteroid castle and renames it New Camelot. Futrelle, a

wealthy French industrialist, pays homage to Arthur and is revealed as a reborn Sir Lancelot. As Guinevere and Lancelot meet again, Arthur recognizes the passion between them that renews the tragic love triangle. The chapter ends with a picture of the beautiful and nearly naked Morgan Le Fay plotting the downfall of New Camelot.

Lancelot and Guinevere are caught in a passionate embrace by the brooding King Arthur who sends Guinevere to Australia where she discovers Neo-men are being made. There she rescues Percival but not before he is transformed into a Neo-man. In Japan, Lancelot saves Galahad from attempted suicide and both join the team of Knights. In South Africa, Merlin plucks a black Sir Gawain from his family. In Canada Sergeant Owen McAllister is about to wed Amber March when Amber is revealed as the Knight Tristan. She cuts her hair short and joins the companions which now total six Knights. Meanwhile, alien space ships are traced to a mysterious tenth planet.

The world's population wants King Arthur as their saviour but the four corrupt and power-hungry world leaders refuse and order Jordan Matthew, UN Security Director, to kill Arthur. At New Camelot all the knights pledge loyalty to Arthur at the new Round Table. Jordan hires McAllister to destroy Arthur and the Knights and a battle ensues.

As Morgan plots with Jordan, she tells him of her life story including her domination of the tenth planet and the enslavement of its alien inhabitants. She also informs Jordan of his birth revealing his true identity as Mordred, bastard son of King Arthur. Elsewhere, Tristan (who detests her female body) and Percival ask Merlin to change them back to their original identities but he refuses. Guinevere and Lancelot are again discovered embracing by the king who despite this announces his betrothal to Guinevere.

Morgan begins seducing Tristan to betray the Round Table. Tristan accepts Morgan's bribe to return her to the male gender. Jordan, the UN Security Director, hires Claire Locklyn as assistant. Arthur and Guinevere marry, lifting the spirits of the population. Guinevere is shot at the wedding ceremony but is revived by Lancelot. Claire Locklyn is transformed as Isolde and meets Tristan. They fall into each others arms, but Tristan cannot accept this relationship and denies her identity as a woman. The knights successfully attack the headquarters of the Neo-men. Guinevere and Lancelot are again discovered together by Arthur who banishes them from New Camelot.

The witch Nyneve spirits Merlin away and Arthur searches for the betrayer of the Round Table. The knights all take an oath on Excalibur in order to reveal the traitor who turns out to be Sir Kay. Before Arthur can behead him, Morgan's space ships attack. In the following battle, Arthur's team is victorious. Tom saves Arthur's life but is badly wounded himself so Arthur undertakes a quest for the Holy Grail to cure Tom's wounds.

Arthur now defines two quests, the first to find and free Merlin, and the second to find the Holy Grail. The Knights go questing with the result that Percival finds the Grail at Glastonbury Tor, reverts to his natural form and is transfigured. Lancelot becomes guardian of the Grail Cup but during the battle with the aliens, Jordan captures the Grail and takes it to Morgan who fashions it into a suit of golden armour to protect Mordred from wounds. Mordred and Morgan are then transported to Morgan's tenth planet where Merlin is imprisoned. One team of Knights returns to Salisbury Down where Elaine, Lady of the Lake, responds to Lancelot's plea and transports them to the tenth planet. Arthur's team and Lancelot's group are reunited on the tenth planet at the foot of Morgan's

castle. Friendly aliens take the knights to the Alien Mother whose children were corrupted and enslaved by Morgan.

The knights' space ship is used as an explosive battering ram to get into the castle. Mordred, wearing armour made from the Grail Cup touched by Jesus, is thrown against Merlin, son of the devil, with a resulting explosion that kills Mordred. Merlin is released from the spell and causes Nyneve to be strangled with her own tongue. Morgan is transformed into a spider-woman, Excalibur is returned to the stone by Arthur who is disembodied in a cloud of atomic radiation. The war is ended but Kay, Percival, Galahad and Arthur are all dead although it is intoned that this life is not the end. Merlin leaves to plan for the next cycle; Tristan and Isolde cuddle passionately on a bed and will remain as partners. Guinevere is pregnant and hopes the child is Arthur's although she and Lancelot remain as lovers. Somewhere, on another planet, an alien creature finds Excalibur and the book ends with the words, "and the road goes ever on".

The character of King Arthur is one that has often been met subsequently in Arthuriana of 20th century popular culture. This reborn Arthur of the third millennium is bigger than life, charismatic, physically strong, decisive, a born leader and highly pro-active. He is not one subject to self-doubts nor inclined to wait on the advice of others. The Knights regard him as their undisputed leader and the masses quickly recognise him as their saviour from oppression, from aliens and from the Neo-men. Arthur quickly and willingly accepts this role and begins a campaign against the enemy.

The future world that Arthur confronts is very different from his place of origin, although not nearly as different from our time as one might expect. There are technological marvels to be sure, but socially very little

has changed. The furious action in *Camelot 3000* takes place at many of the sites associated with Arthur. For example, the king is reawakened at Glastonbury, and Merlin is released from his imprisonment at Stonehenge which he himself is said to have built. Consistent with the modernisation of the tale, action also takes place at a nuclear plant at Salisbury Down, in Oregon, Australia and U.S.A. Relatively little attention is paid to political and social structures in *Camelot 3000*, yet that little is highly significant. National and international institutions of government have all been taken over by corrupt officials and the masses are pictured as frustrated, inert, dejected and desperate for a strong leader to take command. They are quick to accept King Arthur and welcome his pledge to release them from bondage and to confront the aliens. Political concepts familiar in the current millennium turn up with little change in the year 3000.

When King Arthur is reawakened in the third millennium he meets threats to civilisation from two sources: 1) political oppressors and their henchmen who have gained control of nation states as well as the United Nations; (*Camelot 3000* is one of the few instances in which there is an organized institutional threat to society) and 2) aliens from space under the control of Morgan Le Fay. As Arthur and his Knights take command, the action is extremely violent with hand-to-hand combat against Neomen and aliens.

A war in the 23rd century is said to have killed billions of people with the result that new weapons technology as well as space exploration has been rejected and abandoned. The planet thus became vulnerable with no defence when aliens from space invaded earth. There is a definite anti-science theme throughout this book. *Camelot 3000* is a tale of violent personal conflict and war. Ray guns and space ships co-exist with magical spells and talismans used by both Morgan Le Fay and Merlin. One strange anachronism is that Arthur is sometimes armed with both a

sword and ray guns. Consider the developments in technology from the time of the presumed historic Arthur to the present time compared with what might occur between the present era and 3000 AD. Narrow it down even further and consider the development in computer technology in the past fifty years. There are few indications of social or technical developments in *Camelot 3000* aside from space ships and weapons technology. Genetically modified crops have not come about since food and water are insufficient for the population. Even given the limitations of a graphic novel, this lack of futuristic innovation is disappointing.

In general, male-female relationships are not significantly different from today with one startling major exception. Some female characters assume warrior roles in hand to hand combat at the side of Arthur but this is to be expected. Romantic love and monogamy is still the ideal, so the love and disloyalty of Guinevere and Lancelot is again destabilising and the perpetrators deserving of punishment.

One novel twist in the story is the rebirth of Tristan in the body of a woman. He/She is unable to accept herself as female and agonises over this throughout the book. At the very end she finally gives in to the sensuous seduction of Isolde with whom she enters into a passionate lesbian love affair. There are no other homosexual relationships. The continuance of the nuclear family is supported.

Religious concepts and symbolism are again present in *Camelot 3000*. Arthur and Guinevere are married in what appears to be a Christian ceremony for example. The main object of devotion is the Grail Cup, said to have been touched by Christ. It is found by Percival who is transformed from an ugly dark Neo-man into a transfigured blond human with golden locks who ascends and disappears in a blaze of glory.

In terms of philosophy, *Camelot 3000* is the direct opposite from *The Return of Merlin*. In *Camelot 3000* there is an aggressive superman as leader of a small band of Knights who overcome all odds no matter their magnitude. Arthur wins the support of the masses when he symbolically withdraws the sword that has been magically transported to the Great Hall of the United Nations. The population at large however does not appear to be at all involved in the war of liberation and there is no interaction with the public by Arthur or the Knights. Disloyalty is again a dominant theme. The faithless Guinevere and Lancelot are banned from New Camelot after repeatedly being discovered in an embrace by King Arthur. When Sir Kay's disloyalty is revealed, King Arthur is about to behead him. Tristan nearly betrays the Round Table in return for Morgan's promise to return her to a male body. Violence begets violence and the corrupt politicians plotting the destruction of Arthur and the Knights are all murdered by their rivals.

There are new twists at the conclusion the *Camelot 3000*. One is the desire of some remaining knights to return to their normal lives when the fighting is over. Gawain wants to return to his family in Johannesburg; the female Tristan and Isolde are destined to a lesbian relationship together, and Guinevere and Lancelot will continue their partnership despite Guinevere's pregnancy with Arthur's child. During their final combat, Arthur hurls Mordred against Merlin, son of the devil, and since Mordred is wearing the armour made from the Grail Cup touched by Jesus, Mordred explodes. This dual nature of the Grail Cup is confusing since if the Grail is endowed with religious sanctity one would not think it could be perverted by Mordred. (This feature has also been encountered in *The Forever King* and *One Knight Only*) Merlin's enchantress. Finally, Arthur himself appears to vaporise when he returns Excalibur to a stone, and Merlin disappears, saying he will power up until the next cycle begins.

The vision of the future offered in *Camelot 3000* is not a hopeful one. The society in which King Arthur reawakens not only suffers from current political, social and environmental problems with no solution for 1000 years, but is also under attack from outer space. The 'Matter of Britain' has become the 'Matter of Civilisation'. King Arthur and his six knights tidy up this situation with apparently little support from anyone although the magic and power of witches is met by equivalent spells by Merlin. The solution to political problems appears as a narrowly based authoritarian one since no world leader or international organization such as the United Nations shows the ability to cope. Arthur leaves the scene after defeating the obvious threats but there is no suggestion regarding solutions to long term earthly problems mentioned at the beginning of the story, or to the political vacuum remaining after King Arthur's departure. The two dominant role models who successfully confront evil are thus a superhuman Arthur, and the Devil's son Merlin. With its colourful graphics and fast-moving action, *Camelot 3000* has more in common with a contemporary arcade game than with any of its literary forbearers.

Legacy by Steve White.

Legacy is a sequel to Steve White's book *The Disinherited* and is followed by its sequel, *Debt of Ages*. Both *Legacy* and *Debt of Ages* are hard-core classic science fiction involving time-travel with a purpose. Both have an element of the Arthurian legend, particularly *Legacy*. In this novel, Arthur briefly appears in a historical reconstruction that differs considerably from the historical reconstruction familiar to readers of Arthuriana.

The story opens with a prologue dated 469AD, which sets the historical and geographic context and introduces some of the characters that figure in the latter parts of the story. The main action introduces Captain Robert Sarnac of the Solar Union Space Fleet (Survey Command). A battle cruiser

from a rival empire, the Realm of Tarzhgul, attacks Sarnac's space ship. When his shuttle crashes, a group of alien Korvaash, the dominant race of Tarzhgul, captures Sarnac and his crew. Leader of the Korvaash is the Interrogator, a huge Bug Eyed Monster outfitted with high-tech weapons and gadgets. The captive heroes are rescued by an unknown race of humans but again captured by the Interrogator. Yet another rescue takes place, but this time by a time-traveller from even farther into the future named Tyler. Tyler explains that his people monitor earth's history to ensure that history evolves towards an alliance of human worlds in order to defeat the empire allied with the Realm of Tarzhgul. Intervention in the affairs of earth must take place at weak points in the fabric of history and one of these weak points is the Gallic campaign of King Arthur. Tyler proposes that the just-rescued party assume different identities consistent with the time and be transported to earth at the time of Arthur's campaign. Sarnac assumes an identity known as Bedwyr, a bodyguard to Tyler.

Halfway into the narrative, the King Arthur of the past appears leading his cavalry, which has been through several successful battles against the Saxons. As Arthur's strategy plays out, he is defeated and badly wounded at the battle of Bourges. As he lies dying, his companions throw his sword into a nearby lake and learn later that three women take him to the town of Avallon. In the sequel *Debt of Ages*, Arthur appears centuries later as Captain Drago on Admiral Sarnac's space ship (presumably reincarnated by Tyler who is something of a stand-in for Merlin).

Throughout the passages involving Arthur, he appears in familiar legendary guise: charismatic, courageous, a leader of men, audacious, and a superb battle strategist and tactician against the Saxons. Female interest in the book is in the person of Tiraena, another time traveller from the

future who is assigned by Tyler to be a lady in waiting to Gwenhwyvaer at the court of Camalat.

Much historical research has gone into this volume but the speculative association with Arthur is mainly to link his minor role to the broad sweep of European events following the breakup of the Roman Empire. The significance of Arthur is found in Tyler's explanation that at this moment in history there has never been, nor would there be, another time when individuals acting in their own small ways could produce such cosmic consequences. The outcome of events involving the failure of Arthur's Gallic campaign assures the eventual restoration of Western Europe without the stasis that would result from a victory. Tyler explains it this way:

It will be ugly, but out of it will emerge that Western civilization which, for all its endemic war, its political stupidity, its regrettable tendencies toward religious and racial bigotry, will nevertheless give birth to the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the first fundamentally new departure in human history since Neolithic man thought of growing his food instead of gathering it (White, 1995:275).

Legacy is another example where science fiction is the vehicle by which a solution to earth's problems is found by escape from earth to outer worlds and to the future. It is a tale incorporating classic science fiction elements: time travel, space ships with advanced drives, weaponry, alien contact and combat, and solutions to the Grandfather Paradox. It is also an example of the need for humans to band together in spatial alliances to defeat alien enemies. It is into this mixture and at a weak point in the fabric of time that King Arthur emerges as leader, saviour and symbol of human values worth preserving. The future evolution of human beings and the time-travelling technology that takes contemporary travellers back to the 5th century is of course unknown to Arthur. This device of characters in our time or future time going back to Arthur's time is found

not only in *Legacy* and *Debt of Ages*, but also in *For King and Country* and *Merlin's Bones*. The limited involvement of Arthur in *Legacy* restricts analysis of his role. Not until *Debt of Ages* does a reborn or revitalized King Arthur get catapulted into the future.

Debt of Ages by Steve White.

Among all the works examined, *Debt of Ages* and *Legacy* are the best and possibly only examples of an Arthurian saga that could be described as classical science fiction. The major theme of *Debt of Ages* is the attempt by an emissary from the far future, Tyler, to arrange for a minor intervention in history in order to avoid the downfall of the West. The main objective is the obligation and effort required to correct an historical 'error' in battle strategy during King Arthur's Gallic sojourn and its resulting political consequences. The book's title, *Debt of Ages*, refers to the burden of wiping this error from its time in history in order to change the course of events from that point forward in time. To make this correction, the cooperation of King Arthur and his supporters is required. Of necessity, the story must cope with the problem of interfering with a previous time period or parallel universe for fear of changing events in a future time. To overcome this problem, Tyler explains that a weakness in the fabric of reality allows the same event to have multiple outcomes, all of which have equal mathematical validity.

To deal with this situation the structure of the book is unusually complex as it involves two parallel but similar universes and three time periods of past, future and far future. To bring about the necessary subtle intervention needed in the 5th century, the agent of the 29th century must convince Fleet Admiral Robert Sarnac of the Pan-Human League Space Fleet (Survey Branch) to accompany him back in time with the group of actors that were carrying out the political campaigns at that time. One of the group is a Captain Geoffrey Draco in Admiral Sarnac's own

command. Draco, whose name is said to mean Norman Dragon, is none other than a future transmuted King Arthur, but he does not play a major role in the book despite the fact that events revolve around his particular historical role.

In addition to the human time travellers, there is an ugly, marauding one-eyed time-travelling alien giant who is present with his Saxon army in one of the 5th century universes. Gwenhwyvaer makes an appearance in a role as the Regent of Britain and battle commander while Arthur is away on the continent . Neither Merlin nor Lancelot appear in the cast of characters to muddy the already complicated tale. Characters in *The Debt of Ages* are not well drawn for there is relatively little psychological or sociological meat on the bones of the plot.

As one would expect in a science fiction novel, there are an several futuristic technological marvels. This has little impact on Arthur who of course takes it all for granted. Despite his minor role in the story, Arthur is described as brilliant and charismatic in both historic and current circumstances. The description of his relationship with Gwenhwyvaer reflects standard romantic values.

Most of the action of the book involves manoeuvring for political advantage, either diplomatically or through armed conflict. There is some discussion of religious tolerance but Tyler has no respect for our world. He says modern, secularised Westerners were a product of the scientific and industrial revolutions and their resultant social disintegration otherwise known as 'freedom'.

Debt of Ages adds little to Arthurian literature or to any social insights into a meaningful future. The book is awkwardly written with a turgid and complex plot. No period of history appears to have advanced civilisation

beyond what we know except technologically. The action of the book is aimed at saving or conserving Western civilisation but there is no model of the future in utopian or any other terms. The author leaves us with the message that very little will ever change in terms of the violence of human conflict.

The Keltiad (The Hawk's Grey Feather, The Oak Above The Kings, The Hedge Of Mist) by Patricia Kennealy-Morrison

The Keltiad saga comprises six volumes concerning worlds in space that span many centuries into the future. Science fiction and fantasy are combined as science fantasy with magic and sorcery dominant. The first trilogy concerns a future King Arthur who disappears at the end of the third volume but contains many references to his eventual return. Keltia is a federation of star worlds originally settled by Brendan The Astrogator whose Celtic origins were on earth. The Arthur trilogy takes place thirty-five centuries after Brendan when Arthur is destined to lead a Counterinsurgency to overthrow a two hundred-year Druid Theocracy. The future monarch's final triumph over the evil Death-Druid forms the central core of the story that ends with Arthur's fiery disappearance. A second trilogy of the Keltiad takes place 1500 years after Arthur's disappearance and features Queen Aeron, a female counterpart to Arthur in almost every respect. This thesis is limited to the three novels featuring the exploits of Arthur.

The history of this future King Arthur is told by his foster-brother and close Companion, Taliesin. In the first volume, *The Hawk's Grey Feather*, Taliesin traces the development of these two young boys through their rigorous education and training: Taliesin as Druid and bard, Arthur as warrior and military planner. It becomes known that Arthur, whose descent is somewhat mysterious in the beginning of the story, will become High King and eventually lead the successful Counterinsurgency.

Gweniver enters the scene but for much of the trilogy, Gweniver and Arthur are far from friendly. Each takes other mates before they eventually fall in love and come to jointly share sovereignty as ordered by the High King. Arthur's wicked half-sister, the ambitious Marguessan, also believes she has a valid claim to the throne as High Queen. Her wicked plots are a constant theme throughout this trilogy. After fighting many battles, Arthur and his Companions overcome the local despot on the home planet.

In *The Oak Above The Kings*, Arthur's conflict with the Druid Theocracy continues beyond the home planet into space where Arthur is finally victorious. Arthur is assisted by the semi-divine Sidhe, the "Shining Ones", who reveal the Thirteen Treasures of Keltia that Brendan brought from earth centuries earlier. During the joint reign of Arthur and Gweniver they begin the task of restoring law and order following the chaos of war, instilling representative government and punishing supporters of the former Theocracy. Arthur leaves the capital Tara to establish his reign among the associated planets of Keltia. A new flagship named Prydwen is built for the purpose. *The Oak Above The Kings* ends with the devastating loss of the One Cup, one of the Four Hallows of Keltia among the Thirteen Treasures, which is stolen by Marguessan. The One Cup or Graal has immense magical healing powers and unless it is recovered, the health and vitality of all Keltia will ultimately decline. In addition, there is the fear that Marguessan may be able to use the Cup for evil purposes. The volume ends with the dedication of Arthur and Gweniver to recover the Graal as instructed by the Sidhe.

The final volume of the Arthur trilogy, *The Hedge of Mist*, moves unerringly toward three monumental conclusions: the successful recovery of the Graal; the raising of the protective Curtain Wall around Keltia by Morgan; and Arthur's victory over opposing star fleets ending with his

dramatic disappearance and apparent doom. The recovery of the One Cup comes only after an earth-shattering confrontation with Marguessan who tries to destroy the Graal and to permit the entrance of its opposite entity, the Black Graal or Cup of Darkness. Morgan's epic creation, the protective Curtain Wall shielding Keltia from outside contact is raised, while Taliesin initiates the Dragon Kinship, a new non-partisan organization dedicated to the benign use of pure magic to preserve the spirit and soul of Keltia. Queen Gweniver resigns but before dying, she appoints three queens as regents to her young son, the new High King.

This King is not reborn, reincarnated or transported into a society about which he knows nothing. He is born and raised in a world 35 centuries in the future. Arthur is of royal descent, of heroic stature and destined to rule. He is thoroughly educated in magical lore, law and trained in the skills of weaponry and personal combat. He becomes the strong and unchallenged leader of a dedicated group of close Companions. He also receives assistance from demi-gods and non-humans in times of crisis, but the reader is never in doubt that his personal qualities are paramount. The theme of powerful leaders with justice and morality opposed by corrupt, wicked or ambitious opponents runs throughout these books, the classic Manichaeian plot of Good vs. Evil, Light vs. Darkness. Arthur is physically attractive, strongly sexed and enjoys a series of partners of the opposite sex before settling down to a continuing relationship with Gweniver.

King Arthur of the Keltiad is a far more complex individual than the Arthur of other novels examined. The charismatic Arthur is the classic battlefield war leader. He is not hesitant in describing his own identity in terms of his skills as Rex Bellorum a warrior, strategic planner and leader of the Companions. He has no doubt as to his role and destiny, which is of course widely recognized. Arthur trains and excels as an officer in the

Fianna, the Keltic order of military supremacy. He is also skilled in the arts, fashioning jewellery from metal and wood.

Despite his aristocratic lineage and assumption as High King, Arthur is also a man of the people. He judges himself and others on their merits, giving no allowance for birth or title. He is humble in victory, eager for new knowledge and rarely makes a mistake. This king is entirely proactive with a strong sense of duty. His overall mission is threefold: to overcome Keltia's enemies both on the home worlds and in space; to re-establish democratic government and justice throughout the system; and to guard the Thirteen Treasures until they are needed again. Arthur is successful in all three objectives although he does not survive his last mission. Arthur foresees his own doom and is transformed as he plunges towards a fiery planet where he will be entombed. Just prior to his disappearance he foretells that he will return when needed.

Equally great achievements are carried out by women. It is Arthur's wife, Gweniver who is charged by the Sidhe with organizing the quest to recover the Grail Cup while Arthur must remain behind to govern. It is the sorceress Morgan who raises the protective curtain wall to shield Keltia from outside contact. The greatest threat to Keltia arises from the obsessively jealous Marguessan.

King Arthur is an entirely traditional hero. Success results from being born to leadership in the aristocratic line; to be skilled and have good individual karma or *dán*; to have good relations with the gods (who may intervene in one's behalf); and to work and study hard, including magical spells and incantations. The Shining Ones are on the side of Arthur and appear in times of crisis. Note that despite innate potential and developed skills, success in large part arises from rank in aristocratic descent, magic,

sorcery or supernatural assistance which somewhat diminishes victories based solely on individual effort.

There is more description and elaboration of the culture of Keltia than in any of the other recent Arthur novels. Keltia is ruled by a despotic Theocracy until Arthur and his Companions in the Counterinsurgency conquer it and re-establish the traditional social structure. The restored society is essentially a benevolent aristocracy. Major governmental bodies are the High Council and Privy Council, but non-governmental orders figure more prominently in the story. There is the Dragon Kinship, a magical and military order limited to males; the Druid Order, also limited to males who are primarily concerned with sorcery and politics; the Bandraoi, a female counterpart to the Druid order, the chief purpose being worship of the "Mother Goddess". The members are sorceresses as well as priestesses whose magic matches that of the Druids. The Fianna is a purely military organization of the most highly skilled warriors and finally, there is the Bardic Association. Members of these orders all receive long and intensive training. In some, perhaps all of these orders, a meritocracy prevails as members can be drawn from any part of society as long as they show early promise and complete the rigorous training. A more restricted and less formal group are those closely associated with Arthur as the Companions.

In common with other renderings of the Arthurian legend, the Keltiad's focus is on war, politics and internal dissension. Perhaps it reflects our own past preoccupation with the cold war. There is little indication as to how its inhabitants spend their time when they are not fighting or training as warriors, Druids, sorcerers, or bards. If the arts have developed in 35 centuries, we are not made aware of it. In addition, there is no indication of how future technology has impacted on society. There are no reports on the Keltic economy aside from the elimination of

poverty and the establishment of trading relationships with outlying planets. In case of need, goods are shared. A serious omission in the text is any reference to the concept of property, the acquisition or distribution of wealth, and its relationship to power. What is clear is that in time of peace, a utopian society has been achieved.

As one would expect, women occupy an equal place as men in Keltic society. There are some gender specialisations, but on the whole women carry out similar occupations and roles as men including hand to hand combat. Sexual relationships are all romantic and heterosexual with ten recognized forms of marriage.

The chief motivation among Keltia's leaders is the defence and protection of the state. All personal and collective efforts by the major participants are directed to this single purpose reflecting perhaps the rampant nationalism of our 20th century. The political values of Keltia are those of a liberal democracy within the context of a unitary and apparently homogeneous society. Law is based on fairness and compassion. Little internal conflict is evident, there is no mention of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and the masses appear dedicated to the support of Keltia's rulers in their various wars of liberation and planetary federation.

Religion in Keltia is not spelled out in systematic fashion. There is said to be one Supreme God, a Creator of no fixed gender, and numerous other gods and especially goddesses with whom every individual can communicate without any intervening clergy or institution. The underlying philosophic concept sometimes held responsible for the outcome of action is *dán*, the Wheel of Fate. This is a slippery concept with strong Buddhist associations similar to the inescapable operation of karma. Consistent with the concept of *dán* is the notion of an endless cycle of re-birth. There is a reference to *Gwynfyd*, the Circle of Perfection

or eternal afterlife attained only after many cycles of rebirth. Perhaps this is the key to the notion that Arthur will return as it is said that the dead go to “Land-Under-Waves” where they commence their next turn of the Wheel. The Vedic and/or Buddhist underpinnings of these concepts is apparent.

There is a problem in the handling of religion in Keltia. There are gods that receive awe, respect and worship as in many religions, but for the individual there appears to be no religious goal. The idea of accumulating merit to ensure rewards in this and future lives is absent as is any concept of individual salvation or ultimate spiritual goal. The worship of the gods does not constitute a religious system nor does it perform an integrating function in the society. The gods do not appear to control the Wheel of Fate nor do they seem to require prayer or sacrifice. The semi-divine Shining Ones intervene in human affairs but they are not worshipped. There are no Christians in Keltia.

The Keltiad is not typical, classic or authentic science fiction as usually defined. There are a number of technological devices such as space ships, computer pads and laser guns, but magic is far more elaborated and important to the story than science. Evidently there has been a breakthrough in medical technology given the presence of extraordinary procedures for healing battle casualties. As reported in Raymond Thompson’s interview with Kennealy-Morrison, some things normally considered magic might be the possible evolution of human capabilities. Second sight is a good example of this. Being fantasy, perhaps it is not necessary to require explanations of what appear as anachronisms. Both black and white magic and sorcery are used throughout the Keltiad, particularly by females.

Celtic culture continues to be a major integrating theme and one of the pleasures in reading *The Keltiad* is the discovery of how the author brings forward and modifies various aspects of Celtic culture and the Arthurian legend. Celtic aspects of culture, magic and religion are far more elaborated in the story than science or technology. It is astonishing that these cultural materials remain vital after so many centuries yet apparently so little technological change has occurred aside from that mentioned.

The absence of basic social change is the most disappointing feature of the *Keltiad*. Even though the work is more fantasy than science fiction, one would still hope for more reference or speculation concerning the influence of rapid scientific and technological change 35 centuries from the present since the *Keltiad* is a world evolved from our own. There are a few technological wonders but the impact of science and technology on the social system is overlooked. This is not only disappointing but depressing as future humankind is still consumed with fighting nationalistic and civil wars. The concept of human nature as being flawed is not challenged. There is no suggestion that any evolution of the species or social order has taken place aside from the unexplained elimination of poverty.

Related to the problem of social and technological change is the nature of threats to society. The serious threats to our own society (environmental, demographic, etc.) are apparently overcome in Keltia but without explanation. The only threats to Keltia are those of war from external or opposing sources, disloyalty and betrayal. This is consistent with earlier accounts of the Arthur legend but rather unimaginative. Consistent with the more traditional retelling of the Arthur legend, 'Evil' or immoral behaviour tends to be described in terms of black and white. There are few shades of grey or corporate threats aside from military threats.

The Keltiad is interesting and important for several reasons that set it apart from other novels examined.

- 1) It is a well worked-out and innovative modification of the Arthur legend set in the far future.
- 2) The entire work draws heavily on Celtic sources, themes and symbolism.
- 3) The 'original' cast of Arthurian characters are used, although not always in their usual roles or relationships.
- 4) There is a carefully developed plot with supporting sub-plots.
- 5) Religious and/or philosophical themes, both Celtic and otherwise, underpin the action.
- 6) There is little or no indication of social change 35 centuries into the future.
- 7) The character and role of King Arthur and the legend generally is somewhat static.

The Dragon Rises by Adrienne Martin-Barnes

The Dragon Rises is a somewhat dated space opera focusing on a love story worthy of Mills and Boon. The front cover of the paperback reveals it all. The Admiral (an Arthur proxy) in full uniform is shown embracing his ladylove, who is wearing an evening gown. The setting is presumably the forward area of a space ship supporting a large perplex dome. Ahead in space is a large planet set against a blue sky sparkling with stars, while in the foreground several small fighter craft are flying by. Beneath the book's title is written, "An eternal hero plays out his destiny on a stage of stars" while the bottom of the cover says, "Defiant romance in a universe at war".

Arthur, never specifically identified as the King Arthur of the past, has been reincarnated, or rather reactivated as the Dragon. From his eternal

“home” in Ker Vidor, he shares the Glass Palace with the Bull, Eagle, Roebuck, Griffin, Fox and Hound. The Dragon has been called out again by “The Lady of the Glass Palace,” a prison where the starlight never reaches. From time to time, one of the seven departs this resting-place for heroes to seek final release from the endless night. The Dragon is aware of his past lives, is aware the pattern is beginning to repeat again with the expectation that he will win battles but not survive the last one when he must be returned to the Glass Palace.

The Dragon, when released, occupies the body of Admiral Gilhame ur Fagon whose personality has been largely suppressed although his technical abilities remain. The Dragon is never in any doubt as to his own identity or purpose. The Dragon’s host body, Admiral Gilhame, is an outstanding strategist of war, decisive and aggressive but the Dragon finds him cold, ruthless, unorthodox and merciless. As the Dragon’s somewhat changed personality is revealed to his crew, he comes across as a warmer, more humane, and caring individual compared with his ‘usual’ self.

The Dragon, now Admiral Gilhame ur Fagon, is a complex character. He is idealistic and pragmatic, familiar with the irony of having to accept his eventual fate, yet optimistically always fights the good fight for a just cause. On the other hand, the Dragon is accused of being “Chaos masquerading as Law” and of using people for his own ends which he justifies on grounds of the needs of the greater good. When his paramour accuses him of liking war, he becomes furious and says “Fighting is what I do, not what I like” and when asked why he does it, he replies that he has been cursed. Unlike many in this role however, the Dragon’s paramount value is to protect the lives of those in his trust. Among those with this military orientation, he is an honourable man who feels sorrow but no guilt over what he has done and must do as Admiral. But he asks

himself, why he can't just stop fighting, stop spending lives to save lives, just die, once and for all. It is this aspect of his personality that constitutes the main barrier in his relationship with the Guinevere-type female in the plot, Alvellaina Curly-Krispin.

About the only meaningful contribution to an updated, disguised Arthurian legend is the exploration of the relationship between the Dragon and Alvellaina. They get off to a thorny start for Alvellaina is the daughter of a defeated enemy Group Commander and she thus becomes chattel of the Dragon. Alvellaina has a dilemma, for she is a high-spirited feminist, attracted to the Dragon but hates his warrior occupation and presumed paternalism. She values her independence and perceives the Dragon as a threat. For most of the story she will not let him touch her and he honours her wish. Alvellaina berates the Dragon this way.

You always fight for right-or, at least, it turns out to be right, because you always win. You seem to hold back the darkness, but really you are the darkness....You are war, the very spirit of it...You make killing romantic. I cannot reconcile myself to that.
(Martine-Barnes, 1943:116)

It is a classic case of a woman who not only cannot accept the nature of this man's job that always takes priority, and in addition, cannot accept a man who violates her basic values. But Alvellaina has another problem, for despite her intense dislike of what the Dragon does, she is strongly attracted to him personally and physically.

In this novel of the future, feminism has clearly entered the Arthuriana genre with its classic male-female role conflicts. There is turnabout symmetry in this relationship however, for in the beginning, the Dragon's military bearing is matched by the strong feminist orientation of Alvellaina. By the end of their stormy courtship Alvellaina has fallen in love and submits to the inevitable. In the end, the Dragon faces a hard choice. The Emperor, for reasons of state, insists that the Dragon put

Alvellaina aside as his concubine and marry one of the royal princesses. The Dragon will not do this and finally resigns his commission and retires with the pregnant Alvellaina. Despite the loss of his power and prestige, however, the Dragon's greater gain is his release from the return to the Glass Palace and his eternal re-birth. And so, a happy family ending and a happy ending for the Arthurian legend in space.

Threats to the Dragon stem from ambitious rivals grasping for power. There are betrayals from outside the inner circle but not from within. There is no tension among relationships in the inner circle. The Dragon is universally loved, respected and admired.

The Dragon Rises is an example of romantic pseudo-science fiction in which the principal characters and many elements of the plot bear striking similarities to the Arthurian legend, yet neither Arthur nor the others assume the characters of the legend. It is the only book of the group in which the dilemmas of the female lead are exposed.

The Wurm Trilogy by Robert N. Charrette

(The Wurm Trilogy is a collective title bestowed by the thesis author on Charrette's three linked volumes: *A Prince Among Men*; *King Beneath The Mountain*; and *A Knight Among Knaves*)

The three books of this trilogy constitute one of the most modern and imaginative efforts to take King Arthur into fairyland. The novels begin sometime in the near future and take place in this and in the otherworld. The remarkable features of Charrette's work are the successful blend of science fiction and fantasy, the evolution and adaptation of King Arthur to both worlds, the recognition of his environmental mission, the appearance of a significant corporate threat to society and Arthur's response.

The complex plot of the *Wyrm Trilogy* involves the struggle among several human and non-human combatants to either open or deny entry into this world of evil demons from another and parallel world.

The trilogy opens in a museum full of ancient artefacts. King Arthur is magically awakened and released from supernatural suspension by the mysterious elf Nym. In this series, Merlin is not present at all and the principal character is not Arthur but the young changeling elf named John. Arthur does waken, but he is not in full command of himself and is very confused. After he finally regains his full faculties, he becomes the leader of an urban street gang.

During Arthur's lengthy wakening there are those who want to control the king, (or Artos the Bear as he is called), partly in order to find the magical sword Caliburn, or Excalibur. There are dwarfs who try to bring Arthur back to the present time by putting him in a tank and leading him through simulations of his previous lives.

In this modern near future the action takes place mainly in the northeast corridor of the U.S.A., an area characterised by urban sprawl and urban blight. There is a parallel world, the "otherworld" that is physically different but reflects the damage to the 'real' world. The elf Bennett says the beauty of his otherworld is blasted and corrupted by the thoughtlessness of men. As the way is opened to the other world, a proliferation of entrants from Faery gain access to this world – .elves, goblins, sprites, dwarfs, magicians and satanic monsters. There are few clues concerning the human population of this future world which appears to be dominated by street gangs and global Japanese corporations controlling many facets of everyday life. The FBI is active together with a scientific branch of the European Community. Technology is far

advanced beyond that of today, particularly in transport, communications and weaponry.

A major innovation in the story of King Arthur's new entry here is the introduction of these corporate threats, perhaps symbolically replacing the armies of the past. One of these mega- corporations seeks out magical beings from the other world in order to control them for its own purposes. These corporations have powerful resources in the form of staff, finance and technology.

The role of Arthur in these books is somewhat strange since he is not present during much of the action, other characters being more involved in the story. Although Artos is a strong character in parts of the trilogy, the main action revolves around the changeling elf John who is forever seeking his true identity, human or elf.

The strongest threats in the trilogy are the demon Quetzal and the human Van Dieman, a follower of the Glittering Path of black magic. The first demon to emerge is Quetzal, the blood lusting semi-mummified ancient human with magical powers. Before his demise, Quetzal uncovers a second monster, a powerful serpentine harbinger sometimes called the Wyrm. The Wyrm is finally defeated in the Antarctic at a temple resembling Stonehenge. Curiously, Arthur never directly confronts either Quetzal or the Wyrm.

A second type of menace is that of corporate threats to society. In The Wyrm Trilogy, science and magic are clearly opposed although there is white and black magic associated with the forces of light and darkness. Science and technology controlled by the corporations have severe limitations when it comes to opposing the evil sleepers and their magic. The magic of the otherworld is generally more benevolent.

Artos, or The Bear, emerges in the end as a commanding figure with all the necessary skills and charisma encountered in previous appearances. He does not deal in magic nor does he develop any strong personal relationships. As the final battle approaches however, one of The Bear's close followers is actually given Caliburn to take away to slay the serpent while Arthur remains behind. At the end of the struggle, the forces of darkness are overcome with both magic and hi-tech weapons.

The reason for Arthur's odd decision to abandon the final conflict is because he has recognized the nature of the environmental threat facing the world, an evil that has degraded the land. He learns from the Lady of the Lake that his mission, together with Caliburn, is to heal the land. The king comes to recognize that the environmental degradation of the world brought on by men and their mega -corporations is supported by the entry of magical evil creatures from the outer world. Arthur organizes the campaign to destroy the worst of the demonic entrants and in his final capacity, demonstrates leadership and administrative talent as founding Director of an environmental organization, the Pend Foundation.

The important new introduction to Arthuriana is this environmental mission assumed by The Bear. In Arthur's words:

The real problem is that the earth is dying – unthinking people are killing it. People don't understand their place in nature, people who lack ideals and people who just plain don't care. The dreams are dying and the earth with them (Charrette, *A Knight Among Knaves* 1995:291).

In no other contemporary work has Arthur appeared in such a role with such an explicit altruistic mission. Arthur absents himself from the final battle with the implication that he will remain to carry on with his environmental pursuits through the Pend Foundation, and will stay alert to prevent further "sleepers" from entering this world.

There are few carryovers from the Arthurian legends of the past or from Celtic mythology. There are hints in a few of the names: Nym, The Lady of the Lake, and Morgana. Just as Arthur may represent or symbolise renewal, Caliburn is also an important icon as a mirror of the land. When Arthur retrieves the sword, there is fear on the part of the opposition that there will be an increase in otherworldly energy permeating the world, enough to cause a radical shift such that society will fragment and civilisation will devolve into a new dark age (Charrette, 1994:151).

The Wyrn Trilogy ends optimistically. Arthur is a modern, vigorous executive with recognition of current social and environmental decay who has a remedy and vision for the future. Ethics and morals are not spelled out in detail but Arthur's actions speak for themselves.

The Fionavar Tapestry by Guy Gavriel Kay

The Fionavar Tapestry is a trilogy of epic proportions consisting of *The Summer Tree*, *The Wandering Fire* and *The Darkest Road*, an undertaking of 1200 pages. The story's action takes place in the first world ever made by the Weaver at the Loom, one of many worlds but in a galaxy apart from our own. The world of *The Fionavar Tapestry* unfolds as the setting for the story with descriptions of its physical geography, 1000 year-old history of human cultures and societies, its seasons, flora and fauna. If this were not enough, there is an astonishing abundance of gods, goddesses, kings, queens, princes, seers, mages, priestesses, water and wood sprites as well as many long-dead heroes from the past. As Loren Silvercloak, the Merlin figure says, there are creatures of good and evil co-existing here with humankind. These creatures are not window dressing however for all have an important part to play in the unfolding saga.

The Weaver of the Loom created Fionavar over thousands of years ago. Since its creation, an elaborate culture evolved based on a village and tribal society of numerous provinces with a variety of song, dance, ritual, and language. Social organization has elements of democracy but being on a war footing the patriarchal theme is strong. There is a good gender balance in this society, unlike in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Despite being apart from our world, persons and creatures are able to cross between our world and Fionavar with the use of magic. The main crossing is accomplished first by Loren Silvercloak, a powerful mage who takes five young Canadian adults across to Fionavar. These five all develop remarkable powers and skills as they become more and more involved in the complex life of the other world.

A seer raises Arthur Pendragon from his long sleep at Glastonbury Tor and takes him into the complex tapestry of Fionavar with its bewildering cast of characters. Fionavar needs him in the confrontation against despicable Maugrim the Unraveller and his corrupted human and animal minions. Maugrim exists outside the loom of the tapestry, outside the walls of time, and cannot be killed. Among the worst of his supporters is the evil Wolflord Galadan whose objective is to destroy all life in Fionavar. The similarities with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* are too numerous to outline. It needs to be said that as with Sauron, the dark genius of Maugrim the Unraveller is the brooding personification of Evil.

The Fionavar Tapestry is by no means a full re-creation of the Arthurian legend for the Arthurian elements are not central to the story and come mainly at its conclusion. King Arthur's appearance begins after the seer Kimberly goes to Stonehenge and raises Uther Pendragon from the tomb, then forces from him the name of the Warrior which will bring the Warrior back to life. This name turns out to be Childslayer, a name that

revives Arthur Pendragon at Glastonbury Tor. Arthur is referred to as The Warrior who always dies at the end but is not allowed to rest. It is his doom because of great wrong done at the beginning of his days, his slaying of the children. Arthur may only be called back by magic at a time of darkest need when summoned by a secret name. When called out by the seer Kimberly, the two of them cross over into Fionavar.

Turning from this summary to the character of Arthur, we find that despite all his fighting and leadership capabilities, Arthur has a small but significant part in *The Fionavar Tapestry*. Arthur shows little or no leadership qualities in this trilogy however. He is a respected counsellor and warrior in the field, but does not plan strategy or lead armies for others initiate all such action His combatant skills are fully realized at the conclusion of the third volume, *The Darkest Road*. The king has no difficulty in adapting to the otherworld of Fionavar, for this is just another battle for which he has been revived to fight. Arthur knows he can never see the outcome of a battle in which he is 'killed' and he also knows he cannot permanently 'die' for all time. Arthur explains: "I die before the end. I will not be here for the ending – it is part of what has been laid upon me". (Kay, 1986:133) Arthur expects death on the field of the final battle, one more event in his endless cycle of death and rebirth.

The forces of Light, including King Arthur and his friends, are successful in locating the island of Cadir Sedat and destroying the cauldron being used by the renegade mage to increase his power by drawing life from corrupted creatures. In the dungeon of the castle, Arthur finds Lancelot among the dead heroes and revives him by speaking of Guinevere, saying, "Oh, Lance, come, she will be waiting for you". With the return of Arthur and Lancelot to the mainland, the tragedy is about to be played out once again. It is made clear that Guinevere has loved both men, and that they had loved each other as well, "making all the angles equal" and "making

them shaped most perfectly for grief". It appears to be a hopeless situation.

There are two major themes in the story concerning Arthur. The first are his fighting skills and special knowledge employed opposing the Unraveller. A second theme is Arthur's involvement once again in the tragic love triangle with Guinevere and Lancelot who are both restored in the Tapestry. This tragedy is referred to as the saddest story of all the long tales ever told, and is well known to most inhabitants in Fionavar. There are major impediments blocking the restoration of love between Arthur and Guinevere. Arthur can never rid himself of constant guilt over the slaying of the children in his previous life, a sin for which the gods have punished him with an endless penance of personal doom. The ravishment and torture of Guinevere by Maugrim stands between her and Arthur. The relationship among Guinevere, Arthur and Lancelot is sensitively and touchingly told by the author. Readers are offered a neat final resolution as all three sail into the west without further guilt or bitterness.

Just as elements of *The Lord of the Rings* are reflected in the Fionavar trilogy, so also does the trilogy contain Celtic names, concepts and associations reminiscent of the Mabinogion. Guinevere and Lancelot are present as is Taliesin and Cavall, Arthur's hunting dog. One of the main characters, Paul, becomes Pwyll the Twiceborn, Lord of the Summer Tree. The dwarves deliver a powerful cauldron to the traitor mage Metran that he uses to raise the dead. The ship Prydwen takes the forces of Light to the island of Cadir Sedat, said by Arthur to be Caer Sidi or Cair Rigor, a place of death. A selection of the Thirteen Treasures of Britain are represented by the cauldron that has been turned to evil purposes, Arthur's spear and sword. Lastly, the final battle with the forces of the Unraveller is fought at a place previously known as Camlann.

As expected in fantasy, magic takes the place of science. As in much of fantasy, mages, priestesses and seers use magic to help the forces of Light out of tight spots, and to batter the forces of Dark and its competing magic. This is not to say that individuals do not have to exert superhuman effort in the conflict, they do, enduring pain, exhaustion, and in some cases, the ultimate sacrifice of life itself.

A variety of classic science fiction and fantasy themes and devices are used in the Tapestry such as the threatened doom of world. It is Maugrim's magic that causes widespread killing rain and snow. The magic of mages is used as weaponry and the powerful Baelrath ring of the seer permits instant transport across worlds and from place to place within Fionavar. It is magic that underlies Galadan's shape shifting from human to wolf and Darien's shift from human to owl. Another form of human transformation is that of the contemporary Jennifer who becomes the Guinevere of the past.

Most human values found in the Tapestry are those idealized in contemporary western society. Conflict in this society arises not from within (except for the dreadful betrayal by a faction of dwarfs) but external to society in the form of Maugrim the Unraveller. There are important themes involving values, some of which touch the noble single-minded Arthur. For example, there is the classic dilemma involving what appears to be the fatalistic determination of outcomes and choices individuals must make using their own moral compass at a time of crisis. There are instances of pre-determined outcomes due to the gods, but gods cannot, or are not supposed, to intervene in the affairs of humans. To confuse things, they sometimes do. Some individuals must choose to follow the Light or the Dark. One character bemoans the ethical dilemma of choosing an 'evil' deed in the quest for Light. These choices are difficult especially when they involve choices between conflicting values. *The*

Fionavar Tapestry is more successful than most novels examined in presenting these moral dilemmas and the necessity of choice.

A major underlying theme in *The Fionavar Tapestry* is the operation of fate and free will. Within the patterns established by the Weaver of the Loom, there is still an element of choice brought about by a random wildness such that those in Fionavar are not “slaves to the Loom”. This even applies to Kimberley the Seer who says; “there is a point beyond which the quest for Light becomes a serving of the Dark”. This is demonstrated in the lives of a number of other major characters. In the case of Arthur however, he is never confronted with choice for he is doomed before entering Fionavar.

The Fionavar Tapestry does not attempt to retell the Arthurian legend per se yet is an outstanding example how elements of the legend can be interlarded into another story – the story of another world, a world of fantasy. The prose in this one is quite addictive and merits a second reading.

Conclusion to Future and Fantasy

The basic elements of Arthuriana science fantasy differ little from the novels in the embrace of contemporary times. The expected major differences did not emerge although some new elements do appear. Time travel and space ships are present but the driving force of technology has had little impact on culture and society. For example, there is nothing comparable to the invention of the printing press or mass production or the widespread revolution of communications technology now sweeping the world. With no sign of benevolent mutants or human evolution, perhaps it is not surprising that inhabitants of future worlds are faced with the same major problems experienced in the past, especially warfare, although in some cases the enemy may be non-human aliens.

The authors of Arthurian science fantasy do pose major threats comparable to Arthur's defeat of the original Saxons, especially in *The Keltiad* and *Camelot 3000* but Arthur's role continues to be mainly an individual combatant on the battlefield. His character shows more continuity from the past than changes as he appears in the future and fantasy worlds. King Arthur is not an introspective hero and his only self-doubts arise in *Fionavar* due to his guilt over the murder of the children in his past.

There is surprisingly little emphasis on future technology or on the impact of technology on the future societies in which Arthur is found. It is as though the future is little different from contemporary society with the exception of a few advances in transport, communications and weaponry. Sorcery is still very much present in *Camelot 3000* and *The Keltiad*, particularly in *The Keltiad's* finale in which Morgan raises the Curtain Wall. Those hoping for hard core science fiction will be sorely disappointed.

The type of evil threat to society that continues to surface in these novels to demand the attention of King Arthur are again in the form of personalized or externalised evil. The demonic threats to the king usually appear in the persons of Mordred, Morgan or some wicked monster from the future or otherworld. Arthur's response reveals his simplistic morality associated with this form of evil, a response in the form of traditional individual combat.

This collection of science fantasy contains only one example of a complex society demonstrating significant variations on contemporary social themes and that is *The Keltiad*. Several new social forms and institutions have evolved in Keltia but only at the end of the series does King Arthur,

his family and supporters, overcome internal betrayal and external war to achieve peace and prosperity. This is accomplished only through escape behind the protective Curtain Wall. In general, ethical values of today are carried forward into the future.

Many elements of the traditional legend are carried forward into King Arthur's future in other worlds but a re-creation of the entire plot with a complete cast is only achieved in *Camelot 3000*. Merlin or his proxy is usually present, and the tragedy involving Guenevere and Lancelot is finally resolved in Fionavar. King Arthur is not so fortunate in *Camelot 3000* for the pregnant Guenevere is coupled with Lancelot as the king disappears into the next cycle of time.

In future and fantasy novels, women are beginning to show more independence than previously and there have been strong female characters in Keltiad and Fionavar especially. Gender and marriage relationships show some modification in some future worlds. Although monogamy appears as the ideal in Keltia, King Arthur, after one unsuccessful marriage finally weds Guenevere. The marriage does not prevent him from simultaneously raising a family on a different planet however. The only 'deviant' occurrence is the lesbian relationship between the knight Tristan and Clare Locklyn.

King Arthur leaves the scene with no long-term plan for the future, for after he disposes of his opponents, he fades away leaving little in the way of a continuing legacy of social value. The single exception is the figure of the Bear who ends the *Wyrms Trilogy* to repair the shattered earth.

Chapter 5. Other Arthuriana

The legend of King Arthur clearly has a hold on public imagination and is being kept alive in a variety of ways. Academic interest among archaeologists, linguists, historians, literary buffs and others is enormous of course. In addition, some rather curious publications have grown up around the figure and legend of King Arthur. What now remains is to briefly show examples of other literary and non-fiction efforts that do not meet the selection criteria observed in the main body of the thesis. The novels referred to here do not add much to what we have already learned, but the non-fiction works reveal an aspect of current Arthuriana which stress a spiritual and compassionate side of Arthur and the legend that most novels ignore.

Although novels that feature King Arthur in Dark Age or Medieval settings are outside the scope of this work, mention needs to be made of a few that combine a contemporary setting with a science fiction return to the past where King Arthur is encountered. We have already observed this twist in time in Steve White's novels, *Legacy*, and *Debt of Ages*. This literary device is also used in two science-fiction novels which depict heroic attempts by modern day time travellers to return to the past to protect King Arthur and to block the unfolding of time in a dangerous direction.

There are also a number of novels concerning the character of King Arthur and/or the legend, in which Arthur does not appear. These are: *Dominion* by Fred Saberhagen; C. J. Cherryh's science fiction novel, *Port Eternity*; Sanders Anne Laubenthal's *Excalibur*; *Merlin's Bones*; *For King and Country* by Robert Asprin & Linda Evans; and *Merlin's Mirror* by Andre Norton.

Port Eternity by C. J. Cherryh is widely regarded as classic science-fiction and is by far the best of this group. Each of the seventeen chapters begins with a quote from *The Idylls of the King* by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Travelling through space and time is the spaceship *Maid*, inhabited largely by human clones. The opulent owner of *Maid*, Lady Dela Kirn, has not only decorated the spaceship with medieval paraphernalia but created clones of Lancelot, Elaine, Percevale, Gawain, Mordred, Lynette and Vivien. Arthur is not present in any form but a cloned guest, Griffin, is the owner's paramour. The owner and her crew are challenged by spatial instability and attacked by aliens. They barely survive.

Dominion by Fred Saberhagen is one of a group of fantasy novels in which King Arthur is not brought forward in time but the story transports contemporary characters back in time to discover Arthur in the 6th century. In the case of *Dominion*, the device of time tunnels connecting the present with the past is used. Curiously, the device is used to relatively little purpose and Arthur plays no significant role in the action beyond wielding a sword that subsequently displays magical powers in the contemporary world.

The sword, never named, is an object sought by two contending parties, representing of course the forces of Good and Evil. Each group contains characters from the Arthurian legend as well as others. Outstanding among the evil powers is the well-developed character of Vivian, sometimes called Nimue who says she was also Lady of the Lake. Nimue needs the sword to open the door to the present for her lover, Falerin. Opposing Vivian is a Merlin character variously named Feathers, Hawk, Ambrosias, and Falcon. In the distant past, Vivian has seduced Feathers who taught her all his magic. Still besotted by Vivian, Feathers has been enchanted by her and has spent centuries as a hopeless drunk. He is

restored to engage in the conflict with Vivian and is aided by one of her powerful enemies, Talisman, who is a vampire. Medraut is present in the past but is a minor character without a role.

Dominion is another example of a novel that touches on the legend of King Arthur in ways that use Arthur in only a peripheral way but whose sword is significant as a powerful weapon in the fight against evil forces abroad in the world.

Merlin's Bones is another Saberhagen novel with an absent King Arthur. The mysterious monarch appears only in an ambulance, is never seen and never speaks. The story involves two time periods: the present (or perhaps the near future) and the far past. At a UK research facility called the Antrobus Foundation there is a device termed a hypostator capable of altering fundamental reality. With it, material can be transported from one time period to another. A group is attempting to capture the hypostator in order to return to the past and obtain Merlin's bones so as to use his magic. Action in the plot follows readings from Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*. The story opens with a troupe of itinerant actors being pursued by a band of bloodthirsty warriors. They stumble into a crumbling fortress containing Merlin's bones and as the plot unfolds, there are several battles for control of the bones.

Many characters from the Arthurian legend appear in the story. While Merlin is the focus of much of the action in the past, the present sees the appearance of The Fisher King, Morgan le Fay, Mordred, Lancelot, Vivian (Lady of the Lake and Nimue) and Dr. Elaine Brusen.

For King & Country by Robert Asprin and Linda Evans combines time travelling and historical fantasy in a rousing adventure story. A Northern Irish terrorist manages to capture secret technology to travel 500 years

into the past with the intention of assassinating King Arthur in order to alter history for Ireland's benefit. A British SAS officer follows him where they meet the Dux Bellorum, Artorius.

Excalibur by Sanders Anne Laubenthal is a brooding Gothic romantic fantasy set within an Arthurian context. While some Arthurian novels of the future bring the king forward into contemporary or future time without including much of the legend, its plot or characters, *Excalibur* is just the reverse: many Arthurian legendary elements are present in contemporary Alabama, but King Arthur himself is absent from the story. This book is worth a brief examination since the author has displayed considerable skill in wrapping the legend in Celtic mythology and religious lore. Disappointingly, this will be of more interest to those with a literary or historical bent rather than social scientists, for the actors in this book do not engage whatever with local society.

A Welsh archaeologist and Pendragon of Logres is a descendant of Arthur and last in a line of successor Pendragons. The mission of the Pendragons is to try to keep England closer to its ideal status. An archaeological expedition is undertaken to Mobile, Alabama in search of *Excalibur*. The focus of interest is the location of the ruins of a lost colony founded by a Prince Madoc, a 12th century Arthurian descendant. As the plot develops, it is revealed that *Excalibur* was thought to have been brought to Prince Madoc's colony where it disappeared. The Pendragon is not the only one searching for the Sword of Llew however, for Morgan Le Fay and her evil sister Morgause, both identified as representatives of Celtic goddesses, are seeking the sword as well as the Grail cup. There is an abundance of Christian symbolism, particularly surrounding the Grail.

Despite *Excalibur's* old-fashioned quaintness it is unusual in the way it incorporates Celtic mythological elements into a contemporary story.

Basically a dark Gothic romance, the book reflects considerable research and familiarity with the Arthurian legend and Celtic lore. In the end, the sword is left where it will be protected for the future to be drawn by the king who will come again when most needed.

Mythago Wood by Robert Holdstock is possibly the most curious fantasy mentioning King Arthur. Here, a phantom King Arthur from long before the dawn of history makes a brief appearance.

Finally, the wealth of short stories featuring King Arthur go far beyond the limits of this paper to earn even brief reference. One example will have to suffice and that is entitled "Wake-Up Call" by M. Friesner in the Issac Asimov collection entitled *Camelot*. In this modern-day story, Morgan Le Fay, Guinevere and the Lady of the Lake are engaged in a card game. King Arthur emerges from another room but is told the time is not yet for him to return to save Britain.

In addition to the return of King Arthur in popular literature, there are several non-fiction works in the New Age tradition that stress spiritual and symbolic aspects of Arthur's character, aspects largely lacking in the literary genre. Brief mention needs to be made of them here to round out this aspect of current interest in Arthuriana. Some authors assessing the character of King Arthur draw attention to one important feature entirely missing from the collection of contemporary, future and science-fantasy novels and that is a personal or social spiritual quest, a vision of the future based on higher goals than those encountered in these novels.

Many writers seized with the need to interpret or re-interpret the character of King Arthur are not novelists but authors attempting to show a modern revelation of the real meaning and/or significance of the character. There is Diana Durham's Jungian approach in *The Return of*

King Arthur, and a Christian elaboration in *The Mystical Way and the Arthurian Quest* by Derek Bryce. We have already observed the philosophic messages in Deepak Chopra's novel *The Return of Merlin*.

The Return of King Arthur. Completing the Quest for Wholeness, Inner Strength and Self-Knowledge by Diana Durham.

This book is a psychological and symbolic interpretation of the character and legend of King Arthur, his Knights, Round Table and women. As in the case of Deepak Chopra's novel, the book deals with the issue of leadership, especially collective and community leadership as an alternative to past authoritarian models. New Age feminism would describe the genre of this book. Durham attributes significance to components of the Arthurian legend that not all will find reasonable or acceptable. She builds a huge symbolic and psychological edifice on the skeleton of the legend, attributing questionable values and significance to characters and actions. There may be a long tradition for this but whether Durham's effort is valid needs further research. The book also follows Durham's own personal quest for psychological and spiritual health. A few quotes will demonstrate the flavour of the book.

He (Arthur) represents enlightened leadership, particularly the spiritual mentor who blesses, creatively challenges and empowers his "subjects". She (Guinevere) represents the feminine wisdom that brings the gift of the future, in the shape of the Round Table. The Round Table then symbolized not just Camelot or the united kingdom of Britain but the whole world, indeed the whole visible cosmos...The Grail chalice expands to become the consciousness of oneness. The sword represents one's power, which has been given away to others and must be taken back. As the Grail is the heart, the sword is the conscious mind that is aligned with God, the masculine principle, and a symbol of truth. The Round Table then symbolized not just Camelot or the united kingdom of Britain but the whole world, indeed the whole visible cosmos (Durham, 2004: 6, 8, 15, 222).

The Mystical Way and the Arthurian Quest by Derek Bryce

Derek Bryce's book is also full of unsupported generalizations, speculations, and items often not related to Arthur or the quest. There are similarities with Durham's *The Return of King Arthur* in trying to show the contrast between the material world, the modern world, individualism, ancient wisdom and spirituality. The quest is seeking the inner heart and spiritual sanctity, overcoming the evil, dark side of human nature towards a higher vision. *The Mystical Way and the Arthurian Quest* is poorly researched despite references to various religious texts. Some symbolism is expounded, especially that surrounding the Grail Cup. As explained on the back jacket, the profound interpretation of the quest tales is of the human soul in search of spirituality, and ultimately, its union with God.

In his concluding sentence, Derek Bryce writes as follows:

In modern times, the functional equivalent of the exterior life of the knight should be the practice of virtue; the fight against evil should be an internal practice of virtue; the fight against evil should be an internal one; an internal struggle that leads toward spiritual perfection and real freedom; the only quest that is truly worthwhile, for the individual and the world. Focus is mainly on the knights, the spiritual knight and the quest of self (Bryce, 1996:139).

The Trials of Arthur. The Life and Times of a Modern-Day King by Arthur Pendragon and Christopher James Stone

Of all the books hitherto mentioned, the oddest of all is the life story of an eccentric, if not mad, self-styled king, Arthur Pendragon, Druid and Eco-Warrior. This man is said to have taken the Home Office to the High Court in a battle for the public's right to attend solstice celebrations at Stonehenge. One journalist recommends the book as an inspiring story of an unjustly maligned British counterculture.

These last three books point up one important feature almost entirely missing from the collection of contemporary, future and science fantasy

novels and that is a personal or social spiritual quest, a vision of the future based on higher goals as exemplified in the Grail Quest and Camelot in the traditional legend. It is curious that the psychologically-oriented authors of books in *Other Arthuriana* are those who stress the spiritual dimensions and the symbolic role of Camelot in the Arthurian legend. These features are largely absent in most of the novels considered.

Turning now from an examination of recent fiction and non-fiction books of *Arthuriana*, the legendary identity and role of the king will be taken up as a prelude to outlining how this iconic figure has changed in contemporary time and the reasons for the change.

Chapter 6. The Identity, Character & Role of King Arthur : The Legendary Figure

The actual character of King Arthur, as well as his deeds, is shrouded in mystery. Little is known of this Dark Age warrior so our perception of him is built on an edifice of patchy early chronicles, accounts from the Middle Ages, European romances and a plethora of imaginative novels, poems and tales. No single Arthur emerges from this conglomeration, but the several Arthurs that do come to light share a few common features. Until today that is, for as will be seen in the following pages, the Arthur who has entered popular culture in the 20th century sometimes takes on a very different persona.

Contemporary scholars who have examined early records and literature featuring King Arthur have generally arrived at a very positive image of this legendary King. Richard Barber, who has published several books on the Arthurian saga, writes that from the time of the 13th century account of Geoffrey of Monmouth, King Arthur is the overarching figure of British myth and legend (Barber, 1999:159).

Arthur governed the realm of Britain for thirty-nine years in the power of his strength, the wisdom of his mind, the acuteness of his judgement, and through his renown in battle (Barber, 2001: 51).

In Stephen Knight's review of Arthurian sources, he finds that the legend has always dealt with the issue of 'greatness' with Arthur always becoming and remaining 'great'. Going beyond even this, the aura surrounding Arthur earns him the accolade of being "an archetype of true heroism" (Knight, 1983: xiv,110). Within the Welsh tradition, the king is seen as an ideal soldier if not a supernatural super-hero. On the other hand, there are early texts that show King Arthur as a villain who

terrorizes the church. These occur in some of the lives of the British saints in which Arthur is described as lustful and deceitful.

The role of the Christian hero begins with Nennius who described King Arthur as a patriotic warrior, victor of Baddon and defender of his nation. Geoffrey of Monmouth points to Arthur as a warrior who marches with just cause and extols the king's courage and generosity. More recently, Richard Barber concludes that:

as long as poetry is written, Arthur will be remembered: he may yet have many vicissitudes to come, but the legends are integral to our heritage that his figure will always emerge again, mysterious, heroic, and yet human (Barber, 1986:200).

Randall Thompson has surveyed a great deal of recent Arthurian fiction published since World War II up to the 1980s. Thompson found fiction set in the Dark Ages is usually heroic in mood but in most of these works, Arthur's charisma inspires his follows with his dream of stability and order. Thompson propels the laudatory nature of the myth into the present day:

Amidst the desolation and despair that darken about us as the twentieth century draws to a close, he (Arthur) is the dream of peace and justice, of love and laughter. He is the unquenchable spark of hope in the human spirit (Thompson, 1985: 178).

Despite Thompson's reservation concerning the transitory nature of Arthur's achievements, he writes:

that the modern legend demonstrates that much can be achieved by heroic defiance in the face of overwhelming odds, that a glorious kingdom can be established, to hold back the darkness for a while (Thompson, 1985:172).

There are few accounts that are critical of Arthur although some admit that ancient warriors perform expected excesses that would not be sanctioned today (although in fact they do occur all too frequently).

The recent author most critical of the character of King Arthur is Sara Douglass in her book, *The Betrayal of Arthur*. It must be said at the outset that Douglass' assessment of Arthur is built upon careful research into the early literature but also draws upon contemporary novels by M. Stewart, R. Sutcliff, T. H. White and M. Z. Bradley (note that 75% of authors in this group are female). An interesting portrait emerges but one suspects the selective evidence, (as well as the author's bias perhaps) may have been chosen to support a pre-existing hypotheses, particularly since Douglass has admitted in an interview that she does not like King Arthur.

Douglass shows that as leader, the English chronicles stress Arthur's magnanimous kingship and the love and respect shown to him by the people. He is characterized by his generosity and is known to consult with his barons for advice. Despite the heroic qualities associated with King Arthur, Douglass begins by noting that our perception of King Arthur as an inspirational hero is a misconception based on a figure that exists neither in fact nor in legend. The Arthur we know, writes Douglass, is a nineteenth century medieval character created to "placate Victorian middle-class parlour morality" (Douglass, 1999: xi).

In Douglass' portrayal, Arthur is a man surely betrayed, but whose personal failings were responsible for his eventual downfall. Betrayed by his parents, wife, son and best friend, the tragedy of the king is a moral fable teaching that "if one succumbs to sin, even unintentionally, then one necessarily embraces disaster" (Douglass, 1999: xii). While modern readers enjoy the heroic aspects of King Arthur, she writes, they overlook his weakness and ignore the moral of the story.

Sara Douglass considers Arthur in his dual role as war leader and Christian icon, and in his role as a family man. According to her, it is his family that ultimately betrays and destroys the king. In any case,

Douglass is of the view that Arthur is a “blemished icon” for he is weak and indecisive and as war leader, he can be cruel and unjust. His lust for power causes him to wage unjust wars to further his own ambition.

To support her thesis of Arthur’s betrayal, Douglass outlines how, in the chronicle tradition, internal treachery results in civil war bringing disaster to Arthur and Britain. This focus is contrasted with the romance and modern traditions in which it is Arthur’s original sin that is responsible for the king’s downfall. According to Douglass, it is the medieval fear of sexuality and incest that produces a morality tale dealing with Arthur’s origin in sinful lust, a sin in which he himself, his wife, best friend and son all engaged. The original sin motif embedded in the theme of sexual betrayal, depravity and sin brings on civil war and dismemberment of Camelot and Britain itself.

Central to King Arthur’s problems were his inability to have a legitimate son and heir within the royal marriage. Secondly, he is unable or unwilling to resolve Guenevere’s adultery with Lancelot. Arthur fails to put Guenevere aside for a queen who could provide him with an heir thus ensuring a successor to the throne. Both issues were of major concern to the knights. It is the king’s indecisiveness in these matters that causes Douglass to conclude that Arthur was largely responsible for his own downfall.

As war leader, Douglass charges King Arthur with fighting only one of four major campaigns for a just cause, that of fighting back the Saxon invaders to protect the realm. In her review of the literature, Douglass finds that it is Arthur who initiates and fights unjust wars because of the flaw in his character arising from “the physical manifestation of his sin” (Douglass, 1999:2120).

To further Arthur's faults there is his indifferent attitude towards the church. Douglass sees this king depicted as full of Christian virtue in early accounts, but becomes a king more pagan than Christian in the later 20th-century novels. Two of three female authors of recent renditions of the legend have set their stories in the Dark Age in which Arthur's dedication to the church is less than enthusiastic, while in Bradley's *Mists of Avalon*, the fall of Arthur is linked to his betrayal of the old gods when he embraced Christianity.

Sara Douglass is not alone in stressing the theme of betrayal in the legend of King Arthur. Allan Massie introduces Richard White's book, *King Arthur In Legend and History*, with the view that the betrayal goes far beyond the personal. Lancelot's love of Guenevere is a betrayal of the ideals of the Round Table, and Mordred's rebellion against Arthur is a revolt of disorder against order and high ideals (White, 1997: xiv).

It is important to show these assessments of the character of King Arthur both in terms of the changes through the centuries (see Evolution of the Legend) and the different perception of the king as hero. As Arthur enters popular culture of the 20th century, an entirely different picture emerges. Just as the character of Arthur changes, so do the moral lessons embodied in the contemporary fable.

The theme of Arthur's betrayal is generally absent from the contemporary, futuristic and fantasy novels reviewed. This is due mainly to the absence of a disruptive Lancelot in these stories, although instances occur in *Camelot 3000*. As for Mordred, he continues as a major personal opponent of Arthur but his role is that of a villain and not as a betrayer or source of rebellion. In addition, modern Arthurian novels do not dwell on any weakness or indecisiveness in King Arthur's character. Thus it is that as in both the ancient and modern Arthuriad, the heroic figure of King

Arthur goes far beyond patchy archaeological or historic evidence and becomes a symbol for inspired leadership in overcoming threats to the social order. The nature of these threats is very different however as will be seen as Arthur appears in the context of popular culture.

Chapter 7. King Arthur in Popular Culture

The last decades of the 20th century have witnessed an enormous increase of interest in the Arthurian legend. In addition to major films such as *Excalibur* (1981), *First Knight* (1995) and *Arthur* (2000) there has been at least one television series produced by the BBC, “Arthur of the Britons”, and a long radio series on King Arthur from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Arthur is found in many recently mass-produced novels by such popular authors as Stephen Lawhead, Bernard Cornwell and Marion Zimmer Bradley, all of whom have set their stories in the Dark Ages, a period outside the limits of this thesis. Scholars, aficionados and writers of reports can take advantage of thousands of offerings on the world wide web such as the academically oriented *Arthuriana* and a chat line called *Arthurnet*. In addition to literary and historical approaches, this flood of media interest in a Dark Age or medieval king and his court can also be examined sociologically as a form of popular culture from the viewpoint of cultural studies.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to use the contemporary Arthur legend to review the debate opposing elite culture with popular or mass culture. However, a brief review will help to establish a context for contemporary Arthurian literature among critical elements of the debate. Later pages will focus on the sociological implications of modern Arthurian novels.

Raymond Williams describes mass culture as being an inferior kind of work deliberately setting out to win favour (Williams, 1976:199). This view is supported by Dominic Strinati when he writes:

From this point of view, mass culture is a standardized, formulaic, repetitive and superficial culture, one which celebrates the trivial, sentimental, immediate and false pleasures at the expense of serious, intellectual, time honoured and authentic values (Strinati, 2004:12).

Adorno leads the debate with this statement:

In an age of spiritual disenchantment, the individual experiences the need for substitute images of the 'divine'. It obtains these through pseudo-culture. Hollywood idols, soaps, novels, pop tunes, lyrics and film genres such as the Wild West or the Mafia movie, fashion substitute mythologies for the masses (Adorno, in Witkin, 2003:29).

Dwight Macdonald also distinguishes between High Culture and Popular or Mass Culture, referring to the latter as a vulgarised version of High Culture which it threatens by its ease of consumption, its ease of production and standardized nature. In addition to all this, Macdonald accuses mass culture of destroying all values since value judgements imply discrimination. He sees a slowly emerging tepid, flaccid Middlebrow Culture that threatens to engulf everything in its spreading ooze, not an art form but a manufactured commodity always tending downwards toward cheapness (Dwight Macdonald, in Storey, 1998:24-25).

A similar assessment is to be found in the recent publication of *Pulp: A Collector's Book of Australian Pulp Fiction Covers* by Dr. Toni Johnson-Woods who writes that "devoid of literary pretensions, pulp fiction was unapologetically formulaic and relied heavily on stereotypes and simple morality tales". As we shall see, this description fits much of current Arthurian fiction as well.

Finally however, one would have to agree with Susan Sontag:

One important consequence of the new sensibility (is) that the distinction between "high" and "low" culture seems less and less meaningful (Storey, "Postmodernism and Popular Culture", in Sim, 1998:147).

The sterility of the debate over elite and popular culture overlooks the values embodied in the study of popular culture, a legitimate undertaking

now recognized by sociologists. Such studies, of which this is one, provide a unique perspective and understanding of our own culture and society since literature analysed through concepts developed from the study of popular culture reveals, interprets and reflects our own society.

As M. Thomas Inge writes:

There is no more revealing index to the total character and nature of a society than an examination of its popular arts and the way it spends its leisure time (Inge, 1989: xxiv).

Richard Simon in his book, *Trash Culture*, certainly demonstrates that popular culture is worthy of study but he takes a very controversial point of view when comparing trash culture and the literature of the western tradition. His argument can be summarized as follows. Trash Culture replicates all of the major genres of literature, and the current stories in the various media are very similar to the great tradition of the past, i.e., the great books of western civilization. Simon writes that any of the differences between Trash Culture and high culture show only that storytelling reflects changing economic, social and political conditions. The most important difference between trash culture and the great tradition is the manner in which they are experienced (Simon, 1999). By this, Simon is able to equate Trash Culture and stories of the great tradition because of the similarity of the emotional response they elicit.

Simon dismisses the critics of mass culture such as Dwight Macdonald, who argued that mass culture is: 1) a parody of high culture fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen, and 2) that popular entertainment borrowed the forms of high culture, reduced their complexity and then substituted infantile or worthless content (Simon, 1999:15). Simon disagrees and argues there is a remarkable continuity between the great literature of the past and popular entertainment of the present, with few consistent shifts from the great tradition to Trash Culture. With care and

attention paid to Trash Culture, he finds that Trash Culture turns out to be almost exactly like the products of the classics.

In this comparison, Simon finds a meticulous cinematic retelling of “The Faerie Queen” with all major characters and plots repeated in the TV series Star Trek. Similar comparisons are made by pointing to popular versions of the *Iliad*, The Bible, Plato and Shakespeare which are pervasive in forms that are emotionally meaningful to current readers (Simon, 1999:21).

Turning now to the legend of King Arthur, we may ask if the foregoing hypothesis by Simon is valid in this example, treating the novels under review as popular versions of the classic *Le Morte D’Arthur* for example. What we find is that the current depictions of Arthur are a pale shadow of the original – there are weak similarities of plot in some cases, but hardly enough to validate the hypothesis. *Camelot 3000* is the only example that exhibits this type of continuity with the past in a modified re-creation of the legend.

Simon would fail to show that contemporary novels of Arthuriana are in any way as rewarding or as revealing (as literature or as sociology) as, let us say, Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*. If Simon’s examples are as wanting as this one, his thesis is called into doubt. It is not simply a matter of complexity lacking in contemporary Arthuriana, but the emasculation of the legend and the omission of central features which are integral to the story.

Here is an example of a returned King Arthur during World War II coping with 20th century technology as he attempts his first flight as a pilot.

Unable to see beyond the fighter plane's nose, and moving into a grey cloud that wrapped the cockpit bubble, Arthur pushed the throttle forward. Arthur felt each bump of the grass field beneath him. He felt everything, his senses supercharged. As the seed indicator jumped, the fog grew thicker. The wheels rolled rapidly and the needle bolted toward 100 mph. He felt a jump in his stomach and a lift as though the palm of a great hand raised the aircraft. The king trembled, and remembered the manual. The gloved hand left the throttle only long enough to retract the landing gear and adjust trim (Anderson, 1995:146).

There are few examples of a returned Arthur having difficulties coping with 20th century technology. There is no doubt that the classic legend of King Arthur is part of the Great Tradition of Western Civilization or High Culture. The issue is how to characterize its commodification after its descent into popular or mass culture. It could be asked if the commodified batch of King Arthur stories still qualify as recurrent myth in Joseph Campbell's terms.

Myths do not mean untrue stories but rather essential storylines, recurrent ones which run deep in the psyche of our culture. These mythic themes, which express our deepest goals and values, give dramatic credence to our everyday lives in the shape of their settings, characters and plots (Campbell, in Kittleson, 1988:6).

In these terms, mass-marketed Arthuriana does not meet the standards of this definition of myth. The settings, characters and plots are stripped of their deeper meaning, goals and values beyond the personalized conflict of good and evil. Arthur's heroism is never really tested, he is not required to abandon the love of his life, nor does he suffer any personal sacrifice or the sacrifice of life itself for the common good in a quest for a better society. There is little on which to base a lasting legacy, for the king barely touches Campbell's deepest goals and values, particularly the issue of a vision of a better society.

A significant feature of popular culture is the operation of media conglomerates that include the publishing industry that markets current

Arthuriana. (See the chapter: Authors and Publishers) The influence of these conglomerates on what reaches the reading public is undeniable.

The interpenetration of the music, film, print, and video industries does not arise in response to demand from movie goers, record buyers, or comics subscribers. Rather, this interpenetration is orchestrated by the conglomerate in its search for more profitable and cost-efficient ways to manufacture culture (Eileen R. Meehan, quoted in Pearson and Uricchio, 1991:56).

The publishers of these Arthurian sagas are creators of cultural products and presumably are responding to a demand, which they may have in part created themselves in the hope these creations will produce a profit for their business.

The significance of these empires has been noted in *The Polity Reader in Cultural Theory* where it is recorded that:

the field of cultural studies has now moved into the centre of the social sciences and humanities. The domain of cultural studies covers the social processes involved in the production, transformation and reception of symbolic forms. How far such power (ownership and control of the media) is used to try and propagate particular types of political or social attitudes is a matter of some debate (*The Polity Reader* 1994:8).

A functional analysis of popular culture examines the relationship of its products to the holding of economic and political power, and to its role in political criticism and action. This issue will be taken up further in later pages.

Going beyond this particular debate, mass media images and popular culture are among the most powerful influences that not only shape social relationships but have a major impact on our sense of reality. Dominic Strinati believes sociologists of postmodern theory have the task of understanding a media-saturated society and hence we ask, what is the symbolic form, image or sense of 'reality' concerning King Arthur?

Jean Baudrillard, an influential theorist of the media, contends that the capitalist democracies of the West have become based not on production of goods but on the production of images and information. The mass media have transformed our lives and defines the world, in fact *is* the world in which we live. The insights of Baudrillard offer interesting perspectives on current Arthuriana that apply to mass-marketed paperbacks even though the concept of hyperreality includes but goes far beyond contemporary novels. Baudrillard's world of hyperreality is constructed of simulacra or images which get their meaning from other images and thus have no referent to external reality. The curious thing about the legend of King Arthur is that every story of the past, coming right down to the present, is in part a reproduction or simulation without external reality, making it difficult to distinguish any one of them from the 'real'. In this case there is no 'real'. Meaning, according to Baudrillard, is created by a flow of images. Arthuriana is one such flow.

The point here is that current recreations of the classic legend vary enormously from the 'classic' and become simulation. If this were the only source of Arthurian images, the public may come to regard these images as the authentic King Arthur, particularly since his origins have been so transformed. Baudrillard distinguishes four successive phases of the image:

1. It is the reflection of a basic reality.
2. It masks and perverts a basic reality.
3. It masks the absence of a basic reality.
4. It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

The current crop of Arthurian novels fit phase 4 since these Arthurs bear little relation to reality or even reflections of reality. For one thing, the kings we have encountered in these novels do not have a consistent, recognizable personality such as Superman, Batman or Spiderman although they do have some features in common.

Peter Kivisto thinks Baudrillard would counsel us to passively accept and enjoy the spectacle and the carnival that is postmodern culture and perhaps that is how we should regard these novels (Kivisto,1998: 142). Needless to say, judgement of the literary quality of many of the novels examined in this thesis is difficult to avoid. An illustration of mass marketed love interest in a future carnival legend is that of Arthur's proxy Admiral Gilhame Ur Fagon, who becomes so smitten with his paramour that he sacrifices everything for her. He first encounters her in this passage.

Gilhame knew her even before she had leapt to her feet. He thought that he would have known her anywhere, anytime, not by her red hair and swan throat, not by her green eyes and strong nose, but by the proud spirit which seemed to shine out of her, always. Throughout every lifetime he had lived, "she" had been the light of his eyes. But who was she now? (Martine-Barnes,1983:43).

Of course the products of popular culture are not restricted to the here and now. In particular, novels of the future and of fantasy worlds are especially revealing in expressing society's current fears, future hopes or future despair. Revisions of cultural myths and legends such as the Arthurian saga are carried forward in time and place as we have seen. What Paul Davies says of science fiction applies equally to any form of speculative fiction including fantasy where we find King Arthur today.

The best science fiction achieves more than mere entertainment. It tackles deep philosophical or ethical issues and widens the reader's vision of the universe (Davies, in the Forward to *Labourne*, R. et al. 1999).

Unfortunately, most of the Arthurs found in current popular culture fail to achieve the high standard one would expect of the legendary king, particularly in terms of offering a vision for this or future societies. A major disappointment with this icon from the past found now in the popular culture of today is his narrowness of purpose and only a fleeting

charisma. As with Arthur, other characters in the legend also reflect contemporary standards in the mass market. Here is Morgan Le Fey before she resumes her more elegant persona later in the story.

She held up the can in a salute. "To mighty Morgan," she croaked, her voice cracking from disuse. "Here's to eternal life, and to the thrice-damned gods who showed me how to have it." Morgan choked then, and for the first time in a long time she really thought about what she had become. With a heartrending sob she drew back her arm and hurled the half-empty can square into the TV, which sat two yards away. Except the can was not propelled by a normal arm making a normal throw. Instead, in that throw was centuries of ennui, of frustration and anger, heaving it in an eldritch fit of pique. Against such a display, the ancient television had no chance. The screen exploded in a shower of glass and sparks, flying out like a swarm of liberated sprites. There was a sizzling sound, and acrid smoke rose from the back of the set (David, 2002:3).

Summing up, King Arthur today lives in a mass-marketed popular culture media. Putting aside the debate over the 'quality' of the literary forms, current Arthurian novels provide insight into cultural change and into contemporary society. The literature surrounding King Arthur has been commodified through the capture of the legend and character by the publishing giants with the result that both legend and character have undergone a transformation in creating and meeting popular tastes and values.

Insights into characteristics of the creators and distributors of contemporary Arthuriana will be found in the following chapter on Authors and Publishers. Within these two groups are the men and women who, together with film and TV producers, mold the image of King Arthur today. All are producing for the market.

Chapter 8. Women In The Worlds Of King Arthur

The women in King Arthur's life during his return to this and other worlds have little influence on Arthur's action in the basic elements of the stories, but they have an important impact on Arthur personally and especially on many of the story's conclusions. The role of these women is another reflection of how the legend has been changed in the modern era. Before turning to this however, the various types of women encountered in these modern reconstructions will be described.

First there are women in traditional romantic roles allied to Arthur. In most cases, these are women who return as Guenevere, although at first not all recall their previous personalities or relationship to the king. The traditional role of partner, comforter and supporter is occupied by Jenny in *Arthur, King, Avalon*, and Gwen in *Knight Life, One Knight Only* and Gwen in *The Third Magic*. These women represent an ideal value of passive femininity of a bygone era and perhaps are a remnant from the age of chivalry with its ideals of courtly love. There is no adultery on the part of Arthur and in only one case, *The King*, is Guenevere unfaithful.

Guenevere appears in various guises in these novels. Aside from *The King* in which Guenevere is a woman of loose morals and repeated infidelity, Guenevere is treated romantically as a lover and strong supporter to Arthur. Their relationship is not at all complex and could be taken from the pages of Mills and Boon. There is no liaison with Lancelot, and no tragic overtones. When Arthur is faced with an impossible choice between his U.S. presidency and his wife, he chooses Guenevere and gives up everything he returned to earth to do. In another instance, he persuades Merlin to allow Guenevere to return with him to his past. There are no personal tragedies in these stories, all of which have a happy

ending. At the conclusion of *Arthur, King* when Merlin is about to return Arthur to his past, Jenny sobs “You can’t have him ...I must be with him”. Arthur begs Merlin “Please, Merlin. I must have my queen” (Anderson, 1995:357).

The strongest female character in these novels is not Guenevere but Morgan Le Fay, a powerful evil witch often in league with her son Mordred. The character and motivation of Morgan Le Fay is especially interesting but her antecedents in Arthurian literature and the reasons for her particular depiction go beyond the limits of this thesis. In addition, her confrontation is more often with Merlin than with King Arthur directly.

The evil, aggressive females who oppose the king and his mission are mostly reincarnations of Morgan Le Fey. These women have the strongest personalities in the Arthurian literature. Magical skills and the incantations of Morgan however are not countered by Arthur however, but by her main opponent, the wizard Merlin. Morgan is present in *The Return of Merlin, Avalon, Knight Life, One Knight Only, Camelot 3000* and her proxy Morguessan in the Keltiad. Unlike the reincarnations of Morgan however, Morguessan is entirely human, capable of remorse and redemption. These semi-human creatures are larger than life. Their wicked personalities exude evil and far outshadow the more passive Guenevere types. The contrast between the two could not be greater.

It should be said that the female opposition to King Arthur is usually unsuccessful in terms of strongly influencing events in the story or the final conclusion.

It is somewhat surprising that in no case does Morgan assume a seductive role to tempt King Arthur, so we never know if the king would be immune or succumb to these feminine wiles.

Some women are victims of representatives of the Dark such as Katy who is corrupted by Amberside-Mordred, and the tragically damaged Jennifer-Guinevere who is ravaged and tortured by Rakoth Maugrim the Unraveller.

In only two instances do Guenevere and Lancelot meet again to have an impact on King Arthur. Their passionate affair causes King Arthur to ban them from New Camelot in *Camelot 3000*, but surprisingly Arthur, Guenevere and Lancelot are harmoniously restored at the conclusion of *The Fionavar Tapestry*.

Looking back on these contemporary restorations of Arthur's tale, it can be asked to what extent do these women have a significant impact on Arthur or on the course of events? Morgan of course is a negative and destabilizing influence in several novels mentioned. Undoubtedly the most important effect of many of these women on King Arthur is through his romantic attachment to them. In *One Knight Only*, he is forced to resign his presidency and sacrifice Gwen when offered the cruel choice by Basilisk to save her or arrange the destruction of Sandoval to avoid a war. Arthur, as Gilhame ur Fagon, resigns his Command in order to marry the pregnant Alvellaina rather than putting her aside to accept a promotion..

These sacrifices by Arthur are part of the frequent phenomena in contemporary Arthuriana to close the story with a happy ending. King Arthur and his paramour remain together at the conclusion of *Arthur, King*, *The Return of Merlin*, *Avalon*, *The Dragon Rises*, *Knight Life*, *One Knight Only* and *The Fionavar Tapestry*. Thus, the mythical doom or death of the

king is avoided, reflecting contemporary optimism in popular culture and the avoidance of tragedy.

Only a few women are 'fully liberated' in the sense that they have fully formed professional qualifications, career and independence. There is Katy, a police constable in *The Return of Merlin* but she quickly succumbs to the machinations of Amberside. *Legacy* and *Debt of Ages* show women in professional roles in the space fleet although they are not close to Arthur, nor are the female scientists in the Wyrms Trilogy. Joan Acton, (Guenevere-to-be in *Camelot 3000*), is a United Nations military commander. It is interesting that as Joan Acton she wears a close fitting military uniform but as Guenevere her wardrobe changes to something more revealing.

Entirely absent in these novels is any strong female who is either councillor or protector. This king does not listen, take advice from or worship women, another departure from some previous Arthuriana and Celtic legends, simplifying the modern genre of Arthurian novels.

One conclusion from the crop of modern novels is that opposition to King Arthur is always from either human males or semi-human females, i.e., Morgan. Normal women do not oppose him. Women's roles in a few recent Arthuriana novels are beginning to show changes in social mores concerning gender. Professional women are beginning to appear as are classic role and gender conflicts. It must be said that on the whole, King Arthur's relationships with these women is not intense. The king remains somewhat in the background with the exception of *Fionavar's* conclusion where the pathos of his situation is sensitively revealed.

Probably the most interesting woman in this series, but another with no direct relation to Arthur, is The Innocent in *The Broken Sword* and *The*

Third Magic. The Innocent, and not Merlin whom she counsels, is the repository of philosophy and ancient wisdom. Her thoughtful perspective on the final tragedy governing the loss of the old gods is highly unusual in these sagas as is her spiritual orientation.

It is Patricia Kennealy-Morrison who brings together a circle of professional women into the complex world of Keltia. Foremost is Arthur's High Queen Guinevere, a highly skilled Ban-droi priestess whose regal role includes both governor and manager of Keltia together with Arthur and alone during his absences. There are professional soldiers, highly trained members of the Keltic order or priestess-sorceresses. Spiritually, in addition to the Mother-Goddess there is Kelu, the One High God above all gods, held by Kelts to be both Mother Goddess and Father God together, beyond any gender distinction. It is clear that Keltia has achieved equality of status for women. Perhaps it is not surprising that these volumes were written by a woman and that the three volumes of Arthur were preceded by three similar volumes based on Queen Aeron, an Arthur-like figure.

If these examples of the Arthuriad are read as morality tales, current reality is not exhibited. Instead, the values of heterosexual relationships, monogamy and marital fidelity are promoted as ideal behaviour. The only exception is *The Keltiad* where several types of monogamous (heterosexual) liaisons and marriage are permitted in this far future world.

Chapter 9. Authors and Publishers.

Each century has authors who find the Arthurian legend fascinating and write new interpretations of it. Along with the occasional film and TV series, it is this group who now bring King Arthur into the 20th century and take him into the future. Who are the men and women writing novels about King Arthur and his re-entry into this and future worlds? What are their characteristics and background and what do they have in common? To what extent have they researched the background of the legend to adapt it to the present and future? Who are their publishers, what position do they hold in the industry? In answering these questions, the following information is based on interviews, personal communications and internet websites of the authors and publishers.

Authors

Mike Barr, author of the stunning Arthurian graphic novel *Camelot 3000*, has contributed to four instalments of the Star Trek TV series, in either comic book form or in other formats. His work on another graphic novel, *Batman*, restored the publisher, DC Comics, to first place in sales after 15 years. Mike Barr is a prolific writer of novels and short stories. *Camelot 3000* would not have been nearly as successful without its outstanding illustrator Brian Bolland. The work is a futuristic adaptation mainly of the Malory version of the legend, though it is doubtful if Malory would recognize it as such.

(See "Epic Beginnings" and "Opening Knight" in opening pages of *Camelot 3000*.)

The versatile **Robert N. Charrette** was born and educated in Rhode Island and now lives in Virginia. He has degrees in both biology and history, has worked as a graphic artist, game designer, art director and commercial

sculptor. Charrette's literary output includes 17 books of fantasy and science fiction. In addition to the Wyrms trilogy, selected titles include *Heir to the Dragon*, *Wolves on the Border*, *Eye of the Serpent* and *Never Trust an Elf*. Publishing houses who have published Charrette are ROC, Harper and Warner Books. (A brief biography of Charrette appears at the end of each volume of the Wyrms Trilogy.)

Deepak Chopra, a medical doctor born in 1949, has become internationally known for his promotion of holistic healing. As a leader in the field of mind body medicine, Deepak Chopra established his Chopra Center in California offering a variety of courses, workshops, books, yoga, meditation and consultations. Chopra was formerly Chief of Staff at Boston Regional Medical Center, has had a successful practice of endocrinology and has taught at several universities. He travels the world making presentations and has collected paeans of praise from William Clinton, *Time Magazine* and Mikhail Gorbachev among others. A prolific best selling author of over 35 books, translated into over two dozen languages, his best known work is *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*.

Deepak Chopra's first novel, *The Return of Merlin*, contains philosophic messages largely absent in other recent Arthurian novels. *The Return of Merlin* was published by Arrow Books (Random House) in 1995. It is the only work of Arthurian fiction that has earned the sobriquet 'New Age', reflecting Chopra's alternative approach to healing. (From the Chopra website <http://www.chopra.com/3.html> (accessed 25/6/07) and Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepak_Chopra (accessed 25/6/07))

Molly Cochran was born in Japan in 1949 and has written over 25 books, many of them co-authored with Warren Murphy as is the case of *The Forever King* and *The Broken Sword*. Her three best sellers include *The*

Forever King, the film rights of which have been sold to Warner Brothers. TOR publishes her books.

Cochran's work has won the Mystery Writers of America's prestigious Edgar Award as well as awards from *The Romantic Times* and the New York Public Library. She has taught both at the college level and in workshops at a number of writers' conferences. Cochran was educated at the University of Pittsburgh, studied at the Sorbonne and has lived in Rome. She now lives in Pennsylvania. (See <http://mollycochran.com/bio.html> (accessed 25/6/07))

The productive **Peter David** has authored more than 40 novels of non-fiction, worked in television, written for film, audio books, short stories and comic books. The television scripts include several for *Babylon 5* and its sequel, *Crusade*. David's literary output includes spy stories, thrillers and detective novels with titles such as *Mind-force Warrior*, *Aquaman*, *Spy School Confidential*, *The Return of Swamp Thing*, *Spider-man*, *Supergirl* and *The Hulk*. Peter David was born in 1956 and also writes under the name David Peters. (See inside the back cover of *Knight Life* for brief bio and <http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/d/peter-david/> (accessed 25/6/07))

Guy Gavriel Kay was born in Canada in 1954 and is resident there. His education led to degrees in philosophy and law but although admitted to the bar, he never practiced law. Kay is now a full time novelist. An important influence on his work was an acquaintance with Christopher Tolkien, J.R.R. Tolkien's son, who invited Kay to Oxford to assist with the editing of the elder Tolkien's uncompleted work, *The Silmarillion*. Kay spent a year in Oxford with Tolkien's son. In 1984, Kay's first volume of the successful *Fionavar Tapestry* trilogy was published, launching him on his career as a fantasist. For this trilogy, Kay consciously worked within the traditional boundaries of the branch of fantasy founded by the senior

Tolkien. (See inside cover of *The Summer Tree*.)

Raymond H. Thompson has conducted a series of interviews with authors of modern Arthurian literature. He interviewed the talented G. G. Kay in July 1989. This interview, found on Thomson's website, is very revealing of Kay's approach to King Arthur and is highly recommended. Kay is a serious author who undertakes extensive research for his books. Working with Celtic myths and traditions brought King Arthur into prominence early in Kay's career, but later he read deeply into the chronicles and Medieval literature which aroused his interest further.

The most interesting feature of Thompson's interview is Kay's explanation of how he turned the Arthurian legend on its head, explaining that his major innovation to the story was to describe Arthur as being accursed due to his sin, the slaughter of the children. This resulted in his perpetual doom, "a burden, duty and responsibility" to return at a time of need. Related to this was Arthur's final escape from his preordained doom, the curse being lifted by the intercession of someone else shouldering the burden. The concept of free will is important to Kay and is reflected in his stories. (See Volume 3 of *The Fionavar Tapestry, (The Darkest Road)*). The Thompson interviews can be found at:

(<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/intrvws>) In addition there is a rich website for G. G. Kay containing his booklist, book reviews, bibliographies, a site newsletter, and frequently answered questions from readers and admirers. There is little of substance in the newsletter compared with the Thompson interview (See <http://www.brightweavings.com> (accessed 25/6/07)). Kay's publisher is HarperCollins.

Stephen R. Lawhead is undoubtedly the modern author most closely associated with Arthurian novels today. He has published five books

about King Arthur, *The Pendragon Cycle*, which is set in the far distant past. Lawhead's latest book on King Arthur is *Avalon*, which has a contemporary setting in the U.K. This author's output totals more than 20 novels including his science fiction and books on the Celtic crusades. Perhaps more than any other author included in this review, Lawhead has carried out extensive historical research for his novels. A Christian religious orientation is also apparent in his work.

Steven Lawhead was born in Nebraska in 1950. He has lived in the U.S. where he attended college and the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has lived in the U.K. researching his Arthurian cycle, and in 2002 moved to Austria. (See <http://www.stephenlawhead.com/> (accessed 25/6/07)) Lawhead's publishers include HarperCollins, HarperTorch, Avon and Zondervan.

The literary output of **Patricia Kennealy-Morrison** is centered around a group of novels known as the Keltiad. The first three of these are devoted to Queen Aeron (published in 1984-88) and three to King Arthur (published in 1991-96). These were followed by *Blackmantle* and *Deer's Cry* but these did not involve King Arthur. Her publishers are Voyager-HarperCollins, ROC-Penguin Group and Grafton-Collins.

Of all the authors represented in the books reviewed for this thesis, Kennealy-Morrison is by far the most seriously committed to the Celtic origins of the Arthurian legend. Beyond her extensive research for the Keltiad series, she is a Dame of the Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani, a High Priestess of a Celtic pagan tradition and a member of mensa.

Raymond Thompson interviewed Kennealy-Morrison in 1988, before she had completed the Arthur trilogy. This interview is revealing of

Kennealy-Morrison's view of the Arthur legend and her projection of it into future time and space. The Keltiad blends science fiction and fantasy but Kennealy-Morrison admits she is not a science fiction fan and so prefers to write science fantasy. When asked why she transposed the Arthurian legend into the future, she said it was self-indulgence because she liked spaceships and Druids. In addition, it circumvented the necessity of doing so much research. With regard to magic, the feats ascribed as magic are really a function of higher human capabilities. The biggest influences on her writing are said to be Rudyard Kipling, Lord Dunsany, the King James Bible (for its language) and the Mabinogion.

Despite all the fighting and warfare in her books, Kennealy-Morrison says she is more interested in religion. Women are also an important feature in her books, because, she says, she is a woman and women occupied a more important place in Celtic society than they do now. Women play a major role in the Keltiad and many of Arthur's major influences are from women. Regarded as a warlord, Arthur is seen more as a catalyst than a mover, more acted upon than acting although he brings change and renewal.

Political stress in Keltiad has been all but eliminated by the year 3513. As in ancient Celtic society, Kennealy-Morrison says in the Thompson interview:

Keltiad is basically a feudal society where about ten per cent of the population owns ninety-eight percent of the wealth, but the aristocracy have important obligations to their clients. They have to take care of them and provide for them.

The full interview from which these snippets are taken, can be found at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/intrvws>. Other information is at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_Kennealy-Morrison (accessed 25/6/07).

Steve White, born in 1948, was formerly an officer in Naval Intelligence who completed tours in the Mediterranean and Vietnam. He works for a law firm outside Washington, D.C. but is best known for his science fiction adventure novels or space operas. Some sample titles will convey the flavor of his 18 or so books: *Blood of the Heroes*; *The Stars at War II*; *Demon's Gate*; *In Death Ground*. The covers of these mass-marketed paperbacks are equally revealing as to content.

White became familiar with the Arthurian legend in childhood and has continued his interest. The story says many things that matter deeply to the human condition he says, and continues to exert influence through the works that it has inspired. Asked if he was trying to convey any message in his two books involving King Arthur, he replied that he was possibly “holding him up as an example of the way we often make heroes of people who score one last victory for a lost cause.”

The audience White tries to reach are “intelligent young men” and he thinks he has had some success in reaching them.

Steve White is under contract to Baen Publishing Enterprises. After submitting his basic plot ideas to the publisher, the concept has to be pre-approved by Baen. Other than that, there is no attempt to influence the content other than minor editorial corrections. (Personal communication)

The authors described briefly above are among the significant custodians of the Arthurian image and legend which they project to the reading public. All are mainstream commercial authors of mainly mass-marketed paperbacks. They were born in the decade between 1946-1956 and their output consists almost entirely of science fiction, fantasy, adventure thrillers and detective stories. It is clear from examining the booklists of

these authors that with the exception of Steven Lawhead and Kennealy-Morrison, King Arthur is not a major pre-occupation of theirs. Not surprisingly, either they or their publishers have commercial involvement with associated products, activities and/or the media. All but one of these authors are published by major publishing houses or their associated imprints. The exception is the independent Baen Books.

The authors under consideration are not academic scholars or writers of horror stories. Some, like Steven Lawhead and Patricia Kennealy-Morrison, have carried out extensive historical research for their books and show familiarity and respect for the Arthurian legend. In addition, G. G. Kay has thought deeply about the significance of the tragic relationships within the legend. With the exception of Deepak Chopra and Steve White, all are full-time writers. Most are American or have been born in the U.S. Others were born in India, Japan, Canada and the U.K.

To a certain extent, the values within these Arthurian novels reflect the period in which they were published, in addition to the nationality, age and gender of the authors. About 77% of the authors are male, 33% female.

The novels were written mainly in the mid-1980s-1990s, and it should be noted there are surprising omissions. The turmoil of the 1960s is not reflected for example. The conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1991 together with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War perhaps causes these authors to reflect a public aversion to militaristic leaders and overseas entanglements.

The post-war period has seen globalisation, the increase of population, depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution and the increasing spread of drugs. Considering King Arthur's mythical

reputation and image as a saviour, it is notable as well as disappointing that while these events may contribute to worry about the future felt by many people, they are addressed only once by Arthur in his many returns.

The authors of contemporary Arthuriana are very much a part of the mass-market paperback trade. Many of them are prolific writers with many books to their credit. Although this thesis focuses on King Arthur as an individual, it must be said that the authors reviewed have varying knowledge and appreciation of the Arthurian legend. In most cases, the character of Arthur is brought forward with the legend in the background but the core plot and characters are not strongly developed. The exception to this is *Camelot 3000* in which all the knights are present together with several characters of Arthur's past. Since many of these authors are American, it is not surprising that the action-oriented values of that country are reflected in this crop of Arthuriana.

Publishers

Writing a book based on the Arthurian legend is one thing – getting it published is quite another. For one thing, publishers must assess the demand among sections of the public for this type of fiction. The competition is fierce.

HarperCollins Publishers is one of the world's leading English language publishers. The company is a subsidiary of News Corporation with headquarters in New York City. Following News Corporation's acquisition in 1980, HarperCollins established associated publishing groups in the U.S., Canada, the U.K. Australia, New Zealand and India. The world-wide book group has revenues of over U.S.\$ 1 Billion annually through its aggressive acquisition program. To indicate the spread of HarperCollins' influence, their U.S. publishing imprints include, Amistad, Avon,

Caedmon, Collins, Collins Design, Dark Alley, Ecco, Eos, Fourth Estate, Harper paperbacks, Harper Perennial, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, Harper Audio, HarperCollins, HarperEntertainment, Harper Large Print, Harper San Francisco, Harper Torch, Morrow Cookbooks, Perfect Bound, Rayo and William Morrow.

During 2004, HarperCollins had 97 books on the New York Times bestseller list. Movie tie-ins were big sellers globally, especially those based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Worldwide sales of Spiderman books and other associated products have added to HarperCollins's profits.

HarperCollins has published *Arthur, King, The Fionavar Tapestry, (The Summer Tree, The Wandering Fire)* and *Avalon*.

Penguin Group (USA) Inc. is the U.S. affiliate of the international Penguin Group, the second-largest English trade book publisher in the world. It was formed in 1996 as a result of the merger between Penguin Books USA and the Putnam Berkeley Group. In the USA, Penguin publishes a wide range of imprints and trademarks, including Berkley Books, Dutton, Grosset & Dunlap, New American Library, Penguin, Philomel, G. P. Putnam's Sons, Riverhead Books, Viking and Frederick Warne.

The Penguin Group, including Ace Books and the Berkeley Publishing Group has published *The Oak Above The Kings (Keltiad), Hawks Grey Feather, Hedge of Mist, The Dragon Rises, Knight Life* and *One Knight Only*.

Time Warner Book Group resulted from the 1990 merger of Time Inc. and Warner Communications. Like HarperCollins and Penguin, Time Warner has grown enormously through acquisitions of other publishing

houses. The group has profitable links to movies, games and related consumer products. Among the novels examined, Time Warner has published the Wyrms Trilogy: *A Prince Among Men*, *King Beneath the Mountain*, and *A Knight Among Knaves*.

Random House Inc. claims to be the world's largest general trade book publisher. It assumed its present form when it was acquired by Bertelsmann A.G., one of the foremost media companies in the world. Random House now includes such names as Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Crown, Knopf and others. The global reach of the firm embraces its subsidiaries in Canada, the U.K.

An early publication by Random House in the Arthurian genre was *Excalibur*, a Ballantine Book.

TOR Books are an imprint of Tom Doherty Associates. Doherty established the firm in 1980 which is now largely committed to publishing science fiction and fantasy. In 1986 the firm was sold to St. Martin's which is how TOR came under the umbrella of Macmillan UK, now TOR's parent company. TOR claims it annually publishes the largest and most diverse lines of science fiction and fantasy ever produced by a single English language press.

Arthurian books published by TOR include *The Forever King*, *The Broken Sword*, *The Third Magic*, *Dominion*, and *Merlin's Bones*.

Baen Books may be the only U.S. independent publisher of science fiction and fantasy. It is an American publishing house established in 1983 by the entrepreneur Jim Baen who headed the science fiction line at both ACE and TOR before going independent. Baen Books specializes in political and military science fiction and fantasy. Distribution is by Pocket

Books/Simon & Schuster.

Baen Books published *For King and Country*, *Legacy*, and *Debt of Ages* while Daw Books brought out *Port Eternity and Merlin's Mirror*.

In 2004, more than 2,500 titles in the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror were published by 248 publishers. Baen Books was the ninth most active publisher of these genres, publishing 67 titles and is ranked the seventh most popular science fiction publisher. Baen Books has an innovative approach to marketing through the internet Webscriptions which were introduced in 1999. Although Jim Baen himself is politically conservative, he publishes works covering a broad spectrum of political philosophies. Nevertheless, his conservative politics led to friction with one liberal author who departed the firm.

Arrow Books published *The Return of Merlin*, DC Comics published *Camelot 3000*. *The King* is a Minerva Paperback while The Borgo Press published *The Quest of Excalibur*. Finally, Unwin Paperbacks also published *The Fionavar Tapestry* including Book Three, *The Darkest Road*. Arrow Books published *The Return of Merlin*

From this brief review, it can be concluded that the publishers of Arthuriana, (or perhaps any other book for that matter), are characterized by a limited number of vast conglomerates resulting from world-wide mergers and acquisitions leading to a high degree of consolidation in the industry. These houses publish a variety of literary genres targeted at different audiences. Many have associated film rights, television, games, toys and clothing associated with their books. It is difficult to know the extent of any editorial control by a group or subsidiary but that is outside the scope of this thesis.

The proprietor of a retail book shop in Canberra that specializes in science fiction, fantasy and detective fiction says that her clients are in the age group 30s-40s. They are very knowledgeable about the field they are interested in, and know exactly what they want. Clientele is equally divided between males and females and fantasy has become more popular than science fiction. As to the influence of publishers on authors, unless an author is extremely popular, authors must accept the guidelines of publishers who are out to make a profit and know what the public wants.

The inescapable conclusion is that Arthuriana in the market economy of today is in the hands of corporate giants and writers of adventure stories using King Arthur as one more commodified image in the interests of personal and business revenue. In this environment, what has happened to the values underlying the image of King Arthur?

Chapter 10. Values and The Americanisation of King Arthur

We have seen that contemporary characterizations of King Arthur have much in common with comic books and novels of the sword and sorcery variety. The iconic status of the King Arthur of popular culture goes far beyond the comics however and arises from cultural myths that are uniquely American such as the pragmatism, optimism and drive associated with the winning of the frontier, including the defeat of the native Americans so popular in western films. During the settling of the west, the heroic sheriff or renegade gunslinger (an individual often outside normal society) made sure that socially disruptive forces, outlaws or Indians, were eliminated or kept in check. King Arthur is called upon to do the same.

The Arthur of today, the future and of other worlds, is firmly rooted in the era and values of the Enlightenment. Confirmation of this conclusion can be seen using the discussion of identity by Stuart Hall who distinguishes among three very different conceptions of identity. (a) The Enlightenment subject. (b) The Sociological subject, and (c) The Post-modern subject. Hall writes that

The Enlightenment subject was based on conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action.

The notion of the sociological subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to 'significant others', who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the worlds he/she inhabited.

In the post-modern subject, the subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented: composed, not of a single, but of several sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. The post-modern subject is

conceptualised as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. ...the subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self' (Hall, 1992:275-77).

In all but two of these novels, King Arthur is, or becomes, a totally assured individual, sure of himself, of his values and his role and as such can be identified as an Enlightenment subject. The newly emergent Arthur certainly does not take his identity from those outside himself, nor is his identity contradictory or impermanent. As we have seen in *The Third Magic* however, the young Arthur rejects the role which Merlin attempts to foist upon him despite Arthur's understanding that he is indeed the re-born legendary King Arthur.

The situation in *The Return of Merlin* is less clear for it is only near the end of the book that Arthur is revealed as the legendary king reborn and it is unlikely that he would assume the regal mantle since this would be a complete contradiction to the book's philosophic message.

On the whole, the last two personalities of King Arthur demonstrate a complexity or elaboration of personality that goes beyond the character found in early chronicles or Malory for example. This is central to the sociological understanding of the contemporary King Arthur for in these two cases, Arthur is moving toward the modern concept of individualization.

Considering the enormous social, economic and scientific changes particularly in the post World War II period, it is surprising there has been so little impact on the character of King Arthur. It is tempting to say that the social and economic upheavals during this period have brought about sufficient distress in the wake of postmodernism that the public yearns for the strong morally upright leadership represented by the mythical King Arthur.

The values associated with the image of the king are those popularised and projected in the media, by Hollywood films, television, novels and comics concerning Arthur. The Bear is presented as physically robust, personally courageous and a dominant actor on the world stage rather than a person acted upon. As we can see, the current image and values of King Arthur that are projected in the contemporary novels are those associated and shared with popular stereotypes in the media such as Superman and Batman. Arthur embodies the concept of a saviour with an optimistic vision of a stable, well-ordered society with diminished corruption and reduced criminal elements, be they human or monstrous. King Arthur, with one exception, accepts responsibility for helping to bring this about. Because this king is not particularly introspective, his values must be judged largely from his actions and from his mentor, Merlin. As much as one might admire these characteristics, King Arthur does not generally embody other values of a softer nature, such as compassion for example, nor is there a spiritual side or broader vision. Where tenderness is required, it is usually reserved for Guenevere.

In the novels under review, King Arthur is not closely identified with Christianity per se, although one assumes he shares Christian values if not its theology. In her thesis "American Values And World View As Reflected In Science Fiction," Barbara Hornum characterizes authors of science fiction in a manner that could be ascribed to the authors of contemporary Arthurian literature.

Whether in describing various types of interpersonal relationships, the interplay of social institutions, or the sweep of future history, American science fiction writers deal with the importance of inventiveness, self-reliance, practical idealism, competitiveness, moral righteousness, success, materialism hard work and effort, optimism, flexibility, conformity and pioneering or innovation (Hornum, 1977:326).

This view is supported by Janina Traxler quoting Alan Lupack and Jeanne Fox-Friedman who suggest Americans have reinterpreted the figure of Arthur to suit the national self-image of a people succeeding through civic virtue and skill. Traxler is also of the view that the popularity of the Arthur figure arises in part from the longing for a shining ideal leader arising in the midst of corrupt political systems, environmental degradation, spiritual sterility and alienation (Traxler, 2001:11.4). In other words, this looking back to a nostalgic past could be a means of relieving the anxieties of the modern age.

Many stories of heroes parallel, or are allegories, of Christian theology in which Christ is tempted by Satan. The story of the popular superhero, Spiderman, is one such story but the current crop of Arthuriana avoids this situation entirely. In any case, King Arthur is so self-confident, so self-assured of his role, that he would never be tempted to compromise his beliefs in himself by giving in to the temptations offered by an opponent or a weaker self. Arthur is sometimes faced with difficult choices such as the time he must choose between the health of Guenevere and the greater public good, but these situations do not arise from, or do not reveal, a character flaw or weakness.

The recent novels of Arthur are essentially secular in nature and free of Christian symbolism. The exception is *Avalon* and scattered references in *Camelot 3000*. There are far more references to Celtic gods, to the operation of Fate or *dán* or Eastern religious orientations. The old gods are well developed in Molly Cochran's novels and in *The Keltiad* but while belief in them is expressed, they do not appear to be worshipped.

Chapter 11. King Arthur As Hero And Superhero

The earliest European vernacular epic poem is named after the Scandinavian hero Beowulf, a poem composed in the mid-eighth century. There is no evidence of a historical Beowulf, just as in the case of King Arthur. According to the story, an evil monster raids the king's mead hall and every night devours one of his warriors. A young visiting prince, Beowulf, eventually overcomes the monster. Later however, a fire-breathing dragon ravages the land and after a long fight, the hero Beowulf kills the dragon but is himself mortally wounded.

Central features of this tale have come down through the ages in many forms, including the legend of Arthur. Critics have seen the epic as a Christian allegory with Beowulf the champion of goodness and light against the forces of evil and darkness. The evil monsters are regarded symbolically as enemies of the whole community if not of civilization itself (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 1994-2002).

Heroic acts alone do not make a hero. Although the social definition of hero has changed markedly through the ages, there are a number of consistent elements of character. The hero possesses a capacity for action that surpasses normal men and women. Both morally and physically the hero is of the human species, not superior to it, but fully human rather than superhuman. The hero becomes a model of higher potential and is charged with the responsibility to only use violent force as the situation requires but not be consumed by it nor use it to dominate others. The hero is never power-mongering, sanctimonious or self-righteous, rarely embraces causes. His capacity for benign aggression must be directed toward aiding and assisting others (Lash, 1995).

Time and sociocultural environments change the nature of the hero and his quest (if any). According to Lash, in the so-called modern age with its technological and ideological developments, the hero may face a crisis of identity and need to redefine his quest (Lash, 1995: 27).

One new role that has emerged for the hero in recent times is the revolutionary whose personal power and vision directs the future of his people. Although the heroic quest itself has varied through the ages, the heroic code of morality has been consistent. Feats of strength have been replaced by strength of character and an ethical dimension.

The character of King Arthur in mass produced contemporary novels is consistent with Lash's definition sketched above. It is important to note that Arthur lacks the wizardry and spells of a Merlin, Mordred or other demon. He is entirely human and in this sense represents humankind when battling overwhelming odds such as demons with greater powers. There are departures from Lash's characterization of revolutionary heroes however, for King Arthur is basically conservative, never appears as a revolutionary, so never challenges the political status quo. A vision or spiritual quest is usually absent, as is an ethical dimension apart from a dedication to justice.

In contemporary popular fiction, King Arthur appears in a variety of roles, but the most common is that of hero, superhero or its modern equivalent. Most often Arthur reappears in a warrior or combatant role, combining his prowess with other talents. In any event, we find this heroic Arthur particularly displayed in *Camelot 3000*, in *Arthur, King* and the *Fionavar Tapestry*. He is much more than a battler in *Avalon, Knight Life, One Knight Only*, *The Keltiad* and the *Wyrms Trilogy* where his political and managerial skills are matched with his traditional role.

In his capacity as hero, King Arthur shares many of the traits found in a multiplicity of heroic figures in various forms of popular culture, particularly comic books or graphic novels of which *Camelot 3000* is an outstanding example. All of these heroic figures share a passion to overcoming evil elements in society and a devotion to justice. Opposing the superhero is the supervillain, existing in the same social time and space, with the supervillain representing the challenge to the social order as in the case of Beowulf's dragon. The superhero usually overcomes all odds and in the end, triumphs. It is these features, central to the characters of Superman, Batman and Spiderman for example, that King Arthur shares in mass-marketed contemporary fiction. Superman and Batman both had their origins in the popular culture of the 1930s and are still with us in one form or another, as is King Arthur.

A recent example of this form of popular culture can be found in the DC graphic publication, *Superman Vs. The Flash: Seven of the Races Of All Time* (DC Comics 2005). This compilation of seven separate instalments that stretched from 1967 to 2002 pitted the two popular characters against each other in friendly races that took place not only on earth but also into outer space. In the course of these races, a variety of threats and combatants confronted the two. These included gangsters, criminals, monsters from outer space, exploding supernovas, etc. All threats and combatants are always overcome largely because of the special powers the racers possess: fantastic speed, x-ray vision, invulnerability to assault, etc. More importantly perhaps is the moral fibre possessed by Superman and Flash and their cooperation in overcoming their opponents. It is likely that DVD and role-playing videogames which share these features will replace such comic book heroes

While these popular culture heroes may share the mission, dedication to justice, courage, and personal morality of King Arthur, they differ in the important respect of the supernatural powers they possess. King Arthur, it is important to remember, is thoroughly human – in this sense he is like one of us.

The aging Batman and Superman have also undergone changes in character since their beginnings. In the case of Superman, *Time Magazine* has made an unusual comment concerning the current character.

He's a metaphor for America, but an outdated, obsolete America: invulnerable to attack, always on the side of right, always ready to save the rest of the world from its villainy whether or not it wants to be saved (*Time*, May 31, 2004:64).

In like fashion, so have a few Arthurs undergone remarkable transformations from Battler to Reformer in the modern era. In some novels, King Arthur leaves Excalibur behind and chooses different 'weapons' to meet modern social needs. In *Avalon, Knight Life and One Knight Only*, Arthur must adopt the tools of political expediency and public support to achieve his goals within democratic institutions. In these cases, Arthur chooses persuasion, the manipulation of the media, public rallies and in some cases, alliance with a political party. The warrior of the past has been transformed into a successful, enlightened politician.

Richard Reynolds in his review of Super Heroes has outlined several traits these Super Heroes have in common with King Arthur. The hero is marked out from society and often reaches maturity without having a relationship with his parents. His devotion to justice overrides his devotion to the law. Superheroes are capable of considerable patriotism and moral loyalty to the state. In the case of American comic book

characters of this type, they assert the cultural myth of American Utopianism (Reynolds, 1992:16).

The notion that the hero stands somewhat aside from society has particular relevance to the King Arthurs of the modern age, particularly when it comes to the issue of leadership. These Arthurs are all worthy individuals without a character flaw, yet it cannot be said that they are true leaders. King Arthur of *Camelot 3000* and the Arthur of *The Keltiad* come closest in qualifying as natural leaders for they command the loyalty of knights and/or troops in war. Aside from this however, the King Arthurs under review, despite their undoubted courage, charisma, and even popular acclaim, act mainly as individuals in overcoming challenges to authority and the social order. In the traditional legend, King Arthur obviously has leadership qualities and particularly has the loyalty of his Round Table Knights. In the modern novels that repeats the structure of the legend (*Camelot 3000*) this pattern is repeated, but it is mostly absent in the others unless you include *The Keltiad*. The boy Arthur in the *Forever King* series does have 'knights' etc. The Arthur that emerges is an individual hero that basically works alone (*Arthur, King, The Return of Merlin, Avalon, Knight Life* and *One Knight Only, Legacy, Debt of Ages, The Dragon Rises, Fionavar Tapestry* and the *Wyrms Trilogy*) although *The Bear* leads a street gang for a time.

In his book, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell shows that the hero is endowed with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth and is predestined for great deeds. A legend will be built around the hero "inventing miraculous journeys into miraculous realms" (Campbell, 1988: 219, 221). Campbell writes that myths are essential stories embedded in culture and reflecting its goals and values. They give credence to every day lives in the shape of their settings, characters and plots. Campbell even claims that heroes indicate the "right way" to act and think although

a better way to put this is that the heroes' behaviour expresses current social ideals and/or values (Kittelson, 1998).

The tales featuring superheroes are frequently found in a genre of literature termed 'sword and sorcery'. These tales are also characterized as action stories in which the heroes are especially heroic and villains are particularly villainous, and in which the hero overcomes all odds. In some cases however the seemingly powerless overcome the powerful (Filmer: 173).

The contemporary King Arthur may appear apolitical on the surface, but in fact he is not. In spite of those Arthurs who have reformist tendencies, in all cases the social values of the status quo are supported and defended. As Richard Reynolds puts it,

The normal is valuable and is constantly under attack, which means that almost by definition the superhero is battling on behalf of the status quo.... The superhero has a mission to preserve society, not to reinvent it (Reynolds, 1992:77).

For the most part, the authors of contemporary Arthuriana treat the king with respect. None of the novels about Arthur ascribe negative, petty character traits or erotic tendencies. Arthur's relationship with Guenevere is handled with restraint. In one sense however, the character of Arthur is rather bland. His persona is somewhat like that described for Superman as an image of supreme masculine strength with matching goodness. He performs good deeds for the benefit of mankind, not for personal gain, and protects the innocent because it is the right thing to do. This image of the idealized hero is matched by the exact opposite of his enemies who exhibit nastiness, self-aggrandizement and domination.

King Arthur is so sure of his moral strength that he is rarely exposed to temptation and if he is, does not succumb to it, unlike Spiderman who is so filled with shame for his flawed and lustful flesh that he feels the need

to transform shame into atonable guilt. In only one recent case, *Fionavar*, does King Arthur suffer from such pangs of guilt.

Superheroes in comics are not the only type of hero with characteristics similar to those of King Arthur. There is an abundance of literature on real-life heroes, particularly American. Ray Brown for example has classified these into a number of categories such as The Super-Hero, Supreme Hero, and Leader-Hero who are to be found in comic books, movies, television, science fiction as well as flesh and blood. In addition, the hero:

hangs out in video-game arcade, disguised as Pac Man, Black Knight, Tron or Jungle King. The electronic revolution has created new environments of invisible power-new patterns, new space, new style. The basis of that style is electronic popular culture (Edelstein, 1966:8).

Edelstein points out that we are dominated by images rather than words and it is not surprising that sociological commentary on the hero- genre bears a similarity to Baudrillard's concepts of simulations within hyperreality.

We are threatened by a new and a peculiarly American menace...the menace of unreality...We risk being the first people in history to have been able to make their illusions so vivid, so persuasive, so 'realistic' that they can live in them. We are the most illusioned people on earth (Edelstein, 1996:266).

People need someone to admire, someone to emulate as a role model. Edelstein is very disturbed that the United States has run out of national heroes and goes to some lengths to try and explain the reasons. He makes a strong case that heroes serve a purpose in society by permitting standards to exist, encouraging excellence and effort and explaining the need for sacrifice and dedication. The greatest cultural heroes, he writes, are extreme individuals who served the public good and are representative of the metaphysical ideal of the people. The contemporary King Arthur fulfils this role to only a limited extent however, for in

modern Arthuriana King Arthur is rarely required to make sacrifices and his dedication to the common good is often narrow. (The Keltiad is an exception to this, as is *Avalon*.)

More importantly, King Arthur returns to this and future worlds with his character partially brought forward from the past. He does not bring with him, nor does he earn, a type of moral authority found in such contemporary real life heroes as Gandhi, Mandela or Martin Luther King for example, all men whose moral authority ensured a devoted following and a lasting legacy. Within popular culture, perhaps this feature of character is largely overshadowed by the combative skills of the battler.

Given the well-recognized need for heroes and the functions they perform, it is surprising that Edelstein does not suggest that the media and electronic images of popular culture heroes are a modern-day substitute or proxy for the real flesh and blood heroes of the past. It has even been suggested that secular heroes stand in for religious figures of the past, including saints, martyrs and other religious figures. This would certainly help to explain the popularity of such heroes as King Arthur in the current literature.

King Arthur does not always act alone for Merlin is usually nearby. In *Avalon* for example, Merlin is political advisor to Arthur as well as using magic in combating Moira. Despite having aged backwards to the age of eight, in *Knight Life* Merlin tells Arthur that he must return because the public needs him. In *The Broken Sword*, it is Merlin who wants Arthur to bring back the old gods but in *The Third Magic*, Arthur rejects Merlin's attempt to return him to his former role as monarch. In *The Return of Merlin*, it is Merlin who is responsible for explaining the nature of evil and the value of empowerment.

In a few cases in modern Arthurian novels, Merlin's role is taken by another character who performs the same function. Tyler appears as the font of wisdom in *Debt of Ages* and Loren Silvercloak and the seer Kimberly are present in *Fionavar*. In very few cases, Merlin is altogether absent, as in the *Trilogy of the Wyrms*.

This review of the heroic status of King Arthur in recent mass-marketed novels has shown the following:

- The basic character of King Arthur and his traits remain similar to his legendary persona which matches popular expectations.
- The role of the monarch has been updated to adapt to contemporary conditions. Arthur shares many of the characteristics of current comic-book heroes and in some cases, popularly elected politicians.
- The king generally acts alone without a close-knit group of supporters such as the Knights of the Round Table. *Camelot 3000* and *The Broken Sword* are exceptions.
- Merlin is usually at the side of the king as advisor and protector.
- Despite his dedication to justice, King Arthur is focused on short-term objectives and does not challenge the dominant political and economic authorities. He is as far from the Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara as can be imagined.

The failure of King Arthur as a returned saviour will be taken up in following pages with particular attention to how the king meets challenges confronting modern society. The question is: If Arthur has been called back to meet social crises, what is the nature of these crises and how well does he meet them? Initially, how does the king tackle the problem of injustice as it relates to evil in society?

Chapter 12. King Arthur Confronts Evil – Or Does He?

The concept of evil, as it is currently understood, is largely absent in the earliest Arthurian chronicles and legend. The usual concept as it appears in recent Arthurian novels reflects current society and poses a challenge for King Arthur. In the novels considered, Arthur meets evil characters in a variety of individual forms – human, semi-human, and monstrous. It is important to understand how evil represents challenges to Arthur's mission and authority, and the manner in which he responds. It is equally important, if not more important, to understand the absence of other forms of evil which are not personalized and which have political significance. Herein lies the justification for dwelling on the concept of evil and its sociological significance in contemporary Arthuriana.

During his appearances on earth, whether in the distant past or during more recent appearances in contemporary literature, the society of King Arthur has been challenged by a variety of anti-social threats. These challenges that involve Arthur's mission and authority will be examined within the context of the nature of evil itself. It will be shown through King Arthur's response that he fails to recognize or deal with hidden forms of evil that threaten postmodern society, thus reducing the credibility of his role as saviour.

The authors of current literary Arthuriana, in common with much of popular culture, embrace simplistic formula for combating evil to the exclusion of relatively hidden forms of evil which have negative and destructive impacts on society. It is instructive to examine sources and causes of evil that are among the real threats to society and which are largely overlooked by authors of contemporary Arthuriana. This thesis will demonstrate that the discourse on evil and the public definition and

perception of evil as found in current Arthuriana, avoids or circumvents several forms of evil which have political significance in the support they render to the status quo. In the broadest sense, this is a form of unrecognised social control and is related to the maintenance of social solidarity.

Emanuel Kant was the first to define radical evil as an innate human propensity to evil. Evil results from conduct regarded as immoral, conduct that causes pain, is harmful or injurious. Evil is the suffering that results from morally wrong human choices, hence the term is used as a synonym for extreme forms of moral wrong. Evil is a term describing that which is regarded as morally bad, intrinsically corrupt, destructive, inhumane or wicked. There are three types of evil but only the first will be dealt with in this thesis. 1) moral evil is when an intelligent being knowingly and deliberately inflicts suffering upon another sentient being; 2) Natural evil which results from the processes of nature such as typhoons and earthquakes; 3) Finally, metaphysical evil that is related to theological arguments concerning the nature of God.

The concept of evil describes a hierarchy of moral standards applied to human behaviour. It is usually applied to extreme forms of morally wrong choices such as participation in the Holocaust or child killing. The difficulty in dealing with the concept arises partly because of 1) the subjectivity of the concept; 2) changes in the perception of evil behaviour from one era to another; and 3) it is situational in some cases. In other words, evil has no easily identified common essence.

Neil Forsyth has traced the evolution of evil and found that the concept as we know it today was absent in the classical world. (See Volume 1, Number 1 of the e-Journal of the Wickedness Net (no date).

<http://www.Wickedness.Net>) As for a satanic figure epitomizing evil,

there has been many names bestowed on this figure as it has evolved. Satan is Hebrew for 'adversary' and the term 'devil' originates from the Greek *diabolos* meaning 'opponent'. In Christian theology, the fallen angel Satan is cast out and came to be considered by many, especially in evangelical denominations, as the embodiment of all that is wrong in the world. Such an overwhelming figure of evil is not often encountered in current Arthuriana but he is nevertheless there as Rakoth Maugrim, the Unraveller in *The Fionavar Tapestry*, very similar to the Dark Lord Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The incorporation of the devil or Satan into Christian theology as the opponent of Christ matches the two opposing forces of Good and Evil, of Light and Darkness, concepts that appear throughout literature. The theme of these bipolar opposites is often extended to represent the struggle of civilized society when threatened by external savagery. This common theme in Arthurian novels connects with debates on moral philosophy, individual responsibility and the freedom to choose Good or Evil. Modern Arthurian tales are full of the classic symbolic conflict between Good and Evil but it is usually portrayed in simplistic terms.

Sophie Masson also contends that the concept of evil is not portrayed in the medieval world, Arthur's world. In a discussion on the Arthurnet, an on-line Internet discussion group devoted to King Arthur, she wrote this surprising opinion regarding evil:

I think Arthurian narratives, both medieval and modern, do not tend to portray evil. Perhaps this is also true of Celtic literature, and maybe even mythologically-based narratives and traditions. It is difficult to find a really evil character in traditional literature (Arthurnet, 7 July 1999).

Additional concepts of evil occur which, if present, would be revealing as the legend begins to reflect the modern era. The first is the philosophic notion that evil does not exist externally but resides within the individual

alone. This concept, derived from Manichaeism, is popular in the New Age philosophy reflected in Deepak Chopra's book *The Return of Merlin*. The confrontation between Good and Evil is dramatized in the efforts of the Court of Miracles to defeat Mordred. And yet, Merlin makes it quite clear that evil does not reside in any external demon. When Arthur was still a boy, Merlin says to him, "I am going to tell you the secret of conquering evil. You are the evil. When you can face that, all monsters dissolve into the mist" (Chopra, 1995: 394). As an adult, Arthur comes to understand that Merlin would not fight Mordred because Merlin understood that Mordred was himself. The whole point of this New Age novel is to encourage this awakening to the nature of evil.

A somewhat similar concept of evil can be found in Lyall Watson's study of the origins of evil, leading him to the conclusion that the roots of evil are in natural selection, that the selfish gene responsible for Good and Evil is inescapably within ourselves as the product of biological evolution. Thus, he writes, there are no external demons, only the devil within (Watson, 1996: 265).

King Arthur is relatively free of this type of personal evil which accounts in part for his unblemished character and positive image among the public. In all but one of the contemporary novels of this period, Arthur is free of the evil of sin arising within himself. That exception is *The Fionavar Tapestry* in which the king is burdened with guilt concerning his slaughter of the newborn children. It is remarkable that in all 23 novels examined, this is the only King with a stain on his character. He always chooses Good over Evil although rarely is he forced to make a choice. This is one reason for the mystical aura ensuring his enduring positive image.

Despite the horrors perpetrated in the 20th century, the conceptual discourse for dealing with evil has been sparse and inadequate. Richard

Bernstein writes that the term evil has almost disappeared from the vocabulary of moral philosophers even though it is still very much in evidence. The concept has largely been avoided by sociologists as well, probably on the grounds that it is a philosophic or theological concept. Although there is an abundant literature on large scale evil such as Auschwitz, some forms of evil are overlooked as such because they are hidden or disguised by the mask of some superior good (Bernstein, 2002: 9).

An entirely different perspective on the definition and sources of evil is to be found in 'institutional evil' which is an overlooked perspective in the approach taken by most authors of mass-marketed Arthuriana. White-collar crime for example is perceived quite differently from forms most often portrayed in the media. This type of crime such as fraud, bribery, insider trading, embezzlement, and bureaucratic corruption often has severe negative social impacts and costs. Unlike murder and assault, white collar crime is relatively undetected, yet, the malicious intent and resulting harm and suffering easily qualify institutional crime and behaviour as evil.

If evil is defined as actions causing suffering by individuals and the community, then it should include deliberate, morally wrong actions on the part of individuals within corporations and bureaucracies which engage in destructive consequences to both individuals and society. Such behaviour is often hidden, has had less visibility and receives less punishment than other forms of criminal behaviour. Wendell Bell, writing in *The Futurist* has written:

Finally, the structuring of society into collectives – corporations, states, government agencies, military units, schools and thousands of other complex organizations – contributes to the production of evil. It does so through the diffusion of responsibility and isolation of top decision makers from face-to-face contact with the harmful actions they may foster (Bell, 2004:55).

As long ago as 1949 Edwin Sutherland demonstrated that theories of crime that blame broken homes, poverty and Freudian fixations for illegal behaviour, were far from adequate explanations for the phenomena. It was Sutherland who invented the phrase “white-collar crime” found in hidden criminal behaviour within corporations and their governing leadership in the U.S.A.

An outstanding recent example of white-collar crime in Australia is the case of Alan Bond and his Bell Resources. This extravagant figure reached the pinnacle of public adulation yet his unbridled and unprincipled greed finally brought him down with only a modicum of justice. Alan Bond committed fraud involving \$1.2 billion which he stripped from Bell Resources to support his Bond Corporation and his extravagant life-style. He was able to evade virtually every legal sanction after leading the Bond Corporation to Australia’s biggest corporate loss in 1989, declared himself to be the country’s worst bankrupt in 1992 and was finally convicted of the nation’s biggest fraud in 1997 (Barry, 2000: 349).

The major focus of King Arthur’s battle over personal and social threats is the defeat of criminal behaviour and the overcoming of human and non-human threats to society. King Arthur shares the fight against this form of evil with a variety of heroes and superheroes in popular fiction, TV and film. The popularity of destroying or putting away the criminals plays on the public fear of crime. Defeating the perpetrators of crime can be a means of alleviating public anxieties when the community perceives a high instance of crime, particularly in urban areas and among the elderly.

Among the monsters or demons King Arthur encounters in these novels are Basiliskos, Gilgamesh, Korvaashan the Interrogator, Quetzal and the harbinger Wyrm. In other cases, evil springs from deeds by purely human

or semi-human opponents including Saladin, Sandoval and Titus. This group is corrupted by choice, are evil in and of themselves and incapable of redemption. Finally, there are those that might be described as re-born semi-humans, characters emergent from the Arthuriad, usually with special magical powers. These are best exemplified by Morgan Le Fay (or Morgan or Moira), and of course Mordred, her son.

Sociologists sometimes use the term 'culture of fear' to describe feelings of fear and anxiety in contemporary public discourse. A. Tudor has written that a proper sociological approach to fear has both empirical and theoretical significance in understanding late modern society (Tudor, 2003:238). The importance of this issue is to be found in the hundreds of books, articles and monographs that have been written on the subject. One only has to scan "crime" entries in the Google web browser to appreciate public and academic awareness. Various aspects of crime have become an increasing concern of sociologists who have conducted numerous surveys, particularly on the perception of crime, and there are many organizations established to deal with crime such as Neighbourhood Watch and wealthy gated communities.

Moral evil need not necessarily be linked to individual behaviour. In searching for the source of contemporary social problems, Lionel Tiger and others attribute evil to the operation of the industrial system itself which has not produced a viable ethical system but is responsible for a variety of contemporary ills (Tiger, 1987:9). The industrial system with its large corporations and governmental bureaucracies certainly provides opportunities for individuals with evil intent to escape individual responsibility by hiding within the protective cover of the organization.

It is essential to understand that the causes of crime go beyond individual threats and criminal activity such as found in contemporary Arthuriana.

Among the sociologists who have looked into symptoms of modern social contradictions are Ulrich Beck and Lionel Tiger who both see social malaise arising from the economic and social system. Beck challenges the myth that all that is well today can be attributed to economic growth, science, technology and democratic underpinnings. He finds that productive forces in modern industrial society have “lost their innocence” as industrial society is replaced by the risk society in which unknown and unintended consequences have become dominant social forces.

Beck also points to the consequences and risks of modernization as threats to the life of plants, animals and human beings (Beck, 1992:11-13,22). According to this major sociologist, the risks and consequences resulting from techno-economic development have come to be a dominant force in history and society (Beck, 1992:2).

In like vein, Tiger writes that the industrial system itself has produced all manner of ills.

But in the industrial system evil has become systematized. The production of it has become technologized, internationalised, multinationalized (sic) and especially in time of war and high zoolatry, officially rhapsodised....Malefactors are harder to spot. They no longer boast horns and wear suits with tail, but rather three-piece suits and sometimes turtleneck sweaters of cashmere wool or magenta blouses of tailored silk (Tiger, 1987:4).

It is clear that crime, whether real or imagined, poses an increasing risk in the reflexive society to which Beck refers as the second modernity.

Increasing population growth, urbanisation, drugs, unemployment of minority groups are related to crime by individuals or street gangs. The prevalence and location of urban crime is a matter for empirical studies, but there seems no doubt that fear of crime among various sectors of the population is sometimes exaggerated by the media or promoted for political gain.

Adventure novels such as the Arthuriana genre rarely refer to the causes of crime in their plots or expand the type of perpetrators. Contrary to the findings of sociological research, and in common with much of the media and popular culture, criminals are portrayed as evil persons or creatures outside normal society and deserve no respect. Overcoming this criminal element is the mission of popular culture heroes including, of course, the contemporary King Arthur. It is likely that one function of these popular heroes in overcoming gangsters and other threats is to reinforce and maintain social solidarity (Hall, 1979:96) and diffuse anxiety about helplessness when threatened by contemporary risks.

The French sociologist Rene Girard has written on violence and scapegoating which relates to an analysis of contemporary Arthuriana. Girard theorizes that the community rids itself of threats to the social order in the form of sacrificial victims. Criminals, and/or monsters in the case of future and fantasy Arthuriana, are a form of externalised evil that is overcome by the hero, King Arthur thus restoring communal cohesion and maintaining the status quo. Referring to violent, sexual and, religious crimes, Girard writes as follows:

All these crimes seem to be fundamental. They attack family and the hierarchical differences without which there would be no social order. In the sphere of individual action they correspond to the global consequences of an epidemic of the plague or any comparable disaster (Girard, 1986:15).

In Girard's analysis, it is the community as a whole that identifies and rids society of the perpetrators of crime through scapegoats. In the case of the current Arthurian, this becomes a major function of the heroic King Arthur. Considering our society's fascination with celebrity sex, rape, incest and paedophilia, it is surprising that none of this finds its way into the worlds of King Arthur, who, in the modern Arthurian, does not target these perpetrators.

It is both disappointing and revealing that in general, contemporary Arthurs are rooted in the past when it comes to identifying and dealing with the source of evil in 20th century society. There is rarely any form of institutional threat to society comparable to the disunity of Britain prior to Arthur's unification and response to the invasions of the Saxons. In only a few recent reconstructions, negative forces opposing King Arthur take on a distinctly modern form. In Stephen Lawhead's book *Avalon*, and in *Camelot 3000*, evil is also to be found among political opponents. It may be associated with either a human or non-human threat. Dark forces within the Wyrms Trilogy take the form of grasping Japanese corporations as well as the monsters they seek to enlist. In *Avalon*, one of Arthur's opponents is the corrupt ambitious Prime Minister Waring and his political cronies. It should be recalled however that Waring was under the influence of Moira.

The role of Merlin in the confrontation of evil cannot be overestimated. Merlin's command over magic and his access to the old gods is often critical in protecting Arthur from the magic wielded by Morgan, Thanatos, or Mordred. As the magician who often brings the king into the present or future, Merlin has a vested interest in protecting the king from these threats. Although Merlin is mainly concerned with the protection of the king, the threats can be seen to threaten the stability of society as well.

One purpose in raising the issue of evil in these books is to demonstrate how contemporary authors of Arthuriana have rarely deviated from past models of evil behaviour, and in only one case does King Arthur address modern challenges such as those outlined by Beck, Giddens and others. In the contemporary world, if evil is not part of the moral discourse, then white-collar or corporate crime escapes judgement. In this sense, authors of Arthuriana mislead their readers with out of date, unrealistic concepts

of evil, thus avoiding any challenge to the status quo and questioning of problems of evil arising from within the political-economic system.

Why is it that authors of modern Arthuriana present such a limited view of evil, avoiding attention to injustices and anti-social behaviour arising within our economic system? Some suggested answers to this question will be taken up in the pages that follow.

Chapter 13. Summary and Conclusions

The Arthurian Legend And Its Transformations

Departures from the Core Legend

It is said of postmodern literature that there is a random cannibalisation of all literary styles of the past, and this is certainly the case with the current Arthurian legend. The use of the Arthurian characters in novels of this genre is a superficial cannibalisation and commodification of the past legend which is not often treated with the respect one would either expect or hope for.

It is not surprising that the King Arthur of the 20th century and beyond differs significantly from the king in the classic Arthurian legend. The king's mission remains familiar despite variations in time and place and King Arthur's identity remains stable even though he may occupy new occupational roles. In some cases, his traditional identity gives way to new patterns and relationships, particularly those concerning Guenevere. King Arthur still responds to meet immediate threats to society and is the champion of Good against Evil. There are indications of modern trends in the direction of individualization as King Arthur adapts to the worlds in which he finds himself.

Of course not all authors of current Arthuriana attempt to recreate the entire legend in modern dress, in fact most of them weave a story around the character of King Arthur together with a few personalities from the past. Variations in features of the Arthur story are related to the restrictive nature of the crisis that calls King Arthur forward into the present or future. From the classic Arthurian legend, it is believed the king will return again at a time of need. The timing of this return and the judgement of need is generally up to Merlin. What we find in the current

Arthurian literature is that often the crisis does not seem to be a crisis at all – witness the absence or lack of urgency in *The Forever King*, *Broken Sword*, *Third Magic*, *Return of Merlin*, *Knight Life*, *One Knight Only* and *The Wyrms Trilogy*. It is understandable however that the king is called back during the aerial Battle of Britain, the political instability of British monarchy in *Avalon*, the invasion of aliens in *Camelot 3000* or the final battle in *The Fionavar Tapestry*.

A major reason for departures from the legend is that King Arthur has undergone a transformation to meet the need and demand for mass-marketed popular culture. As expected, the ‘modernized’ King Arthur is cast in a variety of occupational roles in contemporary, future and fantasyland. We find him there as fighter pilot, politician and space jockey as well as his traditional role as battlefield commander. The heroic Arthur, often raised to the stature of Superhero, fights the battle with opponents taking on the characteristics of supervillains in popular culture.

The final glimpses of Arthur in most of these novels stands in sharp contrast to Jean Baudrillard’s reminder that “In olden days the king (also the god) had to die – that was his strength. Today he does his miserable utmost to pretend to die, so as to preserve the blessing of power. But even this is gone” (Poster, 1988). The public perception of King Arthur is still that of an ideal king. There is evidence in the current assemblage of novels that Arthur’s iconic status rests mainly on his past achievements and has not been imaginatively updated. Perhaps most seriously, Arthur lacks the moral authority and vision that must accompany true leadership.

The classic Arthurian legend, based on the culture of the High Middle Ages, contains numerous references to an elaborate society embracing

elements of the court with its hierarchy of roles, dress, weaponry, food, etiquette, and religious ritual, etc. The cultural setting in the current Arthurian legend is neither as rich, extensive or as complex as in the classic legend, nor are the personal relationships as elaborated. (The Keltiad is an exception) All this means that from an overall perspective and with some exceptions, the components of the legend have been simplified and trivialized. The scope and grandeur of the past society, as well as its sociological significance, has been lost through most of these reconstructions of the present, future and fairyland. It must be concluded that the transformation of King Arthur, together with his cultural and social milieu, is reduced by the commodification of the legend into the genre of popular culture, leaving both readers of this literature and sociologists with only a skeleton to ponder.

To illustrate, a critical feature of the core legend is the tension and political instability brought about by the love affair between Queen Guenevere and Lancelot du Lac. Lancelot does not appear in the English chronicle, but is a major character in the French romances from the mid-to-late 12th century. Malory combines these two traditions in the 15th century and in this version, the tension following Guenevere's betrayal of Arthur continues to build as she fails to produce an heir to the throne. The Knights pressure Arthur to put his Queen aside, but he refuses. This must have caused him some stress to say the least. Based on the novels in which Guenevere or her proxy appears, the 'modern' Arthur has a single monogamous relationship with his Guenevere, a relationship which always ends happily, and apart from the scandalous versions of *The King* and *Camelot 3000*, neither he nor she has any other relationship.

The omission of the disturbing influence of Lancelot removes an essential feature of the legend and its ramifications. The destabilising influence of Lancelot disappears and the relationship of Guinevere and Arthur is

completely changed. This change reflects modern preferences for a relatively passive helpmate who does not betray Arthur for another man. Arthur, being besotted by Guenevere, keeps her by his side and their story together ends happily.

The overpowering concern over incest and adultery that is so strong in the middle ages is avoided in current Arthuriana. This Arthur has a clear conscience, for in only one novel, the *Fionavar Tapestry*, does he suffer from his past sin and the guilt laid on him in his past. This king is never tempted by the promise of sexual favours or material goods. King Arthur cannot avoid moral dilemmas however and is sometimes faced with cruel choices regarding private morality with those relating to the public good.

The strong supporting alliance between King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table is also largely absent in most recent retellings. Ghostly knights appear at the end of *The Forever King* and then reappear on motorcycles in the other Cochran books. Knights take an interesting variety of ethnic and gender personalities in *Camelot 3000* and are strongly supportive in battles. The Keltiad Arthur has an army behind him while the Bear in one otherworld heads a street gang. In only *Avalon* perhaps, and in *The Return of Merlin*, does a sense of community comparable to the Knights come together, but the group around the Lady in the Green Hat is a transient and impermanent collection of oddities. For the most part, Arthur meets his opponents as a single figure, a feature linking him with Superheroes of the popular media.

The quest for the Holy Grail is nearly absent in contemporary novels. In the first place, there is usually no quest whatever. Although the cup appears in a number of stories, it has a secular character in most cases. If there is any 'quest' involved, it is Saladin's obsessive desire to recapture what he once possessed, this being the thread that ties all action together

in *The Forever King*. Finally, in *The Keltiad*, the cup is simply one of the thirteen Treasures of Britain. Much of the previous symbolism has been lost. For Christian symbolism one must turn to *Camelot 3000* where the nature of the cup is strangely ambiguous.

The lack of moral authority can also be linked to the absence of a spiritual element or of a vision of a future society in contemporary Arthuriana. There is rarely a comparable objective beyond restoring law and order. The handling of the Grail Quest and the Grail Cup is one more indication of the secularisation of the Arthurian legend.

An intriguing question in modern Arthurian renditions is to what extent, if any, the authors of these novels are laying the groundwork for Arthurian novels still to come in the future. Acceptance of the king's destiny is related to the acceptance of his royal identity from the past. Already there is one case in which this identity and destiny is rejected in favour of leading a normal life. More often than not, the 'traditional' Arthur complains of being encumbered by the burden of his role and destiny which he cannot escape.

Casting the king as a young man who rejects his destiny is a departure and an innovation in the Cochran stories. Rejection of the traditional role of monarch and the individualization of the young Arthur reflects one of the major traits of the modern era. The Cochran novels are the only ones in which an autonomous King Arthur actually abandons the role of monarch.

In earlier societies, it would be rare for a person to reject or depart from a social role into which he/she was born and raised for such a person would be locked into family, socio-economic status, gender and language and all the expectations associated with these. Institutions such as the

church would support the status quo as they do in the novels of Charles Dickens and the Brontës which illustrate this point. Achievement through personal choice or merit would be rare although the legendary King Arthur sometimes overcame these barriers.

A significant feature in some modern revisions is that King Arthur appears to escape his destiny altogether insofar as it means avoiding his recurrent doom and return to the past. (This feature occurs in *Knight Life*, *One Knight Only Debt of Ages*, *Legacy*, and *The Dragon Rises*.) In the conclusion of *Arthur, King*, Arthur returns to the past but is accompanied by his lover Gwen, as is also the case in *The Fionavar Tapestry*. The final doom cannot be escaped in *Camelot 3000* and *The Keltiad*. The issue does not arise in *Avalon*, *the Return of Merlin* and *The Wyrms Trilogy*.

It must be asked what accounts for these departures from the traditional legend and the curious phenomenon that the iconic King Arthur is both an admirable role model personally but simultaneously fails as a king in contemporary, future and fantasy worlds.

Role Model Yet Failed King

In the novels under review, the personal character of King Arthur usually emerges close to the legendary figure of past centuries for he exhibits many worthy traits admired in heroic role models. Many of these characteristics are the familiar ones of the past as well as those demonstrated in popular culture: charisma, altruism, courage and acceptance of responsibility. Contemporary Arthurian literature pictures the king as a morally blameless icon. Arthur does indeed 'Hold Back The Darkness' however temporarily.

The values associated with Arthur make him an ideal representative of the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. The irrationality and

superstition of the Dark and Middle Ages are absent in an individualized monarch who is presented as an entirely modern, rational, pragmatic, tolerant individual who is not dependent on the authority of priests or religious texts. These are the values and traits associated with the Enlightenment. Nor does the modern King Arthur suffer from the individual rootlessness associated with postmodern society. As models of traditional personal behaviour, these Arthurs are successful and account in large part for his popularity today. On the other hand, Arthur's reputation was fashioned in the past and his survival may be somewhat in doubt if assessed by contemporary standards. In the modern Arthuriad there is no instance of the king ever being seriously tested or even tempted, and in no case does he sacrifice himself for the common good.

The King Arthur of the past carries a positive image in the public mind, yet currently he must compete with the far more popular contemporary figures in the world of sports, film, music and television, all of whom are aggressively promoted by the media and its sponsors. As is the case with so many celebrities lionized by the media, King Arthur in these novels shares such a role within popular culture. This is inevitable as the king becomes a commodity of cultural production generated by publishing empires. Obviously the authors and publishers of Arthurian novels are meeting a public demand insofar as these books are successful. Since many of the authors and publishers are American-based, the books reflect consumer preferences for action-oriented adventure stories with strong romantic overtones.

In assessing the current crop of kings that appear today, in the future and in fantasyland, it is necessary to examine the nature of Arthur's objectives and in the end, his actual achievements.

There are several significant issues which together lead to disappointment, even dissatisfaction, in assessing King Arthur's current role and these revolve around Arthur's failure to recognize significant types of threats and evil that are present in contemporary society, nor does he recognize the source of these threats and their relationship to political power. It is particularly unfortunate that the King Arthur of today and tomorrow does not recognize, respond to or address a wider range of social threats. After all, an earlier King Arthur did not stand idly by while the Saxons invaded Britain, and in addition, he had a vision of a unified and better society.

As we have seen, the monarch's major focus is largely the defeat of criminals, witches, demons and/or monsters, many returned from his past. The threat of corporate or institutional crime, which is damaging to social stability and the justice system, is almost completely ignored. Although major external threats of communism from Asia and the USSR had diminished by the time of publication of these novels, environmental degradation was beginning to emerge as is reflected in the *Wyrms Trilogy*. Also absent in contemporary Arthuriana are any references to the civil rights turmoil of the late 1960s, the drug culture and spread of globalisation. Needless to say, the current crop of Arthurian novels were written mainly before the current threat of terrorist bombers and the organizations that support them. It will be interesting to see whether such a confrontation takes place in the future *Arthuriad* as it does in *One Knight Only*.

The concept of evil varies from society to society and through time in the same society, but each society has a moral code that defines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The concept of evil as we know it today may be absent or far different from that in the days of King Arthur, but it still

exists in our more secular culture despite having been derived largely from a Judaic-Christian tradition.

Discourse has been defined as a body of ideas, concepts and beliefs which become established knowledge. Such a discourse surrounds the concept of human evil which is a byproduct or predictable result of the pursuit of interests at the expense of the legitimate interests of other people. The concept of evil within popular culture is an important issue in assessing the role of King Arthur and how he addresses evil, for popular culture is influential in both defining evil and in influencing the way we perceive it. In a perceptive article, Turnau suggests that authors manipulate worldview and human minds. Relying on Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative representation, Turnau writes:

Worldview is not simply an opinion stated and believed: worldview is something inscribed into the very structure of the world of the text. Worldview has become the very fabric of worlds, and habitation in such a world has potentially profound effects in the world of the reader, the reader's sense of self and relation to the world, and how the reader sees evil (Turnau, 2004:388).

According to Michel Foucault, power works through discourses to shape popular attitudes toward phenomena such as crime, madness or sexuality etc. He said in an interview:

It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them (Rabinow, 1991:6).

One can only conclude that most modern Arthurs avoid such a task altogether.

A modern perspective on evil behaviour is strangely removed from criminal acts which are often explained by a variety of psychological, genetic and environmental causes. Many of these acts, whether they occur

on the streets, in the home or within organizations, are understandably regarded as evil in terms of the harm, pain and injustice they cause. Infractions of this moral code within corporate and other institutional settings are less well recognized despite having negative consequences on a scale that constitutes equally damaging consequences for society.

The contemporary King Arthur perpetuates the myth that evil behaviour arises mainly in the form of criminals, villains or demons, or. As has been seen in previous pages, there are also significant institutional or corporate forms of evil in modern society. The media and the courts have only recently begun to uncover widespread examples of fraudulent corporate and bureaucratic activity that has caused pain and suffering among the public. There is no shortage of unethical behaviours among some corporate or governmental organizations which perpetuate such behaviour from behind institutional structures. Examples are the socially irresponsible actions by officers and staff to increase profits or benefit executives by defrauding investors through accounting schemes, misleading advertising and labelling, biased research, price fixing and bribing governmental officials. The same can be said for national and international bureaucracies whose personnel have engaged in unethical behaviour that produces a corrupt culture for the entire organization.

Corporate or institutional evil takes a variety of forms, only one of which is addressed by King Arthur in only one volume. The Bear in the the Wyrms Trilogy is the only one concerned with environmental issues resulting from some corporations within the industrial system which are responsible for pollution of the earth, air and water. The Bear recognizes that the evil goes beyond the individual whether demon or human. In the final book of the Wyrms Trilogy, Artos establishes the Pend Foundation to overcome the degradation of the earth carried out by a Japanese enterprise in league with demons from the other world.

It would not be surprising if the image of King Arthur suffers a decline in the future for he has been unable to address real threats to this society. Arthur is only successful in overcoming simplistic and personalized forms of evil. As noted, Rene Girard has provided a clue to account for this pattern. Societies experiencing anti-social threats frequently relieve their anxiety through externalising the perceived evil by the elimination of scapegoats. King Arthur is called upon to perform this vital function at which he excels, but he is shown to be morally blind in his failure to recognize and deal with other forms of evil that go beyond individual and personalized challenges.

Meaning, according to Baudrillard, is created by a flow of images and images within Arthuriana constitute one such flow. Modern Arthuriana is made up of these simulations that convey particular meanings, one of which is that of evil and the perpetration of evil actions. It is here that these contemporary Arthurian novels are related to the power elite in the way they protect the values and institutions of the status quo.

Considering the media world in which we live, there should be little surprise at this. One major feature revealed is the conservatism of King Arthur that allies him with the economic and political status quo. This also prevents him from either recognizing or addressing long-term postmodern uncertainties in the worlds that he has re-entered. This issue is related to the political ideological overtones that surround the conservatism of King Arthur and his apparent protection of the status quo. In these contemporary novels, King Arthur may be a reformer of sorts, but he is no critic of the establishment, in no sense a rebel, so his talents are put to limited use in most cases. The authors of books about this noble monarch do King Arthur an injustice in failing to realistically bring him up to date into this and future worlds.

The heroes' mission to preserve society, and not to reinvent or challenge it, is well described by Richard Reynolds in his book, *Super Heroes. A Modern Mythology*,

A key ideological myth of the superhero comic is that the normal and everyday enshrines positive values that must be defended almost without respite against an endless battery of menaces determined to remake the world for the benefit of aliens, mutants, criminals, or sub-aqua beings from Atlantis. The normal is valuable and is constantly under attack, which means that almost by definition the superhero is battling on behalf of the status quo (Reynolds, 1992:77).

As long ago as 1979, James Lovelock issued clear warnings in his Gaia hypothesis that showed the earth as a single living entity maintaining conditions necessary for survival through self-regulating biological mechanisms. These mechanisms are now under threat and/or out of control.

Ulrich Beck recognized this in his pathbreaking book, *The Risk Society*, when he wrote:

We are therefore concerned no longer exclusively with making nature useful, or with releasing mankind from traditional constraints, but also and essentially with problems resulting from techno-economic development itself.The productive forces have lost their innocence in the reflexivity of modernization processes. At the center lie the risks and consequences of modernization, which are revealed as irreversible threats to the life of plants, animals, and human beings (Beck, 1992: 12-13, 19).

One characteristic of the superhero that may help to explain Arthur's failure to institutionalise his mission has been noted by Joan Rockwell when she writes that charismatic leaders by definition have no institutional power and are able to influence social events only through the belief that they inspire in their followers (Rockwell, 1974:26).

Rockwell's comments on the charismatic hero are consistent with Abrams' comment that the major type of American hero is the outsider, one with unbounded optimism and clear-sightedness who, when they enter a community, one can predict they will find its wound and cleanse it before they leave (Inge, 1990:142). As we have seen, King Arthur's major task is fighting villains who share his popular culture environment.

Modern authors of Arthuriana are contributing to the public's flawed perception that evil mainly resides in the criminals so popularly overcome in comic books, westerns and TV police dramas. Although responsible individuals have the ability to make choices and anticipate the consequences of their actions, individual evil behaviour within institutions has only recently been shown to be widespread within corporate headquarters, government bureaucracies, city councils or within police departments. The status quo is the beneficiary of this misleading portrayal of the perpetrators of evil since the focus avoids reference to institutions and individuals whose actions promote and protect strong vested interests.

We cannot expect the authors of these books to write like political economists, yet it is surprising how King Arthur in their novels is usually unaware of emerging problems of the twentieth century such as population growth and associated resource constraints, environmental problems, urban sprawl, globalisation, income disparities and ethnic and religious tensions. Among major threats to our society which cry out for leadership are those associated with damage to our planet earth resulting partly from the harmful products and consequences of industrial society. The narrowness of King Arthur's grasp of social threats is not consistent with that of Arthur in classical accounts.

Current Arthuriana novels give hardly a hint of the major risks to postmodern society that Giddens also warned of in 1990: 1) the growth of totalitarian power; 2) nuclear or large-scale warfare; 3) collapse of economic growth mechanisms; and 4) ecological disaster (Kivisto, 1998:150, referencing Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity*).

With regard to what we understand as evil behaviour, we can agree with Bernstein when he writes that when confronted with specific evils, whether ethical, social or political, the challenge is always to search for ways to combat and eliminate them. If evil is not part of the moral discourse, then corporate crime escapes public perception and judgement.

King Arthur fails not only to recognize these problems but also to see the political and economic nature of their source. American political institutions may be tidied up and the British monarchy may be cleansed as in *Avalon*, but in general Arthur is a reformer at best and makes no challenge to the hegemony of the dominant paradigm, to use the current sociological phrasing for such things.

One way to assess the returned King Arthur is to look at his linkage to society in terms of his authority, power and influence. Arthur's personal authority within a military context maintains his legendary role as leader as would be expected. In terms of power and influence however, the king is not at all strongly associated with political and economic institutions holding corporate or government power with the exception of his role in *Avalon*, *Knight Life* and *One Knight Only*, in which one must assume he either exercises or will exercise authority in his role as King, Mayor and President. These three books do not dwell on this issue however since Arthur has not yet assumed the position in all cases. The two books in which King Arthur is given the role comparable to the legendary Arthur are *Camelot 3000* and *The Keltiad*. Even in these cases, it is the legendary

Arthur of popular perception and not a failed king revealed by Sara Douglass, a king whose influence and authority is severely limited by his own indecision and personal failures.

It is interesting to compare Sara Douglass' assessment of King Arthur and that of Raymond Thompson with the conclusions of the present work. Douglass undermines the popular image of King Arthur as a sinful betrayer of Camelot who waged unjust wars and left behind a legacy of failure (Douglass, 1999:239-40). Raymond Thompson, determined to protect the image of King Arthur, describes him as "the dream of peace and justice, of love and laughter", who pushes back the Darkness for a while (Thompson, 1985:178). The conclusion of the present study resembles neither of these assessments for the masterful monarch of the past emerges in the 20th century as a caricature of his former self with little to offer in terms of vision or leadership. Arthur has joined a group of virtual superheroes generally found in comic books, arcade or computer games. The only Darkness he holds back is found among villains and demons he confronts and overcomes. Fortunately two of King Arthur's avatars are exceptions to this gloomy appraisal, thus holding out a hope for future incarnations.

King Arthur returns with his identity intact, and his heroic status as saviour is enthusiastically received once his credentials are established. After his departure however, Arthur leaves little behind so his impact on society is negligible. He founds no group or institution associated with his name apart from the Pend Foundation in the Wyrms Trilogy. He leaves no individual or institutional heir to carry on his mission. This is consistent with other heroes of popular culture who stand somewhat apart from society, but is inconsistent with the figure of Arthur with his visionary ideal of Camelot as a better society.

Any way you look at it, Arthur's power and influence in contemporary, future and otherworldly novels is negligible and short-lived despite his popularity which rests on his heroic status in the past. The king is often outside the dominant institutions of power in society, institutions which he does not challenge, although in some cases he chooses to become involved.

George Feldman and Lyall Watson among others are both convinced that we need to find guidelines that promote social good for all. This is certainly in line with Bauman's moral philosophy and political activism. One of these guidelines must surely be watchful of institutions that are producing socially harmful results, institutions that go beyond the collectivity of individuals who wield an influence, power and authority that extends beyond themselves. These thoughts on evil are directly related to the mission of sociology, for as Zygmunt Bauman writes:

Postmodernity is, to put it in a nutshell, a time of constant, everyday choice-for humanity as a whole as much as for the individual men and women. This already renders a non-committal sociology an impossibility...Sociologists may deny or forget the 'world-view' effects of their work only at the expense of forfeiting that responsibility of choice which every other human faces daily (Bauman, 2000:81).

Bauman is principally concerned over moral responsibility which he contends leads to political action because the ethical is always already political. The contemporary, futuristic and otherworldly novels of Arthur fail to touch on the broader political aspects of evil. The authors of these novels do the reading public a disservice in furthering a false perception of evil and its source in the interests of entertainment focused on superheroes overcoming criminal elements.

Even if King Arthur's character and values are rooted in the past, a modern and/or future Arthur with his dedication to justice would be expected to attack evil behaviour in contemporary sites that did not exist

in his previous lives. Such is not the case in the novels of his return to this and other worlds, This is a major disappointment with his current role as he appears in mass-marketed popular culture.

The failure of Arthur's leadership in many of the current reconstructions is apparent in his lack of following. The King's character comes across as an individualistic postmodern superhero with an identity similar to comic book and film superheroes such as Batman or Spiderman.

There is a final aspect of King Arthur's flawed vision that appears in contemporary and futuristic novels. In the classic *Arthuriad*, King Arthur's outstanding achievement was the unification of Britain following the collapse of the Roman Empire. The King however failed to institutionalise this achievement due mainly to the unwillingness of the local chiefs to accommodate Saxon settlers in the realm. In the current novels of popular culture, Arthur again usually fails to capitalize in the long term on whatever victories he may have won. *Avalon* appears to be an exception to this pattern as the king is fulfilled within the democratic parliamentary system and hopefully, following Arthur's fiery doom in *The Keltiad*, family and supporters will carry on his work.

To the extent that King Arthur is said to be dedicated to the spread of justice, his recent appearances show a very limited view of justice, one that does not recognize, or extend to inequities in society. In summary, with exceptions, many of these Arthurs do not appear as champions for noble causes, have little to offer in terms of a vision for a better society, and leave little behind as a lasting legacy to carry on their work.

The authors of contemporary Arthuriana respond to their publishers and social demand for a type of mass-marketed literature that undermines the majesty of the Arthurian legend of the past. The legend and the characters

are simplified and used as a platform on which to base what are essentially comic book stories of action and romance. Given this, what supports the continuing interest in the Arthurian legend? It must be that the king himself represents an untainted figure from an idealized past that is admired in a society that lacks such figures and perhaps longs for them. Arthur's current persona however leaves much to be desired, and contemporary Arthurs do little to support the figure or the myth described previously by Joseph Campbell.

There are those who claim the public looks towards heroes like King Arthur to be saviours from situations causing contemporary anxieties. This may be true in an abstract sense, but there is little evidence in these novels to support this view unless one wishes to argue that these villains symbolise or represent broader threats to civilization. Arthurian adventure novels may be a distraction from contemporary anxieties but they function mainly as action-oriented entertainment.

One can only hope that future authors who return King Arthur to this and other worlds will provide a better vision for a modern Camelot. A valid tapestry for the Millennium King Arthur has yet to be woven.

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The Once And Future King

Grailpower

An example of a postmodern King Arthur story that incorporates features not present in the current crop of novels can be found in the scenario of an unwritten story, by the author, entitled *Grailpower*. These features include scientific, sociological, political and psychological variations on Arthurian themes.

It is the year 2250 and Britain is on the verge of anarchy. The gap between rich and poor has increased to the point of exploding social tensions on the one hand and suicidal anomie on the other. Homeless terrorist gangs have started to attack the walled suburbs of the wealthy, patrolled by armed guards and dogs. Resource depletion and environmental degradation have affected food supplies and raised their cost.

Into this situation, a mysteriously reborn Arthur begins his plan to rescue Britain. He has recently returned from a spiritual retreat in one of the few remaining wilderness areas protected by the devotees of Gaia. Arthur's personal renewal has followed from the dissolution of his partnership with Guenevere who feared Arthur was about to abandon her for his male lover.

Arthur is a research scientist who has gathered around his private institute a team of brilliant advisers, economists, chemists, psychologists and geologists, etc. Under Arthur's leadership the group has developed a scientific and political agenda to save Britain. It is a source of renewable, non-polluting and inexpensive power called *Grailpower*. Following neo-Darwinian theories based on reciprocal altruism, Arthur has mobilised grass-roots local collectives outside the dominant corrupt and incompetent government authorities. Using *Grailpower* as an incentive to join him, Arthur's movement has grown from scattered isolated cells to what has become a large cooperative distribution network that bi-passes international oligopolies.

The U.S. dominated cartel controlling solar and fossil fuels has become worried about Arthur's scientific and political activities. A top CIA operative, Mordred, is assigned to deal with the situation and has allied himself with Guenevere whose hatred of Arthur over his current sexual preferences has reached psychotic proportions. As the two of them conspire, the plot unfolds.

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