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# The *Reel* Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in *Camelot*, *Excalibur*, and *King Arthur*

ROBERTA DAVIDSON

Filmmakers use King Arthur as a platform for their own agendas and as a figure of hope. Examination of three works reveals a range of implicit and explicit politics. (RD)

The figure of Arthur and the legend of Camelot have inspired an unusual degree of political proselytizing, as Arthur is recreated in each version in the image of the storyteller's ideal leader.<sup>1</sup> As Susan Aronstein has pointed out,

Arthurian romance, by displacing a problematic present with an ideal past, endows its resolution of contemporary cultural crises with the authority of that past. It argues that the new order the romances propose is actually the old order, the world of an idealized past to which the present must be compared and found woefully wanting. Furthermore, only by returning to this ideal past can the culture in question—whether twelfth-century France, thirteenth-century Wales, nineteenth-century Britain, or twentieth-century America—find its divine mission and heavenly vindication.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Thomas Malory, the fifteenth-century source of most modern versions of Arthur, saw such connections between Arthurian history and his own turbulent times, and commented upon them to his readers.<sup>3</sup> Although acknowledging the problematic nature of the past—who would need Arthur in the first place if there hadn't been problems?—Malory and his literary descendants have nonetheless consistently constructed their own activity of reinventing the past as a step toward the restoration of a better world. The ideal that existed once, they imply, can exist again if the present is inspired to remember the past. Arthur can indeed come again.

Despite the tragic ending of the story, the act of remembering in these texts paradoxically becomes an act of hope. The return of a 'once and future' king who shares the artist's ideals and concerns—who offers a real world solution which he alone, charismatically, can persuade the public to adopt, and about which the public is informed through the medium of the artist's text—links the artist's idealized and articulated political agenda with the

weight of timeless and universal truth, and presents a claim to linking the fictional narrative with objective reality. Accordingly, there is a significant weight placed upon the veracity of the work. Despite Arthurian literature being one of the most historically and fictionally complex inheritances of character and narrative from medieval literature to the present, the artist must make good a claim to veracity—that *this* Arthur, out of all the possible Arthurs past and present, is, indeed, the *authentic* Arthur.

The artist is not always whom we might expect. On *Life's* 50th birthday, journalist Theodore H. White told the then twenty-three-year-old story of how the Kennedy administration first became associated with Camelot:

Friday, one week after the assassination, Mrs. Kennedy suddenly telephoned to my house in New York. It was almost an unreal conversation. She felt the American people were going to forget John F. Kennedy... And she wanted me to come because she had a message to give the American people. Remember it was Friday night, so we stopped the press for a second time... Mrs. Kennedy wanted to be out of the camera and television and just talk her heart out because she loved him—and I must confess I loved him, too... She told me so many things that I realized should not be printed at that time. But one thing stood out. She said that when Jack quoted lyrics they were usually classical. But, she said, 'At night, before we'd go to sleep, Jack liked to play records, and the song he loved most came at the end of this record, and the lines he loved to hear were

Don't let it be forgot  
That once there was a spot  
For one brief shining moment that  
Was known as Camelot

'This was Camelot, Teddy,' she told me. 'Let's not forget the time of Camelot.'<sup>4</sup>

We may note, therefore, that it was neither the musical's lyricist Alan Jay Lerner, nor the public, nor the press who were directly responsible for linking the 1960 musical and the assassinated president so indelibly in our minds. While all three played their roles, it was Jacqueline Kennedy's inspiration to link her husband's memory with another figure of 'shining,' tragic brevity that created the persistent myth of his presidency as another Camelot, an association which has endured for nearly fifty years, despite later scandals and 'how linguistically impoverished it really is when one looks closely to see which aspects of the Arthurian legend are explicitly applied to Kennedy.'<sup>5</sup> In fact, as Pamela S. Morgan has pointed out, there are *no* direct correspondences between the familiar cast of characters in Arthurian legend and the Kennedy White House, or the Kennedy family. 'They are merely alluded to by the word

"Camelot," which...will bring along the associations of hope and goodness (via "shining") and glamour (via "Camelot," the royal court).<sup>6</sup>

The day after White's interview with Mrs. Kennedy, Lerner recalls walking out of his offices in the Waldorf Astoria and seeing a newspaper on the news-stand. The lyrics Jackie Kennedy had quoted to White were printed in headline letters above the title of the newspaper.

The tragedy of the hour, the astonishment of seeing a lyric I had written in headlines, and the shock of recognition of a relationship between the two that extended far beyond the covers of one magazine, overloaded me with confused emotions. I was so dazed that I did not even buy the newspaper. I lived on Seventy-first Street at the time and I started to walk home. It was not until Eighty-third Street that I realized I had passed my house.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously, an association between John F. Kennedy and Camelot was not part of the original conception of the 1960 musical. In fact, the inspiration to make a musical out of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* had not even been Lerner's own.<sup>8</sup> Once he became interested in adapting the work for the stage, he decided to focus upon the intimate, adulterous relationship between Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot—hardly a tactful decision had he meant an association between Arthur and Kennedy. Moreover, unlike some later adapters of Arthurian works, Lerner acknowledged White's prior claim to the story of *Camelot*, noting the author's generosity in allowing Lerner 'free rein to do whatever I thought was best for the play.'<sup>9</sup> In Lerner's own mind, he was always rewriting White's book. Of course, White's own political ideals as expressed in the book were shaped by his concerns about World War II and thus predated the Kennedy administration by decades.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, although Kennedy was known personally to Lerner from his school days, at the time the lyricist was composing *Camelot*, although a Democrat, he had become disenchanted with the American political scene and was in a mood to 'sit back and wait' before assessing the new president.<sup>11</sup>

Lerner acknowledged that he never knew what it was he was trying to say in his writing until after the fact. He discussed the meaning he grew to recognize in his version of *Camelot*:

I began to see clearly that what motivated me was in three pages, the last three pages of the play. For me, the *raison d'être* of *Camelot* was the end of the journey when Arthur has lost his love, his friend, and his Round Table and believes his life has been a failure. Then a small boy appears from behind a tent who doesn't know the round table is dead and who wishes to become a knight. Arthur realizes that as long as his vision is alive in one small heart he has not failed. Men die but an idea does not. To me, that scene was the play.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his emphasis on the love triangle in his play, he felt that the legend of King Arthur was far more than a love story. In terms more Christian than Kennedian, he wrote

I believe it is the idealism expressed in the concept of the Round Table that accounts for the indestructibility of the Arthurian legend. Stripped of its tales of derring-do, its magic, love potions, and medieval trimmings and trappings, there lies buried in its heart the aspirations of mankind, and if Arthur lived at all, he was a light in the Dark Ages. If Arthur is pure fantasy, it is even more significant. To me, the greatest contribution of Jesus Christ is contained in three words, the 'Brotherhood of Man.' Arthur is more related to that dream than to the monarchical pageantry of English history. Even the many versions of his death include one that faintly echoes Isaiah's ancient prophecy of the coming of a Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, while it might have been possible to draw general associations between Arthur's Round Table and Kennedy's administration, until the *Life* article appeared those associations were not made. After the *Life* article, however, Kennedy and Arthur became so interconnected with one another in the public mind that the very word 'Camelot' is still as likely to evoke associations with the President as with the king. At the time, the story took effect almost immediately. Lerner recounts being told about a performance of the play while it was on the road in Chicago. When the actor playing Arthur sang the lines Jackie Kennedy had quoted, 'there was a sudden wail from the audience. It was not a muffled sob; it was a loud, almost primitive cry of pain. The play stopped, and for almost five minutes everyone in the theater—on the stage, in the wings, in the pit, and in the audience—wept without restraint. Then the play continued.'<sup>14</sup>

In 1967, when the film *Camelot* premiered, the association between Kennedy and Arthur had become canonical. 'The Kennedy girls,' Pat Lawford, Eunice Shriver, and Jean Smith (Lerner's lover), were in attendance at the premiere. Jackie Kennedy's intent to link the political legacy of her husband with the figure of King Arthur had been enormously successful. Richard Harris, who played the king in the film, described the rationale behind the association in an interview at the film's opening:

I think it's a kind of Utopia that everybody, that all great political leaders—and Kennedy was a great political leader, incredible political leader, I think—and I think that all great men of great vision look into the future for things like that, to create the circumstances through which a situation or a country or a place like Camelot can come into existence for everybody.<sup>15</sup>

In light of the lyric, 'don't let it be forgot,' it seems self-evident to point out the importance of remembrance in *Camelot*, but *what* is remembered about Arthur is what is at stake.<sup>16</sup> Jackie Kennedy was explicit not only in

her desire that Arthur and her husband be conflated in popular memory, but in the Arthur/Kennedy she desired the public to remember. He is the well-meaning, fallibly human but ultimately idealistic character in *Camelot*, a man more sinned against than sinning, who sings his own epitaph to the future. Mordred sums up the traits that characterize Lerner's Arthur in his rejection of them in 'The Seven Deadly Virtues'—courage, purity, humility, diligence, charity, honesty, and fidelity. To those virtues it is also possible to add Arthur's saintly forgiveness of those who betrayed his love, Guinevere and Lancelot, and his devotion to his country's interests above his own. Indeed, Jackie Kennedy invoked the memory of Camelot itself as an element in the construction of her husband's character, a part of the process that shaped him to become the new Arthur.

There'll be great presidents again—and the Johnsons are wonderful, they've been wonderful to me—but there'll never be another Camelot again... I realized history made Jack what he was. You must think of him as this little boy, sick so much of the time, reading in bed, reading history, reading the Knights of the Round Table, reading Marlborough. For Jack, history was full of heroes. And if it made him this way—if it made him see the heroes—maybe other little boys will see.<sup>17</sup>

The way memory functions in this description—history shapes the man, who in turn shapes history—is similar in tone to the ending of *Camelot* itself, in which Arthur sends the young Sir Thomas Malory away from the final battlefield so that he can live to tell the story that will make both the memory and the recreation of Camelot possible. Even before the *Life* article, Lerner had constructed the act of remembering as an act of hope: 'Arthur realizes that as long as his vision is alive in one small heart he has not failed. Men die but an idea does not.'<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it is due to Lerner's emphasis upon the idea, rather than the actuality of Arthur, that he appears to have been unconcerned with whether or not he got the historical Arthur 'right.' That mission—of linking fiction with truth—was undertaken instead by Kennedy's widow, as has been discussed. It was an association, as it turned out, to the benefit of Kennedy's popularity, and to the ticket sales of the stage version of the play, but not to the 1967 film. Alice Grellner has suggested that

by the time the film came out, four years after John F. Kennedy's death, its mystique and lyrics had come to be identified with that 'one brief, shining moment,' and the public was ready to accept the ideology and the romance, the humor, the satire, and the fantasy of the movie as an escape from the disillusionment of Vietnam, the bitterness and disenchantment of the antiwar demonstrations, and the grim reality of the war on the evening television news.<sup>19</sup>

This view of some degree of public response to the film is borne out by statements like Harris's at the premier. However, the film was not a commercial or critical success. Box office receipts were weak, and the film failed to make back its investment.

There are several possible explanations why the film *Camelot* failed to benefit financially from the Kennedy charisma. It was not, to be frank, a well-made film, despite its lavish budget and star appeal. Additionally, the advertising for the film concentrated heavily on the love triangle—the trailer called it 'the Most Poignant Legend of Love in Our Language'—which was, in fact, consistent with the film's emphasis, but which distanced it from the Kennedy myth which was political rather than romantic (as well as distancing it from Lerner's association of the figure of Arthur with the Messiah, which was probably just as well). Nor was the film particularly enjoyed by critics. A 1967 review in *The New York Times* is typical: 'This mystical aspect of Arthur, which is never satisfactorily clarified, and Guenevere's dual devotion to him and to the easily diverted Lancelot, constitute the most formidable barrier to audience empathy. It is hard to feel cozy with people you simply don't understand.' Most damning of all, the film wasn't visually interesting enough to sustain its three hour running time:

The music is played and sung with great charm, but the settings are vastly overdone—much too massive and vulgar for the delicacy and grace that should prevail. Mr. Logan has run to heavy close-ups of his characters that uncomfortably crowd the screen. Somehow, there isn't much magic in the insides of people's mouths, which is what we are shown too often.<sup>20</sup>

Charles Champlin, the Entertainment Editor for *The Los Angeles Times*, acknowledged the potential of the film as a tribute to Kennedy. 'One knows that John Kennedy admired the musical tremendously, and perhaps saw in Arthur's golden visions for his state something of his own visions for his presidency...memories and dreams are stirred that are not Arthur's alone.'<sup>21</sup> However, the film's qualities as a film interfered with this association.

[T]here is, I'm afraid, nothing to say but that the film is a very considerable disappointment, a very, very considerable disappointment...The moments of charm—there are some—and the moments when the picture moves you—there are a few—on balance simply cannot cancel out the slow, static pace, the lack of style, the pinched and artificial quality of the proceedings, the jumpy and inconsistent cuts, the incessant overuse of close-ups, the failure to sustain emotional momentum, the fatal wavering between reality and fantasy, the inability to exploit the resources of the medium.<sup>22</sup>

As one later film reviewer wrote, 'One hour into the film, Guenevere declares that she has "never found chivalry tedious...so far." So far indeed.'<sup>23</sup>

Although the stage play had its own share of problems—most notably, that it was a ‘musical tragedy’—it did not commit the unforgivable sin of being boring. That one sin alone apparently negated the Kennedy charisma effect, which was alive and strong in the political arena at the time in the figure of Robert Kennedy. In 1966, a *Newsweek* analyst wrote, ‘For many people, Bobby embodies the dream of Camelot and the hope that it can one day be restored. There never really was a Camelot in Washington, but as long as people think there was, that’s all that matters.’<sup>24</sup> Finally, however, it may be that the association between Kennedy and Camelot was too indefinite, too much a question of resonance and not specific enough in regard to characters, for the power of the analogy to reflect back on Logan’s film. In the end, it was more a question of what Camelot could do for Kennedy, than what Kennedy could do for *Camelot*.

Certainly, Lerner never intended to write a ‘meaningful’ script, and any need he felt to connect his Arthur with some larger truth was after the fact. In contrast, two recent film directors depicting Arthur have not only felt the need to attest to the ‘reality’ of their particular version of the story, but even appear to have determined in their own minds what their truth was prior to filming. In both cases, the ‘veracity’ of the version is linked, once again, to an idealized and articulated political agenda.

John Boorman’s 1981 film *Excalibur* looks for, and finds, a far different Arthur than Broadway’s. Although reviews were mixed, the film won the 1981 Cannes Film Festival award for ‘Artistic Contribution to the Poetics of Film,’ and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Cinematography. In the commentary accompanying the DVD version of the film, Boorman reveals that he had tried to get the picture made for twenty years, moving through a variety of different scripts. ‘It was as though this was a kind of destiny that I had to make this picture, and having done it I felt my burden was lightened. I felt a sense of release really.’<sup>25</sup> This is a far greater degree of investment in the figure of Arthur and the recounting of his story than Lerner’s more casual acceptance of a suggestion from a friend that *The Once and Future King* might make a good musical.

In fact, as well as directing *Excalibur*, Boorman, in association with Rospo Pallenberg, wrote much of the script. Perhaps because of his greater sense of involvement with, even ownership of, his version of Arthur, Boorman is somewhat dismissive of Malory, even though the film announces itself as based on Sir Thomas Malory’s book. In one interview, Boorman referred to his medieval predecessor, condescendingly, as ‘the first hack writer.’<sup>26</sup> In his film commentary, he gives an historically shaky version of events in which Caxton ‘commissions’ Malory to ‘write down the story of the Arthurian legend’ because Caxton ‘had just built this printing press, the first printing press, and of course he didn’t know what to do with it.’<sup>27</sup> Rebecca A. and Samuel J. Umland suggest that *Excalibur* cannot really be described as an



"adaptation" of Malory at all, but rather, as a criticism of it—a text that acts as a "corrective" to it.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as Muriel Whitaker notes, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* had at least as powerful an influence on Boorman's imagination as the *Morte Darthur*:

Tennyson gave Boorman a way of combining the primitive world of Dark Age Britain with the myth of a hero who for a brief period established peace, truth, and justice. Though doomed to defeat, the hero survives in the imagination as an ideal of human achievement...For both Tennyson and Boorman, myth is didactic. "Listen carefully to the echoes of myth. It has much more to tell us than the petty lies and insignificant truths of recorded history," the director told an interviewer on the set of *Excalibur*...Tennyson provides a mythic time scheme that links the progress of Arthur's life to a seasonal cycle, making it possible to use the world of nature as a source of mood and symbol.<sup>29</sup>

To note these two influences on Boorman's film, however, is to have noted no more than the tip of the referential iceberg.

Michel Ciment finds Jung's work also contributed to the shape of Boorman's Arthur, as it does to much of Boorman's work:

However varied the settings of Boorman's films and the cinematic gestures to which they belong, all of them are based on the notion of a quest. Each is the story of a journey—a journey undertaken by the hero who, at the conclusion of a series of tests and ordeals, finds himself radically transformed. As in Jung, a critical influence on the film-maker, the hero personifies the evolutionary urge and the power of the mind.<sup>30</sup>

Not only does this association seem evident in Boorman's own work, but it has been suggested that Arthur is inevitably connected with a Jungian archetype in contemporary popular culture representation.

In some cases...Arthur is simply the traditional image of the warrior king: stern, strong, aloof. In every instance, however, he primarily reflects the Jungian archetype of the *persona*: a *persona* governed by the character of the warrior, which makes him appear unfeeling in his resolution and in his devotion to duty.<sup>31</sup>

As this description of Arthur is also consistent with many of Boorman's heroes, the influence of Jungian persona on Boorman's Arthur appears undeniable. This influence will have further significance when we turn to how Boorman views his own role as a purveyor of the Arthurian narrative.

One more influence on Boorman's film is worth noting, particularly in light of his denial of any overt political agenda—although it is one that may have contributed to the film's negative reception with German audiences. Ray Wakefield draws the obvious parallel between Boorman's use of Wagner's music and a cinematic mythologizing of a charismatic male leader and his

faithful chieftains with Leni Reifenstahl's epic, brilliant, and disturbing *Triumph des Willen*.<sup>32</sup> John Boorman, who lived through the Blitz as a child, surely did not wish to associate his Arthur with fascism. However, the clarity of such an association reminds us that Boorman's Camelot is deliberately designed to recall multiple prior models to the viewer's mind. Indeed, Wakefield notes 'as the film acquired cult status in the United States, viewers would come equipped with notebooks for second and third screenings.'<sup>33</sup> Ciment's explanation for this multi-layered resonance is drawn from his understanding of Boorman's play with genre:

Boorman is aware that each genre creates its own tradition, and that from such a tradition, and the narrative codes that circumscribe it, derives the possibility of communicating with a mass audience and fulfilling its expectations. . . *Excalibur*, a costume film, reinvents a mythical past in which a bewildering variety of styles and periods together conspire to revive the Arthurian cycle. . . his primary concern has been to escape the categorical imperative of plot.<sup>34</sup>

Boorman acknowledges that he and Pallenberg took elements from other sources, but rather than speculate on how this shaped the film he moves on to the heart of his own assertion of his claim to the tales:

we invented things and with a legend like this you have to respect the legend, you're one in a line of storytellers, a long line of storytellers, and each storyteller can take this story and twist it and turn it as long as its essential elements are respected, and this is what I did...and I had the feeling when we were doing the script, when we were inventing things, I had the feeling that we weren't inventing things, that we were uncovering them, that they were lost elements of the story, that we were actually recovering and putting back to rights again, and, you know, you're gripped by this myth. I've known it, I read all the versions of it, so I feel a part of it, a very, very small insignificant part of it, and I feel that I'm merely one in a long line of storytellers who have taken this story and told it. Each generation retells these myths.<sup>35</sup> (italics mine)

In the midst of Boorman's modesty *topos* of himself as one of a long line of storytellers, each of whom have made Arthur his own, is his startling assertion that he was *not inventing the story, but restoring it*. This idea of *restoration* of a lost past, combined with Boorman's sense of destiny in the making of the film, suggests we should take as seriously intended whatever ideology the film puts forth, even when it is expressed by a character like the magician Merlin, whom Boorman describes as 'a mixture of fakery and real magic,'<sup>36</sup> (a description not unlike that of a director?).

It is possible to imagine a reconstruction of Arthur's story without the figure of Merlin, but it is rare. Merlin's role in Boorman's film, as in White's book, is to educate the young Arthur in what it means to be a king. Unlike the extended tutelage in *The Once and Future King*, however, Merlin's education

of Arthur in *Excalibur* occurs in a single night. It consists of bringing Arthur to realize that he and Excalibur are both part of 'the dragon,' a creature never entirely defined, but apparently synonymous with the earth itself, 'a beast of such power that if you were to see it whole and all complete in a single glance it would burn you to cinders. It is everywhere. It is everything.' Excalibur itself is part of the dragon, the 'sword of kings from the dawn of time, forged when the world was young and beast and bird and flower were one with man and death was but a dream.' Similar to the unity of man and nature, Merlin understands the relationship of past, present, and future as one in which difference is illusionary. When Arthur is conceived, he announces that 'the future has taken root in the present.' The cave to which he takes Morgana, he tells her, is where 'you enter the coils of the dragon...here all things are possible, all things meet their opposites.' By the end of the film, however, Merlin's power has been circumscribed by imprisonment in his own cave. He only lives, as Arthur explains, 'in our dreams.' Merlin himself had already acknowledged the passing of the natural world to which he belonged: 'It is a time for man.'

There are striking similarities between the character of Merlin and imagination itself.<sup>37</sup> The Old Irish charm Merlin uses is referred to as a charm of 'making.' Richard H. Osberg and Michael E. Crow note that

The performative character of language in Arthurian film is perhaps most evident in the depiction of magic...Although there have been a number of attempts to transcribe the charm of making (into Old Irish and Druidic Welsh for instance) or to guess its meaning (Bartone argues it "can be imagination, consciousness or myth itself"), the primary significance of the charm of making is its unintelligibility, for just as the charm is a lost language, so magic is a lost art. Both the charm and its effects on the natural law and linguistic dominion over the world mark its difference from our own.<sup>38</sup>

Merlin, speaker of the charm, is an agent of creative imagination, unlimited by coherence, logic, or science, and in contrast to the pathological and politically ambitious imagination of Morgana. (It can be argued that the two magicians interact almost as rival filmmakers, particularly in comparison with the more mortal, less theatrical inhabitants of Camelot.) Imagination in *Excalibur* is not constructed as in opposition to reality, but rather as its predecessor and shaper. Ciment suggests an association between Magician, sword and dragon. 'They can...be compared to the unconscious, to everything that lurks, repressed, just beneath the surface and one day arises to reawaken our dreams and desires.'<sup>39</sup> This is reinforced when Perceval is able to save Arthur through the medium of a dream/vision. It is noteworthy, in fact, that he heals Arthur by telling him a truth that he already knows, but has forgotten. 'The retelling of these stories is like the rediscovery of them—it "catherizes" and then gives solace,' Boorman explains.<sup>40</sup> What is reflected in

them is 'some deep pattern of early happenings in the human race.'<sup>3</sup> What is reflected, as well, is Boorman's belief in the duality of reason and magic, and the necessity of them coming together for creativity to exist.<sup>42</sup>

Because Merlin's original powers are so all-encompassing, the transformation of the dragon's world to a world of men feels like a loss of creativity and connectedness, even if it is the initiation of more formal ideals of morality and civilization. Camelot, as Boorman understands it, is about the simultaneous rise of Arthur and civilization, 'and then the collapse of civilization and the wasteland, which it seems to me represents the past, the present and the future of humanity.'<sup>43</sup> This is a bleak vision, if we consider time as moving in purely linear fashion. If, however, we understand the past as recoverable through the use of memory and the imagination—as Boorman believes he has recovered and put back to rights lost elements of the story through his film—then we, the audience, are as potentially capable of recovering our lost connection to nature as Boorman is of reconstructing a lost time. Camelot at its height mirrors present civilization:

They've achieved this power, this strength, this civilization, and to some extent they're incarcerated by [it]...they're cut off from...nature, from the natural world they're sprung from, which happens, as you know, in civilization, the price you pay for knowledge is the loss of, perhaps, that primal magic.<sup>44</sup>

It is the loss of the natural world itself with which Boorman is concerned, and his concern with nature extended beyond the making of the picture to that which inspired his vision, the 'primeval oak forest.' He recounts that he had purchased land in Ireland on which the oak forest still stands, in an attempt to 'recover' a little of it. The film itself, he tells us, was made practically on his property. His vision of Camelot was linked to the forest, both in actuality and mythically.

The forest is so important to this myth and to all British myths, really, because the whole land was covered in trees, covered with oaks and what interested me particularly is really the way in which this legend is about the coming of Christianity and the passing of the old gods and so the Merlin represents the magic of the past, and indeed the way in which human beings connected to nature.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, in response to the question why so many of his films 'tend to deal with the world of men,' Boorman turned the question around to the relationship between man and nature. 'We live these very comfortable kinds of lives where we're cut off from nature to a large extent. I think it's the cause of neurosis if you're not in touch with nature. There's a danger that you become disassociated, and I believe it causes a lot of our problems.'<sup>46</sup> In the film, the apparent cause of Arthur's mysterious wasting illness is the 'sin' of Excalibur

striking into the dragon, a sin against nature (whose displeasure is evidenced by a lightening strike when he turns to the ineffectual rites of Christianity) and associated with a second 'natural' sin in committing incest.

A healthy association with nature is linked, in Boorman's vision, with paganism, and the Grail quest in his version of the story more closely resembles *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* than Malory's *Tale of the Sankgreal*. 'In a film where the king and the land are one, the Grail is the central symbol of a murky defined pagan ritual,' Kevin J. Harty notes,<sup>47</sup> agreeing with Martin B. Shichtman's (and Rospo Pallenburg's) assessment that 'Boorman's vision of the Grail owes more to Jesse Weston than it does to Malory.'<sup>48</sup> Boorman's vision of the Grail, however, is not solely a reflection of his admiration of a pagan past, but also with Ireland's modern political history. Christianity is one of the 'foreign' overlays he needs to remove in order to restore an authentic past. The Christian faith, he declared, is 'alien' to his understanding of British myth, born from olive groves and deserts rather than oak trees. 'One of the things I feel about Ireland is that it's always been an occupied country, by the British and also by the [Catholic] church.'<sup>49</sup> Correspondingly, it is when Arthur turns away from the forces that made him king to Christianity for protection from Mordred that he is struck by the lightening that maims him. It is Boorman's 'pagan' vision of reality, in which men understood their relationship to nature correctly, that he tries to restore in his version of the story of Arthur.

It is not difficult, therefore, to see the role remembering plays in *Excalibur*. It is a way of returning the past to the present, to shape the future and to restore our lost understanding of our relationship to the land. Boorman's role in this process of redemption is similar to that of the knights themselves.

In a sense, making movies is itself a quest... a quest for an alternative world which is more satisfactory than the one we live in. That's what first appealed to me about making films. It seemed to me a wonderful idea that you could remake the world, hopefully a bit better, braver, more beautiful than it was presented to us.<sup>50</sup>

Boorman defines himself, in Jungian terms, as a figure in the process of 'becoming' as much as any hero he constructs. This also, perhaps, helps us to understand the role Arthur himself plays in the film. He is the idealistic hero with the power to create a better reality, who must also risk everything—both in his own person and through the character of Perceval—in order to achieve renewed life for the land. Once again, we recognize him as the site of our remembrance, which is intriguing, as the land suffers when Arthur 'forgets' his true role. As a figure halfway between the old world of nature and the new world of civilization, he is the last king of one and the first king of the other. He serves the needs of imagination (including the apparent needs of the dragon, Merlin, and Boorman himself) through the use of reason, at

the expense of the very individuality the time of man is meant to embody. 'I was not born to live a man's life,' he tells Guenivere, 'but to be the stuff of future legend.' Although he muses about a time when 'I owe no more to the future,' ultimately, he recognizes himself as a vehicle of narrative; its reason for being, so that memory can do its job of reaching into the future. Finally, he is the one who fixes our memories upon him and the brief utopia he creates through the use of the visual symbol of the Round Table.

At the end of the last battle of his early reign, Arthur and his knights celebrate the end of the wars. Merlin advises them to remember this moment, 'for it is the doom of men that they forget.' Arthur's response is to formalize remembrance in human terms, inventing a symbol around which future narratives and future hope can construct themselves, the Round Table.

So that we remember our bonds, we shall always come together in a circle to hear and tell of deeds good and brave. I will build a round table where this fellowship shall meet, and a hall about the table, and a castle about the hall. And I will marry, and the land will have an heir to wield Excalibur.

His last statement contains an irony that Arthur does not recognize in that his marriage is the very thing that will destroy the peace Arthur hopes to maintain and his heir is the man who kills him. Nonetheless, the Round Table itself, a symbol constructed by human beings, is in contrast to Excalibur, which was forged by non-human forces, and survives the deaths of the human beings identified with it. Excalibur, as a physical object, is lost in the lake at the end of the film, returning to the pre-human natural world and the realm of the dragon where, like Merlin, it lives on in our dreams and may someday return. The Round Table, however, because it is constructed as both object and community, is physically lost, but potentially to be reconstructed when and if a new Arthur comes along—and a new Merlin to instruct both him and the community about who they are.

What would make this new Arthur recognizable as the true heir of the old, in the terms established by Boorman's vision, would be his understanding of the relationship of human beings to nature and his restoration of that relationship—even as the healed Arthur in the film makes the land blossom as he rides through it. He would embody traits of both man and myth, allowing him to be a bridge between the past and the present. Additionally, he would listen to the teachings of the imagination, and adhere to the truth. (Truth, Merlin affirms, is the greatest quality of knighthood.) Boorman, like Merlin, attempts to empower his new Arthur through *Excalibur* and hopes those who understand his message will nourish regrowth in this 'time of man.' Ultimately, the memory of Arthur himself and the retellings of his story serve as the best seed for restoration of that primeval forest. If it is 'the doom of men that they forget,' Boorman, like Arthur, has constructed an artifact to

help us remember. Indeed, the film functions potentially like a sword set in a stone, calling attention to a need, awaiting the hero who can wield it.

When we turn to Antoine Fuqua's 2004 film *King Arthur* in our search for modern-day representations of the once and future king, we find the issues of truth and memory arising once again, associated in a more explicit fashion than in either *Camelot* or *Excalibur*. The term 'realistic' was used by nearly everyone associated with the film, and *King Arthur* was advertised as 'the history behind the legend.' The film's stake in being perceived as real, therefore, was both financial and ideological. In fact, it was not well received, once again due to questions concerning its quality as a film. How an audience would respond to a film that made equal claims to authenticity which was also received as a well-crafted film remains unknown. Ironically, the film identified itself as the very kind of endeavor Bootman rejected when making his own:

The risk—most notably, with a contemporary approach—would be to subject it to a political interpretation, explaining the story in terms of the political void which existed in England following the departure of the Romans, of the need to find a new leader.<sup>51</sup>

Despite its advertising, the film is not really historically accurate, even in its own terms, conflating the eras in which Sarmatians served in the vicinity of Hadrian's Wall under the command of Lucius Artorius Castus, ca. 175, and the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons in the late 5th century, closer to the date of 452 in which the movie professes to be set. Presumably, the desire was to conflate the story of the Sarmatians with the 'historical' Arthur who fought the Battle of Badon Hill (which Fuqua identifies as Hadrian's Wall). The importance of this conflation to Fuqua will become clear.

The script itself was written by David Franzoni, the screenwriter for *Gladiator*, another film in which a man who is a part of the Roman Empire, although not born in Rome (Maximus is identified as Spanish), is enslaved and finds renewed dignity in an act of free will. Concerning *King Arthur*, Franzoni acknowledged that he was intrigued by the Arthurian myth. 'Everybody knows who King Arthur is, but no one really knows where he came from.'<sup>52</sup> Despite this uncertainty, he 'pitched' his script to Producer Jerry Bruckheimer as 'this idea of the origins of the King Arthur legend.' Franzoni's inspiration was the theory that the legends of Arthur were linked to the Sarmatians who were sent to Britain to fight for Rome, a theory laid out in the book *From Scythia to Camelot*, and reinforced by the historical consultant on the film, Linda Malcor, co-author of the book. 'For me,' Franzoni explained, '[it was] the first believable Arthur that I've ever run across.'<sup>53</sup>

Another historical idea that factors into Fuqua's and Franzoni's conception of the film is the figure of Pelagius, who is made into the young Arthur's surrogate Merlin figure (far more Merlin-like than the actual character by that name). When the child Arthur sees the young Sarmatians arriving, Pelagius gives him a modified Round Table code to live by, one which already entails the act of remembering:

Pelagius: With this title comes a sacred responsibility: To protect, to defend, to value their lives above your own. And should they perish in battle, to live your life gloriously in honor of their memories.

Arthur: But what of their free will?

Pelagius: It has always fallen to a few to sacrifice for the good of the many. The world isn't a perfect place. But perhaps people like you, Arthur, and me, and them, can make it so.

At the critical moment in *King Arthur*, when the freed Sarmatian knights return to almost certain death to fight with Arthur against the Saxon hoard, Fuqua portrays Arthur and his band of knights symbolically mounted on a height, so that we see them as both the last line of defense against the Saxons (despite an army of 'Woods' concealed in the woods) and as men on a moral high ground.<sup>54</sup> Arthur's speech reinforces the themes of both free will and memory: 'If this be our destiny then so be it, but let history remember that as free men we chose to make it so.'

The Arthur we are meant to remember from *King Arthur*, then, is a man who believes in struggle and sacrifice on behalf of others. He is a leader of men, *noblesse oblige*, but not, technically, a king, despite the film's title. According to Fuqua:

He's very human. There's no magic powers in the man or in the sword. You don't just become a king by wielding a sword—you have to earn it. This is what the movie is about—him earning the right to be king.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps Arthur's humanity is important to Fuqua because of his own sense of identification with the character. 'This is one of those stories we all relate to. We all grow up with it. We all want to be King Arthur.'<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere in the same interview, he elaborates upon this theme. 'There's a warrior in all of us. There's a king in all of us. You have to choose your destiny, choose your fate.' The 'authentic' depiction of men like Arthur and his knights is therefore intended to restore not only believability to the character, but also, implicitly, to inspire similar acts of free will and heroism in a contemporary audience.

As with Boorman, Fuqua sees his work as a director as a restoration of a lost past. This takes a different spin in Fuqua's case, however, in that it is not civilization's alienation from nature that he deplors and is trying to rip



away, but rather the anonymity of slave narratives. For Fuqua, *King Arthur* is the story of slaves freeing themselves and being remembered as historical forces.

What attracted me the most about the script was that the knights were from different parts of the world and it had a more realistic point of view of what they could have been based on than Roman history... The idea of these young boys being taken away from home at a young age to be folded into the Roman military to fight against an enemy not of their own reminded me a lot of my own culture being African-American, my ancestors being brought to this country and most of the American military is fought by African-Americans, Latino young men. So I felt that relationship, that parallel relationship, easier for me to comprehend possibly what they may have been going through, what it could have felt like for them.<sup>57</sup>

This is a perspective to which Fuqua returns more than once. 'The knights were slaves, or military men, I think they were slaves, that's how I like to see them, if they were taken from their home I don't see that as being a volunteer—that's not a draft.'<sup>58</sup> The actors cast to play the Sarmatians are a mixture of physical types, but tend toward darker hair. None of them strikingly resembles the physical type *From Scythia to Camelot* postulates: blue-eyed, 'tall and handsome, [and] their hair inclines to be blond.'<sup>59</sup> In *King Arthur*, true blondness is an attribute of the enemy Saxons. In fact, the Saxons look remarkably like a twentieth-century Aryan nation biker band (without the bikes). Again, in the midst of this film, touted as an attempt at historical and visual authenticity, is a visual referent that leads us irresistibly to make a connection with the present.

In resonance with his foreign knights, Fuqua constructs an Arthur with a mixed heritage and identity, postulating a man whose father was Roman and mother British, who fights against his own people, the British. In Fuqua's mind, the British also have a contemporary analogy.

when I read the script I thought this was more like a Vietnam situation and the knights being the American soldiers or even the French, and the British would be the Woads, the Picts would be the VC... The Woads were just people living in the woods trying to fight for their country as much as the VC.<sup>60</sup>

Galahad notes that the Woads, against whom he and his fellow soldiers fight, are 'men who want their country back.' When Arthur and his men join forces with the British, it is not only to stop the Saxons, but also because Rome (like America in the sixties) has failed to live up to the ideals for which he thought it stood, a place where 'the greatest minds in all the lands have come together to help make mankind free.'

The importance of remembering the accomplishments of men who are denied their freedom by Rome is emphasized repeatedly in the film. Arthur and his men stand around a Round Table, and Arthur makes the toast: 'Let us raise our glasses to these gallant and extraordinary men we have lost, but who will be remembered for eternity.' (*There is a brief dialogue concerning the round table, in which Bishop Germanus's secretary asks: 'A Round Table? What kind of evil is this?' and Arthur's seneschal replies: 'Arthur says for men to be men they must first all be equal.'*) After Lancelot's death, his voice-over confirms that the death in battle of a man who has sacrificed himself for a cause is worthy of remembrance.

And as for the knights who gave their lives, their deaths were cause for neither mourning nor sadness, for they would live forever, their names and deeds handed down from father to son, mother to daughter, in the legends of King Arthur and his knights.

(It can be argued that, in Fuqua's version, the names are about the only thing that is retained of the original identities of the knights.) These legends, Fuqua speculated, 'were from people sitting around the fire, where they probably told stories to their children to comfort them and give them faith that their great man rose, meant to give them hope.'<sup>61</sup> This theory bears little resemblance, however, to the relationship of the Sarmatians to the Arthurian legends as described in *From Scythia to Camelot*.

There is no single reason why these particular nomads had such a profound impact on the legends of the Middle Ages. That the Romans enlisted the Alans as allies, stationed them as 'protectors' of the local populace (as were the Sarmatians in Britain), and eventually settled them on estates gave these landowners an aura of legitimate authority that was perhaps missing from contemporary invaders like the Vandals and from conquerors like the Normans. The descendants of the original nomads certainly did not think of themselves as Alans after a century or two, but they continue to this day to think of themselves as descendants of Roman colonials, even before they think of themselves as Celts. . . . Many of these nobles, several of whom bore the name Alan, either commissioned or were closely associated with other nobles who commissioned most of the medieval Arthurian romances.<sup>62</sup>

Those folk sitting around the campfires may have told the stories of Arthur, but historians suggest that it was the aristocracy who propagated them.

At times in his commentary, Fuqua expresses his dissatisfaction with the constraints Disney placed upon him in making the film. At first glance, we would agree there seems little in common with what we think of as 'a Disney film' and the bleak, bloody world that Fuqua evokes. However, Susan Aronstein and Nancy Coiner point out that the American vision of the Middle Ages, figured as American pre-history, presents an essentially

democratic version of the American Dream, a 'Distory' (i.e. Disney history, using Steven Fjellman's term) of a Middle Ages not as it was, but as it should have been. 'Medieval narrative forms, particularly romance narrative, provide the basis for our own cultural myth... The Middle Ages speaks to us as Americans because its dominant myth provided the plot and values for our own story.' Ironically, Fuqua responded to the myth of King Arthur in surprisingly Disney-like fashion—i.e. constructing history not as it was, but as it should have been. As with any other Distory, his version of the story is pedagogical, designed to displace previous narratives on a 'factual' level.<sup>63</sup> Under the dark and dirty visual surface of *King Arthur*, we nonetheless catch a glimpse of the democratic, idealistic, fairy-tale Middle Ages which Disney and Disneyland fostered.

In some ways, *King Arthur* is the latest stage in the (probably illusory) evolution of increasingly specific symbolic representations of Arthur. Lerner's musical centers upon Camelot as the site of the myth, while Boorman's film evokes the more narrow twin images of Excalibur and the Round Table. In Fuqua's version, the myth is centered in the man himself. As impressive as Fuqua's rebuilt Hadrian's Wall was, it is not a true 'home' for Arthur, as it stands for the ruin of the Roman identity he is in the process of shedding for most of the film. A film which relies on the 'humanness' of Arthur is also required to construct a specific person, one that fits a particular place and time. In the autobiography of an individual, this enhances the character being depicted, but in the representation of a myth it is a nearly impossible challenge to represent a middle ground between the real and the legendary. As Clive Owen, who plays Arthur notes (albeit somewhat out of step with the screenwriter and director's claims for the film's realism):

every *King Arthur* movie that has been made so far is only perception, isn't it? I mean, it's a myth that there are different versions of, so I think any movie that has been made is only somebody's take on it.<sup>64</sup>

It is interesting that the least critically and commercially popular of these versions of Arthur is also the one with the most explicit message about his meaning. Perhaps viewers prefer a vaguer, more multi-faceted figure of Arthur who can reflect their own ideals, rather than one that seems prescribed to them with all the weight of 'authenticity' behind him. Or, it may be that *King Arthur* was simply not a very good movie, however well-meant. Either way, it seems probable that versions of the story will continue to be made, and each future version will succeed or fail to the extent that it taps into the desires of the public as well as filmmakers to construct an Arthur in their own image. This is, in fact, a good thing for the legends. As Norris J. Lacy notes, 'only constant renewal can ensure the continued vitality of the Arthurian story.'<sup>65</sup>

The figure of Arthur invites us to use him as a model for who we want our leaders to be and what we want them to represent. It is his lack of absolute perfection which makes him a figure of hope—he is not wholly unbelievable, only *almost* impossible. It is that grain of reality inherent in his character that transforms the causes associated with him from expressions of pure idealism to idealistic possibilities. What is at stake for filmmakers reconstructing the Arthurian legends is, therefore, a mixture of politics and profit, idealism and commercialism, coupled with the artist's desire for self-expression. Audience response bears this out—Arthurian legend still resonates for both American and British audiences, and bears its unusual burden of 'authenticity.' The need for remembrance is evoked and linked to some greater 'truth' of which the story is meant to be seen as a reflection. Even a construction as light and airy as Lerner's *Camelot*—making no real truth claims on its own behalf—becomes the base upon which a powerful political myth is constructed. Both Boorman and Fuqua are explicit about the need to remember Arthur, and to apply the truths he represents to the present's political awareness. The once and future king, today as in the Middle Ages, remains linked to a mixed identity: mythical, historical, political, and fictional, with the last of these qualities the most noticeable, and the least often acknowledged, by those who tell his story.

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#### NOTES

- 1 There are exceptions, of course. In order to idealize Arthur it is necessary to want to construct an ideal hero/king in the first place.
- 2 Susan Aronstein, "'Not Exactly a Knight': Arthurian Narrative and Recuperative Politics in the Indiana Jones Trilogy,' *Cinema Journal* 34.4 (Summer 1995): 7.
- 3 Toward the end of *Le Morte Darthur* he reflects upon the betrayal of those who changed their allegiance to Mordred's cause. 'Lo, ye all Englysshemen, se ye nat what a myschyff here was? For he that was the moste loved of the felyshyp of noble knyghtes, and by hym they all were upholdyn, and yet myght nat thes Englyshemen holde them contente with hym. Lo thus was the olde custom and usayges of thys londe, and men say that we of thys londe have nat yet loste that custom. Alas! thys ys a grete defaughte of us Englysshemen, for there may no thyng us please no terme.' Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. 1229.

- 4 Ted White, 'For President Kennedy: An Epilogue,' *Life* (1963), reprinted as 'Mrs. Kennedy Likens the Capital Under Her Husband to Camelot,' *New York Times*, December 5, 1963, 14-15.
- 5 Pamela S. Morgan, "'One Brief Shining Moment': Camelot in Washington, D.C.," *Studies in Medievalism* 6 (1994): 189.
- 6 Morgan, "'One Brief Shining Moment,'" 200.
- 7 Alan J. Lerner, *The Street Where I Live* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 251.
- 8 In his autobiography, Lerner recounts the circumstances: 'One Sunday, while reading through the book section of the *New York Times*, I came across a glowing review of a book about King Arthur and the Round Table called *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White. It looked interesting, but I did not make a mental note to buy it. The following morning, Bud Widney, our production manager, came into my office and placed the review on my desk. "Lerner," he said, "here's your next show.'" (Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 188).
- 9 Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 229. T.H. White, however, may not have been entirely uncritical. 'The theater is a practical affair... and I am as content that he [Lerner] should use his own reading of Lancelot—if it works—as I would be content if he returned to my interpretation, at some future rewriting, if that worked better,' in William K. Zinsser, 'Camelot,' *Horizon* (May 1961): 117. Nonetheless, White professed himself flattered at the sincere fidelity which Lerner's use of a central theme of the survival of an idea of justice in a barbarous world offered his book (Evelyn Schroth, 'Camelot: Contemporary Interpretation of Arthur in "Sens" and "Matiere,"' *Journal of Popular Culture* 17.2 (Fall 1983): 33).
- 10 On December 6th, T.H. White wrote to L.J. Potts, formerly his tutor at Cambridge, 'You see, I have discovered that (1) the central theme of *Morte d'Arthur* is to find an antidote to war, (2) that the best way to examine the politics of man is to observe him, with Aristotle, as a political animal... I have been thinking a great deal, in a Sam Butlerish way, about man as an animal among animals—his cerebrum, etc. I think I can really make a comment on all these futile isms (communism, fascism, conservatism, etc.) by stepping back—right back into the real world, in which man is only one of the innumerable other animals. So to put my "moral" across (but I shan't state it), I shall have the marvelous opportunity of bringing the wheel full circle, and ending on an animal note like the one I began on. This will turn my completed epic into a perfect fruit, "rounded off and bright and done.'" T.H. White, *The Book of Merlyn: The Unpublished Conclusion to The Once and Future King*, prologue Sylvia Townsend Warner (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. xvi-xvii.
- 11 Edward Jablonski, *Alan Jay Lerner: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996), p. 178.
- 12 Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 228.
- 13 Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 192.
- 14 Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 252.

- 15 'The World Premier of Camelot,' produced for Warner Bros.-Seven Arts W, 1967.
- 16 *Camelot*, Book and Lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, Music by Frederick Loewe (NY: Random House, 1961), p. 114.
- 17 Ted White, 'For President Kennedy: An Epilogue,' p. 32.
- 18 Lerner, *The Street Where I Live*, p. 228.
- 19 Alice Grellner, 'Two Films That Sparkle: *The Sword in the Stone* and *Camelot*,' *Cinema Arthuriana: Essays on Arthurian Film*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 74-75.
- 20 Bosley Crowther, 'Camelot Arrives at Warner: Film Hasn't Overcome Stage Play's Defects,' *The New York Times*, October 26, 1967.
- 21 *The Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1967, C10.
- 22 *The Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1967, C1.
- 23 Alexandre Paquin, *Camelot*, <http://filmcritic.com/review.php?movie=5701&reviewer=287>, originally posted 01/07/02, 18:25:42.
- 24 Morgan, "'One Brief Shining Moment'" p. 200.
- 25 John Boorman, 'Director's Commentary,' *Excalibur* DVD, Warner Home Video, (2000).
- 26 Harlan Kennedy, 'The World of King Arthur According to John Boorman,' *American Film* (March 1981): 33.
- 27 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.' In his interview with Harlan Kennedy, Boorman asserts, 'The film has to do with mythical truth, not historical truth.' (American Cinema Papers) Harlan Kennedy, 'Excalibur: John Boorman—An Interview,' *American Cinema Papers, Print Archive, American Film* (March 1981), <http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com./files/EXCALIBUR.htm>, March 15, 2006.
- 28 Rebecca A. and Samuel J. Umland, *The Use of Arthurian Legend in Hollywood Film: From Connecticut Yankees to Fisher King* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 137.
- 29 Muriel Whitaker, 'Fire, Water, Rock: Elements of Setting in *Excalibur*,' *Cinema Arthuriana: Essays on Arthurian Film*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), pp. 136-37.
- 30 Michel Ciment, *John Boorman*, trans. Gilbert Adair (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1986) p. 14.
- 31 Charlotte Spivack and Roberta Lynne Staples, *The Company of Camelot: Arthurian Characters in Romance and Fantasy* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 133.
- 32 Ray Wakefield, 'Excalibur: Film Reception and Political Distance,' *Politics in German Literature*, ed. Beth Bjorklund and Mark E. Cory (Camden House, 1998), pp. 166-76.
- 33 Wakefield, 'Excalibur: Film Reception and Political Distance,' p. 167.
- 34 Ciment, *John Boorman*, pp. 10, 12.
- 35 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 36 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.'

- 37 Boorman himself makes the obvious connection between imagination, 'making,' and filmmaking. 'In a sense, making movies is itself a quest...a quest for an alternative world, a world which is more satisfactory than the one we live in. That's what first appealed to me about making films. It seemed to me a wonderful idea that you could remake the world, hopefully a bit better, braver, more beautiful than it was presented to us.' Kennedy, 'American Cinema Papers.'
- 38 Richard H. Osberg and Michael E. Crow, 'Language Then and Language Now in Arthurian Film,' *King Arthur on Film: New Essays on Arthurian Cinema*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 1999), p. 55.
- 39 Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 181.
- 40 Kennedy, 'American Cinema Papers.'
- 41 Philip Strick, 'John Boorman's Merlin,' *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1980): 171.
- 42 Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 183.
- 43 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 44 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 45 Boorman, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 46 Stephen Lemons, 'A Conversation with John Boorman,' p. 3, Dec. 17, 1998, <http://archive.salon.com/people/conv/2001/04/02/boorman/index2.html>, March 15, 2006.
- 47 Kevin J. Harty, 'Lights! Camelot! Action!—King Arthur on Film,' *King Arthur on Film: New Essays on Arthurian Cinema*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 1999) p. 26.
- 48 Martin B. Shichtman, 'Hollywood's New Weston: The Grail Myth in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and John Boorman's *Excalibur*,' *Post Script* 4 (Autumn 1984): 35–48.
- 49 Charles Taylor, 'Safe Haven,' p. 2, 1998, [www.salon.com/ent/movies/int/1998/12/17int2.html](http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/int/1998/12/17int2.html), March 15, 2006.
- 50 Kennedy, 'American Cinema Papers.'
- 51 John Boorman, quoted in Ciment, *John Boorman*, p. 196.
- 52 This statement is made in the companion piece to the film, 'Blood on the Land: Forging King Arthur.' It is my belief that the irony implicit in the title, of 'forging' Arthur—i.e. claiming a counterfeit is the real thing—is unintentional. Antoine Fuqua, dir., *King Arthur*, Unrated Director's Cut DVD, 2004.
- 53 'King Arthur: A Roundtable Discussion,' *King Arthur* DVD (2004).
- 54 Fuqua acknowledges the influence of films like *The Wild Bunch* and *The Seven Samurai* on *King Arthur* in his 'Director's Commentary.'
- 55 'Blood on the Land: Forging King Arthur,' *King Arthur* (2004).
- 56 'Blood on the Land: Forging King Arthur,' *King Arthur* (2004).
- 57 Fuqua, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 58 Fuqua, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 59 C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: a radical reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), p. 26.

- 60 Fuqua, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 61 Fuqua, 'Director's Commentary.'
- 62 Littleton and Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot*, p. 282.
- 63 Susan Aronstein and Nancy Croner, 'Twice Knightly: Democratizing the Middle Ages for Middle-Class America,' *Studies in Medievalism* 6 (1994): 299.
- 64 'King Arthur: A Roundtable Discussion,' *King Arthur* (2004).
- 65 Norris J. Lacy, 'Mythopocia in *Excalibur*,' in Kevin J. Harty, ed., *Cinema Arthuriana: Essays on Arthurian Film* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), p. 131.