



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KING ARTHUR'S RADIAL JOURNEY: BACK TO THE BEGINNINGS

KRAL ARTHUR'UN DAİRESEL YOLCULUĞUNUN KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR İNCELEMESİ: BAŞLANGICA DÖNÜŞ

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Abstract

When talking about literature and King Arthur, the premise of the Arthurian legend is vague. The myth of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table might have been real or merely fairy tales. However, historical aspects of a questionable kingdom are one thing, and the fictional aspects of King Arthur and his knights in the realm of Camelot is another thing. Therefore, through literary myths, an intertextual analysis of Arthurian legacy will be applied to selected literary texts to display the radial transformation of the attempted meanings of King Arthur's legacy under the influence of history and pseudo-history.

Keywords: Arthurian Myths, Knights of the Round Table, Camelot, Sir Thomas Malory, Radial Journey, Morgaine

Öz

Edebiyat ve Kral Arthur hakkında konuşurken, efsanenin öncülü görünen o ki belirsizdir. Kral Arthur efsanesi ve Yuvarlak Masa şövalyeleri gerçek ya da sadece bir masal olabilir. Bununla birlikte, şüpheli bir krallığın tarihi yönleri bir konudur, Kral Arthur'u ve onun şövalyelerini Kamelot Krallığında kurgulamak başka bir konudur. Bu yüzden, tarihin ve sözde tarihin gölgesinde, edebi efsaneler aracılığıyla, seçili edebi metinlere, yine bu eserlerde yüklenmeye çabalanan anlamların dairesel dönüşümünü göstermek adına Arthur efsanesinin metinler arası incelemesi urylanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arthur Efsaneleri, Yuvarlak Masa Şövalyeleri, Kamelot, Sir Thomas Malory, Dairesel Yolculuk, Morgaine

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1. Introduction:

Times have changed alongside the myths of Arthur. By looking at the Arthurian myths from an intertextual view point, the focus of this article is to display the radial journey of King Arthur's myths in selected American and English literary works. King Arthur and the tales of Camelot have been utilized in myth-making in different eras and have been embedded in different societies and perspectives until now, when the legacy of King Arthur has, in a way, settled back to its foundations. The representation of Arthur has altered through time, often with distinct intentions, yet for some reasons, the myth has returned to square one. Such coming back of a hero is typical of an assertion made by Joseph Campbell, who stated that, "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (2008, p. 23). As in Campbell, a hero, King Arthur, emerges from the blurred and dusty remnants of ancient Celtic myths to serve at cross-purposes and then return to the cradle of the ancient myth of Excalibur and the Britons, while becoming a concrete symbol of Christianity. Therefore, starting from the ancient legend of King Arthur, the radial journey of King Arthur will be analyzed under inspiration from Campbell's words, that define the typical trail of the mythological adventure of the hero as a circular motion that returns to where it started. In that sense, we might call for aid from intertextuality to decode the symbols applied to King Arthur "since works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature" (Campbell, 2011, p.1). As the symbols attributed to King Arthur are not stable and have changed over time, first of all, a discussion of the historical background on the archetypal Arthurian romance and myth is essential in order to see the origins of this myth and how pseudo-historical traditions have distorted this myth.

An archetypal romance locates the hero in a chain of challenges that he overcomes, finally conquering the dark, malevolent force and bringing harmony and order to his realm. In this way he offers the opportunity for existing in a structure demarcated by the standards of collective ethics. The hero turns out to be a prototype of complete righteousness and permanence, and he towers above his companions as a representation of excellence and durability of will against the influences of the dark side. This design of a one-man contest and control was very productive in formation of stories in the pre-Christian era, throughout the expansion of Christianity, and from the Medieval Age until nowadays. One example of such an archetypal hero is King Arthur. The legend of King Arthur is well-known among everyone who is interested in medieval literature or in the myths of the Britons. Not only is he seen as a canonical figure in Celtic myths, but his legend has left a remarkable effect on various authors. Thus, there have been various stories and adaptations through different approaches to this legend since the name King Arthur first appeared in literature. As Christopher Snyder asserts,

[b]oth historians and archeologists use literary evidence to help them reconstruct the past. But the modern literary critic is not only interested in historical questions. That form, structure, metre and imagery may be more important in their analysis of an Arthurian poem than determining whether or not Arthur existed. Some literary critics ask questions about a writer's background, others consider such questions irrelevant. Some like to look for comparisons with, and allusions to, other literary works, while others see literary creations as isolated and independent. The literary criticism of an Arthurian work may be completely subjective and idiosyncratic, or the critic may be following a recognizable school of thought. (2001, p14)

In this text, therefore, we will see different adaptations of the Arthurian legend that utilize Campbell's theory of the hero who comes back to the point where he starts after some transformation. In other words, King Arthur starts his journey to legendary status in the same manner as he rises from nothing to become a king. As we will see, in Celtic myths, King Arthur owes his kingdom to nature, Merlin and the Lady of the Lake. However, due to Arthur's popularity in literary works, later, Arthurian myth will be transformed into a Christian myth rather than a pagan myth, through pseudo-history that distorts history to propagate Christianity. To examine these changes in depth, we shall see the effects of Celtic pagan roots in Arthur owing his power to Morgana and his 'beloved comrade Excalibur' to Lady of the Lake. Then we will see the transformations in medieval times, when women's place was lowered and became associated with the devil and with witchcraft. Such an equation brings a structuralist tendency, where everything is simply seen as black or white, good or evil, Excalibur to masculinity, King to God's authority and so on. Pseudo-history (distorting the reality of the past to create an alternative history) and parataxis techniques (especially used by Malory to make the reader focus on specific notions of chivalry, bravery, fidelity and so on) are used to change some facts and to create the effect of fiction. Finally, we will return to Celtic roots as well as a paganist and pantheist world view via selected literary works. An intertextual adaptation is required to realize the interdependent manner in which texts stand in relation to one another (as well as to the culture at large) to produce meaning (Lemaster, 2012). Since King Arthur has many different interpretations and comes from a hybrid culture, traces of intertextuality are present throughout the different myths. To display the different interpretations of the Arthurian myths, the text starts with a historical overview of the legacy.

Historical Background

Historically speaking, the Arthurian myth does not start with a reference to a particular king. Rather, it is Gildas who first mentions the name of Arthur. Gildas was a Romano-British monk and the author of *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain* which tells the history of the Britons before and during the coming of the Saxons and the withdrawal of the Romans. If historians interpret Gildas' words as a reference to Arthur, this can be seen as the first mention of the king. According to Gildas, there were numerous large and small wars between two sides—Britons and Saxons—in which Britons were generally defeated, until the emergence of a general from a noble Roman family, Ambrosius Aurelianus. It was only after Aurelianus' appearance that the Britons were victorious in the battle of Mount Badon. Being a Roman commander, Aurelianus might have been a pagan who held blended Celtic and Roman beliefs, which is rather a possibility or a speculation. While on the one side Roman culture means civilization, on the other side Britain had the impact of the Celtic culture that existed prior to Romanized Britain. According to Geoffrey Ashe, the author of *The Discovery of King Arthur*,

Britain had been a latecomer to the Roman system. The Britons were a Celtic people, one branch of an ethnic and linguistic complex which had spread through central and Western Europe during the last centuries BC. The Celtic complex embraced a variety of groupings and cultures. It included the Gauls, who were in the empire, and the Irish, who never were. Britons spoke a language which is now dead, but has a living descendant in Welsh. In the last century or two BC the outside world still knew little about the Britons although it did know about their Druid intelligentsia. The Druids were a close-knit, highly trained religious order, an immensely influential elite. They were priests, scholars, bards, royal counselors and seers. They flourished in Ireland and Gaul as well, but their advanced colleges were in Britain. Their religion was a mixture of the

sophisticated and the savage...Druidism reflected a special feature of Celtic society – the unusually high status of women. Members of both sexes could be Druids. Similarly, members of both sexes could hold royal power. Celtic queens ruled over tribal coalitions in their own right. In sexual morality at that level the double standard was far from absolute. A queen could take a lover without being condemned any more than a king who took a mistress (2013, pp. 28-29).

The Arthurian legend was also affected by this blended pagan culture. In other words, the legend must have roots in a Celtic culture that enabled women to have high status and be involved in pagan Druid practices. When Roman culture -later embedded in Christianity- met with the Arthurian legend, a heterogeneous legend, in which one can see elements of different mores and cultures from various practices including Christianity and Druidism, developed.

Returning to historical accounts of King Arthur, according to Williams and Lewis, Gildas was not writing about Arthur. Nor did he state that Aurelionus was a king (1969, pp. 5-7). Thus, it may be inaccurate to assert that Gildas is really talking about Arthur. However, Gildas implants the Arthurian monomyth, which later becomes a huge cultural force. It is Nennius, four hundred years after Gildas, who provides our first explicit reference to Arthur. He tells a very similar story to that of Gildas. However, Nennius provides more detail. Nennius writes, as quoted in Williams and Lewis, of “the story of the calling in of the Saxons, under their leaders Hengist and Horsa, by the British Vortigern; of the marriage of Vortigern to Rowena, Hengist’s daughter; of the new arrivals of Saxons in force” (1969, p.6) which emerged with the outbreak of war and the downfall of the Britons. He also mentions a gathering under the leadership of Vortimer. Nennius later refers to Ambrosius as a king of kings among Britons. Meanwhile, war continues until a new hero rises (Williams & Lewis, 1969, p.7). As Williams and Lewis quote from Nennius:

Then Arthur fought with the Saxons, alongside the kings of the Britons, but he himself was the leader in the battles. The first battle was on the banks of the river which is called Gelin. The next four were on the banks of another river, which is called Dubylas and is in the region Linnius. The sixth was on a river which is called Bossa. The seventh was in the wood of Celidon; that is, Cat Coit Celidon. The eighth was by Castle Guinnion, in which Arthur carried on his shoulders an image of St. Mary Ever-Virgin, and on that day the pagans were put to flight, and there was a great slaughter of them, through the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the holy Mary His Maiden Mother. The ninth was in the City of the Legion. The tenth was on the bank of the river which is called Tribuit, eleventh was on the hill called Agned. The twelfth was on Mount Badon, in which -on that one day- there fell in one onslaught of Arthur’s nine hundred and sixty men; and none slew them but he alone, and in all the battles he remained victor. (1969, pp. 6-7)

Even though Gildas does not mention Arthur, the Arthurian myth tends to indicate the physical reality of Arthur.

As the 12th century drew near, conventional medieval kingdoms appeared. Through the church and the subjective orthodoxy of Christianity, early accounts of a traditional medievalist belief had been propagated through metaphysical concepts. Metaphysics is a discipline outside natural physics. It focuses on questions like ‘What is there beyond physics?’ and ‘If something exists beyond it, then what is it like?’ Thus, the main issue for metaphysics is to understand the being and the environment that surrounds the being “and a distinguished capacity for elliptical thought and tersely compact expression (Cuddon & Preston, 1999, p.507). Compared to ancient Roman times, Jesus Christ plays the role of the salutary Emperor, in the form of the utmost holiness. Jesus Christ is the rescuer and the

anticipated front-runner of human race. When viewed from this angle, the representation of King Arthur reflects a more Christianized idealization by breaking away from ancient Pagan Celtic traditions. King Arthur becomes the savior of Britons by delivering them from the pagans and gathering all of them under Camelot's reign. Even the near death and removal of Arthur's body from the borders of Camelot to Avalon is an expectation of Arthur to come back once again to save England when she is in danger. However, the legend of King Arthur is "more than a symbol of the resurgence alone. The story makes him a hero proper to that age" (Ashe, 2013, p. 63) who later becomes an embodiment of an eternal hero for all ages. This is the typical departure of the hero, as Campbell suggests. The hero, who in his life represented the dual perspective, remains a synthesizing image after his death; like Charlemagne, he sleeps only and will arise in the hour of destiny, or he is among us under another form (Campbell, 2008, p.307). Thus, throughout the Middle Ages and the British Renaissance, the Arthurian legacy represented chivalric merits and codes through Christianity, with an expectation of the return of the hero. In fact, Roman Arthur (Aurelinous) has undergone a dramatic change in becoming a Christian who defeats pagans. In a way, the Arthurian tradition is composed of an amalgamation of diverse traditions from Celtic to Roman and Christian orthodoxy. That is, the legacy of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table has travelled from Celtic and Druid myths to a Christianized post-Roman Britain. The shifting in Arthurian legacy from a widespread multi-cultural hero to a fixed Christian and British hero has become visible (Edman, 2015, pp. 12-14).

Many other authors, up to contemporary times, have pursued this pre-destined quest of Arthurian heritage through the Middle Ages, predominantly influenced by Sir Thomas Malory. Furthermore, this development is fixed on one thing: an ideal, virtuous, uniting Christian Arthur who has been betrayed by his comrades and overthrown by his own tragedy, or fate. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, as an ardent follower of Malory, identifies Arthur's story told by Malory and applies the story to the Victorian period with his *Idylls of the Kings*. Afterwards, Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* emerges as a firm example of American fondness of liberty. The novel takes place in Camelot where the privileged rich and noble men tyrannize the weak and feeble men. American humorist author Twain shows his class through implementing a 19th century world on the 6th century of England, in which a Connecticut Yankee seeds a rebellion for equality among oppressed people of Camelot. One of the most gifted authors of the mid-20th century, T.H. White, in his *The Once and Future King*, sets an alternative Arthurian world in the 20th century by still remaining loyal to the historical aspects drawn by Sir Thomas Malory in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Finally, a 1983 novel, *The Mists of Avalon*, by Marion Zimmer Bradley relates the Arthurian legends from the perspective of the female characters, reviewing the myth through pagan roots. It attempts to return Christianized Arthur from patriarchal domination back to the pagan basics of the legacy. The rest of this article will attempt to show the radial journey of King Arthur through the fragmentations of the mentioned novels embedded in history, pseudo-history, intertextuality and legends started by Celtic tradition and Arthurian legacy.

2. Early Celtic Tradition and the Transformation of Arthurian Legacy in History and Selected Literary Works

Roman Britain was an enthralling realm. On the face of it, there was the Roman world, detectible by its familiar "towns, roads, political structure, economy and multicultural society" (Bédoyère, 2006, p.8). However, beyond everything there was the alchemy of Roman Britain. It was "a portal into an age of mystery and intrigue" blended with Ancient Celtic rituals (Bédoyère 2006, p.8). Naturally, "the Britons of the fifth and sixth centuries were, then, a hybrid of Celtic, Roman and Christian influences. Not surprisingly, all three have left their imprint on the Arthurian legends" (Snyder, 2011, p.15). This strange cultural

amalgamation fashioned an exclusive society in which people reinterpreted conventional Roman thinking. Roman philosophy and ancient Celtic sagas were together transformed into a new worldview. In other words, Roman Britain had a kind of cross culture in which the individual beliefs of Celtic and Roman backgrounds were entangled.

However, the Ancient Celtic philosophies that had surrounded Britain in the past were still distinguishable. Archeology might shed light on the remnants of that hybrid culture. The overall agreement among archeologists is that, the time Romans withdrew, they abandoned Britain entirely. This departure dragged Britain into oblivion in the post-Roman period. In fact, to anticipate how the Arthurian Legacy survived even after the departure of the Romans, it is crucial to realize what might have occurred with the Britons after the Roman conquest. The latest excavations have confirmed that a sturdy and inimitable civilization was present prior to the conquest. Although Celtic people left little about their customs and practices, through the fragments of folk-tales and Celtic burial-mounds, “we see the Celt as the seeker after God, linking himself by strong ties to the unseen, and eager to conquer the unknown by religious rite or magic art” (MacCulloch, 2003, p.2). Celts aimed to connect themselves with their ancient worlds through interpretations of their mythologies and rites. Consequently, it is possible to propose that the Arthurian legacy may have had its origins in a time prior to the Roman invasion. For example, Merlin is the product of old Celtic roots since “the origin of the myth of Merlin lies among the British Celts, in the language now called Welsh. They named him Myrddin and located him first in Cumbria, northwestern England” (Knight, 2009, p.1) before the occupation of Anglo-Saxons. It is true that there are miscellaneous records of Merlin in numerous myths and legends. In these stories, Merlin is generally portrayed as an enigmatic, erudite man. Being one of the earliest representations of eruditeness, Merlin as a name has become synonymous with wisdom and knowledge. In contrast, Morgan le Fay’s knowledge and sorcery have been associated with evil actions and witchcraft in almost all Arthurian legends except for *The Mists of Avalon*. There, unlike the previous myths, Morgan le Fay presents her gifted nature as a defense of Celtic matriarchal roots against a patriarchal oriented Arthurian myth, while confronting some Christian teachings:

In my time I have been called many things: sister, lover, priestess, wise-woman, queen. Now in truth I have come to be wise-woman, and a time may come when these things may need to be known. But in sober truth, I think it is the Christians who will tell the last tale. Forever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever held power in this world. At best, they say that her power was of Satan. Or else they clothe her in the blue robe of the Lady of Nazareth—who indeed had power in her way, too—and say that she was ever virgin. But what can a virgin know of the sorrows and travail of mankind? (Bradley, 1987, p.XX)

As defined earlier, Celtic tradition has a practice of placing the women into high status, as is exemplified in *The Mists of Avalon*, which was uncommon in the patriarchal Middle Ages. A drastic shift in the position of women and use of magic occurs in the myth of Arthur through the interpretation of Christianity. As Ashe notes, Geoffrey Chaucer reflects this transformation in his work:

The element of magic changed also. Geoffrey had introduced both the principle magical characters. Merlin was in all his work, and the enchantress Morgen, later called Morgan le Fay, was in his *Life of Merlin*. In their background was that Celtic freedom from animosity towards the pre-Christian scheme of things, and both were benign figures. But the Christianity of the Middle Ages was less able to approve, and

it tightened with the passage of time. Things were Christian or heathen, white or black. Magic was essentially heathen; therefore, it was not good. (2013, p. 193)

Although the effect of the Middle Ages on the selected texts will be discussed in the next section, it is safe to claim that the scholastic perception of Christianity narrowed the scope of Celtic multi-culturalism, which included ‘the Celtic multifaceted groupings and cultures.’ In the next part, the text will demonstrate the transformation of King Arthur’s role and signification from an earlier Roman or Celtic commander (or at best, a king) in a matriarchal pagan society to a Christian icon in a patriarchal society. Finally, other interpretations will set Arthur back into his initial position, first in Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Mists of Avalon* where the story sets Lady Morgana at the center to review the story from the perspective of a woman and a matriarchal society, and, more recently, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* directed by Guy Ritchie, which adapts the literature and legends to the motion picture screen to create a world where magic and sorcery play a great role, unlike the Christian interpretations of Arthurian Legend. All this is supported by intertextuality which, in a broad sense, is the reference to or application of a literary, media, or social ‘text’ within another literary, media, or social ‘text’ (Lemaster, 2012). We can see the different cultures that are mentioned throughout the myths and how the myths refer to them in the selected adaptations of the Arthurian legacy.

3. Selected Adaptations of the Arthurian Legacy as Reflections of Their Times

We cannot talk about one specific Arthur, but of many Arthurs as signifiers that stand for desired symbols at different times. Historically speaking, although his existence is neither confirmed nor can be ignored, there may have been a King Arthur who reigned in Post-Roman Britain around the 5th or 6th century A.D. On the other hand, we have many versions of Arthurian literature and different adaptations of King Arthur. The literary Arthur has been

...portrayed in almost every other artistic medium. There was, and is, a ‘figure’ of Arthur made up of all these elements, who has made a very deep impression in the hearts of so many men and women for more than a thousand years. (Snyder, 2011, p.8)

Among all the adaptations of the Arthurian legacy, Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* is the most prominent since almost all later writers have taken his work as the archetypal role model. As a soldier under the influence of the Hundred Years’ War and the English Civil Wars, Malory penned *Le Morte d’Arthur* in which an authoritarian leader, King Arthur, launches an organized society in Camelot. When Roman invaders challenge the Britons’ power, King Arthur successfully unites Britain under the flag of Camelot and reassures his sovereignty. Camelot, the landmark of Arthur’s dominion, depends on chivalric rules embedded in the codes of the Knights of the Round Table. These codes exist to maintain Arthur’s realm in line with Christian doctrine. As an ardent follower of chivalry, Malory expresses the chivalric ideal of the knight in Sir Lancelot, in harmony with the early romantic French versions of the Arthurian legend. With the jealousies and oppositions that eventually rip apart the Round Table and destroy the Arthurian ideals, Malory portrays in a remote land the civil wars of his own time. There are many battle scenes or duels in *Le Morte d’Arthur* where only the strongest knight survives. Not only are battle skills important, but Malory also emphasizes the importance of the ideals that a knight should have. It is feasible that during the time of civil wars, England needed a firm authority to overcome the chaotic situation and re-establish the royal hierarchy. Being a soldier, naturally Malory believed that ‘military tour de force’² might restore the endangered system back to its glittering days. Therefore, a strong leader and army as in the case of King Arthur and his knights could preserve an authoritarian order. In

² An exceptional military success

maintaining authority, Excalibur and the Knights of the Round Table signify an omnipotent but obedient order, fighting for and being in full submission to Arthur's all-powerful leadership. As Excalibur stands for patriarchy, phallus and kingdom, it stands as a male-controlled, sexist symbol (Edman, 2015, p.51). It also represents a type of divine justice since Arthur receives it from the Lady of the Lake, an omniscient power. Excalibur could even be interpreted as a signifier of justice for Arthur to legitimize his battles since winning or losing in a battle would demarcate just and unjust. Similarly, Beverly Kennedy, a professor of English at Marianopolis College draws attention to that matter:

[A]s soon as he has won the field he assumes his role as rightful judge and reverses the 'wrongful' judgement of God produced by his victory. Nevertheless, to get that victory, Arthur has depended not only upon divine approval of his just intention; he has also depended upon his considerable strength and skill as a knight and, above all, upon the proven power of his sword, Excalibur, and its magical scabbard which protects him from loss of blood. Arthur is devoted to justice, but he is too much of a rationalist to depend solely upon God regardless of the circumstances. (Kennedy, 1992, pp. 158-159)

Malory also implements the technique of parataxis to stress the sovereignty of a patriarchal society. In this technique, diverse elements of each sentence have identical meanings and probably attribute similar prominence to the story. For example, in the chapter titled 'How Arthur was Born and Became King' in the first book Malory gives an account of Morgan le Fay as she "was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she became a great practitioner of witchcraft" (Malory & Armstrong, 2009, p.5). Thus, Malory tried to say that she must have learnt these skills from somewhere or someone while she was at a nunnery school. Afterward, she was wedded to King Uriens of the land of Gorre who was the father of Sir Uwain" (2009, p.5). Malory also makes use of intertextuality because he plants his own views of the war from his time within the legend of King Arthur and his battles. Malory holds on to Christian moral doctrines, and it would be inconceivable to confirm that a regular monastery school would attempt to teach necromantic practices. Atrocities towards women were not limited by prejudicial attitudes. Pursuant to the Christian faith, anyone trying to learn or read any potential sorcery would end up on a stake as a form of execution. Churches did apply death penalties to witchcraft, especially during the inquisitional trials. In addition to that, "[t]he inquisition was at its most severe in Spain during the first fifty years after its formation in 1478, when it is estimated that 50,000 people were tried, a significant proportion as relegates burnt at the stake" (Green, 2009, p.8). Those victims were mostly women blamed for the practice of witchcraft. Green further states that

[i]n some years, such as 1492, 2,000 people may have been 'relaxed' in person and another 2,000 burnt in effigy. Approximately 700 people were put to death in Seville alone between 1481 and 1488, and another fifty in Ciudad Real. (2009, p.8)

Spain is just one example that highlights how common a practice this was throughout Europe. Thousands of innocent women were executed in England, France, Germany, Holland, Scotland, and Sweden as well. The numbers demonstrate the evil feelings towards women during the Medieval Era. To address this issue more clearly, the relationship between the Medieval Ages and the role of women might be informative. In the Medieval Ages, women were thought to be fragile and weak in mind and body. It was also believed that women had different features which placed them closer to evil. The juxtaposition continued between man and woman. As products of patriarchal societies, the Medieval and Victorian eras respectively, Tennyson and Malory both portrayed so-called demonic qualities in female characters. Malory portrays Morgan le Fay as a witch, practicing dark magic and seducing

other knights for her benefit, although she was Arthur's sister. Another sister, Lady Morgause was the mother of Sir Gawain and Sir Mordred. Arthur fathered Sir Mordred with his half-sister Morgause in an incestuous relationship, and Mordred prepared the downfall of Camelot through his treason. Guinevere, in both *Le Morte D'Arthur* and *Idylls of the King*, caused Arthur's fall by her adultery with Lancelot. In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the pagan Lady Vivien was another demon who made Merlin vanish and accelerated the end of Camelot through her intrigues. Finally, Malory represented Satan as a woman. Sir Perceval met a woman while he was on the quest for the Holy Grail and he proposed his love to this fair woman. As Malory writes:

When she saw that he was quite warm with desire, she said, "Sir Perceval, know that I will not fulfill your desire unless you swear that from henceforth you shall be my true servant, and do nothing but what I command. Will you promise me this, as you are a true knight?" "Yes," he said, "fair lady, by the faith of my body!" "Well," she said, "Now you may do with me what you wish, as you are the knight in the world for whom I have the most desire," then she commanded two squires to make a bed in the middle of the pavilion; she disrobed and lay down. Then Sir Perceval lay down beside her, naked, and by chance and grace he saw his sword lying on the ground, unsheathed, and he saw the pommel, wherein was a red cross and the symbol of the crucifix. He suddenly thought of his knighthood and the promise he had earlier made to the good man, and with that thought he made the sign of the cross. At this, the pavilion turned upside down and disappeared in a cloud of black smoke. He was very afraid, and cried out, "Fair sweet Lord Jesus Christ, do not let me be shamed! I was almost lost, and would have been, were it not for your grace!" [T]he man asked Sir Perceval, "How have you done since I departed?" "Sir," he said, "here was a gentlewoman who almost led me into deadly sin." And he told the man the whole story. "You do not know who that lady was?" asked the good man. "Sir," he said, "no, I do not, but I may well believe that the devil sent her hither to shame me." "Ah, good knight!" he said. "You are a fool! That gentlewoman was the master of hell, who has power over all other devils; that was the old lady riding on the serpent that you saw in your vision. (2009, pp.485-486)

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In the lines above, Malory's reference to the Bible is clear. In Ezekiel 28 in the New International Version (NIV), the prince Tyre and Satan are in communion and Satan's rebellion is depicted through Tyre's uprising. It is stated in Ezekiel 28 that,

11 The word of the Lord came to me: 12 "Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: This is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you:

Carnelian, chrysotile and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper, lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. (Ezekiel 28:11-13, New International Version)

Although the following hypothesis is open to discussion, God himself may not refer to a male Satan when he speaks about the 'beauty of his garden' or to 'accessorize' a man with precious jewels and stones. These words might indicate that God's words refer to a female Satan. Such an interpretation gains meaning with the tale of Sir Perceval who escaped the sin of unchastity given above in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Therefore, in these examples, a binary opposition between men and women is visible, since women were inclined to sin or to seduce men to sin, as in the story of Adam and Eve. Man becomes the so-called victim of so-called

feminine corruption. Consequently, since women are considered wicked in these patriarchal adaptations of the Arthurian legacy, women might lose faith in their religion - the basic cause of witchcraft. The instances confirm that both in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Idylls of the King*, authors do humiliate women.

On the other hand, as magic is related to Celtic pagan tradition, Malory most probably does not like the idea of displaying magic and witchcraft, so he allocated limited roles to female characters. By these means, he urges his readers to consider the causal connections between the different events that he reveals throughout *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The use of parataxis to avoid placing blame on characters such as Guinevere or Lancelot leads readers to make their own links. In this way, the reader is actually left to conclude that both Guinevere and Lancelot are conspirators against Camelot, and Camelot is dragged into chaos because of them. As a result, with his style of parataxis, Malory exploits the names of Guinevere and Lancelot as the signifiers of treason. Such tendency continues in the Victorian era, too.

In the late Victorian period, England witnessed an abrupt transition from an economy dependent on land ownership to a modern municipal trade economy based on manufacturing. Despite Britain's intensifying industrial and political standing, the swift development of technology and practices of exploitation also formed a prevalent sense of alienation and loss. Having experienced such a period, Tennyson roots his epic *Idylls of the King* in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and revitalizes its idealism within the modern thought, ethical sensibilities and challenges of the fast-paced Victorian Age. Tennyson reflects Arthur as the perfect king ruling the supreme kingdom where Christianity succeeds, but without Arthur himself, everything breaks down (Edman, 2015, p.53). Staines and Turner note that:

For Tennyson the final engagement of the forces is a horrid display of physical and mental frenzy. With the termination of the temporal realization of Arthur's vision, Arthur's own knights are reeling back into their bestial states; their world now lacks direction and light. Without an inspiring vision, the kingdom returns to the chaos that prompted Leodogran to cry out to Arthur: 'Arise, and help us thou! For here between the man and beast we die.' Arthur's vision has become the subject of scorn, ridicule, and abuse; a world without respect for this vision becomes a world capable only of its self-destruction. (1982, p.94)

From this perspective, Tennyson's poem is timeless because it exposes the ideals that established Camelot but were later denounced as a system by those who were once Arthur's loyal and dedicated nobles. Tennyson praised England for aspiring to an idealized and united English cultural identity. He mythologizes Camelot so that the people of England could take pride in Camelot and its chivalrous and virtuous knights. In other words, Tennyson takes Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* as the prototype for his *Idylls of the King* and he reflects Camelot as the central projection of England. Therefore, the modern understanding of Camelot as the cradle of loyalty, chivalry, and romance comes particularly through Tennyson's images of it in *Idylls of the King*. While Tennyson lays the rise and fall of a society bare in *Idylls of the King*, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert associated themselves with King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, which made this long poem more popular in a revised form in the Victorian age. Tennyson employs the Knights of the Round Table as omens of the deterioration of 19th century England. Likewise, Arthur's death poses another signification of the fragmentation of the court. Tennyson designed the *Idylls* as allegorical, and he utilizes diverse utopias which turn out to be counterparts of each other by enfolded the foremost action amid the approach of Arthur and his death. Through the re-emergence of verbal themes and the consecutive foundation of events and seasons that track each other from spring to winter, Tennyson merges the rise and fall of a civilization with the transient life of Arthur and

the approach of winter. In fact, in equally tempestuous times, both Malory and Tennyson utilize the Arthurian legend as a source from which to launch an image of a thriving society. The authors also share an equivalent distress of Britain losing her power, as Camelot does, through unfaithfulness, which breaks the chivalric codes and the camaraderie of the Knights of the Round Table (Edman, 2015, 54). Also, both authors make use of intertextuality to show their present situation embedded in a tale that happened in the past.

Immediately after Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, another Arthurian adaptation debuted across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1889, Mark Twain's groundbreaking novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* came out. A blend of humor and science fiction, a burlesque of Romantic notions of chivalry, Twain's novel opens a new perspective into Arthurian adaptations. In this novel, Twain "identified stupidity and brutality in the sixth-century world of Arthur, though it is also a fully medieval world, drawing with some humor, but also some affection, on Malory" (Archibald, 2009, p.6). The protagonist of the story, Hank the Connecticut man tries to establish an industrial society in Camelot while struggling against bigotry of the Middle Ages. Hank says,

I saw that I was just another Robinson Crusoe cast away on an uninhabited island, with no society but some more or less tame animals, and if I wanted to make life bearable I must do as he did – invent, contrive, create, reorganize things; set brain and hand to work, and keep them busy. Well, that was in my line. (Twain, 2009, p.53)

It seems for Twain that the evolutionary process improves nearly every single part of our lives except the governments, since man is at the center of governmental institutions and still bound to natural selection as he used to be in ancient times. In other words, greed depends on a sturdy biological basis as well as a tougher social basis. As Darwin explains in his *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection*, one king or a leader might be quite content with the lands, treasure, natural resources or even a queen that he has. Whereas, the other king or leader has a gene mutation which turns him into someone (Darwin & Ghiselin, 2006) like a 'desiring machine'³ that demands more and more. Greed is one of the seven deadly sins, also crafted by Malory in 'The Tale of the Holy Grail'. Hank travels back in time accidentally and he uses his wit to save his life from a certain execution. He uses the trick of lunar eclipse to enchant Arthur and beat Merlin:

You see, it was the eclipse. It came into my mind, in the nick of time, how Columbus, Cortez, or one of those people, played an eclipse as a saving trump once on some savages, and I saw my chance I could play it myself, now; and it wouldn't be any plagiarism, either because I should get it in nearly a thousand years ahead of those parties. (Twain, 2009, p.53)

Hank presumes that the people of the 6th century have no differences to slightly improved animals. They are inferior to modern man and they have a very slow mind and lack of reasoning. For this reason, tricking them would be not an issue and Hank could establish his industrialized society. In Camelot, what Hank witnesses as a so-called kingdom of order and peace is actually another version of slavery. He says:

most of King Arthur's British nation were slaves, pure and simple, and bore that name, and wore the iron collar on their necks; and the rest were slaves in fact, but without the name; they imagined themselves men and freemen, and called themselves so (Twain, 2009, p.61)

³ The term is taken from Deleuze and Guattari.

These lines are associated with today's world since the concept of slavery is not just a servitude to a master. This slavery can be a system where man is enslaved by an amalgamation of everything he wants to possess. Therefore, the physical slavery in tyrannical systems has been replaced in its role with economic subjugations of industry.

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is not the last comic and farcical novel about the Arthurian legends. Another interpretation of the Arthurian legacy dependent upon Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* appeared in 1958 and was entitled *The Once and Future King*. T.H. White, more or less like Dickens, has the ability to blend humor with tragedy. The first years of Wart's⁴ life are a comedy since his tutor is Merlyn. Merlyn is funny, but he is also impressive. With the assistance of Wart, White allows his readers to see a naïve childhood. On the other hand, *The Once and Future King* attempts to show people binding their wounds after two world wars. For this reason, the appearance of tragic elements is inevitable in this work. Nations are like children: they are born, grow up and fade away like Camelot. Brewer suggests that,

The Once and Future King is the book by which T.H. White will be remembered. It reflects his own protean nature: it is the work of a sad man who also saw the funny side of things. It is by turns comic and tragic, farcical and romantic, serious in its presentation of historical material and highly anachronistic. (Brewer, 1993, p.1)

That is why such an interpretation of Arthur makes this legend applicable to almost every century. *The Sword in the Stone* (1938) by T.H. White, successively republished as the initial part of *The Once and Future King* (1958), is a prodigious classic of Arthurian children's literature. White Arthur (the 'Wart') is an openhearted boy in short trousers, instructed by principal Merlin, who is the type of tutor every apprentice dreams of: an instructor who confidently inspires boyish venture and curiosity. The work is one of those astoundingly blissful weddings between a modern novelist's personal interests – White was himself a schoolteacher – and those of his source. His inspiration came through Malory's 'Tale of King Arthur' where Arthur is still young, inexperienced and has lots to learn prior to being propelled to the throne by pulling the sword from the stone and even after (Archibald & Putter, 2009, p.7). Although T.H. White writes this novel mainly addressing children, the main struggle still occurs around power, authority and sovereignty:

“Lord,” said Merlyn, not paying attention to his nervousness, “I have brought a young professor who would learn to profess.” “To profess what?” asked the King of the Moat slowly, hardly opening his jaws and speaking through his nose.

“Power,” said the tench.

“Let him speak for himself.”

“Please,” said the Wart, “I don't know what I ought to ask.”

“There is nothing,” said the monarch, “except the power which you pretend to seek: power to grind and power to digest, power to seek and power to find, power to await and power to claim, all power and pitilessness springing from the nape of the neck.” (White, 2008, p.52)

Towards the end of the 20th century, a new approach to Arthurian legends emerged in the form of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. Bradley reflects a different version of the legend. She chooses to tell the story from a matriarchal perspective. Morgan le narrates

⁴ T.H White uses the name of Wart instead of Arthur.

the invasions of the Saxons and the acceptance of Christianity by Arthur. In Bradley's adaptation, "the long-term historical triumphs of the Saxon invaders and of antifeminist Christianity are finally accommodated by an anthropological understanding that all religions really one, and by an acceptance that all is the inscrutable will of the Goddess" (Archibald & Putter, 2009, p.7). This understanding by Bradley is quite clear from the very beginning of the story as Morgan le Fay starts to tell the things that she has witnessed:

There are now two Britains, Igraine: their world under their One God and the Christ; and, beside it and behind it, the world where the Great Mother still rules, the world where the Old People have chosen to live and worship. (Bradley, 1987 ,p.13)

In the novel, through the conversations among 'the Merlin', Igraine, Vivienne and especially the Lady of the Lake, the ancient belief of the Celts never ceases to exist in spite of the existence of Christianity, and it will be maintained by the fewer people who can travel between the two portals of the two earths. The understanding of reality is somewhat subjective in the novel. Christians altered reality "[a]s they deny the world of the spirit, and the realms of Avalon, so those realms cease to exist for them. They still exist, of course; but not in the same world with the world of the followers of Christ" (Bradley, 1987, p.12). In other words, Bradley doesn't talk about a solid reality in which everything is stable and conceived similarly by everyone. Her reality is not fixed in that sense. It is more post-modern. There is no reality that everyone can perceive in the same way. The reality is dependent on the way people tend to see the world:

They believe," said Viviane, in her smooth low voice, "that there is no Goddess; for the principle of woman, so they say, is the principle of all evil; through woman, so they say, Evil entered this world; there is some fantastic Jewish tale about an apple and a snake." For, as the Druids know, it is the belief of mankind which shapes the world, and all of reality. (Bradley, 1987, pp. 12-13)

Even God (in that sense the God for the Christians) is indifferent to the things around him: "the Christ God seemed not to care whether a priest was stupid or not, so long as he could mumble their mass, and read and write a little" (Bradley, 1987, p.5).

Unlike Malory, Tennyson, White or Twain, Bradley presents a Britain that is devoted to an earth-goddess mystery religion which links the political system of hereditary monarchy to a fertility ritual, as in 'The Great Marriage,' supervised by the priestesses of Avalon (Glastonbury) on behalf of their 'Lady'. The king owes his power to his allegiance to this rite, not to Merlin or Christianity. As a matter of fact, Bradley champions a matriarchal world over a patriarchal one. Instead of relying solely on Excalibur as a penile patriarchal signifier, Bradley introduces the union of Excalibur with a sacred scabbard as a matriarchal and productive vaginal signifier made by Morgaine herself:

She woke with a start, thinking: Arthur! It is Arthur who will bear the sword, he is the son of Pendragon...and as she lay in the darkness, she thought that was why Viviane had given it to her, to make the magical scabbard for the sword he should bear in symbol of all his people. It was Arthur who shed the blood of her virginity, and it was she, also of the sacred line of Avalon, who must fashion the spell-scabbard of his safety, guarding the royal blood (1987, pp.197-198).

Bradley suggests that the image of Excalibur's masculine icon alone will not make sense. In fact, she portrays a female guardian on male hegemony by covering and protecting the sword in the scabbard. Therefore, Pantheist and pagan Celtic images are dominating the text instead of Christian symbols.

4. Conclusion

Different variations of Arthurian legend urge the ideas of interdisciplinarity and universal perspectives. Intertextual analysis has been applied through historical and pseudo historical views to create a multi platformed bridge among the works that are mentioned here. The Arthurian myth as mirrored in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* has at its central point an everlasting battle between nature and civilization. The limits of the utopian Arthurian city of Camelot are a diverse seclusion from the natural world that surrounds it. Arthur emerges from nature and his Celtic roots, ironically enough, thanks to Merlin, and the conversion ends in the patriarchal city. That is, there is a transition from pagan-natural to patriarchal and civic-oriented Christian society in most of the adaptations. It is a radial process in which the monumental city of Camelot stands as the significant form hosting an organized patriarchal city, even while it is built on a matriarchal Celtic culture. The edifice of the city owes much to the natural response of its Celtic fundamentals to freedom of will. King Arthur, on the other hand, establishes his city and domain on fairness, which his natural Celtic background urges him to do. His involvement in nature –when there is no city at all– is that of a blameless baby whose instincts are formed by a pagan guide, Merlin. Taking into consideration the way Merlin brought Arthur up, it is observable in most of the stories that Arthur founds his city on the natural privileges of life and thought. Arthur assembles a round table because its enterprise is ultimately egalitarian. Nevertheless, as the city salutes Christianity and its codes as well as chivalric codes, the city becomes the representation of the codes of civilization all together. Such codes (pre-determined patriarchal laws that create a hierarchy within the society) limit people and restrain them from doing what is prohibited. However, it is in human nature that man cannot be restricted by any artificial codes imposed as if representing absolute truth. The only information that one can achieve is to comprehend the clandestineness of his natural being. That is, man is a creation of nature, not a child of civilization like White's Wart. This is known as the "noble savage" (Cranston, 1991, p.2). No matter how civilized or industrialized man seems to be, like in Twain's Hank, he either by retrospection or by introspection proceeds to nature and the matriarchal cradle. With the return to childhood curiosity, he can disrupt the so-called ethics of civilization. Such defilements are exposed in the faults committed by Lancelot, Mordred and Guinevere. Arthur also makes a great mistake when he commands infants to be massacred in *Le Morte d'Arthur* because he does not want to challenge his childhood again. Arthur recognizes himself as the unshakable king of his foundation. This is his error. With such hubris, he formulates his own downfall. With his death, Camelot falls apart, yielding to the irresistible power of nature that bears in itself the procreative force of rejuvenation, unlike the man-made civilizations both in Malory and in Tennyson (Edman, 2015, p.117). On the other hand, Mark Twain's Hank represents a kind of physical or mental time travel whether a re-conquest or a change would be sufficient to prevent the eventual collapse of the Arthurian kingdom. Nevertheless, as Christianity makes the rest of the folk repent of their sins, they rebel against Hank and his industrialized apprentices. At the end of the battle, like the story of the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,' Hank trapped himself and his comrades and lost all his hope of changing anything. An explicit propaganda of Christianity would eventually turn out to be a biased point of view. Such a text or literary work might lose its reliability when it seeks to propagandize. Therefore, Arthur's myth retreats to Arthur's childhood in *The Once and Future King* to recover the lost innocence of King Arthur. With this adaptation, "the Arthur who once triumphs in battles against the Saxons has now conquered the modern media of film, radio, a children's literature: he has proved himself to be indeed the once and Future King" (Archibald & Putter, 2009, p.8). Unsurprisingly, the conversion from modernism to post-modernism started a change in the way people behaved. To put it in other words, it was a time when people turned to more idiosyncratic concepts. Furthermore, the relation between

belief and total or perpetual reality was deteriorating. Due to the petrifying effects of two world wars, people developed a high degree of skepticism of the role of religion, and so of God. People began questioning heavenly justice. In the past, during the Medieval Era, a firm piety to God was undisputable. As can be seen in the Arthurian legacy, remaining true to merits and ethics meant to be on the safe side in terms of religion. Afterwards, in the enlightenment brought by the Renaissance, scientific evolutions produced distrust about the nature of total certainty, making confusion and unhappiness contrary to presenting steady relief. This progression was sustained through the Victorian era as well. Hence, this development has transformed itself into a new position that neither knowledge nor religion was meant to be the redemption of man from jeopardy. Modernism has swept away the rudiments, affecting everything from philosophy to language, religion to science and politics, and removing the tendency to see view the world in terms of direct oppositions like good and bad, white and black, as throughout the Middle Ages. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, with the fishtail wing of post-modernism, celebrates the sovereignty of a universal mother rather than "a patriarchal Christianity dominated by male authority" (2009, p.185). Once again King Arthur owes his power to nature and nature becomes his god. Therefore, "it is perhaps the simplest way of summarizing the core pantheist belief, with the word god here meaning not a supernatural being but the object of deepest personal reverence" (Harrison, 2013, p.1). On the other hand, Christians "...seek to blot out all wisdom save their own; and in that strife they are banishing from this world all forms of mystery save that which will fit into their religious faith" (Bradley, 1987, p.12). By simply setting pagan rituals and practices against Christian doctrine, Bradley makes Arthur complete his radial journey to come back to the Celtic origins that he has come. Finally, Guy Ritchie's *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* takes on the responsibility of portraying Arthur as a pagan king in the form of ideas approved in this article, far beyond the Christian symbols. This responsibility is nothing, but a pre-destined pagan kingdom of Britain secured by Excalibur. Arthur inherits this enchanted sword from his father, but initially refuses to declare himself king until he is persuaded by the Lady of the Lake, whose power descends from nature like Bradley's Morgaine.

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