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Arthurian Legend in Popular Culture

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ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE
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Zásady pro vypracování

Diplomová práce se bude věnovat filmovým adaptacím artušovských legend. Cílem práce bude analyzovat proměny zvolených aspektů artušovských legend v kontextu jednotlivých adaptací (role of magic, magial object, the figure of the Druid, gender issues, social issues, etc.). Jako teoretický rámec poslouží teorie adaptace. V úvodu práce studentka nastíní zvolený přístup a uvede historický kontext artušovských legend. Dále se bude věnovat analýze vybraných adaptací. Své analýzy shrne, díla z perspektivy zvolených aspektů porovná a vysloví obecnější závěry o rolích daných aspektů v adaptacích.

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Bc. Veronika Foersterová

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TITLE

Arthurian Legend in Popular Culture

ANNOTATION

The thesis focuses on the analysis of the transformations of Arthurian legends in modern film and television adaptations, specifically *The Sword in the Stone, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Excalibur, and Merlin.* The aim is to analyse how the selected adaptations reinterpret Arthurian legends and analyse the changes in role of magic, magical objects, the role of the Druid, and how they deal with gender and social issues.

KEYWORDS

Arthurian legend, magic, adaptation, feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, Excalibur, Merlin, gender roles, social structures

NÁZEV

Artušovská legenda v populární kultuře

ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zaměřuje na transformaci artušovských legend v moderních filmových a televizních adaptacích, konkrétně *Meč v kameni, Monty Python a svatý grál, Excalibur* a *Merlin*. Cílem je analyzovat, jak vybrané adaptace reinterpretují artušovské legendy a sledovat, jak pracují s prvky jako je magie, magické předměty, postava druida a jak řeší otázky genderu a sociální struktury.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Artušovská legenda, magie, adaptace, feministická kritika, marxistická kritika, Excalibur, Merlin, genderové role, sociální struktury

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Introduction

Arthurian legends have transcended their medieval origins to become a rich source of inspiration for countless adaptations across various media. These legends centred around the noble King Arthur, his retinue of knights, and the mystical elements of Camelot have been reimagined in literature, art, and especially film. The enduring appeal of Arthurian narratives lies in their universal themes of heroism, chivalry, and the eternal struggle between good and evil, making them a rich source for adaptation and reinterpretation. Norris described King Arthur's Britain as "an idealized medieval kingdom, a sort of chivalric Utopia."[1] This idealisation helped maintain the allure of Arthurian tales through the ages. Jon Kelly aptly commented on this cultural phenomenon: "For a man who may or may not have wandered Britain some 1,500 years ago, King Arthur retains the enviable knack of making his regal presence felt."[2]

The origins of Arthurian legends can be traced back to early medieval texts. Timothy Tangherlini explains legends as stories that are highly specific to the cultural and environmental context in which they developed, representing the beliefs, values, and experiences of the community that preserves them. These stories are often presented in a way that makes them seem like historical accounts, even if they are largely fictional.[3] Over the centuries, these legends have evolved and adapted to the tastes and values of contemporary audiences, incorporating themes of courtly love, chivalry, and the supernatural. Medieval European literature often reflected or distorted the realities of its time, provided escapism, or presented ideals for reality to imitate. Richard Kieckhefer comments on medieval literature and the presence of magical elements within: "When this literature featured sorcerers, fairies, and other workers of magic, it may not have been meant or taken as totally realistic. Even so, the magic of medieval literature did resemble the magical practices of medieval life."[4] This blend of reality and fantasy in medieval storytelling laid the foundation for the enduring appeal of Arthurian legends. As those stories were retold and adapted, they incorporated contemporary cultural values and elements that kept them relevant and engaging. Although there is no single text of the legend of King Arthur that supersedes all others or solely defines the genre, Norris Lacy points out that when an audience gets ready to watch or read a King

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[1] Norris J. Lacy, Geoffrey Ashe, Debra N. Mancoff, *The Arthurian Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 48.
[2] "King Arthur and Camelot: Why the cultural fascination," BBC News Magazine, BBC, published June 9, 2011, https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-13696160.
[3] Timothy R. Tangherlini, "It Happened Not Too Far from Here…': A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization," *Western Folklore* 49, no. 4 (October 1990): 385.
[4] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19.

Arthur story, they expect certain key elements of the legend, including the Sword in the Stone, Merlin, and the love story of Lancelot and Guinevere.[5] These 'canonical elements' are what make the story recognisable.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the transformation of specific aspects of Arthurian legends in selected adaptations – Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones's *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), John Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981), and BBC's *Merlin* (2008–2012). The focus is on how these adaptations have altered or preserved elements such as the role of magic, magical objects, the figure of the Druid, as well as gender and power issues. All of the listed adaptations differ from each other both in genre and the depiction of the original legend. By analysing these changes, this thesis aims to provide insights into how modern filmmakers reinterpret and reinvent these legendary stories to resonate with contemporary audiences.

The first theoretical chapter explores the historical and literary origins of Arthurian legends, focusing on the role of magic and its function in medieval times. The chapter delves into the early mentions of King Arthur, tracing back to Welsh poems and Latin manuscripts like *Historia Brittonum* and *Annales Cambriae.* The evolution of these tales through the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, and Thomas Malory, among others, highlights how elements like sorcery, supernatural elements, and courtly love were woven into the Arthurian lore. It provides the necessary background for understanding how modern films have adapted these elements.

The second theoretical chapter introduces feminist and Marxist critical theories, which will be used to analyse the selected adaptations. Marxist criticism focuses on class struggle, social inequality, and the ways in which literature and film reinforce and challenge the economic base and ideological superstructure of society. Feminist criticism, on the other hand, examines the representation of gender, the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and the subversion of patriarchal ideologies. This chapter will lay the groundwork for revealing and understanding the underlying ideologies and cultural messages embedded in the adaptations, providing a deeper understanding of their social and ideological dimensions.

The final theoretical chapter focuses on the adaptation theory, examining the processes and challenges involved in adapting stories across different media, particularly focusing on the transition from text to screen. This section will discuss key concepts such as intertextuality,

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[5] Lacy et al., *The Arthurian Handbook,* 78.

fidelity criticism, and the distinction between adaptation and appropriation. By understanding these concepts, the audiences can better appreciate the creative decisions made by filmmakers when adapting Arthurian legends for the screen.

The first analytical chapter examines how magic is portrayed in the selected adaptations. Magic is a central theme in Arthurian legends, embodied in characters such as Merlin and objects like Excalibur. This section will compare and contrast the function and significance of magic in each depiction, analysing how these elements contribute to advancing the plot, developing characters, and conveying the central themes of the story.

Finally, the second analytical chapter focuses on the depiction of female characters and social structures in the selected adaptations. It investigates how these films address or reinforce traditional gender roles and social hierarchies. Drawing on feminist and Marxist perspectives, the analysis explores the representation of female characters and gender roles, examining their agency, power dynamics, and how they reflect or challenge contemporary societal norms. The chapter will also consider broader social issues, such as class struggle, power dynamics, and social inequality and how these themes are woven into the narratives of the selected films.

By examining these adaptations through the lenses of Marxist criticism and feminist criticism, this thesis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Arthurian legends continue to evolve and resonate with contemporary audiences. The analysis will demonstrate how these legendary stories are not only preserved but also transformed to reflect and shape cultural values and social norms, ensuring their enduring appeal and relevance.

Legend of King Arthur and Magic in Medieval Times

The fifth century, the period of the fall of the Roman Empire, remains the least documented period in British history. Paradoxically, it was during this period that several of the most important events that further defined and influenced British civilization took place. As Michael Wood stated: "It was then that the key racial and linguistic alignments of Britain were defined."[6] The new Anglo-Saxon invaders exploited the vulnerability of the abandoned territory and pushed the Celtic inhabitants into Scotland, Cornwall, and Wales, where they settled in the land that was later named England. The inhabitants of Britain fought boldly against the invaders, and it is believed that it was King Arthur, perhaps one of the greatest legendary heroes of all time, who led the defence against the Anglo-Saxon newcomers.

The legendary figure of King Arthur, as he is known nowadays, is a concept of the later Middle Ages. However, the very first reference to Arthur dates back to the 7th century, as it has its roots in a Welch poem, *The Gododdin* (600 AD). Hence, it is proposed that the figure of Arthur as a leader was already known by the time the Welch monk Nennius made the alleged first mention in the Latin manuscript *Historia Brittonum* (828 AD). One of the earliest references to Arthur can also be found in *Annales Cambriae* (10th century), both referring to the legendary figure as a successful war leader of Celtic Britons in the 5th or 6th century.[7] Since then, the legend has undergone countless alternations, starting with Geoffrey of Monmouth, who created a lengthy chronicle, *The History of the Kings of Britain* (1136), with King Arthur as its centrepiece. Due to the lack of official records, Monmouth had to work with fragments of poetry and myth, which resulted in a blend of realistic accounts of places and battles with mythic heroes who used sorcery and magical objects to help them in the battles. Around 1155, poet Robert Wace translated *The History of the Kings of Britain* from Latin to French, adding another element to the Arthurian lore – the Round Table. Shortly after, another French poet, Chrétien de Troyes, wrote a series of romances where he introduced the Holy Grail, as well as the tales of individual knights of the Round Table, like Gawain and Lancelot. Troyes also incorporated elements of courtly love into the adventure – the love triangle between Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere originates from Troyes' stories. Finally, in 1485, Sir Thomas Malory combined all retellings of the stories and tales into one

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[6] Michael Wood, *In Search of the Dark Ages* (New York: Facts on File, 1987), 7.
[7] Geoffrey Ashe, "The Origins of the Arthurian Legend," *Arthuriana* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 1–2.

narrative, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which became the basis for many modern adaptations of King Arthur.[8] Lacy explains the medieval approach to storytelling:

> Medieval storytellers seldom strove to be original. Originality was not favored as highly as it came to be in later times. Medieval minds valued authority and tradition; medieval authors often claimed to be drawing on previous authors, adapting or translating, even when they were not. Storytellers tended to work with recognized bodies of material.[9]

Despite the various alternations of the legend, all of the retellings mentioned are considered part of one of three principal matters, referred to as the Matter of Britain. This term was coined by the 12th-century writer Jean Bodel, who classified romances based on their geographic location and the characters into three literary cycles known as the Three Matters of Romance – of France, Britain, and Rome. The Matter of Britain is the core of medieval literature related to Great Britain, which is mainly formed by romances and legends with Arthur and his retinue of knights in its centre.[10] Moreover, since these legends about a legendary King have undergone so many alternations over the years, it is evident that each retelling reflects the period in which it was written, showcasing the adaptability of this enduring story. Norris highlights the crucial role of medieval romances in shaping these narratives to resonate with their audience as he points out the romancers' inclination towards adaptation of historical events and figures to suit the preferences and expectations of their audience:

> They considered their patrons and readers–mostly of the nobility, or at any rate upper-class–and told stories that those patrons and readers could understand, stories about things belonging to their world, however anachronistic the result. They wrote of chivalry and heraldry, of love affairs following prescribed patterns, of knights wearing showy armor and fighting in tournaments, of witches and magicians such as their audiences believed in. A few facts of history could not be changed (for instance, that people who lived before Christ were not Christians), but generally speaking, whatever the real or supposed historical setting, a story would emerge in the garb, so to speak, of the author's own time.[11]

While contemporary historical novelists meticulously researched various period-specific aspects such as clothing, food, housing, occupations, and conversational topics to ensure accuracy in their depictions of the past, medieval romancers had different priorities. Rather than striving for authenticity and originality, medieval romancers prioritised familiarity and

[8] Mary Williams, "King Arthur in History and Legend," *Folklore* 73, no. 2 (Summer 1962): 75–80.
[9] Lacy et al., *The Arthurian Handbook*, 49.
[10] Hülya Taflı Düzgün, *Texts and Territories: Historicized Fiction and Fictionalised History in Medieval England and Beyond* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 12.
[11] Lacy et al., *The Arthurian Handbook,* 50.

relatability, tailoring their work to the preferences of their noble patrons and upper-class readership. Crafting their tales, they skillfully intertwined themes of chivalry and romance and weaved the plots with knights, damsels, and supernatural elements like witches. Jon Sherman underscores that these narrative choices were purposeful, aiming to align with the cultural expectations and entertainment preferences of their audience. This involved the inclusion of familiar names, places, objects and motifs to underscore the credibility of the text. [12] This approach resulted in narratives that, while set in historical or legendary contexts, were often imbued with anachronistic elements reflecting the author's own time.

Regarding the prioritisation of readership preferences, in the 12th century, the thematic core of Arthurian legends was profoundly altered due to the evolving demand of the audience. Prior to this era, the narratives were predominantly male-oriented, emphasising warrior values, loyalty, and bravery. Jennifer Paxton highlights that Latin literature primarily explored themes of spiritual love, either for God or between clerics united by a common purpose, and vernacular epics like *Beowulf* or *The Song of Roland* celebrated masculine valour while sidelining romantic elements.[13] However, a notable shift in narrative style occurred with the emergence of courtly love literature, marking a departure from traditional themes towards more romantic elements. This development found its roots in the court of Aquitaine, which was influenced by vibrant Spanish culture through marriages. As explained by Paxton, women often found themselves in loveless political marriages, and they sought romance by commissioning their court poets to write them sweeping tales of courtly love.[14] In contrast to the contemporary terms, where love between spouses was viewed primarily as a duty for political alliances and property, courtly love introduced a secretive and passionate love. A pivotal figure in this narrative evolution was Chrétien de Troyes, who reimagined Arthur from a 6th-century war leader to a 12th-century courtly king of Camelot. This alternation underscores the adaptability of Arthurian legends to the changing socio-cultural environment, reflecting the shifting values and desires of the audience.

Laura Lambdin builds upon the notion that no myth has a universal or timeless meaning, as authors may deliberately shape the narrative to convey specific ideological or persuasive messages:

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[12] Jon Sherman, "Source, Authority, and Audience in the BBC's 'Merlin,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 84.

[13] Jennifer Paxton, "Courtly Love," in *The Story of Medieval England: From King Arthur to the Tudor Conquest* (Chantilly: The Great Courses, 2010), 00:03:25 to 00:04:20.

[14] Paxton, "Courtly Love," 00:10:00 to 00:12:12.

> When an author reworks an existing narrative, the changes generally prove an intention to moralize on some ongoing theme, person, or place in his period. The narrative is a rhetorical performance, an attempt at the most authoritative persuasion through historical representation rather than a neutral discourse. Examination of epistemic/ontological choices reflect distinct ideological or political thought perhaps intended to encourage social change or comment upon a political leader.[15]

Lambdin suggests that authors may use their storytelling as a tool for advocating social change or critiquing political leadership, thus reinforcing the notion that narratives are not merely passive reflections of history but active agents in shaping cultural discourse. The legends of King Arthur and his knights reflect the deep-rooted cultural tensions and conflicts of the time, as the Britons struggled to preserve their identity and resist the influence of the invading Anglo-Saxons. Thorlac Turville-Petre highlights how these legends offer a particularly vivid insight into the historical landscape of the Dark Ages and its economic and socio-political orders that defined this period of human history.[16] In addition to their historical significance, these legends also allowed people to maintain a connection with their traditions, values, and identity. Lambdin believes that the enduring appeal of these legends might lie in their accessibility and applicability:

> Malory simplified the legends and made them more English by dropping most of the magic, religious mysteries, and emotional analysis. Action is presented directly with little comment from the narrator. The focus is upon the socio-political ramifications of civil strife in the kingdom.[17]

The simplified narrative style and the themes addressed in *Le Morte d'Arthur* made the stories more relatable and easier for readers to follow. The focus on socio-political issues also made the legends more relevant to the concerns of the time, as Malory's alternation was written during a period of political turmoil in England.

Despite Malory's shift towards political struggles and moral dilemmas, traces of magic and the supernatural still persist within the narrative, embodied by characters such as Morgan Le Fay, The Lady of the Lake, and Merlin, as well as objects like Excalibur. While magic may have been pushed into the background, these enigmatic figures and legendary objects continue to have significant influence, compelling the protagonists into action and shaping the trajectory of events. Christopher Snyder addresses this persistent presence of magic within the Arthurian legends, suggesting that it reflects the fascination and belief in the supernatural in

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[15] Laura Lambdin, *Arthurian Writers: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 12.

[16] Thorlac Turville-Petre, *Reading Middle English Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 81.

[17] Lambdin, *Arthurian Writers,* 19.

medieval times: "To understand the mentality of primitive people – in this case, sixth-century British people – you cannot restrict yourself to purely factual material events, ignoring the whole mythic world in which they lived and set the framework of their being."[18] In medieval society, magic was not merely limited to fantasy. It was deeply intertwined with religious beliefs, folklore, everyday life, and the pursuit of knowledge. Magic served as a means for people to understand the world around them, offering explanations for the unexplained. These remnants of magic added depth and mystery to the stories, reminding readers of the mystical origins of the Arthurian mythos.

In medieval Europe, beliefs in magic were diverse and multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of practices and traditions. Kieckhefer identified the diverse range of individuals engaged in magical activities, including "monks, physicians, midwives, healers and diviners, and even ordinary women and men,"[19] who usually practised folk, ceremonial, or elemental magic. People sought out practitioners for remedies, love potions, or to ward off evil.

Folk magic, deeply rooted in the traditions and beliefs of the common people, was often passed down through generations. It encompassed a wide range of practices, including herbalism, divination, and protective charms. Practitioners brewed potions and remedies and cast spells to heal ailments, protect against evil forces, and foretell the future. Kieckhefer highlights that certain forms of folk magic were so widespread that they formed a 'common tradition,'[20] from the humble cottage to the grand castle, folk magic left its mark on every stratum of society. Kieckhefer further explains that diseases were mysterious and people readily attributed them to supernatural causes, and objects imbued with mystical properties, particularly herbs, played a crucial role in protection and healing.[21] Hence, practitioners' knowledge of plants and their healing properties extended beyond mere remedial functions; it represented a sacred bond with the natural world, wherein every herb and root held a purpose.

Alongside folk magic, medieval England saw the rise of elemental magic, rooted in the belief that the natural world was imbued with mystical energies. This form of magic focused on manipulating the classical elements of earth, air, fire, and water and their "reconstruction into higher forms."[22] Alchemists and natural philosophers of the time dedicated themselves to

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[18] Christopher A. Snyder, "The Use of History and Archaeology in Contemporary Arthurian Fiction," *Arthuriana* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 118.
[19] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 56.
[20] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 17.
[21] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages,* 90.
[22] Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2010), 107.

studying these primal elements, seeking to unlock their secrets and harness their powers. Alchemists sought to transform base metals into gold and create the elixir of life or discover the philosopher's stone. Rosemary Ellen Guiley notes that "the heart of alchemy is spiritual: a means of personal transformation, purification, and perfection into a state of prolonged life or immortality."[23] From transmuting base metals like tin and lead into gold to searching for the elixir of life, practitioners of elemental magic pursued the mastery of nature's fundamental forces.

Ceremonial magic, on the other hand, was a more structured and ritualistic form of sorcery practised by learned individuals such as scholars, monks, and those of noble lineage. According to the *Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy*, this type of magic is classified as higher magic – exploration and manipulation of cosmic or divine forces.[24] Drawing upon ancient grimoires and mystical teachings, practitioners of ceremonial magic sought to harness supernatural powers "to purify [thmeselves] as a channel for divine Light dedicated to the service of the divine and humanity,"[25] including summoning spirits, invoking divine blessings, and uncovering hidden knowledge. However, the practice of ceremonial magic was not merely a pursuit of power or knowledge; it was a transformative journey of self-discovery and enlightenment.

Furthermore, the influence of Celtic traditions, such as practices of Druidism, also persisted in medieval Britain. Druids were regarded as wise men and keepers of esoteric knowledge through their deep connection to the natural world. Anne Ross underscores that their expertise extended beyond natural philosophy, encompassing moral philosophy as well. They were considered the most just of men and hence entrusted not only with resolving private disputes but public ones as well.[26] This enduring reverence for the Druids underscores the depth of their societal impact. Guiley further explores the enigmatic nature of Druids, describing them as:

> […] keepers of traditional wisdom who were concerned with moral philosophy, natural phenomena, and theology. Skilled in divination, the interpretation of omens and prophesy the future, the rites of sacrifice, the construction of a calendar, the magical medicine of herbs, the science of astronomy, and the composition of poems. They played a key role in the sacred

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[23] Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Magic and Alchemy* (New York: Facts On File, 2006), 23.
[24] Guiley, *The Encyclopedia,* 180.
[25] Guiley, *Encyclopedia,* 181.
[26] Anne Ross, *Druids: Preachers of Immortality* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2013), 12.

and secular life of the Celts. […] [Druids] served as mediator between the people and the gods.[27]

Through their deep understanding of the natural world and their mastery of spiritual practices, Druids occupied a unique and revered position in medieval Britain. In essence, the diverse forms of magic present in medieval Britain, from folk remedies to ceremonial rituals, reflected a fascination with the supernatural and a quest for understanding the mysteries of the world surrounding them.

Even though each new author shifted the narrative focus to change the intention, each interpretation of the Arthurian legends retains the atmosphere of the Dark Ages by blending pagan and Christian elements, chivalry and honour, and visions of a utopian society based on justice and equality. These enduring stories have been adapted to reflect the values and aspirations of each era, illustrating the timeless power of storytelling. Each retelling mirrors the socio-cultural contexts in which it was written, demonstrating the adaptability of these legends. By preserving the essence of the original narratives and adapting to changing cultural and social landscapes, these legends have maintained their relevance and appeal across centuries.

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[27] Guiley, *Encyclopedia,* 82–83.

Feminist and Marxist Criticism

Feminist criticism is a literary and cultural theory that examines literature, media, and culture, focusing on the portrayal and treatment of women. It examines the representation of women, gender roles, and the socio-political contexts that shape and are shaped by these portrayals. Lois Tyson broadly defines feminist criticism as a critical theory that "examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women."[28] This critical theory is mostly rooted in the 1960s feminist movements; however, Peter Barry points out that the advocacy for women's rights predates the 1960s, with activists addressing the issue of women's inequality and, in some cases, proposing solutions.[29] He then proceeds to list some of these significant works, which include *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1729), *Women and Labour* (1911), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).[30]

At its core, feminist critics analyse various aspects, including characterisations, narrative structures, language usage, and themes, to uncover underlying assumptions and hidden biases about gender roles, stereotypes, and inequalities. In other words, they explore how authors represent women and their experiences and how they reflect, reinforce, or subvert traditional gender roles. Tyson provides a definition of traditional gender roles:

> Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. These gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision-making positions (in the family as well as in politics, academia, and the corporate world).[31]

Feminist writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Bell Hooks have highlighted how traditional narratives tend to marginalise and silence women, laying the groundwork for feminist literary analysis. De Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, challenged the notion of a woman as the *other* and advocated for women's liberation from oppressive societal constructs.[32] Building upon these foundational texts, feminist critics examine how literature and media reflect and maintain gender stereotypes, unequal power dynamics, and the erasure

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[28] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 83.
[29] Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 116.
[30] Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 116.
[31] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 85.
[32] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 15–16.

of women's experiences. Anette Kolodny points out that *feminist criticism* lacks a single, uniform definition. When applied to the study of literature, it encompasses a wide range of activities and approaches:

> (1) any criticism written by a woman, no matter what the subject; (2) any criticism written by a woman about a man's book which treats that book from a "political" or "feminist" perspective; and (3) any criticism written by a woman about a woman's book or about female authors in general.[33]

As quoted by Kolodny, Margaret Andersen rejects the notion of separate branches of criticism based on gender, emphasising the need for inclusivity and equality within literary discourse.[34] Kolodny argues that "feminist criticism will remain a quite separate and necessarily compensatory kind of activity,"[35] suggesting that it functions as an attempt to make up for the lost perspectives, voices, and experiences of women who have been marginalised or ignored. This notion of feminist criticism as a compensatory means is further underscored by the historical standardisation of literature. As Tyson explains, the literary works written by white male authors were regarded as the standard of universality,[36] meaning that they were seen as representatives of the experiences of all readers by presenting events from a white man's perspective. Hence, women's writings were not seen as universal as they did not conform to this perceived universality, i.e., they lacked representation from the male point of view.

De Beauvoir's citation of Aristotle: "The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities [...] we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness,"[37] highlights the long-standing attitude towards women, viewing them as inherently inferior to men. Feminist critics aim to disrupt these conventional portrayals while advocating for more complex and nuanced representations of women that reflect the diversity of their experiences and identities. Kolodny suggests that societal definitions of what is appropriate or acceptable change over time, impacting what artists may express and how they reveal themselves.[38] This underscores the dynamic relationship between literature and culture. As societal norms evolve, so do the expectations placed on artists and the stories they tell. Feminist criticism drives these changes by challenging traditional conventions and advocating for more inclusive and representative narratives. This leads to another key aspect of feminist criticism is its focus

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[33] Annette Kolodny, "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism,'" *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 75.
[34] Kolodny, "Some Notes," 92.
[35] Kolodny, "Some Notes," 92.
[36] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 84.
[37] De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 15.
[38] Kolodny, "Some Notes," 77.

on literary and cultural production by women, referred to as *women's writing* or *feminist literature*. Feminist writers like Virginia Woolf have explored the unique challenges and opportunities women writers face. Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* argued for the importance of creative freedom for women artists. Tyson believes that women's psychological liberation is closely tied to language "because it is within language that detrimental patriarchal notions of sexual difference (what patriarchy believes are the essential, or inborn, differences between women and men) have been defined and continue to exert their repressive influence."[39] In other words, language serves as the primary medium through which patriarchal beliefs about sexual differences are articulated and reinforced. Hélène Cixous reveals that the language reflects the patriarchal binary thinking, which is a tendency to perceive the world in terms of opposing pairs, with one being considered superior to the other. In patriarchal thinking, women are typically associated with the inferior word of the two. For example, women are associated with the heart, motherhood, nature, and passivity. Conversely, men are associated with the superior of the two, meaning the head, fatherhood, culture, and activity.[40] Patriarchal ideology asserts that women are naturally passive while men are naturally active. Cixous states, "either woman is passive or she does not exist."[41] Assuming that these differences are inherent to each gender. This belief also reinforces the notion that women are naturally submissive to men, while men are perceived as natural leaders. In response to these limitations, Cixous introduced a concept of *écriture feminine* (feminine writing),[42] an approach that aims to challenge patriarchal norms and create space for women's voices to be heard on their own terms, embracing the diversity of women's experiences and identities. Patriarchal ideology tends to prioritise rationality and logic while disregarding emotionality. Feminine writing, however, challenges this limited perspective and recognises the importance of emotional and intuitive experiences.

Central to feminist criticism is the recognition that narratives are not neutral but are shaped by societal norms, biases, and power structures that often privilege male experiences and perspectives. One of the concepts within feminist criticism is the notion of the *male gaze*, popularised by Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema, as a predominantly male-dominated industry, tends to depict

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[39] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 100.
[40] Hélène Cixous, Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 63.
[41] Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman,* 64.
[42] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 101.

women as objects of male desire, reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics.[43] Feminist critics have since expanded upon Mulvey's theory, examining how the male gaze functions across various media, from literature to film, and advertising. These critics, such as Sue Thornham, analyse how camera angles, editing techniques, and narrative conventions contribute to the objectification and sexualisation of female characters.[44] Through the lens of the male gaze, women are often positioned as passive, attractive objects to be looked at rather than active subjects with agency and autonomy. Lois provides examples from well-known fairy tales such as *Snow White and the Sven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella* to illustrate this point:

> In all three tales, a beautiful, sweet young girl (for females must be beautiful, sweet, and young if they are to be worthy of romantic admiration) is rescued (for she is incapable of rescuing herself) from a dire situation by a dashing young man who carries her off to marry him and live happily ever after.[45]

Such ending implies that marrying the *right man* guarantees life-long happiness, but only for a woman deemed worthy by societal standards. Within patriarchal societies, women are categorised into two archetypal roles based on their conformity to traditional gender norms and patriarchal expectations. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, literature has been dominated by male authors whose narratives often depict women as either angelic figures or demonic temptresses.[46] Lois builds upon this notion and explains that if a woman conforms to traditional gender roles and adheres to patriarchal expectations, she is labelled a *good girl*. Conversely, if she challenges or rejects these norms, she is categorised as a *bad girl*.[47] The *good girl* archetype embodies traits such as gentleness, submissiveness, and angelic purity, while the *bad girl* is associated with qualities like violence, aggression, and monstrosity. Lois further notes that these roles are also referred to as *madonna* and *whore* or *angel* and *bitch*.[48] These categorisations reinforce the idea that a woman's happiness depends on how well she conforms to the stereotypical gender values prescribed by patriarchal society. Such labels limit women's freedom to fully express themselves and pursue fulfilling lives on their own terms. Virginia Woolf's statement that

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[43] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 750 – 751.

[44] Sue Thornham, *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

[45] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 89.

[46] Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 26–28.

[47] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 89.

[48] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 89.

"women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel" [49] aptly underscores the need to recognise and validate women's emotions and experiences rather than restricting them to limiting gender roles.

In addition to critiquing representations of women in literature and other media, feminist criticism also examines how gender intertwines with other aspects of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity. Intersectional feminism, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the overlapping nature of systems of oppression and the need to consider multiple identity categories in feminist analysis.[50] Intersectional feminist critics highlight the experiences of marginalised women who may be overlooked or misrepresented in mainstream discourse. They examine how race, class, and other social factors intersect with gender to shape individuals' experiences of power and privilege. As Crenshaw states, "this process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of American Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others."[51] By amplifying the diverse experiences of women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalised groups, intersectional feminist criticism aims to create a more inclusive environment and broaden perceptions of gender dynamics and power structure.

Feminist criticism serves as a framework for examining literature, media, and culture, revealing the portrayal and treatment of women while trying to change the consciousness of society by challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By uncovering underlying assumptions and biases, feminist critics have paved the way for more inclusive and representative narratives that reflect the diversity of women's experiences and identities. Furthermore, the emergence of intersectional feminism emphasises the importance of acknowledging the complexities of identity and the overlapping systems of oppression. As feminist criticism continues to evolve, it maintains its significance as a driving force in reshaping cultural narratives and creating a more accepting environment.

Although distinct in their approach and focus, both feminist and Marxist criticisms share a common goal of challenging oppressive power dynamics and advocating for social change toward equality.

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[49] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), 75–76.
[50] "Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectional Feminism," JSTOR Daily, published August 1, 2020, https://daily.jstor.org/kimberle-crenshaws-intersectional-feminism/.
[51] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–1242.

Marxist criticism, a theoretical framework derived from the socio-political theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, provides a framework which analyses literature, media, and culture with a focus on class struggle, capitalism, and social inequality. At its core, Marxist criticism seeks to uncover how literature and other media reflect, reinforce, or challenge the prevailing power dynamics inherent in capitalist societies. Marx himself highlighted the transformative aim of Marxist theory: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."[52] By examining how literary texts depict class relations, labour, capital, and societal hierarchies, Marxist critics aim to uncover the conditions that shape both the production and reception of literature. According to Barry, "Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes."[53] This means that significant social and political advancements occur when oppressed classes challenge and seek to overthrow the existing power structures controlled by the dominant class.

Marxist literary criticism emerged from a broader framework of Marxist theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century. Their jointly written *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) laid the groundwork for understanding society as divided into two main classes. From a Marxist perspective, socio-economic class distinctions overshadow other social divisions such as religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. Tyson provides an explanation of this socio-economic inequality:

> For the real battle lines are drawn, to put the matter simply, between the "haves" and the "have-nots," between the *bourgeoisie*—those who control the world's natural, economic, and human resources—and the *proletariat*, the majority of the global population who live in substandard conditions and who have always performed the manual labor—the mining, the factory work, the ditch digging, the railroad building—that fills the coffers of the rich.[54]

This class struggle forms the basis of Marxist analysis, which examines how economic relations shape all aspects of society. Marxism is, at its core, a materialist philosophy, "it tries to explain things without assuming the existence of a world, or of forces, beyond the natural world around us, and the society we live in."[55] In other words, it focuses on analysing the observable facts, such as economic factors and social relations, to explain the influence on human behaviour, societal structures, and historical developments. Tyson explains Marxist

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[52] "Karl Marx, Yesterday and Today," A Critic at Large, The New Yorker, published October 3, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/10/karl-marx-yesterday-and-today.
[53] Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 151.
[54] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today,* 54.
[55] Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 150.

terminology, "economic conditions are referred to as *material* circumstances, and the social/political/ideological atmosphere generated by material conditions is called the *historical* situation."[56] Tyson further explains that all human events and productions, whether political events or cultural creations, are deeply rooted in the specific material and historical conditions of their time.[57] In other words, Marxist critics believe that to truly understand any aspect of human society or culture, it is essential to analyse the economic, social, and historical context in which it emerges.

One of the key concepts within traditional Marxism is the notion of the *base* and *superstructure*. Barry provides a breakdown of this model, clarifying that the *base* represents the economic structure of society, including the means of production, such as factories and machinery. The superstructure, on the other hand, encompasses non-economic institutions, including culture, politics, and education that arise from the base, such as literature, art, and religion.[58] These institutions reflect and meet the interests of the ruling class, thus reinforcing the existing social structure. Louis Althusser notes that changes in the base, such as shifts from one mode of production to another, inevitably lead to corresponding changes in the superstructure – altering the social, economic, and political landscape.[59] For example, revolutions or economic crises may disrupt the existing social order, leading to transformations in political systems, cultural norms, and ideological beliefs. Barry explains that cultural phenomena such as art, religion, and laws are not considered to be independent or *innocent* entities but are instead *determined* and shaped by the economic base.[60] However, Philip Goldstein suggests that the relationship between the economic base and the ideological superstructure is less direct or deterministic than the base/superstructure model suggests. Instead, there is a more interactive and reciprocal relationship where ideological practices also shape and influence economic structures to some extent.[61] This means that cultural, political, and social factors can shape economic relations and contribute to social change.

Another key concept within Marxist criticism is *ideology*, which refers to the ideas, beliefs, and values that maintain and justify the existing social order. Goldstein defines *ideology* as:

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[56] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today,* 54.
[57] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today,* 54.
[58] Berry, *Beginning Theory,* 151–152.
[59] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014) 19.
[60] Berry, *Beginning Theory*, 151–152.
[61] Philip Goldstein, *The Politics of Literary Theory: An Introduction to Marxist Criticism* (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1990), 23.

> [...] unsystematic, decentered network of socially necessary images, myths, structures, and concepts. Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigor) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and historical role at the heart of a given society.[62]

In other words, ideology is a collection of ideas and beliefs that people in a society hold, which helps to maintain and justify the way a society is structured. These ideas and beliefs are expressed through various images, myths, and concepts, and they play an important role in shaping how society operates and how people understand their place within it. Marxist critics argue that literature promotes and justifies dominant capitalist ideologies while obscuring the realities of class struggle. As Barry states, "culture (including literature) is a crucial vehicle of the values which underpin the status quo in any society."[63] The critics analyse how literary texts encode and reinforce ideological messages and how they can potentially subvert or critique dominant ideologies. Tyson highlights the dual role that literary works can play:

> [...] literature grows out of and reflects real material/historical conditions [creating] at least two possibilities of interest to Marxist critics: (1) the literary work might tend to reinforce in the reader the ideologies it embodies, or (2) it might invite the reader to criticize the ideologies it represents.[64]

Althusser argues that ideology mainly works by *hailing* or *interpellation*, a process by which ideology addresses individuals, effectively transforming them into subjects who recognise and accept their roles in society.[65] In other words, through continuous exposure and reinforcement of certain values and beliefs, individuals gradually accept and embody these ideologies, seeing them as natural truths. This process is crucial for maintaining the social order, as people become subjects within the ideological framework and come to accept existing power structures without questioning them. Additionally, Althusser distinguishes between two types of structures that sustain the ruling class's power – Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). ISAs, such as educational institutions, religious organisations, media, and cultural institutions, function primarily through ideology, shaping individuals' beliefs and values to align with the dominant ideology.[66] In contrast, RSAs, including the government, police, military, judiciary, and prisons, maintain order through force and coercion, ensuring compliance with the ruling ideology.[67] Both ISAs and RSAs are

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[62] Goldstein, *The Politics of Literary Theory,* 23.
[63] Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 157.
[64] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today,* 66.
[65] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 190.
[66] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 75.
[67] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 65–66.

essential for sustaining the existing power structures, with ISAs influencing consciousness and RSAs enforcing laws and norms through direct involvement. In essence, Ideological State Apparatuses form part of the previously mentioned superstructure. In the context of literature, interpellation can be seen as the ways in which texts address and position readers within specific ideological frameworks, shaping their perceptions, interpretations, and emotional responses.

In contrast to Althusser's focus on how individuals are positioned and reinforced within social structures, Fredric Jameson's concept of *cognitive mapping* offers a framework to help individuals navigate and understand the complex social and economic structures of contemporary capitalism.[68] Jameson describes cognitive mapping as a way "to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole."[69] This method aims to help individuals comprehend their own specific situations within the broader and complex society. It helps them to enhance their awareness and understanding of how their lives are influenced by and connected to the social, economic, and political systems that make up society as a whole. Jameson suggests that literature and other cultural forms serve as mediums for cognitive mapping, offering individuals a way to understand the underlying social and economic structures that shape their lives.[70] By engaging with these cultural products, individuals can gain insights into their society's broader structures and dynamics, helping them achieve a more comprehensive and critical awareness of their social reality. Jameson emphasises the importance of understanding literature and other forms of art as a reflection of the contradictions and tensions within capitalist societies.[71] Through cognitive mapping, individuals can gain a deeper insight into the broader societal structures, enabling them to navigate and potentially challenge the forces that influence their lives.

Furthermore, the concepts of *exploitation* and *alienation*, rooted in Marxist theory, are important for understanding the socio-economic critiques of literature. Allen Buchanan explains how workers are exploited under capitalism according to Marx:

> [...] the wage-laborer's work can be divided into two parts: the work by which
> he produces commodities whose value is equivalent to the value of those goods
> required for his own subsistence, and the work by which he produces

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[68] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 46.

[69] Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51.

[70] Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 54,

[71] Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 75–76.

commodities whose value exceeds the value of these subsistence goods. The former Marx calls 'necessary wage-labor', the latter 'surplus wage-labor'.[72]

The necessary wage labour represents the amount of labour needed for workers to survive, while surplus labour represents the additional labour that benefits the capitalist rather than the worker. Marx's distinction between necessary and surplus wage labour underscores the exploitative nature of capitalist production, where capitalists profit from workers' labour without fair compensation, thereby enriching themselves at the expense of the labourers. Marx believed that exploiting one social class by another results in alienation. He discusses the four types of alienation experienced by workers under capitalism: alienation from the product of their labour, from the process of production, from their species-being, and alienation from other workers.[73] Alienation describes the estrangement of individuals, whom Tyson labels as victims of forces beyond their control,[74] from aspects of their human nature. Work becomes merely a means to an end, stripping it of fulfilment and preventing individuals from reaching their full potential. This estrangement also affects interpersonal relationships, as individuals come to see each other as competitors, further deepening the sense of isolation and disconnection.

In conclusion, Marxist criticism provides a framework for analysing literature, media, and culture within the context of capitalist societies, revealing how it reflects and challenges dominant ideologies and social relations. By examining how literature reflects class struggle, exploitation, and resistance, Marxist critics offer insights into the complexities of contemporary capitalism and the possibilities for social change. Marxist critics not only analyse literature, but they also seek to raise class consciousness, empower marginalised communities, and challenge capitalist hegemony.

As Barry notes, "the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political circumstance in which it is produced."[75] Both feminist and Marxist criticism highlight how social and political factors shape literary expression and challenge the notion of hegemony. These critical approaches emphasise the significant role that socio-political factors play in interpreting literature, as they both aim to challenge and deconstruct dominant ideologies.

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[72] Allen Buchanan, "Exploitation, Alienation, and Injustice," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (March 1979): 123.

[73] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), 78.

[74] Tyson, *Critical Theory Today,* 164.

[75] Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 160.

Theory of Adaptation

Adaptation, a process that transmutes narratives across different mediums, serves as a vibrant and essential aspect of creative expression. From literature to film, theatre to television, the art of adaptation navigates the delicate balance between preserving the essence of the source material and infusing it with new and unique interpretations. Whether it involves adapting classical literature, historical events, legends, myths, or popular stories, adaptation theory delves into the motivations, challenges, and creative decisions involved in transforming pre-existing narratives from one medium to another. Key concepts within adaptation theory include the *source medium*, which refers to the original narrative from which the adaptation is derived, and the *target medium*, which represents the medium to which the source text is adapted. Nowadays, adaptations surround people everywhere, and the target mediums span from the theatrical and musical stage to television and cinema screens, across the Internet, within the pages of novels and comic books, and even extending to theme parks and video games.

Even though adaptation is by its very nature a retelling of an original story, it can be perceived as an autonomous piece of work nevertheless. Linda Hutcheon presents the idea that "neither the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum: they all have a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture."[76] Instead of viewing adaptation as a mere imitation or copy, Hutcheon argues that it is an artistic re-creation, which creates new meanings through its engagement with the original narrative. This process of re-creation is shaped by the cultural, historical, and ideological contexts of both the source and target mediums, as well as the creative choices made by the adapters. Hutcheon suggests that adapters are "using the source as raw material,"[77] where the original narrative provides the essential elements – themes, characters, and ideas – that are then reworked, transformed or repurposed in the adaptation process. George Bluestone builds upon this notion by stating that "the film-maker merely treats the novel as raw material and ultimately creates his own unique structure"[78] and proceeds to highlight the key differences between the production of literature and the production of films:

> The governing conventions of each medium are further conditioned by different origins, different audiences, different modes of production, and

[76] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16.
[77] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 7.
[78] George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), 8–9.

different censorship requirements. The reputable novel, generally speaking, has been supported by a small, literate audience, has been produced by an individual writer, and has remained relatively free of rigid censorship. The film, on the other hand, has been supported by a mass audience, produced co-operatively under industrial conditions, and restricted by a self-imposed Production Code.[79]

These distinctions profoundly affect the storytelling possibilities and conventions within each medium. Therefore, when novels are adapted into a film, adapters encounter the challenges and creative decisions involved in transmuting written narratives into a visual and cinematic medium. Hutcheon explains that "the narrator has a point of view and great power to leap through time and space and sometimes to venture inside the minds of characters."[80] Hence, the departure from elements typically associated with the literary form is inevitable in the process of adapting, and according to Bluestone, "this abandonment is so severe that, in a strict sense, the new creation has little resemblance to the original."[81] The cinematic medium eliminates language as its primary form to convey abstract contents – memories, dreams, and conceptual consciousness. Instead, visual adaptation introduces "endless spatial variations, photographic images or physical reality, and the principles of montage and editing."[82] Through such variations, filmmakers are able to effectively adapt the author's narrative commentary without necessarily resorting to explicit words and sentences from their novel counterparts.

In many cases of adaptation, especially when transitioning from literature to film, creators face the intricate task of maintaining a delicate balance between staying faithful to the source material and ensuring that the adaptation thrives in its new medium. Achieving this balance is crucial to crafting an adaptation that not only respects the original work but also speaks to both its established fan base and a new, broader audience. For instance, according to John Tibbetts, Peter Jackson's film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* carefully navigates this balance by preserving the intricate world-building while adapting certain elements to suit the cinematic medium.[83] Visual storytelling in film often demands concise and impactful scenes that convey information efficiently. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings* film adaptation, complex historical details were condensed into brief exposition, allowing the audience to grasp essential information without overwhelming them; key

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[79] Bluestone, *Novels into Film,* 8.
[80] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 12–13.
[81] Bluestone, *Novels into Film,* 8.
[82] Bluestone, *Novels into Film,* 8–9.
[83] John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh, *The Encyclopedia of Novels into Film* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2005), 259–260.

characters' arcs were retained, but some sequences were reordered for a more dynamic narrative flow. According to Linda Seger, as long as the focus of the storyline is strengthened, any kind of diversion from the source material is acceptable.[84] Hence, it is essential for the adapter to choose what is important within the original source – which theme to explore, which character is the most important, and which plots and subplots are worth pursuing. Adapters have the creative liberty to implement various cinematic alternations to achieve the desired effect. These changes may span from reimagining the point of departure of the narrative, adjusting the pacing, condensing or expanding the material, introducing new characters, emphasising, condensing or even omitting characters' storyline to maintain focus on the central narrative, changing the focus character, or even altering the ending.

Due to adapters' creative freedom, theorists often approach adaptations through the lens of fidelity criticism. Fidelity, commonly understood as the faithfulness of an adaptation to the source material, can manifest in various ways. In some adaptations, a commitment to maintaining the original plot and characters is evident, resulting in a close adherence to the narrative structure of the source. Nevertheless, Robert Stam points out that when an individual is familiar with the original narrative, an adaptation often faces the perception of being regarded as minor and subsidiary, rarely achieving the same level of acclaim as the original work.[85] However, adaptation is not limited to mere replication. Creative departure from the source material allows adapters to explore new interpretations, themes, and perspectives, adding layers of meaning that might resonate differently with audiences. Hence, Hutcheon proposes a different way to evaluate adaptations:

> Like classical imitation, adaptation also is not slavish copying; it is a process of making the adapted material one's own. In both, the novelty is in what one *does with* the other text. […] Perhaps one way to think about unsuccessful adaptations is not in terms of infidelity to a prior text, but in terms of lack of the creativity and skill to make the one's own and thus autonomous.[86]

Instead of measuring success by mere fidelity, it should be considered how effectively the adapter alters the source material and presents it in a way that is innovative and captivating while still maintaining a connection to the original. In this way, adaptations can be appreciated for their unique artistic contributions and ability to present familiar narratives to diverse audiences. Building upon the notion that adaptations should be evaluated based on

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[84] Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1992), 9.
[85] Robert Stam, *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 3–4.
[86] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 21.

their creative innovation, Julie Sanders's adaptation and appropriation theory further explains the intricate relationship between source material and its reimagined forms. According to Sanders, *adaptation* typically involves a more faithful or respectful transformation of source material from one medium or form to another. It aims to convey the essence or spirit of the original work while adjusting it to suit the limitations and possibilities of the new medium. Adaptations often maintain a degree of fidelity to the source material.[87] Appropriation, on the other hand, often involves a more creative or transformative act of borrowing individual elements from one work or culture and repurposing them into another context. Sanders notes that it may not necessarily aim to faithfully represent the source material as a whole but instead uses it as a starting point for brand new interpretations, commentary, or artistic expression.[88] Regardless of its specific intent, whether it be faithful representation or innovative reimagining, every instance of adaptation or appropriation is a form of intertextuality.

Hutcheon's theory emphasises the importance of defining adaptation not only as a finished product or a process of creation but also as a process of reception. From her perspective, adaptation is "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."[89] Graham Allen states that "intertextuality foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life."[90] Intertextuality focuses on the interconnections between the source text and the adaptation, exploring how elements from the original words are interwoven and referenced in the new narrative. Hutcheon presents the idea that individuals experience adaptations as palimpsests through their memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.[91] Adaptations draw on intertextual references, borrowing elements from both the source material and broader cultural contexts. Sanders complements this thought by pointing out that "all texts invoke and rework other texts in a rich and ever-evolving cultural mosaic."[92] Intertextuality recognises that an adaptation does not exist in isolation but is interconnected with various texts, including the original source, other adaptations of the same source, additional texts that may have influenced or been influenced by the adaptation and various cultural references. Hence, intertextuality allows

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[87] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2016), 21–25.
[88] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation,* 35–40.
[89] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 8.
[90] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5.
[91] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 8.
[92] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation,* 21.

adaptations to resonate across media and genres with both the existing fanbase of the original work as well as the new audiences who may not have encountered the source material before.

Adapting narratives involves more than simply translating words from one medium to another. According to Seger, it requires an intimate understanding of the source material's nuances and the artistry to weave those elements into a new narrative fabric that may reach new audiences,[93] ensuring the story endures across different generations and demographics. In an interview conducted by Linda Hutcheon, an adapter, Priscilla Galloway, noted: "I am motivated by a desire to preserve stories that are worth knowing but will not necessarily speak to a new audience without creative reanimation."[94] Galloway's adaptations often bring mythical and historical narratives that are outdated due to changing times and cultural shifts to a new audience by simplifying language and adapting themes to make them more accessible and engaging for children and young adults. Similarly, Sanders suggests that transforming a text from its original genre into a different one may potentially introduce it to different or additional audiences.[95] By doing so, it may be possible to reach a larger and more diverse audience if the adaptation is thoughtfully crafted to resonate with the preferences of those who may not have engaged with the source material in its original form; for example, by adapting a classical novel into a science fiction version, the adaptation may attract sci-fi enthusiasts. This strategy has the potential to not only broaden the narrative's appeal but also potentially enhance its commercial success. However, Seger highlights that creating a commercial adaptation means providing the story with a clearer structure so audiences can follow it easily.[96] Consequently, the decision regarding what to adapt becomes crucial. Seger further emphasises that some narratives are too difficult to adapt and will resist any changes to make them adaptable; hence, the adaptor and the producers need to make a reasonable assessment about what will work and what will be too difficult and not worth the investment, including choosing the most suitable platform for the new adaptation.[97] This highlights the importance of selecting source material that can be effectively transformed into a commercially successful adaptation and, therefore, resonate with a broader audience while also recognising the potential of transmedia storytelling to further extent narrative engagement.

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[93] Seger, *The Art of Adaptation,* 2.
[94] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 8.
[95] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation,* 23.
[96] Seger, *The Art of Adaptation,* 7.
[97] Seger, *The Art of Adaptation,* 4–5.

Transmedia storytelling extends the concept of adaptation to encompass narratives that span multiple media platforms. This approach deepens audience engagement by offering diverse entry points into the narrative universe with different levels of participation. Hutcheon categorises the modes of engagement into three distinct groups based on their level of immersion and interactivity. In the telling mode, as seen in novels, immersion occurs through the power of imagination, where the readers actively create mental imagery of a fictional world and forge a unique connection with the story. The showing mode, evident in plays and films, draws audiences into the narrative world through a blend of visual and auditory elements. Lastly, the participatory mode, exemplified by video games and amusement parks, represents the most physically immersive engagement – participants actively shape or experience the progression of the narrative, whether through gameplay or physical interaction.[98] A prime example of transmedial narrative is *Harry Potter*, originally a book series by J.K. Rowling, that has been adapted into films, theme parks, and video games, providing fans with a comprehensive experience of the wizarding world. In the context of theme parks, the adaptation process focuses on what Kenneth Ruthven determines as *heterocosm*,[99] essentially an alternate world that is fully realised and replicated with all the narrative elements, such as settings, characters, and events. A tangible example of such immersive transmediation is evident at Disneyland and Universal Studios, where visitors are able to step inside and physically navigate a universe that was originally presented as a linear experience through film. Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin analyse the intense immersion that can take on multiple forms – rides that recreate iconic film moments, interacting with real-life portrayals of famous characters, strolling down the cobbled streets of a fairy tale village or partaking in musicals and stage shows.[100] Such experiences effectively blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, creating a dynamic narrative space where visitors become active participants.

Even though adaptations of all kinds are omnipresent in our culture, contemporary popular adaptations are often perceived as an inferior form of the adapted work in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing. Charles Newman commented on the transition from the literary medium to the cinematic or televisual medium as "a willfully inferior form of

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[98] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 22–27.
[99] Kenneth K. Ruthven, *Critical Assumptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2.
[100] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 170–171.

cognition."[101] This viewpoint often stems from a belief that the original written work possesses a certain depth or complexity that is allegedly lost in translation to other mediums. This belief was supported by James Naremore, who noted that adaptations are "belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior."[102] His perception arises from a belief that adaptations are driven more by commercial interests than artistic innovation, potentially leading to simplification of the source material. This perspective aligns with the concerns of both the postmodern and Frankfurt School critics who have questioned the impact of adaptations and modern media on the cultural landscape. Theodor Adorno was critical of what he called the *culture industry*: "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together."[103] Adorno was concerned about mass culture's effects on both society and art. Even though he did not specifically focus on adaptations, his broader critique of the culture industry applies to them. Adorno argued that the culture industry produces standardised and formulaic cultural products designed to cater to the lowest common denominator,[104] thereby creating a passive and conformist audience who consumes pre-packaged cultural products rather than engaging in genuine artistic and intellectual exploration. Georges Duhamel characterised the new wave of medialisation as a "pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures."[105] Robert Stam argues by stating: "We mustn't forget that "adaptation" and the "summary" (*résumé*) of original works became part of our way of doing things quite some time ago, and on such a scale that their existence should certainly no longer be called in question."[106] Stam's argument serves as a reminder that adaptation, as a creative and cultural process, has a rich history and is not a recent phenomenon. Shakespearean plays may serve as a prime example of how literary works have been transformed into theatrical performances. Such transformation is considered an adaptation as it involves reinterpreting, reimagining, and bringing the written narrative to life in a different medium.

The impact of adaptations extends far beyond Shakespearean theatre. In contemporary culture, adaptations continue to shape the understanding of storytelling and entertainment.

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[101] Charles Newman, "The Post-modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation," *Salmagundi,* no. 63/64, (Spring–Summer 1984): 129.

[102] James Naremore, *Film and the Reign of Adaptation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 5.

[103] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94.

[104] Horkheimer et al., *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 114.

[105] Georges Duhamel, *America: the Menace: Scenes from the life of the Future* (Boston: Houghton Miffin Co., 1931), 34.

[106] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 223.

They provide new perspectives on familiar narratives, introduce these stories to diverse audiences, and serve as gateways for individuals to explore the source material in its original form. Furthermore, adaptations can bridge the gap between different mediums, inviting audiences to engage with stories through literature, film, television, theatre, and digital media.

Magic in Camelot

Magic, magical objects, and the mystical influence of druidic presence are integral components of the rich tapestry of Arthurian legends. Across centuries, these enchanting elements have captivated audiences and have served as a rich source of inspiration for various cinematic and television adaptations that reinterpret and reimagine the timeless tales of Camelot and its legendary figures. This chapter explores the role of magic, magical objects, and the influence of a sorcerer in selected adaptations, namely *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), the BBC TV series *Merlin* (2008–2012), *Excalibur* (1981), and Disney's adaptation of T. H. White's novel *The Sword in the Stone* (1963). Though rooted in the same legendary lore, each of the selected adaptations approaches the mystical and magical elements with unique perspectives, enriching the Arthurian cinematic universe.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail stands out for its irreverent and comedic take on the Arthurian legend. Beyond its comedic genius, the film cleverly incorporates elements of magic and magical items that play a significant role in advancing the narrative and contributing to the overall absurdity of the story. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the incorporation of magic serves a dual purpose – to subvert traditional fantasy conventions and to generate humour. For instance, when King Arthur and his knights encounter the Bridge of Death, they face a traditional fantasy trope – a perilous bridge guarded by a mysterious figure. However, instead of engaging in a typical battle or trial, the confrontation becomes absurdly comical. The bridge keeper quizzes them with questions that seem arbitrary and unrelated to their quest, such as "What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?"[107] which subverts the expectation of a serious challenge and highlights the absurdity. Similarly, in traditional fantasy, heroes might encounter fierce dragons or monstrous creatures, but the Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog subverts expectations by presenting a seemingly harmless creature as a deadly foe. Additionally, the Holy Hand Grenade scene is a prime example of how magic is used to generate humour. Instead of a sacred relic associated with religious or mythical significance, the Holy Hand Grenade is depicted as a comically exaggerated weapon, complete with specific absurd instructions for its use. The Black Knight scene is another instance where magic contributes to the humour of the film. Instead of a grand battle between noble opponents, the encounter devolves into a farcical display as the Black Knight refuses to yield even after having all his limbs severed.

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[107] Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, dir. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Python (Monty) Pictures, 1975), 1:20:58 to 1:21:02.

Similarly, *Merlin* stands out for its humorous approach to the Arthurian legend; however, alongside humour and witty banter between characters, the series also incorporates a more serious narrative of the Arthurian legend. Magic is not merely a plot device but a central theme, with a focus on the relationship between the young, powerful warlock Merlin and the future King Arthur. In the first episode, the young warlock discovers the purpose of his magic through an encounter with a dragon, Kilgharrah, unravelling the pivotal role he is destined to play in Arthur's life:

> Your gift, Merlin, was given to you for a reason. Arthur is the once and future king who will unite the land of Albion. But he faces many threats from friend and foe alike. Without you, Arthur will never succeed. Without you, there will be no Albion. […] None of us can choose our destiny, Merlin. And none of us can escape it.[108]

The Great Dragon Kilgharrah is portrayed as a wise and ancient creature with immense knowledge of magic and destiny. Sherman points out that in this adaptation it is the dragon who fulfils the role of a cryptic advisor, a position commonly held by Merlin.[109] Kilgharrah serves as a mentor figure to Merlin, offering guidance in understanding Merlin's magical abilities and often cryptic prophecies that help Merlin navigate the challenges he faces in fulfilling his destiny as Arthur's protector and the future king's advisor. Magic in *Merlin*, as already mentioned, is intricately tied to the concept of destiny and prophecy throughout the series. Merlin is a powerful warlock destined to guide and protect Arthur Pendragon, who harnesses the power of magic solely to safeguard Arthur. Young Pendragon himself was conceived through magical means as Uther, his father, sought help from sorceress Nimueh to enable his barren wife to conceive a son. After Arthur's conception, Nimueh demands a life for a life, and tragically, Uther's wife dies in childbirth. Hence, Uther blames magic for her death and becomes fiercely anti-magic, leading to the prosecution of magic practitioners and magical beings throughout Camelot. Despite this, magic remains an essential source of power and knowledge for Merlin, enabling him to confront threats to Camelot and, most importantly, Arthur. Nevertheless, its use poses moral dilemmas for him as he navigates the tension between his duty to protect Arthur and the need to conceal his true identity as a sorcerer.

In Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*, similarly to *Merlin*, magic is portrayed as a whimsical and transformative force that shapes the journey of young Arthur, known as Wart, as he navigates his destiny to become the future king of England. Through the guidance of the

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[108] *Merlin*, season 1, episode 1, "The Dragon's Call," directed by James Hawes, written by Julian Jones, aired September 20, 2008, 00:31:02 to 00:31:58.
[109] Sherman, "Source," 85.

eccentric wizard Merlin, magic serves as a tool for learning and self-discovery, offering Arthur lessons in wisdom, courage, and leadership. Merlin believes that knowledge and proper, or as he calls it real, education – Latin, mathematics, history, natural sciences – are important for a good ruler. When Arthur finds out Merlin has magic, Merlin tells him to "not get any foolish ideas that magic will solve all the problems,"[110] emphasising the significance of education. However, Merlin adopts a unique approach to education, often employing unconventional means such as transformations into animals, offering Arthur hands-on learning experiences. For instance, he transforms himself and Arthur into fish, plunging them into the castle's moat to teach Arthur the importance of using his intellect to outsmart the brute and the ability to thrive even in unfamiliar and challenging circumstances. As a squirrel, Arthur experiences the fleeting nature of power and the need for caution in relationships. Finally, when Arthur becomes a bird, he learns firsthand that the best way to learn is through experience. By soaring through the skies and exploring the world from a bird's perspective, Arthur gains practical knowledge and insight that cannot be learned from books or lectures alone. This immersive learning experience reinforces Merlin's philosophy that true wisdom comes from actively engaging with the world around us. Through experimentation and exploration in Merlin's magical lessons, Arthur discovers his own strengths and abilities, paving the way for personal growth and self-discovery.

Contrastively, *Excalibur* adopts the most serious approach to both Arthurian legends and magic among the selected adaptations. Snyder characterises this approach as "mud and blood reality,"[111] suggesting that *Excalibur* offers a more authentic portrayal of Arthurian legend within the harsh medieval world. In this film, magic serves as both a mystical force and a narrative device that shapes the destiny of the characters and the kingdom. Merlin, the enigmatic wizard, connects the mortal and magical realms, guiding and advising Uther and, later, Arthur throughout their journey. The Magic in *Excalibur* is symbolised by 'the Dragon,' which represents Merlin's magical powers and guidance. It serves as a mystical force intertwined with the natural world, offering advice and wisdom to those who seek it. The Dragon is not a physical creature but rather a manifestation of Merlin's magical abilities, which he describes as "a beast of such power that if you were to see it whole and complete in a single glance, it would burn you to cinders. […] It is everywhere. It is everything. Its scales glisten in the bark of trees. Its roar is heard in the wind. And its forked tongue strikes like

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[110] Wolfgang Reitherman, dir. *The Sword in the Stone* (Walt Disney Productions, 1963), 00:14:40 to 00:14:46.
[111] Snyder, "The Use of History," 115.

lightning."[112] In other words, magic is an omnipresent force pulsating through the mythical kingdom of Camelot, as well as the characters. Similarly to *Merlin*, Arthur's conception is also connected to magical forces as Merlin assisted Uther in seducing Igrayne, Arthur's mother. Merlin uses his magic to help Uther disguise himself as Igayne's husband, which leads to Arthur's conception. This manipulation of circumstances reflects Merlin's portrayal as a trickster-like figure, a characteristic noted by Covington Littleton, who compares Merlin to the Germanic Loki,[113] a trickster associated with Norse mythology and often depicted in tales about Thor. Merlin's involvement in Arthur's conception underscores the pervasive presence of magic in the very bloodline of Camelot's future king.

The choice of genre of the movie adaptation significantly influences the visual representation of magic within a narrative. Live-action adaptations like *Merlin* and *Excalibur* rely on practical and subtle special effects due to the limitations of the genre. This approach creates a more grounded and realistic depiction of magic, focusing on its mysteriousness rather than the spectacle. On the contrary, animated adaptations like *The Sword in the Stone* have more freedom to explore more elaborate and creative visualisations of magic. Animation allows supernatural elements to be depicted in ways that may not be achievable in live-action format, such as the transformations into animals. In unique cases like the satirical *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, blending animated sequences with live-action scenes contributes to the unique storytelling style. Martine Meuwese praises Terry Gilliam's inventive humour, noting that "[his] outstanding capacity to cause amusement with his animations is due to his skill in subverting expectations and to his instinct for the humor and the absurd."[114] Meuwese further explains that the unexpected turn in 'The Monster of Aaargh' animated sequence had a very practical cause. Gilliam himself admitted that he did not know how to end the sequence, and he resolved the situation by having the animator suffer a fatal heart attack,[115] causing the cartoon monster to dissolve into thin air. Thus, "the cartoon peril was no more, the quest for the holy Grail could continue."[116] Gilliam explains this decision, "It was just the only way I could get out of a cartoon situation that I painted myself in the corner with."[117] Such resolution was possible thanks to the genre of the movie, allowing for such creative and absurd solutions to narrative challenges.

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[112] John Boorman, dir. *Excalibur* (Orion Pictures, 1981), 00:33:23 to 00:33:48.
[113] C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Malcor, "Some Notes on Merlin," *Arthuriana* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 88.
[114] Martine Meuwese, "The Animation of Marginal Decorations in 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail,'" *Arthuriana* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 46.
[115] Meuwese, "The Animation," 46.
[116] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 01:17:57 to 01:18:01.
[117] Meuwese, "The Animation," 46.

The questing heroes, be it King Arthur himself or Arthur's knights, usually seek the aid of magic practitioners in their quests for glory, honour, or redemption. These individuals may encounter druids, warlocks, or sorcerers who offer magical assistance or guidance along their journeys. The primary practitioner of magic sought by these heroes is usually embodied by Merlin, the legendary prophet-magician of Camelot. His wisdom, knowledge of the mystical arts, and connection to the supernatural make him a pivotal figure in guiding and assisting those who seek his aid. Anne Lawrence-Mathers describes Merlin as someone who:

> [...] can appear and disappear at will, read minds and change physical appearances. These powers, together with apparently unlimited knowledge of past, present and future, enable him to guide the destinies of kings, to provide magical weapons and to prophesy the future of the kingdoms. With his powers he ensures the birth of King Arthur, and then shapes him into an ideal, if tragically fated, ruler.[118]

Littleton, on the other hand, claims that "the Merlin introduced into the Arthurian material by Geoffrey of Monmouth does not exhibit shapeshifting, magical fairy powers"[119] that are commonly associated with later interpretations of the character. Littleton further explores Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of Merlin:

> [Geoffrey's] story tells of a scholar, trained by monks, who outwits magicians, accomplishes skilled feats of engineering, and uses 'drugs' rather than spells to transform himself. [...] But first and foremost Merlin is a prophet, and it is this characterization of him, rather than the portrayal of him as a spellcaster.[120]

All of the chosen adaptations diverge from the original characterisation and introduce the character of Merlin, except Monty Python, which fits Lawrence-Mathers' description. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the character of a sorcerer is not prominently featured. However, the film introduces Tim the Enchanter, a mysterious and eccentric figure who appears out of nowhere, possesses magical abilities and aids King Arthur and his knights in their quest for the Holy Grail. Tim the Enchanter defies the traditional archetype of a wise mentor, highlighting the film's departure from conventional Arthurian storytelling by offering a humorous take on the mystique often associated with sorcerers. However, despite his eccentricities, Tim provides crucial information to the knights by directing them to the Cave of Caerbannog, where they believe the Holy Grail may be found. Additionally, he warns them of the dangers that lie ahead, including the fearsome Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog. While Tim's primary function in the film may be comedic, his role as a guide to the Cave of

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[118] Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *The True History of Merlin the Magician* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 1.
[119] Littleton, "Some Notes on Merlin," 87.
[120] Littleton, "Some Notes on Merlin," 87–88.

Caerbannog underscores his importance in the context of the narrative. Without his assistance, King Arthur and his knights may have struggled even more on their quest for the Holy Grail.

Contrastively, in *Merlin*, the character of the sorcerer takes centre stage as the protagonist. Erin Chandler comments on Merlin's appearance in the series: "*Merlin* reverses what most readers and viewers think of as the 'standard' set-up of the Arthurian legend, in which Merlin is old and wise by the time Arthur comes out of obscurity to be made king and marry a noble lady named Guenevere."[121] Unlike other adaptations, where Merlin is an established and wise sorcerer, this series portrays Merlin as a young, inexperienced warlock who is bound by destiny to serve as a protector of equally young Arthur during his journey to becoming the legendary King of Camelot. The viewers are reminded of this great destiny every episode in the opening title sequence by the previously mentioned dragon, Kilgharrah. The iconic lines set the tone for the entire series and highlight destiny as one of the central themes: "In a land of myth and a time of magic, the destiny of a great kingdom rests on the shoulders of a young boy. His name – Merlin."[122] As already mentioned, practitioners of magic are prosecuted in this cinematic universe; however, Merlin, as Arthur's royal confidant, defies the perilous consequences and uses his extraordinary powers solely for Arthur's well-being and protection. Merlin's commitment is expressed in his confession to dying Arthur, where he reveals his true nature as a sorcerer, which remained a secret to Arthur until the very last episode: "I am a sorcerer, I have magic, and I use it for you Arthur, only for you."[123] This pivotal moment proves the depth of Merlin's devotion and the profound sacrifice he is willing to make for his future king and friend, underscoring the inseparable bond between magic and his destiny.

In *The Sword in the Stone*, Merlin assumes the role of Arthur's mentor and guide, preparing him for his destined role as the King of England through a series of magical adventures and lessons. Throughout the film, Merlin imparts wisdom, teaches valuable life lessons, and instils a sense of responsibility in Arthur, shaping him into the future ruler. Amy Peterson interprets Merlin in *The Sword in the Stone* as "the archetype of fool instead of magician, and although he serves as Arthur's father, teacher, and a friend, his forgetfulness and clumsiness provide

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[121] Erin Chandler, "Pendragons at the Chopping Block: Elements of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' in the BBC's 'Merlin,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 101.

[122] *Merlin*, season 1, episode 2, "Valiant," directed by James Hawes, written by Howard Overman, aired September 27, 2008, 00:00:00 to 00:00:12.

[123] *Merlin*, season 5, episode 13, "The Diamond of the Day – Part 2," directed by Justin Molotnikov, written by Julian Jones, aired December 24, 2012, 00:09:41 to 00:09:59.

comic relief."[124] This interpretation underscores the duality of Merlin's nature; balancing wisdom with eccentricities adds layers to his relationship with Arthur and his upbringing. Overall, his portrayal reflects the importance of guidance and mentorship in the hero's journey.

In *Excalibur*, Merlin emerges as the archetypal sorcerer, wielding ancient powers that bend the fabric of reality itself. Unlike comedic interpretations or subversions of the character, this adaptation presents Merlin as a sorcerer with prophetic abilities who aids Uther and later Arthur Pendragon in claiming the throne and wielding the legendary sword, Excalibur. Merlin's role extends beyond that of mere advisor; he serves as Arthur's mentor and protector, offering counsel and magical aid in times of need, underscoring themes of destiny, honour, and the quest for divine kingship. Alfred Collins describes Boorman's Merlin as a character who "makes a human bridge to the underworld […] [He is] excessive and sometimes foolish, but ultimately wise, ruthless, and deeply in touch with his Dragon,"[125] suggesting that Merlin's wisdom comes from his understanding and connection with ancient forces, i.e. the Dragon. His eccentricities add layers to his character, making him more human and relatable despite his supernatural abilities. Furthermore, through his interactions with Arthur and other characters, the film explores the timeless themes of power, sacrifice, and the struggle between good and evil.

In the selected adaptations of Arthurian legends, Merlin's appearance varies, yet certain iconic elements remain consistent across different interpretations. Sherman shares his view on Merlin's appearance: "The image of Merlin, while essentially mutable, has solidified over the centuries into something iconic and instantly recognizable; King Arthur's advisor has become the quintessential wizard, with flowing robes, a staff and a white beard."[126]

In *Excalibur*, John Boorman presents Merlin as a mysterious figure, easily recognisable by his cloak, a walking staff, and a distinctive shiny metal headpiece. Disney's *Sword in the Stone* adheres closely to the archetypal portrayal of the legendary sorcerer, characterised by a pointy hat, long white beard, and flowing robes. Even in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, where Merlin does not make an appearance, Tim the Enchanter adheres to familiar tropes – robes, a long beard, and a staff. However, in the BBC series, the portrayal of Merlin's appearance

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[124] Amy T. Peterson and David J. Dunworth, *Mythology in Our Midst: A Guide to Cultural References* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 114.
[125] Alfred Collins, "Review of Excalibur," *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 58.
[126] Sherman, "Source," 95.

undergoes notable changes. Initially, the series subverts expectations by presenting Merlin as a young warlock. Nevertheless, in several episodes, he conforms to the traditional image of Merlin as he disguises himself as an aged warlock who goes by the name Dragoon the Great or Emrys. Since King Uther has outlawed all magic, Merlin is unable to use his powers openly in Camelot. Thus, this disguise allows Merlin to use magic without arousing any suspicion. Sherman observes that "Emrys is essentially the iconic image of Merlin that audiences readily recognize, with white hair, long beard, and flowing robes."[127] These transformations not only allow Merlin to practice magic incognito but also satisfy the audience's preconceived image of the ageing wizard.

Where there is light, there must be shadow; where there is good, evil inevitably lurks. Just as Merlin, the wise and generous sorcerer, guides Arthur towards his destiny as the once and future King, there exists a counterpart to his benevolence – Morgana le Fay. Her role and depiction vary across selected adaptations, but her character generally embodies themes of ambition, treachery, and the misuse of magic. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, Morgana is not explicitly featured, as the film focuses more on parodying Arthurian tropes of heroism and chivalry. However, in *Merlin*, Morgana undergoes a significant character arc, starting as a trusted friend and ally to Merlin and Arthur, eventually descending into darkness and becoming a formidable practitioner of dark magic, seeking revenge against those she perceives as her enemies, including Arthur and Merlin. Similarly, in *Excalibur,* Morgana is portrayed as a powerful sorceress and Arthur's half-sister who practices magic for wicked purposes, motivated by revenge and ambition. In contrast, *The Sword in the Stone* introduces the character of Madam Mim, who serves as a playful antagonist, showcasing the presence of dark magic in the absence of Morgana. Despite the differences in portrayal, both Morgana le Fay and Madam Mim underscore the enduring fascination and consequences of dark magic within the legendary kingdom of Camelot, offering contrasting perspectives on its role and impact within Arthurian lore.

Another prevalent motif among selected adaptations is the presence of magical objects, prominently the legendary sword Excalibur. As Lorraine Stock observes, "a sword in a stone is one of the 'stock elements' audiences expect in any version of the Camelot narrative."[128] The mystical sword of Arthurian lore embodies a profound symbolism that transcends its physical form. As Peterson notes, Excalibur represents the very essence of nobility and valour

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[127] Sherman, "Source," 95–96.
[128] Lorraine K. Stock, "Reinventing an Iconic Arthurian Moment: The Sword in the Stone in Films and Television," *Arthuriana* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 66.

within the realm of Arthuriana. Furthermore, Peterson suggests that every great hero wielded a weapon with a purpose: to avenge, protect, or hunt,[129] yet Excalibur surpasses mere functionality. This legendary blade has evolved into a symbol of strength, pride, and power of a bygone era. The notion of swords as vessels of immense power is further underscored by Peterson, who suggests that such weapons are forged to be effectively wielded only by a select few or a chosen one.[130] The weapons of such power are often forged with the help of supernatural forces and later become entwined with the destinies of great heroes who wield them in epic battles and quests. After the hero passes at the end of their fight or quest, Peterson observes that the hero's weapon is usually thrown back into a lake afterwards.[131] In other words, the weapon is returned to the depths of a lake, perhaps to prevent others from wielding their formidable armament, a practice mirrored in Arthur's noble act of returning Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake. Theresa Bane builds upon this notion by highlighting the broader symbolism of swords:

> Swords are widely symbolic. They represent authority, justice, power, protection, and righteousness, as well as the qualities people want in heroes and kings to have: courage, honor, strength, and truthfulness. To have a sword was literally to hold the power to change the course of history in the palm of the hand.[132]

The notion that possessing a sword equates to holding the power to change the course of history underscores their immense cultural and narrative significance. Each of the selected adaptations presents the marvellous sword in different ways. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail,* the significance of Excalibur is downplayed in favour of humour and absurdity. However, it still includes elements consistent with traditional narratives: "The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying, by divine providence, that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I'm your king!"[133] This serves as a humorous nod to the traditional Arthurian legend but is not explored in depth. Despite the comedic tone, the scene still underscores Excalibur's symbolic significance as a representation of Arthur's kingship.

Contrastively, in *Merlin*, Excalibur embodies multiple layers of significance. Crafted by Merlin himself and burnished in the dragon's fiery breath, "the sword was forged for Arthur

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[129] Peterson et al., *Mythology in Our Midst*, 52.
[130] Peterson et al., *Mythology in Our Midst*, 53.
[131] Peterson et al., *Mythology in Our Midst*, 53.
[132] Theresa Bane, *Encyclopedia of Mythological Objects* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2020), 8.
[133] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:11:02 to 00:11:21.

and him alone,"[134] hence is destined to be wielded solely by Arthur. Its creation symbolises the union of destiny and magic. Originally created as a weapon against supernatural threats, the sword underscores its purpose in safeguarding the land from dark forces. To prevent the sword from falling into the wrong hands and being misused, Merlin hides it where no mortal can find it, casting it at the bottom of Lake Avalon and later thrusting it into a stone. When Arthur loses faith in himself and questions his worthiness to be king, Merlin takes him to the stone and makes up a story about the test of kingship – pulling out the sword from the stone to restore Arthur's faith and solidify Arthur's destiny as the rightful king. However, Stock argues that the sword withdrawal in *Merlin* downplays the significance of the kingship's divine approval.[135] As Arthur prepares to pull out the sword, viewers can see a subtle cue – Merlin's eyes turn gold, a characteristic associated with sorcerers when they use magic. This implies Merlin's magical involvement in Arthur's ability to withdraw the sword. However, as already stated, the test aimed to restore Arthur's self-confidence rather than affirming his divine right to rule. Nonetheless, Excalibur in *Merlin* not only embodies the union of magic and destiny but also serves as a powerful symbol of honour, duty, and kingship.

In Disney's adaptation *The Sword in the Stone*, Excalibur serves solely as a central symbol of destiny and potential. Unlike other adaptations, where Excalibur is crafted by powerful sorcerers or bestowed upon Arthur by divine entities, usually Lady of the Lake, in this film, Excalibur appeared by a miracle. Its presence ignites the quest for a rightful ruler of England as is written on the sword under the hilt: "Whoso pullet out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise king born of England."[136] *The Sword in the Stone* represents the idea that true greatness can come from unexpected places and that true leadership is not determined by birthright alone. Arthur's ability to pull the enchanted sword from the stone signifies his innate worthiness and destiny to become king. Through Arthur, an orphan not of proper birth, Excalibur symbolises the ultimate manifestation of magical destiny and the potential of the underdog rising to greatness. Roberta Davidson labels such idealisation as 'Distory', short for Disney history, implying a "portrayal of history not as it was, but as it should have been."[137]

Unlike the rest of the selected adaptations, *Excalibur* delves into the legend of the sword with a darker, more epic tone. Initially, Excalibur symbolises the unity of a land in turmoil, which

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[134] *Merlin*, season 1, episode 9, "Excalibur," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Julian Jones, aired November 15, 2008, 00:28:33 to 00:28:40.

[135] Stock, "Reinventing," 79.

[136] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone*, 00:03:00 to 00:03:09.

[137] Roberta Davidson, "The 'Reel' Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in 'Camelot, Excalibur, and King Arthur,'" *Arthuriana* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 79.

was bestowed upon Uther Pendragon by Merlin, who retrieved it from the Lady of the Lake. The sword becomes a beacon of hope and a symbol of the rise of Lord Uther, as he unites the land under his reign through alliances and the enforcement of the King's will, gained with "Excalibur, sword of kings from the dawn of time."[138] When Uther meets his demise, he thrusts the sword into the stone believing that "nobody shall wield Excalibur but [him]."[139] The sword thus becomes a physical manifestation of divine right and legitimacy to the throne. Merlin's prophecy, "He who draw the sword from the stone he shall be king […] Arthur, you're the one,"[140] finds its fulfilment when the young Arthur, unaware of his royal lineage, effortlessly retrieves Excalibur and thus unwittingly fulfils Merlin's prophecy and reveals his destiny as the rightful king. Collins emphasises that the sword represents Arthur's power, his ability to lead and protect his kingdom[141] as well as the legitimacy of kingship, justice, and union. Furthermore, the act of pulling the sword from the stone signifies a sacred connection between the ruler and the land, as noted by Peterson: "To give away Excalibur would be to give away all of England."[142] This sacred bond between the king and the land emphasises the importance of Arthur's role in preserving the unity and justice that Excalibur symbolises.

In essence, magic, magical objects, and the mystical influence of sorcerers are undoubtedly essential elements across selected adaptations of Arthurian legends. These elements serve as a multifaceted narrative device, driving the plot forward. From Merlin's enchantments, the legendary sorcerer who guides Arthur's destiny, to the mystical objects like the marvellous sword Excalibur, magic embodies both power and mystery. Moreover, sorcery often serves as a double-edged sword, capable of unlocking powerful forces for both creation and destruction, healing and harm, loyalty and treachery. Each adaptation offers a unique perspective on these magical elements, enriching the cinematic universe of Arthurian lore.

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[138] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 00:14:24 to 00:14:27.
[139] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 00:22:17 to 00:22:24.
[140] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 00:22:42 to 00:22:54.
[141] Collins, "Review," 57.
[142] Peterson et al., *Mythology in Our Midst*, 54.

People of Camelot

In examining the selected adaptations, it becomes evident that the portrayal of female characters often adheres to traditional and limiting gender roles. Dominated by male characters, such as King Arthur, Merlin, and Lancelot, these narratives position men as the central forces driving the plot, making critical decisions, and engaging in battles, while the women's roles are largely reactive. Jennifer Edwards notes that "women who seek power or a change in status – even if they begin by standing for the weak or oppressed – turn out to be evil, dangerous, and threatening to the more proper male authority. […] only women who maintain traditional gender roles and accept humility can succeed."[143] This dichotomy is usually illustrated by the contrasting portrayals of Guinevere and Morgana. Ann Howey highlights this contrast between Guinevere's portrayal as good-natured and Morgana as "the counter-hero [who] violates the norms of the Arthurian patriarchy in some way."[144] This pattern underscores the persistent theme that only women who conform to traditional gender roles can succeed. Moreover, Cindy Mediavilla observes that:

> In most Arthurian retelling, Morgan's actions are motivated by her complex relationships with men: Arthur, usually depicted as her half-brother, with whom she may or may not conceive a son, Mordred; Merlin, often the architect behind Arthur's ascension to the throne; and Uther, Arthur's father and, in many cases, the primary cause of Morgan's unfortunate circumstance.[145]

Thus, this chapter will explore how these portrayals reinforce or challenge the limitations placed on female agency within these narratives.

The primary female characters in *Excalibur* – Guinevere, Morgana, and Igrayne – are central to the narrative yet are often portrayed through traditional and limiting gender roles. Guinevere is central to the narrative as King Arthur's queen and the lover of Sir Lancelot. Her character is often passive, largely defined by her relationships with men rather than her own agency. This aligns with traditional patriarchal narratives where women's identities are secondary to men's. Her affair with Lancelot is pivotal, setting in motion the events that lead to Camelot's downfall. Guinevere's infidelity is depicted as a betrayal not only of her husband but also of the ideal of Camelot itself, suggesting that female sexual agency is a threat to male authority and social order. This narrative choice reflects a common trope in

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[143] Jennifer C. Edwards, "Casting, Plotting, and Enchanting: Arthurian Women in Starz's 'Camelot' and the BBC's 'Merlin,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 58.

[144] Ann F. Howey, "Arthur and Adaptation," *Arthuriana* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 41.

[145] Cindy Mediavilla, "From 'Unthinking Stereotype' to Fearless Antagonist: The Evolution of Morgan Le Fay on Television,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 50.

literature and film where women are blamed for the disruption of male-dominated power structures.

Igrayne, Arthur's mother, is another figure whose role is primarily defined by her relationships with men. Her portrayal as a passive object of desire, manipulated by both Uther Pendragon and Merlin, highlights the limited agency given to the female characters within the narrative. For instance, the seduction scene is marked by a lack of consent and agency on the part of her character, reinforcing patriarchal notions of male dominance and female submission. Igrayne's consent and desires are irrelevant, underscoring her role as a pawn in the power struggles of men. Eventually, her body becomes a mere vessel for Merlin's schemes as Uther must promise Merlin that "what issues from [Uther's] lust shall be his,"[146] completely excluding Igrayne and her feelings from this decision. Furthermore, Uther's aggressive pursuit of Igrayne exemplifies toxic masculinity, showcasing his power through domination and control over her.

Morgana, on the other hand, is portrayed as a powerful sorceress whose ambition and manipulation drive much of the conflict in the latter half of the film. Her character embodies the archetype of the dangerous, power-hungry woman, reinforcing negative stereotypes about female ambition and intelligence. Morgana's character falls into the trope of a dangerous and seductive woman driven by anger and revenge. She seduces Merlin to learn his magical secret, and then she traps him "by the same sorcery [Merlin] used to deceive [her] mother."[147] Jenna Busch calls Morgana "an early feminist fantasy icon" as she "takes revenge on [Merlin] who uses her mother as a sexual pawn without regard for her feelings or intentions *and* who kidnaps her little brother."[148] Her depiction as a manipulative villain further demonises female power, suggesting that a woman's quest for power is inherently corrupting. In contrast to Guinevere, who starts as a symbol of purity, but only her affair with Lancelot tarnishes her image, Morgana is portrayed as corrupt from the start, using her sexuality and sorcery for manipulation and control.

Excalibur intertwines sexuality with power, often depicting female sexuality as a threat to male authority. Guinevere's affair with Lancelot and Morgana's seduction of Arthur are both seen as disruptions to the social order. Guinevere's affair with Lancelot undermines Arthur's reign, while Morgana's seduction of Arthur leads to the birth of Mordred, the eventual

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[146] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 00:09:03 to 00:09:07.
[147] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 1:30:00 to 1:30:10.
[148] "The Twisted Ambition of Excalibur's Morgana," Syfy, published January 18, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfy-wire/the-twisted-ambition-of-excaliburs-morgana.

destroyer of Camelot and Arthur's bane. As Collins notes, "The result of their incestuous union, Mordred, embodies Morgana's hatred for Arthur and all his civilising works. [...] She wants to destroy kingship and return the land to its pre-patriarchal condition of magically complicated disorder."[149] However, her ultimate defeat and the vilification of her character undermine the potential for feminist subversion. Thus, these narratives further perpetuate the notion that female sexuality is dangerous and must be controlled or punished to maintain stability.

A more contemporary adaptation, the BBC *Merlin*, modernises many elements of the classic tales while also reflecting and reshaping the gender dynamics traditionally associated with Arthurian legends. *Merlin* features several prominent female characters, including Morgana, Gwen (Guinevere), and Morgause. Edwards notes that "while the show is willing to alter the typical canon of Arthurian legend in playful ways – and suggest that women *can* be powerful – they are not willing to alter their characters' fates enough to allow them to fulfil that promise."[150] Despite the series' attempts to give these characters depth and agency, it often circles back to traditional tropes.

Guinevere, often referred to as Gwen, starts as Morgana's maidservant but eventually becomes Queen of Camelot. As Edward notes, "*Merlin* plays with traditional understanding of Guinevere's character, first by nicknaming her, and second by making Gwen a serving maid to Lady Morgana."[151] Her character is initially portrayed as kind and humble, yet her journey to queenship often depends on the actions and decisions of male characters, particularly Arthur. While Gwen exhibits moments of strength and independence, her character development is frequently overshadowed by her relationships with Arthur and Lancelot, reinforcing the notion that her worth is tied to her romantic entanglements. Her character also falls into the trope of the virtuous woman whose love and loyalty define her worth. Her affair with Lancelot, although brief, is depicted as a significant moral failing, reinforcing traditional notions of female purity and fidelity. As Edwards states, "We as an audience still expect women to be properly feminine – like Gwen, remaining pure, innocent, and quiet supporters of their men – rather than ruthless power-seekers – such as Morgana – and that is what this show delivers."[152]

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[149] Collins, "Review," 58.
[150] Edwards, "Casting," 57.
[151] Edwards, "Casting," 60.
[152] Edwards, "Casting," 76.

The casting of Angel Coulby as Gwen sparked controversy due to her appearance, challenging traditional representations of the historical and mythological character of Guinevere from established Arthurian lore. Coulby, a dark-skinned actress of Afro-Guyanese descent, portrayed a character traditionally depicted as blonde and fair-skinned. Critics like Stock expressed reservations about this casting choice, arguing that it deviated from historical and mythological accuracy.[153] However, as David Tollerton explains, such a casting decision was possible because "[*Merlin*] pitches itself as an adaptation of Arthurian legend rather than a specific body of Arthurian literature. So when making casting decisions, the creators of *Merlin* did not have their hands tied by close association with any specific text."[154] Furthermore, mythology and fantasy are flexible enough to allow for different interpretations and depictions of characters, reflecting contemporary values of inclusivity and representation. Edwards quotes Syfy, which suggests the actress chosen for the role of Gwen was unattractive: "If there's one thing Gwen might wish for, it's that she could be just a little bit prettier. With her wonky teeth, uncooperative hair, not even the most charitable person could call her beautiful."[155] Such a view is problematic as it places unnecessary emphasis on conventional beauty standards, overshadowing the significance of diverse representation. Despite such critiques, it is noteworthy that the ethnicity of characters is not something the citizens of Camelot care about or even notice, highlighting a more inclusive and accepting narrative within the series.

Morgause, Morgana's half-sister, is introduced as a powerful and enigmatic sorceress. She plays a significant role in influencing Morgana and challenging Camelot. Morgause embodies the archetype of the powerful, independent woman who exists outside the traditional gender norms of Camelot. The series thus frequently associates female power with treachery and malevolence.

Morgana undergoes a significant transformation from a compassionate ward of Uther to a powerful and vengeful sorceress. Initially depicted as a strong and independent woman concerned with justice, Morgana's descent into villainy is driven by her discovery of increasing magical powers and her fear of and opposition to Uther's tyrannic rule against magic. She seeks solace from other magical folk and bonds with the druid Alvarr, who is gathering an army to overthrow the king. She expresses her feelings toward Uther: "Every

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[153] Stock, "Reinventing," 74.

[154] David C. Tollerton, "Multiculturalism, Diversity, and Religious Tolerance in Modern Britain and the BBC's 'Merlin,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 115.

[155] Edwards, "Casting," 60.

day o must look Uther in the eye, knowing if he were to discover who I really am, he'd have me killed."[156] After Uther finds out Alvarr is plotting against him, he sentences him to death. Morgana is the only person in Camelot who challenges Uther, who has generally been good-natured toward Morgana, exemplified by her confrontation of Uther for ordering the execution of a druid:

> How many more must you kill before you're satisfied? […] Is it any wonder [Alvarr] wanted you dead? You, who have persecuted his kind day after day, year after year? […] You are an arrogant fool. You are deaf and blind to the very needs of the people you profess to serve and protect. The people will take it no longer […] they are rising up against you. From this day forward, I do not know you. From this day forward I disown you. You, Uther, you will go to Hell.[157]

Driven by fear and hatred, she eventually joins the druids' rebellion. This transition aligns her with the stereotypical 'evil witch' archetype. Morgana's character arc is marked by her increasing isolation and resentment. Her turn to darkness and alliance with Morgause is portrayed as a tragic fall from grace. Howey observes that "Morgana's magic has taken her somewhere that [Merlin's] magic never would…they've gone in completely opposite direction,"[158] implying that she could not bear the power of magic because she is a woman "as if her growing sense of power darkened her heart."[159] Even the Great Dragon stresses the dichotomy between the main practitioners of the series: "She is the darkness to [Merlin's] light, the hatred to [Merlin's] love."[160]

Initially, Morgana's primary goal is to dethrone Uther, an enemy to the magic practitioners and thus a direct threat to her own survival. However, Morgana later discovers that Uther is her biological father, who does not acknowledge her as his daughter; hence, she wants to claim the throne. As Edwards aptly states, "Morgana's vengeance is thus justified, and yet the plots still portray her as evil and treacherous."[161] Moreover, Chandler notices that "Morgana [plays] what is essentially the legendary Mordred role, turning against her father."[162] Though ultimately portrayed as a villain, Morgana represents a powerful form of resistance against the

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[156] *Merlin*, season 2, episode 11, "The Witch's Quickening," directed by Alice Troughton, written by Jake Michie, aired December 5, 2009, 00:19:50 to 00:19:57.
[157] "The Witch's Quickening," 00:33:39 to 00:34:38.
[158] Howey, "Arthur and Adaptation," 44.
[159] Edwards, "Casting," 59.
[160] *Merlin,* season 3, episode 2, "The Tears of Uther Pendragon Pt 2," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Julian Jones, aired September 18, 2010, 00:05:35 to 00:05:40.
[161] Edwards, "Casting," 60.
[162] Chandler, "Pendragons," 109.

oppressive rule of Uther Pendragon. Her character's complexity adds depth to the portrayal of female power, even if it is ultimately portrayed as extreme and negative.

In contrast to the selected films, which focus on a single aspect of Morgana's (or Madam Mim's) character or motivations, *Merlin's* Morgana is portrayed with depth and complexity, allowed by the nature of the adaptation. Daniel Walters asserts that episodic television is one of the best mediums for developing characters: "Slow, realistic character development is the one thing serialized television can do better than almost any other medium."[163] Mediavilla supports this notion that character transformation can be the most profound in a series: "A two- or even four-hour movie or miniseries provides little time for delving into a character's psyche, a five-year TV series, like *Merlin*, presents many opportunities for characters to evolve from one season to the next."[164] Consequently, the series effectively illustrates Morgana's motivations for her actions by starting the narrative before she discovers her magical powers. This approach allows the audience to understand Morgana as a person first, adding depth to her eventual transformation into a magical entity.

The Sword in the Stone features very few female characters, and those present are often depicted through a limiting and stereotypical lens. The primary female character, Madam Mim, serves as a counterpoint to Merlin and embodies many negative stereotypes associated with women in positions of power. As Heather Worthington observes, the film depicts "an idyllic childhood, largely free from women."[165]

Madam Mim is portrayed as an old, eccentric witch whose magic is chaotic and harmful. Unlike Merlin, whose magic is shown as wise and benevolent, Mim's power is depicted as dangerous and malevolent. Her physical appearance, characterised by exaggerated features and a lack of traditional beauty, further underscores her role as a comedic villain. Additionally, Madam Mim's ability to switch between her true form and a beautiful woman highlights the themes of deception and dichotomy of the 'ugly witch' versus the 'beautiful enchantress,' where beauty is often associated with goodness and ugliness with evil, a common trope in fairy tales rooted in misogynistic depictions of powerful women. The lyrics of her song illustrate her ability to transform her appearance while simultaneously

[163] "The five best examples of character development on TV," Inlander, published March 30, 2011, https://www.inlander.com/Bloglander/archives/2011/03/30/the-five-best-examples-of-character-development-on-tv.
[164] Mediavilla, "From 'Unthinking Stereotype,'" 52.
[165] Heather Worthington, "From Children's Story to Adult Fiction: T.H. White's 'The Once and Future King,'" *Arthuriana* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 99.

acknowledging the superficiality of beauty: "I can be beautiful, lovely and fair, silverly voice, long purple hair […] but it's only skin deep, I'm an ugly old creep."[166] She suggests that beauty can be manufactured or altered at will. However, such beauty is 'only skin deep,' implying that the transformation does not change who she is.

Madam Mim's challenge to Merlin in a magical duel serves as a climactic moment in the film. Her transformation into various frightening creatures underscores her association with chaos and malevolence. The duel itself is not merely a physical battle but a contest of wits and magical abilities. Despite Madam Mim's power, she is ultimately outmatched by Merlin's cleverness and knowledge. Worthington notes that "[Merlin] uses the medical knowledge gained in his backwardly-lived life and, in 'a master stroke…turned himself successively into the microbes, not yet discovered, of hiccoughs (*sic*), scarlet fever, mumps, whooping cough, measles and heat spots,' from which combination Madame Mim immediately expires."[167] Madam Mim's defeat reinforces the narrative that male wisdom and methodical thinking prevail over female unpredictability and emotion-driven power. Her character embodies the trope of the 'dangerous woman' whose power must be controlled or neutralised by a male figure.

In contrast, the female animals Wart encounters in his various transformations, such as the female squirrel, are depicted in a more positive but still stereotypical light. These characters are often shown as nurturing and concerned with romance, reinforcing traditional gender roles even within the animal kingdom. The interactions between the male and female animal characters during Wart's transformations are set within a romantic context, often depicting the female animals actively pursuing the male characters, which might initially appear to subvert traditional gender norms by showing females as the initiators in courtship. However, this portrayal reinforces the stereotype that female desire is uncontrollable and primarily driven by natural instinct rather than individual choice or agency. As Merlin sings during the encounter with squirrels: "It's a natural phenomenon, state of being, a frame of mind […] there's no sensible explanation for this discomboomeration […] it's most illogical, most confuse-ling, most bamboozling […] thing."[168] This portrayal subtly underscores the idea that female worth is naturally tied to their relationships with males rather than their own qualities or capabilities.

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[166] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone,* 01:02:05 to 01:02:29.
[167] Worthington, "From Children's Story," 101.
[168] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone,* 00:43:17 to 00:44:13.

Additionally, Worthington observes that "Sir Ector does not appear to have a wife, and indeed, the world of Arthur's childhood is almost exclusively masculine: the absence of women appears to guarantee the stability and happiness of the Wart's early life."[169] This perspective is influenced by T. H. White's own dysfunctional youth. Worthington notes that White reflected his personal experiences in his work, constructing an idealised childhood for Arthur that excluded feminine influence, reflecting his own experience with an emotionally distant mother.[170] The creation of a world largely devoid of women, where male authority and rationality dominate, suggests that the stability and happiness of Wart's childhood were achieved through this exclusion.

This theme of masculinity equating to stability and femininity to dysfunction could be observed in *Excalibur*, as Worthington asserts: "[the movie depicts] a direct contrast between Arthur's idyllic (masculine) childhood and the dysfunctional (feminine) boyhood of Mordred."[171] In both *The Sword in the Stone* and *Excalibur*, the absence or negative portrayal of female influence underscores a theme that aligns masculinity with stability and happiness, while femininity is associated with dysfunction and emotional turmoil. In *Excalibur*, the contrast between Arthur and Mordred's childhoods highlights the consequences of different gender influences. Arthur's masculine upbringing is depicted as ideal, as it provides him with the qualities needed to become a noble and just king. In contrast, Mordred's upbringing, marked by his mother Morgana's influence, is shown as corrupt and dysfunctional, contributing to his eventual role as a villain.

Similarly, women in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* are largely peripheral, often used to underscore the absurdity of the male characters' quests. The female characters, such as the peasant woman, the women in Castle Anthrax, and the character of Zoot, serve primarily as comedic devices rather than fully realised individuals. Their portrayal not only reinforces traditional stereotypes but also satirises the marginalisation of women in historical and mythological narratives.

The anarcho-syndicalist peasant woman, although given a brief moment to voice political opinions, is portrayed more for comedic effect rather than as a character with depth or agency. Her interactions with King Arthur are designed to mainly mock Arthur, using her as an amplifier to critique the absurdity of medieval hierarchies.

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[169] Worthington, "From Children's Story," 100.
[170] Worthington, "From Children's Story," 100.
[171] Worthington, "From Children's Story," 113.

The women of Castle Anthrax, particularly Zoot and her identical twin sister Dingo, are depicted as sex-starved nuns eager to seduce Sir Galahad. This portrayal reduces them to mere sexual objects, emphasizing their desire in a way that is meant to be humorous but ultimately reinforces the stereotype of women as temptresses. Zoot provokes Sir Galahad by saying: "we are but eight score young blondes and brunettes, all between sixteen and nineteen-and-a-half, cut off in [the] castle with no one to protect [them]" and whose occupations are "bathing, dressing, undressing, [and] making exciting underwear."[172] Their characterisation lacks depth and agency, existing primarily to provide comic relief through exaggerated sexual behaviour. This whole sequence parodies the trope of the damsel in distress. Instead of needing rescue, the women are eager to seduce Galahad, subverting the traditional narrative and highlighting the absurdity of the sexualisation of female characters. Gilliam asserts that "there were always these places in the Grail quest, always castles with the most beautiful maidens."[173] Christine Neufeld completes Gilliam's statement: "The Castle of Maidens that appears in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and Malory is but one exaggerated example of the various undefended castles filled with nubile maidens that litter the Arthurian landscape."[174] The film's treatment of sexuality also includes instances where female characters are denied any meaningful power or influence. For example, the Lady of the Lake, a significant figure in Arthurian legend, is reduced to a brief, almost dismissive mention. As Worthington observes, "In the implicitly masculine practice of questing for adventure, women figure as disruptive or subversive factors."[175] This perspective underscores how the film marginalises female characters, reducing their roles to mere plot devices within the male-dominated storyline.

The witch trial scene is a moment that satirises the misogyny and irrationality of witch hunts. The scene humorously critiques the patriarchal and superstitious practices that led to the persecution of women. The villagers' absurd logic of determining whether she is a witch is "if she weighs the same as a duck, she's made of wood; and therefore, a witch,"[176] underscores the irrational basis of witch hunts. The woman accused of being a witch is a victim of nonsensical accusations, highlighted by the ridiculous exchange: "How do you know if she's

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[172] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:38:32 to 00:39:00.
[173] Christine M. Neufeld, "Coconuts in Camelot: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in the Arthurian Literature Course," *Florilegium* 19, no. 1 (2002): 130.
[174] Neufeld, "Coconuts," 130.
[175] Worthington, "From Children's Story," 109.
[176] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:19:56 to 00:20:15.

a witch?" "She looks like one!"[177] They even dressed her up as a witch, pointing out, "She has got a wart,"[178] further emphasising the absurdity of the situation. This scene effectively uses comedy to expose and ridicule the unfounded and discriminatory nature of historical witch hunts.

In essence, all of the selected adaptations draw on Arthurian legend, which traditionally places women in secondary roles. The recurring imagery of swords and the emphasis on male heroism and valour are contrasted with the more passive and ornamental roles assigned to female characters. Tara Foster argues that "despite paying lip service to feminist ideas about women's empowerment, both shows offer narratives that ultimately reinscribe patriarchal values."[179] Rather than subverting these roles, the adaptations reinforce the medieval societal norms where men are the heroes and women are either damsels in distress or malevolent sorceresses.

As already stated, each of the selected adaptations presents a unique take on the legend, including the portrayal of the legendary King Arthur, his knights, and the quest for the Holy Grail. Through their narratives, these adaptations reveal the hierarchical structures, exploitation, and ideological control. This part of the chapter will explore the depiction of class struggle, power dynamics, and ideological apparatus within the selected adaptations. Each adaptation portrays a clear feudal society with a clear class hierarchy, where power is concentrated in the hands of the ruling class, typically represented by King Uther or Arthur and the noble knights.

In analysing *Excalibur* and *The Sword in the Stone*, it becomes evident that these works offer limited engagement with themes of class struggle and power dynamics, primarily focusing on the surface-level dichotomy between the ruling class and peasantry. While *Excalibur* depicts the traditional feudal system within its clear hierarchies and power structures, it largely focuses on the legendary and mythic elements of the Arthurian legend. The nobility, represented by characters such as King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, hold power over the peasantry. This stratification is evident from the opening scenes, where Uther Pendragon's forceful claim to the throne through the sword Excalibur establishes his dominance.

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[177] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:17:42 to 00:17:46.
[178] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:18:10 to 00:18:12.
[179] Tara Foster and Jon Sherman, "King Arthur in the Twenty-First Century:'Kaamelott', BBC's 'Merlin', and Starz's 'Camelot,'" *Arthuriana* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 3.

The peasantry's role is largely passive; they serve the lords and have little agency or representation. For instance, when Arthur pulls Excalibur from the stone, it is not the masses that celebrate, but the knights and noblemen who acknowledge his right to rule. Arthur's rise to power, marked by his retrieval of Excalibur, symbolises the legitimisation of his rule through divine right. Arthur himself asserts his authority when he declares, "I am King. And this is Excalibur, sword of kings from the dawn of time."[180] This proclamation reinforces the idea that rule is preordained and justified by a higher power. This divine justification serves to cover the underlying class oppression and maintain the status quo, reflecting Marx's concept of ideology as a tool used by the ruling class to perpetuate its dominance. Moreover, Merlin represents the intellectual class that perpetuates the ruling ideology. His guidance to Arthur, often mystical and cryptic, can be seen as manipulating knowledge to sustain Arthur's reign. Merlin's role ensures the continuity of the feudal order, demonstrating how intellectuals can function as agents of the ruling class in maintaining hegemony.

Additionally, in *Excalibur*, the dialogue style is marked by high diction. This formal and elevated language is consistent among the characters, much like the portrayal of King Artur in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Such language is associated with nobility, authority, and the ruling class. It reflects the ideology that those in power are inherently noble and deserving of their status. Thus, this use of high diction can be seen as a way to legitimise the ruling class's authority. However, as Ellen Bishop points out, "only Merlin can also speak ironically, and it is he who provides this otherwise straight high mythic story with reduced comic moments."[181] Merlin's irony can also be interpreted as a form of resistance to the dominant ideology. Bishop continues by noting that the dialogues in *Excalibur* are:

> [...] weighted and few, often centered on enigmatic comments about the "nature of life and death." This comes into sharp contrast with *The Holy Grail* where the conversations are multiple, endless, and constantly interrupting one another, the topics ranging from the procurement of shrubberies to questions about people's favorite colors.[182]

The comedic discourse in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* further undermines the serious nature of traditional mythic narratives. In essence, *Excalibur* upholds and legitimises the existing power structures through its serious and elevated discourse. In contrast, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* mocks these structures through its comedic conversations.

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[180] Boorman, *Excalibur*, 00:47:19 to 00:47:27.
[181] Ellen Bishop, "Bakhtin, Carnival and Comedy: The New Grotesque in 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail,'" *Film Criticism* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 58.
[182] Bishop, "Bakhtin," 58.

Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* similarly focuses on the narrative of individual merit and destiny. The nobility in this adaptation is represented by characters such as Sir Ector and Kay, who wield power over the lower classes, exemplified by Arthur (Wart), who serves as squire. In both *Excalibur* and *The Sword in the Stone,* Arthur is raised as a squire, and despite his noble birth, unknown to him and others, Arthur is treated as a lower-class individual, performing menial tasks and receiving little respect. This dynamic illustrates the exploitation inherent in the feudal system, where one's social status dictates their value and opportunities. For instance, Wart's chores and responsibilities are undervalued, and his aspirations are dismissed by those in power. This portrayal highlights how the feudal system suppresses the lower classes' potential, reinforcing the status quo that keeps the ruling class in control. However, Wart's eventual rise to power challenges this dynamic by suggesting that merit, rather than birthright, should determine one's position in society.

Magic plays a central role in *The Sword in the Stone*, serving as a metaphor for knowledge and enlightenment. Merlin embodies the role of the intellectual, who seeks to enlighten the oppressed. His magical abilities and vast knowledge represent the power of education and critical thinking to challenge and transform society. As Merlin repeatedly says throughout the film: "Knowledge is the foundation for any true power."[183] His teachings and guidance help Wart transcend his humble origins, symbolising the potential for education and knowledge to disrupt the established hierarchy. However, the film also portrays the resistance of the ruling class to such ideological challenges. Sir Ector and Kay dismiss Merlin's teachings as nonsense, clinging to their conventional beliefs and authority. This resistance could reflect the ruling class's tendency to suppress revolutionary ideas that threaten their dominance.

In both *Excalibur* and *The Sword in the Stone*, Arthur's ascension to the throne through the retrieval of the sword represents the possibility of social mobility. This moment challenges the established social order by demonstrating that individual merit and destiny can elevate someone who is perceived as a lower class to the highest position in society – king.

Each of the selected adaptations portrays a clear feudal society with a distinct class hierarchy, where power is held by the ruling class. However, *Merlin* offers a deeper exploration of the tensions between the ruling class and the oppressed, particularly through the persecution of people with magic and the use of ideology to maintain power. Will Hodgkinson reflects that

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[183] Reitherman, *The Sword in the Stone,* 00:15:26 to 00:15:30.

"the thrust of the story is shaped by basic modern fears: mysterious and untameable forces that threaten the safety, stability, and most of all, familiarity of life inside Camelot."[184]

King Uther Pendragon, and later his son Arthur, represent the ruling elite, holding absolute authority over the kingdom. The knights and noblemen, such as Sir Lancelot and Sir Gwaine, enjoy privileges and power, whereas the commoners, including Merlin and Gwen, endure a life of servitude and limited agency. The relationship between Merlin and Arthur exemplifies this dynamic. While Merlin's magical abilities often save Arthur and Camelot, he is still bound by his servant status. The series frequently highlights Merlin's subservience, even as he performs tasks that are vital to the kingdom's survival.

In *Merlin,* magic serves as both a source of power and a tool of ideological control. King Uther's rigid anti-magic policies and the enforcement of his laws through fear and repression reflect the repressive apparatus (RSA) used to maintain control. Magic, in this context, symbolises a potential threat to the established order, representing the revolutionary potential of the oppressed classes. By criminalising magic, Uther maintains his authority and controls potential threats, much like how ruling classes historically suppress revolutionary ideologies. As Tollerton observes, "Uther's war on magic represents the perils of indiscriminately suppressing diversity and free expression in the name of peace and stability."[185] Similarly, Edwards adds, "Given Uther's hostility to magic, its use becomes an opportunity for him to demonstrate his masculine authority, his dominance over this disorderly world, and his control of his realm."[186] This sentiment is echoed by a critical villager in the very first minutes of the series, "There is only one evil in this land, and it is not magic. It is you, with your hatred and your ignorance."[187] Morgana, unsurprisingly, also critiques Uther's rule, stating, "A king is wise and just. You are neither. You rule only with the sword.[188] […] You do not care for me or anyone but yourself, you're driven mad with power. You are a tyrant!"[189]

As already stated, class conflict is a recurring theme, particularly in the tension between Uther and the magical community. The Druids and other magical beings, marginalised and

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[184] "Stone castles, sword battles and talking dragons – Merlin's back," Television & radio, The Guardian, accessed April 29, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2010/sep/09/merlin-series-three.

[185] Tollerton, "Multiculturalism," 120.

[186] Edwards, "Casting," 68.

[187] "The Dragon's Call," 00:03:37 to 00:03:48.

[188] *Merlin,* season 1, episode 12, "To Kill the King," directed by Stuart Orme, written by Jake Michie, aired December 6, 2008, 00:13:55 to 00:14:02.

[189] "To Kill the King," 00:14:45 to 00:14:53.

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oppressed, symbolise the revolutionary class challenging the dominant ideology. Merlin's secret use of magic to protect Arthur and Camelot further demonstrates the ideological contradictions within the kingdom. While Uther condemns magic, Camelot's survival often depends on it, highlighting the hypocrisy of the ruling ideology. This dynamics also reflect Marxist ideas about the exploitation of labour and the ways in which the ruling class benefits from the labour of the lower classes without offering corresponding recognition or reward. The following conversation between Gaius and Merlin illustrates the growing doubts among some in Camelot regarding Uther's attitude towards magic:

Gaius:	It is not Uther's job to be liked. It is Uther's job to protect the kingdom. Most of his methods are right. Sometimes he may go too far.
Merlin:	Really? You mean like executing anyone who even passes a sorcerer on the street?
Gaius:	Yes. But despite Uther's failings he has brought peace and prosperity to this kingdom.
Merlin:	But at what cost? At the cost of women and children, fathers and sons?[190]

Morgana's rebellion and her alignment with other marginalised groups, such as druids, symbolise the potential for an alliance between the oppressed classes and the ruling elite. Her use of magic to challenge Uther and later Arthur's authority highlights the revolutionary potential within the oppressed. However, Morgana's descent into tyranny also complicates this narrative, suggesting that the struggle for power can corrupt even those who initially fight against oppression.

The difference in attitude toward magic between father and son is evident as Arthur proposes a more tolerant approach:

Arthur:	The Druid was only in Camelot to collect supplies. He meant no harm. Is it really necessary to execute him?
Uther:	Absolutely necessary. Those who use magic cannot be tolerated.
Arthur:	The Druids are a peaceful people.
Uther:	Given the chance, they would return magic to the kingdom. They preach peace but conspire against me. We cannot appear weak.
Arthur:	Showing mercy can be a sign of strength.
Uther:	Our enemies will not see it that way. We have a responsibility to protect this kingdom. Executing the druid will send out a clear message.[191]

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[190] "To Kill the King," 00:28:50 to 00:29:20.
[191] *Merlin,* season 1, episode 8, "The Beginning of the End," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Howard Overman, aired November 8, 2008, 00:05:05 to 00:05:37.

Arthur's eventual rise to the throne and his attempts to create a more just and inclusive society represent a reformist approach within the ruling class. Arthur's vision of a united Camelot where magic is accepted mirrors the potential for progressive change. Later in the series, Arthur, who is now a king, proclaims, "From this day forth, the Druid people will be treated with the respect they deserve. I give you my word. I am truly sorry for what happened to you."[192] This statement underscores Arthur's commitment to reconciliation and justice, contrasting sharply with his father's oppressive policies. Chandler observes that "Arthur as a young man is doing the right thing in continually striving to break free from the faults and mistakes of his father, and the tragedy of his destiny is that he will never quite be able to,"[193] implying that Arthur's untimely death prevents him from fully realising his vision for a more inclusive Camelot. Thus, despite his efforts, Arthur's progressive reforms remain incomplete, leaving his vision only partially fulfilled.

Furthermore, the series explores themes of equality and justice through various subplots, such as Gwen's ascension to the throne or the inclusion of common-born knights like Sir Percival and Sir Elyan to the Round Table. These narratives suggest a gradual erosion of class barriers and the possibility of a more inclusive society. Gwen's crowning as a queen is a significant moment of agency, representing her journey from servitude to royalty. Edwards comments on this transformation, stating, "[Gwen's] servile status complicates her relationship with Arthur, who initially resists his feelings for her because of her rank. Almost all the other characters stress this class divide as an impenetrable barrier to Gwen and Arthur's love."[194] This class divide is further exemplified by Arthur and Gwen's conversation:

| Arthur: | What happened while I was staying with you, I'm afraid my father would never understand. |
| Gwen: | You don't have to explain. Perhaps when you are king, things will be different.[195] |

Uther's horror upon learning of their secret relationship underscores the severity of the class barrier. Edwards highlights a moment from the series, "Uther tells his son that it is possible to have a dalliance with a servant, but that a relationship is unacceptable, even going so far as to condemn Gwen to death when he realizes that Arthur is serious about her."[196] This reaction

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[192] *Merlin,* season 4, episode 10, "A Herald of the New Age," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Howard Overman, aired December 3, 2011, 00:39:05 to 00:39:28.

[193] Chandler, "Pendragons," 111.

[194] Edwards, "Casting," 60.

[195] *Merlin*, season 2, episode 2, "The Once and Future Queen," directed by David Moore, written by Howard Overman, aired September 26, 2009, 00:41:33 to 00:41:55.

[196] Edwards, "Casting," 61.

underscores the rigid social hierarchies enforced by Uther. However, as Chandler notes, "like many adolescents, [Arthur] learns to distance himself from blind obedience to his father and his father's beliefs."[197] Thus, it comes as no surprise that Arthur overcomes these objections and marries Gwen, further signifying the gradual transformation of the kingdom's social structure.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail's portrayal of class structure is both exaggerated and critical, using humour to highlight the absurdities of feudal society. King Arthur and his knights, representing the ruling elite, are depicted as clumsy and often clueless figures, highlighting the incompetence and absurdity of the nobility. The film humorously depicts the ridiculousness of feudal hierarchy and the arbitrary nature of power. Furthermore, the film presents different dialects to highlight social and power dynamics. Bishop observes that King Arthur and his knights speak in a high, archaic diction, while the guards (who ask about the coconut shells) and peasants use a modern, broad cockney accent.[198] This juxtaposition creates humour and critiques the languages of power and powerlessness.

This mocking of the nobility and the different dialects is evident in the "anarcho-syndicalist-peasant" scene, where King Arthur encounters peasants who, as Neufeld states, are usually "conveniently ignored in chivalric fantasies."[199] These peasants question Arthur's divine right to rule:

Dennis:	What I object to is that you automatically treat me like an inferior.
Arthur:	Well, I am king!
Dennis:	Oh king, eh, very nice! And how d'you get that, eh? By exploiting the workers! By 'anging on to outdated imperialist dogma which perpetuates the economic and social differences in our society. If there's ever going to be any progress with the…[200]

This exchange sets the stage for a broader critique of Arthur's legitimacy. The scene continues with further questioning of Arthur's authority, exposing the absurdity of his claim to power:

Arthur:	I am your king!
Woman:	Well, I didn't vote for you.
Arthur:	You don't vote for kings.
Woman:	How do you become king then?

[197] Chandler, "Pendragons," 107.
[198] Bishop, "Bakhtin," 57.
[199] Neufeld, "Coconuts," 140.
[200] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:09:30 to 00:09:50.

Arthur:	The Lady of the Lake…her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I'm your king!
Dennis:	Listen, strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.
Arthur:	Be quiet!
Dennis:	Well, but you can't expect to wield supreme executive power just because some watery tart threw a sword at you!
Arthur:	Shut up!
Dennis:	I mean, if I went 'round saying I was an emperor just because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me, they'd put me away.[201]

The interaction between King Arthur and the peasants underscores the stark class divisions. Arthur's claim to kingship based on divine right is mocked by a peasant who challenges the legitimacy of his rule, arguing instead for a more democratic and rational basis for leadership. This scene directly critiques the feudal ideology that legitimises the authority of the nobility through divine approval.

The portrayal of the peasants throughout the film further emphasises the obvious class divisions. They live in squalor, and the film's comedic exaggeration of these conditions serves to highlight the inherent inequalities and absurdities of the feudal system. This is depicted in the 'bring-out-your-dead' scene, where a man walks the streets of a filthy village with a cart full of filthy dead bodies. In the middle of this scene, Arthur and his squire 'ride' by and the villager remarks:

Villager:	Who's that, then?
The cart man:	I don't know. Must be a king.
Villager:	Why?
The cart man:	He hasn't got shit all over him.[202]

Bishop comments on this scene, "the aristocracy is made fun of, but so are the commoners, since they, presumably, are the ones covered with shit. This moment also makes fun of filmmakers' methods of coding the elite and the common people by how dirty they are."[203] The film humorously highlights the material conditions of the lower classes. The peasants are shown living in filth and poverty, contrasting sharply with the relatively more comfortable

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[201] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:10:53 to 00:11:43.
[202] Gilliam and Jones, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 00:08:41 to 00:08:47.
[203] Bishop, "Bakhtin," 58.

lives of the nobility. This disparity is exaggerated for comedic effect but serves to critique the exploitation and neglect of the common people by the ruling class.

Additionally, King Arthur himself is portrayed as a well-meaning but ultimately ineffective leader, unable to unite his knights and complete the quest for the Grail. This ineffectiveness is further highlighted by the absence of the character Merlin. Unlike traditional Arthurian tales where Merlin plays a crucial role as the wise advisor, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* subverts this trope. The lack of a guiding intellectual figure underscores the randomness and chaos of the knights' quest.

In conclusion, the selected adaptations of Arthurian legend, while varied in their approaches and styles, consistently reflect and reinforce traditional gender roles and class structures. From women's passive and reactive roles in *Excalibur* and *The Sword in the Stone* to the more complex portrayals in *Merlin*, these narratives reveal persistent themes of patriarchal dominance and limited female agency. Even in modern retellings like *Merlin*, stories often circle back to traditional tropes that emphasise male authority and female subordination.

Simultaneously, these adaptations underscore the rigid class structures, reflecting Marxist themes of class struggle and the maintenance of power by the ruling elite. The nobility, represented by characters such as King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, hold power over the peasantry, who are often depicted as passive and subservient. Ultimately, these adaptations not only illustrate the timeless appeal of Arthurian legends but also underscore the enduring challenge of subverting deep-rooted cultural narratives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the enduring appeal of King Arthur's tales, whether rooted in a historical figure or created to meet cultural needs, lies in their ability to evolve while preserving the core themes that resonate with people across centuries. Though varied in approaches and genres, the selected adaptations of Arthurian legends offer unique interpretations of the timeless themes of magic, gender, and class dynamics.

Even though magic is one of the central themes of all selected adaptations, one could say it is a character itself, the interpretation and purpose vary across each narrative. In *The Sword in the Stone*, magic serves as a tool for education and transformation, imparting essential lessons to Arthur, emphasising the importance of embracing one's inner strengths and virtues, and guiding him on his journey to becoming King Arthur. *Excalibur* presents magic as a powerful force intertwined with destiny, shaping the journey of King Arthur and his knights. Contrastively, in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, magic takes on a whimsically absurd role, serving as a comedic device to subvert traditional fantasy conventions. In *Merlin*, magic serves as both a gift and a burden as the young warlock navigates his destiny to protect and guide the once and future king, Arthur, in a land where magic is persecuted. Through such diverse interpretations, magic offers insight into the complexities of destiny, moral dilemmas, and power dynamics and reflects both the light and dark aspects of human nature.

When exploring the various portrayals of magic, it becomes evident that each adaptation brings its own perspective to the mystical characters and objects as well. While Monty Python's interpretation of the Arthurian legend features a comedic twist with Tim the Enchanter, other adaptations such as *Merlin*, *Excalibur*, and *The Sword in the Stone* place Merlin at the forefront as a central and influential figure in Arthurian mythology. Whether portrayed as a wise mentor or powerful wizard, Merlin plays a crucial role in shaping the destiny of King Arthur and the kingdom of Camelot, guiding adventurers through encounters with mythical creatures, enchanted objects, tests of valour, and essentially contributing to the development of their character. The interactions with characters like Morgana le Fay and Madam Mim further underscore the dichotomy between good and evil magic, exploring the eternal struggle between righteousness and corruption, light and shadow. Additionally, the representation of Excalibur in each of the selected adaptations aligns with the thematic elements and narrative focus of the story, whether it is destiny, power, satire, or magic. The symbolism of Excalibur extends beyond a mere sword, reflecting the pursuit of a brighter

future for Camelot and a sign of divine kingship. Ultimately, without the magic surrounding and influencing King Arthur, there would be no legend to tell. The Lady of the Lake, Excalibur, and Merlin all play significant roles that could not exist without magic.

Applying feminist and Marxist criticism to these adaptations of the Arthurian legend reveals the persistent influence of gender and class dynamics in shaping narratives. While each adaptation offers a unique interpretation, common themes emerge – women often remain marginalised or stereotyped, and class structures, though critiqued, are rarely fully dismantled. From a feminist perspective, these narratives predominantly depict women in passive and reactive roles defined by men. The stories also follow the traditional tropes that emphasise male authority and female subordination. This persistent theme underscores the patriarchal dominance inherent in these tales, where female ambition and power are often depicted as corrupt or dangerous. Although the anger of female protagonists is often justified, the audience still tends to cheer for the 'good' side, i.e. patriarchal norms.

For instance, *Excalibur* largely reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The limited agency afforded to female characters like Guinevere and Morgana underscores the film's alignment with traditional, rather than progressive, views on gender. Morgana is portrayed as a powerful sorceress whose ambitions and manipulations drive much of the plot. However, her portrayal leans into the archetype of the dangerous and sexually manipulative woman. Guinevere's affair with Lancelot and her role in the kingdom's downfall also reinforce negative stereotypes about women as sources of chaos and distraction from male duties. Despite their prominence, these characters are often defined by their relationships with men and their impact on male protagonists. However, the film's often surreal cinematography also creates moments where the boundaries between gender roles blur. For example, the ethereal depiction of the Lady of the Lake presents a powerful female figure who transcends the human realm, offering a subtle yet significant alternative representation of femininity and power.

In contrast, BBC's *Merlin* offers a more complex and progressive take on the Arthurian legend, featuring strong female characters like Morgana and Guinevere. Initially portrayed as kind and virtuous, Morgana's character arc transforms her into a powerful antagonist. This shift can be seen as reinforcing the trope of the 'dangerous woman,' though it also gives her substantial agency and complexity. Guinevere's rise from a servant to queen challenges traditional class and gender boundaries, though her character often exists in relation to male

characters like Arthur and Lancelot, suggesting that her significance is still tied to male-centric narratives. However, while the series makes efforts to provide depth and agency to its female characters, it frequently reverts to traditional tropes that limit their roles and reinforce patriarchal norms.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail parodies the Arthurian legend by subverting traditional gender roles for comedic effect. The female characters are often portrayed in ways that reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes, serving as comedic elements rather than as fully realised individuals with their own agency and power. While the film's treatment of female sexuality and power is meant to be humorous, it ultimately reflects and perpetuates patriarchal norms. The absurd and exaggerated portrayals of women underscore the film's satirical intent, but they also highlight the marginalisation of women both in the original legends and their contemporary retellings. Moreover, the lack of significant female presence reflects the persistent exclusion and trivialisation of women's roles in historical narratives and modern adaptations alike.

Similarly, Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* focuses primarily on male characters and their adventures, underscoring the marginalisation of female perspectives. The film offers limited scope for female agency, with female characters existing to support or antagonise the male protagonists. Apart from Madam Mim, the absence of significant female characters is notable. Wart's adventures and education are facilitated entirely by male figures, suggesting a world where women are peripheral to the narrative of male heroism and leadership. Despite her antagonistic role, Madam Mim exhibits a form of agency through her magical abilities and her challenge to Merlin. However, her agency is framed within a negative context, suggesting that when women seek power, it is often through destructive means. Madam Mim, despite her role as a villain, represents a form of resistance against the male-dominated magical hierarchy. Thus, the narrative positions her as a threat that must be neutralised, thereby negating her agency in favour of reinforcing the established order.

From a Marxist perspective, these adaptations highlight the entrenched class structures and the ideological apparatus that maintain the status quo. *Excalibur* presents a more brutal and realistic depiction of medieval class structures and the power struggles within them. The film does not shy away from the violence and oppression inherent in maintaining hierarchical order. Characters like Arthur and Lancelot are depicted as both noble heroes and flawed

human beings, their greatness intertwined with their social status. The eventual decay of Camelot can be interpreted as a critique of the unsustainability of such rigid class systems.

Meanwhile, *Merlin* delves deeper into these themes, portraying the persecution of magical beings as a metaphor for the repression of revolutionary potential within oppressed classes. The rigid anti-magic policies of Uther Pendragon symbolise the ruling elite's efforts to maintain control through fear and suppression of dissent. However, the eventual rise of Arthur suggests a gradual, though incomplete, move towards a more just society. Furthermore, the development of the titular character, Gwen, who starts as a servant and eventually becomes a queen, highlights the potential for social mobility and the challenge of established hierarchies.

Similarly, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is rich in Marxist critique, particularly in its satirical depiction of medieval feudalism. The film humorously undermines the idea of divine right and noble superiority, exemplified in the debate with the anarcho-syndicalist peasants who question King Arthur's legitimacy. The film's absurd portrayal of the class system highlights the arbitrary and oppressive nature of feudal hierarchies, inviting viewers to question similar structures in contemporary society.

Lastly, *The Sword in the Stone* portrays class mobility through Arthur's transformation from an orphaned squire to the future king. Merlin's teachings emphasise intelligence and virtue over noble birth, subtly promoting a meritocratic ideal. However, the film simplifies these complex social dynamics by presenting Arthur's journey as relatively straightforward and unchallenged. The whimsical, magical elements of Arthur's rise suggest an almost utopian view of social progression, which downplays the struggles and resistance that are usually part of challenging and changing entrenched class systems.

Ultimately, the adaptations of Arthurian legends not only showcase the timeless appeal of these stories but also provide diverse interpretations of magic, gender, and class dynamics. Each adaptation reflects its unique cultural context and creative vision while preserving the essence of the Arthurian legacy. This enduring relevance demonstrates how these timeless tales continue to evolve and resonate with contemporary audiences, bridging the past with the present.

Resumé

Hlavním cílem této diplomové práce je poskytnout přehled o moderních adaptacích artušovské legendy ve vybraných dílech. Předmětem této práce je zjistit, jakým způsobem jsou v těchto adaptacích využívány prvky magie a magických předmětů, či jak vyobrazují ženské postavy a sociální struktury. Tato práce je rozdělena do pěti kapitol.

První teoretická kapitola se věnuje historickým a literárním kořenům artušovských legend a druhům magie ve středověké společnosti. Tato kapitola začíná ranými zmínkami o králi Artušovi ve velšských básních a latinských rukopisech jako *Historia Brittonum* a *Annales Cambriae*. Dále popisuje vývoj těchto příběhů přes díla významných autorů jako Geoffrey z Monmouthu, Chrétien de Troyes a Thomas Malory. Právě tito autoři do artušovské legendy začlenili prvky magie, nadpřirozena a dvorské lásky. Magie představuje významný prvek těchto legend, jelikož odráží fascinaci nadpřirozeném ve středověké společnosti. Kapitola proto zdůrazňuje, jak středověká literatura mísila realitu s fantazií, a jak tyto prvky přispěly k trvalé přitažlivosti artušovských legend.

Druhá teoretická kapitola se zabývá feministickou a marxistickou kritikou. Tyto teorie jsou následně využity k analýze vybraných adaptací v dalších kapitolách. Feministická kritika se zaměřuje na reprezentaci genderu, posilování nebo zpochybňování tradičních genderových rolí a patriarchálních ideologií. Tento kritický přístup též analyzuje charakterizace postav, struktury vyprávění, jazyk a témata, aby odhalila předsudky vůči genderovým rolím a nerovnostem. Přední feministické autorky, jako Simone de Beauvoir a Betty Friedan, poukázaly na marginalizaci žen v tradičních narativech. Kapitola se dále zabývá tím, jak literatura a média reflektují a podporují genderové stereotypy a mocenskou nerovnost. Anette Kolodny zdůrazňuje, že feministická kritika nemá jednotnou definici a může zahrnovat různé přístupy a aktivity. Feministická kritika rovněž zkoumá, jak genderové otázky souvisejí s dalšími aspekty identity, jako je rasa, sociální třída a sexuální orientace. K rozšíření tohoto tématu zavedla Kimberlé Crenshaw koncept intersekcionálního feminismu, který zdůrazňuje potřebu zohledňovat různé kategorie identity ve feministické analýze.

Marxistická kritika se soustředí na třídní boj, sociální nerovnost a způsoby, jak literatura a film reflektují, posilují, nebo zpochybňují mocenské dynamiky ve společnosti. Kapitola také zahrnuje diskusi o pojmech jako ideologie, státní aparáty a kulturní hegemonie, které jsou klíčové pro pochopení společenského kontextu, ve kterém jsou tyto adaptace vytvářeny. Literární kritika této ideologie vychází z širšího rámce marxistické teorie, která rozděluje

společnost na dvě hlavní třídy, a to buržoazii a proletariát. Marxismus zkoumá, jak ekonomické vztahy formují významné aspekty společnosti. Klíčovým konceptem je vztah mezi základnou (ekonomickou strukturou společnosti) a nadstavbou (kulturou, politikou a vzděláním). Dalším klíčovým konceptem je ideologie, což jsou myšlenky a hodnoty, které utváří a udržují stávající společenský řád. Marxistická kritika zkoumá, jak literatura podporuje dominantní kapitalistické ideologie, či jak tyto ideologie zpochybňuje. V rámci tohoto přístupu zavádí Fredric Jameson koncept kognitivního mapování, které pomáhá jednotlivcům porozumět komplexním sociálním a ekonomickým strukturám kapitalismu.

Feministická i marxistická kritika sdílejí cíl zpochybňovat utlačovatelské mocenské dynamiky a usilovat o sociální změny směrem k rovnosti. Obě kritiky zkoumají, jak společenské a politické faktory ovlivňují literární tvorbu a interpretaci, a zdůrazňují důležitost dekonstrukce dominantních ideologií.

Poslední teoretická kapitola se zaměřuje na teorii adaptace, která zkoumá procesy a výzvy spojené s adaptací příběhů mezi různými médii. Kapitola rozebírá klíčové pojmy jako intertextualita, zachování věrnosti vůči původnímu materiálu a rozdíl mezi adaptací a apropriací. Při adaptaci literárních děl do filmů je klíčové zachovat věrnost originálu a zároveň uspět v novém médiu, jako je tomu u Jacksonovy adaptace *Pána prstenů*. Kapitola se též zaměřuje na věrnost adaptace vůči originálu, avšak Robert Stam navrhuje hodnotit adaptace podle jejich tvůrčí inovace. Teorie adaptace se mimo jiné zabývá tím, jak adaptace transformují původní materiál, aby rezonovaly s moderním publikem, jak se tyto změny odrážejí v nových kulturních a historických kontextech, a jak adaptace mohou být vnímány jako samostatná umělecká díla.

První analytická kapitola zkoumá, jak jsou v jednotlivých adaptacích vyobrazena kouzla, magické předměty a mystický vliv druida. Magie je v artušovských legendách centrálním tématem a je ztělesněna postavami jako Merlin a předměty jako meč Excalibur. Kapitola dále porovnává funkci a význam magie v každé adaptaci, které přistupují k těmto mystickým prvkům odlišným způsobem. Například *Monty Python a svatý grál* využívá magii k parodování tradičních fantasy prvků, zatímco v *Merlinovi* je magie ústředním prvkem příběhu a osudu postav. *Meč v kameni* využívá magii jako nástroj pro vzdělávání a sebepoznání mladého Artuše, zatímco *Excalibur* prezentuje magii jako tajemnou sílu, která ovlivňuje osudy králů a rytířů. Každá adaptace tak zdůrazňuje různorodost a význam magie, čímž obohacuje artušovský svět o nové perspektivy a intepretace.

Druhá analytická kapitola se zaměřuje na ženské postavy ve vybraných adaptacích legend o králi Artušovi, které často podléhají tradičním a omezujícím genderovým rolím. Mužské postavy, jako král Artuš, Merlin a Lancelot, jsou dominantní, zatímco ženské postavy jsou pouze reaktivní. Postavy jako Guinevere a Morgana představují dichotomii mezi ženami, které dodržují tradiční genderové role, a těmi, které je porušují a jsou proto vyobrazovány negativně. *Excalibur* vykresluje Guinevere, Morganu i Igrayne v tradičních rolích. V tomto filmovém zpracování jsou jejich identity a osudy určovány a formovány na základě jejich vztahů s muži. Guinevere je pasivní a její nevěra s Lancelotem je zobrazena jako ohrožení mužské autority. Igrayne je manipulována muži a v příběhu nemá žádnou kontrolu nad vlastním životem. Morgana je naopak vyobrazena jako ambiciózní a nebezpečná čarodějka, což posiluje negativní stereotypy o ženské moci. *Merlin* modernizuje některé prvky, stále se však vrací k tradičním motivům. Gwenin (Guinevere) příběh začíná, když je zaměstnaná jako služka, ale v průběhu příběhu se stává královnou, avšak i její vývoj je často závislý na mužských postavách. Morganina postava je ze začátku zobrazována jako spravedlivá a pečující, ale postupně se stává zrádnou čarodějkou, což opět reflektuje stereotypní zobrazování ženské moci jako nekalé. *Meč v kameni* má málo ženských postav, a i ty jsou často zobrazovány stereotypně. Madam Mim představuje chaotickou a nebezpečnou čarodějku, zatímco ženské zvířecí postavy jsou pečující, což posiluje tradiční dichotomické zobrazení genderových rolí. *Monty Python a svatý grál* používá ženské postavy primárně jako komediální prvky, čímž paroduje a zesměšňuje tradiční genderové a společenské role.

Zbylá část této analytické kapitoly zkoumá, jak adaptace reflektují třídní struktury, kde je moc koncentrována v rukou vládnoucí třídy, zatímco obyčejní lidé jsou vyobrazováni jako pasivní a submisivní. *Excalibur* a *Meč v kameni* zobrazují feudální systém, kde je moc legitimována božským právem. *Merlin* se více zaměřuje na třídní napětí a ideologickou kontrolu, především skrze perzekuci lidí s magickými schopnostmi. *Monty Python a svatý grál* paroduje feudální společnost a kritizuje absurditu feudální hierarchie.

Finální část práce poukazuje na to, jak artušovské legendy pokračují v evoluci a jak rezonují s moderním publikem. Analýza ukazuje, jak jsou tyto legendární příběhy nejen uchovávány, ale také proměňovány tak, aby odrážely a formovaly kulturní hodnoty a sociální normy, což zajišťuje jejich trvalou relevanci. Závěr též zdůrazňuje, že moderní adaptace artušovských legend nejen udržují tradiční prvky, ale také je inovativně přetvářejí, aby vyhovovaly současným kulturním a společenským kontextům.

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