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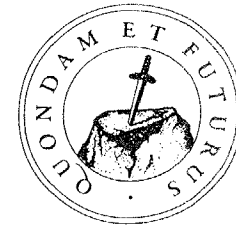
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The Once and Future King: The Book That Grows Up

ALAN LUPACK

T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* is an experiment in artistic structure, in which the book grows up with the characters. As characters age, genres change from children's story to *bildungsroman* to romance to tragedy. *The Book of Merlyn* was intended as the final stage of this process, a philosophical dialogue which reflected upon all the whole of Arthur's life and experience. (ACI)

Works that attempt the formidable task of telling the whole story of Arthur must find a way to deal with the range of characters and themes and the multiplicity of tales that constitute the Matter of Britain. The story of Arthur is, after all, many stories even as it is one story. The history of Malory criticism alone illustrates this point. And Malory, like his successors, felt the need to tell many stories (actually many more than the eight that Vinaver defined) in order to tell the one story of Arthur. Tennyson too found it necessary to tell a variety of stories, each one so independent that it could be read on its own—or even, as the Balin idyll was in 1885 and as various idylls have been since, printed without the support of any of its fellows. Though each idyll tells a different tale, the interactions among them reveal a theme and a reinterpretation of the Arthurian world that, as with the various tales in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, is more than the sum of its parts. Yet the multiple idylls are necessary as a structural device that allows Tennyson to treat the diversity of the Arthurian legend, which can overwhelm an author or undermine a work of art. The attempt to tell the whole Arthurian story despite the range of material it includes no doubt explains the fact that the most common form for treating the Arthurian legend in the latter half of the twentieth century was the trilogy (or in some cases the tetralogy or pentalogy), as is demonstrated by the work of such novelists as Gillian Bradshaw, Vera Chapman, Bernard Cornwell, Stephen Lawhead, Mary Stewart, Fay Sampson, Persia Woolley, and others. Since there are so many recent examples, it is easy to forget that one of the earliest and still most important sequences of novels to tell Arthur's story was that written by T.H. White.

Since most people now read the 1958 version of *The Once and Future King*, we tend to think of it as a single finished book, though a long one that is divided into four parts. Within each of those parts and within the book as a whole, there are some obvious structural devices employed to tie everything together. Evans Lansing Smith has commented on White's 'cunning use of the conventional devices of form that give extraordinary shape and significance to the novel's mythic materials' which involves a 'scheme of parallelism among the books' and a 'plot structure' in each of the books that 'oscillates between opposing settings in the progressive development of its plot, which culminates in a reconciliatory climax which recapitulates the entire action of the individual book.'¹ I do not intend to dispute or to discuss the specific parallelisms or reconciliations of the four parts of the novel. Instead, I want to focus on the shifting plans that White had for his Arthuriad and ultimately the structural experiment that is made clear by, but survives the excising of, *The Book of Merlyn*.

Much of the unity of the individual parts is due to the fact that each of the first three parts was published separately, as *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Witch in the Wood* (a title later changed to *The Queen of Air and Darkness*), and *The Ill-Made Knight*. Though initially White thought in terms of a tetralogy, he developed a five-part structure and actually submitted to his publisher a five-volume work, concluding with *The Candle in the Wind* and *The Book of Merlyn*. But his new plan required that he rewrite the first three books for thematic consistency with the concluding pair—and to be part of one book, not separate parts in a serial publication. In a letter to his publisher Collins (Dec. 8, 1941) accompanying what he thought of as a completed manuscript, White said: 'The last two books are like a hat made to fit on top of the first three as re-written. They would not fit on the first three as originally published. Anybody who bought the last two after having read the published volumes would be quite puzzled and annoyed. They have not got a unity of their own, suitable for separate publication.'² While it is not unusual for a multi-volume sequence to be published as an aggregate volume—as Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy and Fay Sampson's Daughter of Tintagel pentalogy were—what is unusual about White's book is that his sequence ended with two volumes that were written as a capstone to the previous ones and not meant to be published by themselves.

In a 1939 journal entry, White talks of the parts of the Arthuriad as his 'quadruplets.'³ White originally planned for a tetralogy that was to be the story of 'the Doom of Arthur' and even intended that the fourth volume would 'be in the form of a straightforward play or tragedy.'⁴ But at some

stage he decided to shift from a four-part to a five-part book. In a letter to his friend David Garnett (dated June 8, 1941), White outlines the five-part structure. He writes that 'the final epic, which will be called The Once & future King [*sic*], will have five books. (1) The Sword in the Stone, boyhood and animals. (2) The Witch in the Wood—that bloody bitch Morgause. (3) The Ill-Made Knight—Lancelot & the middle years. (4) The Candle in the Wind—final bust up with the sons of Morgause—none to blame except because of her—ending with the aged Arthur weeping and smashed on the eve of his last battle with Mordred. (5) The Book of Merlin.'⁵

At the same time that White was developing this five-part structure, his conception of the book was shifting from a classical tragedy to something more in line with what he says he 'suddenly discovered,' that is, that 'the central theme of Morte d'Arthur is to find an antidote to war.'⁶ Nevertheless, his sense of the work as a tragedy is still evident. In the 1958 *Once and Future King*, at the end of 'The Queen of Air and Darkness,' White writes that though most of Malory's book—and by implication his own—deals with knights and quests, 'the narrative is a whole, and it deals with the reasons why the young man came to grief at the end. It is the tragedy, the Aristotelian and comprehensive tragedy, of sin coming home to roost.'⁷ And White's book is better as tragedy than as treatise. Still, *The Book of Merlyn* remains important in understanding White's artistry in *The Once and Future King*, not so much because it is the most blatant exploration of the theme of war, which remains part of the point of the book in its ultimate revision, but mainly because it is the key to a brilliant experiment in artistic construction.

There is throughout White's sequence of books an awareness of time. The most obvious example of this is the fact that Merlin lives backwards in time. Because of this unusual quality, White is able to introduce any number of anachronisms into the book. As Marilyn K. Nellis has observed, 'Anachronism penetrates conversations, appearance, customs—constantly tying the modern world to the medieval for the incidental humor of the resemblance as well as for social comment.'⁸ White's playing with time is not, however, just for purposes of humor and satire; it is part of the very fabric of the book.

Towards the end of *The Sword in the Stone*, Kay asks Merlin not to leave him and Wart. Merlin replies that he must go and adds, 'We have had a good time while we were young but it is in the nature of Time to fly' (199)—a strange statement for a character who is living backwards in time to make. Merlin is, after all, growing younger. Perhaps Merlin's departure is just another lesson about life that Merlin is teaching his young students, but it seems also

to mark a passage, to be a sign that afterwards Kay will enter the adult world and Wart will become King Arthur and, time having flown, he will have responsibilities that will require him to apply his youthful education—perhaps without having as good a time as he has had as a youth. And since Merlin is getting younger but T.H. White was not, it may mark an authorial lament about the nature of the world and an authorial comment about the nature of his book. (More about the latter in a moment.)

In *The Sword in the Stone*, Arthur's nickname Wart marks him as a different figure from the hero of romance, a child who must learn to be king by learning about the world around him, the animals that live in that world, and from them and their political systems about man and his. In *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, Gawain and his brothers continue the childhood theme, sometimes with a darkness that it did not have in the earlier book. With a mother who is more of a figurative than a literal witch but who nonetheless casts a spell over her children, most of the brothers become psychopaths. Arthur, who is called 'the young king of England' (220), is beginning to mature. He arrives at the idea of Might for Right; and Merlin says 'the first few words of the Nunc Dimittis' (248) because his pupil has begun to think for himself and what he thinks is noble.

Early in *The Ill-Made Knight* when 'Guenever was twenty-two,' White introduces a long passage on the development of a seventh sense in middle age. This seventh sense is a sense of balance that is gained with experience of the world. It is the reason 'Middle-aged people can balance between believing in God and breaking all the commandments, without difficulty' (378). White speaks of this quality before Guenever or Lancelot has developed it because it is just this aging and balancing process that is the subject of the third and central book of his *Arthuriad*.⁹ Midway through *The Ill-Made Knight*, Lancelot has fathered Galahad, lived with Elaine for a time, and returned to Camelot and resided there for fifteen more years. White calls attention to the new generation at court 'for whom Arthur was not the crusader of a future day, but the accepted conqueror of a past one—for whom Lancelot was the hero of a hundred victories, and Guenever the romantic mistress of a nation' (421). White emphasizes the passage of time with a deliberate cliché: 'Indeed, a lot of water had flowed under the bridges of Camelot in twenty-one years' (421). And when Lancelot returns from the quest for the Grail, Guenever gives him time to get over what she sees as his selfish holiness but is also aware that 'a woman could wait too long for victory—she could be too old to enjoy it' (475). Towards the end of this installment of his book, White writes that 'Now the maturest or the saddest phase [of Camelot] had

come, in which enthusiasms had been used up for good, and only our famous seventh sense was left to be practised. The court had "knowledge of the world" now' (477). The characters have reached mature, worldly-wise, and a bit world-weary middle age. At the very end of the book, when Lancelot, after healing Sir Urry, weeps like a child who had been beaten, the force of the scene is different from that of its parallel in Malory. In the medieval author, the sense is that Lancelot is chastised by his own sinfulness in the face of the blessings God has bestowed on him. In White's tale, Lancelot's ability to work a miracle, a blessing that he thought had been taken from him when he lost his virginity by sleeping with Elaine and that he believed would never return because of his sinfulness with Guenever, has been granted to him once again; and the generosity of God brings him back momentarily to the ethic of his childhood, a time before he had developed his seventh sense.

In *The Candle in the Wind*, Arthur, prevented from reconciling with Lancelot by Gawain's anger and Mordred's innate iniquity, is referred to as 'the old man' (602); and when Mordred taunts Guenever before suggesting that they marry, the Queen tells him that she is 'old enough to be your mother' (602), a detail that Malory finds no need to mention. The pattern of aging characters continues into *The Book of Merlyn* where, on the first page, Arthur is said to have 'an old man's misery'¹⁰ and is repeatedly described as old or referred to as 'the old man' or 'an old man' (cf. 69, 98, 105, 115, 130). Even Lancelot and Guenever are seen to have aged. When Lancelot goes to the convent for a last meeting with the Queen, he climbs 'the convent wall with Gallic, ageing gallantry' (132); and when she dies and Lancelot returns to claim her body, the hero of romance is depicted as an old man 'with his snow-white hair and wrinkled cheeks' (132).

It is perhaps not remarkable that characters in a novel, even a novel based on a romance, age or that the author so clearly calls our attention to their aging. But this awareness of aging does intensify the tragedy. As C.N. Manlove has observed, 'Time is at the centre of White's work as it is only at the end in Malory: we watch the Dark become the Middle Ages, and the Middle turn into the later Middle Ages; and we see the central characters aging. The story may have been given to White, but his peculiar emphasis on the fading of the dream and on the movement of time heightens the poignancy of the loss.'¹¹ What is remarkable is that White reflects this aging in the macro-structure of his book. In a rather brilliant structural experiment, at the same time that the characters age in the sequence, the book itself is growing up with them.

In the letter cited above in which White wrote to David Garnett of his book's five-part structure, he noted that *The Sword in the Stone* would be about 'boyhood and animals,' that the subject of *The Ill-Made Knight* was 'Lancelot & the middle years,' and that *The Candle in the Wind* would end 'with the aged Arthur weeping and smashed on the eve of his last battle with Mordred.'¹² This account of the structural divisions of the book is clearly tied to the aging of the characters. White's comment that 'The last two books are like a hat made to fit on top of the first three *as re-written*'¹³ indicates that he saw these two books as a sort of diptych of Arthur's old age. What we have then is a pair of tales at the beginning depicting the youth of Arthur and of Gawain and his brothers, a central book depicting 'the middle years,' and another pair of tales focusing on an aged Arthur.

The Sword in the Stone is a children's book. As Elizabeth Brewer points out, 'The fact that White intended *The Sword in the Stone* to be a children's book in the manner of Masefield's *Midnight Folk* which he so much loved and admired differentiates it from the subsequent parts of *The Once and Future King*, and surely affects the way in which we should interpret it.'¹⁴ The turning of Arthur into various animals, the adventure with Robin Hood, the talking owl Archimedes, Merlin's botched spells—all are the stuff of a tale for young readers. The distance from this book to the almost pessimistic philosophizing (some might say pseudo-philosophizing) of *The Book of Merlyn* seems great, but part of White's artistry is to make the process gradual, like aging itself. Looking from the first book to the fifth is like seeing an acquaintance from youth after many years and being surprised at how much the person has changed. But reading through the books in sequence makes the aging process less startling, like living with a person and seeing small changes day by day.

The other frame of the opening diptych, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, also has elements of a children's book—though ultimately a darker and more ominous one than *The Sword in the Stone*. Arthur is the young king learning to think for himself; but much of the book is set in the Gaelic world of Lothian, and many of the adventures are those of a children's tale even though 'the snake is now in the garden.'¹⁵ The killing of the griffin from *The Sword in the Stone* is paralleled by the hunting of the unicorn in *The Queen of Air and Darkness*. Both are adventures with a fabulous beast, but the latter—a revolting slaughter of a beautiful animal, an offense against the nature that Wart learns to love and respect in the first book and a double travesty because it is done to please an uncaring and unpleasable mother—is a sign of the deep dysfunctionality of the Lothian clan. This is then a step beyond the

idyllic world of the first book but, despite ominous foreshadowing, the characters have not yet reached the world of adult trouble that later books depict. It seems as if White was trying in this second part of his pentalogy to write a *bildungsroman* in which Arthur comes of age and is no longer in need of his tutor but also to link it through both comic and disturbing elements to the part that comes before.

Similarly, the second installment of White's Arthuriad depicts love affairs, another step toward the adult world. But the love interest of Pellinore in the second book is much different from that of Lancelot in *The Ill-Made Knight*, and it has far less dire consequences. Pellinore's love-sickness because of his affection for the Queen of Flanders' daughter, called Piggy, remains largely comic; and the episode of the Questing Beast's falling in love with the artificial Beast created by Grummore and Palomides to distract the pining Pellinore is completely comic. In this book Lothian is at war with Camelot, a situation that would seem to provide a forum for treatment of the theme of finding an antidote to war. It does so to a certain extent in the scenes set in Camelot, but in Lothian the three knights from Arthur's court are not even aware of the war and no one bothers to tell them about it.

In this second part of the Arthuriad, White also demonstrates how Gawain and his brothers are shaped into the men they will become under the influence of their horrible mother and depicts Arthur's planting of the literal and figurative seed of the future tragedy. Perhaps even more importantly, the book portrays Arthur's maturation. In contrast to some of the arrested sons of Lot and Morgause, who are doomed not by fate but by the Freudian influence of their mother, Arthur learns to think for himself, and Merlin declares through the 'Nunc Dimittis' that his student is ready to face the world on his own. He proves that he is by arriving at the notion that Might is not Right but should be used for Right and by fighting in a new way, attacking the knights and thus providing a disincentive for the nobles to think of war as a lark. These demonstrations of Arthur's maturation make *The Queen of Air and Darkness* a *bildungsroman* that bridges the gap between his childhood and his maturity.

The Ill-Made Knight moves into the world of adult concerns and dangers. One marker of the change, for example, is seen in Morgan's Castle Chariot, to which Lancelot is brought by Morgan and her three sister queens/witches: it 'no longer had its fairy appearance as a castle of food [as it did in *The Sword in the Stone*], but its everyday aspect of an ordinary fortress' (343). The book was also conceived as belonging to a different genre. As Elizabeth Brewer points out, White repeatedly wrote in his letters to Potts and others

that it was to be a 'Romance.'¹⁶ With the adventures and quests and especially the love interest that that genre usually implies, the book concerns itself with love and religion and strife.

The sequence ages again in its fourth part, *The Candle in the Wind*, which White first wrote as a tragedy; and, as John K. Crane has observed, 'In changing it from its original form as drama to novel, White seems to have done little more than remove the stage directions and convert a few long speeches from spoken lines to narrative passages.'¹⁷ The book not only remains highly dramatic but maintains the tragic situation. Lancelot and Arthur share a love for each other that is almost as strong as their love for Guenever. Arthur is very much aware of the affair between his wife and his champion; and yet he chooses to overlook it because he puts the good of his kingdom and of his friend above his own pride. 'One of White's great triumphs' Martin Kellman writes, 'is to make this attempt to avoid the truth, indeed to be above jealousy, a sign neither of cowardice nor ignorance but an indication of a profoundly noble nature.'¹⁸ Arthur's nobility and Lancelot's inability to yield totally to a seventh sense make the tragedy all the more moving. But when the King is confronted with an accusation and his entire system of law and justice depends on his condemning those he loves, he can no longer look the other way. Mordred, like all true scoundrels, uses against the one he would destroy that person's own goodness.

White intended to end his Arthuriad with *The Book of Merlyn*. When White sent the five-part book to Collins, his publisher, Mr. Collins quoted to White from a reader's report that said 'The Introduction of the animals in the last book suggests *The Sword in the Stone*, but the purpose is sadly different. White has changed into a political moralist. Fun and fancy have abdicated in favour of a purpose. Nor do I see what can be done about it, if the author feels that way.'¹⁹ Of course, the philosophical tone of the last part of the Arthuriad is not terribly inconsistent with the rest of it. As John K. Crane has observed, in *the Sword in the Stone* 'the nature of man is either directly or obliquely discussed continually.'²⁰ And the same can be said for the other parts of the sequence. But *The Book of Merlyn* is different not only from *The Sword in the Stone* but from all the books that precede it in White's cycle. What the reviewer missed, however, is that it was intentionally a very different sort of thing, a philosophical dialogue, not, to be sure, as profound as Plato's but of the same genre. He also missed the fact that this change in genre is a key to White's structural experimentation. It is the capstone in the construction of the sequence, a speculative reflection on the nature of man and on the problem of Might. And it is the last stage in the aging of White's

book, which mirrors the aging of the characters. Thus, in the five parts of White's Arthuriad, the book grows up from a children's story to a *bildungsroman*, to a romance, to a tragedy, to a philosophical treatise.

When White published the 1958 *Once and Future King*, he did not of course include *The Book of Merlyn*. Most critics would agree with the judgment of Sylvia Townsend Warner that 'It is difficult to read the fifth Arthur [*The Book of Merlyn*] without exasperation. It could have been so good and it is so bad. The fault is not in the choice of theme: abolition of war is an interesting subject...The fault lies in the book's schizophrenia. Giving the impression of having been written by two different people it does not seem sincere. Written by one man, it seems demented.'²¹ Elisabeth Brewer offers a different criticism: 'Interesting as *The Book of Merlyn* is, it would have made a strange ending to the story of Arthur, had its author been able to carry out his original intention of concluding his epic with it as a fifth book. For what reader, after reaching the tragic end of the story, when Arthur, old and defeated, faces death at the hand of his own son, really wants to attend a Privy Council of animals, including the sentimental and sentimentalised hedgehog, for another dose of polemic and facetious humor at the end?'²²

Brewer, however, also recognizes that 'the return to the animals at the end of Arthur's story [in *the Book of Merlyn*] is ingenious, too, in that it creates a circular pattern, somewhat similar to the older Arthurian tradition, in which the appearance of the Lady of the Lake with Excalibur marks the beginning of Arthur's career as king, while the return of the sword to her at the end signals its close.'²³ This circularity is only a part of the structural completion that *The Book of Merlyn* offers. For the dialogue about war not only occurs in Arthur's old age but it is also the 'old age' of the book, the final part and the culmination of the growing up of the Arthuriad. While the earlier genres are clearly related to stages in the lives of the characters, from youth to maturity, the philosophical dialogue of this final part is the culmination of the growing up of the book. It provides an opportunity for reflection on the experiences of Arthur's whole life and thus may be said to be the final stage in his growth and development. It is in one sense the maturest of genres because it looks back on the experiences of his life, from the youthful enthusiasm of a young boy learning about the world to the tragedy of an aging king forced to condemn his beloved wife and make war against his best friend. This is not to imply that themes as serious or as 'mature' may not be treated in the other genres that make up *The Once and Future King*, including a children's story. Indeed, the questions of education, maturation,

love and friendship, and government and morality that the other books treat are serious and important. But White has structured his books in such a way that this final part grows out of the others and depends on the experiences gained in them for its themes and insights. Therefore, it is important to recognize that, in spite of its clumsy execution, *The Book of Merlyn* strives for both aesthetic and philosophic fulfillment.

But the ending of the 1958 book is, as Brewer points out, 'a far more satisfying and elegant conclusion.'²⁴ White's final revision of his Arthurian demonstrates that the artist has triumphed over the polemicist.²⁵ In fact, it is hard to imagine a better ending than that of the 1958 version—for several reasons. First of all, the omission of *The Book of Merlyn* forced White to move its chapters about the ants and the geese to *The Sword in the Stone*, where they are more suitable as part of Arthur's education about man's role as a political animal. The 1958 ending also seems appropriate to the concern with time throughout the sequence. In the end, time, so essential to the book, is part of its ultimate theme. There is not enough time to solve the great problems like war and human iniquity and the tragic consequences that result from them, and not enough time to teach the things that make it possible to solve these problems, not even enough time for someone like Merlin who lives many lifetimes. Thus art and culture, embodied in the young Tom Malory, become crucial so that one is not always starting anew, so that values and ideals can be preserved and absorbed even when Merlin or some Merlin figure like T.H. White is not around to teach. In addition, though the return to the animals of the first part was eliminated, another circular pattern is completed in the 1958 book. Given the emphasis on the aging of the characters throughout the sequence, it is only fitting that the ending introduce a child so that the cycle can begin again. His presence, accepted because of the pattern of anachronism and the muddled medieval time in which the story takes place, allows White to announce that the conclusion of his tale is not 'The End' but 'The Beginning.'

White's Merlin said that 'the best thing for being sad...is to learn something' (183). The ending of the 1958 *Once and Future King* implies that the best answer to macrocosmic sorrows like war is indeed to learn something—from the examples of books like Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and White's own sequence.²⁶ And White returns to a youth, not Wart but a young Tom Malory, who will learn and then inspire others to learn. In this ending, White suggests a different kind of return of Arthur from that hinted at in Malory, a return of the sort seen over and over again—in the literature

and music and art created through the ages, a tradition to which White himself adds an innovative and experimental novel.

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NOTES

- 1 Evans Lansing Smith, 'The Narrative Structure of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*,' *Quondam et Futurus* 1.4 (Winter 1991), p. 39.
- 2 Cited in Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T.H. White: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape with Chatto & Windus, 1967), 187.
- 3 Cited by Elisabeth Brewer in *T.H. White's The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 17.
- 4 T.H. White, *Letters to a Friend: The Correspondence Between T.H. White and L.J. Potts*, ed. François Gallix (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1982), 109 and 111.
- 5 *The White/Garnett Letters*, ed. David Garnett (New York: Viking, 1968), 85–86.
- 6 Letter of Dec. 6, 1940, in *Letters to a Friend: The Correspondence Between T.H. White and L.J. Potts*, ed. François Gallix (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1982), 120.
- 7 T.H. White, *The Once and Future King* (1958; rpt. New York: Berkeley Medallion, 1966), 312. All other citations to *The Once and Future King* will be to this easily available edition and will be given in the text by page number.
- 8 'Anachronistic Humor in Two Arthurian Romances of Education: *To the Chapel Perilous* and *The Sword in the Stone*,' *Studies in Medievalism* 2.4 (Fall 1983), 73.
- 9 As Martin Kellman has observed, 'The tone [of *The Ill-Made Knight*], mostly somber, autumn and twilight, the season and time of transition, is appropriate because the lovers and the court are aging and maturing' (129).
- 10 T.H. White, *The Book of Merlyn: The Unpublished Conclusion to The Once and Future King*, Prologue by Sylvia Townsend Warner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 3. All other citations to *the Book of Merlyn* will be to this edition and will be given in the text by page number.
- 11 'Flight to Aleppo: T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*,' *Mosaic* 10.2 (1977), 71.
- 12 *The White/Garnett Letters*, ed. David Garnett (New York: Viking, 1968), 86.
- 13 Cited in Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T. H. White: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape with Chatto & Windus, 1967), 187.
- 14 'Some Comments on "T.H. White, Pacifism and Violence,"' *Connotations* 7.1 (1997/98), 129.
- 15 Martin Kellman, *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), p. 103.
- 16 *T.H. White's The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 76.
- 17 *T.H. White* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 111–12.
- 18 *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 123.

- 19 Cited in Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T.H. White: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape with Chatto & Windus, 1967), 188.
- 20 *T.H. White* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 79.
- 21 *T.H. White: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape with Chatto & Windus, 1967), 182.
- 22 *T.H. White's The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 150. See also Martin Kellman, *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), who observes that '... both volume one, *The Sword in the Stone*, and volume four would be weakened by the absence of material later donated to them from the abandoned book. Moreover, *Merlyn* is so different from them in style and tone and so uneven in quality that it would have been somewhat of a disruption, being too long for a coda.' Kellman adds: 'I believe White chose correctly when he did not include it in the 1958 edition of *The Once and Future King*' (131–32).
- 23 *T.H. White's The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 152.
- 24 *T.H. White's The Once and Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 164.
- 25 Elisabeth Brewer remarks that 'although *The Book of Merlyn* might seem to represent White's last word on the subject of Arthur, since it was not published until so long after the rest, his final revision of *The Candle in the Wind* before the tetralogy eventually appeared in 1958 enabled him to end it more judiciously and with more decorum. So, although it was not until November 1948 that White at last decided that he would have, in effect, to discard *The Book of Merlyn* and that he would insert the visits to the ants and to the geese into *The Sword in the Stone*, in doing so he surely made the right decision' (*T.H. White's The Once and Future King*, [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993] 150–51).
- 26 The 1958 ending also seems to resolve some of the 'schizophrenia' that Warner complained of. As John K. Crane observes, 'Though Arthur debates the improbability of perfection at great lengths in his tent in the final chapter, the fact that he seeks a boy to carry his message into the future seems to indicate that neither it nor the theme is one of fatalism and consequent resignation' (*T.H. White* [New York: Twayne, 1974], 115).

Reviews

MARTIN BIDDLE et al., *King Arthur's Round Table: An Archaeological Investigation*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000. Pp. xxxvi, 534. 28 color plates, 169 black-and-white figures, 20 tables. ISBN: 0-85115-626-6. \$55. (US), £30. (UK).

In 1976 the eighteen foot diameter, one and a quarter ton table-top which for centuries has adorned the wall of the Great Hall at Winchester Castle was carefully lowered to the floor and subjected to a thorough archaeological-historical investigation. *King Arthur's Round Table* is a fascinating and complex account of that investigation and its conclusions.

All angles are covered, from the Table's literary background and Winchester setting (chs. 1–3) through to its carpentry and dating (chs. 4–6), as well as an examination of the painting, and its inscriptions and iconography (chs. 7–9). A further three chapters on the making (ch. 10), hanging (ch. 11) and painting (ch. 12) of the Table follow, occasionally confirming, repeating, or rejecting findings from earlier chapters, but including now Biddle's conclusions and a considerable focus on the uses to which the Table was put as royal propaganda. There are two final chapters dealing with Hampshire County's care of the Table and some of its more notable visitors, as well as two appendices.

The Table has long been speculatively associated with Edward III or Edward I. Biddle and team provide relatively convincing proof for the latter. They further demonstrate the skill that went into the Table's construction, that it was originally a table proper, and that even at its initial construction it was deemed to be a special object. The carpentry analysis dates this construction to AD 1250–1350, with the tree-ring analysis proposing c. 1250–80; the radiocarbon dates are rather later. To my mind the discrepancies between the tree-ring and radiocarbon investigations (Chapters 5 and 6 respectively) should have been explicitly acknowledged sooner than Chapter 10, where the solution is to discount the radiocarbon analysis due to the greater degree of verification available for the dendrochronology. This makes sense, but does render less decisive Biddle's final conclusion, which combines the scientific tests with historical events and records to argue that the Table was constructed in 1289 for Edward I in preparation for a tournament held at Winchester in 1290 to celebrate the forthcoming marriages of three of Longshanks's children.

The Tudor rose in the center of the painting adorning the Table's surface is a fair indication of at least one period of (repair and) decoration. Although the painting was restored in 1789, Biddle's team reveals that the restoration follows faithfully, albeit less finely, the original painting underneath and, more surprisingly, that this design is the only painting ever applied. Partly for reasons of size and labor (there are 254 square feet of painted surface), Biddle's team decided to restore the restoration