The Arthurian Legend Now and Then
A Comparative Thesis on Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and BBC's *Merlin*

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Introduction

In Britain's literary history there is one figure who looms largest: Arthur. Many different stories have been written about the quests of the legendary king of Britain and his Knights of the Round Table, and as a result many modern adaptations have been made from varying perspectives. *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* traces the evolution of the story and begins by asking the question "whether or not there ever was an Arthur, and if so, who, what, where and when." (Archibald and Putter, 1). The victory over the Anglo-Saxons at Mount Badon in the fifth century was attributed to Arthur by Geoffrey of Monmouth (Monmouth), but according to the sixth century monk Gildas, this victory belonged to Ambrosius Aurelianus, a fifth century Romano-British soldier, and the figure of Arthur was merely inspired by this warrior (Giles). Despite this, more events have been attributed to Arthur and he remains popular to write about to date, and because of that there is scope for analytic and comparative research on all these stories (Archibald and Putter).

The legend of Arthur, king of the Britains, flourished with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* (Monmouth). Originally, he wrote the book in Latin around 1136, which is approximately 600 years after the victory over the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Mount Badon. Monmouth claims to have actually translated his story from a historic book, presumably associated with *The Mabinogion* (Archibald and Putter, xv), written in early Welsh (Monmouth, 11). Monmouth also wrote the *Prophecies of Merlin* and that story, together with *The History of the Kings of Britain*, builds the basis for the Arthurian legend as it is known today (Monmouth, 9).

The legend as it was written down by Monmouth included Arthur, his father Uther Pendragon, and the old wizardly advisor Merlin. Later versions of the Arthurian legend include characters such as Morgan le Fay, or simply Morgana, Guinevere, Mordred, and Lancelot, together with many other Knights of the Round Table. There was no mention of the

mainstream artefact the Holy Grail in Monmouth's version either, though Excalibur has always been at Arthur's side, whether it be with or without magical prowess. The Holy Grail and Lancelot where both introduced by Chrétien de Troyes in his *Arthurian Romances* (de Troyes).

Though not much is known about Chrétien de Troyes, it is agreed upon that he wrote in the second half of the twelfth century in French, and he is primarily known as pioneer in imposing the romance genre on the legend (Troyes). These stories became popular for both leisurely reading and teaching the moral standards of society at that time, which in the medieval time period were the norms and values of Christianity.

However, nowadays the story has changed to suit a society where this religious influence has declined (del Rio). Therefore, this research will look into a modern adaptation and compare it to an older one to see how exactly the tale has been influenced by the time period it was written in and what these changes entail. To do this, it is important to look at the factors which are nearly always present, such as the characters, their actions and their relationships. The adaptation of these characters and the events they are involved in reflect the manner of thinking during the time period in which the adaptation was written.

This research will use Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* as an older adaptation of the Arthurian Legend to compare to a modern adaptation (Malory). Malory's story describes the quests and relationships of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, including the love triangle of Lancelot, Guinevere and Arthur. This makes this adaptation a more suitable option than the *Arthurian Romances*, as Chrétien's work consists of poems on very specific events (de Troyes).

Modern adaptations can take the form of novels, but the more popular ones are movies and series. That is why the most recent media adaptation will be compared to

Malory's book. The most recent media adaptation is BBC's series *Merlin* (BBC). Though these series are based on multiple different sources concerning the Arthurian legend, comparing this to Malory's work will undoubtedly answer the question of how the approach to the Arthurian Legend has changed between medieval times and present day.

This comparative research will focus on the characters, themes and adaptation theories as described by Linda Hutcheon as a basis for comparison. The first chapter will briefly go through relevant adaptation theories. The second chapter will discuss the adaptation of Arthur and Merlin as the major male characters. Then, in the third chapter, the adaptation major female characters, Morgana and Guinevere, will be analysed. The research will end with the conclusion in which the findings will be summarised and the research question will be answered.

Adaptation Theories

There are many factors involved when a story is adapted and it is these adaptation theories that this chapter will briefly discuss in the light of the Arthurian stories by Malory and BBC. To do so, *A Theory of Adaptation* by Linda Hutcheon will be analysed using examples from the two stories. The 'what', 'who' and 'why' of adaptation will be addressed in this chapter.

First off, the 'what' of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon describes an adaptation as the following:

"[A]n adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This 'transcoding' can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation." (Hutcheon, 8)

She elaborates on this description by saying that an adaptation is creative and interpretive, and that the adaptation has an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. Especially the interpretive part of the definition is important to consider when analysing comparisons.

The influence of interpretation can be unveiled when looking at the shifts that Hutcheon described. The shift of point of view in the adaptations of Malory and BBC goes from Arthur to Merlin. The consequences of this are elaborated upon in the next chapter. The shift of medium in this case is from a novel to a series, or as Hutcheon describes it, from telling to showing (Hutcheon). Hutcheon explains that a book may describe gestures, tone, voice or expressions, but in a movie or series these factors are evidently present (Hutcheon, 39). As a result, whenever any of these factors are up to the imagination of the reader, an adaptation will be changed based on the personal interpretation of the adapted work.

A good example can be found when look at the relationship of Merlin and Nineve in *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Merlin falls in love with Nineve, while he knows due to his powers of prophecy that she will bury him alive (Malory). Nineve does not like him and Merlin only gets her attention when he promises her that he will teach her magic which she eventually uses against him (Malory). Two black and white interpretations of this scenario are that either Merlin is the victim or Nineve. The first interpretation means that Nineve is manipulative and Merlin naïve. The second would make Merlin stubborn and arrogant as he believed he could change Nineve's opinion while he knew of his future, and Nineve just sought for a way to defend herself.

When looking at how this relationship got adapted in BBC's *Merlin* it appears a mixture of the two was used. BBC's *Merlin* has Nimueh as counterpart for Nineve and in the series it becomes clear that Nimueh has actually helped Uther to get Arthur, not knowing that Igraine's life would be lost for Arthur's. Uther banishes magic as a result and Nimueh seeks for revenge during the first season by manipulating the young, unknowing Merlin. Merlin in this case is a victim, but Nimueh is a victim too.

This difference in scenario can also be explained by another shift that occurs between the adaptations. This shift concerns who wrote the story. Hutcheon explains that when a story shifts from a solo model to a collaborative model, this will influence the story telling as well (Hutcheon, 80). She writes:

"In interactive digital installations and Internet-connected work, a collective model of creation best describes the web of interlinkages that are constantly being reorganized by the various participants both before and during the interaction itself." (Hutcheon, 80).

In Malory's version, only he writes the story and he is every character. He may be influenced by previous works, but he remains the sole author. However, the BBC series has

four different screenwriters; Julian Jones, Jake Michie, Johnny Capps and Julian Murphy (BBC). Add the personal interpretations of the producer, the actors, and even the music composer, since it is the music which sets the mood for every scene, and a mixture of different interpretation becomes unavoidable.

The last theory by Hutcheon that this chapter will discuss is why stories get adapted. Hutcheon explains that the monetary appeal undoubtedly is a major factor in why writers adapt stories, but she defines four different reasons for an adaptation to be created: the economic lures, legal constraints, cultural capital, and personal or political motives (Hutcheon, 86).

Economic factors are not relevant to the research question, but the legal constraints are naturally considered while writing an adaptation. However, these legal constraints are not relevant if a work is written before 1923 or when the author has passed away over seventy years ago. In other words, BBC's *Merlin*, who claim to have loosely based their story on Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, is likely not influenced by the copyright law. If it were influenced by this however, this could partially explain why the character Mordred is not a child of Arthur, why Merlin became the main character at a much younger age, and why Guinevere is not of noble blood among other details.

The cultural aspect should warrant for the adaptation to stick to its roots rather than for it to cause major differences. The political motives have to do with laws and right that were implemented while writing an adaptation and debates revolving around political views. These will be discussed in the following chapters as they are relevant to the research question.

Adaptation of Male Characters

In the story of King Arthur, the two major male characters are Merlin and Arthur himself. A lot can be said about the other characters by only looking at differences in the adaptations of Merlin and Arthur. These differences are namely in the age and wisdom of Merlin, and in the conception and raising of Arthur. The characters and their actions will reflect accepted, and unaccepted, behaviour for the time period in which they were written and based on which audience the stories were written, since Malory's novel was published in 1485 and BBC's *Merlin* aired in 2008. In addition, the medium changes from a novel to a series and there's a difference in point of view in the novel and the series. By analysing the differences between adaptations of Arthur and Merlin, and the themes that are associated with their characters, it will be explained how these differences influence the storyline and how these changes are influenced by the time period in which the adaptations were written.

One of the things to consider while analysing a 1485 adaptation and a 2008 adaptation is the genre and writing style of both time periods. Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* falls under the genre of chivalric romance. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* a chivalric romance is:

"[T]he principal kind of romance found in medieval Europe from the 12th century onwards, describing (usually in verse) the adventures of legendary knights, and celebrating an idealized code of civilized behaviour that combines loyalty, honour, and [courtly love]. The emphasis on heterosexual love and courtly manners distinguishes it from the [chanson de geste] and other kinds of [epic], in which masculine military heroism predominates." (Baldick, 38).

Le Morte D'Arthur does have a strong emphasis on the themes of loyalty, honour, courtly manners and courtly love, as the actions and events revolving around the characters discussed in this thesis will show, but these themes are not the main themes in BBC's Merlin.

The theme of loyalty, honour and courtly love can definitely be associated with Arthur in Malory's adaptation. There are various scenes in Le Morte D'Arthur that discuss these themes when Arthur is involved, and BBC's does implement the same themes in Merlin, but the focus is much less on love and more on courage, strength and friendship.

Arthur's loyalty shows first in Malory's adaptation when Arthur explains to his foster father, Ector, that he took Excalibur from the stone in the churchyard to bring it to his foster brother, Kay:

"I thought my brother Sir Kay should not be swordless; and so I came hither eagerly and pulled it out of the stone without any pain." (Malory, 9).

Arthur shows that he is loyal to his brother and keeps the honour of his brother in mind as he goes through great lengths to get Kay a sword. The sword Arthur takes is Excalibur, put in that stone by Merlin, with the inscription that it could only be pulled out by the true king of England, so after Arthur proves that he pulled out the sword he became king (Malory, 8). Arthur then shows his loyalty again by awarding Kay a notable position in his court as he is crowned king (Malory, 10).

Similar scenes can be found in BBC's Merlin, however, these scenes come with multiple themes. It can be said that Malory discussed courtly manners as well, as Arthur showed his gratitude for Ector's caretaking, as would be expected from a knight and a king, by rewarding Kay that position, but this was subtly introduced along the theme of loyalty, while in BBC's Merlin the themes are all strongly evident.

In *Merlin*, Arthur claims Excalibur in *The Sword in the Stone*, though he is sceptic about taking up the sword, as he is aware that if he cannot pick up the blade, it means he has failed his lineage, so he shows courage in grabbing the sword (BBC, Season 4, Episode 12). In the same scene, Merlin shows his loyalty to Arthur and his strong bond of friendship by encouraging him throughout the ordeal. The difference between this scene and Malory's scene is then that Malory describes that it is your duty to be grateful and pay people back for their services to you, while in the BBC version the message seems to be that you draw strength and courage from the bonds between your friends and family. The life lesson of being grateful is only explicitly shown by Arthur in *Merlin* in the very last episode when he says thank you to Merlin for the first time.

Yet, the difference between the usages of themes is clearest when discussing the theme of courtly love or simply love in Malory's adaptation and BBC's adaptation. There is much less focus on this theme in *Merlin* than there is in *Le Morte D'Arthur* and *Merlin* entirely avoids the theme of sexual sin which often co-exists in Malory's version of the story.

In Malory's adaptation, love almost always interferes with the theme of loyalty, in the shape of sexual sin. In Arthur's case, he sleeps with one of his sisters, Morgause, although he is unaware of the incestuous nature of this act (Malory, 21). From this sin Mordred is born and he will end up betraying Arthur by killing him. In addition, since Morgause cheated on her husband, Lot, and Arthur betrays his bond with him, which he wants revenge for in the form of a war as his honour and pride were shamed (Malory, 40).

So there is a lot of betrayal following from one sexual sin concerning Arthur even if we do not consider the sin of Guinevere eloping with Lancelot. However, the incestuous conception of Mordred is completely removed from the BBC version, likely because incest is frowned upon and should not been shown to a younger audience. The only time *Merlin*

discusses sexual sin is in *The Crystal Cave* when Uther Pendragon secretly shares with his friend Gaius that he is actually Morgana's father instead of the deceased Gorlois, which suggests that he may have cheated on Igraine or at least that Morgana's mother Vivienne cheated on her partner (BBC, Season 3, Episode 5). Even the affair between Lancelot and Guinevere is justified by the use of evil magic, which will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Malory's focus on the sexual sins in his story are meant to teach the reader what the consequences are of neglecting courtly manners and committing adultery, but BBC avoids this topic since incest is already taboo and cheating on your partner is at least frowned upon, let alone discussing it with or in front of children. In turn, there is one theme that Malory avoids while BBC's *Merlin* revolved entirely around this theme: the supernatural.

In Malory's version, Arthur is aware of Merlin's magic, as Merlin uses his magic to save and educate Arthur, and this makes Arthur respect Merlin more (Malory, 23). However, the use of magic is limited in the story and magic is often associated with antagonists like Morgana or manipulative tricks, like when Merlin helps Uther to steal Igraine from her husband (Malory, 5). Magic, and the supernatural, is condemned in *Le Morte D'Arthur*. This makes sense for the time period in which Malory wrote this as religion and the bible were very important during this time, and in Leviticus the use of magic is condemned as well (Bijbel, Leviticus, 19:23). Malory makes several references to his own religious nature in his novel so it is not surprising that his approach to magic is overall negative (Malory).

This is actually interesting since in the BBC version, Merlin lives in a society were magic is prohibited so he has to keep it a secret from Arthur as he saves him (BBC). The magic in *Merlin* has both good and evil sides and the approach of magic is treated similarly to how guns are viewed nowadays: magic is not evil depending on who uses it. This seems to be

a result of the lack of religious influence as well as the ongoing debate about the gun policy nowadays, but may also have to do with a shift of point of view in the adaptations.

As Linda Hutcheon explains in *A Theory of Adaptation*, a point of view influences the interpretation of a story (Hutcheon, 8). *Le Morte D'Arthur* Arthur is the main character and *Merlin* it is Merlin so the adaptations do share the same point of view. Merlin is old and he dies before Arthur does in Malory's version, which is fine since Merlin is not the main character (Malory). However, this would be awkward if the story was told from Merlin's perspective, as the story would come to a sudden halt at his death. That may explain why in the BBC version, Arthur dies before Merlin does, or rather, it explains why Merlin does not die at all (BBC).

The influence by the shift of point of view does not stop there however. In Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* Merlin is much older than Arthur and Arthur is automatically forced to respect Merlin (Malory). In BBC's *Merlin*, Merlin cannot be that much older than Arthur as it would raise eyebrows if he lives for so long in a world where magic is prohibited, and it is difficult for a younger audience to identify themselves with the main character if the main character is that much older than themselves. Instead, Arthur is the same age as Merlin, and Arthur, thanks to his stubbornness and arrogance, initially refuses to acknowledge Merlin's help and advice (BBC). Had Merlin been older than Arthur in the series, Arthur would have been forced to respect his elderly status and any help or advice would have sooner considered imperative. This makes Merlin in Malory's version immediately a capable and wise advisor as he tries to direct Arthur by openly using his magic and sharing his knowledge of the future (Malory, 23), whereas in BBC's version, Merlin slowly becomes a trustworthy companion (BBC).

In conclusion, the main themes in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* are shown to be different from the ones in BBC's *Merlin* with regards to the male characters. The themes of the chivalric romance, courtly love, honour and loyalty, were also present in the series but in *Merlin* the emphasis lay much more on the themes of friendship, strength and courage. The theme of sexual sin Malory discussed is avoided or justified in *Merlin* to the point that it could almost be said that it was removed all together. In addition, the supernatural aspect of the story was shown in a much less negative light in *Merlin* than in *Le Morte D'Arthur*. These differences were the result of religious influence and political debates that were relevant during each time period. The portrayal of characters was also influenced by the shift of point of view from Arthur as main character in *Le Morte D'Arthur* and Merlin in *Merlin*.

Adaptation of Female Characters

Perhaps the clearest evidence of a development in the approach to the Arthurian Legend can be seen in the portrayal of the most important female characters: Morgana and Guinevere. Their story is undoubtedly tied to the theme of love, but the BBC version is more feministic in tone. The feministic aspect as it appears in *Merlin* differs from the somewhat misogynistic tone of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. During Malory's time, character descriptions were overall not as extensive as they are in modern novels, as was seen in the last chapter, yet the female characters lack even more personality than the male characters. In Malory's version, Morgana and Guinevere make judgments based on one emotion which is love, while Arthur and Merlin are ruled by love, loyalty, and pride among others. With the need for equality between men and women nowadays and the desire for character depth, Malory's approach would be unacceptable to a modern audience.

The first time this feministic approach to the Arthurian Legend is seen is in *The Mists of Avalon*, written by Marion Zimmer Bradley's and published in 1982 (Bradley). Ever since *The Mists of Avalon*, adaptations of the Arthurian Legend include a more feministic approach to the characters, and BBC's *Merlin* is no exception.

The easiest way to prove this is to look at the character of Guinevere, as her change is the most drastic when comparing Malory's version to the BBC's version. Despite having several chapters dedicated to her and her affair with Lancelot, Guinevere does not directly have that big of a role in *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

The first time she is mentioned shows that Arthur is rather quick to decide on who to marry as can be seen in the following lines:

"And there had Arthur the first of Queen Guenivere, the king's daughter of the land of Camerlard, and ever after he loved her; and after they were wedded, as it telleth in the book." (Malory, 20).

It could be argued that this is just a display of the lack of character description and character development in Malory's adaptation, typical of all English medieval romances, and any details on the bonding between characters that are expected in relationships nowadays are simply left out here. However, seeing as Arthur sleeps with another woman a few paragraphs later, it suggests that Arthur is not interested in getting to know a woman before demanding her to be with him, no matter if it is for life or one night only (Malory, 21). Such a transactional approach to marriage would not be accepted from a man nowadays, while it was much more common an approach to women and relations during the time *Le Morte D'Arthur* was written, and this reflects on the approach to the story in the different time periods.

In Malory's version, Guinevere is depicted as a temptress and adulteress. She is mentioned by Merlin just before she marries Arthur:

"Merlin warned the King covertly that Guenivere was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Lancelot should love her, and she him again." (Malory, 50).

This refers to the recurring theme of sexual sin and betrayal in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, which is much less prominent in the modern BBC adaptation.

In *Merlin*, Guinevere does not willingly cheat on Arthur. The BBC writers attempt to create some sort of understanding for her position in the events, almost completely negating the heavily present theme of adultery and sexual sin in Malory's version. The only way the bond between Lancelot and Guinevere shows up in the series as an affair is when Morgana uses her magic in an attempt to avert a future where Guinevere is Queen of Camelot in *Lancelot du Lac*, showing that dark magic was needed for Guinevere to betray Arthur, a clear sign of her goodness and loyalty (BBC, season 4, episode 8). After this, in *The Hunter's Heart*, Guinevere is seen surviving on her own in nearby villages as a strong woman, who is still faithful to Arthur, passing on information to Merlin, and therefore to Arthur, about Morgana's plans to attack Camelot (BBC, season 4, episode 11).

The BBC's approach shows that Guinevere is not only a wife and queen, but also an individual with her own struggles and strengths. Malory's version does show Guinevere as a fair queen, who maintains balance and order at court and among the Knights of Camelot, but this is mostly to display what a good wife is supposed to be like and to discuss the theme of order and balance. These are themes that are often paired with Guinevere's character in both Malory's version and *Merlin*. It shows in Malory's adaptation when Guinevere judges Gawain as he fails to show mercy on his adventure (Malory, 56), and in the form of kindness when she praises Sir Kay for his deeds in combat (Malory, 60), but the theme of order truly shows in the story when Lancelot is tricked into sleeping with Elayne. Guinevere banishes him, calling him out on his betrayal to her personally when he tries to visit her (Malory, 320). That last detail shows that Guinevere actually only acts out of love.

In *Merlin* this is different. When she returns as queen, it is shown that she is a good queen, like in Malory's story, but she also shows independence and intelligence as she sentences a supposed traitor to death in part one of *Arthur's Bane* (BBC, season 5, episode 1). In the second part of *Arthur's Bane*, it is shown that she is actually pretending to execute the daughter of the real traitor to lure him out, and she shows mercy and kindness by agreeing to meet with the daughter after having sentenced her (BBC, season 5, episode 2). Contrary to what happens in Malory, where Arthur and Guinevere both die in the end, Guinevere survives and is assumed to remain Queen Regent of Camelot until she dies of old age, which again shows her capability to rule on her own out of a sense of duty and pride rather than just out of love for Arthur (BBC, season 5, episode 12).

Another difference that influences the female characters is the shift of medium in the adaptation from *Le Morte D'Arthur* to *Merlin*. A series can convey emotions through facial expression and voiced dialogue. In addition, if you were to write a novel based on the series *Merlin* and then compared it to *Le Morte D'Arthur*, *Merlin* would still show much more than

Le Morte D'Arthur. This text in Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* will quickly explain why:

"[y]our job as a fiction writer is to focus attention not on the words, which are inert, nor on the thoughts these words produce, but through these to felt experiences, where the vitality of understanding lies." (Burroway, 22).

In other words, Malory's story is effectively a retelling of fictional events, as it neglects emotions in experiences while they are shown and described through both dialogue and facial expressions in the BBC series. This difference is easiest to show by looking at the character of Morgana.

In both Malory's version and the BBC version, Morgana appears as the nemesis of Arthur, trying to seize his throne for herself or her lover and she even tries to kill Arthur. Both versions also include an earlier, friendly and trusting bond between the two characters, and this is where the difference in adaptations becomes evident.

In *Le Morte D'Arthur* it is briefly suggested that Morgana cares for Arthur in the lines "and she loved another knight better than her husband King Uriens or King Arthur", but her love for another knight by the name Accolon is overpowering (Malory, 41). This bond is mentioned again when, after Arthur trusts Morgana with it, she steals the scabbard of Excalibur from him. He defends her against the knights who wish to see her burn saying that "she is a kind sister" (Malory, 73). Even that last line is dry and lacking in empathy; there are no strong emotions involved; he simply states that she is kind.

When looking at the first two seasons of *Merlin,* however, Arthur and Morgana quarrel like siblings and look after each other, expressing love and concern through actions which could very well be described in a text and not just through facial expressions.

An excellent example of this is the episode *The Gates of Avalon*, where Morgana experiences prophesizing dreams and tries to warn Arthur so she can protect him for the danger he is in without actually telling him about her dreams (BBC, season 1, episode 7). Arthur attempts to reassure a frantic Morgana and orders Merlin to keep her safe (BBC, season 1, episode 7). The remains of this bond linger when Arthur walks up to Morgana after fighting his way back into Camelot and holds up his hands in good will, requesting to talk to her, and though Morgana had been sassing him upon his entry, her facial expression softens and saddens as she listens to Arthur when he mournfully asks her what happened to her (BBC, season 4, episode 13).

So the BBC version shows the bond rather than describing it in words and it becomes visible that Morgana is hurt over what happened between her and Arthur, creating a better understanding for the character's actions and motivations. To further support that claim, the reasons behind Morgana's actions as nemesis in Malory's version and the BBC version will be compared.

In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Morgana commits three acts of treachery. The first act is after Merlin prophesizes to Arthur that Excalibur's scabbard will be stolen by the woman he trusts the most, so Arthur gives the scabbard to Morgana, who is deeply in love with Accolon, for safe-keeping but she would kill her brother to see her lover on the throne, so she betrays Arthur's trust and passes the scabbard unto Accolon, effectively stealing it (Malory, 41). Morgana then devices a plan in which Accolon, using the scabbard Morgana enchanted, will fight Arthur, but Nineve knows of Morgana's plan and assists Arthur, who then kills Accolon (Malory, 68). Morgana then goes to steal Arthur's scabbard again and throws it into a lake as he rides to pursue her, hiding herself by means of enchantment (Malory, 72). She then tries to kill Arthur as revenge for the loss of her lover by sending him a mantle that will set him

aflame, disguised as a beautiful peace offering (Malory, 73). After Nineve disrupts that plan as well, Morgana does not come up with any other huge plan to take Arthur's life.

Morgana was married off to a king, and not to Accolon, so the theme of sexual sin and betrayal shows again in Morgana's character. Through this, the awareness of the misogyny in Malory's adaptation grows even stronger. It is always the women who are at fault.

In a modern adaptation, the expectation is that a nemesis is not the only one at fault, and BBC's *Merlin* does not fail its audience in that aspect, as Morgana in *Merlin*, is a far more complex character in comparison to Malory's Morgana.

Morgana in the first episodes is described as a compassionate and strong-willed character, though secretly she is afraid as her magical abilities slowly awaken and she does not understand them, as can be seen later in *The Nightmare Begins* (BBC, season 2, episode 3). After meeting Morgause in *The Sins of the Father*, who helps her overcome her nightmares by means of an enchanted bracelet, she slowly turns against Uther, seeing how magic can be good while he refuses to see that (BBC, season 2, episode 8). Merlin sees that the only way to save Camelot, is to kill Morgana, and thus he regretfully resorts to poisoning her, which turns Morgana against Camelot for good as she, rightfully, feels betrayed (BBC, season 2, episode 12).

This already reintroduces the familiar theme of betrayal, but also goes into the theme of the supernatural. Morgana is shown that both the side of magic and the side of Uther and Arthur, have good and evil, making her decision on with who to side difficult. This difficulty can be seen in *The Beginning of the End*, when a young druid boy, Mordred, appears in Camelot in need of medical attention and she is hesitant to help (BBC, season 1, episode 8). Later, when she has already began to accept her magical abilities, she remains hesitant to

assist Mordred when he returns to Camelot (BBC, season 2, episode 11). There is no such conflict in *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Morgana loves Accolon and thus she turns on Arthur in the blink of an eye when the opportunity presents itself to her. Had that same scene occurred in *Merlin*, she would have struggled plenty before deciding.

In *Merlin*, Morgana acts out of her personal need to be herself and strives for equality, eventually all the grief causes her to snap and her original goals get blurred by the need for revenge and control. Her magic is not purely evil, which is also different from Malory's version, where magic is ultimately always used to manipulate and betray, with Merlin only being half an exception. This could very well be explained due to the religious background tied to the original Arthurian stories. According to many verses in the Bible, magic is prohibited. The Bible's influence especially shows for Morgana as she is a necromancer in Malory's story (Malory, 8). In Leviticus it reads that one should not turn to mediums or necromancers, and so make yourselves unclean by them (Bijbel, Leviticus, 19:31). This makes Arthur decision to entrust the scabbard to Morgana suddenly more of a religious lesson not to trust the use of magic than a portrayal of the bond between Arthur to Morgana. Since in the modern time, the religious aspect is not at all relevant, it can be as present in the story as the writers see fit, making room for other lessons to be learned, such as to respect women and see them as equals.

In conclusion, the female characters portray a shift in the focus of themes, from love and betrayal to strength, individuality and the blurred lines of good and evil. They promote a sense of equality between male and female in the modern adaptation that was unknown in the medieval romances. There is a shift of telling to showing in the BBC version that allows BBC to visualise the character's emotions and thus create a deeper empathy for their actions and motivations. It appears that Malory is focused on retelling a story in a way that it teaches the

moral norms and values of the society in that time, rather than developing character

personality and provide showing descriptions.

Conclusion

This thesis argued how the approach to the Arthurian Legend changed now from medieval times by looking at one the factors that are omnipresent in any version of the tale: the characters. For a medieval text it was decided to look at *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory and it was compared to the television series *Merlin* aired on BBC in 2008. The focus lay on the comparison of the adaptations of the characters Arthur, Merlin, Morgana and Guinevere and the differences in their personality, relationships and actions in the BBC version and Malory's version. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* was used to explain differences that were found through these analyses, such as the character's actions, age and personality. These were partially influenced by the different point of view and medium of storytelling. Differences based on the time period it was written, such as themes and gender roles, were explained with help from citations from the bible and through carefully studying the content of both adaptations. From these findings it can be concluded in short that a big part of the differences between the medieval adaptation are accounted for by a shift in medium and a shift of frame, however, both Malory and BBC describe similar events differently and characters are adapted in a fashion that suited the expectations and needs of the audience of the time period in which the content was written. This includes themes such as love and sexual sin which were much more common in the medieval adaptation by Malory than they were in the modern series by BBC, though BBC did not entirely ignore these themes. The theme of love was still present, but even though the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere was not removed the theme of sexual sin was minimized. BBC also worked with the theme of feminism which was introduced into the Arthurian adaptations by Marion Zimmer Bradly in *The Mists of* Avalon, and was not present in *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The supernatural theme also was put in a more positive light by BBC. Therefore, it can be said that there is a notable change in the approach of adapting the Arthurian Legend due to

political views and important themes associated with the time period in which the adaptation was created. This conclusion satisfied the research question but is incomplete until more adaptations are analysed. Therefore, this research leaves opportunities for further research which can possibly discuss more themes, objects and events, such as the Holy Grail and the Fisher King. It is also important to look at different authors and texts to establish a similarity in writing style based on the time period, and to exclude the possibility of differences being solely based on the author's preference.

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