Facultade de Filoloxía

Grao en lingua e literatura inglesas

Traballo de Fin de Grao

Arthurian Propaganda: The Politicization of King Arthur

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CUBRIR ESTE FORMULARIO ELECTRONICAMENTE

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SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: ARTHURIAN PROPAGANDA: THE POLITICIZATION OF KING ARTHUR

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Arthur Pendragon, the legendary Celtic-Briton warrior that was later turned into King Arthur by medieval chroniclers, is a renowned figure in the British Isles. From the Welsh *Mabinogion* (11th-12th centuries) to Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), through Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, the legendary world of Camelot, Merlin, the Knights of the Round Table, and the mighty Excalibur took shape.

Through the tantalizing words of bards and writers, we envision an Arthur that became king and ruled justly up to his death. Arthur's ideals of honor and chivalry have shaped a whole nation and made him immortal in the minds of people. Arthur is *rex quondam rexque futurus*, the once and future king. It is for this reason that his legend has always been, from its very beginnings, not only a source of inspiration, but a source for politicization as well.

The aim of this dissertation is to conduct a diachronic study on the use of the legend of King Arthur as a tool of political propaganda, attending primarily to the appropriation of the Welsh legend by English sources. I will also be paying special attention to the idea of Arthur's messianic return, its role in the Middle Ages, in the Tudor myth, in the Victorian Era and in our time.

To accomplish this, I will carry out close readings of the main bibliographical sources, such as those by Geoffrey of Monmouth and Thomas Malory, besides carefully analyzing and taking note of the historical context in which they were written. Additionally, I will select relevant historical information that will help in the illustration of the use of the legend as a political weapon throughout British history.

SRA. PRESIDENTA DA COMISIÓN DO TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

Santiago de Compostela, 7 de novembro de 2022.

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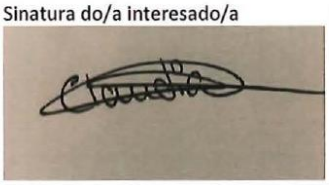	MOURON FIGUEROA CRISTINA - 32799294Y Firmado digitalmente por MOURON FIGUEROA CRISTINA - 32799294Y Fecha: 2022.11.07 19:20:48 +01'00'	25 NOV. 2022 Selo da Facultade de Filoloxía

SRA. PRESIDENTA DA COMISIÓN DO TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

Title: Arthurian Propaganda: The Politicization of King Arthur

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Key words: King Arthur, history, politics, legend, myth, propaganda.

Título: Propaganda artúrica: la politización del rey Arturo

Resumen:

Arturo Pendragon, el legendario guerrero celta-británico que posteriormente se convirtió en rey Arturo gracias a los cronistas medievales, es una reconocida figura de las Islas Británicas. Desde el *Mabinogion* galés (siglos XI-XII) hasta *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) de Malory, pasando por Godofredo de Monmouth y Chrétien de Troyes, se formó el mítico mundo de Camelot, Merlín, los caballeros de la Mesa Redonda, y la poderosa Excalibur.

A través de las cautivadoras palabras de bardos y escritores, visualizamos a un Arturo que se convirtió en rey y reinó justamente hasta su muerte. Sus ideales de honor y caballería han dado forma a toda una nación y lo han inmortalizado en las mentes de la gente. Arturo es *rex quondam rexque futurus*, el rey que fue y será. Es por esta razón que su leyenda ha sido siempre, desde sus inicios, no sólo una fuente de inspiración, sino también una fuente para la politización.

El objetivo de esta disertación es realizar un estudio diacrónico sobre el uso de la leyenda artúrica como herramienta de propaganda política, atendiendo primamente a la apropiación de la leyenda galesa por parte de fuentes inglesas. También prestaré especial atención al concepto del retorno mesiánico de Arturo, su papel en la Edad Media, en el mito Tudor, en la Era Victoriana y en nuestra época.

Para lograr esto, llevaré a cabo lecturas detalladas de las principales fuentes bibliográficas como las de Godofredo de Monmouth y Thomas Malory, además de analizar cuidosamente y tomar nota del contexto histórico en el cual estas fueron escritas. Asimismo, seleccionaré información histórica relevante que ayudará en la ilustración del uso de la leyenda como arma política a lo largo de la historia británica.

Palabras clave: rey Arturo, historia, política, leyenda, mito, propaganda.

Título: Propaganda artúrica: a politización do rei Artur

Resumo:

Artur Pendragon, o lendario guerreiro celta-británico que posteriormente se converteu no rei Artur polos cronistas medievais, é unha recoñecida figura nas Illas Británicas. Dende o *Mabinogion* galés (séculos XI-XII) ata *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) de Malory, pasando por Godofredo de Monmouth e Chrétien de Troyes, o mítico mundo de Camelot, Merlín, os cabaleiros da Táboa Redonda e a poderosa Excalibur colleu forma.

A través das marabillosas e excitantes palabras de bardos e escritores, visualizamos un Artur que se converteu en rei e que reinou xustamente ata a súa morte. Os seus ideais de honra e cabalería deron forma a toda unha nación e inmortalizárono nas mentes do pobo. Artur é *rex quondam rexque futurus*, o rei que foi e será. É precisamente por esta razón que a súa lenda foi, dende os seus comezos, non só unha fonte de inspiración, senón tamén unha fonte para a politización.

O obxectivo desta disertación é realizar un estudo diacrónico sobre o uso da lenda artúrica como ferramenta de propaganda política, atendendo primeiramente á apropiación da lenda galesa por parte de fontes inglesas. Tamén prestarei atención ao concepto do retorno mesiánico de Artur, o seu papel na Idade Media, no mito Tudor, na era Victoriana e no noso tempo.

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Palabras clave: rei Artur, historia, política, lenda, mito, propaganda.

Declaración de orixinalidade

Dona Claudia Fernández Estrada, con DNI 35632891-A, declara que o presente Traballo de Fin de Grao é íntegramente orixinal, non tendo sido empregada ninguna fonte sen ser referenciada, sendo consciente do delito de plaxio que constitúe o contrario.

En Santiago de Compostela, a 6 de xuño de 2023.

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1. Introduction.

The legend of King Arthur has long been known to us. From watching Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963) in our early years, to learning about the romantic relationship between Lancelot and Arthur's queen Guinevere, as well as the epic Quest for the Holy Grail. The mythical world of Arthur has always inspired in us a sense of wonder and amusement.

Arthur Pendragon, the legendary Celtic-Briton warrior that later became King Arthur by virtue of medieval chroniclers, is a renowned figure not only in the British Isles but also worldwide. Through the enticing words of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, Sir Thomas Malory, and many other recognized authors such as Edmund Spenser and Alfred Lord Tennyson, the enchanted world of Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table was created. In their works they have portrayed alternate but somewhat similar descriptions of a king that ruled with righteousness and bravery up to his death, and whose ideals of chivalry inspired generations to come.

For this very reason, the Arthurian legend has constantly sparked interest in those seeking to exploit it for political purposes, effectively acting as a vessel to express and manipulate the societal and aristocratic concerns of the time.

The objective of this dissertation is to undertake a thorough diachronic study on the use of the Arthurian legend as a means of political propaganda in British history, which will be accomplished by close reading key literary sources including Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485). Moreover, I will diligently examine and contextualize the historical background within which these texts were composed, on top of carefully selecting pertinent historical data to provide further insight

on the matter. Lastly, this study will also be supported by research conducted by experts and scholars in the field.

To be more precise, this dissertation will be divided into four chapters, each of which will be devoted to a specific period of British history that I have considered relevant for the analysis of the use of the Arthurian legend as a political weapon.

The initial chapter, which roughly covers the so-called Early Plantagenet period, from the reign of Henry II (r. 1154-89) to Edward III (r. 1327-77), will focus on the assimilation of the original Welsh legend by English historical sources and monarchy, as well as the adept exploitation of chivalric ideals.

Following this section, chapter 2 will deal with the exploitation of the Arthurian legend during the War of the Roses (1455-1485), exploring the increased usage of the notion of Arthur's return – the idea that Arthur would return to save the people of Britain. This will be particularly examined through the figure of King Edward IV (r. 1461-1470 / 1471-1483) and his association with this belief.

To continue the discussion, in chapter 3, which will encompass the reign of the Tudor dynasty (1485-1603), we will witness the splendor of the notion of Arthur's return with the birth of Prince Arthur of Wales. However, we will also observe the erosion of the legend's historical significance as it begins to assume a more symbolic character.

Lastly, chapter 4 will focus on the Victorian Era (1820-1914) and its impact on the 21st century. This concluding chapter will encounter the rebirth of the Arthurian legend after a period of oblivion and examine how the chivalric ideals intertwine with Victorian morality.

Finally, in concluding this study, I will provide a comprehensive assessment of the most significant aspects by establishing correlations and disparities in the use of Arthurian propaganda across the different historical periods that have been subject to analysis.

2. Arthurian Propaganda in Early Plantagenet England: from Henry II (r. 1154-89) to Edward III (r. 1327-77).

Plantagenet England is known as the period during which House Plantagenet[1] held the English throne, from 1154 to 1485. It began with the accession of Henry II (r. 1154-89), son of Empress Matilda and Geoffrey Plantagenet, after a time of great turmoil marked by the Anarchy[2] (1138-53), and ended with the defeat of Richard III (r. 1483-85) at the Battle of Bosworth Field (1485) against Henry Tudor, who became Henry VII (r. 1485-1509).

In this first chapter, I will focus on the period of the Early Plantagenets from Henry II to Edward III (r. 1327-77), directing my attention mainly towards the monarchs who I believe have most exploited the legend of King Arthur for their personal and political interests.

Through his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152, Henry II gained control over the French Duchy of Aquitaine, which gave him power over the western half of France. Nowadays,

[1] The name Plantagenet was brought to England after the Norman Conquest of 1066. It originated in the Latin *planta genista*, a yellow broom flower that the Counts of Anjou wore as an emblem (http://projectbritain.com/monarchy/angevins.html. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

[2] The Anarchy is the name given to the period of civil war in England from 1138 to 1153 between Stephen of Blois and Empress Matilda. Upon dying, Henry I (r. 1100-1135) named his only surviving legitimate child, Matilda, as his successor. However, his nephew Stephen of Blois, with the support of the nobility who did not want a woman on the throne, seized the crown. This led to years of confrontation between the two claimants that was not resolved until Stephen recognized Henry FitzEmpress as his successor, who ultimately ascended the throne as Henry II in 1154 (https://www.bl.uk/people/empress-matilda. Last Accessed 20.04.2023).

scholars refer to the territories which Henry II possessed as the Angevin Empire[3]. Consequently, owing to the large number of holdings that he now possessed, Henry II's reign was strongly marked by territorial disputes over French land with Louis VII (r. 1137-80), by then King of the Franks and Eleanor of Aquitaine's ex-husband.

These conflicts were one of the factors that sparked Henry II's interest in the story of King Arthur. The Matter of France, a body of literature that deals with the legendary history of the emperor Charlemagne[4] (r. 800-814) (Hardman & Ailes, 2017: 11) was widely popular in Europe. The French rulers of the House Capet[5] would claim descent from Charlemagne, who, at this point, had become a model knight and enjoyed a renowned legacy of deeds and achievements in European culture. This direct connection to the Holy Roman Emperor placed the Capetian kings in a superior position to any other kings of Europe because they possessed the bloodline of one of the most exceptional rulers in history. Therefore, amidst this rivalry with Louis VII, Henry II went in search of a mystique[6] that could rival the one of Charlemagne. As Ashe (1968: 3) explains:

> The young monarchy founded in England by the French king's nominal vassals, the dukes of Normandy, already possessed a character of its own. But it had no equivalent legend, no sense of a pedigree or vocation […] A fortifying mythos became a psychological need. In civil war the Matter

[3] The Angevin Empire lasted roughly until King John (r. 1199-1216) lost most of the Angevin possessions in France after his defeat against Philip II of France (r. 1180-1223) during the Anglo-French war (1213-14). Ultimately, this tight connection between England and France seeded a rivalry betwixt the two nations that culminated in the Hundred Years' War (1337-14539 (https://www.britannica.com/place/Angevin-empire. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

[4] Charlemagne was King of the Franks from 768 to 814 and was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on 25 December 800 (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlemagne. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

[5] The House of Capet ruled France from 987 to 1328. They descend from the Robertians, a prominent family amongst Carolingian nobility. King Robert I (r. 922-923), who succeeded the last Carolingian ruler, Charles III (r. 898-922), and married Beatrice of Vermandois, a direct descendant of Charlemagne, was the grandfather of Hugh Capet (r. 987-996), the founder of the Capetians (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Capetian-dynasty. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

[6] In this sense, a mystique, also referred to as 'mythos', is a framework of doctrines or beliefs created around a person or object, endowing them with enhanced meaning (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/es/diccionario/ingles/mystique. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

> of Britain was born; and, after peace returned, the Anglo-Norman monarchy found itself equipped to confront France with a rival mystique […] to Charlemagne.

The king found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* [7] (c. 1136) exactly what he needed: a powerful Briton king who managed to drive out Saxon settlers and conquered most of northern Europe. It was by virtue of this chronicle that Arthur passed on to history as a champion of institutional authority and imperialism that Henry could, and did, use to his favor (Berard, 2019: 15). When it came to rivaling the descendants of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry understood the importance of portraying himself in a manner similar to the Capetians in order to enhance his chances of retaining his French territories. He was fortunate to be supported by a group of chroniclers and propagandists who worked diligently to present him as a descendant of Britain's most powerful historical ruler – at least according to Geoffrey of Monmouth –: King Arthur. Consequently, the figure of Arthur, Welsh in origin[8], began to be exploited and appropriated by English culture. Berard (2019: 43) explains it in the following statement:

> The writers associated with the Angevin court endeavored to wrest the 'historical' Arthur from the 'fabulous' Breton Hope and to claim Arthur as an English royal forebear for Henry II. There are two overarching trends in this process. One is the recasting of Arthur into an idealized and nearly superhuman prefiguration of Henry II. […] The other is the

[7] *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1136) is a chronicle written by Geoffrey of Monmouth which narrates the stories of the kings of Britain from Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas the Trojan, all the way up to Cadwallader, King of Gwynedd from 655 to 682. Though now regarded as a pseudo-historical work, Monmouth's chronicle was of great importance during the Middle Ages and was regarded as a valuable history book (Mersey, 2004: 58-68).

[8] It is believed that the Arthurian legend has its roots in Wales. Despite the lack of surviving written literary evidence, there is no doubt that there were a number of older texts that predate Geoffrey of Monmouth by several centuries. The earliest surviving references to Arthur are found in Old Welsh poetry. One of these is the Welsh poem *Y Gododdin* (c. 6th century), found in the 13th-century manuscript *The Book of Aneirin*, where Arthur is praised for his generosity and military success. A similar image is presented in another poem found in the 14th-century manuscript *The Book of Taliesin*. But the only prose tale in Welsh that presents Arthur and that is earlier to Monmouth's *Historia* is the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* (c. 11th century), where Arthur is here shown as a king whose court provides the space for knights and their adventures (Lloyd-Morgan, 2001: 2-5). I must note, however, that a reassessment of *Culhwch ac Olwen* has dated it to the latter half of the 12th century (Rodway, 2005: 21-44). If this were the case, then the tale would not be earlier than Monmouth's *Historia*, which was composed in the first half of the 12th century.

> dismissal of the 'Brittonic' literal interpretation of the Breton Hope on intellectual and theological grounds.

One of the chroniclers that attempted to separate "the 'historical' Arthur from the 'fabulous' Breton Hope[9]" was Étienne of Rouen, a pro-Plantagenet Norman monk who wrote *Draco Normannicus* (c. 1167-9). Here, Étienne presents us with a mock letter exchange between an immortal Arthur that personifies the Breton Hope and Henry II (Berard 2019: 54-55). With *Draco Normannicus,* Étienne creates two different Arthurs: one of the Welsh, an eternal one with no place in the mundane world that, as Berard (2019: 61) calls it, "was an aberrant belief of degenerate Brittonic Celts"[10], and one of the English, a 'historical' Arthur to whom Henry II could aspire.

Another writer that contributed to Henry II's purpose was poet Wace, author of the *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155)[11], who was under the king's patronage. Here, Arthur is, above all, a great warrior and conqueror, just like in Geoffrey's *Historia*:

> He [Arthur] was a very virtuous knight, right worthy of praise, whose fame was much in the mouths of men. (…) He was *a stout knight and a bold*: a passing crafty captain, as indeed was but just, *for skill and courage* were his servants at need (…) a lover also of glory; and his famous deeds are right fit to be kept in remembrance. (…) So long as he lived and reigned *he stood head and shoulders above all princes of the earth, both for courtesy and prowess, as for valour and liberality* (Wace in Mason ed., 1999: 45-46 [emphasis mine]).

[9] I am here using the term employed by Berard (2019: 5): "The Breton Hope (*exspectare Arthurum*) [is] the supposedly indigenous Brittonic belief that Arthur did not die and was fated to return to rid Britain of its 'foreign' oppressors and to restore it to its former greatness". Notice the use of 'Breton' in this context to refer to those who speak the Brittonic language.

[10] The English perceiving the notion of Arthur's return as aberrant could potentially stem from its challenging nature to their authority and because it evoked memories of a pagan era that the English now regarded as uncivilized. Even though by this time the Welsh were already Christians, Barlett (qtd. in Berard, 2019: 22) has noted that: "[w]hile the Celts could not be called pagans, they were criticized as being the next worse thing – very bad Christians, semi-pagans. It is clear that some kind of religious deficiency was a crucial part of the concept 'barbarian'".

[11] Wace's *Roman de Brut* (c. 1155), which was dedicated to Queen Eleanor and was composed less than a year after Henry II's rise to the throne, is a loose translation into Norman-French of Geoffrey's *Historia* (which was originally written in Latin). Wace's *Brut* contains the first reference to the Round Table and its knights, working thus as the Arthurian counterpart of Charlemagne and his twelve peers (Le Saux, 2001: 18-21).

And there is a reason why Arthur was portrayed as such. Not only because Wace translated Geoffrey, where Arthur is also presented as a valiant king:

> At length *the fame of his munificence and valour spreading over the whole word, he became a terror to the kings of other countries*, who grievously feared the loss of their dominions, if he should make any attempt upon them. […] Arthur being informed of what they were doing, was delighted to find how much they stood in awe of him, and *formed a design for the conquest of all Europe* (Monmouth in Gottfried & Fritz eds., 2015: 231-32 [emphasis mine]).

but also because this specific portrayal of Arthur helped Henry II in his territorial disputes with Louis VII. Since Henry's empire was formed through a combination of inheritance, marriage, and conquest, despite the efforts he had put in claiming his descent from Henry I, Henry II lacked royal descent on his father's side, who was not a king, but a count (Berard, 2019: 44-45). By contrast, Henry's opponent, Louis VII, enjoyed a rightful ancestry that inevitably gave him a far better claim to the French territories.

Given this, Henry II got the English throne largely by virtue of martial ability, which was something that his opponent, Louis VII, lacked. Therefore, as Berard (2019: 45) puts it: "emphasizing nobility of character and deeds as the principal qualities of a good king seems to have been how Henry's writers compensated for his lack of nobility". This is what Wace did. A militarily accomplished ruler such as the Arthur depicted in both Wace's *Brut* and Geoffrey's *Historia* was exactly what gave Henry what he needed to surpass the mythos of Charlemagne. Accordingly, Henry II did certainly take pride in being the successor of such a mighty king, who, arguably, could also be called emperor. But even though that portrayal of himself helped him maintain control over French territories against Louis VII, it was not enough to keep his own English kingdom fully secure. To achieve that, Henry needed to destroy something that neither Wace nor Monmouth could do: the belief that Arthur was not dead.

As mentioned above, chroniclers like Wace attempted to create a historical English Arthur for Henry II to provide him with a suitable pedigree against the Capetians. And this task also entailed discrediting the Breton Hope of Arthur's return.

It is widely believed that the idea of Arthur's return was greatly used by the Welsh of the 12th century as a sign of resistance against Anglo-Norman incursions[12]. According to the Anglo-Norman text *Description of England* (c. 12th century), the Welsh "openly they go about saying,... / that in the end, they will have it all; / by means of Arthur, they will have it back... / They will call it Britain again" (Gillingham in Berard, 2019: 39). Nonetheless, there are no surviving Welsh texts that prove it. The possibility of Arthur's return was first mentioned by William of Malmesbury, a 12th-century English historian, in 1125: "But Arthur's grave is nowhere seen, whence antiquity of fables still claims that he will return" (Padel, 1994: 10). Monmouth and Wace also maintained this idea.

The Breton Hope was a problem because it slowed the process of anglicization of Arthur, as he remained an emblem of Breton resistance[13], which naturally made it more difficult to establish a historical English narrative around Arthur. Therefore, when Henry II was passing through Wales and heard a Welsh bard tell of King Arthur's burial at Glastonbury Abbey, he saw the ultimate opportunity to have his remains dug up to prove to the Welsh that their long-asleep

[12] Throughout the reign of Henry II, Anglo-Welsh relations were marked by Henry's attempts to obtain territorial control over the lands of the Welsh princes, who resisted at maintaining their independence. Particularly in 1165, Henry II had to face Owain of Gwynedd (r. 1137-1170), King of North Wales, who had combined forces with the ruler of Deheubarth in South Wales, Rhys ap Gruffydd (r. 1155-1192), and with the ruler of Powys in east-central Wales, Owain Cyfeiliog (r. 1160-1195). This alliance between the Welsh princes forced Henry II to retreat and to cede territory to the Welsh (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Owain-Gwynedd. Last Accessed 25.05.2023).

[13] I also employ the term 'Breton' in accordance with the definition provided by Berard (2019: 5), where it serves as an umbrella term encompassing individuals who speak the Brittonic language. Furthermore, I have opted to use this term specifically in this context due to the inclusion of the Duchy of Brittany within the Angevin Empire of Henry II, where the term 'Breton' is commonly used.

sovereign[14] was dead and buried (Ashe, 1977: 6). Showing King Arthur's remains would destroy any hope for his return and would also provide a basis for the English to lay claim to Arthur. The justification behind this claim would be based on the idea that since Arthur was buried in English soil, the English kings were the rightful heirs of his legacy and of the lands that Arthur had supposedly once ruled. In addition, the exhumation also helped to boost the economy of the area, for it had been experiencing a financial crisis since a great fire had destroyed the abbey in 1184. To make the story more credible, the monks asserted that Glastonbury Abbey was in fact the Avalon where Geoffrey of Monmouth said Arthur was taken for recovery after his final battle at Camlann (Carley, 2001: 48).

Unfortunately for Henry, he died in 1189 and did not live long enough to see Arthur's supposed remains, which saw light soon after his death in 1191. Regardless, the discovery at Glastonbury marked a before and an after in the anglicization of Arthur. Arthur was now definitely an English king.

But Henry's successor Richard I (r. 1189-99), famously known as Richard the Lionheart, did live to see the remains. And despite his general disinterest in Arthur, he also used the legend to his favor. It is believed that on his way to the Third Crusade, Richard I met with Tancred, King of Sicily (r. 1190-94), at the foot of Mount Etna[15]. There, after days of negotiations, Richard presented Tancred with a sword that had been dug up at the abbey and was said to be Excalibur: "The king of England, however, gave him [Tancred] the finest sword of Arthur, who was once noble king of the Britons. The Britons called this sword 'Caliburn'" (Berard, 2019: 123).

[14] Many Celts in Wales, Cornwall and Brittany believed that Arthur was not dead but asleep (Ashe, 1971: 84).
[15] According to Gervase of Tilbury, a cleric who had been favored by Henry II, Mount Etna was Arthur's resting place (Berard, 2019: 122).

In my eyes, this is clearly a gesture that attempts to secure Richard's newly made friendship with king Tancred, with whom he had just signed a treaty in which, amongst other terms, Richard's nephew Arthur of Brittany was proclaimed his heir presumptive and was to be wed to one of Tancred's daughters. The reason why Richard I chose to specifically give Excalibur away, however, is not known. Warren (qtd. in Berard, 2019: 126) speculates that: "[S]hould Arthur accede to the English throne, we can imagine him inheriting Caliburn from Tancred and returning it to England from whence Richard had carried it". In this sense, we could assume that Richard I was hoping that his nephew would be well-received in England as what Berard (2019: 32) calls *Arthurus redivivus* – Arthur reborn[16]. Had he not been imprisoned, and probably murdered, by his uncle John[17], Arthur I, Duke of Brittany, may have thus become King Arthur II of England.

Additionally, I would also like to briefly draw attention to Arthur of Brittany, for I consider his choice of name particularly important. Names, especially when it comes to royals and nobles, serve a purpose. Typically, royals tend to reuse family names, and it is thus surprising that Henry II's fourth son, Geoffrey II, Duke of Brittany (1158-86), named his first-born Arthur, considering there is no record of any previous Plantagenet ancestor named Arthur.

One reason for this name's choice would be what Warren (qt. in Berard, 2019: 113-14) believes: "the ducal court christened the boy after Brittany's own great cultural hero in hopes that the native Bretons would receive the 'half-Angevin' child as their own". In fact, there were

[16] We must not forget that this 'Arthur reborn' would be the 'English Arthur' that had begun forming during Henry II's reign owing to the discovery at Glastonbury Abbey, and not the Celtic Arthur of the Breton Hope that would come to save the Britons from Anglo-Norman rule.

[17] King John (r. 1199-1216), the youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, is widely known for having lost almost all English possessions in France in a war with the French king Philip II (r. 1180-1223), as well as for having signed the Magna Carta (1215) during the First Barons' War (1215-1217) (https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-king-of-England. Last Accessed 20.04.2023).

propagandists, like monk Albericus of the Cistercian abbey of Trois-Fontaines, that drew direct genealogical connections between Arthur of Brittany and King Arthur (Berard, 2019: 109). If this were the case, we can see a manipulative attempt made by the ducal court of Brittany to reignite – assuming it had ever disappeared –, the Breton Hope so that Brittany would acknowledge their new Plantagenet ruler.

However, William of Newburgh claims in his 12th-century *Historia rerum Anglicarum* that Henry II chose the name for his grandson. This would not be surprising. Henry could have decided on the name with hopes that he would one day become king of England and fully integrate Brittany into his empire[18], for as Jones (qtd. in Berard, 2019: 114) asserts: "Since Arthur was Henry II's only legitimate male grandson to date in the direct line, whatever hopes they [the Bretons] may have entertained for independence, his life inevitably had wider horizons than Brittany alone".

Regardless of who decided on the name, the fact is that it was not coincidental. The propositions seem to suggest that both the ducal court of Brittany and Henry II wanted to use Arthur as a pacifying and unifying figure between England and the duchy of Brittany.

Moreover, of particular interest regarding the figure of Arthur of Brittany is also Laʒamon's *Brut* (c. 1190-1215)[19]. There is the possibility of Laʒamon composing the *Brut* during Richard I's reign, and it is key for the final anglicization of Arthur, for, as well as being written in

[18] Henry II had integrated Brittany into his French territories – commonly referred to as the Angevin Empire – thanks to the marriage between his son Geoffrey, and Constance, the hereditary duchess of Brittany. Through this marriage in 1181, Geoffrey became Duke of Brittany to his death in 1886. Arthur of Brittany was born in 1187 (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Geoffrey-IV-duke-of-Brittany. Last Accessed 25.04.2023).

[19] Laʒamon's *Brut* (c. 1190-1215) is one the first major pieces of English literature of Middle English which stands as the earliest surviving work in English language to deal with the figure of King Arthur. Despite deriving from Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Laʒamon, unlike Monmouth and Wace who had focused on the conquering deeds of Arthur, restores the focus to Britain, reinforcing the idea of Arthur as a specifically British king (Le Saux, 2001: 22-24).

English[20], Laʒamon's portrayal of Arthur seems to remind us in some way of Arthur of Brittany. For instance, whereas Monmouth and Wace never mention Arthur's whereabouts at the time of his father's death, Laʒamon chooses to add that Arthur had been residing in Brittany. By doing this, Laʒamon harmonized the biographical details of King Arthur with those of Arthur of Brittany (Berard, 2019: 129-30), inevitably linking both figures and possibly readying the public to accept Arthur of Brittany as King Arthur II.

There is much speculation regarding Arthur of Brittany, from his name to his purpose in Angevin politics. Therefore, I am bound to say that, though a more individual, thorough analysis of the figure of Arthur of Brittany is necessary, I maintain that his name choice was, again, not coincidental, and his persona was widely used in the politics of his time.

But unlike Richard I, Edward I (r. 1272-1307), also known as Edward Longshanks, was extremely interested in the stories of King Arthur, and he was potentially the Plantagenet king who most exploited Arthur as his political weapon and imperial policy of expansion.

Edward I was known to be historically conscious, and it is believed that he originally saw Arthurian lore as a threat to his ambitions, hence why he later chose to use it to his own advantage. Particularly, the historical representation of Arthur by Geoffrey of Monmouth, where Arthur is, above all, presented as a *rex-imperator* ("king-emperor") (Berard, 2019: 218), was of the most political value to Edward. Since Edward's early reign was concerned with his conquest of Wales[21], Edward I made sure to restate himself as the rightful heir of Arthur's legacy to

[20] The fact that Laʒamon's *Brut* was composed in English, and not in Latin or French, marked a significant point in the development and transmission of Monmouth's *Historia*, as well as placing the English language on the literary sphere at a time when it was predominantly dominated by French (Le Saux, 2001: 22).

[21] After the death of Henry III (r. 1216-1272), Llywelyn the Last (r. 1246-1282), Prince of Gwynedd, ceased paying the English crown the annual sum that allowed him to rule the principality of Gwynedd as agreed on the Treaty of Shrewsbury (1267) (https://www.timeref.com/episodes/edward_i_and_wales.htm. Last Accessed 24.04.2023).

counterattack the Welsh hope of Arthur's return. To achieve that, he visited Glastonbury with his first wife, Eleanor of Castile, in 1278, where he exhumed Arthur's remains to assert himself as the legitimate ruler of England, mirroring Henry II's intentions. To further assert his legacy, Edward I went as far as publicly exposing King Arthur's skull, which showed a fatal head injury, and he also conducted a royal burial for Arthur where he personally touched Arthur's bones to emphasize their titular kingly connection (Berard, 2019: 236).

But he went even further. After defeating Llywelyn the Last (r. 1246-1282), Edward I got possession of a wide variety of treasures that had belonged to the House of Gwynedd. Amongst these there was a crown that had presumably been King Arthur's. This is reported in the English chronicle *Annals of Waverley* (c. late 12th – early 13th century): "Also the crown of the famous King Arthur, which the Welsh held for a long time in the highest honor. […] and thus the glory of the Welsh to the English was passed on" (Berard, 2019: 260).

This chronicle, and particularly this fragment, showcases that whatever glory Arthur had provided Wales with, the English had Arthur's crown now, and were therefore entitled to that glory which the Welsh once had. Arthur's crown symbolized a shift in power, and, as Smith (qtd. in Berard, 2019: 260) has stated: "The English crown now, by means of *translatio imperii,* had the rights to the principality's past, present, and future".

Consequently, Edward I's conquest of Wales (1277-1283) was driven by Llywelyn's failure to fulfill his agreement, alongside Edward's own desires of creating a unified kingdom under his rule. Edward I attacked Snowdonia and starved Llywelyn into surrender. Subsequently, he constructed castles to encircle Gwynedd, leading to its reconquest and the death of Llywelyn. The enactment of the Statute of Wales in 1284 resulted in the reorganization of Wales according to English administrative systems, except for the Welsh marcher regions. Although there were occasional uprisings, Wales remained under full English control for over a century (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-I-king-of-England/Wars. Last Accessed 24.04.2023). Edward I's conquest of Wales involved the appropriation of the title of Prince of Wales by English heirs to the throne, which is still used today.

I also find the Latin expression *translatio imperii*, of extreme interest. According to Leneghan (2015: 660), it means "the succession or transference of empires". As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Arthur was, as presented by Monmouth, a powerful monarch that had obtained military success by conquering most of northern Europe. He was, in a way, an emperor (hence why he had provided Henry II with a suitable pedigree to match the descendants of Charlemagne). This idea of Arthur as an emperor was well kept in Edward I's mind, whose aim was to assert sovereignty on the whole of the British Isles, becoming thus some sort of emperor as well. Therefore, as I see it, the expression *translatio imperii* is exactly what acquiring the crown of Arthur meant for Edward I: the transfer of power from one emperor to another.

But Edward's plans went beyond conquering Wales. Once he had achieved the subjugation of the Welsh, he then turned his focus to Scotland, where he further exploited the figure of King Arthur to his favor.

When the last direct descendant of king Alexander III of Scotland (r. 1249-86), Margaret 'the maid of Norway', died in 1290, Edward I saw the opportunity to impose English sovereignty and become overlord of Scotland. To achieve it, he did something that no king had done before. In 1301, in a letter to Pope Boniface VIII, Edward I mentioned Arthur as his historical precedent to justify his overlordship in Scotland: "Edward cited Arthur's successes against the Scots in response to Pope Boniface VIII's demand that the English king cease his campaigns" (Berard, 2019: 285). In particular, Edward I mentions two episodes of Geoffrey's *Historia*: one where Arthur surrounds some Scots and ultimately offers them mercy by virtue of the local Scottish clergy, who comes barefoot before Arthur with relics:

> The bishops of that miserable country, with all the inferior clergy, met together, and bearing the reliques of the saints and other consecrated things of the church before them, barefooted, came to implore the king's mercy for their people. […] The king was moved at the manner of their

> delivering this petition, and could not forebear expressing his clemency to them with tears; and at the request of those holy men, granted them pardon (Monmouth in Gottfried & Fritz eds., 2015: 227).

And the other in which Arthur summons his vassals to display his power and confirm his vassals' submission to him (Berard, 2019: 288-89):

> Arthur, the better to demonstrate his joy after such triumphal success, and for the more solemn observation of that festival, and reconciling the minds of the princes that were now subject to him, resolved, during that season, to hold a magnificent court, to place the crown upon his head, and to invite all the kings and dukes under his subjection, to the solemnity (Monmouth in Gottfried & Fritz eds., 2015: 236).

Edward I's reference to Arthur in a letter to the Pope was a daring move, for doing so meant placing Arthur in a scope outside of English diplomacy as well as confirming the veracity of Monmouth's *Historia*, which was, to a few skeptics the period, not totally accurate.

In addition to all these historical claims about Arthur, Edward I also fashioned his propaganda after the Arthur of romance propagated by Chrétien de Troyes[22], where chivalric values and heroic acts were emphasized. In 1279, shortly after his visit to Glastonbury, Edward I attended a Round Table at Kenilworth with Roger Mortimer[23] and hundreds of knights and ladies. According to Berard (2019: 240), this event, which would have originally been an opportunity for the barons of England to gather in opposition against the monarch, transformed

[22] Chrétien de Troyes was a French poet that stands out as the most prominent figure regarding the creation of Arthurian romances, notably through works such as *Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart* (c. 1190) and *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* (c. 1180). While drawing heavily on Monmouth and Wace for historical basis, he also drew upon Celtic sources that helped him create the more legendary aspects of the stories. Even though King Arthur himself does not play a huge part in these romances, the idea of his court as being a model court of chivalric values stands out as one to be mimicked (Barron, 2001: 63-66).

[23] Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, virtually ruled England with Queen Isabella during the minority of Edward III. The Mortimer family, of Anglo-Norman descent, became earls of March and Ulster, wielding thus great power in the Welsh marches. They achieved political prominence during the 13th and 14th centuries and even held a claim to the English throne in the 15th century (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mortimer-family. Last Accessed 24.04.2023).

into an activity that promoted unity between royalty and aristocracy[24]. Later, in 1302, Edward himself held a round table at Falkirk, where three years earlier he had won a victory against William Wallace[25]. Lastly, Berard (2019: 292) believes that the Feast of Swans, a knighting ceremony that took place in 1306 at Westminster, where Edward I knighted his successor, his eldest son Edward, could have also been an event inspired by the Arthur of romance. How much Arthurian the feast really was we cannot say, but Berard (2019: 292) declares that "Edward did, however, draw upon the romantic flavor of knighthood to win the support of his subjects".

Notwithstanding, the ruler who perhaps most exploited the chivalric and romantic aspect of the Arthurian legends was not Edward I, but Edward III (r. 1327-1377), who assumed the throne after his mother Isabella of France and Roger Mortimer invaded England and forced Edward II (r. 1307- 1327), to renounce the crown in his favor[26].

Similarly to Edward I, Edward III tried to establish overlordship in Scotland in hopes of fulfilling Merlin's prophecies[27] of a unified British kingdom by integrating England, Scotland, and Wales under the same ruler (Braswell, 2011: 469), and his reign saw the beginning of the

[24] Monarchy and aristocracy had been at odds ever since the English baronage had rebelled against the monarchy in the First (1215-17) and Second Barons' War (1264-67). Edward I had reissued the Magna Carta – document whereby the power of the monarch was reduced – in 1297 as part of England's statute law to please his barons and avoid any further rebellion.

[25] William Wallace, one of Scotland's most revered national heroes, served as a prominent inspiration for Scottish resistance against Edward I. He assumed the role of guardian of the kingdom of Scotland during the initial years of the prolonged and ultimately triumphant fight to liberate Scotland from English dominion. Wallace's defeat at the Battle of Falkirk (1298) against English forces destroyed his reputation as a general https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Wallace. Last Accessed 24.04.2023).

[26] According to Prestwich (2005: 218), "Edward II had been a disastrous king", not only due to his lack of ability in politics and war, but also because he had put his wife, Queen Isabella of France, against him by engaging in what sometimes has been referred to as a homosexual relationship with Hugh Despenser the Younger, whom Isabella profoundly hated. Isabella, exiled in France, refused to return to England and was joined there by Roger Mortimer, who had just escaped from the Tower of London after engaging in the Despenser War (1321-22) against Edward II. Isabella and Mortimer began to plot their invasion of England and successfully deposed Edward II in 1327 (Prestwich, 2005: 214-219).

[27] Merlin's prophecies are the main subject in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1130), which were later incorporated in Book VII of *Historia Regum Britanniae* (Lambdin, 2008: 30).

Hundred Years War[28] (1337-1453) against France, in which he achieved notable victories like the Battle of Crécy (1346). But according to Prestwich (2005: 574), these military accomplishments were largely owed to "the adept exploitation of chivalric ideas".

Even though Edward III, like his predecessors before him, also visited Glastonbury Abbey with his queen, Philippa, in 1331, his most avid demonstration of Arthurian propaganda was the intention of recreating Arthur's knightly Order of the Round Table. According to Harris (2009: 191), Edward III ordered the building of a Round Table in 1344 at Windsor that was intended "to seat 300 knights". This Round Table went beyond being a symbol of equality of knights, as it also stood "for the highest aspirations of chivalry" (Munby et al. in Harris, 2009: 191), serving thus a politically motivated purpose. Munby et al. (qtd. in Harris, 2009: 191-92) state that:

> The order of the Round Table […] was further intended as a method of recruitment for the upcoming war with France. Edward, after the political crisis of 1341 and suffering a dire financial situation, may have hoped the Round Table would encourage recruitment and funding for his wars.

In this sense, I find it fascinating how Edward III employed the principles of chivalry to increase his prospects against France. Chivalric values promoted skillful prowess in battle as well as steadfast loyalty to the king[29], which proved highly valuable for Edward III in his upcoming war

[28] The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) was an ongoing conflict between England and France over territorial disputes deriving from previous English possessions in France owing to the Angevin Empire of Henry II, as well as the question of succession to the crown of France, to which Edward III had a claim mainly by virtue of his mother, Isabella of France, sister of King Charles IV (r. 1322-1328), which he passed on to his descendants (https://www.britannica.com/event/Hundred-Years-War. Last Accessed 24.04.2023).

[29] In addition to courage and loyalty, other principles of chivalry entailed honor, courtesy, and religious devotion of Christian values. In English law, 'chivalry' also meant the tenure of land by knights' service, and it was Edward III who instituted the court of chivalry, which had summary jurisdiction in all cases of offenses of knights (https://www.britannica.com/topic/chivalry. Last Accessed 20.04.2023).

with France. In line with what Prestwich (2005: 574) had said, this clearly shows "the adept exploitation of chivalric ideas" to accomplish his own military ambitions.

However, the original concept of the Order of the Round Table never materialized completely. Instead, in 1348, Edward III opted for the Order of the Garter[30]. Munby et al (qtd. in Harris, 2009: 192) claim that this decision was influenced by Edward's victories at Sluys (1340) and Crécy, (1346) during the Hundred Years' War, as these triumphs bolstered his reputation, making it easier to attract soldiers without the need for an elaborate propaganda operation.

But despite not being directly named after the Round Table, the Order of the Garter was still established with the intention of upholding the values and principles of chivalry. As Urbach (2010: 106-10) has pointed out:

> When Edward created the Order of the Garter (…), he was consciously trying to revive a perceived set of older martial chivalric values (…) he used the Order of the Garter to build a reputation of paramount chivalry or arms and moral uprightness. (…) The founding of the Order of the Garter in 1348 functioned as the completion of the failed Round Table project.

And in addition to the Order of the Garter, Edward III further demonstrated his fascination with the Arthurian world by continuously amusing the nobility, who further entertained themselves with Round Table performances such as those of Edward I's reign in which the performers would take on the roles of Arthurian characters (Ashe, 1971: 12). For instance, there is evidence

[30] The Order of the Garter is considered nowadays to be the oldest and most senior Order of Chivalry in Britain. Even though the earliest records of the order were destroyed by a fire, popular belief has it that, on top of trying to revive the Round Table of the Arthurian legend, the order was created to commemorate an incident during which Edward was dancing and one of his partner's garters accidentally fell on the floor. In a chivalrous gesture, Edward picked it up put it on his leg whilst saying '*Honi soit qui mal y pense'* ("Shame to him who thinks evil of it"). This phrase is the motto of the order (https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Most-Noble-Order-of-the-Garter. Last Accessed 20.04.2023).

suggesting that Edward had a profound affinity for Sir Lionel[31]: at the tournament of Dunstable in 1334 he jousted anonymously under Lionel's arms. Unsurprisingly, he also named his second-surviving son Lionel (later Duke of Clarence) (Vale in Urbach, 2010: 110).

Therefore, in light of these findings, it is understandable why Prestwich (2005: 571-73) regards Edward III as the ideal king for an era defined by chivalry. Edward III's triumphs in France were largely attributed to his adherence to chivalric principles, for, much like the knights of the Round Table on their quests, he "was prepared to risk in battle in pursuit of his great enterprise" (Prestwich, 2005: 573).

To bring this chapter to a close, it is important to emphasize how, overall, the Early Plantagenet period exemplifies the English kings' appropriation of the Arthurian legend. The unearthing of Arthur's alleged remains at Glastonbury Abbey marked a significant turning point in solidifying his image as an English king. Subsequent English monarchs, by regularly visiting the abbey, continued to nurture and enhance the notion of Arthur as their predecessor. Moreover, the concept of Arthur as a king-emperor proved highly advantageous in their endeavors to assert English dominance over Wales and Scotland, and ultimately, chivalric ideals and Arthurian feasts further helped in bolstering their claims as Arthur's successors.

3. Arthurian Propaganda during the War of the Roses (1455-1485).

The fifteenth century, to which this chapter is devoted, began with the deposition of King Richard II (r. 1377-1399) by Henry, Duke of Lancaster who was crowned King Henry IV (r.

[31] Sir Lionel was cousin to Sir Lancelot and was a knight of the Round Table (Vale in Urbach, 2010: 110).

1399-1413)[32]. For sixty years, the Lancaster kings[33] held the throne of England until Henry VI's (r. 1422-1461 / 1470-1471) inability to rule the kingdom by himself[34] led to discontent and quarrels amongst the nobility, some of whom began to place their hopes on Richard, 3rd Duke of York[35].

The struggle for power between the supporters of the Houses of Lancaster and York turned into a civil war known today as the War of the Roses[36] (1455-1485). It officially began with the First Battle of St. Albans (1455), when Richard of York, captured King Henry VI[37] (r. 1422-1461 / 1470-1471), who was ultimately deposed in 1461 by Richard's eldest son Edward, Earl of March, who was crowned King Edward IV[38] (r. 1461-1470 / 1471-1483). After years of conflict for the crown, the war officially came to an end in 1485, when King Richard III (r. 1483-

[32] Richard II was the son of Edward the Black Prince, heir to the throne, and Henry IV was the son of John of Gaunt, Edward III's third surviving son. Henry had previously opposed Richard II's rule, and upon John of Gaunt's death, Richard seized all the Lancastrian states that belonged to Henry, depriving him of his inheritance. In turn, Henry, who had been banished from the kingdom in 1398, returned to invade England, and, with the support of the nobility, forced Richard II to abdicate in 1399 (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-IV-king-of-England. Last Accessed 28.04.2023).

[33] The Lancaster kings were Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI. Henry V (r. 1413-1422) is especially renowned for his military success during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) against France. Owing to his victory at the Battle of Agincourt (1415), he made England one of the strongest kingdoms in Europe (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-V-king-of-England. Last Accessed 28.04.2023).

[34] Henry VI suffered from periods of mental illness that prevented him from actively ruling his kingdom.

[35] Richard, 3rd Duke of York was the descendant of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the second surviving son of Edward III. By primogeniture, Richard had a stronger claim to the throne than Henry VI. When Henry VI was affected by a period of mental disturbance in 1453, Richard was appointed protector of the realm (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-3rd-duke-of-York. Last Accessed 20.04.2023).

[36] The War of the Roses receives its name from the two emblems that represented the two confronting Houses: the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster.

[37] When Henry VI recovered from his breakdown in 1454, his wife, Margaret of Anjou, convinced him to dismiss Richard and to reinstitute to power Richard's long-time rival, Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset. This made tensions rise between the Duke of Somerset, in alliance with Queen Margaret, and Richard. Richard intercepted royal forces at St. Albans (1455) where the Duke of Somerset was killed. This battle marks the official beginning of the War of the Roses. Ultimately, Lancastrian forces led by Margaret killed Richard in 1460 at the Battle of Wakefield (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-3rd-duke-of-York. Last Accessed 28.04.2023).

[38] Edward IV briefly lost the crown due to his enmity with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who restored Henry VI to the throne in retaliation for having lost all his power at Edward IV's court (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VI-king-of-England. Last Accessed 28.04.2023).

1485)[39] was slain at the Battle of Bosworth Field by Henry Tudor, who assumed the throne and became King Henry VII (r. 1485-1509), giving way to the Tudor dynasty.

A dynastic conflict such as the War of the Roses entailed an avid use of political propaganda from both parties. During this time of unrest, we will see that an extended use of the Arthurian myths was applied by alchemists and propagandists, who believed that a strong sense of unity was needed to prevent the nation's utter destruction. Alchemy, the medieval forerunner of chemistry, was used extensively in fifteenth-century England, and it especially acquired a political dimension during the War of the Roses. Since alchemists would take part in court life, they would usually draw upon prophecies, alchemical beliefs, and symbols to justify what was in the court's best interest[40]. Particularly, it was the Yorkist alchemists and genealogists who most exploited the Arthurian legends to their benefit, especially since these alchemists thought themselves to be the heirs of Merlin[41].

Their champion, Edward IV, was young and energetic, and, as Hughes (2002: 112) puts it: "was flexible and confident enough to allow these archetypes to be projected onto him". In their eyes, Henry VI was the sick Fisher King[42] whose wasteland needed salvation (Hughes,

[39] Richard III, Edward IV's youngest brother, assumed the throne after the king's sons were declared illegitimate by the Parliament in 1483.

[40] One of the most well-known uses of alchemy of this period was the association of the sons of Richard of York (Edward IV, George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III) with the sun. At the Battle of Mortimer's Cross (1461), which resulted in a Yorkist victory from Edward, Earl of March (not yet Edward IV), an atmospheric optical phenomenon now known as parhelion was projected onto the sky. This optical illusion created the impression of three suns in the sky which could have been easily linked to the three sons of York. To Edward and the Yorkist forces, this was the definite heavenly proof of their right to the throne. Hughes (2002: 83) affirms that Edward's alchemists most likely used the natural phenomenon to simply urge him to act and take the throne as the embodiment of the new emerging sun. Edward IV's cognomen in genealogies was, in fact, *Sol*.

[41] Merlin was considered to be the founding father of British alchemy (Hughes, 2002: 19).

[42] The Fisher King first appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval, the Story of the Grail* (c. 1190) as a maimed king who rules an infertile land and guards the Holy Grail.

2002: 72). Edward IV, as the descendant of Roger Mortimer[43], whose family had long claimed to be descendants of King Arthur (https://aprilmunday.wordpress.com/2016/10/02/edward-iii-and-king-arthur/. Last Accessed 01.06.2023), was more than fit to be this savior.

For Edward IV to be seen as the rightful rescuer of the nation, these propagandists needed to draw upon the idea of Arthur's messianic return, which, as presented in the previous chapter, suggested that King Arthur would come back to save the Britons[44] when they needed it most. In the setting of the War of the Roses, the idea of Arthur's return appeared to be highly adequate to save the nation from the wasteland created by Henry VI. But to attain that, Edward IV needed to be, first and foremost, presented as *Arthurus Redivivus*.

The first step towards transforming Edward IV into Arthur was to establish Edward's British[45] – and not English – identity by drawing direct genealogical connections between them. Considering his Mortimer lineage, this was an easy enterprise. Genealogists reinforced Edward IV's British roots through the Mortimer line[46] by creating genealogies such as the *Genealogy of Edward King of Britain*[47] (1464), where the Briton line with Brutus[48], Arthur, and Cadwallader[49]

[43] Roger Mortimer, the 4th Earl of March, was the son of Philippa of Clarence, the daughter of Lionel, Duke of Clarence. Therefore, according to primogeniture, as the grandson of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, he had a better claim to the throne than Henry VI.

[44] 'Briton' is the term used to refer to "any of the early Celtic inhabitants of Britain who were largely dispossessed by the Anglo-Saxon invaders of the 5th century AD" (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/briton. Last Accessed 01.06.2023).

[45] Notice that I am using the term 'British' as in "relating to or denoting the ancient Britons" and not in the sense used nowadays of "citizens, or inhabitants of the United Kingdom" (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/british. Last Accessed 01.06.2023). I will be using the terms 'Briton' and 'British' interchangeably in this context.

[46] The source of the British identity was perceived to be Wales. Hughes (2002: 136) affirms that "between the death of Cadwallader and the reign of Llewelyn the Last of Gwynedd, Wales west of the marches was never conquered and remained untouched by the successive waves of foreign invasions who overran the renamed England". Consequently, given their Welsh lineage, the Mortimers were the heirs of this British identity.

[47] Title given by Hughes (2002) to the genealogical roll found in the College of Arms MS 20/20.

[48] According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Brutus was the first king of the Britons. He is descended from the great Trojan hero Aeneas.

[49] In Monmouth's *Historia*, he is presented as the last ruler to hold the title King of Britain. The *Historia* extends his reign to 689.

is depicted with golden crowns, and Edward IV is shown with three golden crowns in their honor. Hughes (2002: 142) claims that this roll was intended for public display and proclamation. If this was the case, this genealogy would be a clear and extremely conscious attempt of proclaiming Edward not only as Arthur's descendant through their shared British identity, but also as *Arthurus redivivus*, for, much like Arthur – since he is depicted bearing his crown -, he would be returning to save the British nation from the chaos. Yorkist genealogists went as far as stating that this chaos originated from a series of invasions that had begun with the Saxons:

> The genealogical rolls produced by the house of York […] emphasized the disorder, discontinuity and lack of unity brought about by the various conquests and usurpations from the time of the Saxon heptarchy until 1461. This heptarchy was shown in Yorkist rolls to mark the destruction of the British nation (Hughes, 2002: 128).

The Lancastrian kings, who had come to power through Henry IV's invasion of England in 1399, were thus nothing more than the last foreign invaders that deprived the Britons of their rightful king (Hughes, 2002: 135). This assertion was strengthened by the fact that Henry VI, Edward's opponent, was of French blood through his mother Catherine of Valois[50].

Consequently, since Edward IV was the heir of the British identity – and therefore Arthur's heir – through his Mortimer ancestors, the Lancasters were the heirs[51] of the Saxons who had destroyed the British nation. In this sense, we can imagine that the Yorkist party could have had in mind a fifteenth-century reenactment of Arthur's struggle – projected onto Edward

[50] The French were the last invaders that had destroyed the British identity (Hughes, 2002: 131).

[51] The term 'heir' in this context is used in the sense of mythical heirs or descendants who share the same identity and not in the sense of bloodline. Henry VI, for instance, as explained above, is the heir of the French bloodline through his mother Catherine of Valois, but he is also the heir of the Saxons by virtue of their shared identity of invaders. Edward IV is more complex. He is mainly presented as Arthur's heir due to their British and Welsh identity. However, there are genealogies that did go further and attempted to establish actual blood connections between them through Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father (Hughes, 2002: 168).

IV – against the Saxon invaders – projected onto the Lancasters – at the Battle of Mount Badon[52] (c. 500).

King Edward IV's depiction as a redeemer of the land is also shown in the *Coronation Roll*[53] (1461), probably commissioned by Edward himself to commemorate his coronation, which illustrates how Welsh blood and myth contributed to the healing and rebirth of the nation in the alchemical sense[54] (Hughes, 2002: 137). This roll, which was also put on public display, was meant to show how the reconnection between Edward IV and his British ancestors – and therefore with King Arthur – resulted in the healing of a nation that had been, up until his coronation, a wasteland product of continuous foreign invasions.

But perhaps one of the biggest pieces of propaganda of the Yorkist party at the beginning of Edward IV's reign was the prophecies used by alchemists. These prophecies all shared the common theme of Edward, as the heir of the British, defeating the usurping Saxons. According to Hughes (2002: 145), this theme has its roots in the prophecy that Merlin had delivered to Vortigern[55], as presented in Monmouth's *Historia*:

> Woe to the red dragon, for his banishment hasteneth on. His lurking holes shall be seized by the white dragon, which signifies the Saxons whom you invited over; but the red denotes the British nation, which shall be oppressed by the white. […] At last the oppressed shall prevail, and oppose the cruelty of foreigners. For a boar of Cornwall shall give his

[52] The Battle of Badon is thought to have been fought between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons somewhere between the fifth and sixth centuries. The victory of the Britons stopped Saxon expansion into the island. Arthur is described as a soldier who led the Britons to triumph in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* (9th century), and Monmouth expands the detail of this battle as well as Arthur's role in it in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

[53] Title given by Hughes (2002) to the *Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV* found in the Philadelphia Free Library E 201.

[54] In alchemical terms, the nation was understood as a trinity: the body (the people), the spirit (the king), and the soul (the ancient British past). The spirit, in this case Edward IV, heals the nation by establishing a connection with his soul – that is, the soul of the nation itself – which is made up of the myths, heroes, and legends of its ancient golden past (Hughes, 2002: 140).

[55] Vortigern, King of the Britons (r. 425-450) first allowed the Saxons into the country to help him fight the Picts. Owing to their victories, Vortigern granted them land as a reward (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vortigern. Last Accessed 08.05.2023).

> assistance, and trample their necks under his feet. […] There shall be an open destruction of foreigners. The seed of the white dragon shall be swept out of our gardens, and the remainder of his generation shall be decimated (Monmouth in Gottfried & Fritz eds., 2015: 163-165).

This fragment predicts the temporary victory of the boar of Cornwall, who is Arthur[56], against the Saxon invaders, who will later return. However, the people of Britain, and therefore the red dragon[57], eventually succeed and expel the white dragon from the island. This prophecy was of great value to Edward IV, for, in portraying himself as part of the British lineage, as the descendant of the boar of Cornwall who had once bravely fought the Saxons, he was, according to the prophecy, destined to defeat the Lancaster invaders, saving the nation from its chaos. The red dragon – Edward – was bound to ultimately defeat the white. In fact, in the *Coronation Roll*, Edward IV is given the cognomen of *Rubeo Draco* ("red dragon"), and Henry VI is referred to as *Albino Draco* ("white dragon") (Hughes, 2002: 133-144).

Nonetheless, Edward IV's Arthurian quest went beyond genealogies and prophecies. His link to King Arthur was also reinforced by continuous displays of chivalry in what could be seen as an attempt to fashion his court after Arthur's legendary Camelot. Chivalry and jousting had

[56] The boar has strong prophetic implications in Medieval England. Its association with King Arthur led to many rulers want to identify themselves with it. For instance, Edward III associated himself with the 'Boar of Windsor' who, according to one of Merlin's prophecies, would succeed the malfunctioning goat. Most notably, however, Richard III strongly associated himself with a white boar. His supporters would wear a badge with the image of a white boar (https://www.leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/articles/royal-boar-prophecies-in-medieval-england. Last Accessed 04.05.2023).

[57] Overall, dragons are important creatures in British culture. King Arthur's title, which he inherited from his father Uther, was Pendragon. Pendragon means 'head chief' (Mellizo, 1976: 44). As creatures, dragons enjoyed even a higher relevance in the Middle Ages owing to the creation of bestiaries which included them. But they also became an important symbol in heraldry. Particularly, the red dragon has over time come to symbolize the Welsh nation. The Welsh kings of Aberffraw are believed to have initially embraced the dragon symbol in the early fifth century as a representation of their power and authority following the departure of the Romans from Britain. Subsequently, during the seventh century, it came to be recognized as the Red Dragon of Cadwaladr, who reigned as the king of Gwynedd from 655 to 682 (https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofWales/The-Red-Dragon-of-Wales/. Last Accessed 10.06.2023).

been strongly present in the reigns of Edward III and of Richard II[58], but had ceased to be a part of court life during the reign of the Lancastrian kings, who valued a more liturgical and classical court (Hughes, 2002: 163). Despite this, Edward IV, on top of being a patron of romance and chivalric literature, made jousting an important activity of his court and used it to his political advantage.

One of the first jousts of his reign emerged from a diplomatic mission in 1461 which was meant to negotiate a marriage for him. However, since Edward married Elizabeth Woodville[59] in secret, this marriage never happened, and, when he crowned her queen in 1465, a tournament was also held in her honor (Hughes, 2002: 174-76). This tournament in honor of Elizabeth Woodville could be interpreted as Edward's reliance on the chivalric ideal of jousting and tournament to assert his own power as king who had gone against the advice of his counselors. This approach to chivalry was also present in the reign of Richard II, who used the pageantry of chivalry to venerate his own royalty and power.

Moreover, the value that Edward IV placed on chivalric ideals went further than being an assertion of his power as king. According to Hughes (2002: 182), Edward saw jousting as the ultimate knightly pastime, which reflected the Arthurian ideal that he followed. In this sense, we could say that much like Arthur, he sought to bring together the feuding nobles of the War of the Roses in jousts of peace. This vision of chivalric values and jousting would then be comparable

[58] As seen in the previous chapter, Edward III engaged in the exploitation of chivalric values to secure his emerging court and his war with France. However, rather than styling his court on the ideal of war like his grandfather had done, Richard II styled his chivalric court on an Arthurian ideal of youth, peace, and leisure. His use of chivalry served thus to venerate royalty through an excessive use of pageantry and performance (Scott, 2014: 1).

[59] Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of a Lancastrian knight, was one of the main reasons that made the Earl of Warwick, who had put great effort in trying to arrange a marriage to a French princess, turn against Edward and briefly depose him in 1470.

to the one followed by Edward I when he attended the Round Table at Kenilworth (1279), which promoted unity between royalty and aristocracy.

Another aspect to be taken into consideration regarding Edward IV's use of chivalric Arthurian ideals was his interest in the Order of the Garter. Founded by Edward III in 1348, the Order of the Garter had been inspired by King Arthur's Order of the Round Table, and though it had fallen largely into disuse during Henry VI's reign[60], Edward IV revived it as a knightly order and enlisted thirteen new knights in 1461 in hopes of resurrecting the original intention of mimicking the Order of the Round Table. The Arthurian ideals of Edward IV's Order[61] were expressed by John Russell[62] in 1470 to Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, whose speech was printed by Caxton[63] in 1475 to advertise England's alliance with Burgundy (Hughes, 2002: 176-78). In this light, we can see how the Order of the Garter, following the steps of Arthurian ideals of life, was used once again for the political interest of the monarchy. On the surface, it served to present the kingdom and Edward IV as an embodiment of Camelot and King Arthur, which helped strengthen the identification between the two. At the same time, this embodiment assisted the kingdom's own political pretensions, such as the alliance with Burgundy, which provided Edward IV with an ally against France, which he unsuccessfully invaded in 1475[64].

[60] Hughes (2002: 176) affirms that: "Under Henry VI the Garter had become a largely ceremonial religious order used by the king and Margaret of Anjou as an instrument of political control in which elections were restricted to those foreign princes and magnates who were supporters of the Lancastrian dynasty".
[61] "Edward IV's Order" was the name given to the Order of the Garter by William Lord Hastings in a letter in 1477. This showcases the importance and impact that Edward IV had on the Order of the Garter (Hughes, 2002: 176).
[62] John Russell was appointed Bishop of Lincoln in 1480 and Lord Chancellor in 1483.
[63] William Caxton was the first English printer. His work had an enormous impact on English literature and language. He is responsible for printing Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in 1485.
[64] Edward IV's invasion of France depended on his alliance with the Duchies of Burgundy and Brittany, both of which failed to provide the support promised. Following the disastrous attempt, King Louis IX (r. 1461-1483) proposed a resolution to Edward, offering him an agreement wherein he would be required to depart from France, relinquishing thus his claim to the French throne, in exchange of 75,000 golden crowns and an additional annual pension of 50,000 golden crowns. This settlement became known as the Treaty of Picquigny (1475) (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-IV-king-of-England#ref267847. Last Accessed 03.06.2023).

In addition to this, I also consider it primordial to mention Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*[65]. Though published by Caxton in 1485, Sir Thomas Malory, whose identity is still largely a mystery[66], wrote his best-selling novel during the turbulent fifteenth-century England.

Owing to the mystery of Malory's identity, finding a reason for the composition of *Le Morte* is also a challenge. While Hughes (2002: 205-207) affirms that "it was Malory who saw the striking parallels between the events of his own time and the Arthurian legends of the disintegrating Camelot" where "Arthur is an innocent man unjustly betrayed by Lancelot in the same way that Edward was betrayed by Warwick". Barron (2001: 246) states that Malory's world does not reproduce the world of his own time. And even though I believe that *Le Morte* was not explicitly written for political purposes and was perhaps intended to offer an escape to the turbulence of fifteenth-century England by creating a world of chivalry and honor, I am convinced that it does carry political implications. In telling the stories of King Arthur and his knights, Malory's work, though perhaps coincidentally, somewhat tells the story of the politics of his time. It depicts how Arthur, though valiant and successful at the beginning of his reign, cannot do anything to prevent it from disintegrating, just like the energetic Edward IV could not prevent his Yorkist reign from disappearing two years after his death[67]. Camelot dies after Arthur is gone, and so does Plantagenet England soon after its Arthur, Edward IV, passes away. With

[65] *Le Morte d'Arthur* tells the story of Arthur from his birth to his death, while also placing great focus on the quests of the knights of the Round Table.

[66] Sir Thomas Malory's identity has not been fully pinpointed, for there have been many candidates. However, the most commonly accepted identification is the one suggested by G.L. Kittredge, who claims that Malory was Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel. This Malory spent many years in captivity given his long list of crimes (Mersey, 2004: 78-79).

[67] After Edward IV's death in 1483, his eldest son Edward V became king of England, but he was never officially crowned by virtue of the invalidation of his parents' marriage, which declared their children illegitimate. During the time between his father's death and the declaration of his illegitimacy, Edward V's short reign was largely controlled by his uncle Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who had been named Lord Protector of the realm on the condition of Edward V's young age. After the declaration of Edward V's illegitimacy, Richard was proclaimed the rightful king and crowned King Richard III. His reign ended within two years, after Henry Tudor defeated him at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. Factually, Richard III is the last Plantagenet King of England.

this comparison I am by no means saying that Malory wrote his work trying to mirror Edward's reign, for this seems highly unlikely[68]. Nevertheless, considering Edward IV's identification with Arthur, I have found the similarities striking, for, in showing the rise and fall of Camelot, *Le Morte*, albeit casually, also reproduces Edward's rise and fall.

Regardless of its purpose, Malory's work provided one of the most solid foundations for the legend of King Arthur in the world of romance, and for this reason, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is undoubtedly deserving of a study of its own, for it is far more complex than the question of its degree of political implication. However, what I want to highlight, as it will be relevant in the following chapter, is that Arthur's messianic return is here once again stressed:

> Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place ; and men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the Holy Cross. […]. But many men say that there is written upon his tomb this verse: *hic jacet Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus*[69] (Malory in Griffith ed., 1996: 793-94).

To end this chapter, in light of what has been seen, I can conclude that Edward IV's Arthurian activity peaks at the beginning of his reign due to the Yorkist need of securing a throne that they, though rightly entitled to, had to take. By using genealogies that portrayed Edward IV as *Arthurus redivivus* and dismissing the Lancastrian line as unworthy of the throne by virtue of their invader heritage which turned golden Britain into a wasteland, the Yorks successfully

[68] If this Malory is Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel, he died in 1471. Edward IV's reign ended in 1483. Therefore, it is impossible that he would have tried to portray Edward's fall in his work. Nonetheless, Mellizo (1976: 69) states that William Caxton edited and worked on Malory's original manuscript. My assumption with this information is that if *Le Morte* was to mirror Edward's reign, which, again, I deem improbable, it would have been more at the hands of Caxton than at the hands of Malory.

[69] The widely accepted translation of this Latin phrase within Arthurian literature and scholarship is: "Here lies Arthur, the Once and Future king". Though its exact source is difficult to pinpoint, T.H. White's collection of novels *The Once and Future King* (1958) likely played a significant role in popularizing and promoting this particular translation.

increased their possibilities of being favored both by the people and by the nobles, which they reinforced throughout their reign by following chivalric ideals of life.

In addition, I must also say that, even though this section has mainly shown how the Yorkist side of the War of the Roses used Arthurian propaganda to strengthen their place on the throne, I consider it important to mention that the reason for the Lancastrian party not receiving the same attention in this regard is because, as far as I have found, they have not seemed to have used the legend of King Arthur in their propaganda. Hughes (2002: 163) had affirmed that this was due to their lack of interest in mythical legends and preference for a more classical court. However, I have noticed that the Lancasters, avid propagandists in their own right[70], did not draw upon the legend of King Arthur primarily because they simply could not – at least not in the way that Edward IV was doing -, and not because they valued "a more liturgical and classical court". Whereas Edward IV could openly make use of his Welsh lineage – and therefore British, according to genealogists –, the Lancasters, particularly Henry VI, could not[71]. If genealogies were being published affirming that the English were merely the descendants of the invading Saxons, there was no way for the Lancasters to refute that, especially since Henry VI had attempted to canonize King Alfred the Great (871-899)[72] in 1445 by stressing to the Pope that Alfred was the first English king (Hughes, 2002: 131).

[70] One of the most salient pieces of Lancastrian propaganda was the Parliament of Devils (1459) summoned by Henry VI, which meant to emphasize Richard of York's treachery against the crown. The Duke of York, the Earl of Warwick, and the Earl of Salisbury were made out to be ambitious men who, not content with the lavish gifts given to them by the king, desired more, to the point of being willing to put York on the throne in the pursuit of material gain (Butcher, 2004: 44-45).

[71] Interestingly, Henry V was commonly known as Henry of Monmouth because of his birth in Wales, but this did not automatically make him eligible to assert Welsh descent. Despite his Welsh birthplace, Henry V's lineage and claim to the throne were primarily rooted in his English heritage. Although he maintained a connection to Wales and demonstrated an interest in consolidating his power there, his Welsh birth alone did not grant him the right to claim Welsh ancestry.

[72] Alfred the Great was King of Wessex, one of the seven Saxon kingdoms, from 871 to 899. He is known for having defeated the invading Danes at the Battle of Edington (878), and for having compiled *The Anglo-Saxon*

Lastly, I have also observed that the use of Arthurian propaganda during the War of the Roses is slightly different from the one seen during the early Plantagenet period. Whereas early Plantagenet kings largely focused on transforming King Arthur into an English king by showing his supposed remains at Glastonbury Abbey, destroying thus any Welsh hope of his return, Edward IV draws upon the very origins of the legend and upon Arthur's original messianic return by restating that Arthur was British, not English, and that he, Edward IV, as his descendant, was the rightful heir of the land. In this sense, Edward IV distances himself from his own Plantagenet kin, the very same that had worked so hard to anglicize Arthur. He brings back the hope of Arthur's return by virtue of Welsh descent, which will continue to be exploited by the following Tudor monarchs. Viewed in this way, Hughes (2002: 149) has accurately explained Yorkist propaganda:

> The most radical implication of the new Yorkist government's assertions of the uniqueness of the British identity and destiny was that England was no longer to be part of Europe but of Britain, an island nation with a separate identity forged in a distant past before this insularity had been lost. Edward was able to make sense of and resolve the divisions of the present and the invasions of the past by asserting his role as a savior […] of an exiled and suffering people awaiting the redeemer promised to them in prophecies. The history of Britain was one of invasion and struggle for identity that would be resolved by recapturing a long-lost identity through myths.

This search of long-lost identity is precisely the reason why the War of the Roses was such a bloody conflict. At least as far as Yorkist propagandists were concerned, the political dimension of the War of the Roses went beyond whose party had a stronger claim to the throne. For them, the battle entailed regaining a crown to which they were rightly entitled to, and in doing so, they would bring back the British identity which they had so long been deprived of.

Chronicle (c. 9th century), one of the greatest sources of information about Saxon England. He is also renowned for his intellectual interests and his revival of learning (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-king-of-Wessex. Last Accessed 03.05.2023).

4. Arthurian Propaganda during the Tudor Dynasty (1485-1603).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the War of the Roses came to an end in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth Field, when Henry Tudor defeated King Richard III (r. 1483-1485) and crowned himself Henry VII (r. 1485-1509). His arrival brought the long Plantagenet sovereignty to an end, giving way to Henry's own dynasty: the Tudors.

Despite ruling for a relatively short period of time (at least compared to their Plantagenet predecessors), the Tudors came to be extremely renowned in history, most notably through Henry VIII[73] (r. 1509-1547) and his daughter Elizabeth I[74] (r. 1558-1603). However, overall, they have come down to us as perhaps one of the best propagandists English history has ever seen.

Their use of propaganda stems, like many others before them, primarily from their need to secure their place on the throne. When Henry Tudor defeated King Richard III, he proclaimed himself victor of the House of Lancaster, but he was only vaguely a Lancaster[75]. The newly crowned Henry VII obtained the throne by right of conquest, and not by birthright. Consequently, he took extraordinary measures to establish himself as the legitimate ruler of England. All these efforts conflagrated into one big piece of political propaganda: the Tudor myth.

[73] Henry VIII is famously known for his six wives, two of which he beheaded, and his break with Rome (1534) which entailed the beginning of the English Reformation. The English Reformation culminated in the reign of Elizabeth I, who established the Anglican Church (https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Tudor. Last Accessed 07.05.2023).

[74] Elizabeth I was the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife. Her reign came to be known as the Elizabethan Era, which represented the apogee of the English Renaissance in which authors such as William Shakespeare flourished. Elizabeth I's death put an end to the Tudor dynasty in England, and she was succeeded by James VI of Scotland (r. 1567-1625), who was crowned James I of England (r. 1603-1625) (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Elizabeth-I. Last Accessed 07.05.2023).

[75] Henry VII's mother was Lady Margaret Beaufort, a great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, Edward III's son. Henry VII's claim to the throne as a Lancaster was thus very distant, especially compared to that of his Yorkist opponent, Richard III, who, according to primogeniture, had a stronger claim to the throne of England, as explained in the previous chapter (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-VII-king-of-England. Last Accessed 12.05.2023).

The Tudor myth was composed of two connecting ideas: the first was that Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV, had united the roses[76] and brought peace to the chaos of the war and of the tyranny of Richard III, who, in their eyes, had murdered his nephews to usurp the throne[77]. The other was that since his grandfather was Owen Tudor[78], a Welshman, Henry had roots in Wales and, as Edward IV had done in previous years, Henry VII had thus a claim to the throne that was prior to both the Houses of Lancaster and of York. In fact, Henry VII overtly expressed his Welsh descent when he arrived at the Battle of Bosworth Field waving the standard of the Red Dragon[79] (Ashe, 1975: 103).

As seen in the previous chapter, Welsh blood equaling the right to rule was not a Tudor invention, for it had been already used by Edward IV during the agitation of the War of the Roses. Henry VII's concerns were therefore the same as Edward IV's at the beginning of his reign: they both wanted to portray themselves as saviors and redeemers of a land that was, in their eyes, a wasteland.

Henry VII's idea of presenting himself as heir to the land of the Britons due to his Welsh heritage was aided by Caxton's publishing of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which took place in 1485, the same year that he ascended the throne. As formerly stated, Malory's work is extremely

[76] The marriage between Henry VII and Elizabeth of York symbolized the union of the Houses of Lancaster and York, which was expressed in the Tudor rose: a red rose (Lancaster) superimposed on a white rose (York) (https://www.britannica.com/topic/House-of-Tudor. Last Accessed 10.05.2023).

[77] This view of the War of the Roses and of Richard III is the one that will be adopted and spread by William Shakespeare in his history plays of the Elizabethan period, as well as by chroniclers of the Renaissance such as Thomas More.

[78] Owen Tudor married Catherine of Valois, the widow of Henry V (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Catherine-of-Valois#ref39268. Last Accessed 10.05.2023).

[79] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the emblem of the red dragon was a representation of Wales and of Welsh roots. Its origins lie in one of Merlin's prophecies where the red dragon, representing the Britons, defeats the white, the Saxons.

complex regarding its political dimension, but there are a few aspects that I consider relevant for the analysis of this chapter, particularly those concerning William Caxton.

Hughes (2002: 295) affirms that, as a publisher, Caxton was well-aware of public opinion, and subtly suggests that Caxton supported Henry Tudor by comparing Richard III to Mordred:

> By choosing to follow his publication of Hidgen's *Polychronicon*[80] in 1482 with Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* between 1483 and 1485, he [Caxton] was reflecting what must have been a popular perception, that England was being ruled by Mordred, Arthur's bastard son, who had usurped his father's kingdom.

What I gather from this suggestion is that, whether public opinion of the time saw Richard III as the embodiment of Mordred, Caxton certainly did. Hughes (2002: 306) further states that Caxton fully transferred his allegiance from Edward IV to Henry Tudor using Malory's work as a prophecy. He edited the original manuscript where Arthur dreams of a final fight between a dragon and a bear and changed the word 'bear' to 'boar' to symbolize Richard III, whose banner was a white boar. But Hughes does not provide any explanation for Caxton's change of loyalties[81]. Regardless, his printing of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* showcases how easily manipulated history is, and how easily propaganda is produced. Additionally, in editing Malory's

[80] Ranulf Hidgen was an English monk and chronicler who compiled the knowledge of his age into the *Polychronicon*, a large chronicle consisting of seven books – mirroring the seven days of Creation – which narrates history from the Creation to his days. He began writing it during the reign of Edward III and carried the work himself down to the 1340s. After that, continuators further worked on the *Polychronicon* during Richard II's reign (https://www.britannica.com/art/chronicle-literature. Last Accessed 15.05.2023).

[81] One possibility for this lies in Caxton's connection with Anthony Woodville, 2nd Earl of Rivers, and brother to Queen Elizabeth Woodville, who was Caxton's patron. When Richard III assumed the throne, the Earl of Rivers was imprisoned and later beheaded. Therefore, it is likely that Caxton turned against the Yorks after they had killed his closest patron (https://engelskhistoria.wordpress.com/2015/05/24/william-caxton-printer-pioneer/. Last Accessed 10.05.2023).

work to perhaps gain some patronage from the Tudors – which he did[82] –, Caxton almost prophesized the outcome of the Battle of Bosworth Field, where the dragon – Henry Tudor – defeated the boar – Richard III.

This coincidental prophecy was therefore used by the Tudors to support their claim, together with Malory's own statement that Arthur was not dead and that he would return to save the people of Britain. In this aspect, *Le Morte d'Arthur* greatly helped the Tudors in their quest to present themselves as the rightful successors of King Arthur.

But what I found interesting about Henry VII's Arthurian propaganda is that he did not introduce himself as *Arthururs redivivus*, unlike Edward IV. Henry proved – or rather, wanted to prove – that he had a right to the throne by virtue of his Welsh heritage, which included Arthur, but he did not fashion himself after Arthur *per se*. Apart from his primary aim of obtaining the throne, Henry VII also sought to bring an end to the War of the Roses, which he achieved by marrying Elizabeth of York. It was through this union that he relayed the claim of being *Arthurus Redivivus* to his first-born and heir, Prince Arthur of Wales.

Prince Arthur of Wales was above all the product of the union of the two warring Houses of York and Lancaster, but he was also the embodiment of King Arthur himself. Recalling chapter one, names usually serve a function, and Henry VII's choice of name for his heir was extremely far from coincidental. The decision to name his heir Arthur represented the zenith of the belief in Arthur's messianic return, a notion that had recently been reiterated by Malory. In essence, by bestowing the name Arthur upon his successor, Henry VII was efficiently providing

[82] After casually predicting the outcome of the Battle of Bosworth Field, Caxton's new patron was Margaret Beaufort, the mother of the new King Henry VII (https://engelskhistoria.wordpress.com/2015/05/24/william-caxton-printer-pioneer/. Last Accessed 10.05.2023).

England with Arthur reborn. When Prince Arthur ascended the throne, he would be crowned King Arthur II, the literal personification, both by name and heritage[83], of the legendary King Arthur (Ashe, 1975: 104).

Accordingly, the advent of Arthur reborn could thus be nothing but properly presented, and Prince Arthur was consequently baptized at Winchester, where Malory had said Camelot was (Ashe, 1975: 104). This was the most deliberate endeavor any royal had ever engaged in to portray their dynasty as the revival of Arthurian Britain. But in an unfortunate turn of events, the revival of Arthur's Britain under the new King Arthur II never took place. Prince Arthur died before his father aged fifteen in 1502, and never became king.

Nonetheless, his death did not stop Arthurian Tudor propaganda. Prince Arthur's younger brother Henry, who later became King Henry VIII, somewhat took up the role that was originally meant for his brother. Ashe (1977: 16-17) affirms that John Leland, the antiquary attached to the court of Henry VIII, defended the historicity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*[84], and that he wrote verses hailing Henry as *Arthurus Redivivus*. However, I believe that Leland was perhaps one of the very few that saw Henry VIII as Arthur reborn. Particularly because if the actual embodiment of King Arthur, Prince Arthur of Wales, is gone, there is no physical possibility for another one, so it would have been rather bold – and difficult – for Henry VIII to completely take over the role that had originally been meant for his brother, especially since he had already taken his wife[85].

[83] In the words of Hughes (2002: 307): "The birth of the prince was the result of a fusion of the Welsh blood of Edward IV through the female line and of the Welsh blood of Henry VII through the male line".
[84] Ashe (1977: 16) states that Monmouth's *Historia* had become a vital political document that served to justify Tudor propaganda and was thus defended by Tudor patriots. John Leland was one of these patriots.
[85] Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII, first married Prince Arthur of Wales in 1501. After the Prince's death, Catherine declared that their marriage had not been consummated – therefore making it invalid – and

In light of this, I consider the envisioning of the messianic return of Arthur in Henry VIII's reign very intriguing, and I dare say even different from the one conceived by Henry VII. Ashe (1995: 143) mentions that Malory is vague regarding the future rebirth of the nation, and that he rejects Arthur's return despite alluding to the line engraved in his supposed tomb (*Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus*). Consequently, Ashe (1995: 143) guesses that to Malory, Arthur's return is perhaps symbolic, rather than literal. Therefore, I assume that Henry VIII could have also interpreted his embodiment of Arthur as more symbolic than literal, hence why he was viewed more as "Arthur magnified" (Snyder in Stallman, 2002: 19) and not as an actual "Arthur reborn"[86], as Leland had perhaps hoped to portray him.

This interpretation, of course, would have arisen from Henry VIII's very need to uphold the Tudor myth that his father had begun. A great example of this is Henry VIII's repainting of the Round Table at Winchester[87]. He repainted the table in Tudor colors – white and green – and represented the Tudor rose in the center alluding to the Tudor claim of descent from Arthur. The table was presented to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1522 (Ashe, 1977). Politically speaking, his meeting with the Holy Roman Emperor was of prime importance to Henry VIII, for as Heath (https://www.emperorcharlesv.com/emperor-charles-vs-visit-to-england-in-1522/. Last Accessed 03.06.2023) states: "they were trying to 'make a common war' on France, known as the 'Great Enterprise'[88]". Despite the mutual benefit of their alliance during that period, it is likely that Henry VIII sought to gain recognition of the magnificence of the Tudor dynasty from

obtained a Papal dispensation to marry Henry (https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/12-little-known-facts-about-catherine-of-aragon/. Last Accessed 09.06.2023).

[86] This does not mean that Henry VIII stopped claiming descent from Arthur.

[87] As seen in the first chapter, the Round Table at Winchester was created by Edward III whilst he was contemplating founding the Order of the Round Table.

[88] This "Great Enterprise" is born out of Henry VIII's desire to put himself in the center of European politics by becoming King of France (Gunn in Martin, 2000: 4) and by Charles V's need for an ally against his upcoming war with France (Parker in Martin, 2000: 4).

the Holy Roman Emperor. This could explain his decision to showcase the table associated with one of Europe's most illustrious monarchs and a highly revered ancestor of the Tudors, King Arthur.

Nevertheless, aside from Henry VIII's endeavors to revive Arthurian pageants and fashion (Stallman, 2002: 20), his reign primarily focused on warfare, religious matters, and beheadings[89]. Conversely, the subsequent Elizabethan Era, commencing with the reign of his daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, revitalized the interest in King Arthur with renewed vigor (Ashe, 1977: 17).

Elizabeth I's reign saw the beginning of the British Empire, and her astrologer, John Dee[90], debated over whether Arthur's subjects – the English – had colonized the New World (Ashe, 1977: 17). Subsequently, if Arthur's subjects had indeed colonized the New World, Queen Elizabeth I, in contrast, should be seen as the embodiment of Arthur. This is an interesting proposition considering that Elizabeth I did not try to present herself as *Arthurus redivivus* either – or, at least, I have not found that she had done so. Rather, like her father and grandfather, Elizabeth I saw herself as one more of Arthur's descendants. And in fact, the Arthurian descent of the Tudor myth is expanded in her reign by virtue of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1596), where every book opens with a prologue addressed to Elizabeth. Ashe (1975: 104) claims that:

> Spenser […] presents the Tudor dynasty in plain terms as the glorious kingdom of the Britons restored, with a suitable pedigree for Elizabeth;

[89] As mentioned in an earlier footnote, Henry VIII broke his relationships with Rome in order to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn. Anne Boleyn was the first of his six wives to be beheaded on charges of witchcraft and adultery; the other one was Catherine Howard (https://www.britannica.com/question/Why-did-Henry-VIII-kill-his-wives. Last Accessed 15.05.2023).

[90] John Dee was a Welsh alchemist who identified with Merlin and named his eldest son Arthur (Hughes, 2002: 312).

> and weaves an allegorical linkage between the events and personages of the two periods[91].

In this sense, we can see that also during Elizabeth's reign, the Tudor myth that Henry VII had begun still needed to be upheld, a task which Edmund Spenser – along with William Shakespeare[92] – pridefully undertook. But much like Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is also complex from a political perspective. However, what I consider of interest is the fact that despite writing this poem to praise Elizabeth's supposed Arthurian descent, Spenser himself regarded Arthur's story as largely mythical, and even though he had to take his historicity seriously to glorify the monarchy, he did not attempt to reconstruct Arthur within a historical landscape (Barron, 2001: 248). That being the case, Spenser did not draw upon the historical Arthur created by Monmouth, but on the legend that had been formed around him over time:

> As a humanist[93] […], Spenser probably disagreed with the historic claims of antiquarians such as Leland[94] and Camden that Arthur was an early British king, but as a poet he was well aware of the value of the mythical and legendary elements of the Arthurian tradition (Stallman, 2002: 23).

[91] "The two periods" refers to the mythical Arthurian age and the Elizabethan Era.

[92] William Shakespeare's history plays of the kings of England (*King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *Henry IV Part 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Part 1*, *Henry VI Part 2*, *Henry VI Part 3*, *Richard III*, and *Henry VIII*) were based largely on Tudor historiography sources, like those of Sir Thomas More or Polydore Vergil, which were created with the intention of upholding the Tudor myth that could maintain the Tudors on the throne. Consequently, Shakespeare became one of the main contributors to Tudor political propaganda.

[93] Humanism, which developed in fourteenth-century Italy, was an intellectual movement that stressed education as the path towards self-development and placed reason above revelation (Stallman, 2002: 16).

[94] Stallman (2002: 20) states that: "*In A Learned and True Assertion of the Original, Life, Acts, and Death of the Most Noble, Valiant, and Renounced Prince Arthur, King of Great Britain,* John Leland provided both archaeological and documentary evidence of Arthur's existence, and claimed that while fictitious material had been added to the Arthurian legend, this was no reason to dismiss completely the historicity of Arthur".

Spenser's doubts regarding the factual existence of King Arthur are part of a debate that was taking place in Renaissance England[95]. Owing to a more recognized unreliability of medieval chronicles and to a rejection of mythical elements by scholars (Van Der Ven-Ten Bensel in Stallman, 2002: 15), the historical basis of King Arthur was heavily questioned. Asserting Arthur's existence, which entailed that Arthur had been an actual Briton king, just as Geoffrey of Monmouth had originally presented him in his *Historia,* was a need for the previous Plantagenet monarchs as well as for Henry VII, but it did not seem to be of prime importance in Elizabeth's time. This resulted in a slow diminishment of the overall presence of Arthurian legends at the end of the Renaissance, which would explain its later absence in the following 17th and 18th centuries. Loomis (qtd. in Stallman, 2002: 15-16) has attributed the rise of Protestantism as one of the causes for its demise considering that Protestantism, in giving prominence to The Holy Scripture as the foundational and normative basis of Christian theology, scrutinized the Grail legends – which apparently lacked scriptural authority[96] –, therefore leading to a growing disinterest in them.

Nevertheless, what does take place in *The Faerie Queene*, regardless of Spenser's personal feelings towards Arthur's existence, is the glorification of the queen and of the monarchy through the figure of Prince Arthur, who represents the moral virtue of Magnificence (Stallman, 2002: 20). In fact, the virtue of knights is also of great importance in the poem. According to Ashe (1977: 18), Spenser holds up examples of virtue that his knights are supposed

[95] The Renaissance, which emerged in Italy as early as the 14th and 15th centuries, did not fully arrive in England until the 16th and 17th centuries. It was both a cultural and artistic movement that gave birth to a great number of authors such as Shakespeare, Milton, or Spenser, who are still praised today (https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/key-features-of-renaissance-culture#. Last Accessed 27.05.2023).

[96] As Bernhardt (2010: 73) states: "the Reformers taught that Holy Scripture not only offers testimony to the Word of God but also is itself of divine origin since the authors wrote under the immediate influence of God. In view of this, God is ultimately the principal author, while the writing humans are only instrumental scribes". Consequently, the Grail legends were discarded on the idea that they were not of this divine origin.

to follow. The knights of *Gloriana* – the Fairy Queen, a representation of Elizabeth I – all embody various moral qualities. This resurfaces the ideal of chivalry that was expected to be followed and that will later be taken up by the Victorians.

In conclusion, I have noticed that this chapter shows that the Tudor dynasty witnessed both an apogee and a decline in the prominence of Arthurian legends. The apogee of Arthurian lore seems to have been reached during the reign of Henry VII, who brought the messianic return of Arthur to almost completion. But with the advent of the Renaissance during the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, I have observed a change in the approach to King Arthur marked by a more symbolic understanding which greatly impacted on the use of Arthur's figure. Whereas it is true that, owing to Spenser's production of *The Faerie Queene*, Elizabethan England seems to have brought back Arthurianism with vigor – as opposed to the reign of Henry VIII –, as Ashe (1977: 17) had pointed out, I also consider this vigor to be very different from the one that Henry VII had brought upon his conquest. Elizabethan literature did not see Arthur as a historical figure, but as an allegorical one. Even though Elizabeth herself may have thought of Arthur as her ancestor, perhaps also out of the need to uphold the Tudor myth, opinion amongst scholars of the period was growingly discarding his existence.

This new interpretation of Arthur as allegorical and no longer historical therefore diverges from the earlier conception of Arthur that the Plantagenet kings – and the Tudors – had. And, as already mentioned, the revised interpretation of Arthur's figure greatly affected the rest of history. From this moment onwards, King Arthur and the propaganda that came with him vanished from history. Almost like mirroring Edward IV, when Elizabeth I – the last descendant of Arthur, according to the Tudor myth – is gone, so is Arthur. As Mersey (2004: 151) puts it:

"The death of Elizabeth I either signaled the end of England's general interest in chivalry and Arthurian romance, or just happened to coincide with it".

The arrival of the Stuart dynasty with James I put the Arthurian frenzy on pause. Despite initially trying "to annex Arthur with the rest of his royal inheritance" (Ashe, 1975: 104) by naming his new territories 'Great Britain' honoring Arthur's golden Britain, James I failed to carry on the Arthurian mystique of his predecessors (Ashe, 1977: 20). The decline of Arthurian lore was, together with the aforementioned arrival of the Renaissance, largely caused by the Stuart notion of divine right[97], whose opponents further discredited Geoffrey of Monmouth as a historian "thereby proving that there had never been an ancient British monarchy hallowed by heaven" (Ashe, 2003: 190-91). As a result, interest in King Arthur was not heavily resurfaced until the reign of Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901).

5. Arthurian propaganda in Victorian England (1820-1914) and its Effects on the 21st Century.

The arrival of the Stuart dynasty to England cast a shadow over the Arthurian legends. Poets who wrote about him no longer portrayed the legendary king like Malory or Spenser had done. John Dryden[98], a Restoration[99] poet, wrote the libretto for an opera titled *King Arthur* (1691).

[97] The divine right of kings was a political doctrine that defended monarchical absolutism by stating that the kings' authority derived from God and therefore could not be challenged by any earthly authority such as Parliament. King James I was the leading exponent of this doctrine, but it disappeared in England after the Glorious Revolution (1688) (https://www.britannica.com/topic/divine-right-of-kings. Last Accessed 22.05.2023).

[98] John Dryden was Poet Laureate from 1668-69 (https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Dryden. Last Accessed 28.05.2023).

[99] The Restoration is the name given to the period in England marked by the return of Charles II (r. 1660-85) as king after his father Charles I (r. 1625-1649) had been executed and the monarchy abolished, which gave way to Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth (1649-1660) (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Restoration-English-history-1660. Last Accessed 17.05.2023).

Politically speaking, Price (1984: 290-93) affirms that the libretto was meant to be an allegory of the Exclusion crisis[100] whereby King Arthur stands for Charles II, the Britons for the Tories, and the Saxons for the Whigs. But after the king's death in 1685, Dryden abandoned any further work regarding Arthur, pushing the matter more into oblivion.

It was not until the arrival of the Victorians that the legend of King Arthur was fully revived and, most importantly, used as a tool for propaganda. A great number of reworkings of Arthurian lore were produced, such as Tennyson's *The Lady of Shallot* (1832)[101], or the masterpiece *Idylls of the King* (1867), which will be addressed later in the chapter.

The Victorian Era is the name given to the period between 1820 and 1914, roughly coinciding with the reign of Queen Victoria (r. 1837-1901). This time saw immense technological, scientifical, and cultural advances that mainly came with the Industrial Revolution[102]. As a result, society underwent many changes which potentially led to the revival of King Arthur.

[100] The Exclusion crisis was a major political dispute over who would succeed Charles II, either his Catholic brother James or his illegitimate and Protestant son the Duke of Monmouth. The words "Whig" and "Tory" were originally abuse terms to those who supported either James or the Duke of Monmouth. "Whig", which originates in Scottish Gaelic, was a term used to refer originally to horse thieves and later to Scottish Presbyterians, connoting nonconformity and rebellion, hence why it was applied to those who opposed the rule of James and supported the Duke of Monmouth. On the other hand, the term "Tory", an Irish word suggesting a papist outlaw (i.e.: someone who adhered to the Catholic Roman faith in times of religious conflict), was used to refer to those who supported James (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Whig-Party-England. Last Accessed 04.06.2023).

[101] *The Lady of Shallot* is a lyrical ballad divided into four sections where the Arthurian figure of Elaine is depicted as being trapped in a tower in Camelot and ultimately dies of her unrequited love for Sir Lancelot. The first edition was published in 1832, but a revised version was created in 1842 (https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Lady-of-Shalott. Last Accessed 03.06.2023). *The Lady of Shallot* served as a profound source of inspiration for numerous authors, painters, and artists, particularly those of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Amongst them, English painter William Waterhouse represented the ending of the poem in his artwork titled *The Lady of Shallot* (1888).

[102] The Industrial Revolution (1733-1913), which originated in England, is the name given to the process of change from an agrarian economy to one dominated by machine manufacturing and industry. These technological advances introduced new ways of working and living that radically changed society (https://www.britannica.com/event/Industrial-Revolution/The-first-Industrial-Revolution. Last Accessed 21.05.2023).

This Arthurian revival originates primarily from a medieval one. Bryden (2004: 2) argues that, since the 1830s saw reforming movements in government, the beginning of the railway system, and the effects of the French Revolution in English society, the role of all national institutions could be questioned. Consequently, likely in response to the turmoil and uncertainty of the 1830s, the Victorians sought to go back to the (idealized) Middle Ages where chivalry and honor were valued above everything else, and also where the monarchy was less openly questioned. In fact, as Mersey (2004: 152) puts it:

> The chivalric value of the Arthurian legend greatly appealed to the Victorians. […] For the first time, education standards and printing technology allowed Arthur and his knights to become heroes to a much wider audience than ever before; the lower classes adopted the King as a folk hero, and the upper classes saw the King and his court as a symbol of aristocracy.

What is of interest here is that the writers who revived the Arthurian legend inherited medieval texts where Arthur was portrayed in different forms: as a historical figure, as an example of chivalry, and as a Christian member of the Nine Worthies[103] (Dean in Bryden, 2004: 18). Considering that by this time Geoffrey of Monmouth's veracity had been largely discredited, the Victorians did not focus on the historical Arthur as the previous kings of England had done. Void of historical existence, Arthur was during this period a vessel capable of carrying any meaning, symbolism, or value that was poured onto him. Accordingly, Victorian writers reconstructed Arthur and his court as mostly mythical in the shape of the values by which they lived (Bryden, 2004: 26).

[103] The Nine Worthies were a group of historical and legendary men popular in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance who became a common theme in literature and art. The Worthies were meant to represent all aspects of the perfect chivalric knight. In the prologue to his edition to Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Caxton said that the Worthies comprise three pagans (Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Hector of Troy), three Jews (Joshua, King David, and Judas Maccabeus), and three Christians (King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon) (https://medieval_literature.en-academic.com/436/Nine_Worthies. Last Accessed 19.05.2023).

The first of these values was religion. The Victorians, though highly religious, did experience spiritual crisis. Since the Industrial Revolution, people began to move into the newly formed industrial cities and, due to the numerous technological advances, they started to abandon faith and to rejoice in the comfort of material needs. In consequence, Arthurian rewritings of the period aimed either at portraying the Victorian fragmented sense of faith, or at promoting religious awareness in an industrial society. One example of the latter is Henry Alford who, in his poem *The Ballad of Glastonbury* (1835), reinvented the Arthurian legend by focusing specifically on Arthur's Christian aspect "to appeal to his readers to renew religious faith in Britain" (Bryden, 2004: 50-51).

Bryden (2004: 67) has marvelously described the use of the figure of King Arthur as a device of religious propaganda:

> The figure of the Christian Arthur […] was appropriated by writers in the context of social and religious debate about how an ancient faith might be modernized. In this sense, the literary and historical resurrection of Arthur belonged to the Victorian quest for a national religious identity.

Another concern for the nineteenth-century Victorians was purity. Purity – in all senses of the word – was highly regarded and particularly important in the 1850s and 60s as an element of modern courtly love (Bryden, 2004: 97). Opposed to purity laid adultery. Therefore, the stories from the Arthurian cycle that were most exploited regarding these aspects were those of Tristram and Iseult and Lancelot and Guinevere. Adulterous relationships of this kind were subject to moral scrutiny by Victorian standards of life, which were meant to show what was not to be done (Bryden, 2004: 96).

In addition, women were – most often than not – the main subjects from whom purity was expected. The idea of 'the angel in the house'[104] was so engrained in the Victorian collective consciousness that even Lady Charlotte Guest, who translated and compiled the *Mabinogion* (1838-45)[105], was "keen to convey the propriety of Arthurian women, as well as ensuring the suitability of her text for women readers. In her portrayal of Guinevere and Iseult, Guest adds details of their riding attire, to show that they rode side-saddle and were thus proper ladies" (Bryden, 2004: 96).

This vision of women as dependent beings who were meant to be proper and remain in the house undoubtedly influenced and utterly changed the concept of chivalry of the nineteenth century. Whereas medieval chivalric knights were supposed to adore their beloved and to prove themselves virtuous to them, 'Victorian' chivalric knights stopped idolizing women to simply idolize themselves (Girouard in Bryden, 2004: 98).

Regrettably, delving into gender studies of Arthurian folklore and its interpretations throughout history, though extremely necessary, goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, I am compelled to provide a concise summary of gender concerns by stating that the Victorian idea of the 'angel in the house' completely transformed the Arthurian reworkings of the period, especially those concerning chivalry and the relations between man and woman. The irony here is that, by attempting to originally recreate the ideal of chivalry of the Middle Ages to

[104] The term 'angel in the house' is a phrase originating from Coventry Patmore's poem "Angel in the House" (1854) where he expressed the belief that his wife was the perfect Victorian wife. Consequently, the phrase came to be used to describe the Victorian image of the ideal woman who was expected to be devoted, passive, submitted to her husband, and, above all, pure (http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html. Last Accessed 23.05.2023).

[105] The *Mabinogion* is a collection of medieval Welsh tales and includes valuable stories that deal with King Arthur such as *Culhwch ac Owen* (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mabinogion. Last Accessed 23.05.2023). The dates that appear above refer to the edition compiled and translated by Lady Charlotte Guest. The original tales date back to the 11th and 12th centuries, and even these go back to earlier oral traditions.

somehow stabilize the country, core concepts of chivalry – such as the man having to prove himself to the beloved – were completely transformed by Victorian views on gender and, in my opinion, ceased to be chivalric *per se*. The man no longer needed to prove himself to the beloved, rather, the female angel was bound to always remain a damsel in distress awaiting the return of her knight.

Lastly, it is of immense importance to mention Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*'s (1867) contribution to this. According to Mersey (2004: 153), Tennyson:

> Bestowed upon Arthur and his followers the virtues and values that were considered important in his own day and age. Arthur himself represented everything that was thought to be virtuous in Victorian society, and social comment and sin were passed through Tennyson's portrayal of Guinevere.

Particularly, it is through his representation of marriage and infidelity that he stresses holy matrimony over love affairs, "going distinctly beyond Malory" (Ashe, 2004: 191).

But of course, besides trying to present moral issues of his society in an allegorical work, Tennyson also attempted to please the monarchy. Ashe (2004: 192) states that Tennyson was working on the *Idylls* "during England's last serious upsurge of republican feeling, caused by Victoria's neglect of her duties while in mourning for Albert". As Poet Laureate, it was expected of him to praise the monarchy, which I believe he undoubtedly did with the *Idylls*.

It is important to stress once again that at this time in history, King Arthur was no longer regarded as a historical king of Britain. Therefore, contrary to the previous periods I have already presented, there was not a longing for an *Arthurus Redivivus* as such. The monarchy no longer needed to rely on the historicity of King Arthur to assert their power because Arthur had ceased to be historical. Arthur reborn – at least as presented in the original belief that King Arthur

himself would return – was thus not possible; nor was it necessarily sought. However, Arthur was a renowned legendary figure, and being compared to him was still a valuable attribute.

After the passing of Prince Albert in 1861, Ashe (1977: 23) states that Princess Alice expressed the wish that Tennyson should idealize her father. In turn, in a new edition of the *Idylls*, Tennyson added a dedication to Prince Albert:

> These to His Memory – since he held them dear,
> Perchance as finding there unconsciously
> Some image of himself…

I believe this to be a clear example of how the newly symbolical and allegorical interpretation of King Arthur can also be exploited to suit the political desires of the monarchy. Despite not trying to present themselves as heirs of a long British monarchy, as the Tudors had done, the fact that Tennyson chose to somehow liken the figure of Prince Albert to that of Arthur showcases how highly esteemed King Arthur was, even if it was just symbolical. In analogizing Arthur and Albert, the monarchy would be pleased, as such was the task of a Poet Laureate; and the public, which had immensely grown in literacy and by this time was already extremely familiar with the legend of King Arthur, would see in the monarchy a tincture of the same divine that covered King Arthur, and, perhaps, this would be of use to stop any republican feeling.

With this, I am not implying that *Idylls of the King* was purposefully written to stop republican sentiment, as this was not so. But I do see how, with the dedication to the late Prince Albert, it is an appealing possibility. Another much less political interpretation could be that, since King Arthur was greatly admired by the Victorians and since he represented the virtue to which their society aspired, Tennyson simply desired to honor Prince Albert by expressing that, like Arthur, he demonstrated moral excellence.

To bring this chapter to a close, I have detected an immense change in how the figure of Arthur was used. As stated several times, Arthur here was symbolic, and I have observed that, perhaps as a consequence of it, the monarchy seems to have greatly distanced from him. Queen Victoria is no Edward III, she does not hold tournaments and Round Tables; she is not Henry VII and does not wave the standard of the Red Dragon in front of upsurging republicans. But like Henry VII, she did have a son whom she named Arthur[106], although he was never meant to become King Arthur. The reasoning behind the naming of her son as Arthur is very different from that of Henry VII, for it was simply a choice that carried heavily symbolical meaning – or that perhaps was meant to infuse her son with virtuous qualities. Therefore, even though King Arthur stopped being used as a figure to assert the monarchy's right to rule, his symbolism did not wane – if anything, it grew.

The Victorians used Arthur to propagate their own ideals of life, for, being void of historicity, he could be easily adapted into any form they pleased. For Tennyson, Arthur "symbolizes the human soul in its noblest aspirations" (Ashe, 2003: 191), but he could also be the most Christian king, as Henry Alford potentially sought to portray him, or he could be, along with his knights, a model of the newly created Victorian chivalry to which readers were supposed to strive.

In fact, I believe that it is through the Victorian lens that 21st century popular culture sees the legend of King Arthur. Growing up, we have looked at the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere as the ultimate betrayal, leading us to imagine Arthur as some sort of passive king who was deceived by the people he cared about most. Rarely have we pictured Arthur like the

[106] Arthur, Duke of Connaught, is believed to have been Queen Victoria's favorite son. He was governor-general of Canada from 1911 to 1916 (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-William-Patrick-Albert-duke-of-Connaught-and-Strathearn. Last Accessed 29.05.2023).

conqueror Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* made him out to be. However, it is not without a say that the 21st century has also shed new light on Arthur's existence, bringing that historical aspect of the legend back into our minds, and oftentimes this new reassessment of King Arthur has been portrayed on the big screen, as in *King Arthur* (2004), where Arthur appears as a Roman officer in Britain rather than as a medieval king, and which is the historical version of Arthur widely accepted by scholarship.

But again, following Victorian footsteps, the monarchy of 21st-century England does not see Arthur as their ancestor, and they do not claim to be legitimate heirs to his land. As I see it, to the Windsor family Arthur could be the undeniable symbol of the whole of the British nation, and, as such, his name is still used to carry that meaning. For instance, the late Queen Elizabeth II (r. 1952-2022) named her heir – now King Charles III – Charles Philip Arthur George. In a similar way, Charles III and Princess Diana named their first-born William Arthur Philip Louis. Though Prince William seems to have stopped the tradition of giving the name of Arthur to the first-born, he did name his second son Louis Arthur Charles. These are all examples of how the name of Arthur, first used amongst potential heirs to the throne back in the reign of Richard I, has become a tradition that is kept even when no active politics are at play. In this sense, the symbolic seems to have outweighed the political, particularly Arthurian propaganda.

6. Conclusions.

This diachronic analysis of the use of Arthurian propaganda throughout British history has revealed, overall, a striking correlation between periods of national turmoil and the significant presence of Arthurian elements. The first of these occurs during the rule of Henry II, which takes

place immediately after the disorder of the Anarchy, and whose reign marked a crucial period in which the Arthurian narrative became integrated within English literature and culture through the assimilation of the Arthurian legend by English sources and through the discovery of King Arthur's supposed remains at Glastonbury Abbey. Later, this same pattern is repeated both during and after the War of the Roses with Edward IV and Henry VII, whose claims to the throne were based on the idea that they were both descendants of Arthur by virtue of Welsh heritage, greatly exploiting the idea of Arthur's return in their reigns. And similarly, though to a lesser degree, Arthurian folklore resurfaced once more following the Victorian crisis of the 1830s.

Additionally, I have also observed that the notion of Arthur's return was particularly manipulated in the aftermath of civil wars in England, specifically after periods such as the Anarchy and the War of the Roses. As has been repeated throughout the course of this dissertation, the idea that Arthur would return to save the Britons had its origins in earlier Welsh beliefs, was later appropriated by the English, and was used by them ever since. Therefore, it seems suitable that monarchs such as Henry II, Edward IV, and Henry VII, would use this notion to portray themselves as the bringers of stability during, and in the outcome of these wars. By aligning themselves with the figure of Arthur, they sought to strengthen their legitimacy and to present their rule as a solution to restore unity in a fractured kingdom. These depictions were further reinforced and bolstered through the skillful adaptation of chivalric ideals, as exemplified during the reign of Edward III.

However, the analysis has also shown that their approaches to this idea were different. For instance, Henry II, who was amid appropriating the Welsh King Arthur to create a distinct English King Arthur to rival the Capetian descendants of Charlemagne, did not make any

assertions of blood lineage connecting him to Arthur. Instead, he claimed his descent based solely on the fact that Arthur had been an English king, as supposedly evidenced by the remains discovered at Glastonbury Abbey.

On the other hand, Edward IV and Henry VII strategically exploited their Welsh ancestry to present themselves and their lineage as direct descendants of Arthur. It appears that despite Henry II's efforts to destroy the Welsh Arthur to establish a distinct English one, this vision did not completely prevail during the Middle Ages, and it seems that, at least during that time, King Arthur consistently maintained a strong association with Wales, almost as if he kept, in fact, returning. Nonetheless, Henry II's efforts in anglicizing Arthur cannot be discredited, for, if not in the Middle Ages, his efforts did become fruitful in the end. Today, the prevailing concept of Arthur is that of an English figure, evident in the frequent usage of his name amongst British monarchs and princes such as King Charles III or William, Prince of Wales.

But contrarily to the use of Arthur's return during the aforementioned turbulent times, the revival of Arthurian folklore in the reign of Queen Victoria emphasized chivalry rather than any notion of a literal return. As demonstrated, this shift can be attributed to the loss of the historical aspect of the legend that took place during the Renaissance. For the modern monarchy, the absence of King Arthur as a historical precedent implied the break of a nearly dynastic connection with him that had been shared by all the previous medieval kings, despite their varied approaches to it. Notwithstanding, the decrease in the use of the historical Arthur fueled the increase of the symbolic and mythical one, which reached its zenith during the Victorian period, preferring thus to highlight the chivalric aspects of the legend over its historical context. Moreover, I must also stress that though it is true that Queen Victoria did not directly use King Arthur to her own benefit, I cannot say that she did not use the myth at all. Even though the

exploitation of the Arthurian legend did perhaps not benefit her directly – as was the case for instance of Henry VII – she did propagate her own values and hopes for the society through the figure of King Arthur and through the writers that shared her mindset, which is reflected in the Victorian views on gender, religion, and marriage.

Overall, this dissertation has proved that the legend of King Arthur was brought back into the political scheme repeatedly. Even after almost a hundred years of oblivion, Arthur resurfaced again. In the initial chapter, I had explained how Henry II tried to destroy any hope of Arthur's return, but this study has proved how Arthur can never not return. Regardless of the era, the political situation, the ruler, and the way in which he is presented – Welsh Arthur, English Arthur, Symbolic Arthur, Knightly Arthur, Christian Arthur – King Arthur is bound to return. Oftentimes, he will come with increased power amidst periods of chaos, but he will also come lightly as an embodiment of chivalry, and, above all, he will forever stay in the minds of people. Arthur is not only 'The Once and Future King'; Arthur is 'The Everlasting King', and, as such, he will always be interpreted, reinterpreted, imagined, and reimagined.

Given the scope of this dissertation, it was not possible for me to delve into some aspects more in detail. Particularly, I find the political dimensions of both Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* to be of extreme interest to further expand some of the notions presented in this study. In the future, however, I would like to explore the process of the incorporation of the legend into Christian narratives, which has been minimally discussed in this paper. Additionally, I am intrigued by the correlations between the myth of Arthur's return and other myths that exhibit similar patterns.

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