On a Quest for Manhood

Re-Imagining Medieval Masculinities and Male Maturation in Contemporary Arthurian Adaptations for Adolescents

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Please note: I have previously examined cross-dressing masculinities in Arthurian YA narratives in my unpublished Master's dissertation (2015, see bibliography). My discussion of Capetta and McCarthy's Arthurian novels in the Conclusion has been adapted from my article, "'Queer King Arthur in Space': Problematizing Gender Binaries, Heteronormativity, and Medieval(ist) Heroic Ideals in *Once & Future*", published in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (2020, see bibliography).

Abstract

On a Quest for Manhood: Re-Imagining Medieval Masculinities and Male Maturation in Contemporary Arthurian Adaptations for Adolescents (Lisa Kazianka)

Since the Middle Ages, the Arthurian legend has enjoyed a principal status in Western literature and culture. Throughout this long history, contributions to and adaptations of the legend have been deeply concerned with gender identity and ideals, masculinity in particular. These concerns have also been palpable in literature produced for the young. In this dissertation I offer close readings of contemporary Arthurian young adult (YA) novels that move beyond the traditional Arthurian material but maintain recognisable links to the legend. I discuss the ways these so-called variations of the legend enter into dialogue with, de-/reconstruct, and problematise the gendered values and ideologies of the Arthurian tradition and contemporary society. I examine the ways each narrative relates to past and present Anglo-American discourses about masculinities and male maturation, highlighting, in particular, how Arthurian adaptations published between 1998 and 2007 are connected to turn-of-the-century men's movement discourses and the boy crisis debate. I also discuss the ways these recent Arthurian narratives fit within twenty-first-century YA discourses surrounding 'hybrid' masculinities and queer subjectivities. Methodologically, the study presented here merges ideas from masculinity studies, post-structuralist feminism, queer theory, adaptation theory, narratology, medievalism studies, and young adult literature criticism. It draws on theoretical and empirical research from various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, history, and literature. Research on Arthuriana for adolescents has been dominated by a focus on female subjectivities and empowerment. The purpose of the present study is to extend this line of inquiry by centring masculinities, while, importantly, understanding masculinity as independent from cis male bodies. Chapters 1 to 3 discuss Arthurian YA adaptations that focus on cis male protagonists and their journeys towards manhood, while Chapter 4 examines an adaptation that presents two cross-dressing characters, depicts masculinity as performance, and complicates essentialist and binarist views on gender. My analysis demonstrates the ways protagonists move between 'closed' and 'open' masculinities, explores the notion of reconfigured hegemonic forms of masculinity, and highlights the limitations of current theoretical views on cross-dressing in literature. This dissertation is intended as a contribution to scholarship on Arthurian adaptations for children and young adults, an area of inquiry that is still in its infancy. It also aims to enrich the critical conversation surrounding masculinities and their literary representations, especially in texts produced for the young, and particularly in relation to maturation. Crucially, this study demonstrates the value of interdisciplinarity for studying masculinities.

Keywords: King Arthur, Arthurian legend, medievalism, young adult fiction, masculinities, gender, cross-dressing, queer, interdisciplinarity

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"My younger knights, new-made, in whom your flower
Waits to be solid fruit of golden deeds"

— Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King* (1859)

Introduction

> In making the past, we make the present, and thus remake the meanings of both. (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 10)

Contemporary Western society is fascinated with re-imaginations of the Middle Ages, an era, as Steven F. Kruger (2009, 413) highlights, "against which Western modernity has most insistently constructed itself".[1] The recent proliferation of cultural and literary productions drawing on the medieval testifies to the continuation of this trend. George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, adapted for television as HBO's *Game of Thrones*, as well as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and their subsequent film adaptations are two prominent examples of how the Middle Ages continue to permeate contemporary popular culture and occupy our collective imagination. Providing entertainment to international audiences, these narratives illustrate not only the continuous re-envisioning of medieval times, but also of medieval *masculinities*.

A Song of Ice and Fire and its TV adaptation are both "inspired by medieval history and culture" and subvert the period to connect with contemporary audiences (Marques 2019, 48). The series adapts heroic and chivalric ideals of the Middle Ages, focusing on loyalty, blood ties, revenge, and prowess, as Carol Jamison discusses in her recent monograph, *Chivalry in Westeros: The Knightly Code of 'A Song of Ice and Fire'* (2018). Similarly, Shiloh Carroll's *Medievalism in 'A Song of Ice and Fire' and 'Game of Thrones'* (2018) examines the ways Martin's depiction of gender issues is influenced by medieval romance. In particular, Carroll outlines the close relationship between chivalry and toxic masculinity in Martin's medievalist world. Amy Kaufman (2016, 61) terms the masculinity model presented in *Game of Thrones* "muscular medievalism", highlighting that, at the core of this model, lies the "need for the suffering and exploitation of women" for the validation of "its vision of masculinity". Women who (attempt to) hold political and/or military power within the series must

[1] In this dissertation, I use the terms 'Middle Ages' and 'medieval' to discuss the *European* Middle Ages – its history, literature, and contemporary re-imaginations – while acknowledging that medieval Europe, as Ruth Karras states, "was not a 'single culture'" (2017, 3).

"forfeit [their] femininity to be taken seriously in a male-dominated world and to perform deeds mostly ascribed to men" (Marques 2019, 47). The portrayal of such a "mythologically masculine" vision of the Middle Ages, Kaufman argues, "serves as a collective justification for the worst traits of both patriarchy and humanity, [and] has terrifying global political consequences" (2016, 59).

In contrast to Martin's "brutal, patriarchal neomedieval fantasy" (Kaufman 2016, 59) directed at adult audiences, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, which appeals to readers and viewers across ages, portrays a different kind of medievalism, and introduces the world to a young wizard protagonist that can be viewed as a contemporary King Arthur. As Alessandra Petrina (2006, 106) explains, the eponymous hero is depicted as the 'chosen one', a natural leader who assumes responsibility at an early age. He is courteous and protective towards women and anyone younger or weaker than him, demonstrating deep respect for his elders and betters. In Dumbledore, Harry has his very own Merlin, who teaches, guides, and prepares him for future greatness (Ibid.). Andrew Blake (2002; 2009) and Nicola Watson (2009) similarly propose King Arthur as a medieval prototype for Rowling's protagonist, while Jack Zipes (2009, 291) argues that Harry "has supernatural gifts that enable him to perform heroic deeds and defeat cynical forces of evil much like the knights of Arthurian legend". Justine Breton has compared *Harry Potter* to T.H. White's tetralogy, *The Once and Future King* (1958), in terms of "the representation and narrative purpose of the dead mother towards the hero, his personal growth and his role within the story" (2019, 98).[2] Most recently, Carol Jamison (2020) has written on the parallels between Rowling's series and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, published by William Caxton in England in 1485, highlighting the significance of blood and illustrating the ways in which Harry is aligned with Arthur, Galahad, and Perceval. Re-imaginings of medieval masculinities are thus indeed prevalent in contemporary Western culture, demonstrating that epic and chivalric masculine ideals remain firmly embedded in twenty-first-century society.

The impact of medieval masculine ideologies extends beyond popular culture. For instance, in the United States, young people training to join the Navy study military ethics by discussing constructions of warrior archetypes (French 2017). Students learn about the medieval, specifically Arthurian, chivalric code as presented in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. In Shannon E. French's volume, *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present* (2017), Felicia Ackerman discusses the *Morte*'s 'warrior code' and positions America's future midshipmen "as the modern

[2] Rowling herself has acknowledged the influence of T.H. White's Arthurian children's classic, *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), the first book in White's tetralogy (Watson 2009, 288).

heirs to Malory's knights" (French 2017, 136).[3] In the same volume, French notes that "some of the qualities that ancient warriors or warrior archetypes possess do not play well in the twenty-first century" (2017, 254). The key, she maintains, is "to select for preservation only what is consistent with the values cherished by contemporary warrior cultures" (Ibid.). "Modern warriors", French suggests,

> can emulate the humility, integrity, commitment to 'might for right,' courtesy, and courage of a Round Table knight without taking on board his acceptance of an undemocratic, stratified society (where most of the population is disenfranchised and women and serfs are treated as property) or his determination to 'pursue infidels.' (Ibid.)

In other words, there must be a process of selection, a decision about which aspects of ancient and medieval warrior codes – and, by extension, masculinity codes – "should be rejected and which should be preserved or revived" (Ibid., 21).

The US Naval Academy preserves and revives medieval masculinity codes in the training of their officers. The authors of contemporary Christian parenting guides take similar approaches. They present (their interpretation of) medieval chivalry as an ideal model for raising twenty-first-century North American boys. Ultimately, they argue, following this model will bring an end to what they perceive as a 'crisis' of masculinity. For example, in *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood* (1997, republished in 2007), Robert Lewis speaks of "an acute masculinity crisis", which can only be thwarted by "looking back to another day and another time for inspiration … back to the age of knights" (loc.164, 268). In a similar vein, Jeff Purkiss claims that his *Squires to Knights: Mentoring Our Teenage Boys* (2007) is a response to "our son's need for mentorship and training into *authentic* manhood" (viii, emphasis added). Heather Haupt's *Knights in Training: Ten Principles for Raising Honorable, Courageous, and Compassionate Boys* (2017) also looks to medieval(ist) knighthood as a solution, viewing it as a "road map" that "lay[s] the groundwork for creating a family and community culture that prepares our boys to thrive and make the world around them a better place" (6). The publication of such manuals is a concrete example of how medieval(ist) masculinities continue to permeate Western society. It also demonstrates how (interpretations of) these masculinities remain linked to concerns about male maturation, a topic that, over the past decades, has been widely debated, with talks of a 'boy crisis' and 'masculinity crisis', reminiscent of late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century discourses.

[3] An interesting connection here is that medieval chivalric codes of behaviour were also taught to 17th-century British midshipmen (Moelker and Kümmel 2007, 297). As Moelker and Kümmel write, "[t]he diffusion of chivalric codes for social intercourse to broader layers of society did not appear overnight, and though it started at court, it was soon seen in other places, first of all in the British navy" (Ibid.). In relation to contemporary practices that aim to re-introduce chivalry into military education, Moelker and Kümmel state the increasing need for "codification of norms and rules" in a time of terrorism as a reason for the revival of interest in military knighthood and chivalry within contemporary military ethics (Ibid., 296).

The above-mentioned parenting guides are directive in their evocation of medieval(ist) masculinities. They continue a trend begun in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States to view boys' upbringing in terms of medieval, specifically chivalric, manhood – neither as it actually was, nor as it was represented in medieval literature such as Arthurian romances, for instance. Instead, it is filtered through contemporary worldviews. Unlike the US Naval Academy lecturers, who are open about their processes of *selection*, their processes of *interpretation*, some groups would present their models and views, implicitly or explicitly, as historically true and 'accurate', suggesting a seamless application of an age-old code, set in stone in the Middle Ages – a period often viewed as a glorious time in human history, a time when 'authentic manhood' was created and maintained through the adherence to a common code that was unchanged, unquestioned, unproblematic. However, medieval masculinities – real and fictional – were much more complex and, indeed, throughout the centuries, have been transformed and adapted – and they continue to be, as the examples I have introduced attest. In the twenty-first century, re-imaginations of medieval masculinities are *everywhere*.

One area in which these re-imaginations abound is adolescent fiction, a space that, in recent decades, has become increasingly influential in terms of the international book market, popular culture, and education. Adolescent fiction engages with questions of identity and maturation, and is directed at readers who are in the process of trying to understand and develop their own gender and sexual identities. As such, it is a crucial site for masculinity and maturation discourses. In this dissertation, I am interested in how contemporary Anglophone young adult (YA) narratives re-imagine medieval masculinities – epic/heroic and chivalric ideals in particular.[4] I discuss a number of recent Arthurian variations – novels that move beyond the traditional material but maintain recognisable links to the legend – focusing on how these texts are in dialogue with contemporary discourses and anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality more broadly, and masculinity and maturation specifically. I deliberately focus on *Arthurian* narratives, which stem from and add to a widely known tradition that, throughout its long history, has had gender anxiety at its core (McClain 1997, 193).

Adaptations of the Arthurian legend have continuously addressed and negotiated concerns about masculinity and, more generally, gender roles (Ibid.; see also Fries 1998, 67). Indeed, there is a growing corpus of scholarly work on the topic of gender in medieval Arthurian literature.[5] This

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[4] I explain my use of epic and chivalric ideals in detail later on.

[5] Notable examples include: Dorsey Armstrong's *Gender and The Chivalric Community in Sir Thomas Malory's* Morte d'Arthur (2003); Thelma Fenster's *Arthurian Women* (1996/2015); Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (1995); Molly Martin's *Vision and Gender in Malory's* Morte Darthur (2010); Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand's *Topographies of Gender in Middle High German Arthurian Romance* (2001); and Marion Wynne-Davies' *Women and Arthurian Literature: Seizing the Sword* (1996).

scholarship, as Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand (2001, xi-xii) notes, has "benefited greatly from current discussions in gender theory as well as in queer theory", both of which inform this dissertation. Throughout the history of the Arthurian literary tradition, authors have adapted and appropriated the body of Arthurian tales to fit the concerns, ideals, tastes, and (aspired) values of their own time and culture. Accordingly, adaptations of the legend reflect changing conceptions of gender and sexuality, "giv[ing] voice to the prevailing cultural ideologies that determine dominant images of femininity and masculinity" (McCallum 1999, 200). New versions of Arthurian stories can interrogate, problematise, and revise the ideals inherent in the legend. However, they can also – consciously or unconsciously – carry the ideologies and values of a distant past, since each new version builds on and borrows from its predecessors (Aronstein 2005, 30). Arthurian scholars have been preoccupied with how adaptations of the legend negotiate past and present gender ideologies: Adam Roberts (1998, 6) highlights the vast gap between "the [feudal] values of the age of Arthur and the values of the [post-feudal] present age". Bonnie Wheeler (2012, 3) poses the question, "Why do feminist scholars (men and women) keep reading and teaching medieval stories that, like most Arthurian narratives, reinscribe patriarchal sexism?" And Judith Kellogg (2003, 5) asks "how (and if) the basically patriarchal bias of the Arthurian tradition can be adapted to speak to contemporary gender issues". Modern literary adaptations of the legend for young readers as well as the research discussing these have tried to address these questions; however, both literary and scholarly works have been dominated by a focus on constructions of female subjectivity, girl-/womanhood, and female empowerment. Masculinity and queer [6] perspectives are only occasionally at the centre of scholarly discussions of Arthuriana aimed at young audiences. My dissertation aims to redress this lopsided focus.[7]

Tison Pugh and Angela Weisl (2013, 75) stress that female writers such as Marion Zimmer Bradley "have challenged the overarching masculine ethos of Arthurian legend by depicting in greater psychological depth the challenges facing the tradition's women". Similarly, scholars have analysed the tradition from a feminist perspective. These practices are important and have indeed infused the Arthurian legend and scholarship with updated, more 'progressive' views on gender. However, what about (cis) male characters? How are these depicted as maintaining, challenging, changing, and dealing with forms of medievalist masculinity that uphold patriarchy and limit

[6] I use the term 'queer' in this dissertation as "an umbrella term for a range of sexual and gender identities that are not 'straight,' or at least not normative" (Somerville 2020, 2).

[7] A notable exception that looks at Arthurian adaptations through the lens of queer theory is Christina Francis's 2010 article on Paul Gadzikowski's webcomic *Arthur, King of Time and Space*, a text that is not specifically addressed to young adults. In this article, Francis argues that, by using multiple settings and times and by creating "a fluidity of sex identification, Gadzikowski is able to work outside of traditional gender boundaries, so that a character's most fixed attribute is a character's name" (31). It is worth noting that queer readings of *medieval* Arthurian texts are becoming more prominent in contemporary scholarship, a topic that I address later on in the Introduction.

individual expression? And what about fictional characters that occupy the 'spaces in-between'? Feminist literary criticism has done much to interrogate harmful patriarchal, militant, and sexist ideologies of the Arthurian tradition. However, if we want to advance the important project of rethinking, rewriting, and revising the patriarchal gender order and gender inequality as represented in the Arthurian tradition and in contemporary society, we cannot leave masculinities and their representations uninterrogated. We also cannot ignore the fact that the dichotomous distinction man/woman excludes those outside this rigid, problematic binary.

A first encounter with the Arthurian legend usually occurs in childhood (Kellogg 2003, 1; see also Richmond 2013, 55).[8] It is therefore curious, as Velma Bourgeois Richmond (2013) notes, that "adults in literary academe rarely focus scholarly and critical discussions on these texts written and illustrated for children" (55). In 2003, Kellogg described the subject area as "relatively unexplored" (1), and it was only a year later that a first volume of essays on Arthurian juvenilia produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was published (Lupack, ed. 2004). Since then, academic interest in children's Arthuriana has increased, with scholars examining historical and contemporary texts, drawing upon a range of critical approaches. The 2012 Fall issue of the field's leading journal, *Arthuriana*, for instance, deals with representations of female characters in modern children's and adolescent Arthurian fiction; Anne Klaus's essay "The Kids of the Round Table" (2013) in *Adapting Canonical Texts in Children's Literature* offers a way to categorise Arthurian adaptations for the young; and Velma Bourgeois Richmond has published a monograph on *Chivalric Stories as Children's Literature: Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures* (2014), although she solely deals with Arthurian retellings in collections of chivalric stories. Scholars have also demonstrated significant interest in BBC's popular family TV series *Merlin* (2008-2012), which is the focus of the Spring 2015 issue of *Arthuriana*. However, in most instances, it is Arthurian scholars approaching these texts from the viewpoint of their field, rather than integrating theories and concepts from children's literature studies. Vice versa, children's literature scholars such as Janice Robertson (2013, 2019) have engaged with Arthurian adaptations for the young, neglecting a consideration of these texts beyond the theoretical frameworks of their own discipline. As Robertson notes, she discusses Kevin Crossley-Holland's award-winning *Arthur Trilogy* not within an Arthurian context, but "as part of the children's literature genre as this is the context in which most child readers will encounter them" (2019, 13).

Some work on juvenile Arthuriana discusses gender – mostly in relation to female characters. Little attention has been paid to the question of how masculinities are constructed and

[8] Pagès (2015, 63) speculates that for most of today's youth, Walt Disney's *Sword in the Stone* (1963) likely constitutes the "moment of initiation both to Arthur and to the Middle Ages" (see also Kellogg 2004, 62).

performed in Arthurian texts produced for the young, despite the crucial role that ideas about men, maleness, and masculinity have played in the tradition, particularly within the context of children's literature and education. One exception is Janice Robertson's analysis of the protagonist's masculinity in Crossley-Holland's work, included in her unpublished doctoral thesis on children's adventure novels, an analysis that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. Another exception is Junko Yoshida's article (2003) on masculinity in Katherine Paterson's *Park's Quest* (1988), a children's novel that uses the Perceval legend to "deal[] with the unhealed wound of the Vietnam War, a wound inflicted on America's belief in a 'manhood' that emblemized all biases and prejudices against the 'other' that infused its society" (n.p.). According to Yoshida, Paterson's novel suggests that "the regeneration of disintegrated masculinity lies in reconciliation with the feminine and with the 'other' ethnicities" (Ibid.).

Exceeding Robertson's dissertation chapter and Yoshida's article, Elly McCausland's (2019a) monograph, *Malory's Magic Book: King Arthur and the Child, 1862-1980*, and a number of her articles (2019b, 2019c) are notable for their engagement with masculinity as well as for the successful wedding of Arthurian scholarship with childhood studies. *Malory's Magic Book* focuses on retellings based on Malory's *Morte*, "widely acknowledged to be the most comprehensive work of the Arthurian legend in English" (McCausland 2019a, 3). Discussing "the complex relationship between children and the Arthurian legend", McCausland asks how Malory's text has been re-imagined in terms of 'the child' and 'childhood' (Ibid., 2). Her research illustrates "how a single medieval text can accommodate so many different children" at various points in the past 150 years (Ibid., 6). According to McCausland, the child becomes a "protean category" in reworkings of Malory's Arthurian story:

> [S]ometimes the recipient of overt moralising instruction, sometimes encouraged to take risks and learn self-reliance, the child may be envisaged as an object of address or materialized as an author's nostalgic attempt to 'write back' to or access his or her own lost childhood. The pupil in the classroom, the adventurous explorer, the vengeful adolescent and the childish daydreamer all have a place in adaptations of the *Morte* […] (Ibid.)

McCausland argues that re-imaginings of the *Morte* illustrate the text's flexibility, "its capacity to perform changing cultural work as it responds to and interacts with shifting conceptions of the child" (Ibid., 4). Extending this comment to the Arthurian tradition as a whole and applying the idea of flexibility to masculinity, I am making a comparable argument in my study, which aims to illustrate the malleability and 'protean nature' of medieval, specifically Arthurian, masculinities within a decidedly interdisciplinary framework.

McCausland highlights that the "childness" of Arthurian retellings is often gendered (Ibid., 13). This gendered nature of the child emerges, for example, in her analysis of nineteenth-century adaptations such as Sidney Lanier's *Boy's King Arthur* (1880), Charles Henry Hanson's *Stories of the*

Days of King Arthur (1882), and Margaret Vere Farrington's *Tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* (1899). These texts, McCausland argues, illustrate "a clear interpretation of the *Morte* as a text centred around particular forms of masculine adventure, characterised by an individual willingness to embrace the unknown, the demarcation of boundaries between safety and danger, and the performative nature of combat" (2019a, 32-33). An emphasis on masculinity is also discernible in McCausland's discussion of Howard Pyle and Henry Gilbert's early-twentieth-century adaptations, which "promote specific forms of idealised masculine development" (Ibid., 37-38), and in her analysis of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, where, McCausland argues, "risk-taking masculinities become masculinities as risk" (Ibid., 49; 81). Overall, the Arthurian adaptations McCausland analyses often indicate "a connection between the mythic masculinities of Malory's tale and a specifically male child audience" (Ibid., 38).

Although masculinity emerges as a crucial topic within McCausland's research, it is only the primary focus in "'Something which every boy can learn': accessible knightly masculinities in children's Arthuriana, 1903-11" (2019c). In her monograph, McCausland analyses the texts in her corpus "through the lens of childhood" (2019a, 2), rather than drawing primarily on masculinity and/or gender studies. Further, her corpus goes beyond texts that are clearly identifiable as children's literature.[9] Finally, McCausland's overall focus is on one specific form of adaptation, namely retellings. *Malory's Magic Book* serves as a vital and excellent foundation for studying Arthuriana for the young, thus proving essential for my own work and indeed acting as a 'prequel' to this dissertation. However, my study differs significantly from McCausland's work: I explicitly discuss gendered identities and focus on more recent Arthurian narratives that go beyond abridgments and retellings, which are specifically directed at and marketed to adolescent readers. Further, I examine these narratives using an interdisciplinary framework, focusing particularly on maturation and male maturation discourses. Boys' development towards manhood remains a crucial point for debate in contemporary Western society, and experiences and narratives of this transition continue to be influenced by the legacy of Arthurian and chivalric discourse – as indeed they have been since the inception of Arthuriana specifically for children.

This dissertation offers an intervention in the field of Arthurian scholarship, demonstrating the value of contemporary young adult texts for studying the Arthurian tradition. Looking back and analysing 'classic' or more obscure texts is undoubtedly valuable for continuous progress to be made in the field. However, my study exemplifies how more contemporary fiction, particularly YA

[9] Besides notable retellings for children, McCausland also discusses works produced for adults, such as John Steinbeck's unfinished retelling, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, which he began in 1956. McCausland explains that such texts "elude the confines of the category 'children's literature'", constituting instead a "child-focused" Arthuriana (2019a, 6).

texts, can add to, alter, and enrich our understanding of the Arthurian tradition as a whole and shed new light on the discourses and, sometimes, the specific texts that these adaptations engage with. My study further contributes to children's literature scholarship – and literature scholarship more generally – by illustrating how an interdisciplinary approach can lead to more nuanced readings of gender in fictional texts. When focusing on masculinities, a clear and, importantly, up-to-date understanding of concepts from masculinity studies and the integration of research from psychology, sociology, and history are required to move beyond 'codification' approaches and a focus on 'stereotypes' or 'character types'. Similarly, Arthurian YA adaptations need to be *contextualised* within studies on medievalisms and the tradition more broadly, and there needs to be an engagement with adaptation theory. As my dissertation will show, an interdisciplinary research methodology can add much to literary analysis.

The interdisciplinary nature of my research requires engagement with concepts and theoretical debates from a broad range of fields. In the remainder of the Introduction, I outline these in detail in order to model the process of interdisciplinary research in children's literature scholarship, which has so far engaged with concepts such as hegemonic masculinity theory without considering its continuous development and added nuances. In the subsequent sections, I therefore engage with the following topics: adaptation theory in relation to the Arthurian tradition; medievalism studies and YA discourses; masculinity studies and the importance of terminology; as well as maturation theory and discourses. Ultimately, this dissertation illustrates that using an interdisciplinary approach enhances each of the fields I draw on to produce a nuanced understanding of topics that are assuredly complex, both individually and when combined. The following sections highlight these complexities – in general and in relation to my specific focus: the intricate relationship between medievalisms, masculinities, and young adult literature, as viewed through the lens of maturation.

Studying Arthurian Adaptations as Adaptations

When studying Arthurian adaptations, is important to discuss the ways these operate *as adaptations*. Two questions need to be addressed: what does it mean to look at Arthurian narratives from the perspective of adaptation theory, and how can we classify the vast corpus of Arthurian adaptations? The Arthurian legend is a vast body of tales that have been retold, transformed, and added to over centuries. The complexity of analysing Arthurian adaptations is aptly illustrated by a brief look at Meg Cabot's YA novel *Avalon High* (2005) about a group of contemporary American teenagers who are reincarnations of Arthurian characters. Firstly, each chapter of the novel begins with lines directly quoted from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, "The Lady of Shallot" (1833). Secondly, a number of manga books by the same author and illustrated by Jinky Coronado (2007-2009) function as sequels to the novel. There has also been a Disney TV adaptation (2010) of the novel, which alters a central premise of the story by making the female protagonist the reincarnation of King Arthur instead of her love interest. This example illustrates how contemporary Arthurian YA narratives are adapted from and to various sources and media, involving adaptation processes that are anything but straightforward. Meg Cabot's *Avalon High* and its sequels and adaptations further demonstrate how gender dimensions can change across successive versions of the same base material.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been a proliferation in the field of adaptation studies, with definitions and theories "grow[ing] more numerous, more elaborate, and sometimes more combative", making the field "one of the most dynamic […] in textual and cultural studies" (Corrigan 2017, 31). This dynamicity has its downside. There is no agreed-upon definition of the term 'adaptation' – even the most celebrated scholars in the field (e.g., Hutcheon, Sanders, Stam) do not clearly define their subject (Leitch 2012, 88). Corrigan (2017, 34) argues that "there cannot be any single or stable definition of adaptation", because the activities and perspectives of adaptation studies evolve so rapidly. Indeed, the "lack of consensus about the extent, the methodology, and the boundaries appropriate to its objects of study" has marked the field for almost two decades (Leitch 2012, 103). Adaptation scholars such as Kamilla Elliott therefore argue that "adaptations require theories and theorists to adapt to *them*" (2013, 32; emphasis in original).

McCallum (2018, 3) notes that "[t]he application of contemporary adaptation theory to children's texts has scarcely begun". The same can be said of Arthurian adaptations. Only recently, Arthurian scholars have started to explicitly engage with adaptation theory's relevance for – and, crucially, its shortcomings in relation to – studying Arthurian adaptations *as adaptations*. Howey (2015a) and McCausland (2018) offer fruitful discussions about the intersections of Arthurian studies and adaptation theory. Both refer to what Johnson (2017, 87) calls "one of the most contentious concepts in adaptation studies" and what Griggs (2016, 5) describes as "the tired fidelity debate".[11] As Howey (2015a, 39) points out, with Arthurian adaptations, there is always the question of "[f]idelity to what?" McCausland also emphasises that, with regards to Arthurian

[11] Fidelity, as Johnson (2017, 87) explains, "refers to the extent to which a given aesthetic object – traditionally, in adaptation studies, a film – reflects a faithful understanding of its source – traditionally, a literary text". Within this statement lies another main issue I have found with adaptation theory, namely the predominant focus on "novel-to-film transformation and relationships" (Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen 2013, 4). Even though the field has extended to include a broader variety of adaptations, the majority of studies still "tend to cluster around adaptation to screen" (Griggs 2016, 6). Needless to say, discussing the transformation of, for example, a single novel into a movie, requires drastically different vocabulary, theories, and methodologies compared to my study, which focuses on YA novels that do not adapt a single 'source' or 'ancestor text'.

adaptations and medievalisms more generally, definitions of 'source' and 'adaptation' are problematic:

> [P]aradigms traditionally used to analyse adaptation, paradigms that often rely on spatial or temporal metaphors and binaries clustered around the notion of the 'source,' fail to encompass the fundamental fluidity of intertextuality, particularly when considering the challenges posed by medieval texts to modern understandings of authorship and originality. (2018, 80)

Young (2010) similarly argues that any analysis of medievalist texts should "move[] beyond taxonomies which rely on a text's relationship with its source" and instead give preference to a methodology that "explores the purposes and effects of medievalism within a text" (175; 179). Accordingly, in my analysis, I focus on how and to what effect medievalist re-constructions of epic and chivalric masculinities are employed in a text, rather than which 'source(s)' these re-constructions may stem from.

One way for scholars to circumvent 'fidelity' and 'source' issues has been to examine adaptations using the concept of *intertextuality*. Popularised by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s, intertextuality "stresses the extent to which all texts are necessarily derived from pre-existing texts and discourses, and will themselves form part of the context from which subsequent texts are derived" (Hourihan 1997, 13). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Robert Stam (2000), Linda Hutcheon (2006), and Julie Sanders (2006) in particular have brought debates concerning intertextuality into the field of adaptation studies. Intertextuality has also found its way into children's literature (e.g., Nikolajeva 1996, Stephens 1992, Wilkie-Stibbs 2005). There are two problems with the reorientation of adaptation studies to intertextuality. Firstly, scholars have different understandings of the term, and secondly, "if *everything* is acknowledged as adaptation", does this imply that "adaptation essentially means *nothing*" (Dovey 2012, 167; emphases in original)?[12]

Most usefully, Stephens proposes *medievalism* as a type of intertextuality. The study of medievalisms is concerned with "the continuing reception of medieval culture in post-medieval times" (Utz 2011, 101). Scholarship in this field has grown steadily since the first publication of the journal *Studies in Medievalism* in 1979. The twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of research on medievalisms (e.g., Ashton, ed. 2015; D'Arcens and Lynch, eds. 2014; Marshall, ed. 2007; Pugh and Weisl 2013; Simmons, ed. 2001; Young, ed. 2015). Scholars increasingly ask not what the Middle Ages actually were like, but how they "are invoked in their myriad incarnations and for what purpose in relation to the historical context of any given expression of them" (Marshall 2007,

[12] Nikolajeva points out that some scholars distinguish between *dialogics* and *intertextuality*, using the former to describe a conscious relation to a previous text, and the latter to discuss both conscious and unconscious relations (Nikolajeva 1996, 154). Nikolajeva stresses that "this distinction is somewhat vague and difficult to prove", arguing, however, that "it is worth contemplating" (Ibid.). Indeed, this would help address the question I mention above: if every text is intertextual, is the concept of adaptation obsolete?

2). Medievalism studies focuses on the Middle Ages as an *idea* that changes over time and is always influenced by the values and ideas of the period and culture that is re-imagining it.[13]

Pugh and Weisl (2013) make two important points regarding the study of medievalisms. Firstly, "various intersections of medievalisms unit[e] in a given work", meaning it is necessary to speak of medievalisms in the plural (Ibid., 3). Secondly, "reimaginings of the Middle Ages are essentially fantasies about fantasies" and often "draw more firmly from medieval ideas about fictionality than they do from medieval history" (Ibid.).[14] As Pugh and Weisl probe: "[A]re not courtly love and chivalry both realities of the Middle Ages […] as much as they are dreams of what medieval people believed their world should be?" (Ibid.) Clare Bradford (2015, 2) likewise highlights this issue, explaining that "[m]edievalisms are fundamentally recursive", i.e., they draw on medieval culture as well as on various "post-medieval tropes and texts".[15] It is thus essential to consider the larger discourses of medievalisms that are at work in contemporary Arthurian adaptations. This entails an awareness of medievalisms as an agglomeration of ideas about the Middle Ages and post-medieval reconstructions of the Middle Ages, and an understanding of how both fact and fiction influence medievalisms (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 50).

The distancing from 'source text(s)' at the core of Stephen's (1992) medievalism-as-intertextuality approach is certainly helpful for the study of Arthurian adaptations. However, I find Gérard Genette's concept of *architextuality* (1997) best suited for my study. Architextuality "denotes the relationship between a text and the type of discourse that it exemplifies" (Armstrong 2013, 2). In my case, architextuality means the relationship between a YA adaptation and a wider Arthurian discourse emerging from the tradition as it was popularised in medieval England and France primarily, and as it has been re-envisioned in Anglo-American contexts since the Victorian era. This Arthurian discourse is embedded in and linked to medievalist, chivalric, and heroic discourses,

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[13] Interestingly, some scholars note that even medieval authors were already producing medievalisms by constructing their versions of the past. Referring to Louise D'Arcens' research, Jamison (2018, 8) writes that texts we consider medieval, such as Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* "as well as some other medieval romances might arguably demonstrate medievalism because they look backwards with nostalgia to a golden age of chivalry. Though written in the Middle Ages, these works show a 'sense of the medieval' by creating a fictional and glorified medieval past". In a similar vein, Meyer (2017, 83) argues that, in writing his *Historia Regum Britanniae,* Geoffrey of Monmouth was "constructing a past where his 'Britain' leads the world". Medievalism thus already began in the Middle Ages.

[14] In fact, Pugh and Weisl use examples from the Arthurian tradition to make this point. Regarding the use of medievalisms in the plural, they explain: "[I]n a twentieth-century film version of the Arthurian legend, as told and retold by such authors as Chrétien de Troyes, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and T.H. White, and then scripted and filmed by the screenwriter and director, multiple and contradictory medievalisms reflect and refract one another, and to understand their functioning in an organic artwork necessitates understanding them in their individuality as well." (2013, 3)

[15] Bradford uses the contemporary vampire romance as an example, describing how texts such as the *Twilight* series call on medievalist traditions from the eighteenth century. Regardless of whether the authors of such vampire romances have read any eighteenth-century texts or not, they will be "aware of their twentieth-century reinventions […] which themselves draw upon earlier texts and on gothic subcultures and practices" (Bradford 2015, 2). The same can be said of contemporary Arthurian adaptations, which reflect ideas about medieval masculinities – literary and historical – as well as post-medieval reconstructions and reinterpretations of these.

yet has its own specificities. As Jane Gilbert (2009, 155) explains, "[a]lthough there are undoubtedly overlaps between Arthurian and other discourses", the parameters differ, for example, from those of "ancient Greek tragedy or the realist novel. Even within the broader discourse of medieval romance, the choice to write about Arthur determines available engagements and directions". Whether a writer turns to Arthurian material "in order to convey an urgent message" or not, "the discourse itself imparts an imperative quality" (Ibid., 156). We can thus indeed speak of a specific Arthurian discourse, an *Arthurian architextuality*.

The second question with regards to reading Arthurian adaptations *as adaptations* is how these can be categorised, bearing in mind that, in any classification system, boundaries can be and are often breached. Nevertheless, I argue in favour of using some form of categorisation to establish how we might talk about different types of Arthurian adaptations *as adaptations*. Arthurian Studies scholars have developed various tradition-specific classifications, i.e., categories of adaptation designed to understand the variety of post-medieval Arthurian texts (e.g., Klaus 2013, Lacy 2009, Thompson 1985 – the latter is used by Stephens and McCallum [2013] in their chapter on Arthurian stories for the young). For my purposes, Anne Klaus's (2013) model, which differentiates Arthurian adaptations for children according to the relationship between the adapted text and the legend, proves most valuable.

Klaus distinguishes three different modes of adapting the Arthurian legend for young audiences: references/allusions, retellings, and variations. The first category encompasses texts that use references and allusions which "deliberately evoke associations with the Arthurian legends" (e.g., the Holy Grail, Merlin, Excalibur) in plots that are not Arthurian in other ways. Such references and allusions can enhance the reading experience for readers that recognise them (Klaus 2013, 139). Scholars have researched texts that follow this mode of adaptation. For example, Arden and Lorenz (2003) discuss elements of French Arthurian romance in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, while Petrina (2006) looks at Arthurian spaces in Rowling's novels.

The second category in Klaus's typology consists of retellings. Retellings are based on and limited to the content of conventional sources in the Arthurian tradition (see also Thompson 1985, 11). Arthurian scholars dealing with adaptations for a young audience have largely focused on this type of adaptation, examining retellings based on Malory's *Morte* (e.g., Couch 2003, 2009; Lynch 2004; McCausland 2019a; Wakeman 2015), Edmund Spenser's *Fairie Queene* (Richmond 2016; Woodcock 2003), Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* (Pugh 2003; Sklar 2004), and the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Chandler 2015; Miller 2003; Vitto 1998, 2004). Retellings enable access, providing "a foundational platform on which a [child's] relationship to key texts and corpuses might develop" (Sanders 2016, 174). Such adaptations thus often aim to "make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships" (Ibid., 23). Another main function of retellings is the transmission of literary heritage (Stephens 2009, 92). Indeed, retellings can "foster the readers' familiarity with the medieval legends" (Klaus 2013, 128). A retelling's limitation to the content of conventional sources, however, does not mean that it cannot transform or re-evaluate the source material. Stephens (2009, 92) argues that "[f]ew retellings are simple replications, even when they appear to reproduce the story and narrative point of view of the source". Through selection, inclusion, or omission of certain elements, alteration of the mode of discourse, or replacement of the original illustrations, a retelling may be reshaped so that it differs from the source(s) it is based on – although the retelling's intended closeness to its source/s do create limitations (Ibid., 92-101; see also Thompson 1985, 14).[16]

Klaus's third category encompasses variations of the legend. In contrast to retellings, variations clearly go beyond, they *transcend*, their source/s, while retaining an obvious relation to it/them (Klaus 2013, 133; see also Thompson 1985, 11). Variations are "adaptations which are either closely tied to the original plots, or which at least fill the gaps of the medieval pretexts and thus form complementary stories" (Klaus 2013, 137). Arguably, variations have sprung from one of the main trends in modern Arthurian adaptations: an increasing freedom from fidelity. The liberation "from the traditionally authoritative sources" (Lacy 2009, 122) is related to a general desire in many modern adaptations "to suspend a reader's regular protocols in order to think about the focus story in a different way" (Stephens 2009, 97). Variations reframe the Arthurian legend, for example in relation to narrative point of view, by filling gaps through telling the story of the childhood or adolescence of a well-known character, by focusing on a marginalized or traditionally vilified character, or through a change in setting which places the legend in a contemporary, futuristic, and/or different cultural context. An important point relating to the distinction between retellings and variations is that the former usually serve to introduce the audience to "the social, ethical and aesthetic values of the producing culture" (McCallum 2018, 20). Consequently, retellings are regularly dominated by androcentric, ethnocentric, and class-centric metanarratives, and coloured by values that are masculinist, misogynistic, socially elitist, imperialistic, militaristic, and violent. They are usually more conservative, preserving the traditional metanarratives

[16] Retellings need to be distinguished from abridgements. As Elly McCausland (2019a, 15) explains, "abridgments tend to be specifically produced and marketed for children – and to involve censorship and glossing directed at an imagined child audience". A retelling, on the other hand, "encompasses a far greater degree of flexibility" and often "elaborate[s], rather than condense[s]" (Ibid.).

underpinning the adapted stories, while variations "are more likely to draw attention to and interrogate [these]" (Ibid., 20-21).[17]

Based on Stephens and McCallum's arguments as well as my own findings, I contend that variations indeed offer an increased potential for the examination and revision of Arthurian values and underlying ideologies, especially regarding gender and sexuality. As Sanders (2016, 24) explains, "it is at the very point of infidelity or departure that the most creative acts of adaptation take place", and that new possibilities for interpretation and revision unfold. McCausland offers a similar argument, stating that "it is not fidelity to the *Morte* that offers the key to the complex phenomenon of King Arthur and the child. […] It is the adult impulse […] to 'make what we read' with our imagination" (2019a,191). Stephens and McCallum (2013, 22) also highlight the potential of reversions of traditional stories, and Miskec (2013, 83), too, notes that "[a]daptations that are not explicitly designed as bridges or with fidelity critique in mind", i.e., adaptations that distance themselves from mere retellings, "lend themselves to more interesting conversations". However, as Miskec emphasises, such texts "are not without their own problems, nor are they necessarily without traditional hierarchical values" (2013, 83). Hence, we cannot assume that every Arthurian variation problematises the Arthurian metanarrative. An in-depth examination of variations helps us understand how the Arthurian metanarrative is reinforced, reinterpreted, and/or reshaped for adolescents in the light of contemporary issues and concerns.

I have found variations of the Arthurian legend to be more common within fiction for adolescents compared to texts for younger children. As Stephens and McCallum (2013, 142) write, "[i]t remains quite unusual to attempt to graft new stories to the legend in books for young readers, perhaps because to do so contravenes the domain's function to transmit cultural heritage". Variations offer a divergence from well-known patterns within the tradition, playing with and subverting readers' expectations. The reader's engagement is indeed crucial, as an adaptation's "spectator or reader must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference between the original sources or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text, though an experience in and of itself of the adaptation need not require prior

[17] Klaus's distinction between retellings and variations can be compared – but does not entirely correspond – to Stephens's and McCallum's (1998/2013) differentiation between retellings and what they term "reversions" (see also McCallum 2018). Stephens and McCallum look at adaptations of traditional stories – although, interestingly, they never actually use the term 'adaptation' in their monograph. They define three types of intertextual relations: retellings, reversions, and generic intertextuality. Retellings, they argue, retain "much of the plot, character, setting and thematic material […], preserving the chronotope of the pretext", while "[a] reversion takes apart its pretext and reassembles it afresh into a new textual and ideological configuration, thus creating a text that is quite new" (McCallum 2018, 20). This distinction does not imply any form of evaluation, it is "not always clear-cut and the terms need not be thought of as oppositions, but rather as broad distinctions across a continuum of adaptive and intertextual strategies" (Ibid., 21). For purposes of consistency, I use the term 'variations', while acknowledging its proximity to Stephens' and McCallum's 'reversions'.

knowledges" (Sanders 2016, 57). In this dissertation I am looking at texts with an implied audience that is most likely familiar with the legend's context, discourse, or metanarrative, if not with specific texts.

Saussure's discussion of the signifier and the signified is useful here. The signifier relates not to anything in the 'real world', but "to a mental concept which may involve any number of emotional associations" (Hourihan 1997, 12). For example, "a picture of a knight on horseback spearing a dragon, or the simple phrase 'Saint George and the dragon' immediately calls up ideas of a chivalric tradition in which courage, prowess and a determination to triumph over an evil enemy are the paramount values" (Ibid.). Similarly, even though adolescent readers encountering an Arthurian variation may not actually have consumed any specific Arthurian text in their childhood, the legend's discourse is so ingrained in popular culture, that signifiers such as King Arthur, the Round Table, and Camelot will conjure images of knights on quests, damsels in distress, castles, and forests, for instance. I am not arguing that younger children are not able to make such associations; I suggest, however, that adolescent readers benefit from a longer exposure to Arthurian and medievalist images. This argument also supports my decision to focus on YA literature, which I define as "literature written for young people ages 12 to 18 and books marketed as 'young adult' by a publisher" (Short et al. 2015, 3).

Studying (Medievalist) YA Literature

The decision to discuss YA narratives is also rooted in my study's focus on the construction of gendered identities, an issue arguably more prevalent in adolescent fiction. As Jesse and Jones (2020) highlight, YA fiction is "an ideal site for critically examining contemporary iterations of gender: as an explicitly *discursive* and *imaginary* space, it makes possible the work of deconstructing the social norms surrounding masculinity" (112; emphases in original). It is also crucial to consider the impact of literature on young adult readers and their understanding of gender. As Jacobs (2004, 20) writes, "[y]oung adults may be particularly susceptible to gender portrayals in literature as they work through a stage in life in which they are searching to define themselves. Gender stereotypes in literature can prevent young adults from reaching their full potential as human beings". Holly Hassel and Tricia Clasen (2017, 2) similarly argue that "portrayals of gender can be particularly powerful for readers whose conception of their own gender identity is in the process of forming and evolving". Critical examinations of femininity, masculinity, and trans-gender identities in YA fiction, Hassel and Clasen write, have increased in recent years, and so has a focus on sexualities (Ibid.). My study aims to contribute to this growing field of scholarship, while simultaneously advancing research on medievalist, specifically Arthurian, texts for young adults, an area that is still in its infancy.

Medievalist YA narratives, i.e., YA texts that evoke the Middle Ages in some way, provide a discursive and imaginary space that can offer complex explorations of gender roles and relations (Weisl 2015, 169), functioning as a "venue for the exploration of adolescent life and experience" (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 52). Indeed, the medieval often "serve[s] as a locus for the coming-of-age story" in adolescent literature, "as the traditions of the quest narrative merge with those of the *bildungsroman*" (Ibid., 8; emphasis in original). In contrast to medievalist texts for younger children, where the innocence of childhood is often preserved, YA narratives construct the medieval, in terms of a physical space and/or metaphor, as "a place to lose that innocence and find one's self" (Ibid.). Most importantly, compared to texts for younger children, medievalist YA literature (usually) offers "a greater balance of possible gender roles" (Ibid., 51). These arguments support my decision to focus on YA adaptations.

YA Arthurian adaptations, as Howey (2015a, 37) notes, "map legendary narratives developed in the medieval period onto a much later phenomenon: the teenager". Thus, whether set in the contemporary or a quasi-medieval world, Arthurian characters "act according to twentieth- and twenty-first-century norms of adolescence" (Ibid.).[18] Highlighting the "categorical pressures" of YA, Miskec (2013, 81) states that "even more telling than how an author's attitude toward the canon colors the construction of the adaptation is the author's attitudes about teens – both the imagined readers and the created characters". Therefore, Miskec contends, scholars should approach Arthurian adaptations "as YA fiction first", "adhering more to YA literature concerns" than to concerns of fidelity and comparison (Ibid., 82). Anja Müller (2013, 4) also notes that it is "important to eschew concerns about fidelity, to analyse the adaptations in their own right", and to "shift one's attention from the 'what' to the 'how'". In a similar vein, McCallum (2016; 2018) criticises the fact that research on film adaptations for children "rehearse the arguments against fidelity put forward by adaptation-studies scholars", while neglecting to "situate those arguments specifically within debates central to children's literature criticism" (2016, 202). In light of these arguments, I analyse the texts in my corpus not only in relation to Arthurian discourse or architextuality – i.e., the complex web of texts they stem from, are embedded in, and add to –

[18] Much like gender and sexuality, age and the life course are socially and historically constructed (Joosen 2018, 9; see also Gardener 2002, 93 and Ryle 2018, 150). Accordingly, what we view as 'maturity' depends on how we define pre-adulthood and adulthood. As a term to describe a distinctive category or life phase, 'adolescence' only came into regular use at the beginning of the 20th century. Similarly, the term 'teenager' only entered the popular lexicon in the 1940s (Baxter 2013, 26). Up until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the category of 'youth' was commonly used to refer to the stage between childhood and adulthood (Ibid., 25). This category was "[v]aguer and more amorphous", it "extended from the age of eight or so into the middle or even late twenties" (Mintz 2013, 57). In a medieval(ist) context, 'youth' refers to boys 'in training'. However, in the feudal era, a male in the liminal state "between being dubbed knight and becoming a father" was also described using this term (Celovsky 2005, 220).

but also under consideration of the debates and paradigms central to YA literature and criticism, particularly in relation to medievalisms in adolescent fiction.

While medievalisms have played a crucial role within children's literature and culture since the mid-nineteenth century, it has taken much longer for *scholarly* interest to develop in this area. Medievalists have only recently turned to children's literature as a subject, and, similarly, "inquiry into medieval topics and traditions ranges relatively low on the agenda of children's literature scholarship" (Koch 2011, 158). Bradford (2015, 5) explains that the role and influence of medievalist texts for the young is often acknowledged, but not examined. Bradford's *The Middle Ages in Children's Literature* (2015) is, to date, the most extensive study on how medievalisms operate in children's and young adult literature and culture, although recent publications on medievalisms often include chapters on texts for the young (e.g., Ashton, ed. 2015; D'Arcens and Lynch, eds. 2014; Pugh and Weisl 2013). Most recently, the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (ChLAQ) dedicated a special issue to medievalisms in children's literature (2020), proving the growing interest in this area.

Pugh and Weisl (2013) as well as Bradford (2015) highlight an important problem within children's literature scholarship on medievalisms, namely its focus on questions of authenticity, accuracy, and truth, which implies that young audiences "require accuracy and reliability in fictive accounts of the Middle Ages" (Bradford 2015, 6). Both Pugh and Weisl (2013) and Bradford (2015) criticise Rebecca Barnhouse's scholarly work, *Recasting the Past* (2000), for instance, because it focuses on the discovery of ahistorical elements in medievalist texts and values only those medievalisms that 'capture' the Middle Ages. The question of authenticity has played an important role in Arthurian works for children, with adapters often presenting their works as if it reflected 'real' medieval chivalry *as it was actually practiced*. In reality, these retellings reflected Victorian or Edwardian concerns, values, and ideals. My analysis does not focus on how 'authentically' Arthurian YA adaptations depict medieval masculinities. Instead, I examine how these narratives adapt, transform, and play with medieval masculinity ideals, and how this relates to contemporary issues, anxieties, and discourses about masculinity and maturation. As Kristin Bovaird-Abbo (2020, 305) highlights: "[W]e enrich our understandings of ourselves and the world around us when we focus not on what is authentic about the medieval in children's literature, but rather on how we construct meaning from the juxtaposition of the medieval alongside the modern."

Bearing in mind the value of making the past speak to the present (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 10), the alterity of the medieval is just as crucial. Weisl (2015) highlights the ways that setting a coming-of-age story in the Middle Ages provides opportunities that the contemporary world simply does not. The medieval is characterised by different rules and expectations, often lacking, for instance, "the central authority and traditional restraints on adolescent life, such as parents and schools" (Ibid., 169). Indeed, the medieval, as Bovaird-Abbo (2020, 305) notes, "can provide a critical distance that enables us to re-examine our current world in ways that other modes of fiction cannot". In my analysis of Arthurian adaptations, I also discuss how the alterity of the Middle Ages is utilised to present and comment on masculinities, past and present.

Besides 'authentic' and 'not authentic', there are other ways of distinguishing between medievalist works. Pugh and Weisl (2013), for instance, differentiate between the realistic (trying to create an 'authentic' past) and the fantastic (mainly following medieval romance conventions)[19]. However, they also note that "any substantial body of material resists classification", that works often combine these two modes, and that both are *fantasies* of the medieval (Ibid., 52). In her monograph, Bradford makes a case against using a taxonomic approach. She states that "texts cannot readily be slotted into positions of this continuum [of imaginative and historical]". While taxonomic divisions can indeed be problematic, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the texts I deal with are, largely[20], examples of the fantastic. In comparison to historical novels, where the medieval setting creates more rigidity in terms of gender norms, the pseudo-medieval settings of fantasy narratives provide creative opportunities and the potential to challenge these norms in different ways.

Medievalist texts for the young portray multiple, often contradictory Middle Ages. For example, medievalist narratives can provide what Bradford (2015, 12) calls "experiences of enchantment". Such texts often portray the medieval in romanticised ways, as a "lost time of innocence", corresponding to the widely held belief about children as embodying innocence (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 7). However, medievalist works can also serve as "distanced treatments of contemporary questions and issues" (Bradford 2015, 12). Similarly, the modes or modalities of medievalisms vary, ranging from the comic – prevalent in texts for younger children (Ibid., 155)[21] – to the postmodern. The latter often involves taking a deconstructive approach and using strategies such as metafictionality and self-reflexiveness. Bradford (2015) discusses Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) in relation to metafictionality, highlighting the novel's concern with history,

[19] According to Pugh and Weisl, medievalisms can also be organised according to chronology, by influence, and by media (2013, 3).

[20] The adaptation I deal with in Chapter 4, *Here Lies Arthur* by Philip Reeve (2007), is set in South-west Britain around 500 A.D., does not include any magical elements, and reveals Myrddin's (Merlin's) magic as fraud. It is not a historical novel but, nevertheless, as Bradford suggests, "assumes many of the features of historical fiction" (2015, 34).

[21] This certainly seems valid, considering, for instance, the abundance of recent picturebooks that take a comic stance towards knighthood and chivalry. Titles include: *Sir Scaly Pants and the Dragon Thief* (John Kelly, 2017); *There Was an Old Dragon Who Swallowed A Knight* (Penny Parker Klostermann, ill. Ben Mantle, 2015); *The Not-So-Brave Knight* (Kay Woodward and Yuliya Somina, 2016); and *Winnie and Wilbur: The Naughty Knight* (Valerie Thomas, ill. Korky Paul, 2017). Gerald Morris's four-volume *Knights' Tales* series for middle grade readers (2008-2012), illustrated by Aaron Renier, also takes a comical approach to the medieval, the Arthurian legend in particular.

truth, and storytelling, and commending Reeve's "deconstructive approach to the purposes and functions of stories in political life" through which he "advocates resistance to stories which elevate individuals to hero status, and pit one group (ethnic, gendered) against another" (2015, 35). Similarly, Molly Brown (2015) analyses Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* (2000-2003) and Catherine Fisher's *Corbenic* (2002) in terms of their "postmodern awareness of the storied nature of history" (182).[22] In light of this discussion of medievalisms in literature for the young, the following questions guide my analysis of Arthurian adaptations: Firstly, how is the medieval presented and how does this relate to the depiction of masculinities and maturation in the text? Secondly, what functions do the different Arthurian medievalisms serve across my corpus? And, finally, as medievalist texts, how do the Arthurian adaptations I analyse engage with, comment on, and reflect the "contemporary sociocultural milieu" (Pugh and Weisl 2013, 1) in terms of masculinity and maturation?

Whether in children's or YA literature, medievalisms use the past to explore the present. Medieval settings and tropes are used as defamiliarisation and distancing strategies, enabling a "critique or interrogation of contemporary mores and attitudes" (Bradford and Hutton 2015, 13; see also Pugh and Weisl 2013, 47). The adaptation process necessitates choices about what is being presented, preserved, and changed, meaning that there is a risk of perpetuating stereotypes and inequalities, but also the potential to transform Arthurian material to subvert these. My intention is not to set up a simplistic dichotomy between traditional/conservative and progressive/subversive adaptations and to pass value judgments along those lines. Rather, I examine how recent Arthurian YA narratives are positioned in relation to the tradition and how this dialogue operates. I observe where contemporary texts celebrate, test, and/or (partially) break down medieval(ist) and contemporary masculinity codes, gender/sexual schemata, and maturation conventions, thereby signalling the *ideological*[23] work of the imperatives of masculinity, past and present. As Parsons explains, "[a]ll cultures have ideologies" and "[a]ll things produced in a culture are expressions" thereof (2011, 113). Various scholars have argued that, in fact, "all language is ideological", and that thus, in turn, "all writing is ideological" (Sarland 2004, 57). Consequently, texts produced for young audiences are also shaped by ideology, which, according to Peter Hollindale (1992, 27) is "an inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children" (see also Stephens 1992).

[22] Both Reeve's and Crossley-Holland's adaptations are in my corpus.

[23] There is no agreed definition for the term 'ideology', but, for the purposes of my study, I understand it as "the system of ideas that define a culture" (Parsons 2011, 113). This system includes "the larger scale of political, cultural, and economic ideas like democracy, Christianity, capitalism and individualism that dominate the Western world, but also the more intimate identity politics within a culture, in particular those that surround gender, sexuality, race, and class and that effect the distribution of power among individuals in a society" (Ibid.).

In his influential essay, Hollindale (1988/1992) distinguishes three levels of ideology in books for children, the first being the overt ideology of a children's book as it relates to the "explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer and his wish to recommend them to the children through the story" (1992, 27). This *explicit* ideology is usually easily identified, since it is "the most conspicuous element in the ideology of children's books"; however, it is also less powerful (Ibid., 28). The second level is subconscious, or *passive* ideology – an "individual writer's unexamined assumptions", which they have internalised and thus take for granted (Ibid., 30). Passive ideology is more powerful, since it is 'invisible' and thus "invested with legitimacy through the implication that things are simply 'so'" (Stephens 1992, 9). The ideologies inscribed in a work on these first two levels may contradict each other. The third level is the ideology contained within our language, i.e., "within the words, the rule-systems, and codes which constitute the text" (Hollindale 1992, 32). As Stephens (1992, 8) explains, "[a] narrative without an ideology is unthinkable: ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language". Ideology hence operates on various levels in literary texts.

As Sunderland (2011, 9) rightly points out, and as I have noted earlier, "a work of fiction always […] has the potential to be 'progressive' in its gender representation in some ways, and traditional in others". Raymond Williams's understanding of culture as "encompassing dominant, residual, and emergent formations" (Więckowska 2014, 11) proves useful here. Williams proposes that what he calls 'residual ideologies' can, in certain contexts, challenge dominant ideologies of the present (1991, 415). Similarly, ideologies from prior Arthurian texts find their way into contemporary re-imaginations of the legend, so that a variation can be both 'progressive/subversive' and 'traditional/conservative'. A close analysis of the texts in my corpus will uncover the ways ideology operates on the overt, covert, and language-determined level, and how residual ideologies impact the way masculinity and maturation are depicted within a single narrative.

The Arthurian Legend in Children's Literature and Culture

I have so far discussed and justified my approach to studying Arthurian variations and addressed my decision to focus on YA adaptations. I will now offer my rationale for examining the ways contemporary Arthurian masculinities are presented to young audiences. Historically speaking, the Arthurian legend has significantly impacted constructions of boyhood, male maturation, manhood, sexualities, and gender relations, as my subsequent discussion of the Arthurian legend in children's literature and culture over the past centuries will show. Although, through the ages, children were familiar with the Arthurian legend through adult versions, histories, ballads and chapbooks, they only became a specific audience during the Arthurian Revival in the Victorian era, when the Middle Ages came to be viewed as a political ideal, a 'golden age' to be celebrated. An increased interest in all things medieval paired with a growing "market in books for children" (Fenster 1996, lvii) led to the production of Arthurian adaptations explicitly for young readers, both in Britain and the US. Despite the 'mature' nature of many aspects integral to the legend, such as adultery, incest, violence, and death,[24] King Arthur was "transform[ed] into the hero of children's literature" (Archibald and Putter 2009, 7). A major impetus for the Arthurian Revival was the publication of a new edition of Malory's *Morte* in 1816 – the first since 1634 – which quickly became the primary source for children's adaptations – a status it has retained to this day. As Elly McCausland (2019a, 3) explains, "[a]lthough Arthurian adaptations created for children sometimes feature additional material from other medieval texts such as *The Mabinogion* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, they have been, and continue to be, overwhelmingly based on Malory's *Morte Darthur*". The production of Arthurian stories for the young was underpinned by the Victorians' belief that these "could furnish behavioral models" for children (Nastali 2004, 175), instilling into the young a sense of morality and character (Lupack and Lupack 2016, 7). From the onset, Arthurian literature was hence not just produced for children's entertainment, but with specific didactic and pedagogical intentions, its authors pursuing a clear ideological agenda.

In Britain, adult gatekeepers such as teachers, academics, and publishers repeatedly praised and utilised the Arthurian legend for its pedagogical value (McCausland 2016; Richmond 2014). Consequently, a primarily male audience – above all, "privileged British schoolboys" (Kellogg 2003, 3) – learned about nationhood, imperialism, and manhood through Arthurian art, illustrations, and retellings such as Henry Gilbert's *King Arthur's Knights: The Tales Retold for Boys and Girls*, illustrated by Walter Crane (1911), which "offer[s] the *Morte* as an example to children, specifically boys, by reformulating its martial adventures to emphasise a series of social and moral qualities linked to the development of idealised manhood" (McCausland 2019a, 57). Writers fashioned King Arthur as "imperial conqueror; a warrior-leader; the just, Christian ruler of a Golden Age; the founder of chivalry; a stoical and wise husband wronged in love, and an embodiment of the popular masculine ideal which made him an exponent of Christian manliness" (Bryden 2005, 71-72).[25]

[24] Not surprisingly, these aspects were regularly bowdlerised or omitted in children's Arthuriana (Lynch 2004).

[25] It was not only Arthur that played an important role in this regard. The legend was very malleable in the sense that certain qualities of knights and the values they embodied could be stressed to promote a specific type of manliness. In mid-nineteenth century, for example, under the influence of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and his *Idylls of the King* (1859), purity was given priority, with Galahad, and often Perceval, being idealised (Bryden 2005, 97; Kellogg 2003, 3; Knuth 2012, 46). A copy of G. F. Watt's iconic painting of Sir Galahad even decorated Eton College in the 1890s for inspiration (Knuth 2012, 46).

While, in Britain, the legend became crucial for establishing a national identity and mediating imperialist ideologies, the Americans – in alignment with their national ideologies[26] – appropriated and reinterpreted medieval values "to reaffirm the modernity of American individualism and capitalist democracy" (Fox-Friedman 1998, 143). US Arthurian adaptations produced for children during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected these intentions and, like their British counterparts, provided a predominantly male readership with a model of manliness – a model that still "govern[s] America's ideal of masculinity" (Ibid., 154).[27] Adapters such as Sidney Lanier (*The Boy's King Arthur*, 1880, illustrated by N.C. Wyeth) and Howard Pyle (*The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*, 1903-1910, illustrated by the author) intentionally inserted didactic messages into their Malorian retellings, presenting heroes whose virtues and behaviour boys were encouraged to emulate.[28] As the first American adapter of the Arthurian legend, Lanier specifically "call[ed] for an infusion of chivalric values into the moral education of American children" (Wakeman 2015, 103). Accordingly, his series of children's books[29] set out "to reinvent old, hearty tales for growing boys as a way of guiding their spiritual and physical growth" (Ibid.). Pyle adapted Malory's *Morte* for similar purposes, to provide "idealized chivalric heroes as exemplary models for boys" (Couch 2009, 207).

The project of infusing children's education with chivalry was not only pursued via literary channels in the US, but also through the establishment of Arthurian youth clubs, which advocated a strict, specific, and gendered moral code. Boys' clubs were introduced as ideal leisure activities, with the aim to solve a perceived 'boy problem' by "both arousing and controlling masculine impulses" (Grant 2004, 832). The success of these 'Knights of King Arthur' clubs for boys prompted their founder, minister William Byron Forebush (1868-1927), to also establish an equivalent organisation for girls, the 'Queens of Avalon'.[30] Boys were supposed to learn and acquire

[26] Arthurian scholars focusing on the American context frequently note that "there is an inherent contradiction involved in bringing King Arthur to America": The fact that Arthur ultimately bears the title of king due to birth right contradicts the nation's mentality and founding principles (Lupack 1998, 121). Nevertheless, Arthurian tales continue to enjoy popularity in the US. Lupack explains authors' strategies "to deal with the paradox of making a king and his subjects appealing to an audience that believes in democratic ideals": Arthur was ignored (with a focus on one of the other characters), parodied, shown to have less power, or portrayed as 'the common man' with adapters suggesting that his "true nobility comes from basic human qualities and not from an accident of birth" (1998, 121, 135).

[27] Interestingly, the majority of popular Malorian retellings in circulation in late Victorian and Edwardian England were written by American authors (Girouard 1981, Preface).

[28] Pyle, in particular, reformulated the legend so that it "valorized specific American virtues by identifying them with what were made to appear as the eternal truths of the past" (Fox-Friedman 1998, 139). Interestingly, Pyle enjoyed a close friendship with Teddy Roosevelt, widely considered to be *the* 'real-life' American knight, and personally provided Roosevelt with copies of his adaptations (Ibid., 152).

[29] Lanier also wrote *The Boy's Froissart* (1879), *The Boy's Mabinogion* (1881), and *The Boy's Percy* (1882). The latter two were published posthumously. The overarching goal of this series was to "help shape a proper, virile masculinity which supersedes the effeminacy of late nineteenth-century aestheticism" (Wakeman 2015, 103).

[30] The Arthurian clubs, aimed at boys and girls aged thirteen to sixteen, had an even wider-reaching and lasting impact: they served as inspiration for the American and British Boy Scout movements.

the ideals of masculinity, while girls were taught about 'real' womanhood (Finke and Aronstein 2012, 23) – all under the banner of the Arthurian legend.[31]

Following the Victorian era, the period between World War I and post-World War II saw the publication of one of the most influential texts of the post-medieval Arthurian canon: T.H. White's tetralogy, *Once & Future King* (1958)[32], which began as a children's book. A story of male education and maturation, the first volume, *The Sword in the Stone*, is still considered a children's classic.[33] Following White's Arthuriad, retellings by Roger Lancelyn Green (1953), Alice M. Hadfield (1953), Antonia Fraser (1954), Rosemary Sutcliff (1963, 1979, 1981 – published within one volume in 1999), and others added to and transformed the tradition, making the legend available to new generations. More recently, picturebooks, chapter books, comics, and graphic novels have been expanding the ever-growing Arthurian children's literature canon.[34] Whether intended for a specifically male, female, or general audience[35], these texts inevitably engage with and transmit certain ideas about both medieval and contemporary masculinities. Considering the information presented in this section, I believe it is astonishing that the representation of masculinity in Arthurian adaptations for the young has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention.

Limitations

Having provided justifications for the focus and corpus of my study, I now address the limitations of my work. Firstly, the researcher's bias has to be considered in any textual analysis based on close

[31] Within the US context, of course, John F. Kennedy's presidency became known as 'Camelot', again illustrating the pervasive influence of the Arthurian legend on US culture. As Barbara Tepa Lupack (2004, xvii) explains: "the actual identification between Kennedy and Camelot first occurred soon after JFK's death, when Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy urged her friend, reporter and historian Theodore H. White, to label her late husband's historical myth in specifically Arthurian terms. […] Kennedy's mother, Rose Kennedy, was pleased by the Arthurian association, which she felt was both accurate and appropriate: she recalled Jack 'in his boyhood reading and rereading his copy of *King Arthur and the Round Table*.'"

[32] White's Arthuriad consists of *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), *The Queen of Air and Darkness* (1939), *The Ill-Made Knight* (1940), *The Candle in the Wind* (1958). A fifth volume, *The Book of Merlyn*, written in 1941, was published posthumously in 1977. The volumes succeeding *The Sword in the Stone* are geared towards an adult audience, although, as Elly McCausland states, "glimpses of the original intended audience continue to emerge in White's narrative mode and focus" (2019a, 7).

[33] In 1963, the book was adapted by Disney, who, in 2015, announced a live-action re-make, demonstrating the continued interest in this adaptation.

[34] For an analysis of Arthurian picturebooks, see Judith L. Kellogg's "Text, Image, and Swords of Empowerment in Recent Arthurian Picture Books" (2004), and for an examination of Arthurian comics for children, consult Michael A. Torregrossa's "Once and Future Kings: The Return of King Arthur in the Comics" (2004), both essays in Barbara Tepa Lupack's *Adapting the Arthurian Legends for Children*, which also includes chapters on Arthurian poetry and plays, music, and film for children.

[35] As Lupack (2012, 60) states, "the didactic literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was directed primarily to boys, not girls". Accordingly, Arthurian retellings were meant to offer Arthur and his knights as role models to a specifically male audience. Following the second wave of the feminist movement, however, adaptations began to be produced specifically for girls. The distinction between boys' and girls' books, of course, suggests that gender is a simple binary, a view this dissertation works against. However, it has to be acknowledged that, even in the twenty-first century, books for young audiences remain divided along this binaristic line.

reading. As Sunderland (2011, 9) writes: "[G]iven the possibility of multiple readings, what may be seen as progressive in one text by one reader or analyst may be seen otherwise by another." Discourse is polysemic, i.e., it allows multiple interpretations, and meaning is created "based on a fusion of the reader with the text" – therefore, my interpretation might not necessarily reflect other readers' interpretation, although specific elements in a text may suggest "a preferred meaning or reading" (Bereska 2003, 170; 161). A note on positionality is also in order: I am analysing masculinities and queer subjectivities as a white, cis female, heterosexual scholar. These factors and my experiences based on these identities inevitably influence my interpretations.

The second limitation of my study is the corpus size. After reviewing a wide selection of Arthurian adaptations, including picturebooks, middle grade and YA narratives, as well as comics and graphic novels, I narrowed down this extensive corpus to four YA novels/series that would yield the most compelling results in relation to my arguments and purposes, and which exemplify the trends I have observed across my initial, more extensive corpus. I selected adaptations that I believe stand out in offering space for critical engagement with and discussion of masculinities and gender/sexuality more broadly – although, as the Conclusion will show, a myriad of contemporary YA Arthurian adaptations do this work and deserve critical attention. It also should be noted that my study does not include perspectives of real readers. For reasons of manageability, I focus on textual analysis, which, I hope, will prove useful for future empirical studies.

The final and most significant limitation of my study is that it focuses on the constructions, norms, and ideologies of white, middle-class, Anglo-American masculinities. This is inevitably the case with a eurocentric tradition that has been primarily concerned with and adapted for white, male, noble (later, middle-class) Christians. Across adaptations, there is a severe lack of diversity[36],

[36] The We Need Diverse Books project describes diversity as referring to "all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities" (cited in Ramdarshan Bold 2019, 8). As Melanie Ramdarshan Bold notes, the word 'diversity' has become "a buzzword, a political talking point, which can risk overlooking the more complex subject matter" (Ibid.). Indeed, "the concept of diversity itself is problematic", as it "perpetuates the notion of 'otherness', which is viewed from a dominant white lens" (Ibid.). Stacy Collins highlights "how much language can communicate existing power and dominance with relatively little effort or intention" (2018, 42). One popular example, Collins notes, "is the (over)use of 'diversity and inclusion'": "This prepackaged linguistic dyad of diversity and inclusion, while positive on the surface, is not only insufficient on its own to address barriers to equity, it also often enacts the exact opposite of what it states – promoting homogeneity and alienating difference. Diversity – the state of being diverse – in and of itself does not create a pathway to equity, and while inclusion of folks hitherto excluded seems like exactly what we are attempting to accomplish, inclusion elides the power dynamics of the phrase itself, leaving them unaddressed." (Ibid., 47) Collins' article on language, power, and oppression is situated within a library and information sciences (LIS) context but is relevant within the broader discourse of 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. Bearing in mind the complexity and problematic nature of the terms and concepts, I work with the definition of 'diversity' introduced above and use the words 'diverse' and 'diversity' as well as 'inclusive' and 'inclusion' sparingly and with a caveat.

particularly in regard to race and ethnicity[37]. Even in contemporary variations of the legend, the majority of Arthurian characters (and authors) are white, and representations of discernibly non-white characters are scarce. This issue has been raised by scholars, most prominently children's literature critic Ebony Elizabeth Thomas. In her seminal work, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (2019), Thomas examines "the role of race in the collective literary imagination" and "why magical stories seem to be written for some people and not for others". In one chapter, Thomas discusses BBC's *Merlin* (2008-2012), specifically the producer's decision to cast mixed-race actress Angel Coulby as Gwen (Guinevere).[38] Discussing the audience's response to this decision, Thomas observes that "the presence of a Black woman as the love interest of the main character was a source of controversy throughout the run of the series" (2019, 69-70). Negative – often upsettingly racist – audience reactions to the casting choice, Thomas explains, are rooted in "a nameless and lingering fear of dark-skinned people [which] has been normalized in the popular imagination" (Ibid., 70). The rejection of non-white characters is particularly palpable in relation to the medieval: "Seeing a dark-skinned character, particularly one who is of discernible African ancestry, seems to break the spell for many despite the fact that there were people from many different cultures living in England during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages" (Ibid., 75). One of the reasons *Merlin*'s audience protested against a Black Guinevere, was the argument that "Gwen is a character outside of plausible spacetime, thus ruining Arthurian legend", which has – wrongly – been regarded as "the province of an all-White Europe" (Ibid., 93; 101).

Like the producers of *Merlin*, other adapters who integrate non-white characters into their Arthurian stories face critique for flaunting 'historical accuracy'. However, 'historical accuracy' – or rather, the absence thereof in relation to King Arthur, a figure of *legend*, not history – is the very reason why rewriting the legend allows for and *should* offer diversity. As Ebony Elizabeth Thomas puts it: "Why is it easier to believe in talking dragons than in Black princesses and queens?" (Ibid., 102) Reviews of another recent Arthurian adaptation highlight the validity of Thomas's comment, proving again that, for some, the existence of dragons is more acceptable in medievalist texts than the presence of non-white Arthurian main characters. *Netflix's* 2020 adaptation of Thomas

[37] It is crucial to highlight that 'race' is "a discursive category rather than based on erroneous ideas of biological differences" (Ramdarshan Bold 2019, 9). Similarly, ethnicity "can be viewed as *a social construct* which presents a specific individual and/or group identity" (Bilge et al. 2021, 2; emphasis added). Attempting a definition "that distinguishes ethnicity from other related concepts", Bilge et al. suggest the following: "Ethnicity is a communicative process, which establishes a distinct identity for its members through cultural commonalities, such as race, language, religion, and/or national heritage. While ethnicity can be an assigned or adapted identifier, its borders are transparent and are determined by its members." Crucially, as Ramdarshan Bold points out, "[a]t present, all of the terminology used to classify ethnicity is problematic" (2019, 9).

[38] As Ebony Elizabeth Thomas highlights, before BBC's *Merlin*, no text-based Arthurian adaptations "have made Guinevere anything other than visibly White" (2019, 79).

Wheeler's YA novel *Cursed* (2019), illustrated by Frank Miller, has received criticism from some viewers for its casting of a Black Arthur. In a 2020 online article, "writer and cultural critic" Michael McCaffrey states that *Netflix's Cursed* is "more proof that wokeness ruins everything it touches" (n.p.). Amongst other things, McCaffrey criticises what he terms the "not-so-subtle declaration of wokeness" through the show's "colorblind casting" (Ibid.). He complains: "Any real-life historical King Arthur prototype would have been white, and the character is even portrayed as such in the Frank Miller graphic novel that *Cursed* is based upon, but on the TV show he is played by black actor Devon Terrell." (Ibid.) The fact that such comments continue to be made confirms the crucial points Ebony Elizabeth Thomas brings forward in *The Dark Fantastic*.[39]

Like Thomas, Tracy Deonn (2021), author of *Legendborn* (2020-), an inclusive Arthurian adaptation for young adults, addresses the issue of 'historical accuracy' in relation to Arthurian stories, referencing the debates surrounding the casting choice of Dev Patel for the 2020 film *The Green Knight* (dir. David Lowery). She writes: "[P]lenty of commenters began asserting that Patel's inclusion was ahistoric, even though people of color existed and participated in the world of the medieval era." (Deonn 2021, n.p.) Deonn argues that the "calls for a single true Arthur story [are] *themselves* ahistoric" and ignore "hundreds of years of Arthurian storytelling tradition – a tradition that has always included remixes and reinventions" (Ibid., emphasis in original). Deonn suggests that, indeed, all Arthurian adaptations are "fanfic", as they *imagine* Arthur, a figure of fantasy.[40] Crucially, Deonn states that when Arthurian adaptations "with inclusive representations of race, gender, sexuality, and other identities, are deemed 'inauthentic,' these claims aren't based on Arthuriana's reality. They're based on *exclusion*. […] [A]n effort to delegitimize certain versions becomes a tool of oppression that polices who gets to tell which stories, and who gets to have

[39] The same white people complaining about Arthur's skin colour in terms of historical accuracy, one might assume, do not have any issues believing in a white Jesus – they might even actively be opposed to the idea of a non-white historical Jesus. As Jeffrey S. Siker (2007, 27) explains, "[t]he history of Western Christian theology […] has seen the ascendancy of Jesus as a white Christ with a resultant de facto white God endorsing white power claims over other racial/ethnic groups". However, recent scholarship on the historical Jesus has increasingly been defined by a racialising discourse, with both Black and Latino/a theology addressing this issue and working against an "ideology of whiteness" that has "constructed a tacitly and explicitly white Jesus" (Ibid., 49).

[40] There is an ongoing debate surrounding the historicity of Arthur, which proves difficult to settle due to the lack of historical evidence and the unreliability of the few surviving written sources (Bruce 1999, 36). It is not clear in what time period the 'real' Arthur lived, and it needs to be considered that "'Arthur' may be multiple people […], fused through legend and hazy history, into a single character" (Ibid., 37). The Arthurian legend is indeed a *fantasy*, confirming Deonn's argument that there is no 'historically accurate' Arthur in the first place.

adventures at an Arthurian scale." (Ibid.; emphasis added)[41] My study inevitably reflects the lack of diversity in Arthurian adaptations; however, in the Conclusion, I highlight some recently published adaptations such as Deonn's series, that raise hope for a more inclusive future of the legend that goes beyond depicting white, cisgender, heterosexual, privileged characters.

The texts examined in this dissertation are important sites for and examples of masculine – and, increasingly, queer – discourse. As Pugh and Ramey (2007, 6) note, the Middle Ages "frequently serves as a tabula rasa on which to project modern questions of identity". In this study, I examine contemporary YA Arthuriana as a medium for the projection of anxieties about and the negotiation of *gendered* identities, particularly in relation to maturation. To summarise, I offer close readings of a variety of contemporary Arthurian novels for young adults that move beyond the traditional Arthurian material but maintain recognisable links to the legend. I discuss the ways these so-called variations of the legend enter into dialogue with, de-/re-construct, and problematise the values and ideologies of the Arthurian tradition. I focus on how these narratives relate to past and present 'Western' discourses about masculinities and maturation, as well as gender and sexuality more broadly. To this end, I utilise theories and concepts from masculinity studies and queer theory, as well as research on 'coming of age' and maturation, which I introduce in the subsequent sections.

Studying Masculinities

Traditionally, gender studies have been aligned with women's studies, focusing on femininities and their literary and cultural representations. Politically, Armengol (2007, 76) points out, "this is as it should be", since it is "women and girls who have undergone – and still undergo […] the most detrimental effects of patriarchy". However, we need to consider that "[b]oys and young men are exposed to societal pressures just as much as girls and young women, merely in a different manner" (Nikolajeva 2009, 106). Bereska (2003, 168-169) highlights the impact of neglecting boys' experience, both on the individual and on society, asking whether "males [can] accommodate

[41] In terms of diverse casting choices more generally, the recent, highly popular *Netflix* series *Bridgerton* (created by Chris Van Dusen, produced by Shonda Rhimes), a Regency romance based on a series of bestselling novels by Julia Quinn, is interesting. As McKenzie Jean-Philippe explains, *Bridgerton* "raises the question of how diverse nobility could exist during a time when most Black and brown people in Britain were relegated to domestic work", also in relation to "the scale and level of acceptance of those people shown in *Bridgerton*" (2020, n.p.). The limited scope of this dissertation does not allow me to discuss this in more detail, but it is important to highlight that period dramas similarly have to deal with audiences constantly raising the 'historical accuracy' issue – although in the case of Bridgerton, criticism has not only been invoked as a method of exclusion and oppression, but also centred on the *performativity* of including non-white characters. As Jean-Philippe writes: "Is one warm, fluffy conversation between a man and his wise godmother *really* enough to explain multiracial casting in a series set in a country with a painful history?" (Ibid., emphasis in original) In any case, similarly to Arthurian adaptations, *Bridgerton* "doesn't need to elaborate on its inclusion of Black characters. Historical accuracy shouldn't have to matter in a fantasy." (Ibid.) As British author and pop culture scholar Bolu Babalola (2020) put it in a tweet: "Who CARES if it isn't historically accurate they were playing Thank U Next on strings at a ball".

changes in the girls' world, [and] changes in women's lives, if we have left the meaning of masculinity unaltered", and arguing that there must be changes in masculinity "in order to change patriarchal power". In addition, discussing masculinity(ies) beyond the cis-male body is crucial to challenging rigid, binary notions of gender and sexuality that often remain reinforced in gender research.

Recent scholarship has come to recognise the importance and value of masculinity studies for gender studies and the project of increasing gender equality[42]. While it is a valid argument that research has predominantly been *about men*, for a long time there has been a lack of theorization, meaning that there was no critical engagement with or questioning of men and masculinities. An explicit and critical analysis, however, is necessary and valuable as people of all genders suffer from oppression through the patriarchal system and are prevented from thriving in a society based on dangerously repressive views of normative masculinity. Building on insights from feminist scholarship, eminent sociologists such as Michael S. Kimmel and Raewyn Connell have been advocating and advancing the critical study of masculinity for decades, making masculinities *visible*, with new generations of researchers continuously adding to the field.

While in the 1970s and 80s research on masculinities was almost solely restricted to sociology and psychology, in the 1990s, the field expanded to include the study of literary and cultural masculinities. This was a crucial development, since models of masculinity are also created in and through textual representations. A number of recent studies discuss literary representation of masculinities in general literature, demonstrating an increasing interest in this area of inquiry (e.g., Armengol 2007, 2013; Armengol et al. 2017; Baker 2006; Horlacher, ed. 2011, 2015; Horlacher and Floyd, eds. 2017; Ibaseta 2018; Knights 1999; Rowland et al. 1998; Schoene 2000; Więckowska 2014). Some work focuses specifically on Arthurian masculinities. For example, Wheeler (1992) examines the masculinity of King Arthur "from Gildas to the nuclear age"; Westover (1998) discusses Arthur's emasculation in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*; Jenkins (1999) deals with masculinity in American Arthurian film; and Machann (2000) examines Tennyson's *Idylls* in terms of violence and manliness. Worthington's (2002) article on T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* does not specifically deal with gender and masculinity, but offers interesting observations in this regard, while Pugh and Weisl's (2013) study of medievalisms in contemporary literature and culture includes a very useful chapter on King Arthur's and Robin Hood's "mythic

[42] Karla Elliott (2016, 242-243) highlights the fact that there are ambivalences and contestations around the term "gender equality", which I hereby acknowledge; however, she also suggests that the term should not be disavowed altogether. Referring to Kittay's (1999) work, Elliott explains that there are a variety of "possible formulations of equality rather than one, strictly delineated version of the concept" (2016, 242). One of these possible formulations centres problems of subordination and domination, which I focus on in my analysis of masculine embodiments, performances, and ideals.

masculinities". Richmond's (2014) monograph on chivalric stories for children in the Edwardian era includes a section on issues of gender, and Houswitchka (2015) discusses masculinity in Malory's *Morte*. With the exception of Richmond and Worthington, these scholarly works do not focus on children's literature, but offer valuable insights into Arthurian masculinities throughout the centuries. Most crucially, as already noted, McCausland discusses masculinity in Malorian Arthurian retellings for children (2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

Within children's and YA literature, there has been a similar expansion of the study of gender (e.g., Bereska 2003; Khan and Wachholz 2006; Kidd 2004; Jesse and Jones 2020; Mallan 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Nikolajeva 2009; Sasser 2017; Stephens, ed. 2002; Stephens 2002; Wannamaker 2008). Tami M. Bereska's work is frequently cited by scholars analysing the construction and representation of masculinities in texts for the young. In her article, "The Changing Boys' World in the 20th Century: Reality and 'Fiction'" (2003), Bereska explores masculinity in YA literature published in the US between 1940 and 1997, analysing thirty novels based on their likelihood to "appeal to boys in particular (but that girls also might be reading)" (160). Bereska's findings suggest that the components constituting the structure of masculinity remained unaltered over the period she researched. Sofia Khan and Patricia Wachholz (2006) share similar findings, arguing that few YA novels focusing on a male protagonist's coming of age "challenge the conventional constructions of masculinity" (58). Instead, these texts portray boy characters who "must accept the conventional constructions of masculinity and learn to master socially acceptable forms of male power" (Ibid.). Taking a positive outlook on her own conclusion, Bereska speculates that "perhaps changes in the structure of masculinity lie within the changing audience rather than a changing text" (2003, 170).

Using a semiotic approach to discourse analysis, Bereska identifies patterns within her corpus that she interprets as 'codes', which "represent the structure of texts and thereby construct meaning" – in this case the meaning of masculinity (Ibid., 160). Besides codes[43], Bereska argues, YA fiction also sets "conditional boundaries"[44], which "place restrictions on what masculinity can entail", and which need to be fulfilled to be able to "participat[e] in the Boys' World" (Ibid., 162; 164). Bereska's study is certainly interesting and valuable; however, her coding methodology may

[43] The eight codes Bereska identifies are as follows: (1) Emotional expressions (except anger) are inappropriate. (2) Aggression, expressed in various ways, is 'naturally' linked to masculinity and (to some extent) required of all boys/men. (3) Masculinity is collectively enacted and enhanced in different types of all-male 'hang-out groups'. (4) Hierarchical positioning is achieved through (5) competition. (6) Athleticism and physical action are crucial. (7) The boys'/men's world requires adhesion to a code of morality and a willingness to act on the principles stipulated in this code. (8) The boy's/men's world is one of adventure.

[44] The three conditional boundaries according to Bereska are: heterosexuality, embodiment and the importance of the physical body, and 'no sissy stuff'.

have anticipated findings that reflect conservatism and stability.[46] In other words, such a code-driven interpretation and evaluation may not register changes and nuances. While useful to make sense of a large body of works across decades, a methodology based primarily on codes is not sufficient for my own study, in which I use close reading to discover nuances and movements in fictional representations of masculinity. Nevertheless, Bereska's study and similar research has influenced my conception of 'traditional' or 'normative' masculinity.

While Bereska (2003) and Khan and Wachholz (2006) find mostly conservative portrayals of masculinity in children's and adolescent fiction, the twenty-first century has also seen an increase in studies discovering 'new' or 'alternative' masculinities in contemporary fiction for young readers (e.g., Mallan 2001; Stephens 2002; Nikolajeva 2009; Sasser 2017; Jesse and Jones 2020). For instance, Kerry Mallan (2001) addresses the question of how writers for the young "contribut[e] to critiques of masculinity (and gender generally) through strategies of parody, self-reflexivity, and subversion" (2). Mallan identifies three constructions of masculinity that "resist a 'hegemonic' model of virile, active and competitive masculinity": antiheroic, transgressive, and hybrid (Ibid.). Antiheroic constructions of masculinity "work against the heroic ideal and offer a parodic masculine display" (Ibid., 5). Transgressive masculinities play with gender and sexual norms, for example through cross-dressing, suggesting "a sense of danger and risk in traversing gender/sexual boundaries" (Ibid., 10). Contrastingly, there is a minimised risk with hybrid masculinities, i.e., masculinities defined by "selective incorporation of performances and identity elements associated with marginalized and subordinated masculinities and femininities" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246).[47] Mallan's conceptualisation of transgressive and hybrid masculinities is particularly relevant for my analysis of Arthurian narratives.

John Stephens (2002) finds that in between a dichotomy of the manly/masculine "Old Age Boy" and the unmanly/unmasculine "Mommy's Boy" lies the category of the "New Age Boy", who "tends to lack physical prowess and physical courage" and is instead characterised by moral courage, concern, and commitment (53). He is "[c]reative, sensitive, with an articulate command of contemporary discourses" and frequently portrayed as an avid reader and/or writer (Ibid.). Stephens argues that the schemata of the "New Age Boy" has become well established in children's literature, demonstrating "the contemporary imperative to socialize boys away from Old Age

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[46] It has to be noted that Bereska's approach lacks an application of tools from narrative theory. She looks at the 'what' and neglects the 'how', perhaps because she approaches the fictional representations from the perspective of a sociologist, not a literary critic. Nevertheless, her findings are valuable for my analysis of masculinities in Arthurian YA fiction.

[47] 'Hybrid' is not a term universally adopted among scholars of masculinity studies or within children's literature research; however, the concept of hybridity is useful in making sense of the growing body of theory and research on contemporary transformations of masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246) as reflected in society as well as in literature.

masculinity" (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Maria Nikolajeva argues that recent novels for adolescents "frequently present a new male, encumbered by the social pressures and uncomfortable in his conventional gender role" (2009, 106). This "new male" is characteristically "soft, insecure and introvert[ed]", occupied with his feelings and relationships (Ibid., 120). Lacking "conventional masculine traits", he embodies a mix of masculine- and feminine-coded features (Ibid., 111). More recently, Sasser (2017) has found "more unconventional expressions of masculinity" in YA adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which increasingly revolve around cis male "protagonists who are sensitive, nurturing, compassionate, communal, and imaginative" (97).

Jesse and Jones (2020) similarly note "a clear and consistent pattern of male characters who fail to conform to traditional expectations of masculinity" (111). Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (2006, 2007), they define four "iterations of 'new manhood'" across eleven YA novels published between 2005-2015. "The Stereotypical Dude-Bro" "tak[es] the norms of traditional masculinity to extreme lengths", offering both an exemplar and a caricature of twenty-first-century manhood (Ibid., 114). "The Sensitive Thinker", contrastingly, presents a challenge to hypermasculinity through his introspection, "nuanced decision-making", a lack of boasting, and the recognition and appreciation of the role of others on his journey (Ibid., 115). The least common iteration is "The Rebel Outsider", who "exists on the periphery of mainstream school/social culture" and "wears his exclusion as a badge of honor that grants him the power to openly question the codes that govern adolescent life" (Ibid., 116). Finally, the most common iteration the researchers encountered is "The Problematic Other", which "refers to any major character who identifies as male but embodies his male-ness in ways that directly contradict the norms of dominant masculinity" – in other words, he "performs his gender in all the 'wrong' ways" (Ibid., 117).

In my analysis I engage closely with the research reviewed above, aiming to establish how Arthurian variations relate to these masculinity discourses in contemporary YA fiction. I am particularly interested in how the narratives I discuss relate to what Sasser (2017, 97) refers to as "the greater culture's moving toward a stronger acceptance of more diverse notions of masculinity in mainstream culture", a shift that is also reflected in the children's and YA book market. At the same time as engaging with existing research, however, I also argue that much of it proves insufficient in terms of using masculinity studies theories to analyse literary texts. I distance myself from the focus on stereotypes of the masculine which seem to characterise many studies on masculinities in children's and YA literature, and suggest that, to examine fictional masculinities, a deep interdisciplinary engagement with terminology, theories, and history is essential. I offer such engagement in the following sections, in which I also discuss the need to move beyond 'coding' approaches and a simplistic use of hegemonic masculinity theory.

Terminology

Armengol et al. (2017, 2) point out that "masculinity scholarship has traditionally been grounded in a specific discipline". The application of interdisciplinary perspectives, however, can enhance the study of masculinities. In the case of literary analysis, an interdisciplinary approach helps to "bridg[e] the traditional gap between the Social Sciences and the Humanities in radically new and profound ways", while highlighting how theoretical and literary discussions "feed on each other" (Ibid.). I contend that there is a need for a more elaborate, interdisciplinary analysis of masculinities in texts for young readers, one that goes beyond codes and schemata, integrating current gender and sexuality research in sociology, psychology, and related fields. Importantly, such an interdisciplinary analysis should not limit the study of masculinities to cis male bodies.

To build my conceptual framework, I therefore use terminology, theory, and concepts from the aforementioned disciplines, which I introduce in this section. My intention is not, using Robyn McCallum's words, "to impose these theories on texts, but rather to examine conceptions of subjectivity implicit in texts in light of the insights offered by the theories" (1999, 9). Further, it is crucial, as Kruger (2009, 419-420) explains, not to import modern ideas about gender and sexuality into the past, and to recognise "the gap between our own understandings of [gender and] sexuality and medieval ones". Therefore, the concepts I discuss in this section apply to *contemporary* ideas about masculinity and gender and sexuality more broadly, while later sections focus on medieval understandings of this terminology as relevant to this study.

There are a number of important terms that need to be explained, including sex, gender, gender binarism, sex categorisation, gender display, gender identity, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and heteronormativity. As David Glover and Cora Kaplan (2009, 1) write, gender has come to be "one of the busiest, most restless terms in the English language", one "that crops up everywhere" but is difficult to define. Most importantly, gender needs to be distinguished from the term sex.[48] *Sex* is a medical and legal category, based on "differences in reproductive anatomy" (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279), and currently viewed in binary terms, meaning that a person is either assigned male or female at birth.[49] It is crucial to use the phrase *sex assigned at birth*, as some

[48] However, as Paechter (2006b, 125) notes, it is becoming "increasingly apparent that we need to rethink, and maybe abandon" the distinction between sex and gender. Also, "[b]y separating sex and gender and suggesting that gender is socially constructed, we imply that sex is not. Bodies, however, are not just a given, or even just material effects of the social […]; they are socially constructed as well." (Ibid.) For example, anatomical drawings in the Renaissance "continued to show the vagina as an internal penis and the ovaries as internal testes, in accordance with the one-sex model prevalent at the time" (Ibid.). A detailed discussion of the sex-gender distinction and its implications goes beyond the scope of this study, but it is crucial to note that I am using the distinction with a caveat.

[49] Sex is determined by relying upon 1) "genetic karyotyping", i.e., mapping out the genome to determine if a person has sex cells that are XX or XY, 2) hormone levels (testosterone and estrogen), 3) genitalia and/or secondary sexual characteristics such as breasts (Castañeda and Pepper 2018, 120).

individuals are born with "anatomical ambiguities in their genitalia" (Palmer and Clegg 2020, 3).[50] Social scientists have been working to broaden society's understandings of sex and gender beyond simple binaries (Castañeda and Pepper 2018, 119). Nonetheless, the majority of individuals in contemporary society continue to accept *gender binarism* as 'common-sense', "consequently ascrib[ing] others to one of two categories" (Charlebois 2010, 6). This process of *sex categorisation* happens "instantaneously and unconsciously" (Fisk and Ridgeway 2018, 157) and is based on a person's *gender display*, which covers a "wide sense of self-presentation" including clothing and physical mannerisms (M. Gilbert 2009, 96, 101). Gilbert highlights that "even though we want to make genitals the basis for sex, it is only rarely that we are in a position to view each other's genitals", meaning that most of the time, we actually deal with *sex category* rather than sex (Ibid., 96).

While the scope of this dissertation does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the state of gender theory in the twenty-first century, it is crucial to highlight the differences between *essentialism* and *social constructionism*. An essentialist view assumes that "owing to their different biological make-up, men and women have distinct 'essences' and thus are *predisposed* to differ mentally and behaviourally" (Saguy et al. 2021, 2; emphasis in original). At the core of this perspective are "genetic and hormonal differences between females and males", which are considered to determine masculinity and femininity (Ibid.). Such a "biological-essentialist outlook" understands differences between men and women as "predetermined and immutable" and considers gender as binary, thereby "perpetuat[ing] a non-egalitarian gender ideology" (Ibid., 2-3). Biological sex is "a multidimensional concept" (Tate et al. 2020, 8) and scientific research does reveal "group-level differences between women and men" (Saguy et al. 2021, 3). However, this research does *not* support biological-essentialist beliefs that suggest differences between women and men to be immutable, nor does it sustain "that human brains, hormones and 'natures' belong to two distinct kinds" (Ibid.).[51]

In contrast to essentialism, the "socio-cultural theory" is based on the assumption that "gender differences are a result of the different way people think about and act towards women and men", and the fact that "[t]he clearly labelled and distinguished gender categories […] are imbued with social or cultural meaning" (Ibid., 2). This means that biological sex does not decide

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50 For most of the 20th and 21st centuries, these individuals had their ambiguous genitals surgically altered "to become whichever required the least amount of reconstructive surgery" (Palmer and Clegg 2020, 3). Doctors believed that individuals would then "adapt to surgically altered genitalia and conform to the sex indicated by the gonads" (Ibid.).

51 As Amy S. Wharton (2005, 29) explains, "[w]hether there are biological or genetic contributions to the behavior of males and females is a subject of heated debate". The scope of this dissertation prevents me from providing more detailed information on this topic, which would also necessitate a discussion of the complexities of 'biological sex'. For an in-depth discussion about the latter, see Tate et al. (2020), pp. 8-14, and Saguy et al. (2021), pp. 3-4. For more on the biological and genetic impact on 'sex differences', see Wharton (2005), pp.29-31.

the gender(ed) behaviour of human beings: "Although one may be born female, this does not mean that one is by nature womanly or feminine" – rather, society constructs traits and behaviours as feminine and masculine, with humans internalising these as such (Fryer 2010, 41).[52] While understanding "the biological and the social worlds [as] interdependent and mutually influential", I take a social constructionist approach, which views gender as "a system of social practices" (Wharton 2005, 23). I discuss how fictional characters *become* gendered, focusing, to use sociologist Amy S. Wharton's words, "on the social […] processes that produce gender", the processes "through which people learn how to be feminine and masculine (Ibid., 23; 31).

While sex, sex category, and gender are characteristics attributed by others, *gender identity* refers to "a person's sense of being male, female, neither, or a combination of both" (Palmer and Clegg 2020, 2). The term cisgender is used "to describe persons whose sex recorded at birth aligns with their sense of gender identity"; persons whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned at birth are referred to as gender nonconforming, transgender, transsexual, trans, gender nonbinary, gender incongruent, and genderqueer (Ibid.). As Palmer and Clegg write, "[s]ociety is changing", meaning that there are increasing numbers of people who self-identify using the afore-mentioned terms (Ibid., 6).

Gender is undeniably intertwined and intersects with sexuality and sexual practices. *Sexuality* is about orientation or desire: "'A sexuality' is a way of being or a form of desire that is more fundamental to the individual than a preference: 'sexual identity' and 'sexual orientation' are related (modern) terms used to express this." (Karras 2017, 7)[53] In this context, the term heteronormativity is important. *Heteronormativity* is based on gender binaries and references "the implicit belief that heterosexuality is the only 'normal' self-identity" (Crisp 2009, 333). Queer theory – which I discuss in more detail later on – offers a strong critique of heteronormativity, refusing to take heterosexuality as the benchmark and maintaining that human sexuality does not neatly fall into two separate categories.

Similar to gender discourses, debates about whether sexualities are essential or socially constructed dominate scholarly discussions, with the latter perspective now generally being favoured (Karras 2017, 8). A social constructionist view on sexuality proposes that sexuality "is not

[52] There are also so-called "biosocial perspectives" that "emphasize the ways in which biology sets limits on what societal influences can achieve" (Wharton 2005, 22). A fundamental critique of such perspectives is that "they see as taking for granted precisely what is most in need of explanation: people's belief in the existence of two, discrete sex categories" (Ibid.).

[53] Karras offers a helpful example to illustrate the distinction between 'sex', 'gender', and 'sexuality', stating that "a person today born with a *male sex* might have a *female gender identity* and a *bisexual orientation*" (2017, 7; emphases added).

written in the body" but "created by the meanings given by different cultures to sex acts" (Ibid.).[54] This view goes back to Foucault, whose fundamental point was that "sexuality does not exist apart from the meaning sexual behavior acquires in a given culture. No essence in human beings dictates the objects of their desires […] Instead, homosexual and heterosexual are culture-based concepts and have no transhistorical significance" (Mieszkowski 1995, 21).

Another crucial terminological distinction needs to be made between *maleness*, *manhood,* and *masculinity*. As Groth (2007, 20) explains, maleness refers to "the genetically determined anatomical structures and somatic dispositions related to the presence of large amounts of circulating androgens in the male body". Manhood, in contrast, denotes "the cultural status a male is expected to attain and sustain" (Ibid.). Finally, masculinity means the "culture-specific ways of presenting the male body and ways of being in the world that are associated with maleness and manhood" (Ibid.). As prominent masculinity studies scholar Raewyn Connell explains, a society's gender structures "define particular patterns of conduct as 'masculine' and others as 'feminine'" (2015, 44). Masculinity and femininity thus need to be defined as "configurations of gender practice" (Ibid. 42). They come into being "as people act" (Ibid., 44), which is why gender should not be understood as "a 'thing' that one possesses, but rather a set of activities that one *does*" (Kimmel 2008b, 122; emphasis in original), leading us to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. As Butler writes, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through *a stylized repetition of acts*" (2007, 187; emphasis in original). Importantly, "individual enactments of gendered behaviors do not emerge in a social vacuum" (Castañeda and Pepper 2018, 122). Rather, "social norms strongly encourage gender-normative behavior and strongly discourage gender counter-normative displays" (Ibid.). Accordingly, gender scripts and norms shape the understanding of masculinity and femininity.

Gender scripts and norms constitute what is often termed 'traditional' or 'normative' masculinity. Scholarship often takes the meaning of 'traditional masculinity' for granted, conveying an impression of the concept as transparent and self-evident (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele 2015, 4). However, research engaging with this term should show some critical engagement with it. According to Everitt-Penhale and Ratele, three main contentions are crucial. First and foremost, 'traditional masculinity' is socially constructed (Ibid., 5). As such, it "should not be assumed to be a static set of features associated with men that has been timelessly passed down through generations" (Ibid., 11). Secondly, there are *multiple* traditional masculinities: "different cultural

[54] Karras again provides a useful explanation in this regard, stating that "[a] person might perform the same acts in a variety of cultures, but they would not express the same sexuality in all those cultures because the acts would have different meanings and are understood differently" (2017, 8).

groups have different norms for what is traditionally masculine", meaning that "there are vastly different constructions of 'traditional masculinity' across various ethnic, racial and national contexts" (Ibid., 12). When I use the terms 'traditional masculinity' or 'normative masculinity' in this study, I refer to contemporary, largely white, Anglo-American, heterosexual, middle-class masculinity norms that, according to psychological and sociological research, determine contemporary, 'mainstream' Anglo-American society's understanding of 'appropriate' masculine behaviour. I concur with Everitt-Penhale and Ratele who state that it is crucial to "recognis[e] the *contextual-specificity* of each construction of 'traditional masculinity'" (2015, 14; emphasis added) – this, I believe, is often neglected in literary studies of masculinities. It is also important to emphasise that traditional masculinity is not synonymous with *hegemonic masculinity*, a topic that I address shortly.

Traditional masculinity is a collection of gender norms that "make up a sex role, a set of expectations about how someone labeled a man […] should behave" (Ryle 2018, 109). Psychologist William Pollack argues that boys, in particular, find themselves under severe pressure to conform to such expectations, which, he argues, are "inculcated into boys by our society – from the very beginning of a boy's life" (1998, xxv). Relying on Brannon (1976), Pollack subsumes these expectations and assumptions under the term "Boy Code", which is constituted of four fundamental rules. The first rule, "the sturdy oak", emphasises stability, independence, endurance of hardship and pain, as well as the necessity of hiding fear, weaknesses, and insecurities. The need to show confidence at all times ultimately "drains boys' energy because it calls upon them to perform a constant 'acting job'" (Pollack 1998, 24). The second rule, "give 'em hell", justifies and indeed encourages male violence and aggressive behaviour, viewing such conduct as innate – 'boys will be boys', as the saying goes.[55] The third imperative, "the 'big wheel'", refers to the achievement of power, dominance, status, and the importance of suppressing "failure and unhappiness" (Ibid.). Finally, the fourth rule, "no sissy stuff", forbids boys and men to express "feelings or urges seen (mistakenly) as 'feminine'" (Ibid.). Boys learn that such emotional display "must be regulated, lest it undermine a manhood act" (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 282). This fourth imperative is also the

[55] As JJ Bola states, "'boys will be boys' is often used to excuse the kinds of behaviour that are superficially associated with maleness – the kinds of behaviour that would not be accepted from a girl […] 'Boys will be boys' removes accountability from action, and teaches young boys that there are certain behaviours they can get away with as a result of their maleness – think about how there is no such equivalent of *girls will be girls*" (2019, 17; emphasis in original).

reason for men's fear of femininity, which indeed lies "[a]t the very heart of men's [gender role] conflict" (Kimmel and Davis 2011, 7).[56]

Pollack's work has been criticised by academics from various fields, including children's literature scholar Kenneth Kidd. In his monograph, *Making American Boys* (2004), Kidd criticises Pollack's work for its "rather selective form of ethnography" and for "universalizing [the] mythos of boyhood" (182). Kidd states that Pollack fails to provide sufficient information on his methodology and the project itself, and that, "[for] the most part, listening to boys' voices means listening to Pollack tell us, selectively, about boys' voices, much in the vein of early ethnography, in which the field-worker rarely acknowledges the influence of his or her own assumptions on the research" (Ibid., 183). Beyond issues of methodology, scholars have also criticised Pollack and other 'boys-in-crisis writers' for ignoring the diversity among boys, when empirical data highlights the *multiplicity* of masculinities. Oransky and Marecek (2009, 220), for instance, "take issue with the notion of a single overarching regulatory ideal (e.g., a Boy Code or cultural straitjacket) because this notion does not readily account for the diversity among boys". Chu (2014, 7) similarly criticises 'boys-in-crisis' scholarship for "pathologiz[ing] boys and problematiz[ing] boys' development", while "depicting boys as passive recipients of culture and helpless victims of their socialization". Indeed, boys do not "passively absorb a monolithic Boy Code from the culture at large", but rather "actively engage[] with various prescriptions and proscriptions regarding masculinity" (Oranksy and Marecek 2009, 237).

I concur with the above-mentioned criticisms of Pollack's work. However, Pollack's findings echo other masculinity studies research (e.g., Connell 2005; Connell and Pearse 2015; Kimmel 2008a; Kimmel and Davis 2011; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009), which distinguishes certain behaviours and traits that contemporary white, middle-class boys and men in Anglo-American societies are expected to demonstrate, if only to avoid punishments such as name-calling or societal isolation. These behaviours and traits do not necessarily constitute a specific 'code' or 'straitjacket' that is *imposed* on boys – *but* these are norms that boys and men are familiar with and (have to) navigate and negotiate. In the following paragraphs, I introduce traditional masculinity norms, or *scripts* (Mahalik et al. 2003). In my analysis, I then examine how the texts in my corpus reflect and address these scripts in their fictional constructions of masculinities. My approach is in line with

[56] Michael Kimmel has identified a similar 'code' among university-aged males. Based on his empirical research in US-American colleges, he formulated the "Guy Code" in his monograph, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (2008a). The Rules of this 'Guy Code' are: "1. Boy Don't Cry; 2. It's Better to be Mad than Sad; 3. Don't Get Mad – Get Even; 4. Take It like a Man; 5. He who has the Most Toys When he Dies, Wins; 6. Just Do It or Ride or Die; 7. Size Matters; 8. I Don't Stop to Ask for Directions; 9. Nice Guys Finish Last; 10. It's All Good" (as summarised in Kimmel and Davis 2011, 8). Kimmel's monograph (2008a) – based on interviews with 400 men between the ages of 16 and 26 – also highlights that, besides hegemony, three intersecting cultures provide the rationale for the "Guy Code": a Culture of Entitlement, a Culture of Silence, and a Culture of Protection.

the concept of "doing gender", which "does not deny the existence of cultural codes of masculinity and femininity", but "shifts attention to how people" – or, in my case, fictional texts and characters – "actively engage with those codes" (Oransky and Marecek 2009, 222).

Gender scripts, as Bracher (2015, 98) explains, "are structures of knowledge concerning the specific behaviors through which various forms of masculinity and femininity are constituted, performed, and recognized". As such, they help determine "those of our behaviors that imply a certain gender identity" as well as "our perception and judgments regarding the gender identities of other people" (Ibid.). Both femininity and masculinity scripts can cause psychological and social harm. Since they are tied to expectations, adherence is not optional but expected. Literary and cultural texts can undermine harmful dominant gender scripts, most crucially by exposing their negative consequences and offering alternatives (Bracher 2015.). The scripts I introduce below are neither universal nor constitute a concrete list or definition of 'traditional masculinity'. Rather, they reflect ideas about traditional masculinity within a contemporary, white, Anglo-American, middle-class context, based on information that I have distilled from a variety of studies on 'real-life' late twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century masculinities.[57] I recognise the differences between 'real' and fictional masculinities. However, in the spirit of promoting interdisciplinarity, as addressed earlier, I believe it is useful and important to build an analytical framework not only based on discussions of literary masculinities, but also grounded in sociological and psychological research.

I propose five interrelated scripts related to traditional masculinity: regulation of emotional expressiveness; demonstration of (or willingness to demonstrate) violence and aggression; demonstration of power, dominance, and independence; repudiation of femininity; demonstration of heterosexual desire. Firstly, boys and men are discouraged from displaying emotions other than anger. Showing sadness, grief, pain, or fear may put them at risk of being considered 'unmanly', effeminate, weak, or powerless (Brody 2000, 28; see also Jansz 2000, 170). Problematically, hidden 'unmanly' emotions are often funnelled "into the expressive channel of anger", which frequently leads to violence, the second script I have identified (Ibid., 173). Kimmel (2010, 25) argues that "[v]iolence is often the single most evident marker of manhood". Indeed, male aggression and violence are considered normative and accepted – often even encouraged – as "a legitimate way to resolve conflict" (Kimmel and Mahler 2003, 1450). Related to violence and aggression is script three, the demonstration of dominance, power, and independence. Manhood, Kimmel (2010, 28) writes, "is equated with power – over women, over other men". A "capacity to exert control or to resist being controlled" is thus expected of those assigned male at birth (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009, 279). A fourth, crucial traditional masculinity script is a distancing from femininity. Indeed,

[57] My discussion of traditional masculinity therefore inevitably reflects the biases of the researchers and their studies.

"a strong, negative emotion associated with stereotypic feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors" is learned in early childhood (O'Neil et al. 1986, 32), leading boys and men to avoid any actions that may be associated with femininity or, indeed, homosexuality – the two "antitheses" to traditional masculinity (Oransky and Marecek 2009, 235; see also Harper and Harris 2010, Kimmel 1994, Mahalik et al. 2003). Masculinity thus defines itself in opposition to femininity. The final element of traditional masculinity I have identified is (conspicuous) heterosexuality, which is primarily accomplished through the sexualisation of girls and women.

Some scholars maintain that traditional masculinity is not "inherently negative and patriarchal" (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele 2015, 5). Everitt-Penhale and Ratele, for example, suggest that traditional masculinity "[may] be drawn on as positive identity" (Ibid., 4). Addis et al. (2016, 86) share this opinion, explaining that, while research has highlighted "the abundance of negative physical and psychological outcomes with which conformity to masculine norms has been positively associated", there is also evidence of advantages associated with conformity to masculine norms. These benefits include "higher levels of personal courage, autonomy, endurance, and resilience" (Hammer and Good 2010, 303). The view of masculinity as something that is not inherently negative is also central to Seager and Barry's (2019, 106) work, in which they criticise the use of "[v]alue-laden concepts such as 'traditional' masculinity', 'toxic' masculinity and 'hegemonic' masculinity". I agree with some of Seager and Barry's statements. For instance, 'hypermasculinity' is indeed a more appropriate term than 'toxic masculinity', since the former "implies that such behaviour is more exceptional, an extreme version of masculinity and not inherent to masculinity as a whole" (Ibid., 112). Within the context of this study, I clearly distinguish 'traditional masculinity' from other masculinities. Further, I do not use 'traditional masculinity' in an exclusively negative sense. I do, however, find it important to acknowledge that narrow and rigid norms of traditional masculinity, as Harper and Harris (2010, 20) note, limit boys' and men's "ability to be fully human and realize their full potential". Further, for cisgender boys and men, not adhering to traditional masculinity scripts "may incur a negative assessment from others", which, problematically, often leads to isolation and violence (Charlebois 2010, 7). Crucially, the scripts I have introduced contribute to maintaining inequalities across gender and sexuality divides.

As noted above, traditional masculinity needs to be distinguished from *hegemonic masculinity*.[58] Introduced by sociologist Raewyn Connell in 1987, this concept has become perhaps the "most influential set of ideas in masculinity studies" (Horlacher 2011, 7). Initially, Connell conceptualised hegemonic masculinity as "the most honoured or desired", although not necessarily the most common or comfortable form of masculinity (2000, 10). Even though it may only be practiced by a small number of men, hegemonic masculinity is beneficial for the majority of men because of "the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell 2005, 79). Hegemonic masculinity not only controls relationships between men and women (external hegemony), but also between groups of men (internal hegemony). As Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf (2016) observe, "Connell conceptualises the relation between different forms of masculinity as a *hierarchically structured* political order" (194; emphasis added), one that is sustained by and enables male privilege and patriarchy.

Connell's concept was widely used, but also began to attract scholars' criticism (e.g., Demetriou 2001; Elias and Beasley 2009; Martin 1998; Schippers 2007), not least because of its inconsistent application, ultimately leading to revisions by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) that have since been supported by sociological research (Messerschmidt 2018; Messerschmidt and Messner 2018). In its reformulated understanding, hegemonic masculinity is no longer seen as necessarily "the most powerful and/or the most common pattern of masculinity in a particular setting" (Messerschmidt 2018, 144). There is also more emphasis on intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989), i.e., how gender intersects with other social identities and inequalities.[59] Most importantly, current sociological theory speaks of hegemonic masculinities in the plural, arguing that these are situated on three levels: the local (within families, schools, and other social institutions), the regional (society-wide), and the global (in politics, business, and media). Multiple hegemonic masculinities exist within each of these levels (Messerschmidt 2018, 144).[60] The relational nature of the concept, including the notion that men are required to position themselves *in relation* to hegemonic masculinities, remains important.

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[58] In some contexts, that which is constructed as traditional masculinity may overlap with hegemonic masculinity, but traditional masculinity within any given context is not necessarily hegemonic and may even be marginalised. For example, the dominant model of masculinity in South Africa can be described as "hegemony within marginality": "while there are obvious hegemonic ideas about masculinity in the country, these ideas are complicated by the marginality of (South) African society in juxtaposition to powerful multinational capitalist ideologies" (Ratele 2014, 31).

[59] Intersectionality is a seminal concept developed by Black feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). It is "[r]ooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory" (Carbado et al. 2013, 303) and, over the past decades, has grown "into a burgeoning field of intersectional studies" (Cho et al. 2013, 785).

[60] Messerschmidt (2018, 152) points out that, although in theory "identifying a *single* ascendant hegemonic masculinity at each level may be possible, no one to date has successfully done so" (emphasis added).

Revisions regarding the understanding of *non*-hegemonic masculinities have also taken place. Initially, Connell (1987, 1995) defined the following four variants: complicit masculinities – men who do not fit the hegemonic ideal but benefit from it; subordinated masculinities – men who "are oppressed by definitions of hegemonic masculinity" (Pascoe 2007, 7); marginalised masculinities – "men who may be positioned powerfully in terms of gender but not in terms of class or race" (Ibid.); and protest masculinities – men with "compensatory hypermasculinities that are formed in reaction to social positions lacking economic and social power" (Messerschmidt and Messner 2018, 38). Research, however, has shown that these are more complex than in Connell's conceptualisation and that there is an even greater diversity in non-hegemonic masculinities. Most significantly, non-hegemonic masculinities have come to be distinguished from hegemonic masculinities by the notion that, contrary to the latter, the former "do not legitimate gender inequality" (Messerschmidt 2018, 147).

Despite the revisions, some scholars remain wary of hegemonic masculinity theory and its widespread acceptance and use. One major argument against the use of Connell's concept focuses on its incompatibility with empirical research (Seager and Barry 2019, 106). Another line of criticism centres on Connell's tendency "to ignore relations among masculinities that are not based on struggle or domination, but on co-operation and solidarity" (Hadas 2019, 255). Of all approaches refuting hegemonic masculinity theory, Eric Anderson's "inclusive masculinity theory" (2009) is perhaps the most elaborate.[61] However, as Karla Elliott (2016, 246) emphasises, "[e]ven if the concept of hegemonic masculinity on its own precludes a comprehensive understanding of the lived realities of men's emotional lives, it can still provide important insights into the constructions or cultural ideals of masculinity that are most valued in society". Concurring with Elliott, I use the concept of hegemonic masculinities in its revised form, adopting Messerschmidt's (2018, 145) definition of these as specific forms of masculinity which subordinate femininity and alternative masculinities.

Crucially, I supplement hegemonic masculinities theory by drawing on Karla Elliott's conceptualisation of open and closed masculinities within a margin-centre framework (2020a,

[61] Based on his own studies as well as the research carried out by colleagues in his field, Anderson concludes that "[a]lmost all of the youth" studied in the US, UK, and Australia "distance themselves from the type of conservative forms of muscularity, hyper-heterosexuality, aggression, and stoicism that Connell (1987), Messner (1992), Pollack (1999), and others (Plummer, 1999) have described males of the previous generation exhibiting as adolescents" (2013, 80). This change in and variety of adolescents' embodiments of masculinity lead Anderson to reason that "there is no longer a hierarchical stratification of masculinities" (Ibid.). Instead, he contends, "decreasing cultural homophobia and the diminishment of homohysteria permits various forms of adolescent masculinities to exist ***without hegemonic dominance of any one type***" (Ibid., 80-81; emphasis added). However, even if the concept of inclusive masculinity theory works in relation to twenty-first-century adolescents living in the US, UK, and Australia, the absence of "hierarchical stratification of masculinities" and existence of "various forms of adolescent masculinities […] without hegemonic dominance of any one type" (Ibid.) might not necessarily apply within the context of the fictional, medievalist Arthurian adaptations I discuss.

2020b), which she bases on bell hooks' seminal work in Black feminist theory.[62] Elliott's framework (2020a) "align[s] open masculinity and men with the margin, and closed masculinity and men with the centre" (1724). Men with privilege and dominance occupy the closed centre, while men "locked out of the power and privilege of the centre" are located in the margin (Ibid., 1726). Adapting hooks' idea of the margin as a "site of radical openness" (1989), Elliott argues that "the margin can afford certain conditions that empower different expressions of masculinity" (2020a, 1726). The margin-centre framework allows a *mapping* of different expressions of masculinities: Connell's hegemonic and complicit masculinities can be located in the closed centre – they are closed masculinities; Connell's subordinated and marginalised masculinities as well as Elliott's (2016) caring masculinities, which I discuss later on, can be charted in the margin – they are more open masculinities. Importantly, although the margin-centre framework suggests a binary, Elliott emphasises the (possibility of) movement between these spaces, which helps to "circumvent foreclosing the possibility for men to move from the centre towards more openness" and the other way around (2020a, 1727).

Reviewing Elliott's monograph (2020b), which examines how Australian and German men "navigat[e] dictates of closed masculinities and movements towards greater openness" (23), Chris Brickell (2021) shares the following criticism:

> Elliott […] argues that more 'open' forms of masculinity are most likely to stem from those in the margins, especially working-class, [B]lack, and GBTIQA+ men, but little evidence is offered to support this frequently reiterated claim. Elliott's study does not compare men from different socio-economic backgrounds […] (n.p.)

Brickell's observation highlights the issue of privilege in relation to Elliott's margin-centre framework – a concern that Elliott herself addresses. As she explains, "the fundamental task of [her] book" is to examine "expressions of masculinity *amongst men advantaged* across axes such as gender, race, class and sexuality" (Elliott 2020b, 36; emphasis added). This dissertation also examines protagonists that are advantaged along various axes. While the protagonists of Chapter 4 – two cross-dressing characters trying to fit into Arthur's warband – are located in the margin, the protagonists of Chapters 1-3 – aristocratic boys on their path to knighthood – certainly have access to privilege, being white, male, and heterosexual, and thus marked by "triply blind intersectionality" (Carbado 2013 cited in Elliott 2020b, 25).[63] They are further advantaged along

[62] Elliott highlights the ambivalences of drawing on hooks' Black feminist work "as a white woman to write about men and masculinities" (2020a, 1724) and I would equally like to bring attention to this.

[63] While Crenshaw's conceptualisation of intersectionality "provides a lens through which to consider multiple *oppressions*", it is also useful in understanding "the multiple *privileges* bestowed on grounds such as whiteness, middle-classness, heterosexuality and (male) gender" (Elliott 2020b, 25; emphases added). Carbado (2013) examines how "whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity are intersections that are *naturalised and invisibilised*" – they are not seen as intersections, but as "the norm against which all others are intersectionally differentiated" – hence the term "triply *blind* intersectionality" (Elliott 2020b, 25).

the lines of social status, age, and ability. "[T]he language of openness and closedness", Elliott writes, is "useful for enabling an investigation of men *in the centre*" (2020b, 24; emphasis added). Such an investigation is essential, according to scholars such as France and Roberts (2017), who "assert the importance of expanding studies of the privileged and how privilege is reproduced and operationalized in order to better understand possibilities for social change" (Elliott 2020b, 26). This, I argue, similarly applies to *fictional* representations of privilege.

Elliott highlights that attempting to understand men and masculinities in theoretical terms has proven to be a difficult task, since masculinities are "more nuanced, complex, fluid and messy than can be captured in theory or in words" (2020a, 1740). Nevertheless, the margin-centre concept is useful "for considering the ways in which more privileged men can *move towards* openness and how they are also *pulled back* towards closeness" (Elliott 2020b, 46; emphases added). Similar to the concept of hegemonic masculinities, Elliott's framework is not flawless. However, I argue that the language Elliott's conceptualisation provides is exceptionally valuable for discussing fictional constructions of masculinities, a purpose for which, to my best knowledge, Elliott's work has not been used – bearing in mind its recentness. The focus on fluidity and movement facilitates an analysis of masculinities in children's and YA texts that goes beyond 'hegemonic or not' questions, beyond a focus on stereotypes and codes. At different moments within a fictional narrative, a single cis male character may be embodying a hegemonic, complicit, or caring masculinity; he may have started out in the centre but may embrace a more open expression of masculinity in the denouement – or, perhaps, the other way around. Crucially, Elliott's framework allows a focus on privileged characters with the purpose of visibilising privilege. Using Elliott's conceptualisation, I accordingly examine whether/how the narratives in my corpus reveal the workings and reproduction of privilege, and in which ways – if any – they challenge privilege: do the protagonists interrogate their privilege, reject the domination of the centre, and move towards greater openness? If so, how, and what role do genre, language, and narrative devices such as point of view play in this regard? The combination of current understandings of hegemonic masculinities and Elliott's margin-centre framework is a major intervention my dissertation offers.

Historical Constructions of Masculinities

My discussion of masculinity(ies) has so far focused on contemporary understandings and terminology. One of the most important factors to consider in the discussion of masculinities and masculinity models, however, is their historical and cultural construction. Doyle (1995, 27) argues that during "the last three thousand years, there have been at least five distinct male models, or ideals, that Western men were expected to imitate". While these traditional masculinity models – the Epic, Chivalric, Spiritual, Renaissance, and Bourgeois Male – are based on exaggerated expectations "impossible for any one man to achieve in its entirety", they were nevertheless highly influential in the daily life of white, Western males (Ibid.). The development of these ideals demonstrates the continuous *dis*placement or *re*placement of hegemonic ideals (Cohen 2005, 328). At the same time, there is also continuity: contemporary normative masculinity ideals are based on historic constructions, reminding us of Raymond Williams's "residual ideologies" (1991). Doyle argues that, by combining the elements of these models, "we have a fair composite of the complete man as most know him" today (1995, 32). Braudy (2003) is among the scholars highlighting the importance of taking a historical perspective towards masculinity in order to understand masculinity today. "[M]odern assumptions about what constitutes masculinity, male behavior, and individual male identity", he writes, "have been gradually created over the last few centuries, and […] understanding that development might allow us to step back and grasp more firmly what is happening now" (Ibid., xiii). This supports my focus on *connections* between medieval(ist) and contemporary masculinities in Arthurian YA fiction.

This dissertation is concerned with the legacy of Arthurian epic and chivalric ideals in relation to contemporary constructions of masculinities, specifically within the context of maturation. Accordingly, it is vital to discuss both literary and historical iterations of *medieval* masculinities and maturation – the latter I elaborate on in the subsequent section. To begin with, in our contemporary collective imaginary, the figure of the medieval knight is linked to a specific narrative. Going on adventures, rescuing princesses, fighting monsters, and participating in a tournament under ladies' eyes, "[t]he knight is a young man seeking both recognition from elders and love from ladies" (Revelle 2019, 31). Contemporary society continues to use the figure of the medieval knight to "promote a combative heterosexual masculinity, based on physical and mental strength as well as on the seduction of [women]" (Ibid.). The knight's 'code of honour' is similarly enshrined in our cultural imagination, although in modern times, the term 'chivalry' is likely to be perceived simplistically "as reference to polite, but outdated and often unwanted, gestures of men towards women" (Jamison 2018, 19). Medieval conceptualisations of chivalry – as well as knighthood and manhood more broadly – are much more complex.

Before explaining these complexities in more detail, it is vital to emphasise that twenty-first-century understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality cannot simply be applied to a medieval context. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded usage of the term 'gender' as referring to the biological categories of male and female dates to the year 1474, and it was only in the mid-twentieth century that it came to denote "[t]he state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones". Similarly, pre-modern cultures "did not accord individuals who engaged in homo-erotic activities ('homosexuals') an identity in the way that modern culture has done" (Gaunt 1995, 80). Up to the eighteenth century, there was no word to describe an individual's 'masculinity' as we understand it – the term 'manhood', commonly used in the Middle Ages, does not correspond to modern conceptions of masculinity (Fletcher 2011, 61).[64] Bearing in mind the differences between contemporary understandings of masculinity and conceptions of medieval manhood, I nevertheless use the terms epic masculinity and chivalric *masculinity* to refer to medieval Europe's understanding of warriors and knights *as men* who were expected to adhere to certain gendered ideals and practices.

Not all medieval men were warriors or knights. There was a tripartite division, referred to as the three estates model, splitting (male) society into those who fight (the aristocracy), those who pray (the clergy), and those who work (the labourers).[65] There was a hierarchy of masculinities as well as competing masculine discourses, with the embodiment and performance of masculinity being tied to social status. In its ideal functioning, the relationship between the estates was complementary rather than hierarchical – each had important, equally necessary and interdependent functions. In reality, however, the peasantry, responsible for agricultural work, was often deemed to be inferior, while knightly and clerical masculinities were both "ideal-typical forms of habitus", meaning differences between these two estates were less hierarchical (Hadas 2019, 267; 273). Indeed, "borderlines between the knightly and clerical masculinities in the Middle Ages cannot be drawn quite so clearly, and there were transitional, blurred zones between the two ideal types", not least because knights, high priests, and superior monastics usually came from the nobility (Ibid., 266). Importantly, across all estates, masculine attributes were regarded "as the 'default' and/or 'normative' category", while the feminine "embodied a secondary realm of gendered traits that had to be sloughed off, escaped, exteriorized" (Cohen and Interscripta 1996, 8).

Within medieval *literature*, a distinction between epic (or heroic) and chivalric masculine formations must be made. I view these formations in terms of *discourses*, which, using McEachern's (1999, 5) words, "represent a way of constituting the masculine subject in a very particular form through language; a clearly defined way of speaking about this masculine subject". Epic and chivalric discourses are connected to genre conventions and the division of Arthurian literature along the lines of chronicle and romance tradition. The chronicle tradition has its roots in (pseudo)historical sources such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae* (c.1136/1138)

[64] For instance, the concept of *masculinity* as we understand it today is closely intertwined with sexuality. Ideas of medieval *manhood*, however, "only secondarily impinge on sexual activity", focusing instead on "strength, vigour, steadfastness and a certain kind of concern with status and honour" (Fletcher 2011, 62). That manhood was not organised around sexuality becomes evident if we consider how medieval societies viewed the celibate clergy, a group of men that contemporary historians often discuss in terms of "emasculinity" or even regard as "third sex" (Ibid.). However, as Fletcher notes, "it was relatively straightforward for the celibate clergy to redirect the values of manhood to a form of spiritual combat", which demonstrates that "manhood could exist without sex" (Ibid.).

[65] Women were sometimes treated as a fourth estate.

and in Welsh mythology, which portray the Arthurian world as violent and masculine, and Arthur as the central hero, a fearless warrior and leader. Welsh sources in particular are characterised by "blood, sweat and tears; by magnificent palaces, fearsome beasts, mysterious otherworlds, supernatural occurrences, hags and giants and sorcerers, bloody battles, and Arthur presiding over all as an 'emperor'" (Bruce 1999, 38). Contrastingly, the romance tradition makes Arthur a marginal figure, centring the adventures of the individual knights and addressing topics such as courtesy and courtly love. A text does not necessarily have to fall into either category – Malory's *Morte*, for example, is a combination of both chronicle and romance traditions, primarily because it shows "less concern for women and courtly love" than the French sources it is based on (Fisher 2000, 151). Nevertheless, generally speaking, texts in the chronicle tradition celebrate epic masculinity as the dominant model for manhood, while those following romance conventions focus on and negotiate chivalric masculinity ideals.

Originating in the ancient Greek and Roman world and portrayed widely in the hero sagas of these cultures, the epic male represents "the beginning of patriarchy" and "embodie[s] the features of the warrior-ruler" (Doyle 1995, 27-28). He is "a fighter and a leader", an "adventurer and doer of great deeds", demonstrating prowess and martial skills, physical strength, courage, and loyalty (Ibid.). Epic masculinity is defined monologically, i.e., in relation to other men. As Larrington (2017, 260) explains, "[m]en interact with other men, taking counsel, fighting, dying together in battle", while women are relegated to the sidelines, their roles reduced to child-bearer and helper in forming alliances and maintaining stability. The epic male thus exists in a martial world, where ideal manhood is defined in terms of power and authority and a distancing from women (Poor and Schulman 2007, 1). The epic male and his 'heroic code' lie at the heart of early Anglo-Saxon literature, which includes numerous Arthurian chronicle works. It was twelfth-century French writer Chrétien de Troyes who began to combine themes of heroic literature with the emerging idea of chivalry, thereby (re)shaping romance as a genre, setting the stage for a specifically Arthurian romance tradition, and laying the foundation for a new masculinity ideal: the chivalric male.

The term chivalry derives from the French *chevalerie*, which translates to "exploits on horseback" (Burland and Burland 2009, 113). Initially, the meaning of the word was largely military, with an emphasis on "battlefield virtues: being a good fighter, brave, and loyal to one's fellows" (Bouchard 2006, 128), reflecting epic masculinity paradigms. In the twelfth century, when Arthurian romances first started to be composed, a shift took place in relation to chivalry and ideal manhood, both in reality and literature. Besides military strength, the ideal male now needed to demonstrate courtesy, i.e., "suitable behavior for someone at court" (Bouchard 2006, 128), and ethical conduct, particularly towards women (Burland and Burland 2009, 131). The relationship between a knight and his lady, to whom he devotes his strength and skills, becomes a crucial element within this new chivalric ideology, with masculine identity now being constructed *dialogically*, in relation to the feminine (Gaunt 1995, 85).

As a historical reality and in its literary conception, chivalry is not easily defined. The term has "various meanings at different times and in different contexts" – it "can represent an ideal, a behaviour, a vocation, an ethical code for knights, an institution, a social status or noble habitus, even a shared mentality or worldview" (Mesley 2019, 146). For the purposes of this study, I understand chivalry as an "aspirational ideology", a "set of behaviours primarily performed and subscribed to by male members of the medieval military elite" (Rouse 2017, 14). Rouse (2017, 13-14) highlights the important distinction between *chivalry* and *knighthood*: while the former is a behavioural code, the latter is "a military role and a class position within medieval society", meaning that "not all knights are chivalrous, and not all acts of chivalry are performed by knights". Importantly, as a *code* of masculinity, chivalry demands from the members of its community commitment "far more rigorous than that required of ordinary men" (Clein 1987, 34). A recent film adaptation, *Arthur and Merlin, Knights of Camelot* (2020), sees King Arthur (Richard Short) verbalise this need for rigorous commitment: "We are more than men. We are knights".

The chivalric ideal is often described as a code, "[a]n idealized set of behaviors for mounted warriors, and by extension for all noble men", but such a view is misleading, since chivalry does not denote "a *clear* set of guidelines" but rather a "*more or less explicit* set of expectations" (Bouchard 2006, 128; emphases added). Medievalist scholars such as Richard Kaeuper (1999, 63) highlight that, in the Middle Ages, there was no single "detailed [chivalric] code agreed upon by all. Royal administrators, monks, bishops, scholars, and the knights themselves all had plans for what chivalry should ideally be". To complicate things further, notions of chivalry changed over time and differed between cultures. Even at a single given point in time, within a single culture's literary tradition, no agreement could be found. A single literary text could portray different types of chivalry. Clein (1987) describes three ideological perspectives of chivalry that existed in the late Middle Ages: the romance, the heraldic, and the moralist view. All of these, Clein argues, are reflected in the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Chivalry also holds various internal contradictions, which romance writers have explored from the start. For example, Chrétien de Troyes' later works challenge the courtly values he had established in his earlier romances (Gilbert 2009, 158), the Vulgate cycle ascertains romance chivalry to be incompatible with religious perspectives on chivalry (Clein 1987, 23), and Malory's *Morte* "questions the viability of upholding the chivalric code by pointing out its contradictions" (Jamison 2020, 316). It is thus important, as Cohen (2005, 315-316) notes, "to acknowledge chivalry's plural meanings and resist the attempt to reduce it to a coherent phenomenon, eliding its complex, multi-faceted, and contradictory character".

I acknowledge that no single, unified chivalric code existed. As with traditional masculinity, however, there are certain practices and values that have been constructed as ‘chivalric’. Drawing on research discussing chivalric ideals in English and French medieval history and literature in England and France, I have identified a number of practices and values that govern the discourses surrounding chivalry and manhood. I have divided these into six categories: feats of arms, courtly love, courtesy, community, honour, and religion. This taxonomy is not definitive but intended to highlight the various interconnected and often conflicting aspects of chivalry that dominate discourses of medieval chivalric manhood.

The first category, feats of arms, subsumes practices and values surrounding military action, warrior skills, violence, and competition – crucial elements that chivalric masculinity inherited from its epic precursor. In contrast to the epic warrior, however, the chivalric knight is inspired to greatness by his love for, and love from, a noble woman (Larrington 2017, 259). He engages in courtly love, the “distinctive style of aristocratic courtship” that became an integral part of medieval romance narratives (Wollock 2011, 36), serving as a “softening, civilising element in a rough and ready world” (Barber 1974, 72). Another ‘softening and civilising’ element that became integrated into the chivalric ideal was *courtoisie*, or courtesy, much of which was “concerned with questions of manners” (Barber 1974, 155). Courtesy and violence are contradictory elements. As Kaeuper (2016, 388) notes: “Along a single axis of honor, knights could play the refined courtier […] and also enact joyous conquest or hot-blooded revenge”. The fourth category of chivalric practices and values I have identified is community. While there is a strong emphasis on love and interactions with women, the knightly world is largely homosocial, both in real life and fiction. The chivalric homosocial community is also defined by loyalty – to Arthur, to each other, to the ideals they share, and also to one’s lady. Upholding all these different loyalties “can be complicated, even impossible” (Jamison 2018, 12), so that the chivalric knight continuously struggles between embracing his individual and collective identity. A fifth element of chivalric masculinity is honour, which, in turn, is related to reputation, bringing the chivalric knight “renown, glory, riches, [and] power” (Weber 1999, 82). This leads to the final category of chivalry I have identified: religion. The entire structure of medieval chivalry “stood on a religious foundation; the knights’ minds were piously packed with ethical principles by clerics” (Kaeuper 2016, 13).[67] The religious side of chivalry is particularly obvious in relation to crusading and the fictional quest for the Holy Grail. Religious ideals often create tensions and contradictions in chivalric and Arthurian narratives, particularly those

[67] Despite the religious influence, however, it is a mistake, as Wollock (2011, 7) highlights, “to think of chivalry as a purely Christian institution […] It has deep roots in the pre-Christian world and impressive non-Christian versions continue to be important down to the present”.

influenced by courtly love – the exemplary status accorded to Lancelot while he is conducting an affair with Guinevere is a prime example of this.

Contemporary Arthurian adaptations re-imagine epic and chivalric masculinities in different ways. Which ideal is drawn on often depends on what tradition the text espouses, chronicle or romance. The 'source period' – Dark Ages or High Middle Ages – is also influential, and the mapping of the Arthurian narrative onto a contemporary or futuristic setting further affects constructions of masculinities. Like traditional Arthurian texts, the novels I analyse in this dissertation address some elements of epic and chivalric masculinity, but not others, and often depict aspects that stand in conflict with each other. I focus on how and which epic or chivalric ideals are emphasised, celebrated, and/or challenged in contemporary YA Arthuriana, and how this relates to current 'traditional masculinity' scripts and different perspectives on gender and sexuality norms. Epic and chivalric masculinities have dominated Western ideas of heroism for centuries. I am interested in how these medieval heroic masculinity ideals are re-imagined in recent Anglo-American Arthurian fiction for adolescents, and what this can tell us about current views on and anxieties about masculinities, particularly in relation to maturation.

Maturation, Coming of Age, and Rites of Passage

Maturation is a central theme within adolescent fiction as well as the Arthurian tradition, where romance texts and children's adaptations in particular address individual growth. Nevertheless, from the start, retellings of the Arthurian legend for the young have been largely based on a text that depicts *few* child characters: Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The first Malorian children's retelling, J.T. Knowles's *The Story of King Arthur* (1860), and other subsequent nineteenth-century adaptations included illustrations, but, essentially, were "straightforward, abridged versions of Malory's tale" (McCausland 2019c, 216). It was not until American author-illustrator Howard Pyle and British writer Henry Gilbert, that adapters began to go beyond abridging or simplifying the *Morte*.

Pyle's and Gilbert's works "focus[ed] on – and often invent[ed] – the childhoods of Arthur's renowned knights", offering characters boy readers could identify with, while emphasising how masculinity and knighthood are acquired and maintained through proving oneself in testing adventures (Ibid.). This stands in stark contrast to the source text of these adaptations, where the few appearing child characters "make a swift and unacknowledged transition to knightly adulthood" (Ibid., 215). The first to present an in-depth account of childhood and the transition to manhood is T.H. White, whose tetralogy, *The Once and Future King* (1958) "departs dramatically from the healthy, 'red-blooded' adventures of texts like Pyle's and Gilbert's", replacing "exciting adventures with psychological trauma" (McCausland 2019a, 81).

The trend of following characters from childhood to adulthood – or, more specifically, from boyhood to manhood – within an Arthurian context continued in the mid-twentieth century in novels such as Eugenia Stone's *Page Boy for King Arthur* (1949) and its sequel, *Squire for King Arthur* (1955), E.M.R. Ditmas's *Gareth of Orkney* (1956), and Catherine Peare's *Melor, King Arthur's Page* (1963), which depict the (mis)adventures of their young protagonists "as they learn the responsible behavior that will win the noble king's approval" (Thompson 1996, 302). As McCausland (2019a, 175) explains, authors of later child-focused Arthuriana "prioritise the inner lives of child or adolescent characters", their journeys to self-discovery, while increasingly constructing heroism "not as chivalric violence, but as the intelligence, ingenuity and imagination of the child". In my dissertation, I am interested in such recent adaptations of the Arthurian legend that follow and expand the focus on the maturation of child characters.

In related but distinct ways, contemporary YA narratives and medieval romances share a preoccupation with maturation and identity construction. Medieval romance, aptly described by Andrew Johnston (2011, 52) as "a chivalric narrative of heterosexual love and adventure", typically focuses on the quest of a *juvens* (youth) for self-identification.[68] Maturation occurs through undergoing various hardships and is connected to the protagonist's acquisition of "the ethics of courtly society" (Ibid.). The end of his quest sees the protagonist married "to a beautiful, noble woman" (Vines 2014, 167) and, most importantly, highlights his achievement of a particularly chivalric masculine social identity (Johnston 2011, 52). Crucially, the medieval romance hero is nearly always representative of a larger collective. His individual psychological development is less important – instead, his quest, tests, and process of maturation serve as a way to work through central but problematic aspects of the collective's value system, i.e., the chivalric ideal, and to explore or brush over its inherent tensions and contradictions. YA narratives engage with identity construction in different ways. Evolving out of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, the YA novel is more psychological and character-oriented. It focuses on teen protagonists as they try to make sense of new experiences and learn to understand and exist within the power structures and "the social forces that have made them what they are" (Trites 2000, 3). As Weisl (2015) notes, "[w]ith its emphasis on the journey, the medieval past speaks simultaneously to the adolescent desire for adventure and its ability to act as a *modus* for coming of age" (Weisl 2015, 175; emphasis

[68] It is important to note that medieval romance is "far from monolithic" (Archibald 2009, 139). There are different traditions – for example, French and Middle English, prose and verse. However, these do share a number of characteristics.

in original). The Arthurian legend in particular allows for an exploration of "what it means to be heroic and the forms youthful empowerment can take" (Howey 2015a, 213).

'Coming of age' is a term that is frequently used in relation to maturation and identity formation. The discourse surrounding this term "articulates a process of maturation that young people go through in preparation for adulthood. In Western society, it involves the development and internalization of standards of social, sexual, emotional and physical conduct" (Gabriel 2013, 108). A coming-of-age *story* is a narrative focusing on events "leading to the psychological or moral growth of a character who is struggling into adulthood" (Short et al. 2015, 50). Although – or perhaps *because* – the term coming of age is so commonly used, it is problematic. Firstly, if we use coming of age "in terms of the transition into adulthood", the question is in what sense the term 'adulthood' is employed (Shen 2018, 281). For example, psychological and physical maturation may not occur at the same pace, just as legal coming of age does not imply having psychologically reached adulthood (Ibid.). Maturation, coming of age, childhood, and adulthood are also historically and culturally defined – for example, the medieval concept of adolescence differs from contemporary understandings. Secondly, the term is problematic because it implies a single moment when 'becoming' stops and 'being' begins. Miles Groth (2007) argues that, "[s]trictly speaking, […] males do not *develop* from boyhood to manhood, if by development one means a gradual, seamless continuity of transformation. Instead, the change is profoundly existential. It occurs in an instant" (28, emphasis in original). This implies one specific 'coming of age moment' when the male 'sheds' the skin of boyhood and has achieved manhood. As Groth elaborates, at a particular point in time, "boys must cease being what they were and become something utterly different. What a boy has been must be made to seem to disappear altogether. Boyhood must be evacuated" (Ibid.). However, the question, I argue, is whether the internal feeling of having achieved 'manhood' is externally acknowledged, and vice versa. Contrary to Groth, Millard (2007, 4) views maturation as a continuous process, with formative experiences "occur[ing] at any age".

While maturation and coming of age are decidedly complex and fluid in a real-life context, literature can *shape* maturation processes to highlight clear patterns and turning points. For instance, a fictional narrative can emphasise, in its closure, a "complete, cohesive, stable sense of self that the protagonist achieves", even if this stands in stark contrast to actual human lived experience (Baxter 2013, 5). Indeed, the closure or denouement is particularly important, even more so in texts for young readers. As Stephens (1992, 43) explains, "[e]ndings reaffirm what society regards as important issues and preferred outcomes". However, endings can also be problematic, when they "revert to the restoration of a conservative status quo" (McCulloch 2019, 177). Similarly, events and experiences that a narrative stages as what I term 'moments of maturation' can contradict and thus undo the work of the subversion and revision of traditional gender norms elsewhere in the text – for example, such moments can stress the performance of physical heroism as a traditional masculinity script. Indeed, I contend that the way masculinity and male maturation are presented in the narratives I analyse relies heavily on the protagonists' gender performance during experiences and 'breakthroughs' a text presents as *transformative*.

The term 'rites of passage' is of relevance here. Coined in 1907/1908 by German-born folklorist and linguist Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1957), it refers to "rituals which mark significant life transitions of individuals in a community" (Larson 2014). According to Van Gennep, these transitions consist of three stages: "separation from the old role, a liminal period between roles, and then the assumption of the new role" (Kertzer 2019, vii). Rites of passage are prominent in medieval romance, where they both celebrate and problematise chivalry and masculinity (Phillips 2012, 83). Helen Phillips distinguishes three categories of rites of passage in medieval romances: historically accurate rites such as dubbing; fictional or fantastic variants; and tests and trials (Ibid.). Rites of passage can be social or religious "ceremonies and procedures marking transitions from birth to adulthood – christening, name-giving, education, dubbing and wedding" (Ibid., 92). In medieval romance, "[f]ormative experiences of lonely testing, hardship or humiliation" are also considered rites of passages (Ibid., 83). It is through these experiences, Phillips argues, that the hero changes and matures, ultimately demonstrating a "more satisfactory, even triumphant, conformity with the ideals of upper-class masculine identity" (Ibid.). Depictions of ceremonies, procedures, education, and trials in romances reflect medieval visions of maturation (Ibid., 106). Similarly, portrayals of rites of passage in recent medievalist texts, I argue, reveal contemporary ideas about medieval and late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century maturation.

Both in medieval and modern contexts, rites of passage are gendered, *reflecting* and *creating* gender differences; they are also defined by social disparities. Medieval noble boys on the path to knighthood spent their childhood "in expectation, training, and hero-worship of knights" (Lynch 2004, 5), receiving lessons on language, belief, and behaviour; letters and other arts; military skills; hunting, hawking, and archery. A common practice among the medieval nobility was to send one's son(s) – usually around the age of seven – to join the households of other nobles in order "to learn and to make contacts" and to prepare for knighthood (Newman 2007, 224-226). The ideal progression was assumed to be as follows: to serve as a page from age seven to fourteen, act as a squire to a knight from age fourteen, and eventually become a knight some time between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one (Ibid., 234-235). The reality was different, with most boys indeed "undergo[ing] some period of training under more experienced masters", but without "any fixed timetable" (Ibid., 235). The attainment of knighthood was an "important event in a young nobleman's life", a crucial rite of passage – although it "did not confer adult status" (Ibid., 236). Nevertheless, the "dubbing marked a young man's accession to a certain number of rights and empowered him 'to act as an adult'" (Marchello-Nizia 1997, 131). The rites of passage of young female nobles were radically different: "daughters of the nobility were generally kept at home until they were married off or entered a nunnery" (Newman 2007, 226).

In literature, rites of passage are similarly gendered. Texts portray the transformation of "boys into men, girls into women, often in highly stereotyped gender-specific ways" (Apol 2000, 61). For instance, in contrast to the male hero's development in medieval romance, female characters' maturation is usually depicted in terms of the "key stages of their own life-journey", all of which focus on relationships with men: "falling in love, wedding and giving birth to sons" (Phillips 2012, 83). As Groth (2007, 27) points out, "[f]emale initiations are more concerned with preparing the female for motherhood", whereas "[f]or boys, it is a matter of being prepared for manhood, not fatherhood". In my analysis I look at the depicted rites of passages as gendered, defined by social disparities, and influenced by heteronormativity. I pay attention to how recent Arthurian YA texts engage with different paths towards maturation, which, I argue, are constructed through and influenced by the protagonists' relationships with others.

Relationships with others play a crucial role in the maturation process – in real life and in fiction. Masculinity studies scholars highlight the importance of interactions and relations with others in an individual's formation and negotiation of a gender(ed) identity (e.g., Connell 1995; Duncanson 2015; Kahn et al. 2011). In her study of identity in adolescent fiction, Robyn McCallum similarly argues that "an individual's consciousness and sense of identity is formed in dialogue with others and with the discourses constituting the society and culture s/he inhabits" (1999, 3). The formation of subjectivity can thus be described as *dialogical*.[69] Interactions with others are vital in relation to the adolescent protagonists' construction, production, and performance of gender(ed) identities as they mature. It is through these interactions, I argue, that they position themselves in relation to (hegemonic) discourses of masculinity and gender and sexuality more broadly. My analysis thus highlights how protagonists' gender(ed) identities are produced *relationally*, through the imaginative representation of social interactions that define, challenge, affirm, and develop those identities.

Turn-of-the-Century Masculinity Discourses

In reflecting and engaging with ideas and anxieties about male maturation, I argue that the texts in my corpus are inevitably influenced by competing discourses and ideologies about what it means to be a boy and to become a man at the turn of the twenty-first century. Writing on the medieval

[69] As discussed in the works of theorists such as Bakhtin, Lacan, Vygotsky and Volosinov, which McCallum uses as the basis for studying identities in adolescent fiction.

romance, Purdie and Cichon (2011, 1) state that "[n]o literature exists in a vacuum. Meaning is generated through context, or rather contexts, since there will always be several that apply at any point and these will change and multiply over time". This similarly applies to the Arthurian adaptations I discuss, which were published amidst (re-)emerging cultural debates in the US and the UK surrounding masculinity politics. I contend that, consciously or not, these narratives are in dialogue with 'boy crisis' debates and the views of a particular strand of the men's movement – discourses that "represent a way of constituting the masculine subject in a very particular form through language" (McEachern 1999, 5).[70] Further, I argue that Arthurian YA narratives are also embedded in emerging children's and YA literature discourses. In relation to masculinity, the most important of which are the aforementioned growth in depictions of 'hybrid' masculinities as well as the increasing portrayal of queer subjectivities, which I discuss in detail later on.

Boy crisis discourses were – and remain – concerned with "various expressions of youthful masculinity" (Sasser 2017, 82) and how these relate to education and welfare (Tarrant et al. 2015, 60).[71] At the turn of the twenty-first century, competing positions and arguments emerged about what it meant to be a boy and to become a man. Some commentators criticised the 'softening' of young masculinities, which they attributed to the feminisation of schools and other social institutions. They advocated a return to more conservative forms of 'tough' masculinity, highlighting the need for male role models in boys' development. Others argued that allowing boys to 'get in touch with their feelings' will increase their emotional wellbeing and combat the high rates of suicide, poor mental health, and "involvement in offending and anti-social behavior" (Ibid., 62). Supporters of such arguments highlighted how boys and men are socially disadvantaged "victims of the costs of masculinity" (Ibid., 63), who needed to be rescued from this "societal 'gender straitjacket' that prohibits emotional intimacy and expression of troubled feelings" (Oransky and Marecek 2009, 219).[72] Finally, the crisis discourse also focuses on boys' education and their academic underachievement compared to girls. The texts I examine are concerned with their protagonists' education within a medievalist and fantastic context. While they do not address educational (under)achievement in a modern sense, these narratives depict how protagonists

[70] It has to be noted, however, that "*the* masculine subject" (McEachern 1999, 5; emphasis added) conveys an inaccurate universalism. Although late-twentieth-century boy crisis and men's movement discourses revolved largely around white, middle-class, heterosexual masculinities, it is important to note that marginalised men have been and continue to be engaged in ([pro]feminist) men's movements, a topic that has only recently come to the fore within scholarship (Leek and Gerke 2020, 449).

[71] The subject at the centre of boy crisis debates was primarily the "white, middle-class, heterosexual" boy (Wannamaker 2008, 6), which also describes the protagonist in each of the narratives I discuss in the first three chapters.

[72] William Pollack's work on the 'boy code', as discussed earlier, is also based on this claim.

acquire knowledge about the world and the society they live in, and, importantly, how they learn what it means to be(come) a man.

Ideas about masculinity were also the concern of men's groups, which began to develop in the UK and the US in the 1970s/80s and turned into more organised and coherent movements in the 90s.[73] The primary focus of these groups was to provide men with "more liberating and appealing ways of being 'male'" (Heinrich 2014, 238), but each pursued different, often contradictory goals. Men's movement groups, as Leek and Gerke (2020, 447) explain, "exist on a spectrum ranging between aligning with feminist analyses […] and being rooted in antifeminism". The two main opposing strands on this spectrum are the 'Feminist-Friendly' Movement and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

As the name suggests, men's groups within the 'Feminist-Friendly' Movement support a feminist, anti-sexist agenda. While they emphasise the ways traditional masculinity harms men, (pro)feminist[74] men's movement members also acknowledge that masculinity "is fundamentally tied to power and oppression of women" (Ibid.). Through expressing empathy and allegiance with feminism, feminist-friendly men's groups have "encouraged men to engage in the process of self-reflection, a process that would […] allow men to recognize the unearned gender privilege that patriarchy has bestowed upon them" (Heinrich 2014, 240). Men are called on to become politically active, confront male supremacy, and fight institutional misogyny (Ibid.). Central elements of this activism include ending violence against women as well as fighting for gender justice and equality within the workplace and in relation to sexual/reproductive rights. The (pro)feminist groups' ultimate barrier to success, Heinrich argues, was that some voices within the anti-sexist strand called for a complete rejection of masculinity, which did not resonate with large numbers of men (Ibid.).

On the other end of the (pro)feminist-antifeminist spectrum is the Mythopoetic, or spiritualist, Movement, which prioritised men's self-improvement rather than explicit political gain. The Mythopoetic Men's Movement not only blatantly criticised feminism, but "reject[ed] analyses of gendered power dynamics" while also denying the "institutional power and privilege of men" (Leek and Gerke 2020, 448). Although there were differences and variations within this movement, supporters shared certain convictions and values: an essentialist perspective on gender, the conviction that females and 'the feminine' are "inappropriately powerful in men's and boys' lives"

73 Men's Movements exist in other Western countries, e.g., New Zealand (Gremillion 2011) and Australia (Flood 1998), and men's rights groups are active globally (Leek and Gerke 2020). However, my study focuses on US and UK contexts, which is reflected in my discussion of men's movements.

74 As Leek and Gerke (2020) highlight, some men preferred to call themselves *pro*feminists rather than feminists. These men "consider the qualifier 'pro' to be in recognition that they, as men, can be allies to feminist women but, by virtue of being men, they cannot or should not claim to be insiders in the feminist movement" (Ibid., 448).

(Gremillion 2011, 48), a fear of and flight from feminisation, the search for 'lost fathers', the importance of heroic archetypes for manhood, and, finally, a focus on relationships between men (Kimmel and Kaufman 1993, Gremillion 2011). Some voices in the Mythopoetic Men's Movement such as Warren Farrell, author of *The Myth of Male Power* (1993), also strongly advocated the idea that men, not women, are "the true victims of a host of institutional, cultural and social norms" (Heinrich 2014, 240). The importance of the Mythopoetic Movement in public discourse cannot be underestimated. As McEachern (1999, 7) notes, the mythopoetic, spiritualist perspective "captured the imagination of the media such that the spiritualists have often been used to stand for the entire men's movement".[75]

Feminist critics have condemned the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, arguing that "it is a reactive response to feminism that de-politicises issues of gender inequality by focusing on masculine self-actualisation and homosocial bonding for men" (Gremillion 2011, 43). The cornerstone of feminist critiques is the movement's failure "to acknowledge socio-political, economic, and ideological realities of privilege that accrue to hegemonic masculinity and that produce structural gender inequalities" (Ibid., 48). A number of men's studies scholars have similarly rejected mythopoetic approaches to masculinity. Kimmel and Kaufman (1993, 12), for instance, describe the Mythopoetic Men's Movement as "a step backward", both in historical and developmental terms, stating that "[i]t augurs a social return to turn-of-the-century masculinist efforts to retrieve manhood and a personal effort to recreate a mythic boyhood". Kimmel (1992, 168) particularly criticises the group's "frantic effort to dissociate from women".

Large numbers of men were drawn to the Mythopoetic Men's Movement because of one particular publication: Robert Bly's *Iron John* (1990). In this work, a "heady mixture of reworked folklore, social commentary and poetry", Bly criticizes the "mother-dependent 'soft-male" (Bonnett 1996, 274-275), claiming that boys can only develop 'proper masculinity' "under hierarchical forms of male authority" (Gardiner 2002, 101). Bly did not make extensive use of the Arthurian legend, but nevertheless presented King Arthur as "a mythic icon, a point of reference, a symbolic father figure" who epitomises the importance of male mentorship for boys'

[75] The Mythopoetic Men's Movement may have peaked in the 1990s, but, as Helen Gremillion highlights, its understanding of gender continues to thrive in twenty-first-century "New Age self-help, spiritual, and environmental movements and literatures" (2011, 44). The spiritualist ideology further lives on "in the outlooks of some men-centered gender initiatives such as the global non-profit organization 'ManKind Project' that offers 'personal development training' for men across North America, Europe, South Africa, and Oceania" (Leek and Gerke 2020, 452).

development (Jenkins 1999, 90).[76] Male mentorship and homosociality are indeed core elements of the spiritualist men's movement – to the extent that one of the main criticisms of the group is that it "exclusively dealt with men's relationships with other men" (Heinrich 2014, 243); they are also topics of interest in boy crisis debates, manifested in the male role model rhetoric. This rhetoric "reflect[s] the premise that, if boys are to grow into healthy and well-adjusted men and fathers, they need what are referred to as positive male role models" which, conservative public debates argued, "are increasingly absent from home, from schools and childcare settings, and in the media" (Tarrant et al. 2015, 60). At the core of Bly's *Iron John*, the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, and conservative boy crisis voices was thus the "call for a greater masculine presence" in boys' education and gender socialisation (Gilbert 1992, 42).

As can be seen, boy crisis and men's movement discourses share certain concern and anxieties, as well as a specific language to talk about masculinity and the challenges boys and men are facing. Two primary concerns and anxieties, I argue, are at the core of the Arthurian adaptations I analyse: firstly, a fear of feminisation versus the need for more non-hegemonic, open masculinities in texts for young readers; and, secondly, the role of education, (male) mentorship, role models, and homosociality in a boy's maturation process. As Lisa Chu Shen (2018, 294) highlights, a growing body of contemporary male coming-of-age narratives is defined by these topics.

The above-mentioned topics are also prominent in relation to Arthurian masculinities, which depend on "separation from feminine influences and affiliation with men as mentors, friends, or rivals" (Celovsky 2005, 219-220). As discussed earlier, men's strong bonds with other men are crucial in the construction of both epic and chivalric masculinities. The Round Table constitutes "the centre of the Arthurian homosocial realm", its knights embodying "the supreme exemplars of the highest masculine ideal" (Lu 2014, 4-5). Male bonding and intimacy – eminently illustrated in the relationship between King Arthur and Lancelot – may be viewed as a force against hegemonic masculine configurations. However, in her seminal *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire,* Eve Sedgwick highlights a major problem with homosociality: it depends "upon the use and exclusion of women and a fear of homosexuality" (1985, 1-2) – an important point that will surface in my analysis.

[76] In her chapter, "First Knights and Common Men: Masculinity in American Arthurian Film" (1999), Jacqueline Jenkins offers an interesting exploration of the relationship between Arthurian cinema and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, arguing that films such as *Dragonheart* (dir. Rob Cohen, 1996, Universal) offer "a filmic examination of some of the contemporary anxieties about mentorship and male education. […] Like the [mythopoetic] men's movement generally, the film is characterized by an intense nostalgia for a lost code of behavior: in this case, the 'old code' of Arthur and his knights" (Jenkins 1999, 91). Crucially, Jenkins states, *Dragonheart* "imagin[es] a world where male-male relationships provide access to unlimited social power" and "encourage male nostalgia for the time when even a 'common man' could count on being king of his own castle" (Jenkins 1999, 93-94).

Another recurrent motif and one of the most essential rites of passage in medieval romance and male coming-of-age narratives traditionally lies in the hands of men: the hero's martial/chivalric and moral education.[77] Within the Arthurian tradition, Arthur and Merlin are viewed as the ideal student and teacher, a relationship that is most famously explored in the first instalment of T.H. White's Arthuriad, which Maureen Fries (1990, 213) describes as "an inventive *enfances* of Arthur unknown to previous literature, in which the boy prince is tutored by an eccentric Merlin who guides him". The idyllic childhood of young Arthur, nicknamed Wart, sees him "firmly fixed into a masculine and homosocial context, defined through and by his relationships with positive masculine figures as opposed to the negative depictions of femininity" (Worthington 2002, 102). It is indeed the absence of females, Worthington argues, that "guarantee[s] the stability and happiness of the Wart's early life" (Ibid., 100). Arthur's childhood ends with the traditional drawing of the sword from the stone, signifying "an acquisition of symbolic phallic power, enabling Arthur to take his rightful place in the patriarchal hierarchy of men" (Ibid., 102).

Besides being embedded in boy crisis and men's movement discourses surrounding issues of the 'soft' male, homosociality, and male mentorship, the narratives I discuss need to be viewed in terms of two developments within YA fiction, namely the increasing depiction of hybrid masculinities and queer identities. Hybrid masculinities – as understood in contemporary scholarship – are not widespread in the medieval Arthurian tradition, although some knights do embody 'non-conventional' masculinities, displaying behaviours which some scholars such as Gubbels (2016) label 'queer'.[78] Sir Lancelot has been interpreted as an example of non-traditional masculinity, which may come as a surprise, considering that the majority of texts highlight the knight's superior prowess.[79] However, as Krueger (2000, 145) notes, medieval romances frequently describe Lancelot "in terms that are both masculine and feminine – as having 'the mouth, neck, and hands of a lady'", for instance. In Malory's *Morte*, Hoffman (1996, 72) argues, Lancelot "tries on and rejects the various modes of masculinity [presented in the text] until accepting his final role which includes the Christlike and the feminine". Mandel (1999) maintains that both Chrétien's Lancelot and Erec frequently behave 'like women'. Finally, Wheeler (1992, 14) describes Malory's Arthur, in his maturity, as both masculine and feminine. While such 'hybridity' is present

[77] A notable exception is Lancelot's upbringing by the Lady of the Lake in the 13th-century Prose *Lancelot*, which I mention in Chapter 2.

[78] Gubbels uses the term 'queer' to "refer to all acts that are 'subversive of or otherwise resistant to normativity,' as defined by Tison Pugh in his *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature*" (2016, 93). As I work with a narrower definition of the term queer in this dissertation, I call such portrayals 'hybrid' or 'non-conventional'.

[79] While the earliest Arthurian texts depict *Gawain* as "the bravest, most courteous knight of Arthur's realm", Lancelot becomes the most chivalrous knight in the majority of texts from the *Vulgate* (c.1210-1230) onwards (Martins 2016, 19). His son, Sir Galahad, the Grail Knight, later succeeds Lancelot in terms of ideal knighthood.

throughout the tradition, it is less likely to be found in classic Arthurian retellings for children, which predominantly reflect more conservative conceptions of heroic masculinity.

As highlighted earlier, male protagonists embodying hybrid masculinities have become more common in youth literature over the past two decades. For instance, analysing adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for adolescents, Sasser found "more unconventional expressions of masculinity and protagonists who are sensitive, caring, nurturing, compassionate, communal, and imaginative" (2017, 97). Such descriptions certainly apply to the cis male protagonists I discuss in my analysis. Hybrid masculinities can expose and rewrite dominant masculinity scripts and serve as "viable alternative[s] to hegemonic masculinity" in children's literature (Mallan 2001, 12). However, 'hybrid' does not necessarily mean non-hegemonic, i.e., hybridity does not guarantee external and internal gender equality (e.g., Bridges and Pascoe 2014, Demetriou 2011, Messner 2007, Randles 2018).[80] To reiterate, hegemonic masculinities are "those masculinities that *legitimate* an unequal *relationship* between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities" (Messerschmidt 2015, 34; emphasis in original). Hegemonic masculinities are "open to challenge" and can be "reproduced in new form", resulting in *new* hegemonic masculinities (Messerschmidt 2015, 29). As Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf (2016, 192) conclude from their empirical research: "What we are seeing is the integration of new elements into 'old' hegemonic formations, made possible through processes of negotiation" which "further stabilises the dominance of (reconfigured) hegemonic masculinity and the resulting male hegemony". This means that traditionally feminine traits or characteristics of non-normative masculinity can become "essential elements of hegemonic masculine identity when it is in the interest of patriarchy" (Arxer 2011, 398). Duncanson (2015, 234) puts this argument more boldly: "[H]egemonic masculinity is adapting to incorporate whatever practices and styles are necessary for the retention of power".

Similarly, in fictional narratives not all forms of hybrid masculinities necessarily result in external and internal gender equality, and even if a cis male character's embodiment of hybrid masculinity can be described as non-hegemonic, the character can nevertheless be complicit in maintaining inequality. Like hegemonic masculinities, complicit masculinities profit "from the

[80] Ging (2017) discusses an interesting example of hybrid masculinity that *strengthens* rather than subverts male supremacy and gender inequality, namely the masculinity embodied by so-called 'Incels' (Involuntary Celibates). Having experienced rejection by females their whole lives, Incels claim to be collectively victimised by women as well as by 'alpha males'. They "distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously compounding existing hierarchies of power" (Ging 2017, 14 cited in Leek and Gerke 2020, 456). The danger of Incels' hybrid masculinity has become apparent in shootings such as the attack on a sorority house in Vista, California in 2014 (six people dead, fourteen people injured), and the Arizona mall shooting in May 2020 (three people injured), both of which were committed by men claiming to be part of the Incel community. Hoffman et al. (2020, 581) argue that "[t]he violent manifestations of the ideology pose a new terrorism threat, which should not be dismissed or ignored", demonstrating the harmful impact of certain hybrid masculinities and the need to acknowledge that hybrid does not mean non-hegemonic or not harmful.

'patriarchal dividend' – the advantage of being male in a patriarchal society, while at the same time being partially dominated by it" (Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf 2016, 193). Complicit masculinity is highly unstable, as it "constantly oscillates between sub- and superordination" (Ibid.). Finally, the hybrid nature of the male protagonists' masculinity may be limited to their boyhood. Groth (2007, 26-27) argues that "[y]oung boys do not show most of the characteristics of manhood", they are "neither man-like nor woman-like". According to Groth, this is not necessarily the case due to feminine-coded or androgynous features found in boys, but because they are "really presexual or pregender" (Ibid., 38). Irrespective of the merit of this argument, Groth's statement points to the importance of paying attention to the young male protagonist's *developing* characterisation throughout the narrative, since the hybrid nature of his masculinity may alter or decrease as he moves towards manhood.

For the reasons outlined above, it is not sufficient to analyse texts for the young in terms of *whether* male protagonists embody hybrid, 'non-normative', masculinities. A more nuanced reading is required to examine how protagonists' hybrid masculinities perpetuate and/or challenge gender inequalities, and how characters develop and move between different masculine embodiments over the course of the narrative. As Pennell (2002, 61) writes: "Reformulation of character attributes alone is not a sufficient change as these do not result in shifts of power relations among characters nor alter story coherences or closures". The questions I thus ask in my analysis of novels focusing on cis male maturation are, firstly, whether – and if so, how and in which moments – these 'new Arthurian hybrid masculinities' are constructed as reconfigured hegemonic forms and, as such, contribute to the continued legitimisation of unequal gender roles and relationships. And secondly, how do these Arthurian hybrid masculinities develop over the course of the narrative? I argue that it is crucial to view the fictional protagonists' identities not as *either* hegemonic *or* non-hegemonic, but in terms of how each boy character *negotiates* different positions on his maturation journey, and which aspects of his characterisation are emphasised at the end of the narrative. I therefore focus on the production and performance of masculinity in moments that are staged as significant for the protagonist's psychological maturation or 'coming of age', as well as on how the denouement/closure relates to hegemonic discourses. Elliott's margin-centre conceptualisation, introduced earlier, helps me to analyse the protagonists' *movement* between closed and open masculinities.

Besides including more hybrid portrayals of cis male characters, YA fiction is increasingly centring queer subjectivities as a result of societal developments. Prompted by the rise of performative theories of gender, the twenty-first century has seen a growing interest in violations of gender norms, for example through gender-bending (Connell and Pearse 2015, 108). An examination of such violations of gender norms is valuable because, "[i]f normative gender is brought into being performatively, then by changing the performative actions, we should be able to create non-normative gender" (Ibid.). Normative gender ideals can be made to seem 'natural' by showing that "masculinity emerges from a [cis] male body", thereby portraying masculinity and the conventional cis male body as inextricably linked (Bereska 2003, 170). However, research has shown that masculinity is "not exclusively coupled with people assigned male at birth" (Messerschmidt 2018, 150; see also Connell 2005, Halberstam 1998, Reeser 2015).

Rebecca Rabinowitz writes that "many gender studies powerfully probe multiple literary messages about what it means to be each gender", criticising, however, that "both feminist analysis and new masculinity explorations […] often leave behind the spaces in between" (2004, 20). Queer theory endows these spaces with significance, rejecting gender binarism, emphasising the "instability of gender boundaries", and, more generally, challenging the notion of defined and finite identity categories (Connell and Pearse 2015, 108). In twenty-first-century academia, the term 'queer' is ubiquitous, yet there is no agreed-upon definition or consistency in terms of its uses and meanings. In its broad sense, queerness acts "[a]s a foe [to] ideological normalcy", subverting "that which cultures uphold as normative societal values" (Pugh and Wallace 2006, 261). From this perspective, J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, for instance, can be said to *queer* "the traditional form of the school story by undermining structures of normativity" (Ibid.). Reading queerly, in such a broad sense, means to read against the grain.

Nikki Sullivan (2003, 50) similarly describes queer as a "resistance to the norm", a "protest against the ideal of normal behaviour". However, she views queer theory more narrowly, as a "deconstructive strategy, [which] aims to denaturalise heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, sociality, and the relations between them" (Ibid., 81). In this sense, *Harry Potter* discourages queer readings, as it celebrates a heteronormative heroism, relies on binaries, marginalises women, and portrays a narrow conception of masculinity (Pugh and Wallace 2006, 262-263). I understand the term queer in this narrower sense – as "an umbrella term for a range of sexual and gender identities that are not 'straight,' or at least not normative" (Somerville 2020, 2). Or, as Eve Sedgwick puts it, as "the open mesh of possibilities, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality, aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993, 8).

Queer readings of medieval Arthurian texts are becoming more prominent in contemporary scholarship, demonstrated, for example, by the inclusion of a chapter on gender and queer studies in the *Handbook of Arthurian Romance* (2017). The trend for queer analysis within Arthurian studies was arguably inaugurated by Carolyn Dinshaw's (1994) reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* which "focuses on the unsettling nexus between the kisses given to Gawain by the

Lady and passed on […] to her husband, and the implications of Gawain's refusal of sexual intercourse" (Larrington 2017, 267). Boyd (1998) and Ashton (2005) examine the same text through a queer lens, while Gubbels (2016) interprets Malory's Gareth and Kay as well as the Middle English Gawain as queer, albeit – as mentioned earlier – in a broader sense. Non-heterosexual desire and relations within medieval Arthurian texts are also topics of interest. This is illustrated, for instance, by Richard E. Zeikowitz's seminal study on homoeroticism and chivalry (2003), Anna Roberts's work on castration and queerness in the portrayal of the Fisher King (2001), and Kathleen Coyne Kelly's "The Writeable Lesbian and Lesbian Desire in *Malory's Morte Darthur*" (2002). Such research attests to the growing interest in locating the queer – in its broad and narrower sense – within the medieval Arthurian legend.[81] Arthurian adaptations for the young have only recently begun to become more queer – in the modern, narrower understanding of the term – and to be read through a queer theory lens, a development that my dissertation aims to contribute to and that I encourage in the Conclusion.

The connection between the discourses surrounding the boy crisis, men's movements, medieval(ist) Arthurian masculinities, and literature for adolescents is undeniable. My reading of selected Arthurian YA adaptations clearly demonstrates a preoccupation, conscious or not, with late twentieth-century/turn-of-the-century boy crisis and men's movement discourses which, in turn, impacts how these texts are positioned in terms of the shift towards depicting hybrid masculinities and queer identities that is noticeable in contemporary YA fiction. Cultural products such as books for the young are embedded in the socio-political and cultural environment of their time of publication. As Annette Wannamaker (2008, 3) explains, "anxieties about gender identity that are expressed publicly through debates about the current boy crisis are also expressed in literary texts for our children and adolescents". Neither the boy crisis debate nor the men's movements are the focus of my study *per se*; it is not my aim to comment on whether or to what extent specific claims have merit. I am interested, instead, how these discourses are reflected in the texts I discuss. As Bradford (2015, 2) explains, medievalist texts such as Arthurian adaptations "are not 'about' the Middle Ages so much as 'about' the cultures and times in which they are produced".

Chapter Overview

To summarise, I am reading the emerging masculinities of Arthurian YA protagonists by focusing on the dialogic formation of their subjectivities in relation to the discourses I have introduced. I

[81] The term 'queer', of course, needs to be considered in terms of historical and cultural understandings in an effort to avoid applying modern identities into the past (Kruger 2009, 419). For information on the meaning of the term queer in connection to studying the medieval in historical and literary contexts, see Kruger (2009) and Whittington (2012); for discussions on sexuality and queerness in the Middle Ages, see Gaunt (1995), Karras (2017), and Mieszkowski (1995).

examine which traditional and epic/chivalric masculinity scripts protagonists subvert and revise through their gender(ed) embodiments, how the production and performance of the protagonists' masculinities perpetuate and/or challenge inequalities, how their ideas about masculinity and gender relations change as they mature, and how this translates to movements between closed and more open masculinities or, in the case of genderqueer identities, along the gender spectrum. I particularly focus on what I call 'moments of maturation' and the closure/denouement of each text, while highlighting the fluidity of the protagonists' gender(ed) identities. I also discuss the relationships between protagonists and their main socialising agents – father/mother (figures), mentors, guides, peers – paying particular attention to how the protagonists, acting as both subjects and agents, position themselves in relation to the masculinity norms, ideals, and embodiments they encounter. I analyse four YA narratives from the late 1990s/early 2000s: Gerald Morris's *Squire's Tale* series (1998-2010, US), Nancy Springer's *I am Mordred* (1998, US), Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* (2000-2003, UK), and Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur* (2007, UK). These texts are carefully selected as they effectively demonstrate the varied interplay between tradition and transformation and serve as examples of how Arthurian YA fiction engages with the social and literary discourses I have introduced.

The texts I discuss tell of youthful protagonists, chronicling journeys of maturation that begin in childhood. Morris and Crossley-Holland create their own adolescent characters – squire Terence and page Arthur de Caldicot, respectively – while Springer fills the gap of Mordred's childhood and youth. Reeve invents his protagonist, Gwyn/a, and bases another main character, Peri/Peredur, on the Perceval figure. The three narratives discussed in the first chapters – Morris's, Springer's, and Crossley-Holland's – are largely based on Malory's *Morte* and take place in a Middle Ages that-never-was. They share a similar premise: a young male foster child unaware of his true origins is displaced from a familiar context and has to negotiate the codes and conventions of chivalric society. Each protagonist ultimately attains knighthood, despite (initially) not fitting a knightly image in terms of physicality and martial prowess and instead epitomising a 'hybrid' form of masculinity. Reeve's adaptation, discussed in the fourth chapter, is set after the Romans withdrew from Britain, taking a more 'historical' approach and centring Celtic, pre-Round Table elements and ideals, and following the maturation and acquisition of masculinity by two cross-dressing, genderqueer characters.

Chapter 1 focuses on Gerald Morris's *Squire's Tale* series (1998-2010) and how it creates, celebrates, and glorifies a hybrid form of masculinity that is intended to 'correct' both medieval(ist) chivalric and contemporary normative masculinity ideals, but ultimately remains hegemonic and located in the privileged, closed centre. Morris's reconfigured hegemonic masculinity, I argue, is a form of 'deep' or 'spiritual' masculinity that reflects the discourses of and is thus closely aligned with spiritual men's movement ideas. The protagonist's maturation journey indeed reflects both Mythopoetic Men's Movement tenets and conservative boy crisis positions in its physical and metaphorical separation from the world of women and effeminate men, its nostalgic desire for a code of conduct to guide boys and men in their construction of masculinity, and its attempts to encourage males to 'get in touch with their feelings' in homosocial situations. While the *Squire's Tale* series encourages select feminine-coded characteristics and behaviours such as intimacy, vulnerability, and caring in men, it simultaneously advocates a distancing from the feminine as essential to successfully acquiring and retaining authentic, 'deep' manhood, which depends on homosocial intimacy, male bonding, and male mentorship. While Morris's 'deep' masculinity appears, to some extent, removed from violent, martial and militant medieval(ist) heroic ideals, the series ultimately celebrates a reconfigured, "comparatively modern" hegemonic 'warrior and conqueror' ideal that is firmly located in the centre. The *Squire's Tale* series thus upholds the inequalities of medieval(ist) chivalric masculinity even as it attempts to broaden its conception.

Chapter 2 offers an analysis of Nancy Springer's *I am Mordred* (1998), a stand-alone[83] novel that presents an internally fragmented protagonist tormented by the negative effects of his father hunger and society's harmful expectations regarding (chivalric) masculinity. Indeed, *I am Mordred* strongly critiques the Arthurian world and its ideology – and, by extension, contemporary society – for demanding particular ways of being male, highlighting the negative impact of pursuing embodiments of masculinity that are located in the closed centre. With its focus on female presence and guidance rather than homosociality and male mentorship, and a narrative trajectory that leads to the protagonist's rejection of hegemonic chivalric masculinity and failed initiation, *I am Mordred* complicates the male maturation story and seemingly rejects Mythopoetic Men's Movement and conservative boy crisis ideas. The tragedy of Camelot and the tragedy of Mordred's failed initiation, as I will demonstrate, become a lesson on the importance of agency in the construction of one's subjectivity, especially in terms of gender. The narrative implies that boys and men need to recognise their agency in constructing their own masculine embodiments and – by listening to female voices – break out of the system. Despite its negative evaluation of patriarchy and normative masculinity ideals, *I am Mordred* remains characterised by heteronormativity and offers neither concrete ideas on how to change the system it critiques, nor alternative, more equitable masculine embodiments.

Chapter 3 focuses on Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* (2000-2003), which, I argue, does offer alternatives. Crossley-Holland's award-winning narrative portrays a cis male protagonist

[83] Springer also published a novel entitled *I am Morgan Le Fay* (2001), which does, however, not serve as a prequel or sequel to her narrative focusing on Mordred's childhood and youth and is thus not considered in this dissertation.

who desires to occupy the hegemonic position of a knight but, on the path to and while occupying this position, questions and reflects on hegemony, the privileged centre, and the status quo, observing, criticising, and transcending the masculine embodiments of other men. I argue that young Arthur de Caldicot's embodies a more open version of chivalric masculinity, displaying a form of what Karla Elliott (2016) terms "caring masculinities". Drawing on Elliott's conceptualisation, I contend that Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* models a reconfiguring of masculine identities into "identities of care rather than domination", offering a non-hegemonic alternative to masculinities located firmly in the centre, and hence being an example of what Elliott terms a "gender equality intervention" (Ibid., 240; 243).

Finally, the focus of Chapter 4 is based on my argument that research on (re-imaginations of) Arthurian masculinities – and masculinities in general – should not be limited to cisgender, heterosexual males. Chapter 4 therefore examines a YA text that queers the Arthurian legend and literary representations of male maturation by portraying genderqueer identities in a medieval setting. Using cross-dressing as a narrative strategy, Philip Reeve's award-winning *Here Lies Arthur* (2007) presents masculinities as learned and performed, while problematising the concept of gender binaries and highlighting the fluidity of gender identities. Although the narrative only partially complicates the boundaries of heterosexuality, the gender identities of both cross-dressing protagonists as well as the nature of their relationship remain open, suggesting a challenging of heteronormativity alongside the complication of gender categories.

Psychology scholar Miles Groth claims that "we are in a different phase of social evolution where, at least for now, the characteristics of traditional manhood are increasingly superfluous" (2007, 25). He argues that "[w]e no longer need very manly physically powerful males to act as procreators, protectors, and providers – the trinity of traditional manhood" (Ibid., 25-26). How does such a statement fit with re-imaginings of the medieval, specifically Arthurian warrior/knight, "a valiant and cruel champion who organized his life around fights and adventures" (Hadas 2019, 257)? Other voices maintain that there is a need for a return to clearer guidelines and definitions of masculinities and gender relations. Nostalgically, they look back to the history and literature of the Middle Ages for inspiration and reassurance, revelling in "[t]he fantasy of a pure, orderly medieval past that reified male privilege" (Kaufman 2016, 65).

In this dissertation, I ask how these opposing views influence and complicate fictional depictions of masculinities in the twenty-first century, a period that continues to see the Arthurian legends re-imagined by creators from various demographic backgrounds, across media and genres, and for different audiences and age groups. 'Classic' or 'canonical' retellings for children remain popular and continue to be published in new editions – Barnes and Noble, for instance, recently republished Howard Pyle's *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* (2012, 2016). The front cover of the 2012 edition shows the silhouette of young Arthur as he pulls out the sword from the stone, while the blurb on the back of both editions directly addresses the reader: "Maybe he will make thee a Knight of his Round Table – and there is no honor in all the world that can be as great as that." The twenty-first-century child reader continues to be drawn (in)to the Arthurian legend, a collection of tales defined by seemingly timeless values and allure. Retellings also remain relevant through picturebook adaptations, which usually centre on one particular episode, often the drawing of the sword from the stone, a classic male maturation moment within the Arthurian story.[84]

Besides the continuing availability and (re)production of retellings for younger readers, adaptations of the legends are increasingly produced in formats addressed to older children, offering adolescent readers material that goes beyond the traditional stories, thereby altering and expanding the legend and its meanings. However, I have found a lack of scholarship on such Arthurian adaptations. Only recently, researchers have begun to include variations in their corpora (e.g., Bradford 2015; Brown 2015; Davidson 2012; Howey 2015a, 2015b; Tolhurst 2012a), and rightly so: these narratives deserve to receive scholarly attention, not least to balance the lopsided focus on 'classic' Arthurian retellings for children, but also because they have much to offer for scholars, readers, and teachers. The present study provides a departure from the usual focus on retellings and the foregrounding of female characters, seeking to extend the research on Arthurian adaptations. As my analysis in the subsequent chapters demonstrates, contemporary variations adapting the Arthurian legend for adolescents constitute a rich source for examining the representation and changing views and anxieties regarding masculinity, gender, and sexuality. These narratives are important sites for and examples of masculine and, increasingly, queer discourse. As such, they deserve critical attention. The selected texts demonstrate a preoccupation with male maturation, a topic that remains crucial in a society engrossed by boys/men-in-crisis discourses. The Arthurian adaptations discussed in this study exemplify the continuing appeal as well as the malleability of medieval(ist) masculinities to reflect, comment on, and engage with contemporary ideas and concerns surrounding gender and sexuality – topics at the forefront of cultural, socio-economic, and political debates in the twenty-first century.

[84] Judith L. Kellogg offers an intriguing examination of Arthurian picturebooks in relation to both the sword in the stone and Excalibur in her essay, "Text, Image, and Swords of Empowerment in Recent Arthurian Picture Books" (2004).

Chapter 1
"A Comparatively Modern Perspective"?
'Deep' Masculinity, Homosociality, and Nostalgic Gender Stability in Gerald Morris's *Squire's Tale* Series (1998-2010)

In his 2005 article in the *Journal of Children's Literature*, "Retelling Arthurian Legend for an Ironic Age", US-American author Gerald Morris outlines his strategies for reshaping the story of Arthur for a contemporary audience while retaining an Arthurian, specifically Malorian, romance chronotope. For Morris, the process of reshaping involves, first and foremost, the substitution of the omniscient narration that defines Malory's *Morte* and its classic children's retellings with focalisation through a single character, who "tend[s] to view the events of the story from a comparatively modern perspective" (2005, 52). Accordingly, each novel in Morris's *Squire's Tale* series (1998-2010) follows the journey of a cis-male or cis-female protagonist-focaliser, creating a modernised version of the Arthurian story and a reconfigured chivalric ideal for a late-twentieth-century mixed-gender audience. Considering the focus of this study, this chapter examines the maturation process of fourteen-year-old Terence, who becomes squire to Gawain of Orkney, and whom the series is named after. However, my analysis references protagonists from across the ten volumes. A character of Morris's own invention, Terence witnesses and participates in some of the most well-known Arthurian adventures[85], while receiving his own original storyline taking place in Camelot – "the World of Men" – and the magical "Other World". Spanning a number of decades, Terence's story is at the centre of the first two books and the final two volumes. These depict his

[85] Most of these adventures are based on Malory's *Morte*, but Morris also adapts other tales such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and some of Chrétien's chivalric romances. He refers to his sources and inspirations in the *Author's Note* at the end of each novel. It is also important to point out that Morris wrote a four-volume Middle Grade Arthurian series, *Knights' Tales* (2008-2012, ill. Aaron Renier), which offers a distinctly comic approach to the legend. For example, the first book in this series, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot The Great* (2008), is advertised with the following plot summary: "Many years ago, the storytellers say, the great King Arthur brought justice to England with the help of his gallant Knights of the Round Table. Of these worthy knights, there was never one so fearless, so chivalrous, so honorable, so…shiny as the dashing Sir Lancelot, who was quite good at defending the helpless and protecting the weak, just as long as he'd had his afternoon nap." (*Goodreads.com* 2021a, n.p.)

(and, to a lesser extent, Gawain's) maturation, especially in terms of the acquisition and maintenance of 'authentic' manhood – a 'deep' or 'spiritual' masculinity, I argue, that reflects the discourses of and is thus closely aligned with Mythopoetic Men's Movement ideas and conservative boy crisis positions.

The first novel introduces Terence as a "a slim, agile boy" (Morris 1998, 1) living in the woods with his hermit foster father. His tranquil life changes dramatically when he encounters Gawain, a young man a few years his senior, who is on his way to Camelot to request being knighted. The hermit arranges for Terence to accompany Gawain and become his squire.[86] A squire, as mentioned in the Introduction, is a knight-in-training. Deriving from the Old French *esquier*, the term "was originally used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to refer to a knight's servant who had particular responsibility for the horse and arms" (Taylor 2014, 63-64). In addition to assisting his knight, the squire also needed to acquire "the skills necessary to be a leader of men during combat" and "learn[] by observation how to conduct himself in courtly environments" (Huey 1996, 15-16). Morris's squire similarly has to learn these skills, and he does so in a largely homosocial, i.e., gender-segregated, environment. As I discuss in the first section of this chapter, Terence's education and development are exclusively associated with male figures, thus limiting his gender socialisation to a masculine perspective. Within this context, a distancing from Camelot, representing the (feminised) domestic sphere, is portrayed as essential for male maturation and, importantly, pleasure. Adventures and quests provide opportunities for male bonding, creating suitable conditions for the development of an intimate relationship between the protagonist, Terence, and his mentor-turned-friend, Sir Gawain. Consciously or not, Morris's work thus espouses conservative positions of the boy crisis debate and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement that encourage a distancing from the 'soft male' through an increased masculine presence in boys' socialisation.[87]

Earlier twentieth-century Arthurian juvenile novels have told the adventures of pages and squires "proving their nobility through their deeds" (Lupack and Lupack 1999, 303).[88] The most well-known literary squire, however, is Geoffrey Chaucer's in *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400).

[86] In fact, the hermit had been waiting for Gawain to appear and knew that Terence would become the young man's squire, since he "sees time backwards. He sees the future the way we see the past and the past the way we see the future" (Morris 1998, 9). Similarly to Merlyn in T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*, the hermit has 'second sight'.

[87] I am not suggesting that Morris's narrative *exemplifies* masculinity as propagated in the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, which primarily relies on a misuse of Native American rituals, rather than Celtic or Arthurian-inspired ones, onto which they project "their own longings and their own needs" (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995, 31). Instead, I argue that the series shares a discourse, core ideas, and problematic aspects with it.

[88] Examples include Annie Fellows Johnston's *Keeping Tryst: A Tale of King Arthur's Time* (1906), Eugenia Stone's *Page Boy for King Arthur* (1949) and *Squire for King Arthur* (1955), Catherine Owens Peare's *Melor, King Arthur's Page* (1963), and Gwendolyn Bowers' *Brother to Galahad* (1963).

Indeed, the title of Morris's series directly invokes Chaucer's "Squire's Tale".[89] A "young man […] accompanying his father on the pilgrimage" (Huey 1996, 20), the Squire appears in the General Prologue and as teller of his (unfinished) tale. Taylor (2014, 76) describes the Squire as "an engaging and sympathetic figure, and a positive example of aristocratic youth" who is "simultaneously a fashionable courtier, and a soldier, two ideals of aristocratic masculinity that did not necessarily sit comfortably alongside one another in the age of chivalry". Contrastingly, Morris's squire has no aristocratic ties – although it will later transpire that he has otherworldly noble blood. Terence's (seemingly) non-privileged social status fits with the image of ideal *American* knighthood, which "depends on moral qualities rather than circumstances of birth" (Lupack and Lupack 1999, 302). As a US-American work, Morris's series is part of a long-standing tradition of democratising King Arthur for an American audience, achieved here through presenting a protagonist without knightly ancestry.[90]

Being part of the aristocracy, Chaucer's Squire has "skills that were traditionally taught to young men of his social status" – e.g., playing the flute, writing and performing songs, jousting, dancing (Taylor 2014, 65). He is "a charming courtier" who "dresses in the most fashionable of clothing" and is motivated in his chivalrous deeds by a "desire to win his lady's favour" (Ibid., 71; 65; 69). He thus serves as a contrast to his father, the Knight, who, being at a later stage of the life cycle, "has abandoned youthful notions of love and courtliness, and has dedicated himself to a career in arms" (Ibid., 75). Some scholars have posited that Chaucer's Squire "serves as a warning of the decadence of courtly life, especially when contrasted with the ascetic and serious figure of the Knight" (Ibid., 66). Courtesy and courtliness – the 'finer' aspects of chivalry – are also directly invoked in Chaucer's "Squire's Tale" through two Arthurian allusions – the first linking Gawain with courtesy, the second associating Lancelot with dancing and courtly life (Bovaird-Abbo 2006,

[89] Morris quotes passages from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* at the beginning of the second and sixth volume: "[…] As you have heard, I beg you not to blame / My variations; in my general sense / You won't find much by way of difference / Between the little treatise as it's known / And this, a merry story of my own." (cited in Morris 1999, loc.35); "But listen, gentlemen; to bring things down / To a conclusion, would you like a tale […] Don't think I can't tell moral tales. I can!" (cited in Morris 2004, loc.34). In his *Author's Note* at the end of each novel, Morris usually discusses sources that inspired his work. While he does mention the *Canterbury Tales* once, at the end of volume two, it is only in the following context: "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written by an anonymous poet in the fourteenth century, at about the same time that the great English poet Geoffrey Chaucer was writing *The Canterbury Tales*. The Gawain poet, however, wrote in a completely different dialect of English than Chaucer." (Morris 1999, 230) It is therefore uncertain how much Morris was inspired or influenced by Chaucer's "Squire's Tale".

[90] In his essay, "Visions of Courageous Achievement: Arthurian Youth Groups in America", Alan Lupack (1994, 61-62) discusses an early-twentieth-century US-American didactic novel, *The Gang of Six: A Story of the Boy Life To-day* (1906) by Horace M. Du Bose. In this novel, the main character – Harry Wilmot, "a young man who sets about to reform six street urchins by organizing them into a club modeled on the Round Table" – tells a story, loosely based on *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a second-century Christian tale (Ibid., 61). The hero of the story, Yarkin, is a shepherd boy who achieves knighthood. As Lupack writes, "[t]he shepherd boy is not, as one might find in a medieval tale, someone who is sired by a knight or nobleman and whose nobility is ultimately discovered. He is actually a commoner whose nobility is moral rather than hereditary. Thus Yarkin, who becomes Hermas, is a perfect model for the American urchins whom Harry Wilmot is trying to rehabilitate and for other boys who will be inspired with the poetry of the Arthurian plan" (Ibid., 62). Similarly, Terence is (initially) presented as a 'commoner'.

108).[91] Morris's squire, as well as his knight, Gawain, have little time for and interest in fashion, courtliness, or courtesy. Indeed, men with such qualities – including Lancelot – are ridiculed throughout the series. In the second section I discuss the highlighting and judging of difference between women and men and, crucially, *among* men, that characterises Morris's series, which – problematically – constructs a form of 'deep' masculinity that is clearly distinguished from and presented as superior to traditional femininity and feminine/feminised masculinities.

In an oft-quoted essay titled "Chaucer's 'Squire's Tale' and the Decline of Chivalry", Stanley J. Kahrl (1973, 199) argues that the Squire's purpose in choosing a more 'exotic' setting for his tale, a romance set in far-away Tartary, was "to outdo the more traditional Arthurian romances". Similarly, I argue, Morris's *Squire's Tale* series attempts to 'outdo' traditional Arthurian stories by reconfiguring chivalry into a form of 'deep' masculinity that is acquired and proven in the "Other World"[92], which is constructed not only as different but, importantly, superior to the "World of Men". It is only in the Other World that Terence, Gawain, Lancelot, and others can discover, or *retrieve*, "the depths of their manhood" (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995, 24). The Other World is not accessible to everyone[93], and it is made clear that only those males with access to and personal growth achieved within the Other World are 'real' men and knights. This, I argue, creates an even more exclusive society than the Round Table. Morris's series[94] casts Terence in a feminised role, presenting him as embodying a hybrid and seemingly more open form of masculinity which ostensibly broadens ideas about 'appropriate' manhood and heroic masculinity: non-violent and nurturing, he refuses to become a knight well into middle adulthood. However, Terence's maturation follows a trajectory that operates along the conventional paradigm of knightly/manly physical tests and chivalric rewards: success in competition, winning glory and respect, heterosexual romance, being rewarded for sacrificing one's life. The protagonist moves from sidekick to hero,

[91] Bovaird-Abbo (2006, 108) notes that some scholars have used the lines referring to Lancelot "to argue a lack of knowledge regarding Arthurian legend on the part of the pilgrim Squire; for example, Karl Heinz Göller claims that 'the Squire's reference to Lancelot, like his reference to Gawain at line 95, betrays a superficial knowledge of romance literature; whereas Lancelot was often associated with a destructive, almost demonic love, the Squire associates him with dancing and the like, that is, with the externalities of courtly life'".

[92] The otherworld plays a crucial role in the Celtic Arthurian tradition – for example, in the Welsh poem "Preiddeu Annwfn" ("The Spoils of Annwn"), found in the Book of Taliesin and probably dating to the sixth century, as well as in the collection of 12-13th century Welsh tales known as the Mabinogion. In the romance tradition, Marie de France's late 12th-century lay "Lanval" depicts its hero entering an otherworld, while in other chivalric texts, such as Chrétien de *Troyes' Chevalier de la charrete* and *Cligés*, the influence of the otherworld is manifested "in rather subtler ways" (Putter 2007, 242). Of course, Avalon is "the quintessential medieval otherworld" despite the fact that depictions of Avalon often "fail to conform to the conventions of otherworld descriptions" (Byrne 2016, 120).

[93] Indeed, at least some amount of faery blood in one's bloodline is necessary to even enter the Other World. As Carol Jamison (2020, 308) explains, in medieval reality and literature, "the possession of noble blood is integral to chivalry". In Morris, this concept of noble blood is translated to fairy blood, again demonstrating how an attempt to update the legend and the concept of chivalry in *The Squire's Tales* series remains based on similar premises of exclusivity.

[94] The analysis in this chapter focuses on the development of the series' primary character, squire Terence, which is central to books 1, 2, 9, and 10. When I refer to Morris's texts as *series* in this chapter, I do so in relation to those novels that focus on Terence, unless stated otherwise.

from an initial position in the margin – a hermit's foster-son living on the literal margins of Camelot – to a privileged, hegemonic status, *the* definition of Arthurian heroic masculinity within Morris's adaptation.

Ultimately, I argue, the medieval and specifically Arthurian trappings in the *Squire's Tale* series serve as a contemporary projection of nostalgic gender stability similar to the desire of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement to "recreate a world of gender certainty" (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995, 38). The values and ideals reflected in Terence's maturation as well as the creation of a chivalric model for 'the modern boy' make this turn-of-the-century/early-twenty-first-century Arthurian variation comparable to canonical retellings such as Gilbert's and Pyle's which modernise and reconfigure rather than complicate or problematise Arthurian masculinities. In this sense, Morris's series stands in stark contrast to the texts discussed later on. In spite of, or rather, because of this nostalgic approach to the legend, and the narrative's strong connection to conservative boy crisis and spiritual men's movement discourses, I believe that Morris's series serves as an appropriate introduction to contemporary Arthurian variations directed at adolescents, offering a fascinating example of how masculinity politics and discourses are reflected in such texts.

Homosociality

In Morris's series, appropriate masculine subjectivity is constructed primarily within male contexts and domains. The acquisition, or *retrieval*, of authentic, 'deep' manhood is only possible in homosocial contexts, through male bonding and mentorship. The importance of male-male relationships is reflected, firstly, in Terence's education; secondly, in the need for Morris's male heroes to distance themselves from domesticity – represented by the feminised Camelot – in order to embody, perform, and enjoy 'real' masculinity; and thirdly, in the strong focus on the relationship between Terence and Gawain which I read as both traditionally chivalric and comparable to the modern-day 'bromance'.

From the start, Terence's developmental process is exclusively associated with male figures, thus limiting the protagonist's gender socialisation to a masculine perspective. The reader is introduced to the fourteen-year-old protagonist as he is still living in the woods with his elderly hermit foster father.[95] When Terence meets Gawain, a young man on his way to Camelot to be knighted, the hermit decides for the boy to become Gawain's squire. As they travel to King Arthur's court, Gawain teaches Terence the basics of squirehood: using a bow, riding a horse, taking care of armour and horse, putting armour onto a knight, and adopting the right manners. In the second

[95] Terence believes himself to be an orphan. As is revealed later, however, he is the son of a powerful enchanter from the Other World and a woman from the human world. His mother died when he was a baby, but his father is alive and well, and will come to play an important role in his life and maturation process.

volume, Gawain continues to teach Terence – this time in the 'knightly arts', including jousting, riding while wearing armour and carrying a lance, and tilting. Courtesy – a main aspect of medieval chivalry that is also central in a number of classic Arthurian retellings – is given the least attention in Terence's education, with Gawain telling Terence, "I suppose we'll pass over the knightly graces and courtesy until last, but that's part of knighthood too" (Morris 1999, 58). The lack of a focus on the 'gentler' qualities of a chivalry, which receive ridicule throughout Morris's series, suggests a distancing from the feminine in Terence's knightly education from the very start. Gawain's teaching and mentoring can be seen as an 'intervention' to Terence's feminised life with the elderly hermit whom he looked after. Throughout Terence's maturation process, the continuing mentorship is never problematised or challenged, but depicted as a natural and necessary part of becoming a man.

Similar to male mentorship, homosocial bonding is a staple element of the Arthurian tradition. It is crucial for the "courage and self-possession of chivalric heroes", which are strengthened through relationships with males "who had passed through rituals of initiation and acceptance and had a common code" (Fraser 1982, 15-18). Importantly, homosocial bonds are built and strengthened away from the domestic sphere. This is also reflected in the *Squire's Tale* series, which portrays the castle and its grounds as a place of "tedium" (Morris 1998, 51), where show warriors and court dandies dally in fancy clothing and try to impress dull ladies with their (inadequate) performances of masculinity. This is not a space where 'real men' feel comfortable and fulfilled: Tor is "[g]etting tired of doing the pretty to all the courtiers and ladies" (1998, 64), Gawain moans, "[w]e've been at court too long" (1999, 54), and Terence "chafe[s] for lack of occupation" (1998, 53). A desire to go questing is expressed frequently. In contrast to the castle, the forest is depicted as idyllic, homosocial milieu where appropriate chivalric masculinity can collectively be practiced and enacted. The following passage aptly encapsulates the role of the forest in this regard:

> That evening, as the summer daylight finally began to fade, the three knights and two squires sat around a dying fire, comfortably full, and Sir Marhault told his story. […]
>
> Gawain, Tor, and Sir Marhault stayed up late that night, talking over their battles and what Sir Marhault called the knightly arts. Finally, the party broke up and each crawled thankfully under his blankets. (Ibid., 93-94)

The forest is "an archetypal romance landscape" – a landscape defined by danger, but that also offers "delight, adventure and escape" (Saunders 1993, ix, 44). In the *Squire's Tale* series, the forest is undoubtedly a space of delight, allowing an escape from the 'civilised' court, where both men and women pay too much attention to manners and less valued (i.e., less manly) aspects of chivalry. Morris's narrative is therefore characterised by a spatial dichotomy between the forest and courtly civilisation, a contrast that is regularly invoked in traditional Arthurian retellings for children (McCausland 2019b). Crucially, this dichotomy is also at the core of the Mythopoetic Men's movement, where the forest serves as a key physical space. Men's 'spiritual' gatherings in the woods enable homosocial bonding and serve as a "significant site for achieving masculinity" away "from the private, the 'world of women'" (McEachern 1999, 8). A fear of feminisation and a desire for gender stability lie at the heart of the move into the forest. As Kimmel and Kaufman (1995, 39) put it: "Playing in the woods recalls the days before we [men] were preoccupied with maintaining our gender barriers, when we felt more at home with the bodies and the tears of other males, and when we felt more at home with ourselves."

Adventures and quests away from the domestic not only provide opportunities for male bonding in larger groups, but also create the ideal conditions for the development of an intimate relationship between Terence and Gawain. Initially, the relationship is one between student and mentor, but, given the character's proximity in age – Terence is fourteen years old, Gawain is only 5-6 years older – a less hierarchical friendship develops as they co-participate in quests and grow older together. The *Squire's Tale* series, I contend, actively engages with a modern idea of the 'bromance' in its play with modes that are related to, but also distinctive from, the medieval tradition. This can be seen, firstly, in relation to how emotions and intimacy are presented within close homosocial relationships, and, secondly, in terms of how these relationships are prioritised over heterosocial/heterosexual ones. I argue that the construction of 'bromance'-like relationships in the text leads to the strengthening of Morris's reconfigured chivalric masculinity and guarantees heteronormativity within the narrative, not least through the evasion of any possible homoeroticism.

A distancing from the feminine usually involves the suppression of feminine-coded emotions and behaviours, including the expression of intimacy and vulnerability. Chivalric romances as well as contemporary depictions of the bromance, however, celebrate males embracing such behaviours within homosocial bonds. Emotionally intimate male friendships have been common throughout history, and literature provides ample examples of such. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, awareness of homosexuality grew in Western society, affecting men's relationships up until the 1990s, when male friends' behaviours started to again "achieve the kind of closeness that men have known in other times and other cultures" (Robinson et al. 2018, 103). As Robinson et al. note, "new studies suggest that young men's same-sex relationships are becoming more emotionally nuanced and intimate", because of "a shift in masculine socialization processes" and a decrease in homophobia and homohysteria (Ibid., 95).[96] Men in the 90s are able to "form deep emotional relationships, based on emotional disclosure with one another" (Ibid., 96). While gendered behaviour is still policed, men are now "permitted more flexibility to socialize

[96] See also Eric Anderson's "Inclusive Masculinity Theory" (2009).

and relate in a way that would have been formerly branded as feminine, and as gay" (Ibid., 102). Over the past decades, intimate homosocial relationships, so-called bromances[97] – "close non-sexual friendship[s] between men" (*Merriam-Webster*, n.p.) – have also been culturally mapped in films and TV programmes addressed to a 16-25-year-old male demographic (Robinson et al. 2018, 95). As Kaley Thomas (2012, 38) explains, the term bromance "gained popularity in the 2000s with films like *I Love You, Man* [2009] and *Superbad* [2007], as well as such television series as *Scrubs* [2001-2010] and *House, M.D.* [2004-2012]", although this genre can be traced back to films such as *Butch and Sundance* (1969) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987). It may follow, then, for adolescent fiction to also begin focusing on depictions of such relationships.

The bond between Gawain and Terence is initially a more traditional one between squire and knight, or student and mentor, with fourteen-year-old Terence admiring and glorifying nineteen-/twenty-year old Gawain. For example, the boy "gaze[s] in wonder" upon encountering his master in full armour for the first time, and, when Gawain accomplishes a feat, "Terence was so proud of [him] he thought he would burst" (Morris 1998, 36; 49). However, the more adventures the two share, the more their relationship takes the form of a close and intimate friendship, creating a space for them to share their thoughts and feelings, for example about family-related issues and, later, their romantic relationships. While there are inevitably hierarchical rules that define the relationship between a knight and his squire, Terence and Gawain usually ignore these in private, especially after discovering Terence's otherworldly noble lineage. When Terence has the chance to remain in the Other World, he refuses, wanting to stay with Gawain. Similarly, Gawain views Terence as his closest companion – he "knows no one so worthy as Terence – in any way" and trusts him with his life (Morris 1999, 163-164). Their reciprocal relationship is foreshadowed in the very first chapter of the series, in which Terence's hermit foster father tells Gawain that the boy "needs you as much as you need him" (Ibid., 11).

In traditional views of masculinity, "[e]xpressing emotions signifies weakness and is devalued, whereas emotional detachment signifies strength and is valued" (Bird 1996, 125). Contrastingly, Morris's narrative models homosocial relationships that are based on emotional closeness and intimacy. The *Squire's Tale* series thus appears to disrupt contemporary traditional masculinity by rewriting the 'no feelings except anger' script. Robinson et al. (2018, 102, 104) argue that bromances "represent improved liberality in contemporary masculinity", writing that "[t]he social freedoms the bromance permits are undoubtedly productive towards fostering a more emotive and expressive masculine culture that is more in line with women's modes of interactions".

[97] The difference between a friendship and a bromance can be said to lie in the degree of emotional disclosure (Robinson et al. 2018, 101). Further, bromances are not temporal experiences, but relationships based on "trust, longevity and mutual love" (Ibid., 103).

Haywood et al. (2018, 73) similarly argue that, while not necessarily providing "a complete disruption of masculinity", a connection between masculinity, intimacy, and emotional closeness points "to a potential reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity that is not a priori and necessarily privileged in relation to femininity". However, rather than being subversive, Morris's focus on intimacy between men serves the purpose of strengthening the ideal, privileged manhood the series espouses, exemplifying the need for men to learn how to 'get in touch with their feelings', a central goal of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

What 'getting in touch with one's feelings' can look like for men in homosocial settings is modelled in the following passage that sees King Arthur share his thoughts about Lancelot and Guinevere's affair with Gawain and Terence:

> Slowly, a tear formed in Arthur's eye, then rolled down his cheek. Terence, ashamed to look on his king's grief, turned away. His own eyes misted. Gawain's eyes, too, were bright with tears. 'Am I a fool to love her, Gawain?'
>
> 'If so, it is a divine foolishness,' Gawain said. Gawain's tears flowed more freely, and he gazed into the morning mist as if looking into the Other World [where his own lady was waiting for him]. The King of all Britain and the Maiden's Knight mingled their misery in the growing day. (Morris 1999, 33-34)

The characters' speech in this passage is rather clichéd and formal in a way that seems to evoke an English class register from the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the above-quoted scene is comparable to one found in Henry Gilbert's retelling, which reads:

> The king strode up and down the chamber, wringing his hands in the grief he could not utter.
>
> 'Why, oh why, did [Lancelot] slay them?' he cried out at length. 'He himself knighted Sir Gareth when he went to fight the oppressor of the Lady Lyones, and Sir Gareth loved him above all others.'
>
> 'That is truth,' said some of the knights, and could not keep from tears to see the king's grief. […]
>
> '[…] O Lancelot! Lancelot! my peerless knight, that ever thou shouldst be the cause of the ruin of this my fair kingdom!'
>
> None that heard the king could keep from tears. (Gilbert 1911/2015, 105-107).

In both passages, the king's grief and his men's compassion for him are highlighted. In Morris, the emotion appears to be intensified by the context of formal restraints and inhibitions through which it is being viewed. Terence feels "ashamed to look on his king's grief", not because masculinity norms require him to feel or act this way, but because seeing the great "King of all Britain" in such a state threatens to dissolve the social gulf between the regal Arthur and himself, at this point still a young squire. It is thus an issue of social status. Terence *respects* Arthur and Gawain's display of grief and vulnerability, demonstrating that emotional expressiveness is not considered embarrassing, unmanly, or effeminate, but viewed as acceptable and, indeed, admirable behaviour for 'real' men. Crucially, the above-quoted scene from the *Squire's Tales* series clearly reflects the spiritualist desire for men to learn how to "face [their] grief" (Beneke 1995, 156) and feel "more at home [again] with the bodies and the tears of other males" (Kimmel and Kaufman 1995, 39). The acceptance of men's displays of grief and vulnerability also responds to the concerns of boy-crisis writers such as William Pollack, who worry that the norms regarding emotional restraint imposed on boys are detrimental to their health.

The emphasis on Arthur's and Gawain's titles, and thus hierarchical status, at the end of the passage above is also important. It suggests that even – or, perhaps, *particularly* – men in such positions are allowed to be emotional. Commenting on the role of social status in the construction of contemporary hybrid masculinities, Randles (2018, 518) explains that the class and race privileges middle- and upper-middle class white men enjoy allow them more flexibility in their gender identities and performances. The *Squire's Tale* series revolves around the lives of the white nobility – in fact, even when characters initially believe themselves to belong to a lower class, their noble origins are revealed later. In light of Randles's argument, I argue that King Arthur and Sir Gawain's social status grants them the flexibility to incorporate certain feminine-coded behaviours in their hegemonic masculine identities.

Eisen and Yamashita (2019, 804) similarly note that men can *earn* "the flexibility to develop alternative masculinities that incorporate feminine behaviors" – not only through their superior social status, but by "accomplishing feats of hegemonic masculinity" and "accumulat[ing] 'man points' in other settings".[98] For example, although Arthur is presented as vulnerable and grieving king in the earlier-quoted passage, he is also portrayed in the traditional role of warrior-knight. In the second book, Arthur makes everyone including Gawain and Terence believe that he regularly retreats to a monastery for meditation and prayer in order to process Lancelot and Guinevere's affair (Morris 1999, 37). As Terence discovers later, however, this story only serves as an excuse for Arthur's absence from court – in reality, the king is riding through the forest, staging his own tournaments by anonymously challenging random knights.[99] Arthur's explanation of his behaviour is crucial: "Perhaps it's childish, but I feel better after I've bashed a few knights off their horses" (Ibid., 67). While the narrative sees the king share his feelings and vulnerability, it simultaneously depicts him as an active, eager, competitive, and successful fighter who requires an outlet for his aggression. This contrast similarly applies to Gawain and Terence, allowing these male heroic characters to integrate feminine-coded behaviours into their embodiment of hegemonic, 'deep' masculinity.

While intimate homosocial bonds can disrupt traditional masculinity, in Morris's series they serve to strengthen it, which also impacts the nature and importance of heterosocial relationships.

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[98] Eisen and Yamashita (2019, 804) name the successful male athlete as an example, who "accomplishes feats of hegemonic masculinity" through his success in sports, which allows him a flexibility to integrate certain feminine-code behaviours into his masculinity.

[99] In fact, Terence discovers Arthur's secret because he himself is challenged by the king, who, after defeating the squire, reveals his identity and secret.

Robinson et al. (2018, 102) highlight that bromances can negatively affect cross-sex relations. Based on their empirical work, they conclude: "[T]he ability to emote, confide and cuddle with male friends may in fact reduce men's appetite for interaction with women and intensify the exclusivity of male friendships". In the *Squire's Tale* series, bromances similarly reduce the need for intimate conversations with females, especially in the first two novels. As Robinson et al. state, "a bromance often surpasses the romantic closeness that men share with their wives and girlfriends" (Ibid., 94). The same can be said of medieval chivalric bonds. In Morris's narrative, Gawain's wife, Lorie, is essentially absent. Homosocial bonds and service to King Arthur take priority, preventing Gawain from spending time with his wife and Terence from being with his family: "[T]hey still had a task to perform for their king, and so they remained – their lives and duty in one world, their hearts and hopes in another" (Morris 2009, 4-5).

Terence's (secret) spouse, Eileen, appears in a more active role. However, it is only in the second-to-last volume – after fifteen years together – that the romantic relationship between the two seems to transcend Gawain and Terence's: "[Terence] was going where he nearly always went when he felt uneasy or incomplete. He swung through the open window into a neat bedchamber where a red-haired woman sat reading. 'Hello, love,' Terence said." (Ibid., 7) The narrative explicitly highlights that Terence values Eileen's advice when he tells her, "That's why I keep coming to you. You have such good sense" (Ibid., 9). Groth (2007, 34) raises an interesting point about close homosocial relationships when he argues that males enjoy them because, within them, they "are free of the pressure of *performing maleness*, which is *de rigeur* in the presence of females, who will be considering which of the males to choose as a potential sex partner" (emphases in original). Viewed in this light, the growing importance of Terence's heterosexual relationship reflects a decreased pressure of performing maleness after such a long time together – it has become a 'married' rather than 'romantic' union. The emotional conversation between King Arthur and Sir Gawain discussed earlier also gains new meaning in light of Groth's argument: the king is able to expose his vulnerability and emotions in relation to his wife's affair *only in front of another man*.

Thomas (2012, 38) describes the common elements of a bromance to be "back-and-forth banter, a love-hate dynamic, co-dependency, masculine physicality and action, male camaraderie and loyalty, and potential homoeroticism". The bromance can also be described as "'romantic love' within the same sex, which can include passionate expressions and courtship rituals that lead to physical intimacy with or without genital behaviour" (González-Casanovas 1999, cited in Zeikowitz

2003, 3).[100] All but a love-hate dynamic and potential homoeroticism apply to the bromance-like relationships depicted in the *Squire's Tale* novels. The absence of homoeroticism, in particular, poses a limitation as it minimises the disruptive potential of close homosocial bonds. Examining real-life homosocial bonds, Haywood et al. (2018) argue that bromances are “a complicated love and affection shared by *straight* males. The ‘bro’ aspect of bromance may perhaps emphasise heteronormativity, as well as homophobia, indicating that it is not gay because it's between men” (68, emphasis in original).

Within scholarship on medieval literature, there are similarly diverging views regarding homoeroticism and the maintenance of heteronormativity within and through homosocial bonds. Gretchen Mieszkowski (1995) discusses two examples of medieval Arthuriana, which, she argues, provide “positive presentations of homoerotic feelings and the men who experience them”: Malory's depiction of Lavain in the story of the Fair Maid of Astolat, and the portrayal of Galehot (Galahad) in the 13th-century Old French Prose *Lancelot*. While Malory's tale “offers only a brief glimpse of same-sex love”, the Prose *Lancelot* tells “a powerful and impressively imagined homoerotic love story”, a “long, sensitive, appreciative, honouring portrait […] of a man's love for another man” (Ibid., 23). Importantly, Mieszkowski highlights that these portrayals of same-sex love resist “some of the strongest historical currents of the late Middle Ages”, concluding that “Galehot and Lavain, attractively presented characters yearning for homoerotic relationships, are anomalous figures in late medieval literature” (Ibid., 24). Dawn Hadley (2014, 13) supports this view of positively portrayed homoeroticism as anomaly, arguing that, while homosocial bonds were viewed as crucial in the construction of male identities within medieval life and literature, sexual desire between men was considered inadmissible. Richard Zeikowitz (2003) presents a different perspective in his monograph, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry*, where he “question[s] heteronormative assumptions regarding late medieval chivalric culture” by analysing a number of texts that, he argues, portray “normative homoerotic desire, which is today considered ‘queer’” (2). Steven F. Kruger (2009) offers a more moderate assessment, stating that medieval chivalry produced and sanctioned “powerful, erotically charged connections between men at the same time at which it policed those connections with the threat that *too* close a male-male attachment might stray into a disallowed effeminacy or sodomy” (422; emphasis in original). Therefore, it is perhaps most appropriate to view medieval literature as producing but also policing homoeroticism within homosocial bonds.

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100 Richard Zeikowitz (2013) criticises González-Casanovas' definitions of homosociality, homophilia, and homoeroticism, stating that the categories cannot be as easily distinguished. Nevertheless, for the purposes of my study, I am adopting the above-cited definition of homoeroticism, while acknowledging that, similarly to other terminology used in this dissertation, the limitations of labels, categories, and definitions.

In her seminal study on homosociality, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick "posits the homosocial sphere of much of male bonding, particularly in contemporary society, as a heteronormative construct that depends simultaneously upon the use and exclusion of women and a fear of homosexuality" (Thomas 2012, 40). This clearly applies to medieval romance and the Arthurian legend, where "the visible presence of women" serves to diffuse the possibility of homoeroticism (Larrington 2017, 259; see also Armstrong 2003, 17-18). "[T]o ensure an exclusively heterosexual masculinity", the chivalric knight is "socially bonded to other knights but sexually bonded to a woman" (Dressler 1999, 156). Importantly, "[t]he knight does not identify with a female character; she merely operates as the foil for his masculinity", meaning that "[r]omance constructs a masculine subject out of a female other and a male ally" (Ibid.). Relating this to Morris's narrative, we can again return to the emotional exchange between Arthur and Gawain. The conversation foregrounds both of their romantic, heterosexual relationships, allowing for an intimate moment, while strictly retaining the heteronormativity portrayed as necessary for 'appropriate' masculinity in Morris's series. This is similarly done in passages where the reader may discern some homoeroticism between the lines. Having been away from the male group for a while, Terence says to Gawain: "'We'd better go back, milord, or they'll be wondering,' […] 'They're wondering already, lad.' [Gawain replied.] 'I know, but we needn't make it worse.' Gawain nodded. He tightened his grip on Terence's shoulder once, then let go and turned away." (Morris 1998, 186) At that moment, Nimue appears to gift Gawain a sword on behalf of his otherworldly lover, adding: "It is all that I have to give to my mistress's beloved" (Ibid., 187). An example from the final volume similarly serves to maintain a heteronormative frame, diffusing homoeroticism just as explicitly, by invoking the male character's female love interest: "[Gawain] and Terence talked quietly inside their tent for several hours, mostly about Gawain's faery wife, Lorie, on the Island of Avalon, until at last, sometime after midnight, Gawain went back to sleep." (Morris 2010, 176) Two grown men share a tent together, but are occupied only with conversations about females. In the above-quoted instances, the men's female lovers are physically absent but discursively present, preventing the reader from imagining what Zeikowitz (2003, 4) calls "homoerotically inflected fantasy images of a model knight".

The possibility of homoerotic or homosexual relations is hinted at only briefly in Morris's series. In volume nine, Terence develops a close relationship with a foreign counsellor, leading Sir Dinadan, the hero of an earlier book in the series, to remark:

> 'You two should be careful, riding off for a tête-à-tête this way […] Remember last time we were in France, how many romances got started? You don't want to set tongues wagging.'
>
> 'We are both men, Sir Dinadan,' Acoriondes replied sternly.
>
> 'Ah, yes. That makes a difference, doesn't it?' Dinadan replied. (Morris 2009, 126-127)

This passage, in particular the rhetorical question at the end, demonstrates an awareness on Dinadan's part that romance between men is possible. Contrastingly, Acoriondes – perhaps out of naiveté or maybe due to his cultural background – lacks such an awareness and responds with discomfort. As Burgwinkle (2006, 85-86) explains, "ostensibly heteronormative texts can contain queer elements, to which the knowing reader responds with a wink and the non-knowing reader responds with discomfort". In the passage above, Dinadan is the "knowing" party, and Acoriondes the "non-knowing". Crucially, the phrases "be careful" and "You don't want to set tongues wagging" suggest that homosexual relationships between men are not widely accepted. The reader does not learn Terence's view on the subject, as the squire does not actively participate in this conversation, which swiftly moves on to the topic of military strategy.

Another passage in the series offers a brief glimpse at the possibility of male same-sex relations, suggesting, even, that these are ordinary occurrences: *The Lioness and Her Knight* sees Ywain being pursued by admirers, "quite a few [of them] men" (Morris 2005, 151). When the novel's protagonist, Luneta, asks Rhience, the male main character, "why do you suppose those men are out there with the ladies?", Rhience "look[s] uncomfortable" and replies:

> 'Well, there are some who have suggested that there's a private reason that Ywain has never shown any interest in the ladies,' he said.
> 'Oh.'
> 'I believe it was your uncle Agrivain who first proposed this theory,' Rhience added. 'I hesitate to speak ill of your family, lass, but –'
> 'What a toad he is,' Luneta said, but she was too tired even to work up a good anger at Agrivain. (Ibid., 152)

The choice of words – Rhience looking "uncomfortable" – suggests distress at talking about male same-sex relationships, whether that is due to embarrassment or a negative view of such. The remainder of this passage supports the latter interpretation: out of jealousy, the overall negatively portrayed Sir Agrivain has spread the rumour of Ywain's homosexuality with the intent to reduce the latter's popularity. Finally, Rhience calling Ywain's potential homosexuality "a private reason", suggests that homosexual identities remain closeted in Morris's "comparatively modern" Arthurian world.

Later on, when Ywain tells his friends about the many marriage proposals he has been receiving due to his knightly successes, the topic of his (male) admirers arises again:

> 'Like Lady Norison offering to marry you?' Rhience asked.
> 'Yes, and Baron Montanus, too.'
> 'Baron Montanus wanted to marry you?' Rhience demanded. 'I hope you said no. He's far too old for you.'
> 'He offered me his daughter.' Rhience grinned and nodded. 'Of course he did. I should have expected it.' (Ibid., 224-225)

Rhience's comment suggests age rather than gender as a reason for Ywain's rejection of the baron, but needs to be read in the context of his characterisation and role in the narrative, which presents him as religious man turned knight turned fool.[101] In contrast to Rhience's earlier, more serious conversation about Ywain's potential homosexuality with Luneta, the above-quoted passage primarily has a comic function, but nonetheless reflects the compulsive heteronormativity of the series.

Even if the *Squire's Tale* series only briefly hints at the possibility of male same-sex relations, and even if those hints present homosexual desire as not highly regarded within Morris's chivalric society, the inclusion of such passages suggests that it is not only women who can be the legitimate objects of male desire. Homoerotic and homosexual relations, it appears, are at least possible – rather than entirely absent or overtly penalised – in Morris's books. However, it is important to note that no references to male same-sex desire appear in Morris's Terence-and-Gawain-centred narratives, which are defined by strict heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is indeed maintained and valorised in Morris's series, even though, or more likely *because*, most novels focus on relationships between men. The following passage encapsulates the way the narrative foregrounds and, importantly, *glorifies* warrior love while continuing to remind the reader of the series' heteronormative frame:

> 'It will always matter to me whether my wife loves me, but her love is not the only love in the world.' The king smiled. 'My nephew [Gawain], it seems, loves me enough to die for me.'
>
> 'Your nephew is not alone in that willingness, sire.' [said Terence.]
>
> The king nodded. 'I know – Kai, Bedivere, Tor, Ywain, all of you. I am ashamed that, surrounded by such friends, I still made such a cake of myself over Guinevere.' (Morris 1999, 46)

Again, the emotional bonding between Arthur, Gawain, and Terence is enabled through the existence – and direct mention – of a heterosexual relationship, which, simultaneously, is clearly undermined and presented as less important than homosocial bonds. Crucially, the passage above sees the word "love" explicitly used in relation to both heterosexual romance and homosocial relations. The scene ends with the king addressing Gawain, who is about to leave for the Green Chapel: "I will enjoy your love while you are here, and when you leave I will await your return" (Ibid., 47). This passage resembles a lady's good-bye to her knight and lover, who, in order to prove his honour and masculinity on a quest, must leave her and courtly civilisation behind. The focus on warrior love is evident in this demonstration and celebration of the close relationship between

[101] Intriguingly, Rhience states that, as a fool, "you can say nearly anything to [people] and they'll think you're joking" (Morris 2005, 45). This provides a space for the reader to discern which of his comments are to be taken seriously. Some statements made by Rhience specifically in relation to gender include the following problematic comment, which, indeed, relates closely to spiritual men's movement and conservative boy-crisis views: "[T]he male parent transmits masculine perfection to the child, but that perfection is always marred a bit, on account of the female parent's involvement. If the baby's really marred, it turns out a girl." (Ibid., 30)

the king and his best knight, again demonstrating Morris's adherence to traditional medieval(ist) masculinity ideals.

Highlighting and Judging Difference

The emphasis on male-male relationships and the simultaneous diffusion of homoeroticism in the series' eminent bromance-like relationships are prominent examples of how the narrative distances its male heroes from the feminine. Besides focusing on homosocial bonds and environments within a strictly heteronormative frame, Morris's novels also reject femininity through highlighting and judging differences, creating both an internal and external hegemony. As Shen (2018, 290) states, "masculine identity, due to its long-established supremacy in the patriarchal society, relies and thrives on the process of differentiation of othering, and on the recognition of difference, which is almost always hierarchical". In Morris's narrative, the devaluation of specific feminine traits in women, the ridiculing of courtly love so central to the chivalric ideal, as well as the subordination of feminised masculinities establish clear internal and external gender(ed) hierarchies and present gender as dichotomous category.

Perceived differences between genders are evidenced in Morris's novels through a constant perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Firstly, passages that describe the reactions of women and men frequently highlight stereotypical differences. Examples include "ladies wept and men cheered" and "[l]adies screamed, and men bellowed vague commands" (Morris 1998, 54-55). Even books centring on a female protagonist's adventures play on stereotypes. For instance, when Sarah, the heroine of book six, arrives at a castle, she observes: "There was not the slightest decoration anywhere, not even flowers in the bare yard. Whoever lived here was male, she decided, and immediately she was proven correct." (Morris 2004, 127) Upon entering the guest room, Sarah's magical helper notes that the blankets are dusty, commenting that their host "probably never noticed", adding, "I suppose a holy man is still a man, after all" (Ibid., 129). Women's behaviours and interests in particular are regularly described in clichéd terms. When Gawain beheads the Green Knight and "blood pour[s] from the severed neck", "[l]adies moaned weakly, and more than half of them fainted or pretended to" (Morris 1999, 42). Similarly, when a tournament in honour of the handsome Lancelot is announced, "ladies squealed with delight and clapped ecstatically" (Ibid., 28). Male protagonists regularly espouse stereotypical views that portray gender as dichotomous. Piers, the hero of volume four, for instance, states: "[W]hy would a man want to go live somewhere where there were only women? It sounds terrible. Two hundred women always telling him to pick up his stockings and clean his nails" (Morris 2001, 170). Similarly, Terence evokes female stereotypes when he observes how Eileen "grabbed a small bag and stuffed some clothes and a comb into it – of course she'd have to have a comb" (Morris 1999, 105).

The narrative's persistent connection between females and a preoccupation with beauty and appearance stands out across the series. A focus on female beauty is not surprising, considering the prominence of this topic in the courtly love tradition.[102] However, contemporary texts often demystify and contest female beauty systems, an opportunity that Morris's narrative misses. In volume three, a conversation between the female protagonist, Lynet, and Terence's girlfriend, Eileen, illustrates female characters' continued preoccupation with beauty: when Lynet explains that she is trying to help her beautiful sister, Eileen replies drily, "Every damsel in distress is the fairest in all England, it seems […] Truthfully, now. Is your sister even passably good-looking?" (Morris 2000, 40). Lynet responds in the affirmative, which leads to the following conversation:

> '[H]ow dreadful for you. I should hate to have a gorgeous sister […] I don't suppose she's the sort who will get sadly overweight when she grows older, is she?'
>
> 'No such luck,' Lynet replied mournfully. 'She'll still be stunning when she's … oh! I didn't mean to say that!' Lynet put a hand to her mouth, but Lady Eileen's eyes held so much understanding that Lynet began to giggle. 'I don't really wish her ill, but it's true that I used to daydream about the day when she would be fat and peevish looking. She hardly eats anything, though, and I had to give it up.'
>
> 'Don't give up,' said Lady Eileen reassuringly. 'She'll be skinny and peevish looking, and that's even worse. […]' (Ibid., 41)

Attempting to present chivalric discourse from a female perspective here, Morris resorts to the harmful cliché of women's jealousy over other women's beauty. Importantly, this conversation takes place between two positively portrayed female characters that the narrative constructs as role models. While it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the series' treatment of female beauty ideals in more detail, it is important to highlight that this aspect contributes to the narrative's creation of gender binaries and hierarchies.

Crucially, an obsession with one's appearance is deemed an unmanly trait in Morris's series, not only implicitly through a focus on females' (preoccupation with) beauty, but through the ridiculing and feminising of knights who pay attention to their appearance. In the first volume, one Sir Griflet is singled out as the main subject of ridicule.[103] The reader first encounters Griflet, "[a] beautifully dressed knight, in yellow stockings" as he thanks Gawain for defeating a knight that he himself had been overpowered by in single combat (Morris 1998, 33). Gawain's victory, as the reader will remember from the first chapter of the novel, was easily achieved, without arms and armour, using only a stew pot. Griflet, however, had embarrassingly lost his horse and armour in his encounter with the same unskilled knight. In the ensuing conversation between Gawain and Sir Kai, Griflet is presented as unmanly and silly-looking, with Gawain questioning how such a man

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[102] Although it has to be noted that Morris continually rejects the courtly love aspect of the Arthurian tradition (as I explain later on in this section), meaning he could have chosen to also reject a preoccupation with female beauty.

[103] To my best knowledge, Sir Griflet is traditionally portrayed as a chivalrous knight. For example, in Chrétien's *Erec*, he is valiant, in Howard Pyle's retelling he is courageous, and he is also not ridiculed in any way in Bradley's *Mists of Avalon*.

could ever have achieved knighthood (Ibid., 38-39). Kai explains that knights such as Griflet came with the Round Table when it was passed on to King Arthur – it was in fact such knights that made Arthur begin to request a brave deed before granting a man knighthood.

The feminisation of Sir Griflet first becomes explicit after the announcement of King Arthur's wedding to Guinevere: "All the ladies of the court, as well as Sir Griflet and many of the other knights, were in an uproar, ordering new clothes and designing new ways of dressing their hair for the wedding feast" (Ibid., 53). Sir Griflet and a number of other unnamed knights are unfavourably equated with the noblewomen of the court, who are regularly portrayed as dull, overly into their looks, and in admiration of what Gawain and Terence dismissively refer to as "show warriors" (Ibid., 25). Another scene sees Sir Griflet react to a pack of hounds causing mayhem in the Great Hall:

> [Terence] heard Sir Griflet scream in an outraged voice, "Look what they've done to my hat!" Two knights whom Terence did not know joined the chase, swinging their swords recklessly and ineffectively. […] then all was quiet in the banquet hall except for Sir Griflet, muttering wrathfully over his hat. (Ibid., 55)

Whereas other knights are shown to take action – albeit unsuccessfully – Griflet is occupied only with the fate of his fashionable accessory. While the ridiculing of Sir Griflet is intended to serve a comic purpose, it also constructs an interest in fashion and appearance as effeminate and unmanly.[104]

In the second book, it is the French knights arriving at Camelot who receive contempt and ridicule for their 'decorated' versions of knighthood. From the start, Gawain and Terence "scornfully reject[]" the "sumptuous fashions and exaggerated graces", and "all the frills and jewels that were popular among the continental knights" (Morris 1999, 3; 7). Importantly, the series creates a strict dichotomy between such effeminate knights and 'real' knights, which is aptly summarised by the statement that "[y]ou could always tell which knights were fighters and which were brightly dressed puppets" (Ibid., 18). There is one knight, however, who appears to bridge this binary: Sir Lancelot. Described as wearing "brilliant continental clothing, a vision in expensive fabric, from satin shoes with long curling toes to a muffin-shaped green silk hat", he nevertheless apologises for being "in [his] traveling clothes" (Ibid., 26). Terence's joking about Lancelot's "[p]retty clothes" as well as the mention that Sir Lancelot and the beauty-obsessed Guinevere "spent hours together, planning their wardrobes" (Ibid., 27; 37) signal to the implied reader that,

[104] Another notable example of feminisation comparable to Sir Griflet's is the portrayal of King Bagdemagus in volume six. In Chrétien's romance, Bagdemagus knows about his son Maleagant's abduction of Guinevere and is aware of everything that is going on, telling his son to give up Guinevere. Morris, in contrast, deprives Meleagant (Meliagant here) of a father who wants to protect him, instead presenting King Bagedmagus as weak, naïve, gullible, and – importantly – overly into fashion. Again, a preoccupation with appearance is used to present a male character as ridiculous and unmanly.

like Sir Griflet, the French knight stands in stark contrast to the manly knighthood embodied by Gawain and supported by his squire, Terence.[105] Unlike Sir Griflet, however, Lancelot is also portrayed as a strong and successful knight, winning tournaments "apparently without exerting himself" (Ibid., 29), which quickly makes him the greatest knight at Camelot – a title that had previously belonged to Gawain. The rivalry and competition between the two men is central to the second novel, the ending of which sees Gawain and Terence triumph, while Lancelot departs Camelot, embarrassed and defeated. Although Sir Lancelot is initially presented as effective and admirable knight, the closure portrays Gawain's and Terence's embodiments of masculinity as worthy and heroic, while subordinating the French knight's effeminate manhood.

In ridiculing men's (focus on) appearance and fashion, Morris moves away from medieval French romance, which regularly describes these in relation to heroic, chivalrous knights. Chrétien, for instance, describes his Erec as follows:

> He was of the Round Table
> and had great honor at court:
> as long as he had been there,
> there had not been a knight so highly praised […]
> he was dressed in a fur-lined cloak
> and a tunic of noble, patterned silk,
> that had been made in Constantinople.
> He had put on silken stockings,
> very finely made and tailored;
> he was wearing golden stirrups,
> and was wearing golden spurs; […]
> (c.1170/1987, line 83-102)

Similarly, we also cannot detect any ridiculing and subordination of knights based on their looks in Gilbert's retelling, which, for instance, offers the following description of a squire arriving at court: "[H]e was a youth full handsome and tall […] He was dressed in a surcoat of red satin and a mantle of crimson, trimmed with gold; and on his head was a cap of rich purple, and his feet and legs were clad in fine leather, with gold bosses on his shoes" (1911/2015, 38). Were Chrétien's Erec or Gilbert's squire to appear in Morris's Camelot, they would no doubt be greeted with ridicule from Terence and Gawain, who would promptly label them as court dandies.[106]

Effeminacy is addressed in canonical texts of the Arthurian tradition. Tennyson, for instance, describes Geraint (Erec) as effeminate – not in relation to his appearance, but due to his inactivity: "And how men slur him, saying all his force / Is melted into mere effeminacy" (1996, n. p.). Later, however, a connection between appearance and effeminacy seems to be made, when Geraint cries out: "Effeminate as I am, / I will not fight my way with gilded arms, / All shall be

[105] An interesting point is also that there are rarely descriptions of Terence's and Gawain's appearance – certainly none that compare to the detailed analyses of Sir Lancelot or Sir Griflet.
[106] This also brings us back to Chaucer's fashionable Squire, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

iron" (Ibid.). Gilbert does not use the word effeminate in his retelling but attaches the label "court dandy" – preceded by the adjective "worthless" – to his Geraint (1911/2015, 54). In Gilbert, the court dandy is a "soft fool" (Ibid., 55) – in Morris, he is a feminised man who dresses well and is preoccupied with his appearance.

The ridiculing of the 'man of mode' is ages old. The portrayal of effeminate knights in Morris's series, however, must be viewed in the context of a new type of masculinity that came to the fore in the 1990s: the metrosexual male, describing "young, urban, white, middle-class men – consumers and young, narcissistic men preoccupied with looks, style and image" (Haywood et al. 2018, 63). The parallels to Morris's effeminate knights are obvious, allowing us to view Morris's novels as a reaction to, and, crucially, a rejection of this type of masculinity. Within the boy crisis debate, the metrosexual was viewed "as evidence of feminizing influences on men" (Martino and Kehler 2006, 117). Indeed, the phenomenon of the metrosexual male "indicated a crisis in masculinity, a closer relation between homo[sexual] and hetero[sexual] men, and a general movement towards a new masculinity" (Haywood et al. 2018, 63) – a masculinity that Morris's series clearly rejects and subordinates.

Despite their effeminate – and thus unmanly – portrayal in the early novels, Sir Griflet and Sir Lancelot are redeemed later in the series. For their redemption, however, both have to align their embodiment of masculinity with the reconfigured hegemonic chivalric ideal Morris's narrative constructs. In the final instalment of the series, Sir Griflet is still described as a "court dandy" (Morris, 2010, 130), a coward who leaves Camelot to evade participating in the most crucial battle. Justifying himself to Gawain, Griflet demonstrates an acute awareness of his deficiencies that prevent him from performing 'adequate' masculinity:

> What difference can one like me make? […] I'm a buffoon. An old fool, fit for nothing but decoration. I'm no more than a tapestry of a knight, and a threadbare tapestry of that. Did you know I'm older than the king? Without… without *help* my hair would be completely white. I can't fight. I'm useless to Arthur. (Ibid., 134)

Despite his shortcomings – now exacerbated by old age – and perhaps having reflected on his masculinity, Griflet eventually returns to the centre of conflict, saving Terence and Gawain's lives. They discover the flamboyant knight's dead body on the battlefield: "'He came back,' Gawain whispered. Then he fell on his knees before Griflet's body. 'You came back.'" (Ibid., 241). In gratitude and respect, Gawain then writes, in his own blood, on the deceased knight's shield: "Griflet le Fise de Dieu, Hero of England" (Ibid., 260). Battle becomes the ultimate test of manhood for Griflet, who will now be remembered as a fallen hero who sacrificed his life and body for the king(dom). The narrative does not miss out, however, on one last opportunity to remind the reader of the knight's obsession with appearance: upon discovering Sir Griflet on the field later, Dinadan remarks, "Griflet didn't write that himself […] The Griflet I knew would never have permitted such a scrawl on his armor." (Ibid., 260)

Sir Lancelot's exoneration is given more attention than Sir Griflet's, and rather than through a final heroic act before death, Guinevere's former lover has to shed his effeminacy through labour and a quest to rescue the queen. When defeated by a disguised Terence in his final tournament at Camelot in book two, Lancelot escapes into the forest. He becomes a woodcutter, taking the pseudonym 'Jean le Forestier'. Tolhurst (2012a, 71) interprets Lancelot's retreat from Camelot as "the ultimate dismissal of chivalry", arguing that "he finds greater happiness as a woodcutter than he did as a knight". "By embracing his new life rather than returning to his old one", Tolhurst argues, "the man whose talent for armed combat made knightly success easy to achieve teaches young readers that there is joy in doing manual labor rather than in wielding a sword" (Ibid., 72). Tolhurst's argument focuses on a single novel in the series, *The Savage Damsel and the Dwarf* (2000). I contend that Lancelot's move into the forest, explored in more detail in later volumes, serves the purpose of 'getting in touch with his masculinity'. When Lynet, the protagonist of book three, comes across 'Jean' in the woods, the reader does not encounter the familiar effeminate, courtly Lancelot, but a rough-looking, hard-working woodsman. It is indeed Jean's physical labour and manliness that impress Lynet:

> Lynet's eyes widened as she imagined one man pulling an oxcart full of wood all the way to the nearest village, at least two miles away. But looking at Sir Lancelot's huge arms and shoulders, she believed it. 'And have you found joy in your labor?' Lynet asked. […]
>
> 'To be a knight, it was easy for me. It was as natural as breathing. It is much greater to be the best woodcutter in the forest.' (Morris 2000, 193-194)

Lancelot is viewed through the protagonist's female gaze which focuses entirely on his build. Competition and physicality remain at the core of this seemingly 'new' version of Lancelot's masculinity.

In *The Princess, the Crone, and the Dung-Cart Knight* (2004), Lancelot joins the protagonist Sarah on her quest to rescue the abducted queen. The story of the Dung-Cart Knight (based on Chrétien's *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la charrette*, c.1180) proves suitable to depict the 'new' Lancelot who has lost all interest in his appearance – he is described as "an unkempt knight with little armor and no horse" (Morris 2004, loc.21). Importantly, Lancelot verbalises the need for revision of his embodiment of masculinity:

> I came to the court of King Arthur […] filled with the lust for fame, desirous of being called the greatest of all his knights. […] But that was my problem, you see. I did not wish to *be* the greatest knight, only to be *called* so by others, and so I did whatever other people thought the greatest knight should do. The world decreed that the greatest knight should be the greatest fighter – that was easy for me – but also that he should be a graceful dancer, should wear the finest clothes, should have a private priest, should walk with a dainty step, and above all, should languish for love. […] That was

> my scripture, *bon frère*, to do… to do whatever was *la mode des chevaliers* – the fashion of the knights. I did not seek to be, only to seem. (Morris 2004, 136-137; emphases in original)

During his time as woodcutter, Lancelot has seemingly been able to reflect on his 'flaws' and to develop a sense of chivalry and masculinity that aligns more closely with that of the series' heroes, Gawain, Terence, and King Arthur. The conversation above spans several pages, demonstrating the importance of depicting Lancelot's transformation into a 'real' knight. Crucially, the passage suggests he only demonstrated interest in fashion and appearance to fit societal norms, whereas fighting has always come naturally to him. The physical labour and distancing from a preoccupation with appearance during his time as a woodcutter have given him the opportunity not to develop but to *return* to his true, 'deep' masculinity.

At the end of *Dung Cart*, Lancelot is finally exonerated. In a later volume, the formerly fashionable French knight is then described as follows: "Among the brightly clad courtiers who filled the court, Lancelot's simple clothes seemed almost shabby." (Morris 2009, 31-32) Lancelot has left his effeminate days in the past and, having received the king's forgiveness for his affair with the queen, is now successfully re-integrated – or rather, for the first time, *properly* integrated – into Camelot's brotherhood of truly masculine knights. Importantly, he is no longer considered a threat in relation to women. As Burgwinkle (2006, 84) highlights, "effeminate men are reprehensible because they are so appealing to women and therefore pose a direct threat to heterosexual men". Lancelot is no longer interested in Guinevere, nor is he shown to pursue any other women. Most crucially, he has adapted his embodiment of masculinity to the hegemonic form, "the current most honored way of being a man, [which] requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832).

The *Squire's Tale* series creates an internal hegemony among men not only through the mocking and reformation of effeminate knights, but also through the undermining and ridiculing of the aspect of medieval chivalry that is most closely connected to the feminine: courtly love. The medieval knight's value depends on his ability to win the respect and/or love of a lady and to enjoy the regard of females in general. It is hard to overestimate the effect that the incorporation of the ideal of courtly love has had on the development of Western culture and, even if this element of chivalry does not override the impulse to shun and eject the feminine in forming a male identity, it certainly complicates it. In Morris's narrative, the potential to complicate the formation of male identity through a celebration or interrogation of courtly romance is overlooked and replaced with a more simplistic focus on its comic potential.

The story of "Pelleas the Stupid" serves to clearly distinguish weak men occupied with courtly love from respectable, manly knights such as Gawain. Sir Pelleas is desperately and unrequitedly in love with a lady whom he describes as "the most perfect example of ladyhood to be found. In no matter is she lacking. Her nose is a vessel of beauty, straight and white, which no desecrating freckle has ever been permitted to touch." (Morris 1998, 121) Pelleas's exaggerated dedication to this lady makes him draft "a sonnet to her nose" in French (Ibid.). Lacking knowledge of the language, however, he amusingly uses the French term for 'snout'. The comic depiction of Sir Pelleas continues as the lady's brutal rejection only increases his obsession, reflected in the following passage that sees the courtly lover make absurd offerings in exchange for the lady's affection:

> Sir Pelleas threw himself from his saddle, and knelt. 'My princess!' he called out. 'My love, my lambkin! I swear to you eternal fealty. My own life I offer you! My corpse I give to you for a rug, if you so desire! I worship you!' (Ibid., 124-125)

Courtly love and feats of arms are competing paradigms of chivalry that, in medieval romance, are often portrayed in tension. In Morris's series the reference to these paradigms does not serve to highlight such tensions, but, rather, to parody chivalric society with the intention of making the reader laugh at the medieval. Inevitably, however, these comic instances also comment on masculinity. The passages ridiculing and devaluing courtly love(rs) work to strengthen the chivalric prowess and superiority of the character the text presents as the epitome of chivalry, namely Gawain, who is also relentlessly admired by the protagonist, Terence. These instances serve to support Gawain's status and reputation as a 'true' knight and fighter, legitimating his embodiment of masculinity as 'authentic'. Indeed, 'real' knightly masculinity such as Gawain's is not concerned with such trivial matters as courtly love.[107] This similarly applies to other heroic characters in the series, as is demonstrated by Dinadan's comment that "'[c]ourtly lovers are all the most frightful asses.' 'Nothing special about that,' Terence pointed out. 'I'd think that was normal for lovers.' 'But *courtly* lovers,' Dinadan explained loftily, 'are noble and tragic asses. […]'" (Morris 2009, 43; emphasis in original) Dinadan later adds that, as a minstrel, he does not sing about "this trash" (Ibid., 44), confirming the devaluation of courtly love that defines most of Morris's series.[108] As shown in the previous section, Morris's narrative valorises strictly heterosexual warrior/knightly

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[107] Gawain, in fact, marries a lady from the Other World, suggesting that a woman from the World of Men would not fit his knightly image – although it has to be noted that in some medieval sources, Gawain's mistress was indeed "a fairy, queen of the other world, and nameless" (Whiting 1947 cited in Bovaird-Abbo 2006, 105).

[108] Paradoxically, in the *Author's Note* at the end of the seventh novel, *The Lioness and Her Knight* (2005), which focuses on the (love) story of a female protagonist, Morris laments the fact that "[t]he great writers of the ancient world didn't go in for love stories so much", an attitude that, as Morris explains, "didn't start to change until around the eleventh century, when the minstrels of southern France began to compose stories in which women had a more important role" (Morris 2005, 341). These minstrels, Morris continues, told the stories of "brave warriors" who "were fighting for their adored ladies", a story that "ended not just with victory, but with requited love" (Ibid.). The author goes on to praise Chrétien de Troyes and his "marvelous poem", *Ywain ou le Chevalier au Lion* (c. 1180), which is the text Morris's *The Lioness and Her Knight* is based on. This is only one of many instances where Morris contradicts the gender/masculinity ideology he sets out in some of his other novels, a pattern that, I contend, is related to the gender of the implied audience that each text in the series constructs. The contradiction cannot be attributed to the chronological development of the series, since the conversation between Dinadan and Terence on courtly love occurs in a later novel. A detailed discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to highlight the ways the series attempts to cater to gendered audiences.

love. Contrastingly, courtly love – focusing, as it does, on the role of females – and those subscribing to it are ridiculed and demasculinised.

In his 2005 article, Morris explains that characters which he turns into a "laughing stock" or "buffoon[s]" embody "virtues that no longer seem all that virtuous" (52). Commenting on Pelleas, he writes that "it is hard to imagine a modern reader, adult or child" approaching the tale in the spirit that Malory – according to Morris – intended: "Pelleas as a noble and admirable lover who deserved a more worthy object of worship" (Ibid., 55). Interestingly, the examples of effeminate/feminised masculinity discussed above – both 'fashionable' knights and courtly love(rs) – suggest that the men, ideals, and virtues considered outdated and being ridiculed by Morris have one thing in common: they are of French origin – Sir Griflet le Fise de Dieu, the French knights including Sir Lancelot du Lac, courtly love. Alan S. Rosenthal (1999, 897) explains that Americans widely regard France and its culture as "overwhelmingly feminine, so much so that even the masculinity of French men is open to question". Indeed, a vast number of Americans believe that, as a nation, France "has qualities and faults that are 'characteristic' of the female gender and that compromise the virility of its men" (Ibid.). This notion has its roots in British-French rivalry and can be traced back to the Middle Ages (Ibid.).[109] Importantly, Rosenthal highlights that "[s]tereotypes usually tell us more about the perceiver than the perceived": "In categorizing and classifying information about France and the French in terms of gender, Americans have revealed something about their own mentality – attitudes that date back to their country's colonial and frontier periods" (Ibid., 906). Similarly, I contend that Morris's ridiculing and stereotypical portrayal of French men and ideals as feminised in the *Squire's Tale* series reveals a fear of the feminine, which lies at the core of conservative boy crisis debate positions and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement.

In the medieval chivalric ideal, the knight's more 'feminine' cultured aspects are an essential part of his core identity. Particularly in the French romance tradition, an incorporation of feminine features in the male hero's character helps him achieve "the maturity enabling him to fulfill his specifically masculine role in society" (Johnston 2011, 53). Masculinity is thus "enhanced by incorporating the feminine" (Ibid.). With the exception of intimacy and vulnerability in homosocial settings, feminine-coded aspects are largely undermined and ridiculed in the *Squire's Tale* series. Crucially, the mocking of fashionable and courtly knights, I argue, does not have a more profound purpose, such as highlighting and negotiating contrasting ideals of chivalry. Instead, the ridiculing is a simplistic strategy that serves as comic medievalism while, harmfully, subordinating feminised

[109] However, as my supervisor, David Whitley reminded me, the stereotype of French refinement as effeminate is more nuanced and ambivalent in medieval times, not least because French was still a major language for the aristocracy and chivalry was conceived as being above nationhood.

masculinities. This reflects ‘real-world’ behaviour. As Michael Kimmel puts it: “We [men] are under the constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance” (2010, 23-24). The validation of other men’s masculine performances is also typical in medieval(ist) chivalric literature. In texts that present “a society which valorizes knighthood, we find a surplus of men who aspire to it”, and “there is simply not enough room at the top for all. Some men ‘do’ masculinity better than others; those who are less able must change their place, become recategorized by a masculinized and feminizing gaze as they range themselves under the domination of a few knights” (Kelly 1996, 62) – and one squire, in the case of Morris’s novels. As I have demonstrated in this section, throughout his maturation process, Terence comments upon and validates the conduct of adult males and watches his idols – Gawain and Arthur – and fellow heroes like Dinadan do the same. Those who want to be respected and highly regarded by Terence and his friends need to become ‘defeminised’, as illustrated in the trajectories of Sir Griflet and Sir Lancelot. Terence is not exempt from judgment; he, too, needs to earn the approval of ‘real’ men. I maintain that this ‘judging of manhood’ – both in its active and passive (i.e., receiving) form – contributes significantly to the protagonist’s development of his sense of masculinity. The series narrows the range of socially acceptable and appropriate behaviours for men, creating a divide between those who are ‘real’ men and those who are not, devaluing women and femininity in the process.

I want to conclude this section on highlighting and judging difference with one final example of how Morris’s narrative demonstrates a clear rejection and devaluation of the feminine, namely through contrasting portrayals of male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing. The climax of the sixth novel sees the protagonist, thirteen-year-old Sarah, disguise herself as a boy to fight Guinevere’s abductor and her own mother’s murderer, Sir Meliagant, in Lancelot’s place: she cuts her hair, puts on “some boys’ breeches”, helm, and armour, and pretends to be “mysterious and silent” to avoid being recognised as a cis female (Morris 2004, 253, 259). Assuming her to be a child or dwarf, her opponent initially refuses to fight Sarah, but she perseveres and, drawing her enchanted sword, “assume[s] the ready position that Sir Kai had taught her” (Morris 2004, 261). Sarah fights well and, with the help of a magic potion, makes Sir Meliagant yield.[110] Importantly, Sarah’s cross-dressing performance is viewed as heroic, both within the novel, and in scholarship. Tolhurst (2012a) argues that, in dressing as a boy and facing Meliagant in single combat, Sarah moves from heroine to “warrior-hero”, embodying “a healthy role model for today’s female teens”

[110] Sarah passes on the opportunity to revenge her mother’s death by ending Sir Meliagant’s life. However, when he raises his sword to kill her, Lancelot enters and intervenes, decapitating the evil knight.

(72-73). The positive and heroic depiction of Sarah's cross-dressing stands in stark contrast to Terence's.

In the second novel, Terence disguises himself as a woman in order to rescue Gawain from a dungeon. When Gawain sees his squire in his "feminine disguise", he comments: "'The grey dress brings out your eyes.' Terence ignored him. 'Here, he said, […] stripping off the dress and shawl. 'Stop laughing like a half-wit and help me with this corset. […]'" (Morris 1999, 97). Terence's cross-dressing is addressed again later: Eileen remarks, "don't come over high and mighty with me, Sir Terence. I've seen you in a dress". Gawain laughs, while "Terence promise[s] himself that he would never again argue with a female" (Ibid., 110). Importantly, when retelling the story of their quest at court, Gawain alters it so that "it was Eileen herself, rather than Terence in one of Eileen's dresses, who freed Gawain from the dungeons": "'Indeed,' Gawain said, gazing mistily in the distance, 'it was a vision of all that is fair in womanhood that greeted my eyes when the dungeon door swung open. Such surpassing loveliness and grace!' Terence grunted, and Eileen's shoulders shook." (Ibid., 213) Each time Terence's cross-dressing is addressed, it is presented as laughable behaviour.[111]

The changes made in Gawain's tale of the incident, in particular, suggest that Terence disguising himself as a woman – even for the purposes of a brave rescue – would not receive approval at court. Writing on Malorian retellings for children, McCausland (2019a, 32-33) explains that, while knights "seek honour through dangerous adventures", they "always return to the domestic space of Camelot for validation". The social rite of a knight telling the story of his quest, McCausland notes, is, in fact, "of equal importance as the quest itself" (2019b, 348). In the *Squire's Tale* series, the heroes' retelling of their quest is crucial in a somewhat different way: it usually highlights the discrepancy between what really happened – especially in relation to events that take place in the Other World – and what is relayed at court. This, I contend, serves to establish males such as Terence and Gawain, who have connections to the faery world, as superior in terms of their performance of masculinity. Men linked to the Other World are presented as exemplary heroes, members of an even more exclusive group than the Camelot knights, who are likened to dogs by Gawain and described as "children" by King Arthur (Morris 1999, 218). In the instance of Terence's cross-dressing, I argue that the discrepancy between the 'quest as it happened' versus its

[111] The difference between the depiction of female-to-male and male-to-female cross-dressing in Morris's series reflects a common tendency in children's literature: while the former usually leads to feelings of liberation for female characters, allowing them "to inhabit the male world and experience many of the liberties denied them in their female form", the latter primarily serves to create a comic effect, with the male character regularly receiving ridicule (Flanagan 2002, 79). I address the issue of cross-dressing within Arthurian variations in more detail in the fourth chapter.

retelling at court is clearly linked to what the narrative presents as absurdity – a man in a woman's dress – again highlighting the need for a distancing from the feminine.

Chivalric Tests and Rewards

Just as he physically discards the feminine after the rescue mission, Terence also needs to metaphorically discard the feminine in order to mature, develop his heroic masculinity, and move towards the privileged, closed centre. The conventional tests and rewards that the series constructs as crucial for the protagonist's maturation illustrate my argument. Medieval romance tells of the protagonist's journey "toward self-knowledge" (Neal 2008, 192-193), which is marked by tests and rewards, and usually ends with the protagonist's marriage to a beautiful lady and his establishment in a masculine social identity that is "aligned with his society's construction of ideal masculinity" (Cohen and Interscripta 1996, 8). In terms of male maturation stories, the process of initiation into adulthood is conventionally "constructed as a series of stations, where an adventure is offered at each: a task to perform, a test to pass. The pattern is linear and aimed at a goal" (Nikolajeva 2002, 126). Terence's maturation process, as this section will illustrate, closely follows these conventions. It is organised along a trajectory that sees the protagonist move from sidekick to hero by proving his masculinity through the passing of trials both in the Other World and the World of Men, and by ultimately sacrificing his life for the king. His corresponding rewards include gaining otherworldly knighthood, the title of Greatest Knight in the World of Men, love from and eventual marriage to a beautiful noblewoman, and eternal life in the faery world.

Morris's series introduces Terence in a feminised role, presenting him as embodying a hybrid form of masculinity that appears to be located in the margin. Indeed, when Gawain first meets him, Terence is literally existing on the margins of Camelot, living in the woods and taking care of his elderly hermit foster father. However, the transformations Terence is required to undergo, the tests he is given, and the rewards he accordingly receives suggest an alignment with hegemonic masculinity as presented and embodied in the novel by male heroes such as Gawain and King Arthur. Therefore, I argue that the squire's maturation journey leads to a revised, yet closed and privileged embodiment of manhood, a 'deep' masculinity that is seemingly removed from excessively violent and martial medieval(ist) heroic models, but also rejects a connection with the feminine and the open margin.

As my earlier discussion of homosociality highlighted, "the very essence of the knight's ideal of manhood is called forth by adventure" through which he proves himself (Auerbach 2003, 135). Morris's protagonist also needs to prove himself away from the domestic. Much of this takes place in the Other World, a crucial setting in the *Squire's Tale* series, appearing in all but one of its ten volumes as the principal site of action and, importantly, maturation. The otherworld motif is central to the Arthurian legend and medieval literature more broadly. Conventionally entered through water, a cave, or a forest, the otherworld "exists neither above nor below us, but rather, in another parallel reality" that "follows its own laws of time, logic and morality" (Saunders 1993, 46). Otherworlds can and have been used to articulate a range of concerns. There are secular and religious otherworlds, for example, although the distinction is not absolute (Byrne 2016, 10). This can also be seen in the depiction of Morris's "Other World", which is both a "realm of faeries and magic" (1999, 5) and an afterworld, although religious aspects are otherwise of little importance, especially in comparison to other Arthurian adaptations such as *The Mists of Avalon*.

The crucial question about otherworld themes and motifs within a narrative is: "What do they do to the surroundings into which they are brought?" (Payne 1951 cited in Byrne 2016, 3) Medieval romances, as Phillips (2012, 98) notes, "like to take their heroes into mysterious, separated zones". Morris thus follows romance and Arthurian conventions in his separation of the human world from an otherworld. However, the Other World in the *Squire's Tale* series, I argue, serves another specific purpose: to contrast the superficial masculinity celebrated in the World of Men with the 'deep' masculinity acquired and practised in the faery world. Like the Other World itself, this 'deep' masculinity is only accessible to a privileged few, creating a community even more exclusive than the Round Table.[112]

Conventional chivalric adventures and occurrences in the World of Men are regularly parodied in Morris's series. Traditionally, "the duels and marvels that befall [a knight] are rarely hindrances to his journey, but are usually its very purpose" (Barber 1974, 105). In the *Squire's Tale* novels, however, such "duels and marvels" serve to highlight the absurdity of medieval romance conventions, producing a comic effect for the contemporary reader, while simultaneously strengthening the masculine image of Sir Gawain, who refuses to follow chivalric customs such as the rule that "[a]ll challenges must be met" (Pochoda 1971, 114), but nonetheless emerges as masculine and heroic.

In contrast to the World of Men, the Other World transpires as a place where *significant* events and transformations happen, which allow Terence to move from sidekick to hero, from margin to centre. Throughout much of the first novel, Terence functions as an observer of Gawain's great deeds, continuously demonstrating admiration for his master and thereby contributing to the knight's high standing and reputation within the narrative and in the eyes of

[112] Female protagonists of the series also have access to the Other World, but they similarly must have faery blood, and their maturation usually includes the acquisition of magic – in contrast to male maturation in the novels. Importantly, these females do not challenge 'deep' masculinity or the masculine order, but seamlessly integrate into it while celebrating those men who embody the 'deep' masculine.

the implied readership. Overall, Terence has very little to do or say in the first half of book one, which is marked by external focalisation. However, the two main characters' roles become more interchangeable and eventually reversed once their quest draws them into the Other World. Terence takes charge of their quest, beginning to discover his inner resources and strengths, which, I argue, are largely related to physical embodiment, as exemplified in the following passage:

> Terence broke into a feverish sweat, but he still stepped forward […] Terence could scarcely breathe, but he set his mind on putting one foot ahead of the next […] Terence began to cry from fear and weariness, but he stretched out his foot and began walking again […] Terence felt faint, but he took another step (Morris 1998, 157- 159)

The repetitive pattern and internal focalisation emphasise Terence's demonstration of perseverance and leadership – he is now guiding his mentor, Gawain, through the Other World – and construct these as ideal masculine qualities and requirements for male maturation. There is a discernible focus on the body and bodily sensations as Terence faces his trial, which requires him to fight his way across a misty lake full of dangerous creatures. Mason (2018, 97) notes that because norms for masculine embodiment "prioritize physical strength, mastery, and competence", men need to learn "to trust in their bodies as sturdy, capable, and effective" so that, ultimately, they can act "with as little regard for the body as possible". The above-quoted passage, focusing on Terence's demonstration of physical resilience, serves as a poignant example of this.

The end of the first novel sees Terence act on his own accord and without hesitation, riding out on his master's horse to gather information that could help save the king. He initially refuses Gawain's request to join him, to which the knight responds: "No, Terence. I know that this is your task, beyond my strength. But let me go as your escort. When we arrive, I'll do what you say." (Morris 1998, 197) The role reversal seems to have been completed. When Terence is suddenly attacked by a knight, however, "Gawain step[s] between them and parrie[s] the blow", while his squire stands by, "hardly able to breathe, as the sound of steel on steel continue[s] behind him" (Ibid., 199). Gawain defeats the knight with strength, while Terence helps in his own way, pushing over the magic concoction created by Morgause to destroy Arthur. In the process, Terence burns his hand, a wound that is later tended to by his magical friend, a sprite from the Other World. As Kenneth Hodges (2009, 14) explains,

> injuries are integral to [chivalric] masculinity as it is practiced and celebrated. Wounds not only provide meaning to knightly combats but also educate young knights. […] Thus, although obviously not desirable in and of themselves, the wounds are necessary for the narrative and part of the chivalric ideal of manhood.

Although Terence's wound does not stem from combat, it nevertheless serves as an initiation ritual into the knightly community, evidenced in the rewards he is presented with following his active part in the king's safekeeping, which led to the injury: he discovers his father's identity, Gawain shares a glass of wine with him – a gesture otherwise reserved for accomplished knights – and King

Arthur bows to him as an equal. In Bly's *Iron John*, the fundamental text of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, the boy protagonist's injury "symbolizes that there is no growth, no change, without pain" (Clatterbaugh 2018, 101). Terence similarly grows through injury and pain.

Terence's growth and gradual alignment with 'deep' masculinity ideals becomes even clearer in the second novel, which provides the protagonist with a noblewoman as love interest and sees him outshine both Gawain and Lancelot in terms of chivalric performance. In the first chapter, the reader encounters Terence "cho[osing] Gawain's court clothes, press[ing] them with a hot iron, and polish[ing] Gawain's black leather boots" (Morris 1999, 7). While these are common squire's tasks, they gain a different meaning in connection to a later passage, in which Terence tells Gawain off for wanting to fight despite a severe injury. Gawain promises not to fight "unless things start to go bad for Arthur", to which Terence reluctantly agrees. Gawain's reply is significant: "Thank you, Mother" (Ibid., 18). The knight's sarcastic comment implicitly references Terence's caring and nurturing characteristics that align him with the feminine. On their otherworldly quest to find the Green Chapel, however, Terence becomes more and more distanced from this feminised role.[113] When Gawain is about to be attacked, Terence intervenes, receiving immediate praise from his master, who later compliments his squire: "[Y]ou're the best archer I've ever seen. I'm depending on you to protect me." (Ibid., 71)

According to Gawain, Terence's "only weakness" is his "unwillingness to attack" (Morris 1999, 59). Indeed, on their quest to find the Green Chapel, the squire spares a man's life in battle. However, he later kills a hoard of enchanted boars to protect Lady Eileen:

> For Terence, what followed was a dizzying whirl of instinctive reactions. He felt no pain or fear, made no plans, thought no thoughts, but simply existed in a stretch of clearheaded, tireless action that could have lasted for seconds or for hours. When it was over, he remembered battering boar after boar with his axe […] he remembered throwing himself into a charging boar and knocking it sprawling just before it could hit Eileen […] A wave of dizziness rushed over him, and he leaned against the well for support. (Ibid., 121-122)

Terence's desire to protect Eileen, it seems, allows him to meet risk and danger bravely, to *retrieve*, instinctively, the masculine strength and skills necessary for the task, and to temporarily ignore his nonviolent nature. The boy is, again, immediately rewarded with Gawain's praise: "Good Gog, Terence. […] If I don't have you knighted for, I'll… Good Gog, Terence." (Ibid., 122)[114] Gawain appears in awe and almost speechless at Terence's feat, demonstrating approval for his squire's actions. As in the previous volume, Terence suffers an injury, this time during physical combat with an enchanted beast. He is cared for not by the sprite, but by Lady Eileen, who thanks Terence

[113] This is the same quest that sees Terence cross-dress to rescue Gawain and then 'shed his femininity' in literal and metaphorical terms, as discussed in the previous section.
[114] The expression "Good Gog" is used several times throughout the series, usually as an expression of surprise comparable to "Good God".

for "saving [her] life" (Ibid., 126).[115] Later, the reader witnesses Terence use his sword to protect the lady from another beastly creature, "intend[ing] to defend Eileen to the death" (Ibid., 177). He significantly aids Gawain in his trials and is ultimately rewarded with Eileen's love, a banquet in his honour, and the title "Sir Terence, Knight of the Island, Duke of Avalon", bestowed upon him by his faery father. Additionally, Gawain marries Lorie, Terence's half-sister, a union that strengthens the homosocial bond between knight and squire even more as "his master and best friend was now also his brother-in-law. Terence suddenly had a family, a best friend, and a beloved lady who returned his love" (Ibid., 189). The spiritual men's movement is indebted to Carl Jung, believing in the philosopher's argument that "men start life as whole persons but […] lose their unity and become fragmented" (Clatterbaugh 2018, 96). Only once men "probe the archetypes buried in their unconscious" will they achieve "a state of wholeness and psychospiritual health" (Ibid.). Viewed in this light, Terence has not only achieved 'deep' masculinity, but spiritual unity.

Mythopoetic Men's Movement voices lament that "masculinity is currently an unhealthy, spiritually limiting manifestation of ancestral archetypes" (Clatterbaugh 2018, 103). The otherworldly quests, I argue, counter this, helping Terence establish a seemingly healthier, 'deep' masculinity. Morris creates an alternative realm that is separate from courtly culture and chivalric ideals; a space that enables males to move past the superficial masculinity celebrated at Camelot.[116] Otherworlds are "at one and the same time narrative devices and the repositories of everything 'we' lack and are not, and of everything 'we' would like to have and to be"; they are a place where "acquisitive and utopian longings" can find expression (Rider 2000, 129; 120). The contrast with the frame world is crucial (Mendlesohn 2008, 21). Indeed, in the *Squire's Tale* series, the Other World serves to correct both the superficial masculinity of Camelot and contemporary traditional masculinity, replacing it with a vision of 'deep' masculinity that is aligned with spiritual men's movement ideas. The Other World becomes what Saunders (1993, xii) terms a "solipsistic inner world" that is entered by the protagonist, and wherefrom, through overcoming turmoil and tests, he emerges changed and matured.

The superiority of the Other World, however, is undermined, as maturity and manhood also need to be demonstrated in the World of Men, and in adherence to the tenets of Camelot's normative masculinity. At a tournament in Gawain's honour, Terence – now knighted in the Other World but still a squire in the human realm – is persuaded to participate and fight Sir Lancelot

115 In Malory's *Morte*, healing creates bonds and provides "opportunities for men to talk, to rely on each other, and to be at peace together" (Hodges 2009, 28). Indeed, the period of Terence and Gawain's healing in Eileen's company is described as "an idyllic time, spent telling stories and playing games" (Morris 1999, 126). Gawain, however, decides not to join Terence and Eileen on their long rides in the woods, thereby providing the two with an opportunity to bond and fall in love.

116 As a reminder, the quest that ultimately exonerates Lancelot in Morris's series also takes place in the Other World.

(anonymously). Terence rides into the ring in "a brilliant suit of armor, shining like gold", carrying a child's lance, for which he is jeered at by the audience who accuse him of "mock[ing] the noble institution of knighthood" (Morris 1999, 220-225). He defeats Lancelot with the child's lance and is now hailed as the Greatest Knight of England. It seems that, after all, verifying one's maturity and established manhood means proving oneself in terms of martial skills – although it is suggested that wit rather than physicality determines Terence's victory. Notably, the tournament ends with "Eileen gaz[ing] with adoration at her knight, the Duke of Avalon […] silently mouth[ing] the words, 'Well done, my love.'" (Ibid., 229) The protagonist's journey in the standard romance plot usually ends with his "marriage to a beautiful, noble woman" (Vines 2014, 167) and his establishment in a masculine social identity that is "aligned with his society's construction of ideal masculinity" (Cohen and Interscripta 1996, 8). It is safe to say that Morris adheres to this pattern. Indeed, Terence's tournament victory confirms his new status as knight and lover.

One pattern that Morris's narrative seems to disrupt is that of traditional male maturation. Well into middle adulthood, Terence refuses the title of knighthood in the World of Men, preferring to retain the lower, subservient position of squire: "[A]lthough he was older than the next oldest squire present by at least ten years, he was still one of them, in the service of King Arthur's nephew Gawain." (Morris 2009, 3) Historically, there is proof of squires refusing to be knighted, although this was largely for financial reasons (Taylor 2014, 64). In the *Squire's Tale* series, the purpose of Terence's refusal of knighthood could be the need to continuously present a youthful protagonist who is closer to the implied reader's age – indeed, the narrative repeatedly emphasises how Terence never seems to age[117] – or to support the virtues of service and selflessness explicitly celebrated in the series.[118] The refusal of worldly knighthood can further be interpreted as a revision of the dominance and power scripts that are central to both contemporary traditional masculinity and medieval chivalric ideals. Viewed from this perspective, Morris's series can be said to deconstruct what Mallan (2001, 9) calls "the need among men to be recognised and accepted as men".

Speaking of Malory's Gareth, Gubbels maintains that "choosing to take on roles well below their social status [is] an abnormal or queer decision in and of itself" (2016, 111). Terence's refusal

[117] An argument could also be made against the interpretation of maintaining youthfulness as the purpose for Terence's refusal of knighthood, because some scenes clearly portray Terence as an adult, contrasting him with younger characters. For example, in the second-to-last volume, "Terence reminded himself that [Sarah] was still young. Young people sometimes place excessive value on external forms and ceremonies" (Morris 2009, 23). Later in the same text, Terence is frustrated that a boy was sent out on a mission by himself – he "shook his head. It didn't seem like a job for a youth" (Ibid., 80).

[118] As Terence's hermit foster father tells him at the very start of the series, "You will find your greatest glory in service." (Morris 1998, 15) Selflessness ad concern for others are conventional Christian values and crucial elements of *pastoral masculinity*, which valorises service (Bracher 2015, 113). The celebration of values constituting such a type of masculinity is not surprising considering Morris's background as theology teacher and pastor.

of knighthood – involving a rejection of domination – could therefore be interpreted as a move away from a privileged, closed masculinity. However, it can also be viewed as a means to highlight the inferior status of Camelot-based knights and men compared to those questing in the Other World, where Terence indeed achieves the title of knight early on. Because Terence has the approval of 'real' men such as Gawain and King Arthur, he does not need to be recognised as knightly or manly by Camelot's court dandies. While Terence's decision to remain a squire may obstruct his 'official' passage into manhood, confining him to an 'in-between place' in the World of Men, this does not bother him. He feels secure in his self-identity, finding confidence in the traditionally masculine purpose of protecting others – Eileen, Gawain, King Arthur – "[b]ecause to serve my friends is who I am. Not to do so is to deny myself. You called me the Duke of Avalon: do not do so again. I am more than that. I am Terence." (Morris 2009, 230) Titles, it appears, are irrelevant. Morris thus very conventionally presents knighthood and manhood as determined by chivalric and manly behaviour, by "morals and character rather than class" (Lupack and Lupack 2016, 16). While the *Squire's Tale* series almost exclusively focuses on the nobility, behaviour is continuously emphasised over social status. It is only at the very end of the second-to-last volume that Terence acquires 'official' manhood in the World of Men, through his now-public betrothal to Eileen and Arthur's conference of knighthood upon him, a moment that highlights the 'behaviour-over-title' paradigm: "Today I make a knight. No, today I recognize as knight one who has been one for years." (Morris 2009, 271)

Besides supporting the superiority of otherworldly, 'deep' masculinity, I contend that Terence's rejection or delayed acceptance of knighthood in the World of Men reflects a nostalgic desire for eternal boyhood, a central aspect of the spiritual men's movement. As Kimmel and Kaufman (1995, 36) explain: "The search for the deep masculine is actually a search for lost boyhood, that homosocial innocence of pre-adolescence […]. It is an effort to turn back the clock to that time before work and family responsibilities yanked men away from their buddies, from a world of fun." While both Terence and Gawain get married early on, their marital life, roles as husbands, or desire to start a family are not addressed.[119] Their marriage does not confine them to feminised private spheres, and their public duties are not undermined – quests and the future of Camelot and Arthur are prioritised over happy marital life in the Other World. Kimmel and Kaufman write that "part of the yearning for the past is a nostalgia for a past that did not completely

[119] It transpires later on that Gawain has fathered a boy with another woman prior to meeting his wife. Now grown up, this boy is the protagonist of volume eight, *The Quest of the Fair Unknown* (2006). The boy's quest to find his father, at the centre of this novel, would also prove interesting to read in terms of the Mythopoetic Men's Movement and its focus on "the search for lost fathers (and father figures)" (Kimmel and Kaufman 1993, 4). Terence does not father any children. Moss writes that, in medieval times, "the fathering of legitimate offspring – that is, within the confines of marriage – was a particularly reliable way for a male to exit the youth life phase" (2013, 185). Neither Terence nor Gawain, according to this view, would be considered 'mature' males.

exist" (1995, 39). Morris creates an imagined Middle Ages, a homosocial paradise where men can be with and learn from each other, retrieving and practising their 'deep' masculinity – a 'World of Men', or a 'World of Boys', indeed. As Jessie Weston, translator of Marie de France's medieval lais wrote in 1900: "Children of a land of eternal youth, Arthur and his knights are ever young" (loc. 112-114).

In the final volume, Mordred asks Terence how many people he has killed with the knife that Gawain gifted him when he first became his squire, "when he was barely more than a child" (Morris 2010, 108). Terence replies, "None", reminding the reader of his nonviolent nature (Ibid., 101). The ending of the series, however, sees Terence, Gawain, the king, and his followers ride into battle one last time, presenting war and violence as a test of masculinity, and celebrating the homosocial bond and love between male heroes, exemplified in the following passage:

> Terence fought beyond his strength and ability, driving back men twice his size, and he was keenly aware that the rest of Arthur's men were doing the same. […] At the summit, his armor glowing with the morning sunlight, stood Gawain. Gawain raised his arm, let out a lion's roar, and charged down the hill, his great sword mowing down enemies like hay. Awed, Terence renewed his attack on his own foes, killing one and wounding another, then raced after his friend, following in his wake. "To the king! […] I'm behind you, milord!" Terence shouted.
> "Never expected anything else!" Gawain called back. (Morris 2010, 248-250)

At last, Terence has fully incorporated the violence inherent in the masculine chivalric code into his own masculine embodiment. This reluctant incorporation in stages is perhaps related to the Christian ideal of non-violence, which medieval chivalry had to rewrite to an extent in order to make the ideal compatible with the martial aspect that defines so much of a knight's identity.[120] The above scene also highlights Terence's position within the chivalric collective. One of the aims of spiritual men's movement groups, as Pulé and Hultman (2019, 32) highlight, was "to remythologize notions of masculinities, especially those of fellowship, camaraderie, service, purpose, and self-empowerment". This, I argue, is reflected in the ultimate battle and sacrifice presented in the *Squire's Tale* series, for which the heroes are generously rewarded. In medieval romance, "[t]o sacrifice one's life in some cause is seen as a transcendent experience which wins the knight immortality. […] The ideal of honor lends significance to a death which would otherwise be brutal and meaningless" (Clein 1987, 58). In the *Squire's Tale* series, immortality is indeed achieved – literally. Having died on the battlefield in the World of Men, Terence and Gawain continue their lives in the Other World, a place where they have acquired and can now continue to practice their 'deep' masculinity.

[120] While religion does not play an overt role in the series, the ideals espoused – especially service and selflessness – as well as Morris's occupation mentioned previously suggest that Christianity does play a crucial role and may have affected the portrayal of violence in the novels.

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, Morris's series exemplifies a rather conservative appropriation of the Arthurian tradition in terms of its depiction of masculinity, even in its attempt to reconfigure both chivalry and traditional masculinity norms, and to cater to a mixed-gender audience. The narrative trajectory is in keeping with expectations, so that the series is comparable to late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century children's retellings in their purpose, while also being aligned with discourses of the 1990s/early 2000s boy crisis debate and spiritual men's movement, which propose homosociality, male mentorship, and detachment from the feminine as the 'correct' way for a boy to achieve manhood. The series creates, celebrates, and glorifies a 'deep' form of masculinity that is intended to correct both medieval(ist) chivalric and contemporary normative masculinity ideals, but ultimately remains hegemonic, i.e., "at the pinnacle of the gender order" (Elliott 2016, 245), and thus located in the closed and privileged centre. As Kimmel and Kaufman (1995, 21) explain, the spiritual men's movement "assumes a deep, essential manhood, and its retrieval is the solution. Manhood is seen as a deeply seated essence, an ingrained quality awaiting activation in the social world". This 'deep' masculinity is problematic, since "the spiritual quest for authentic and deep manhood reproduces traditional norms of masculinity and femininity, [and] of heterosexuality", maintaining "the power of men over women and the power of some men over other men" (Ibid., 24; 38). While the spiritual men's movement's "authentic and deep manhood" advocates "the positive qualities of caring and nurturing" in men, the quest for this manhood is "associated with a relentless repudiation of the feminine" (Ibid., 41; 24). Hence, 'deep' masculinity' "corresponds rather neatly with our society's dominant conception of masculinity – man as warrior and conqueror" (Ibid., 25).

Terence's maturation is – in the vein of medieval romance – a tale of trials and triumphs along the path to hegemonic masculinity, the peak of which sees him established as a conventional chivalric hero who is rewarded with eternal life. The series' ten volumes seemingly present different types of heroism and heroic masculinity. As Morris explains: "I've had heroes who were squires, ladies, pages, minstrels, knights, and fools, and to be fair to the medieval world, I really needed a religious hero too." (2006, 261) However, different occupations, skills, and interests do not automatically translate to different ideals and masculine embodiments. While Morris's series may not present masculinity as monolithic, his heroic characters share an understanding of and accept the same rules and boundaries for 'appropriate' heroic masculinity. The masculinities the series presents as heroic are therefore not competing constructions of masculinity, but versions of the *Squire's Tale*'s 'deep' masculinity. McCausland (2019a) writes that in classic children's adaptations, such as those by US adapter Sidney Lanier, the medieval "represents a *tabula rasa* upon which the reader can project his ideals and desires: for the boy, an exemplary tableau of heroic masculinity; for the man, a nostalgic representation of childish freedom and adventure" (30; emphasis in original). The *Squire's Tale* series, as this chapter has shown, acts in a similar vein. In contrast to Morris's nostalgic appropriation of the legend, the narratives discussed in the following chapters complicate and problematise the male maturation process and the medieval(ist) masculine ethos in ways that suggest a more progressive engagement with contemporary and Arthurian gender(ed) codes and ideologies.

Chapter 2
"A King's Son"
Broken Masculinity, (Fe)male Suffering, and the Split Self in Nancy Springer's *I am Mordred* (1998)

> I was a king's son and I had to be a knight and a fighter. (Springer 1998, 26)

This comment by Nancy Springer's protagonist-narrator, Mordred, contains the central conflicts of masculinity that define his maturation process: the attempt (but ultimate failure) to acquire a knightly identity, and the desire to be acknowledged by his father, King Arthur. Like Morris's *Squire's Tale* series, Springer's Arthurian fantasy is set in a quasi-medieval world. In contrast, however, Springer uses retrospective first-person narration – only prologue and epilogue are presented in third-person mode with King Arthur as focaliser. This allows the reader to learn about Mordred's youth through his own words: from his humble but happy childhood as Tad, being raised by the fisher couple who had rescued him after his father, the king, had sent him out onto the water to drown, to the discovery of his true name and origin, and his subsequent entry into and ultimate rejection of knightly society. The narrative particularly focuses on Mordred's desire to be acknowledged by his father as well as his efforts to understand and participate in courtly life. Both struggles are exacerbated by his incestuous origins – he was conceived when Arthur slept with his half-sister, Morgause – and his knowledge of Merlin's prophecy claiming that he will become his own father's murderer. As the reader learns at the beginning of the novel, Mordred recounts his life story "hundreds of years later" (Springer 1998, 3), from the beak of a raven. No longer able to handle the pain caused by his perceived failure and the prophecy of parricide, Mordred decides to split his soul from his body and give it to King Arthur for safekeeping. However, before his soul, "the white moth fluttering in the night" (Ibid., 177), could reach Arthur's casket, a raven appeared, swallowing it, so that since his physical death, Mordred's soul has been confined to the bird's body.[121]

Mordred is a well-known character from the legend. Traditionally vilified, his name "is synonymous with traitor", although he was not always depicted in a negative way (Tichelaar 2010, 47). His origins lie in early Welsh literature, where he appears as Medraut/Medrawt, and is often described as "honorable and admired" man (Ibid.). Initially, there is no mention of a relationship between him and Arthur – in the *Annales Cambriae*, for instance, Mordred is simply referred to as "a British warrior who fell at Camlann" (Nastali 1999, 16). Mordred did not become a key figure in the legend until Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136), where he is Arthur's nephew. It was French romances that made him into Arthur's (incestuous) son. Springer's choice of protagonist reflects the trend in modern Arthuriana to focus on previously marginalised and/or misunderstood characters to explore their psychological motivations in order to explain their actions, and, often, rectify their role in the tradition. Figures such as Mordred are particularly interesting as there is a gap in the literature concerning their early life. As Archibald notes: "Modern writers, of course, have been fascinated by the challenge of imagining Mordred's childhood, his awareness of his destiny, and his first meeting with Arthur, exploring the complex psychology of father and son" (2019, 84). These are precisely the topics *I am Mordred* centres on.[122]

As this chapter will demonstrate, Springer's novel challenges Mordred's status as a villain, offering an intriguing psychological exploration of his inner life through a focus on the internal fragmentation of his identity. This fragmentation, I argue, requires us to view Mordred's character in terms of a split self. The split self, as Catherine Emmott explains, "is a pervasive theme in narrative texts" (2002, 153), where it can be manifested in different ways. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and in the *Back to the Future* films (1985-1990), for instance, the split is a key element of the plot, while in other texts, it "occurs at times of personal crisis" (Ibid.). The divided self can be inherent in the way the narrative is told, since retrospective first-person narratives such as Springer's "generally invoke a current self reporting on a past self and since breaks in narrative chronology (such as flashbacks) provide the means of juxtaposing

[121] Springer's novel is based on her short story, "The Raven", published in *Camelot: A Collection of Original Arthurian Stories*, edited by Jane Yolen and illustrated by Winslow Pels (1995). The story begins with Mordred's arrival at court and thus does not cover his childhood, instead focusing on his decision to split his soul from his body and the events directly leading up to this. Because of the limited scope of this dissertation, I am not able to provide a detailed comparison between short story and novel. However, a brief reference to the short story is relevant here in relation to Springer's choice of animal to hold Mordred's soul. As Yoshida (2003, n.p.) explains, "[i]n the early Celtic legends, Morgana le Fay was originally a war goddess, known as Morrigan or Morrigu, who temporarily took the form of a raven". The short story includes a reference to this, with King Arthur telling Mordred: "[Your soul] will be safe enough in that raven, I think. […] I seem to remember that one of the old gods took shape of a raven. The druids would invoke its blessing before battle." (Springer 1995, 150).

[122] Other YA Arthurian adaptations that engage with Mordred's story and focus on these themes include Elizabeth E. Wein's *The Winter Prince* (1993) and *The Book of Mordred* by Vivian Vande Velde (2005).

different versions of an individual at different points in time" (Ibid., 153-154). More generally, the split self can be viewed as a reflection of "the sense of fragmentation of identity in postmodern society" (Ibid.), evident in *I am Mordred.* The protagonist's split self and suffering are particularly ubiquitous in relation to his feelings towards and (desired) relationship with his father, King Arthur, who can also be viewed in terms of the split self: focalised through his character, the prologue and epilogue highlight the mounting tensions between the king's private and public masculine selves – a theme central in medieval romance that is played out differently in Springer's novel. As I will argue in this chapter, *I am Mordred* presents the medieval Arthurian world as a society that demands a particular way of being male that is both internally and externally harmful. The knightly male subjectivities this society produces are either stable but excessively violent and unethical, or fragmented and suffering.

It is important at this point to distinguish my use of the split self from the idea of the double[123], which also plays a crucial role in Springer's narrative. In her work on the dialogic representation of subjectivity in adolescent fiction, McCallum (1999) examines quest narratives that make use of a double/*doppelgänger* to represent the split subject and explore "the idea that a sense of personal identity is shaped by an other" (69-70). Doubles of different types are present throughout the Arthurian tradition.[124] They "exist in terms of each other, mutually defining each other in the manner of other dualistic pairs of our thinking: good vs. evil, strength vs. weakness, reason vs. intuition, body vs. soul, male vs. female, day vs. night, or truth vs. falsehood" (Welsh 1990, 348).[125] In *I am Mordred*, the double, or Other, is the protagonist's father, who, I argue, serves as Mordred's counterpart, "a mirror inversion of the subject which is located externally" (Ibid., 76) and against whom the protagonist-narrator defines himself. For the purpose of my analysis, I therefore understand the split self as *internal* fragmentation and the double as *external* Other in the form of another character.

[123] The double motif is a common storytelling device. Broadly speaking, the term 'double' "can mean almost any dual, and in some cases even multiple, structure in a text" (Hallam 1981, 5). In its most superficial form, the double can be a copy of the self – the traditional *doppelgänger.* The double can also be a composite character, i.e., two psychologically incomplete individuals who "'fit together' like pieces of a puzzle" such as Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote and Sancho (Ibid.). Or it can be a Jungian "Incomplete Self", such as the protagonist-narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846). The double can be internal, external, or ambiguous; it can be intimidating and threatening to the 'original' or "transform it and extend its boundaries" (Dorfman 2020, *Introduction*).

[124] Examples where doubling is signalled by two characters bearing (nearly) identical names include Balin and Balan and the two Isoldes in the Tristan romances; the *Mabinogion* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* also use doubles to express meaning (Welsh 1990, 349; Hallam 1981, 9).

[125] Such dualistic pairs are central to Springer's narrative, and so are doubles and split selves, which is also suggested in the novel's four-part structure: "The White Shadow", referring to Mordred's brachet, Gull, who is a split self of his female mentor, Nyneve; "The White Stag", who, chased by black hounds, stands for King Arthur being threatened by his enemies; "The White Falcon", who is another split self of Nyneve protecting her husband, Pelleas; and, finally, "The Raven", referring to the animal in which Mordred's soul resides.[125] A dualism is also present in relation to Mordred's feelings about the prophecy: The protagonist's worry about his destined evilness is repeatedly contrasted with his belief in his innocence.

In this chapter I argue that *I am Mordred* breaks with the conventions of medieval romance and contemporary YA coming-of-age narratives in three distinct ways, all related to the split self and the external double. These three aspects guide the structure of the chapter. Firstly, in place of male mentorship and homosociality – core elements of Morris's adaptation – Springer provides her protagonist with a female guide, thus revising the homosocial ethos of medieval romance, challenging contemporary male guidance scripts, and drawing the protagonist closer to the feminine. The split self is reflected in Mordred's relationships with his mentor, Nyneve, and his foil, Morgan le Fay; it is revealed in the protagonist's closeness to and distancing from the feminine, as well as in the juxtaposition between the experiencing and narrating self in terms of his reactions to lessons dispensed by females. Secondly, and again unlike Morris's *Squire's Tale* series, *I am Mordred* focuses less on traditional rites of passage, tests, and trials in the protagonist's establishment of an adult masculine identity: Mordred's knightly education is brushed over, his dubbing is only mentioned briefly, and he (largely) evades the traditional knightly tests, receiving no rewards when he does act like a 'true knight'. Mordred's psychological split self manifests itself in the tension between his desire to become a knight in order to receive his father's approval and his perception of chivalry as excessively violent and unethical. This tension is particularly ubiquitous during Mordred's quest, which sees him both reject and embrace traditional knighthood. Finally, the novel is unconventional as it portrays a protagonist who fails not only his quest but also the initiation into the adult order: having made the wrong choices and lost the struggle to fight his destiny, Mordred decides to split his soul from his body and let fate run its course. The psychological split self thus culminates in a physical split, followed by a father-son union in a mirror scene, highlighting Springer's construction of Camelot as a society in which a satisfying sense of a mature masculine self can only be achieved through conformity to the harmful hegemonic chivalric ideal, and where the effects of this ideal can only be undone after total collapse.

Relationship with Females and the Feminine

Mordred's fragmented identity, his psychologically split self, is reflected in his relationship to females and the feminine in two distinct but related ways: his closeness to and attempted distancing from females and the feminine, and the juxtaposition between experiencing and narrating self when it comes to the lessons he receives from his female mentor. In the previous chapter, I discussed Terence's hybrid masculinity combining feminine-coded with masculine-coded traits. The protagonist-narrator of *I am Mordred* is closer to the feminine, not only in his characterisation, but also through his relationship with two women of magic, Nyneve and Morgan le Fay, who, moreover, represent Mordred's split self in relation to the prophecy – his worry that he is destined to be evil and commit parricide on the one hand (supported by Morgan), and his belief in his innocence on the other (supported by Nyneve). The stories and opinions these women share with the protagonist tell of female struggles and powerlessness in a patriarchal, chivalric world – a world in which Mordred, too, lacks power, despite coming to occupy the hegemonic position of a knight. The focus on female mentorship and female suffering revises the homosocial ethos of medieval romance as well as contemporary male guidance scripts, drawing the protagonist closer to the feminine – a closeness that he tries to reject at various points in the narrative. Importantly, the lessons dispensed by his female mentor, Nyneve, are largely *ignored* by the experiencing – i.e., his younger – self. Before discussing these manifestations of Mordred's split self in relation to the female and the feminine in detail, I first describe the ways Springer aligns her protagonist with the feminine and how this relates to the Arthurian canon.

From the outset, Springer's novel presents Mordred as closely connected with the feminine. Describing an idyllic early childhood, the protagonist-narrator emphasises his loving relationship with the fisherwoman he believed to be his mother. This reflects a significant change from the tradition. In the Post-Vulgate *Suite de Merlin* (c.1230-1240), the first full description of Mordred's birth and survival, "[t]he ship taking the infant Mordred south from Orkney to Arthur's court is wrecked, and all are drowned except Mordred, who is found in his cradle by a fisherman and passed to a lord who raises him" (Archibald 2019, 79). This text was Malory's main source for the *Morte*'s Book I, the last chapter of which focuses on Mordred's survival. However, Malory turns the story into something darker, making Mordred the sole survivor of a ship with only infants on board – a ship that had been sent out by King Arthur, on Merlin's suggestion, for "he that should destroy [Arthur] and all the land should be born on Mayday" (1998, n.p.).[126] Malory only briefly describes Mordred's survival and skips over his childhood entirely[127]: "And so by fortune the ship drave unto a castle, and was all to-riven, and destroyed the most part save that Mordred was cast up; and a good man found him and fostered him till he was fourteen years of age, and then brought him to the court" (Ibid., n.p.). Another fourteenth- or fifteenth-century text, the poem *Awntyrs of Arthur*, refers to Mordred's early childhood, suggesting that he was "fostered in a non-noble household before coming to Arthur's court as a young man, perhaps by the fisherman who first found him in the *Suite*" (Archibald 2019, 80). Springer takes up this idea of the fisherman not only finding and saving Mordred, but also acting as his foster father. Crucially, however, she introduces the fisherman's wife, making her the primary caregiver and socialising agent during Mordred's early

[126] At this point, Arthur does not know that his own son is one of these May Day infants. Malory only reveals Mordred as Arthur's son towards the end of the *Morte* when the king makes Mordred regent, and he tries to usurp the throne and marry Guinevere.

[127] Elizabeth Archibald (2019, 78) explains that Malory meant to expand on his sources, which do not describe Mordred's upbringing and arrival at court, but eventually decided against it, "without any explanation or formal expression of retraction".

years, thereby aligning his childhood – and the positive memories linked to it – with the feminine from the very start.

Positive associations with the feminine are also generated in the novel through symbolism. I argue that, in *I am Mordred*, the feminine is encoded in the landscape. Depicted in Morris's series as a typically chivalric, masculine space where Terence feels at home, in Springer's narrative the forest is portrayed in terms of isolation, danger, and discomfort. [128] Contrastingly, Springer's protagonist-narrator regularly refers to the sea in positive – and, crucially, feminine – terms. In medieval romances, the sea is "synonymous with journeying" (McKinstry 2019, 10)[129]. In *I am Mordred*, however, it serves as a symbol for the domestic: "[T]he sea breathed marvels in my ear, and in my sleep I dreamed sometimes that the waves rocked me in their watery arms" (Springer 1998, 5). It can also be seen as symbolic of the womb: "I was a gift from Lyr. The sea was my father and my mother" (Ibid.). The sea is even postulated as an enemy to knights and their manhood: returning to his childhood home as *Sir* Mordred, the protagonist "discover[s] why knights seldom rode so near to the sea: The damp air rusts armor within a few days" (Ibid., 104). Armour is, of course, "the distinguishing mark of a knight" (Nickel 1995, 3), demonstrating his hegemonic status – a status that would be diminished by decaying gear.

In contrast to the feminine sea, which provides comfort to Mordred, the forest causes him to feel isolated and in danger. As discussed in the previous chapter, the forest is usually "the focal point of the knight's existence", a limen "offering to the hero the means of embodying chivalry and of fulfilling his role as a knight" (Saunders 1993, 80). *I am Mordred*'s protagonist-narrator describes the forest using terms connoting danger, such as darkness, dread, night, chill, shadow, and wilderness. In medieval romance, the forest is traditionally "a landscape of threatening uncertainty" (McCausland 2019a, 34). However, it is also a place of "delight, adventure and escape", a threshold to quests that lead to the knight's "achievement of honour" (Saunders 1993, 44, ix). In *I am Mordred*, the forest retains its meaning as a threshold space, marking the end of the protagonist's idyllic childhood and subsequent entry into courtly society where he will find isolation instead of glory: "That was the day the world closed in on me, dim and glass – green and labyrinthine, and – though I did not know it then – it was the world in which I would ride for the

128 The literary forest is, of course, a multidimensional realm, incorporating, as Saunders (1993, ix) notes, "the themes of adventure, love, and spiritual vision". Even within a single period such as the Middle Ages, the forest's "symbolism shifts and alters, functioning in complex and varying ways", which is "reflected in the variation between individual texts" (Ibid., xii-xiii). For a detailed analysis of the forest in medieval romance, see Saunders (1993).

129 In the *Squire's Tale* series, water serves as a threshold to the Other World, where Terence succeeds in his tasks and trials. In the *Arthur Trilogy*, discussed in the subsequent chapter, the sea is a symbol for journeying, as the protagonist joins the crusade. In *Here Lies Arthur*, examined in Chapter 4, the sea is mentioned at the end of the novel as a path to a better world, again highlighting the 'journey' aspect. In these texts, water and the sea are used in a more traditional sense.

rest of my life." (Springer 1998, 10) Mordred even compares being in the forest to imprisonment: "[T]he trees rose so high and so thick that instead of a sweep of sunlit blue, instead of the vast sky of the seaside that used to cup me like a god's hand, I could see only a dim and distant circle, like a dusty window in a tower." (Ibid., 38) Mordred's preference for feminine-coded spaces is confirmed later on, when he becomes a frequent visitor of Guinevere's garden, "a peaceful place […] full of order and symmetry, quite unlike the twisted wilderness outside the castle walls" (Springer 1998, 82). These passages reveal a stark contrast to Morris's *Squire's Tale* series, where the protagonist feels at home in the woods, thriving within a largely homosocial environment.

Mordred's idyllic childhood, characterised by a closeness to the feminine, is cut short due to the arrival of a woman who, revealing his true name to him, takes the boy to the residence of his biological mother, Queen Morgause. There, Mordred meets his half-brothers and King Lothe, whom he initially believes to be his biological father. The sorceress who takes Mordred to Lothian will become his closest friend and mentor: Nyneve of Avalon. Whereas Morris's *Squire's Tale* series highlights the role of male mentorship and homosociality in the protagonist's maturation process, Springer foregrounds female guidance. The choice of Mordred's primary mentor is particularly revealing. Kaufman (2007, 56) describes Nyneve as "an exception to every rule for women in romance". Arthurian scholars have indeed highlighted the importance and power of her character, particularly in Malory's *Morte*: Hodges (2002, 83) discusses Nyneve as a chivalric character whose actions, at times, resemble those of knights, demonstrating how "[s]trong women can […] act as chivalric agents", not only exhibiting behaviour "suitable for a knight", but even transforming chivalric values; Kaufman (2007, 57) compares Nyneve's rule over the Lake, "an organization of women with power and political influence", to Arthur's rule over Camelot; and Bovaird-Abbo (2014, 36-37) views Malory's Nyneve as a "female hero": "[w]hile she first appears as a passive female in need of rescue, she quickly transforms into a powerful and independent force who becomes the rescuer of many male figures, including King Arthur himself". Nyneve thus seems to be a suitable 'feminist role model' for Springer's narrative, in which she is presented as powerful, knowledgeable, understandable, and kind – and indeed the only person trying to help Mordred believe in free will and agency in constructing his masculine subjectivity.

Another female figure comes to play an important role in Mordred's life, acting as both teacher and foil: Morgan le Fay, who serves as a double to Nyneve, not just in *I am Mordred*, but in the tradition more generally. Bovaird-Abbo explains that Morgan and Nyneve can be viewed "as two sides of a single coin", although their motivations differ to a great extent: while Nyneve is considering "the greater good", Morgan le Fay acts selfishly (2014, 46; 44). Kaufman (2007, 56), however, notes that "[t]hough Nyneve is sometimes friendly to Arthur and his knights, she is equally liable to act in her own interest. She can be beneficent, but she can also be selfish, ruthless, desiring, and capricious". In *I am Mordred*, Nyneve takes Mordred away from the fisher couple to keep him safe from Morgan le Fay; the latter, however, believes that Nyneve only wants to prove Merlin and his prophecy wrong, and is thus acting selfishly. The doubling is particularly evident in terms of fate and choice, with Morgan trying to prove the power of the former, while Nyneve repeatedly attempts to convince the protagonist that "[i]t is up to you, Mordred, what will become of you" (Springer 1998, 86). In this sense, the two females represent Mordred's split self in relation to the prophecy – his worry that he is destined to be evil and commit parricide on the one hand, and his belief in his innocence on the other. While Morgan teaches Mordred about fate and scrying[130] – the ability to see other places and people in reflective surfaces, a skill usually only possessed by women – Nyneve remains his primary guide in terms of moral education.

Within the Arthurian tradition, Nyneve takes on two prominent functions. Firstly, Malory elevates Nyneve (among other noblewomen) to the role of judge/adjudicator of knighthood, profoundly altering her character from his sources "to reinforce female authority as the voice of verdict in an otherwise patriarchal system" (Kaufman 2007, 61). Through testing Arthur and his knights, Nyneve highlights and rectifies the shortcomings of the Round Table, ultimately "redefining knighthood as a service to women" (Ibid., 62).[131] Nyneve's second function is the guiding of knights. Indeed, in some versions of the legend, she appears as a female *educator*. Human female educators are often devalued in romance and mocked for their "maternal attempts to rear a boy away from the perils of warrior culture". In various medieval texts, maternal tutelage "can create a *dümmling* role for the young hero, something to be corrected by masculine guidance" (Phillips 2012, 88; emphasis in original). This is exemplified most prominently in the Perceval romances. *Fantastic* female tutors such as Nyneve – who is often also the Lady of the Lake – fare better in terms of their portrayal but are nonetheless rarely considered suitable and sufficient for the upbringing of a knight-to-be.[132]

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[130] Indeed, the way Mordred learns scrying from Morgan le Fay is reminiscent of the episodes in *Mists of Avalon* where Morgaine practises 'the Sight' with the Lady of the Lake.

[131] This is illustrated in the hart and the brachet quest that sees Gawain, Torre, and Pellinore return to Camelot with the lesson that it is a knight's task to protect women's bodies and sovereignty, which ultimately leads to the "ladies clause" being added to the Pentecostal Oath (Kaufman 2007).

[132] The thirteenth-century Prose *Lancelot*, as contained in the Old French Vulgate Cycle (c.1210-1230), is comprised of *L'Estoire del Saint Graal*, *L'Estoire de* Merlin, and the Prose *Lancelot*, the latter consisting of three parts: the *Lancelot* proper, the *Queste del Saint Graal*, and the *Mort Artu*. The *Lancelot* proper relays the eponymous hero's childhood and youth, his education and coming of age, dealing with the question of who should dispense chivalrous education (Suard 1994, 70). In this text, the young eponymous hero receives instructions about chivalry from the Lady of the Lake, who explains to him the qualities of the ideal knight (Sullivan 2015, 9). As Suard (1994, 70) notes, the fact that a woman "gives Lancelot a splendid lesson in chivalry […] raises questions about traditional education", i.e., education dispensed by men, which is not completely negated in the Prose *Lancelot*: Contrary to the protagonist, his cousins, Bors and Lionel, "waste away under the protection of Ninianne", remaining reliant on male tutelage (Ibid.). Lancelot also receives a male teacher, but the tutelage ends after a dispute, and the Lady of the Lake takes over his education entirely. In the Prose *Lancelot*, therefore, "the hero of love is associated with women" from birth, while "men are prominent by their absence" (Calin 1994 cited in Mainer 2010, 194).

I am Mordred associates the protagonist and his (moral) education predominantly with (magical) women. Nyneve's stories and lessons on power dynamics, hierarchies, and inequalities are given more narrative attention than the protagonist's training in knightly skills – Mordred only briefly summarises his knightly education at Lothian by means of a few anecdotes: he remembers being hit by King Lothe, losing to Garet when they were sparring with swords, and being struck by Gawain during a lesson on letters. This challenges literary male maturation conventions and demonstrates the importance of female guidance in Mordred's development. Although she is not continuously by his side, Nyneve remains a constant presence, also in the form of Gull, the white brachet she gifts Mordred at the beginning of his time at Lothian. The brachet, as it appears in Malory – albeit in a different context – can be read as "an avatar of the divine feminine, especially of Diana" (Kaufman 2007, 58), a figure that Nyneve is frequently linked to in the tradition. The brachet is also interesting in terms of the split self, as it is Nyneve's spirit protecting Mordred. Similarly, Nyneve provides her husband, Pelleas, with a white falcon that contains part of herself. While these animals do not provide guidance or advice, they offer emotional support to Mordred and Pelleas when Nyneve cannot be with them, and, as such, represent female power and protection.

In relation to Nyneve's mentorship of Mordred, a crucial aspect is its contrasting reception by the protagonist's experiencing and narrating self. As noted earlier, with the exception of prologue and epilogue, *I am Mordred* is told by a homodiegetic narrator – Mordred – who, retrospectively, talks about events he experienced hundreds of years earlier. The retrospective personal narrator "has his own, subjective point of view", but "because of the duality of the subject, [can also] adopt the point of view of the hero, his earlier incarnation" (Edmiston 1989, 730). The passage of time "creates a refraction of the subject into the experiencing self and the narrating self", which are defined by temporal, spatial, cognitive, and emotive differences (Ibid., 738). The narrating self has greater knowledge – knowledge that he can "choose to suppress", thus "allow[ing] the hero to focalize, which results in a 'hyper-restriction'" (Ibid., 731). While he can "limit himself to the perceptions of his younger self", the retrospective first-person narrator "is not, however, restricted to those perceptions and he enjoys certain spatial and cognitive advantages resulting from his temporal distance. He therefore often says more than his younger self knew at the moment of experience" (Ibid., 732). The distinction between dissonant and consonant narrators is important here:

> A dissonant narrator views his younger self retrospectively, often distancing himself from past ignorance and delusions while providing a great deal of subsequent knowledge. A consonant narrator, by contrast, draws no attention to his hindsight and identifies with his younger incarnation by renouncing all cognitive privilege. (Ibid., 733)

Although *I am Mordred* focuses on and thus offers more psychological access to the experiencing self, narrative distance and cognitive privilege are emphasised at various points in the narrative, for instance through phrases such as "I think now", "I did not yet feel", "I could not yet think", "at the time I thought", and, more subtly, through the use of the verb "think" in present rather than past tense. Indeed, the issue of temporal distance is addressed early on: "It is instructive, looking back now that I am no longer mortal, instructive and curious to remember how it was to be happy" (Springer 1998, 6).

I argue that, at times, there is a distinct dissonance between Mordred-the-focaliser – i.e., his younger self – and Mordred-the-narrator. While young Mordred pays little attention to Nyneve's stories and lessons, craving primarily friendship and closeness, the narrating self demonstrates some awareness and understanding of these. As outlined above, Nyneve performs two main functions in medieval Arthurian texts: judge of knight- and manhood and educator of knights-to-be. These are also her functions in Springer's *I am Mordred*, although in adapted form. In her conversations with the young protagonist, Nyneve critiques patriarchal and masculinist ideals, thereby unmasking – albeit not changing – the flawed ideologies of knightly society. She particularly highlights female suffering under chivalry and patriarchy with the apparent aim of teaching Mordred to develop empathy for women, and, more generally, the powerless. These lessons are not heeded by the younger self, who seems to be too predisposed in his opinions, informed by the society he lives in. For example, Nyneve tells Mordred of King Arthur's conception, how his father, Uther, had "seized Igraine" (Springer 1998, 34).[133] While this story is summarised by Mordred rather than told to the reader by Nyneve, the narrative then switches to direct speech, as she tells the protagonist: "It is a hard thing to be a woman, Mordred […] and unjust." (Ibid.) Although Mordred does wonder whether Nyneve herself "had ever been seized by a man against her will" (Ibid.), his response to Nyneve's next story demonstrates a clear lack of empathy on the part of his younger self. When Nyneve informs Mordred of his own conception, noting how King Arthur "behaved as might have befitted a king of druid times" in his seduction of Morgause, Mordred responds: "'It is a hard thing to be a woman,' I echoed Nyneve sardonically, for I, also, was trying to be a man." (Ibid., 35) The lesson of female suffering, it seems, has entirely bypassed the experiencing self, who mocks his mentor in his reply.

Nyneve later repeats the statement, "it is a hard thing to be a woman", in her reply to Mordred's inquiry about why Morgan le Fay wishes King Arthur dead, trying to create empathy

[133] The majority of Arthurian retellings for children avoid describing Uther's 'seizing' of Igraine to demonstrate the 'honourableness' of Arthur's father and make the king's birth legitimate instead of stemming from a violent, adulterous encounter. Springer's narrative stands out in that it does not brush over rape, even using the word explicitly in relation to Sir Torre's conception (Springer 1998, 78).

for the sorceress, who "could have been our blessed liege King Morgan had she only been born a man" (Ibid., 134). Mordred's experiencing self, influenced by his contemporaries' societal views, finds the idea of a woman as leader laughable, responding accordingly: "And I could have been an eagle to fly away from here had I only been born with wings." (Ibid.) At this response, Nyneve scowls and explains, "You of all men should understand. You have felt yourself to be a chattel of your so-called fate; is not a woman a chattel of her low estate? Morgan le Fay rules her hand as ably as any lord in the realm, but King Arthur will not title her or admit her to his council" (Ibid.). Even after his mentor emphasises Mordred's own powerlessness in relation to female suffering, the younger self shows no empathy: "But King Arthur was right. The idea of titling a woman was laughable. 'Why, what would he call her? Lord Morgan?'" (Ibid.) Nyneve responds by asking, "[a]nd for what did you come here? To speak with me?", making Mordred realise that "I needed her – a woman – to be my ally" (Ibid., 135). Nevertheless, Mordred feels anger rather than empathy for his mentor. While he himself does not embody hegemonic masculinity – due to his incestuous origins, he is considered 'unnatural', and therefore unable to represent the 'highest masculine ideal' – he is complicit in retaining the hegemonic status quo, embodying a masculinity that is firmly located in the privileged centre, a position from which he seems unable and/or unwilling to escape.

In the above-cited and similar passages, Springer postulates an ideal reader who would recognise the opinions held by young Mordred-the-focaliser as out-dated and perpetuating gender inequality. Presented with the judgments of the knowledgeable, positively portrayed adult mentor as well as with the views of Mordred's young, naïve self, readers are invited to arrive at their own conclusions. Crucially, the retrospective narration allows the reader to access another position: the protagonist's narrating self, which, compared to the experiencing self, demonstrates a heightened awareness and understanding of Nyneve's lessons on patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and female suffering. For example, in the following passage, Mordred-the-narrator clearly mirrors Nyneve's view about Morgan, many pages before the earlier-quoted scene: "Folk said she was wicked. Assuredly she did wicked things. But *I think now* that she was not evil, but a bold-hearted woman bitter because there was no place for her." (Springer 1998, 20; emphasis added) Further, the fact that Mordred-the-narrator is speaking to the reader "from the wind with a raven's black tongue" (Ibid., 3) demonstrates that, although he was not born with wings, Mordred does indeed now "fly like an eagle" (Ibid., 134) – something his younger self had considered as impossible as the existence of a female leader.

Nyneve's mentorship as well as Morgan's role in Mordred's life closely align him with the feminine. However, Springer's protagonist is acutely aware that this identification with and closeness to the feminine is unusual and undesirable in a society that privileges masculinity and has a clear, narrow definition of ideal manhood. Consequently, Mordred explicitly tries to distance himself from the feminine. For example, he stops practicing scrying when he discovers that "it was the magic of ladies and matrons, those who have no power but to know secrets. Folks called me a coward; I did not want them calling me a woman" (Ibid., 112). This passage demonstrates the devaluation of females and shows that Mordred's behaviour and self-perception are continuously influenced by how others (may) view him, which also leads the boy to attempt a distancing from Nyneve. When she tells him of her planned departure to Avalon, Mordred "said nothing, knowing that I would be like a pennon blowing in the wind without her. Yet – yet it might be better if I depended less on her advice. Folk looked down on a man who listened too much to a woman" (Ibid., 85-86). Instances like these demonstrate the impact of social norms and expectations on boys' behaviour and gender performance, contrasting internal feelings – he needs Nyneve – with external pressures – others will consider him unmanly. Later, the protagonist repeats the sentiment reflected in the quote above, now relating his attempted detachment from Nyneve to age, maturity, and societal status: "I did not tell Nyneve […] for I would no longer be a child and tell everything. I was a knight now and I would find my own way." (Ibid., 134) Through this distancing, Mordred desperately tries to remain in the privileged centre.

Irrespective of whether the protagonist's younger self heeds Nyneve's lessons and tries to distance himself from his female advisor and his feminine-coded skills, the prominence of females as focalised[134] characters allows readers to contemplate women's positions and agencies, while the focus on female guidance problematises the patriarchal order as well as the hegemonic chivalric ideal. Writing on Chinese coming-of-age novels, Lisa Chu Shen (2018, 295) explains that the heterosocial bonding reflected in the relationship between a male protagonist and his female mentor "disturbs the popular conception of male comradeship, guidance and homosocial bonding, which underlie masculinity and patriarchal relations of power", hence complicating a narrative's gender politics. Crucially, the foregrounding of "female wisdom and mentorship" within a coming-of-age narrative "challenges the prevalent association of intellect with masculinity" and can open up possibilities "for female agency and power", even if the female mentor is portrayed as nurturing (Ibid., 294-295). The portrayal of female mentors also complicates what Howey (2015a, 41) terms the "binary of 'good' Arthurian patriarchy and 'evil' female power". Finally, in terms of the

[134] Nikolajeva (2003, 11) explains that narratology "forces us to differentiate who speaks (the narrator), who sees (the focalizing character, focalizer) and who is seen (the focalized character, focalizee)". Hartley-Kroeger (2011) uses this distinction in her analysis of Robert Cormier's YA novel *The Chocolate War* (1974) and Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984). She argues that in *The Chocolate War*, "women are nonparticipants in the narrator-focalizer-focalizee flow of narration, being objects contributing to how male focalizees are viewed; […] moreover, they tend to lack agency and therefore subjectivity" (Ibid., 286). In contrast, "*The House on Mango Street*, as a female-narrated, female-focalized text, is much more interested than *The Chocolate War* in looking at women as focalizees and reflecting on the subject positions they occupy, the agencies they hold" (Ibid., 280). Although *I am Mordred* is a male-narrated, male-focalized text, women are indeed often the focalised characters, allowing the reader access to their positions and agencies.

protagonist's portrayal, female mentorship can allow "for an alternative vision of the masculine", one "characterized by emotional sensitivity and empathy, which, significantly, enables and is, in turn, enabled by feminine identification" (Shen 2018, 295). In relation to Mordred, this empathy and identification is reflected in the voice of the narrating self, which gives meaning to past experiences. The protagonist's younger self is more focused on achieving his personal "Grail": being acknowledged by his father.

Father Hunger and Complicit Masculinity

Mordred's split self is particularly ubiquitous in terms of his feelings towards and (desired) relationship with his father and external Other, or *double*, King Arthur, which, I argue, lie at the core of the protagonist's struggles to develop an adult masculine identity. Typically, within the Arthurian tradition, Arthur and Mordred are inherently connected, not only through their familial ties, but also in terms of their characterisation. As Yee (2014, 4) explains, "[n]either character can exist without the other; each defines the other in key ways", so that "readers' or viewers' assessment of Arthur's and Mordred's ethics depends on a comparison between them". Crucially, their characters are defined in terms of polarisation: "[t]heir relative honor and dishonour are usually plotted at opposite ends of the moral spectrum", with Arthur taking the moral high ground (Ibid.). In Springer's novel, the two characters are also inextricably connected, with Arthur acting as Mordred's external double. As such, he is "crucial for the construction and representation of that character's subjectivity" (McCallum 1999, 75). However, the question of who takes 'the moral high ground' is complicated in Springer's work.

Arthur's role in the construction of Mordred's subjectivity becomes clear early on, when the young protagonist begins to develop a desire to become a knight of his father's Round Table. From his entry into courtly society, Mordred struggles to feel sufficiently noble and masculine, and, initially, does not want to become a knight. His older half-brothers, Gawain and Garet, thrive in their knightly training and are eager to travel to King Arthur's court to become squires and knights. In contrast, Mordred dislikes activities such as jousting and sword-fighting, and would gladly become a fisherman, bard, or sheepherder, if only "some miracle were to happen and I were to wake up one day no longer Mordred, Prince of Lothian […] But I could tell these thoughts to no one; I was a king's son and I had to be a knight and a fighter" (Springer 1998, 26). This passage highlights the social, external pressure on the boy to conform to the type of masculinity that is considered the most valued in his society.

However, Mordred's attitude towards acquiring knighthood changes when he discovers King Arthur to be his biological father. While he still "loathe[s] fighting" in real life, in his dreams he is now "defending Arthur's honour and spreading his fame" as a knight of the Round Table:

> I was King Arthur's mightiest champion. When he was unhorsed in battle I slew the opponent riding the finest steed and presented it to my liege. […] I was the fairest knight of his Round Table, purer than Sir Galahad, more valorous than Sir Lancelot. But no, wait – I was not just his knight. I was his son. (Ibid., 51)

These dreams reveal Mordred's thought process: if he becomes a knight and occupies this hegemonic position, King Arthur will acknowledge him as his son. Indeed, acknowledgement by his father becomes the protagonist's strongest desire, signifying a need for male identification, which is complicated by Mordred's incestuous origins and his mixed feelings towards the king.

The love and hatred he harbours for his father again reflect Mordred's split self: "I hated him. No. Damn my childish hatred. I said to Nyneve, 'He is all goodness.' King Arthur, the rose among kings, golden, fearsome, generous and just – I adored him." (Ibid., 76) This passage reflects Mordred's continuous inner psychological struggle in relation to his father. Intriguingly, Mordred repeatedly speaks of his hatred in terms of *childish* behaviour, an opinion formed, perhaps, after an earlier conversation with Nyneve: "'I hate King Arthur.' 'That is spoken as a child,' she said, not rising, not even angry […] 'You will grow to be a man and you will see what it is to be King Arthur. You will see why he acted as he did.'" (Ibid., 36-37) Mordred thus also seems to be split in terms of maturation, between his (perceived) child-self and his (perceived) adult, knight-self. Crucially, Mordred's reflections on his hatred reveal the split image of King Arthur, who is both 'good' and adored as warrior-king, but also committed the heinous crime of the May Day massacre, killing innocent children on Merlin's advice.[135]

While experiencing hatred for King Arthur, the boy also continuously idolises his father, especially in terms of masculine embodiment. Idolising means to consider "a person or person-like figure as an object of worship", and worship implies "admiration, esteeming, respecting, yearning, envying, revering, adoring, and being addicted to" (Cheung and Yue 2012, 35). This accurately

[135] While Merlin's name is invoked frequently throughout the novel, particularly with regards to the prophecy and in relation to Nyneve, he only appears towards the end, in the form of a pigeon hawk, a *merlin*. Overall, he is presented as a negative character, and there are hints, even, that he may be the harper carrying out the soul-splitting and the owner of the raven who 'steals' Mordred's soul. Earlier in the novel, Nyneve tells Mordred a story of Merlin enchanting her white brachet containing a part of her, which Mordred interprets as "Merlin ha[ving] stolen her soul" (Springer 1998, 61). Nyneve also tells Mordred that Merlin "would appear as a child, a beggar, an old charcoal burner, for no purpose but to make folk shudder with fear" (Ibid., 40). Further, when Merlin appears in the form of the hawk, he is "playing with its beak upon the golden and silver wires that enclosed it as if upon the harp of Taliesien himself. I had found the harper" (Ibid., 149). The interpretation of Merlin as the harper is complicated by his own statement that he has "no human form anymore, no human powers. Only the powers of a hawk – to fly high and far, to see acutely, to strike hard." (Ibid. 155). If the harper is indeed Merlin, then the prophecy of parricide only becomes true because he enables Mordred's soul-splitting – as I will discuss later on, without his soul, Mordred embraces knighthood, violence, and his projected image of the villain, leading to the battle between father and son.

describes one side of Mordred’s love-hate feelings towards his father, whom he admires for his courtesy, generosity, and fearlessness. The protagonist’s admiration for the king is particularly evident in his description of his early days at Camelot, which he remembers fondly, primarily because of his father. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> Because of him, Arthur, jewel of kings, my early days at Camelot shine bright in my memory. An unproved youth, I squired for Gawain or Garet, riding out with them to go hunting or hawking, carrying notes and tokens to their ladies, looking after their lances and swords […] And riding with them on adventures, sometimes, into the Forest Perilous. But it is not the tourney or the adventures that I remember. It is odd things, little things. […]
>
> King Arthur in the meadow with the royal horses […]
>
> King Arthur remarking to me, ‘Unless I am much mistaken, Mordred, your brachet is in whelp.’
>
> King Arthur riding to tourney on a white destrier as I watched him, thinking what it might mean to be a knight of the Round Table and face lances and swords for his sake.
>
> King Arthur sentencing a deserter to death. (Springer 1998, 74-75)

The anaphora “King Arthur” in this passage conveys the boy’s obsessive admiration for and idolisation of his father and the role he occupies – an admiration that is shared by the younger and the narrating self.

Cheung and Yue (2012, 36) stress the compensation perspective on idol worship that suggests idolisation “serves to compensate for the worshipper’s missing qualities and resources”. Indeed, *I am Mordred* highlights the protagonist’s struggle to feel sufficiently masculine and mature in comparison to his father, who is considered the epitome of chivalry and manhood in their society. Two passages exemplify Mordred’s habit of comparison:

> My fifteenth birthday. I would meet my father today.
>
> The thought made me feel as thin as water, as if I could not support the slight weight of my chain mail, my plain leather helm, the short sword hanging at my side. I should have waited. King Arthur would look at me and know I was not yet worthy to be a knight, far less his son and prince. When he was my age he was already King, not a stripling in a leather helm, a broadsword, and a shield. (Springer 1998, 56)

> I said, ‘When Arthur was my age, he was King, he was putting down the rebels, he was fighting for his throne and his life.’ In a year or so I would be knighted, but I did not think I would ever be worthy to serve him. (Ibid., 75)

These episodes highlight Mordred’s feelings of inferiority, emphasised by the repetition of the phrase “when he/King Arthur was my age”. Because of this perceived inferiority, *shame* becomes one of the most prevalent emotions the protagonist experiences during his time at Camelot, as he continuously asks himself, “[W]as I ready to be a knight? NO, many times no, to my shame” (Ibid., 72). Mordred wonders whether, in making him a knight, the king is only being dutiful: “Did King Arthur wish to make me his knight? Or was he merely doing what he must? Thoughts like those sliced like sword cuts. For hours every day I wore myself out smiting foes made of straw in the exercise yard, but I still could not sleep at night. *Worthiness*… I had none.” (Ibid., 91-92; emphasis in original) His perceived lack of worthiness has a profound and harmful impact, leading Mordred to have suicidal thoughts on multiple occasions.[136]

To counteract his feelings of shame and deficiency in terms of knight- and, hence, manhood, Mordred begins to train harder. This commitment stands in stark contrast to his growing understanding of knighthood as destructive, again revealing fragmentation in the protagonist's identity. Mordred's recognition of knighthood's harmful aspects begins with the arrival of Sir Pellinore, "[a] massive, harsh-bearded knight in battered armor", a rapist feared by many damsels including Nyneve (Ibid., 78). As Pellinore rides into Camelot, Mordred notices King Lothe's severed head hanging from the knight's saddle. The boy's reaction reveals his shock: "I looked again, for I was seeing what it truly meant to be a knight, a fighter – and then I felt my knees weaken. I had to clutch Nyneve's shoulder to steady myself." (Ibid., 78) The reality of knighthood, Mordred comes to realise, significantly diverges from his dreams of glory. It is also crucial, here, that he is *literally* leaning on his female guide for strength.

The truth of knightly violence becomes even clearer to Mordred once his half-brothers seek vengeance on Sir Pellinore for their father's death. The blood feud is a common theme in medieval epics and romances, which dictate that, "[i]n order to save personal and familial honor, knights and warriors are obligated to avenge their kin" (Jamison 2018, 5). This obligation to commit vengeance highlights the anarchy and fratricide inherent in the Arthurian tradition (Pochoda 1971, 114). In *I am Mordred*, this type of violence is explicitly criticised in the vivid and gory portrayal of Pellinore's death, viewed through the eyes of Mordred:

> Now they were killing him in painful ways. And Gawain was offering me a turn. […]
> I shook my head. I could not look at him.
> 'What,' Garet put in, 'you don't like this game?'
> Gawain complained, 'Be a man, Mordred!'
> That lout Pellinore was a man, I will give him that. […] Tied to the tree, bleeding, he stood with his head up, glaring like a wild boar. […] 'Coward,' Garet accused me.
> True enough. If I were not such a coward, I would not have come with them at all.
> 'How do you ever expect to be a knight?' grumbled Gawain, disgusted with me.
> They turned their backs on me – and they went on with it. I wish to say no more. […]

[136] In emphasising Mordred's suicidal ideations, Springer engages with the widely recognised issue of male suicide. Khan et al. (2020, 652) note that "[m]en demonstrate higher suicide rates than women at all times and across regions and ethnic and socioeconomic groups". River and Flood (2021, 1) state that "[m]en account for approximately 75% of the one million annual suicide deaths worldwide". Crucially, they highlight that there is a "link between suicide and men's active pursuit of hegemonic masculinity", particularly in relation to emotional restriction (Ibid.). Many of the participants in River and Flood's study of 18 Australian men who had attempted suicide revealed that "suicide presented a means of ending painful emotions" (Ibid.). Similarly, Springer's Mordred considers suicide as a way to bring an end to his feelings of unworthiness, loneliness, and fear. To combat male suicides and suicidal ideation, King et al. (2020, 1) suggest "presenting young males with alternative and multiple ways of being male", "[f]acilitating a relaxation of norms regarding self-reliance, and encouraging help-seeking", and "dismantling norms that rigidly enforce masculine norms, particularly in relation to heteronormativity". Springer's novel does not offer any solutions or help for Mordred, and while the ending does not see Mordred commit suicide, it does depict the deliberate split of his soul from his body.

> When [Pellinore] fell silent, I looked up. That was a mistake. I had not known there was so much blood in a man. (Springer 1998, 86-87)

In Malory's *Morte*, "Pellinore's death is more predicted and reported than shown" (Rushton 2004, 139). In *I am Mordred*, the knight's death is turned into a lesson for the young protagonist. While his half-brothers view the killing as a game, Mordred cannot even bear to look. Much more than Nyneve's stories and lessons, this incident profoundly changes the way Mordred views knights, their values, and the society celebrating these: "I thought sometimes: What was the Round Table, truly, that it honored knights such as Sir Pellinore? And Sir Gawain?" (Springer 1998, 88) His opinion is particularly shaped by his half-brothers' violent and vengeful behaviour, which is later repeated in the killing of their own mother and her lover. Mordred ponders: "Folk looked up to them, for they were knights of the Round Table and, yes, there was still that glow about them that had awed me when I first came to Camelot. But now I could not look at them without feeling my gut crawl. They had done such bloody deeds." (Ibid., 163-164)

Remarkably, despite his growing understanding of how courtly life and culture foster a set of hypermasculine values marked by violence and aggression, Mordred lets his father knight him and decides to go on a quest to save them both, thereby aiming to prove his worthiness to him. In psychological terms, Mordred experiences "father hunger", i.e., the (un)conscious desire for a male parent, which usually develops due to the father's abandonment of the child (Erickson 1996, 42). Beth M. Erickson, a proponent of Mythopoetic Men's Movement positions, explains father hunger as "the gaping hole in a boy's psyche created by the lack of contact with and knowledge of his father" (Ibid., 39). When not fulfilled or addressed, Erickson maintains, this "natural longing" can cause emotional and relational issues, including a "lack of self-esteem that manifests in a chronic, not-good-enough-feeling", especially in terms of one's manhood (Ibid., 39-40). The earlier-quoted passages from Springer's novel demonstrate that Mordred is indeed experiencing a chronic lack of self-esteem, particularly in relation to his masculine performance.

Male identification and father presence/absence in boy's lives have been topics of scholarly interest since Sigmund Freud first formulated his views on the importance of the father in the son's establishment of gender identity (Diamond 2004, 1116). They are also crucial topics within the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, a significant motivation of which is "to underscore and correct the damage done to men by their own absent or dysfunctional fathers" (Miller 2012, 195). A hunger for fatherly approval is indeed shared by those within the movement (Jenkins 1999, 90), with initiation rituals centring "around the reclamation of grief over one's lack of connection with one's father" (Beneke 1995, 154).[137] Considered to be a man's "natural role model" (Erickson 1996, 39), the father is thus "located as a fundamental solution" to men's issues surrounding the construction of their masculine identities (Reynolds 2018, n.p.). Reynolds notes that, if we accept the notion that "the paternal is central to masculine gender identity" – an assumption that is shared by Mythopoetic Men's Movement supporters and conservative voices in the boy crisis debate, and which divides contemporary psychological scholarship – father hunger can be viewed as symptomatic of "damaged, or incomplete masculinities" (Ibid.). Viewed in this light, Mordred's masculinity can be described as fundamentally broken. However, it is not the lack of a male figure itself that leads to Mordred's broken masculinity, but his *hunger* for it, which is caused by societal expectations that boys need male identification and by the narrative context surrounding incest and prophecy. Mordred's hunger for fatherly approval, his obsession with being acknowledged by King Arthur, and his idolisation of his father's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, I contend, ultimately impact Mordred's decision-making to such an extent, that the prophecy of parricide becomes self-fulfilling.

Prophecies are a crucial motif in the Arthurian tradition, serving as structuring device, adding mystery and magic, and opening narratives "to an exploration of free will, destiny, and fate" (Cawsey 2015, 75). Kapelle (2009) has argued that, within Malory's *Morte*, there are two categories of prophecies: contingent and categorical. Contingent prophecies "are open-ended: the actions of the characters can affect the outcome", whereas with categorical prophecies, the outcome will be the same no matter a character's actions (Cawsey 2015, 75). Cawsey suggests a third type: "contingent prophecies which become categorical because of the nature or personality of the participants", meaning if they had acted differently, the prophecy could have been avoided (Ibid.). As an example, Cawsey cites the tragic story of Balin and Balan, arguing that it is through the former's chivalric code and understanding of worship that a contingent prophecy becomes categorical: to avoid the prophecy and tragic outcome, Balin would have had to abandon the essence of his self (Ibid.). Cawsey's third category, I argue, applies to Springer's protagonist, whose actions are primarily guided by his father hunger and, during his quest, heterosexual desire.

Shortly before being knighted[138], Mordred has a dream, in which he sees the Grail and King Arthur "embracing [him] as a son" (Springer 1998, 93). Interpreting this as a sign, Mordred

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[137] Attending a meeting organised by a group within the movement, Michael Kimmel observed how "the lights are turned down and the men are taken through a guided fantasy in which they encounter their fathers, and say and hear things they always wanted to say and hear but never could. Suddenly the men are overflowing with grief over their lost intimacy with their fathers" (Beneke 1995, 158).

[138] The protagonist-narrator only briefly refers to the ceremony in retrospective, giving little attention to this crucial rite of passage. He tells the reader that, before leaving for his quest, Arthur said to him: "'Arise, Sir Mordred.' It was an echo of the night of my dubbing, when the Round Table watched and King Arthur lifted the sword from my shoulder and called me for the first time by my knightly name." (Springer 1998, 97)

embarks on a quest, which, he believes, will not only save him and his father, but, importantly, lead to the king acknowledging him, which, in turn, will make him feel worthy. As previously discussed, masculine identity is shaped on the quest, "through an interaction with a hostile physical and social landscape" (McCallum and Stephens 2000, 357). Instead of serving as a way to develop or demonstrate his chivalric masculinity, I contend that, in Springer's novel, Mordred's quest reflects his divided self through alternating rejection and embrace of traditional chivalry. The quest also reveals the workings of 'fate' – more specifically, how the protagonist's actions transform the prophecy from contingent to categorical.

When his quest takes the protagonist into the Forest Perilous, Mordred initially evades the traditional knightly tests and trials. Importantly, he does not fail, but purposefully *rejects* challenges, or handles them in unorthodox ways. The following represents the exchange between the protagonist and his first knightly attacker:

> In full armor, he burst out of a rowan grove with his lance leveled, charging at me. 'Sir, if you love your honor, prepare to joust!' he roared.
>
> In that moment, I decided that I loved other things, including my life, far more than my honor.' […] I turned my back on him and rode away.
>
> I was to grow accustomed to being called a coward. (Springer 1998, 99-100)

In the chivalric ethos honour forms the greatest goal (Kaeuper 2016, 358). Won through valour and bravery, honour leads to "renown, glory, riches, power" (Weber 1999, 82) – knightly rewards that Mordred has no interest in. The only reward he craves is acknowledgment from his father. While these are linked to some extent, the former – renown, glory, etc. – are external rewards that Mordred cares little about. When another knight confronts the protagonist, couching his lance, Mordred responds: "'A lance is an awkward thing to carry in the woodland,' and I threw mine into the bracken. He said, 'Sir, you are a coward.' I said, 'Sir, I am not a lunatic,' and I rode away." (Springer 1998, 107) Behaviour like this contradicts romance conventions and the chivalric code, which dictate that "[a]ll challenges must be met" (Pochoda 1971, 114), and that a knight must express "his superiority in armed combat, using lance and sword" (Johnston 2011, 61). Connected to this are the "knightly concern with reputation" (Clein 1987, 81) and "the desire to avoid personal shame" (Robeson 2003, 28), neither of which concern Mordred here. Comparable to similar passages in Morris's *Squire's Tale* series, the cited episodes from Springer's novel serve to parody romance conventions with the intention of making the reader laugh at the medieval. However, in contrast to Morris's series, which sees Gawain refuse typically chivalric challenges in the World of Men, Mordred's refusal does not serve to demonstrate his superior manliness. Instead, it illustrates his rejection of the knightly order and the expectations it is built on, while, paradoxically, questing to achieve acknowledgment by the paragon of chivalry and leader of knightly society, his father.

A change in behaviour, from rejection to embrace of knighthood, occurs after Mordred manages – with Nyneve's help – to escape entrapment by Morgan, who had been trying to prove the workings of fate. Having seen Nyneve in his brachet's eyes, Mordred worries about her: "She had looked as if she were in a bad way. I knew that, quest or no quest, I must go to her." (Springer 1998, 124) Since he has lost his horse and armour during his escape, Mordred attempts to steal another knight's, which leads to violent combat:

> Odd, what a difference a few days made. He was stronger than I, but my despair had hardened in me, and I did not care whether I were killed; if I died, very well, it would spite Morgan le Fay and prove her wrong. Reckless, I took cuts yet fought like a very demon, quick and hungry. In only a few moments I forced [my opponent] to the ground.
>
> 'Yield,' I told him, the point of my sword at his throat. (Ibid., 124-125)

When the knight tries to attack him again, Mordred beheads him: "It was the first time I had killed a man. The gore made me retch. Other than that, I felt nothing for him. […] I was glad he was dead. Perhaps I would be more like Gawain now that I had killed a knight." (Ibid., 125) Mordred acts more like a rogue rather than an ideal chivalric knight here, and so does his opponent: the protagonist attempts to steal from the knight while he is asleep, while his opponent attacks again after having been granted mercy. Mordred notes that despair had made him act this way: all he cares about is getting to Nyneve, whom he not only sees as friend and mentor, but for whom he also harbours secret romantic feelings.

The reason that makes Mordred truly behave according to Camelot's chivalric ideals is his encounter with Lynette. Unaware of Mordred's identity, the noble maiden urges him to perform tasks for her, and he gladly complies, feeling "more light-hearted than [he] had been since [he] was a child" (Ibid., 129). He fights nobly and courageously in her defence, no longer evading challenges:

> [T]wice I had to fight for her, jousting with knights who challenged me for her as offhandedly as if she were a horse they fancied. Each time I met the challenger even though he was more heavily armed and armored than I. […] Feeling Lynette's gaze upon me made me able to do this, and to fight on with the sword, and to bear the blows and the pain, compelling my opponent to yield. (Ibid.)

This passage highlights two main roles of females in the chivalric Arthurian tradition: women as objects "to be abducted, rescued, or adored" (Hodges 2002, 81) and women as "arbiter of knightly deeds" (Clein 1987, 21). The phrase, "[f]eeling Lynette's gaze upon me made me able to do this", in particular, reflects "the romantic idea that love for, and […] love of, a woman is what inspires the Arthurian male to greatness" (Larrington 2017, 259) – an idea that "is present throughout chivalric history from the early twelfth century onwards" (Barber 1974, 71). In *I am Mordred*, the protagonist thus embraces a hegemonic masculine performance not out of a desire to prove his worthiness to his father, whom he admires for his embodiment of masculinity, and to whom the quest is dedicated. Instead, a performance of his knightly identity is called forth by his protective and/or romantic feelings towards females – Nyneve and Lynette.

During his quest, Mordred is given two chances to act according to different values, thereby averting the prophecy and constructing a more stable identity for himself – one that would not necessarily be based on knighthood and located in the closed, privileged centre. Firstly, in escaping from Morgan le Fay's castle, the protagonist loses his armour: "At some time since I had fallen from the top of the cliff I had lost my sword, my shield, and my helm; now I tore off my heavy chain mail as well and kicked off my boots. I could breathe. I might live." (Springer 1998, 123) Armour, as mentioned earlier, is "the distinguishing mark of a knight" (Nickel 1995, 3). Indeed, "[s]tripped of armour and weapons", a knight is "deprived of the function by which romance culture defines men" (Mandel 1999, 74). In Springer's novel, the loss of armour does not serve an emasculating function. Mordred's comment, "I could breathe. I might live" (Springer 1998, 123), suggests that armour – and, by extension, the role of knight – is harmful and restrictive.[139] Even though Mordred expresses relief at having lost his armour, he immediately acquires a new set after his escape, a decision that Nyneve criticises:

> We took away all those toys before, ladywater and I, in the river below Caer Morgana. […] What made you in such a hurry to take up arms again? Or ever? You could have been once more a carefree churl, a lad with a little white dog […] You could have built yourself a hut and lived there and been a woodcutter […] Why didn't you? (Ibid., 136)

Nyneve suggests a different embodiment of masculinity – a woodcutter's – that could have been possible for Mordred. Indeed, earlier on, Mordred acknowledges other embodiments, stating that "I would gladly be a fisherman on the sea. Or a bard chanting songs of old gods and heroes. Or even a sheep-herder on the rocky hills" (Springer 1998, 26). However, he believes that because of his lineage, these positions are not available to him: "I could tell these thoughts to no one; I was a king's son and I had to be a knight and a fighter." (Ibid.) Further, the beginning of his quest sees Mordred return, as a knight, to the fisher hut where he grew up, seeing what his life could have been like. His foster father's son[140] envies him his horse, mail, shield, and sword, but Mordred "would have traded places with him in a moment" (Springer 1998, 102). Yet, he never attempts to leave knighthood behind. Mordred's reaction to Nyneve's questioning and suggestion to become a woodcutter illustrates the way his restricted thinking and lack of agency turn the contingent

[139] The passage is reminiscent of the way Crossley-Holland's protagonist, at the centre of analysis in the subsequent chapter, describes his experience of wearing armour: "[W]earing my own [armour] felt completely different. By the time I'd fitted on my skull-cap and my helmet, my armour was so heavy that I couldn't swing my arms or quicken my pace, let alone run. I was in my own tight, hot world and could only hear half of what Turold was saying. If I were buried alive, I suppose a coffin would feel like that." (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.2340-2345) Morris's Gawain also finds armour restraining, although in an utterly different way: it is heavy and thus a disadvantage in combat (Morris 1998, 159). Gawain states that "[a]ny clodpole can own armor. […] [a]nd any number of good fighters have to do without it" (Ibid., 21), suggesting that 'true' chivalric masculinity exists independently of knightly accessories. How male main characters view armour is indeed telling of how a narrative engages with medieval(ist) chivalric ideals.

[140] When Nyneve took Mordred away, she told the fisher mother, "It is not so bad. I feel life in you; you are with child again. You will have a fine son and miss this one less" (Springer 1998, 8). This is the boy Mordred meets – the mother, however, has died.

prophecy into a categorical one: "Such thoughts had never occurred to me. It made my heart ache that they had not, but I firmed my mouth and let my face show her nothing. 'I'm a true noble, as you once said.'" (Ibid., 125) Again, Mordred ignores Nyneve's – this time unspoken – guidance, and, again, he will suffer from it.

The second chance Mordred receives to avoid the prophecy and develop a different masculine embodiment is offered to him by Vivien, the Lady of the Lake[141], to whom he speaks on Nyneve's advice. He begs the Lady: "Teach me how to fight my fate." (Ibid., 140) Vivien does not respond verbally, but, regardless, Mordred understands: "[I]t all seemed so simple. I did not need sword and shield and armor for this quest; I did not need to fight. I needed only to live. Just to be, like a swallow on the wing or a turtle sunning. Just to be happy. […] And she spoke to me, a single word: *Love*." (Ibid., 140; emphasis in original) Mordred instantly interprets this single word as referring to love within a romantic relationship: "With Lynette I had been happy. […] If she would be my lady love… if this blessing could be, then King Arthur would live to be old and die in his bed. I would put away my sword and spend my days sweetly in love with Lynette." (Ibid., 141) Excited, Mordred rides off to find Lynette. Before he can confess his love, however, Lynette discovers his true identity – born out of incest, destined to kill his own father. For once, Mordred has listened to female guidance, it seems, but, again, he is punished. However, I argue that he failed to realise that the Lady may have been using the word 'love' in a different sense. Again, there is an immediate, automatic elimination of possible alternative paths and meanings.

The remainder of Mordred's quest only induces more loss: his biological mother dies at the hands of his half-brothers, Nyneve and her spirit selves are killed by Merlin in the form of a hawk, whom Mordred unwittingly and good-naturedly had set free from his cage. It seems that no matter how hard he tries to fulfil the hegemonic role of Round Table knight, Mordred does not succeed. Indeed, instead of receiving rewards for his chivalric conduct, as Terence does in the *Squire's Tale* series, Springer's protagonist is punished – for his disregard (or misinterpretation) of female guidance, his father hunger, and his complicity in hegemonic masculinity. To reiterate, similar to hegemonic masculinities, complicit masculinities profit "from the 'patriarchal dividend' – the advantage of being male in a patriarchal society, while at the same time being partially dominated by it" (Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf 2016, 193). Complicit masculinity is unstable, as it "constantly oscillates between sub- and superordination", a description that fits Springer's protagonist, who, to adopt Buschmeyer and Lengersdorf's phrasing, has a "supportive function in relation to

141 In various Arthurian texts, Nyneve is the Lady of the Lake. In Springer's novel, the Lady is called Vivien – she is described as "more than Nyneve. It was Guinevere before she met Arthur or Lancelot, it was Lynette, it was every white-armed damsel anywhere, it was Morgan le Fay before she learned to hate, it was my mother Morgause when she was a fair young woman setting off to Camelot. She, the one I faced, she was the maiden of all maidens. Yet she was more than that. I do not know how to say what she was, the Lady of the Lake." (Springer 1998, 139)

hegemonic masculinity", and is thereby an 'accomplice' of the system (Ibid.). Rather than becoming a fisherman, bard, sheepherder, or woodcutter – positions that may have allowed him to embrace a nonviolent, perhaps more equitable form of masculinity – he is complicit in upholding the chivalric system that he criticises.

Writing on postmodern adolescent identities in contemporary coming-of-age stories, Ebony Daley-Carey (2018, 472) discusses Sonya Hartnett's novel *Of a Boy* (2002) and how, "[i]n an explicit disruption of the quest narrative, a pattern traditionally associated with a masculine heroic paradigm", the protagonist's subjectivity "is erased by an act that would usually ensure the acquisition of agentic male selfhood". Mordred's subjectivity is not erased by the actions he takes on the quest; however, his quest leaves him shattered instead of fulfilled with honour, glory, power, and a sense of stable social identity within the chivalric community. Further, the punishments he receives for chivalric behaviour serve as catalyst for his decision to split his soul from his body, an attempt to free himself from the pain caused by the prophecy, his father hunger, and the demands and prejudices of courtly society.

From a philosophical viewpoint, this split is interesting as it raises questions regarding the dualism of mind and body, which is "one of the ideas most fundamental to Western thought, perhaps the very first of many dualisms that form the basic structure of Anglo-European ways of thinking" (Ryle 2018, 256). As Ryle explains, this dualism

> is a belief in a split between the physical body and the nonmaterial entity we call mind (or spirit, soul, thought, etc.), where the mind is perceived as superior in many ways to the inferior body. […] [T]he spirit represents the higher selves to which we aspire; the body is the force that prevents us, through its weakness, from achieving those higher goals (Ibid.)[142]

Interestingly, the body-mind dualism "has its own gender dynamic", in which the body is associated (negatively) with femininity, and the mind with masculinity (Ibid., 257).[143] I argue that, in Springer's novel, the body is not associated with femininity, but represents a vessel for hegemonic masculinity, as it is only after the split that the protagonist (or, his body) fully embraces the hegemonic knightly role, suggesting that it was Mordred's soul that prevented him from doing so before:

[142] The mind-body dualism originated in ancient times, but a well-known version of it was developed by Rene Descartes in the 17th century. Recent neurological research has challenged the mind-body dualism and embraced the idea that there is no 'single core' (Emmott 2002, 163). It is also crucial to note that feminist scholarship has criticised Cartesian dualism not only because "it falsely segregates the mind from the body", but also because "the Cartesian subject has been conceptualized as inherently masculine" (Leavy et al. 2009, 262).

[143] According to Ryle, "[i]t's difficult to say whether the male-female dualism came before the mind-body dualism or whether the gender aspect of the mind-body dualism was laid atop preexisting notions about gender differences" (2018, 257). Feminists have been rethinking the body-mind dualism "by reconceptualizing notions of the body as a physical location of gendered enactment, destabilizing former rigid understandings of the mind-body dichotomy" (Leavy et al. 2009, 263).

> I went to find Gawain and Garet. I found them on the practice field and sparred with them and jested with them easily. No longer did I feel any horror of them. On the way back to the keep, I met a damsel, and I smiled at her and spoke to her, for I felt no shame anymore. (Springer 1998, 178-179)[144]

Split and Unity

YA fiction, as Daley-Carey (2018, 473) notes, "conventionally aligns its readers with a successful process of maturation and socialisation". *I am Mordred* breaks with this convention, portraying a protagonist that fails his quest and, subsequently, is unable to establish a stable, adult identity within his society. In this sense, Springer's narrative resembles "the modern or (in Bakhtin's terminology) polyphone, multivoiced adult novel [which] most often depicts a failed initiation" (Nikolajeva 2002, 130). In such novels, the protagonist "comes to the tragic conclusion that emancipation is impossible, that the wrong path has been chosen, that the guides were treacherous" and, most crucially, "that the stage of split Self will never be followed by wholeness" (Ibid.). When Mordred arrives at this conclusion, he decides to split his soul from his body. However, the subversion of YA and medieval romance conventions is complicated by the fact that the protagonist's *body* does become initiated, and is further undermined in the novel's epilogue, which sees the fulfilment of Mordred's desire, as he is rewarded with his father's acknowledgement. This resolution seemingly contradicts the narrative's trajectory which, I have argued, criticises and punishes Mordred's father hunger. It also appears to align Springer's novel with the mythopoetic view of the father as fundamental solution to a son's fragmented masculine identity. Is the ending, therefore, in tension with the masculinity ideology portrayed elsewhere in the novel? Or does it merely reflect the need to provide a happy ending to an otherwise 'dark' story for adolescent readers?

To understand the meaning of the father-son union, it is vital to consider the parallel structures, the mirroring, of Springer's prologue and epilogue. The prologue focuses on the May Day episode, where, on the advice of Merlin, King Arthur sends forty male babies out to die at sea, Mordred among them. The epilogue covers the final battle, focusing on the encounter between

[144] On the other hand, the body-soul split experienced by another character – Nyneve's husband, Pelleas – does not result in a soulless body that seamlessly performs hegemonic masculinity, but one that is defined by frailty and confusion. Before his own split, Mordred visits Pelleas, who tells him about his encounter of the Grail, an event that Mordred had already seen in a vision. Pelleas says: "'It was glorious. […] You were there. And I saw –' His head lifted. His sunrise smiled widened. His hands drifted up like leaves on a breeze, like wings. 'I saw my soul fly up.' 'Your … your soul?' 'Like a white butterfly.'" (Springer 1998, 167) Without his soul, Pelleas recognises no one at Camelot but King Arthur, and needs to be fed by servants – "He was transfigured, folk said." (Ibid., 165) It is after visiting Pelleas, that Mordred decides to split his soul from his body: "It was Pelleas who gave me my solution, in a way." (Ibid.) It is interesting that the only other knight described to have experienced a body-soul split is Pelleas, the single male character who is presented entirely in a positive light and depicted as nonviolent, kind, and understanding of female suffering. (The text mentions that Bors, Percival, and Galahad also achieved the Grail, but does not offer any more information on these characters, meaning the reader does not learn whether their Grail adventure also led to body-soul splits for them.) It is also crucial to mention, however, that Merlin similarly must have experienced a body-soul split at some point – as he tells Mordred from the beak of a pigeon hawk: "I have no human form anymore, no human powers. Only the powers of a hawk […]" (Ibid., 155)

Arthur and Mordred as well as on their subsequent union as father and son. Unlike the main parts of the novel, which are narrated in first person by Mordred, both prologue and epilogue are written in third-person mode with King Arthur as internal focaliser. The prologue highlights King Arthur's emotions – or, more specifically, his need to suppress these – as he sends the infants to their death. This is reflected already in the very first sentence: "Because he was the King, he could show no feeling about this." (Springer 1998, v) The suppression of his emotions is again emphasised when Arthur places Mordred in the coracle: "He looked away, blinking out at the sea. He could show no weakness, for he was the King." (Ibid., vi) The phrase "because he was the King" is repeated multiple times during the prologue, and the restrictions placed on Arthur because of this role are made explicit: "It was a strange, exalted, and terrible thing to be the King. Everything he did sent out echoes like a great bell." (Ibid., v) The prologue, I argue, establishes clear parallels between the prescriptions and proscriptions Arthur has to observe as a king and the behaviours men are required to display or suppress in order to measure up to hegemonic masculine ideals.

The epilogue parallels the prologue as it similarly deals with life and (potential) death of father and son. It again reveals Arthur's split self – his private and public selves, his ultimate responsibility as leader – and focuses on the role of emotions in masculine identity. The first sentence reads: "Because he was the True King, he was therefore the most helpless of men. He had to follow where fate and honor led, or the skies would burn. He had done wrong, and he had to take his punishment" (Ibid., 181). The wrong referred to here is Arthur's seduction of Morgause, leading to the incestuous begetting of Mordred, which, in many Arthurian sources – most prominently the Post-Vulgate – is constructed as the explicit reason for Camelot's fall. While, in the prologue, Arthur is blinking away tears, in the epilogue, he "stood bloodied and so heartsick [on the battlefield] that he wept" at the thought and sight of all his dead companions (Ibid.). Facing the soulless Mordred in this final battle, Arthur describes his feelings towards him – the first time the reader receives insight into the father's perception of the son: "Sir Mordred, he who would have called himself King. A worthy foe. He had fought mightily. King Arthur felt almost proud of him." (Ibid.) Crucially, this moment of a weeping King, standing among his dead knights, feeling almost-pride for his son, is followed by a return to kingly, i.e., hegemonic, composure: "A different sort of pride made him harden his face and stop his tears." (Ibid.) This other type of pride is the need to demonstrate 'manly' self-control.

The depiction of the final battle – the fall of Camelot – is crucial to understanding the way Arthurian narratives constructs masculine identity and understand societal views on masculinity. As Whetter and Cherewatuk (2009, 2) emphasise, "the mutual slaughter or mortal-injury of Arthur and Mordred" in the final battle is "one of the defining moments of the Arthurian legend in either its medieval or modern guise". Traditional depictions of the battle leading to Arthur's and

Mordred's deaths have been read in relation to masculinity. Sutton (2003), for instance, has argued that, in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c.1400), Arthur kills Mordred by driving the sword not into his face or chest, as suggested by other scholars, but into his anus. Sutton reads this brutal blow as "a symbolic act of retribution for the threat Mordred has posed to Arthur's manhood" (Ibid., 280). Arthur's killing of Mordred, according to Sutton, is "the poem's greatest example of violent masculine retribution" and "the ultimate retaliation against the man who has stolen Arthur's masculinity" by taking his throne and his wife (Ibid., 281). In Springer's novel, the final duel between Mordred and King Arthur allows insight into Arthur's inner workings in terms of masculinity, emphasising his feelings of almost-pride towards his son and the immediate switch from weeping out of grief to the suppression of emotions out of 'manly' pride.

After the battle, Arthur – wounded and under the care of the Lady of the Lake – re-encounters Mordred. It is only then, that the king is able and willing to fully embrace his emotions: "Arthur gazed at the raven, his gray eyes widening. 'Mordred?' he murmured. The raven lifted its wings and glided to the foot of his bed. In the harsh croak of a bird it spoke a single word. 'Father.' The King's eyes filled with tears. The King wept. 'Mordred,' he said. 'Mordred, my son.'" (Springer 1998, 183) Both father and son become whole in the closure through mutual embrace. Crucially, only once Camelot has fallen can the king acknowledge his son and show his full emotions – free from societal pressure and expectations, and the requirement of living up to hegemonic chivalric ideals. And only once Camelot has fallen are Mordred's father hunger and internal fragmentation resolved. Distanced from any external characterisation and expectation regarding their personas, Arthur and Mordred gain freedom. Each has confronted the mirrored self, the fragmented Other in the final battle, and, in the union, successfully integrated the double. The closure, I maintain, can thus be read not as a mythopoetic resolution to father hunger, but, rather, as the union of two men whose masculine identities are fraught with fragmentation, who both suffered from society's expectations and hegemonic ideals, and who both lacked the agency to instigate change, to move away from the closed and privileged centre.

In canonical Arthurian texts, the fall of the Round Table is varyingly portrayed as a result of internal fractions and conflicts of loyalty, the members' failure to live up to the chivalric ideal, blamed on women, or attributed to Arthur's incestuous and thus sinful encounter resulting in Mordred's birth. In Springer's novel, Camelot falls because of the flaws evident in the masculine constructions and performances of both Arthur and Mordred. Regarding the former, it is not incest that is depicted as a flaw or sin; rather, it is Arthur's attempt "to prove that he was a man" (Ibid., 35) by seducing Morgause, and his inability to acknowledge Mordred due to his strict commitment to the demands placed on him in terms of kingship and masculinity. In Mordred's case, the problems are his obsessive desire for fatherly acknowledgment and approval, the idolisation of his father, and, crucially, his inability to look beyond chivalric, knightly masculinity in the construction of his own gender identity that cause him to ignore female guidance, to be complicit in hegemony, and to deny himself a position and masculine embodiment – a woodcutter, sheepherder, etc. – that may have saved both himself and the king.

In *I am Mordred*, the fall of Camelot is not portrayed as the end of a 'golden era' or, as in Morris's *Squire's Tale*, the final stand of a heroic group of men who will be rewarded for their manly sacrifice with eternal life. Indeed, the tone of the following passage in Springer's narrative, I contend, mocks the nostalgia found in many other Arthurian adaptations: "Dead, dead, they all lay dead […] every remaining knight of the Round Table, the flower of all knighthood, the jeweled crown of all knighthood, they all lay dead or painfully dying on the trampled grass." (Ibid., 181) The reader is asked to imagine a litany of lifeless, emasculated bodies on a field. The phrases "the flower of all knighthood" and "the jeweled crown of all knighthood" take the reader back to earlier moments within the text that depict Mordred's realisation of the violent and unethical nature of so-called chivalrous knights, even King Arthur himself: "Good King Arthur. Flower of kings, jewel of kings, prince of kings – and murderer. A murderer of babies." (Ibid., 104) Crucially, Mordred and Arthur are the only ones who survive.[145] Both were 'destined' to be punished – Mordred by committing parricide, and Arthur through dying at the hands of his own incestuously begotten son. However, Mordred's soul lives on in the raven, and Arthur – like in many medieval and post-medieval versions of the legend – only goes to sleep: "He was supposed to be dead, but he had not died. The wound Mordred had given him to his head was severe; he would need to rest and heal for a long time – maybe hundreds of years – but he was not dead." (Ibid., 182)[146] The novel's denouement does not focus on the mourning of a lost ideal but instead centres a moment of healing and freedom for father and son who have suffered due to their (attempted) adherence to rigid

[145] There are echoes of Malory's ending in the elegiac tone with which the destruction of Camelot's 'flower of all knighthood' leaves only Mordred and Arthur alive at the end here – in Malory, Mordred dies too, of course, hauling himself up his father's spear so he can inflict the final, fatal wound on him.

[146] The ending of Springer's short story in comparison to the novel's is particularly interesting. In the short story, Mordred is distracted by the raven flying over the final battle, giving Arthur the chance to fatally wound him with his spear. Intriguingly, Mordred-the-narrator says, "I thought my destiny was to kill us both, but in a sense we have both lived because of what I did. King Arthur did not die of his wound, but sleeps, so people say. He is at Glastonbury, and Cornwall, and Avalon, and everywhere in England, and he will come again when England needs him worst. Even now that hundreds of years have come and gone and is not forgotten." (Springer 1995, 150) The focus in the short-story closure, it seems, is to emphasise the subversion of Mordred's status as a villain – indeed, make him Arthur's *saviour* – and to highlight the immortality of both the king and the legend itself. The single illustration included in the short story, portraying the final battle, adds particular significance to this: it depicts the raven in the foreground, flying over Mordred and Arthur on the battlefield, with a mountain in the background that is shaped like King Arthur wearing a castle – Camelot – as his crown. The caption reads: "Even now that hundreds of years have come and gone he is not forgotten." Mordred takes on the role of teller of the Arthurian legend, who safeguards Arthur and his story: "I still live, for the old gods do not die. […] I stay awake while he sleeps, I guard his land, and await his coming again." (Ibid., 151) There is no father-son union after the battle, but the reader learns Mordred's deepest wish: "Though I do not deserve or expect it, I would very much like to be born as his true son next time." (Ibid.) The short story seems to take a more nostalgic approach than the novel.

masculinity codes and their inability and unwillingness of embodying a less privileged, more open masculinity. Therefore, I argue that Springer's YA Arthurian adaptation re-envisions the fall of Camelot as the symbolic collapse of the patriarchal order that harms people of all genders, while nonetheless retaining a sense of nostalgia in its ending through the father-son union.

Conclusion

I am Mordred strongly critiques the Arthurian world and its ideology – and, by extension, contemporary society – for demanding particular ways of being male. Indeed, Springer's feminist adaptation addresses the effects of enforced hegemonic masculinity and the impact of narrowly conceived constructions of masculinity on boys and men as well as on women. With its focus on female presence and guidance rather than homosociality, and a narrative trajectory that leads to the protagonist's rejection of hegemonic chivalric masculinity and failed initiation, *I am Mordred* complicates the male maturation story and seemingly denounces Mythopoetic Men's Movement and conservative boy crisis ideas. At the same time, however, the protagonist's hunger for fatherly approval drives the plot, the epilogue depicting the fulfilment of both Mordred's and Arthur's desires and their ultimate achievement of wholeness and unity through the father-son union. The tragedy of Camelot and the tragedy of Mordred become a lesson on the importance of agency in the construction of one's subjectivity, especially in terms of gender. The narrative implies that boys and men need to recognise their agency in constructing their own masculine embodiments and – through female guidance – break out of the system. However, the novel does not offer a solution or alternative, or provide ideas on how to change the system itself. The adaptation discussed in the subsequent chapter similarly questions the Arthurian value system – going one step farther, however, by imagining an alternative construction of masculinity, and by re-writing medieval(ist) heroism in more equitable terms.

Chapter 3

"I'll Remake It. […] My Own March Camelot"

Caring Masculinity, Negotiating Male Mentorship and Masculinity Models, and Embracing the Feminine in Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* (2000-2003)

Set at the turn of the 13th century, Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* (2000-2003) follows the journey of a young page, Arthur de Caldicot, beginning, in the author's own words, "with Arthur's innocent, often merry childhood in the Welsh Marches and culminating in the barbarity of the Fourth Crusade" (Crossley-Holland 2005, 63). Written as a first-person journal-like narrative, the *Arthur Trilogy* presents the eponymous hero's experiences on his way to becoming a knight, crusader, and, eventually, lord of a manor. Interspersed with the events in young Arthur's life, the reader encounters the story of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table as seen through the eyes of the protagonist-narrator, who watches the rise and fall of Camelot in his seeing stone, a magical obsidian given to him by Merlin. The trilogy thus offers two stories in tandem, reflecting both a historical (though, of course, fictionalised) and a fantastic medieval world.[147]

Of all narratives examined in this dissertation, Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* has, to date, received the most scholarly attention. Research has focused on the relationships between history, fiction, and fantasy in the trilogy (Butler and O'Donovan 2012, Semper 2012), as well as on the role of Arthur[148] as a writer, receiver, and 'maker' of myth (Brown 2015, Robertson 2013). Some scholars have commented on Arthur's masculinity. Bradford (2015), for example, observes that "the trilogy's revisioning of the heroic ideal […] incorporates a *present past* reconfiguration of masculinity, in which Arthur is a relatively conventional modern boy who loves writing and solitary thought, enjoys the companionship of farm-girl Gatty, and is intuitive about the emotions of

[147] The seeing stone and Merlin are the only fantastic elements in an otherwise historically 'realistic' 13th-century setting.
[148] To avoid confusion, I refer to the protagonist-narrator, Arthur de Caldicot, as 'Arthur', and use 'King Arthur' for the mythical figure in the stone.

others" (139; emphasis in original). Bradford's main focus, however, is how Arthur's horse is connected to chivalry rather than the boy's journey to knight- and manhood. In terms of the depiction of masculinity, Janice Robertson's chapter on Crossley-Holland's narrative in her unpublished dissertation, *At the Crossing-Places: Representations of Masculinity in Selected 21st Century Children's Texts* (2019), offers the most detailed analysis.

An extension of her 2013 article on myth and reception in the trilogy, Robertson's analysis of Crossley-Holland's Arthurian adaptation in her dissertation deals with "mythmaking and the perpetuation/contestation of masculine hegemony" and, more specifically, "with the manner in which the protagonist – and, by extension, the reader – questions and evaluates the gendered realities of his particular social context" (2019, 58; 94). Robertson describes Crossley-Holland's main character as "confused, frightened and wounded" – a portrayal that, she suggests, stands in stark contrast to the depiction of male protagonists in earlier adventure novels (Ibid., 172). Robertson highlights Arthur's "relentless questioning of various 'ways of being male'" as a distinctive feature of the narrative, arguing that this questioning "could prove useful as a model for readers who are in the process of responding to the modes of masculinity they encounter in contemporary society" (Ibid., 93). In Robertson's view, Arthur's "musings" about hegemonic masculinity ideals demonstrate how "the construction, performance and maintenance of socially preferred masculinity can prove morally and ethically problematic for the enlightened male subject" (Ibid.).

On the one hand, Robertson refers to Arthur as "enlightened male subject", emphasising his "relentless interrogation" and "broadminded outlook", and describing how he is "bound by the rather more narrow constraints of his social context" (Ibid., 91; 78). On the other hand, she argues that Arthur is purposefully aligning himself with hegemonic ideals, maintaining that he desires, "more than anything, to occupy the hegemonic space", that he understands his "duty", and accepts the obligation to fight, knowing it could result in injury or death (Ibid., 75; 79-80). According to Robertson, Arthur aims to embody hegemonic ideals because he is aware of "the image and reward of being a knight", particularly as pertaining to his desired betrothal first with Grace (who is later revealed to be his half-sister), and then Winnie, both belonging to the nobility (Ibid., 73). While stating that the trilogy functions as "a locus for the contestation of cultural constructs, a platform for the suspension and re-examination of ideologies" (Ibid., 91), Robertson nonetheless concludes her analysis by highlighting Arthur's embodiment of hegemonic masculinity:

> [D]espite the challenging and often bewildering discursive landscape, Arthur, like the modern protagonists that will be discussed in the following chapters, possesses a desire to embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity and is willing to invest physical, mental and spiritual capital to ensure a successful performance. No pain, no gain. At his metaphorical crossing-place between boyhood and

> manhood, Arthur articulates his decision to embody his masculine ideal. 'Yes,' he writes, 'this castle is like a fist. Upright and tight and knuckled. It's at the ready. And so am I.' (Ibid., 95)

While offering valuable points, I find Robertson's interpretation of Crossley-Holland's narrative limited and at times contradictory in its view on Arthur's masculinity. I argue that her analysis neglects to consider three important aspects: Arthur's maturation process as reflected in the narrative trajectory, the moments of maturation, and the closure, including any movement *away from* the centre; the distinction between external (imposed) and internal (experienced) masculinity ideals; as well as the protagonist's relationships with other men.[149] Firstly, the quote Robertson uses in her above-cited conclusion to describe Arthur's "desire to embody the ideals of hegemonic masculinity" (Ibid., 95) is taken from the beginning of volume two in the trilogy. While it is true that Arthur wants to occupy the hegemonic position of knight, as Robertson suggests, the narrative trajectory as well as the closure of the trilogy demonstrate that Arthur's emerging gendered identity is multifaceted, contradictory, and fluid, and cannot simply be described as aligned with hegemonic ideals.

I argue that Arthur's embodiment of masculinity initially is and ultimately remains open rather than closed, even as he attempts to occupy the hegemonic position of a knight. From the beginning, it is clear that Arthur is very different from his peers. He deviates from expectations and is regularly reprimanded for this. For instance, his foster father[150] Sir John tells him off for being left-handed – "No boy in this manor will do anything left-handed. It's not natural." (Crossley-Holland 2000, 57) – and his grandmother scolds him for writing things down instead of remembering them, as well as for spending time alone – "On your own half the time […] It's unnatural! You're not one of us." (Ibid., 93) Both instances highlight the 'unnaturalness' of Arthur's behaviour, reflecting the essentialist views held by the society the protagonist inhabits. Arthur represents what Stephens (2002, 53) terms the "New Age Boy", a creative and sensitive individual "with an articulate command of contemporary discourses, and evidencing an agency grounded in choices shaped by concern and commitment". Stephens describes this type of young male protagonist as follows:

> He is characteristically the boy who reads for pleasure and may aspire to become a writer himself, and this endows him with a mastery over discourses which is germane to subjective agency; his relationship with peers are other-regarding, so that he can act without self-interest; he tends to lack physical

[149] Other overarching issues are the fact that Robertson does not specify what kind of norms and expectations form the 'hegemonic ideal' she discusses, and that she does not look at Crossley-Holland's narrative as *Arthurian* but, as she explains, "as part of the children's literature genre as this is the context in which most child readers will encounter them" (2019, 13).

[150] Arthur grows up at the manor of Sir John, whom he believes to be his father. He only discovers halfway through the trilogy that his aggressive uncle, Sir William, is in fact his biological father. Arthur still has no idea who his mother is but makes it his quest to find her. In order to avoid confusion, I refer to Sir John as Arthur's foster father, even when describing scenes where Arthur has not yet discovered his true origins. The same goes for his foster brother, Serle, and his foster mother, Lady Helen.

> prowess and physical courage, though his moral courage and other-regardingness will prompt him to act courageously. (Ibid., 44)

This is a fitting description for Crossley-Holland's thirteen-year-old page. Arthur is contrasted with his older foster brother, Serle, who fits Stephens' "Old Age Boy" schemata describing a "child who is either aggressive or something of a rascal, self-regarding and physically assertive" (Ibid.). Unlike Serle, Arthur struggles with his yard skills, reflecting a lack of physical prowess. Interestingly, like Terence in the *Squire's Tale* series, the only martial skill Arthur naturally succeeds at is archery. Similarly to Morris's protagonist, Arthur is more skilled at this than other males in the narrative: "I am the best at [the long bow], and have even beaten my father" (Crossley-Holland 2000, 50). Arthur particularly excels at reading and writing – in contrast to his peers and to the 'academically struggling boy' that is often described in boy crisis discourses.

The characteristics defining Arthur do not make him an ideal contender for knighthood. Rather, they suggest a career path within the clergy. Within a medieval context, these two paths to adulthood – chivalry and monasticism – reflect the two conflicting "models of masculine 'life-journey'" (Phillips 2012, 84). In order to deter his foster father from forcing him to pursue the clerical route, Arthur pretends to be bad at writing and reading, choosing, as Robertson (2019, 73) rightly points out, "to sacrifice his (undeniably strong) scholarly tendencies and interests" for future attainment of knighthood. Robertson compares Arthur's predicament to contemporary men having "to sacrifice their talents, interests, passions and convictions at the altar of hegemony" (Ibid., 74).[151] As this chapter will show, however, Arthur does find a way to hone his talents, interests, passions, and beliefs, by constructing and embracing his own, more open and equitable version of heroic masculinity.

Irrespective of his decision not to pursue the clerical path, Arthur's religious education under the priest, Oliver – consisting largely of the priest sharing his opinions and Arthur challenging and arguing against these – is essential to the boy's understanding of the world and his questioning of different masculinity ideals during his maturation process. As Arthur writes: "One reason why I quite like my lessons with Oliver is that I am allowed to argue with him, and find out new things." (Crossley-Holland 2000, 41) He later explains that he "like[s] arguing with him, and although I often disagree with what he says, he always makes me think" (Crossley-Holland 2001,

[151] Importantly, it needs to be pointed out that Crossley-Holland's narrative does not stage Arthur's decision to become a knight rather than a monk as a mistake. Later in the trilogy (but before having experienced crusading/knightly masculinity first-hand), Arthur visits a priory and sees what his life could have been like had his foster father decided for him to become a priest, schoolman, or monk. The boy comes to the conclusion that he would not have liked such a life. Considering how the clergy tried to inculcate their ideals into young males during the Middle Ages – namely through "persuasion, control, punishments and threats, sometimes literally with fire and sword" (Hadas 2019, 261) – it is indeed questionable whether Arthur would have had an easier time constructing his gendered identity within the estate of those who pray.

loc.3476) Crucially, the interactions between the priest and Arthur highlight the boy's concern for others as well as his ability and desire to question the status quo, revealing his commitment to thinking and reflection.[152] Crossley-Holland's protagonist can therefore also be understood in terms of Jesse and Jones's (2020, 114) "Sensitive Thinker" who "spends a significant portion of the [narrative] contemplating how his actions have affected or might affect those around him". Jesse and Jones elaborate on this iteration of masculinity:

> [The sensitive thinker] may talk freely with friends about fear and self-doubt. He may open up to adult characters (parents, teachers, coaches) regarding at least a portion of the difficulties he is facing. Or he may spend time writing in a journal or thinking out loud so that readers are invited into his complex, nuanced decision-making processes. […] [T]he sensitive thinker eschews boasting about his successes or blaming others for his failures – two hallmarks of hypermasculinity in popular culture – in favor of recognizing and appreciating the role his 'supporting cast' plays in his personal journey. And while it is certainly possible for these characters to also embody some of the norms of dominant masculinity, the key difference here is that *these components always remain secondary aspects of the character's social persona.* (Ibid., 115; emphasis in original)

As this chapter will show, Arthur's introspective narration invites the reader to observe his complex thought processes as well as his deep care for others, both counteracting the hyper-masculinity exemplified by his half-brother and his biological father.

Arthur, I contend, displays a form of what Critical Masculinity and Men's Studies scholar Karla Elliott (2016) terms *caring masculinities*. She defines these as "masculine identities that reject domination and its associated traits and embrace values of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality" (Ibid., 240). Importantly, Elliott argues, caring masculinities "constitute a critical form of men's engagement and involvement in gender equality and offer the potential of sustained social change for men and gender relations" (2016, 240). They are therefore located in the open margin (Elliott 2020a, 1735). Drawing on Elliott's conceptualisation, I contend that Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* models a reconfiguring of masculine identities into "identities of care rather than domination", offering an alternative to those masculinities located in the closed centre, and an example of what Elliott terms a "gender equality intervention" (2016, 240; 243).

Arthur's caring masculinity, as this chapter will show, particularly surfaces in moments of maturation and the narrative closure. As discussed earlier, maturation often occurs through rites of passages. In Crossley-Holland's trilogy these are referred to as "crossing-places" – a phrase that generally plays a crucial role in the narrative and is invoked in various ways. Crossing-places can be actual places (the Marches, dusks, bridges) or temporal situations (between waking and sleep, midnight, and New Year's Eve); the term is also used in relation to the seeing stone as well as

[152] The conflict between monasticism and chivalry further demonstrates how maturation and rites of passage depend on a boy's social status and estate. While the texts discussed in the previous chapters effectively ignore the historical differences in attitudes to masculinity and maturation in terms of social status, these differences exert imaginative pressure in the *Arthur Trilogy*, which highlights different paths to achieve medieval manhood.

Arthur's grandmother's storytelling. Most significantly, "crossing-places" refers to "places and times where changes can happen" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.2487). As his mentor, Lord Stephen, explains to Arthur shortly before the boy's knighting ceremony, "[c]ertain events in our lives mark our passage through this world. Baptism, confirmation, betrothal and marriage … But what matters is how we make use of these crossing-places. How we apply them to the rest of our lives. Isn't that right?" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 75) The four most crucial "crossing-places" I have identified and focus on are Arthur's education, his participation in the crusade, his dubbing, and the taking-over of his deceased father's manor. I argue that these moments demonstrate Arthur's caring masculinity as a more open adaptation of the chivalric masculinity model his society expects and celebrates.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the ways that Arthur's caring masculinity is reflected in his need for relationships across social differences as well as in his commitment to social rather than physical-risk heroism. In her analysis, Robertson neglects to differentiate between external and internal masculinity ideals. For example, she describes how a wound Arthur acquires "in honourable and potentially fatal combat" results in him being knighted and hence "accepted into the community of celebrated knighthood" (Robertson 2019, 81). As I will illustrate in the first section, however, the praise and rewards Arthur receives for his bravery reflect others' masculinity ideals rather than his own. Further, even if he desires to occupy a hegemonic space, as Robertson argues, this is not usually echoed in the boy's reflections on his masculine embodiment and performance, which, I maintain, reveal courage rather than bravery, thus confirming his caring masculinity.

In section two, I discuss the protagonist's relationships with the influential men in his life. Robertson comments on Arthur's questioning of different ways of being male (2019, 93); yet she neither examines what ways of being male these are, nor discusses the circumstances under which the protagonist encounters various masculinity ideals outside his magical stone. Robertson focuses on the impact of the 'truth of myth' Arthur sees in the obsidian, and the ways he learns from as well as questions the actions of the mythical king and his knights, neglecting, however, the role of Arthur's relationships and interactions with the 'real' men in his life. As my analysis will show, the relationships he shares with three men, Sir William – his biological father whom he initially thinks to be his uncle, Lord Stephen – the knight he serves and views as his 'almost father', and Merlin – the elderly 'magical' character who gives the boy the stone, are particularly important in Arthur's development of a mature masculine identity in different ways. I argue that the portrayal and juxtaposition of these men and their mentorship models are essential for the understanding of masculinity ideals and gender relations in the narrative.

In the final section of this chapter, I illustrate that, while influenced by the male guides in his life, Arthur's masculinity develops beyond the hegemonic norms he encounters: recognising his privilege, he rejects domination and embodies a more open masculinity. Crossley-Holland's trilogy revises a number of harmful masculinity scripts: domination and superiority, physical risk and violence, limited emotional expressiveness, and the repudiation of the feminine. The revision of the latter – representing, as it does, a clear rejection of Mythopoetic Men's Movement ideas and conservative boy crisis positions – is particularly emphasised in the closure, which depicts Arthur free from male influence and guidance, and (re)connecting with the feminine through a union with his mother. Compared to Morris's *Squire's Tale* series and Springer's *I am Mordred*, then, Crossley-Holland presents a protagonist who devises his own caring – and, importantly, non-hegemonic, open – masculine heroic model, a protagonist whose chosen masculine embodiment offers a gender equality intervention presented within a medieval(ist), Arthurian context.

Relationality and Social Heroism

From the beginning, Arthur's caring masculinity is evident in his need for relationships as well as his commitment to social rather than physical-risk heroism. Throughout the trilogy, Arthur demonstrates a strong need for interaction and connection with others, across gender and class divides. His close friendship with the reeve's daughter, Gatty[153], exemplifies this, and so does his desire for interactions with people of different social status. He deeply misses these connections after his move to Lord Stephen's manor: "If I were at home – at Caldicot, I mean – I could talk to Merlin about all my worries, or even to Oliver. I could go and give Gatty a hand, or elbow-wrestle with Howell and Jankin, and play with Sian. But here there's no one like that" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.852). Both his foster father and his foster brother continuously berate Arthur for his closeness to the labouring estate and emphasise the importance of everyone having their place and duties. Arthur's compassion for and interest in the lives of people from a lower estate contradicts chivalric as well as contemporary hegemonic masculinity ideals that emphasise the need for domination and dictate superiority over others as indicators of 'true manhood'. He also does not – in the chivalric spirit – view these people as subjects to protect, but as valuable participants in his life and society more broadly.

Including interactions between the protagonist and people across estates also allows Crossley-Holland to explore embodiments of masculinities outside the chivalric class. Medieval romances often "provide negative counter-images to the model of knighthood, extreme caricatures

[153] Crossley-Holland later published *Gatty's Tale* (2006), a novel detailing the girl's life as she leaves Sir John's manor to go on a pilgrimage.

to contrast with the ideal image of upper-class manhood" (Phillips 2012, 96). This is not the case in Crossley-Holland's narrative, which succeeds in depicting a plurality of admirable and harmful masculinities from different social backgrounds. The seeing stone largely portrays interactions between nobles, reflecting the interactions in Malory's *Morte*, the work the stories in the obsidian are largely based on. Arthur's reality, however, offers a broader range of masculinities. Men of similar estates or ranks are often contrasted with each other and presented in terms of radically opposing opinions, behaviours, or character traits – for example, Sir John's armourer, Turold, and Lord Stephen's armourer, Alan; or Oliver, the priest at Sir John's manor, and Haket, the priest at Lord Stephen's place. Alan and Haket are depicted in particularly negative terms, the former as overly aggressive and the latter as a sexual abuser. In contrast to the texts discussed in the previous chapters, Crossley-Holland's trilogy foregrounds the hierarchical nature of the society the protagonist-narrator lives in and his attempts to breach hierarchical boundaries – reflecting a rejection of domination – while also highlighting the multiplicity of masculinities across and within estates.

Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* indeed introduces the reader to a multiplicity of masculinities within the knightly class, which Arthur encounters and reflects upon. These multiple knightly masculinities present the conflicting ideals of chivalry, as commonly portrayed in medieval romance but often neglected in children's retellings that offer a more simplified and glorified vision of knighthood to be emulated by the young reader. Crossley-Holland's protagonist regularly observes and interacts with an array of men from the knightly estate whose actions he can judge and use to form his own ideas about what kind of knight he should or *wants* to be. This process of knightly identity development is accelerated once he is on the crusade, a medieval rite of passage to prove one's manhood (Mesley 2019). Before embarking on the crusade, Arthur imagines this event as "a turning-point of my whole life" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.3744), an accurate prediction, as the narrative will show.

While the choice between two different masculinity models – monasticism and chivalry – presents the initial conflict for Arthur in terms of his identity development, his time on the crusade sees him engage with what I term the 'knight-of-the-body/knight-of-the-heart conflict'. These are phrases that he first encounters in his seeing stone, which presents Sir Lancelot as the epitome of chivalry, a knight of the body *and* the heart. An exchange between Lancelot and Guinevere that Arthur watches in his stone emphasises the qualities related to the body and the heart. Lancelot relays to the queen how, as a young boy, the Lady of the Lake taught him about knighthood:

> 'When I was a boy,' Sir Lancelot says, 'I was brought up by the Lady of the Lake, and I longed to be a knight.'
>
> '"Are you so sure?" she asked me. "Do you know what being a knight means?"

> "I know some men are worthy because of the qualities of the body and some because of the qualities of the heart," I replied.
> "What's the difference?" the Lady of the Lake asked me.
> "Some people come out of their mother's wombs big-boned or energetic or handsome, and some do not," I told her. "If a man is slight or lacks stamina, he can't do anything about it. But any man can acquire the qualities of the heart."
> "And what are they?" the Lady of the Lake asked me.
> "Manners. Tact. Restraint. Loyalty and generosity.'"
> Queen Guinevere wraps both arms round Sir Lancelot. 'Of the body …' she whispers. 'Of the heart … You have both, my lord. […]' (Crossley-Holland 2003, 36-37)[154]

Two questions arise from this passage. Firstly, what do the 'body' and the 'heart' stand for in Crossley-Holland's narrative, and secondly, how does this relate to Arthur's characterisation? To answer the first question, 'body' and 'heart', I contend, signify the two conflicting ideals of chivalry – physical prowess and courtesy. Arthur notices these conflicting ideals, for example, in the story of Erec and Enid, which he watches in his stone. He writes:

> I think Erec's friends were right in a way. Because of his passion, he turned his back on his duties as a knight. Overseeing his estates. Serving at court. Protecting the defenceless. And fighting in the field, as Lord Stephen and I are going to do. But if he has to be away from home so often and for so long, how can a man be a true knight without dishonouring his marriage? And how can a loving husband ever be a good knight? (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.2997-2999)

This passage demonstrates Arthur's awareness of contradicting expectations within masculinity ideals, illustrating his continuous questioning of what he sees and experiences.

The second question that needs to be addressed is how the terms 'knight of the body' and 'knight of the heart' fit with Arthur de Caldicot, especially in terms of his caring masculinity, as well as his positioning and movement between margin and centre. To answer this question, we need to pay attention to the subtle but crucial differences between bravery and courage. Both terms are connected to heroism and are often used interchangeably, although, historically and philosophically, they have different meanings (Kinsella et al. 2017, 1). There are overlapping characteristics, and both bravery and courage require agency, i.e., an individual's "capacity to act in

[154] Here, Crossley-Holland adapts the events Lancelot relays to Guinevere not from Malory, but from the Old French Prose *Lancelot* contained in the Vulgate Cycle (also known as the *Lancelot-Grail*, c.1210-1230). Suard (1994) argues that Lady of the Lake's commentary as presented in the Lancelot highlights the nature-nurture debate common in medieval romance. According to Suard, the Prose *Lancelot* suggests that the hero's noble nature (which he is yet to learn of) needs to be "subjected to education" (Ibid., 70). The question of who should dispense this, Suard asserts, lies at the core of the *Lancelot* (Ibid.). Phillips (2012, 85) offers a different perspective on the Lady's "exposition of knight's duties" in the Prose *Lancelot*, viewing it as "the integration of secular and mystical ideals" in the Arthurian chivalric ideals. The passage Crossley-Holland focuses on here is also crucial in a picturebook adaptation of the Arthurian legend, *Young Lancelot* (1996), written by Robert D. San Souci and illustrated by Jamichael Henterly (San Souci and Henterly also collaborated on *Young Arthur* [1997] and *Young Guinevere* [1993], while Daniel Horne illustrated San Souci's *Young Merlin* [1990]). As Kellogg (2004, 55) writes: "As his foster mother, the Lady of the Lake, has told him, [Lancelot] must become a knight with two hearts: 'One should be hard as a diamond when battling cruelty and injustice. The other should be soft as warm wax to respond to goodness and gentleness.' The two hearts not only describe the profile of a balanced chivalric knight but also foreshadow Lancelot's divided loyalties, the hard knight-in-arms serving Arthur and the tender man vulnerable to the passionate love offered by the beautiful but impetuous Guinevere."

any given environment" (Ibid., 8). However, there are differences that are particularly relevant, I argue, for the analysis of Arthur's masculinity. Usually defined as "the ability to confront danger or pain without fear", bravery is one of the core features of what Kinsella et al. term a "physical-risk heroism schema" (Ibid., 2) which, I contend, is aligned with masculine embodiments that are located in the closed centre. Bravery includes acts of martial and civil heroism (Ibid.) and lies at the core of chivalric masculinity as depicted both in medieval Arthuriana and nineteenth- to early-twentieth-century children's retellings.[155] Bravery and physical-risk heroism are traditionally related to "agentic and masculine stereotypes" including "speed, strength, impulsivity, fearlessness, quick-mindedness, and dealing with consequences after the action" (Ibid., 3). These terms hardly describe young Arthur. Yet, other characters in the narrative – Lord Milon de Provins specifically – repeatedly call Arthur *brave*, praising him for specific actions and interventions.

"Naked Bravery", a chapter towards the end of volume two, describes one such intervention on Arthur's part: his reaction to witnessing a man stabbing another before also attempting to hurt a woman. Arthur's intervention does not come without consequences, resulting in a wound on his arm. Largely based on this incident, Robertson (2019) develops her idea of Arthur's "wounded masculinity", which, she argues, defines his gendered embodiment in the trilogy. As she writes, "achieving the ends of hegemonic masculinity seldom comes without some form of physical and/or psychological mutilation. Arthur endures both during his journey from boyhood to manhood" (Ibid., 76). The wound, Robertson argues, "bears testament to his courage" – she uses bravery and courage interchangeably in her analysis – and causes Lord Milon to have the boy knighted (Ibid., 80-81). Robertson concludes:

> It is undeniable that, for Arthur, the obligation to fight is non-negotiable. It is seen as a 'natural' and largely uncontested part of the responsibility prescribed by the dominant discourse of masculinity in his time. Arthur understands his 'duty' and thus accepts the probability of physical injury. (Ibid., 79)

Contrastingly, I contend that a different picture of Arthur emerges when we distinguish between the masculinity ideals held by others (external) and Arthur himself (internal), and if we consider the way the boy's intervention is narrated.

Indeed, the most interesting aspect about Arthur's 'act of bravery' is the way it is presented in the narrative. It is not Arthur himself, in first person, who tells the story, but Lord Stephen who recounts the incident to both Arthur and Milon:

> No one on the steps lifted a finger. But you, Arthur, you leaped across, unarmed, and threw yourself at [the man], and knocked him down. […] You wrestled with him and pinioned him. You gripped his right wrist. […] Milon says you held this lout down until three of his constables forced him to drop his knife. (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.4428-4434)

[155] In her monograph, McCausland (2019a) offers a detailed discussion of risk-taking and physical heroism in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century children's adaptations of the *Morte*.

The pride in Lord Stephen's narration is evident, and so is the focus on Arthur's intervention as a physical act. The reader is left to wonder how Arthur may have told the story. Lord Stephen's animated rendition of the event is met with Milon commenting repeatedly, "Bravee!", while Arthur, contrastingly, responds with concern about the man who got stabbed: "'[I]s he all right?' 'Dead,' said Milon. 'No!' I cried." (Ibid., loc.4436) This aptly illustrates the distinction between what I call external (imposed) and internal (experienced) views on masculinity, as both Milon and Lord Stephen interpret Arthur's behaviour through the lens of their own masculinity ideals, while Arthur's reaction illustrates his caring masculinity.

Robertson argues that the wound Arthur suffers by intervening – "[t]he vicious cut that extends from the wrist beyond the elbow" – marks the squire "as a man of action and honour – and proves that the bearer was prepared to face severe danger to protect another" (2019, 80). Arthur, however, is unaware of or downplays the significance of his intervention, stating simply that he had grabbed the man's wrist because "[h]e would have cut my throat, otherwise" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.4430). In a conversation with Milon's soldiers later, Arthur also mentions his *fear* during the incident (Crossley-Holland 2003, 28). Even though he shows the soldiers his wound, it is not to boast about his 'mark of honour', but to demonstrate the consequences of violent altercations and his dread of entering real battle. Arthur hardly views himself as "a man of action and honour", expressing surprise at Milon's suggestion to have him knighted as reward for his bravery. Robertson's (2019, 81) comment that Arthur's wound, "acquired in honourable and potentially fatal combat, offers the squire a means of being accepted into the community of celebrated knighthood" again neglects that this acceptance is granted on the basis of external ideals held by others – in this case, Milon.

The passage above is not Arthur's only attempt in rescuing someone. In volume three, he saves the young squire Bertie, first from boys who try to drown him, then from two Venetian men who attack him. Again, it is Milon who praises Arthur for his actions: "'Except for Arthur,' Milon went on, 'Arthur and surgeon, Bertie is dead.'" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 237) This time, Arthur himself relays his 'act of bravery' to the reader. He does so in reverse order, explaining first how he faced the attackers:

> [A]nd that's when I saw it was Bertie.
> The two Venetians faced me. One had a glittering knife, the other a staff.
> I unsheathed my sword. The dazzling blade Milon gave me. I grasped the pommel in my left hand. […]
> I swung my sword. I missed. […]
> I don't know how I worked myself loose. I must have raised and swung my sword, but I don't even remember hitting him – the man with the glittering knife. All I can see is his nose. His nose. Lying in front of my feet.
> I can see them running.
> I can hear the man howling.

> I can hear Bertie choking and moaning.
> It's a good thing Lord Stephen had told me to put my armour on. (Ibid., 235)

The short sentences reflect the fear and urgency of the situation, while the miss of his sword stroke demonstrates Arthur's lack of prowess and experience with arms. He does not remember scoring a strike, suggesting an adrenaline-powered moment of self-protection rather than a conscious act of physical risk and violence. The final thought is about protection, his relief about having worn his armour. The way Arthur then describes the lead-up to his physical risk-taking similarly reflects fear and remorse rather than sheer bravery:

> Venetians were chasing Frenchmen. They were knifing each other. Hacking. Jabbing. Slinging stones. Loosing arrows.
>
> Lord Stephen and I tried to stop them, and so did many other knights and squires – Milon, even Sir William – but it was almost impossible. […]
>
> It was dark, and Lord Stephen and I were soon separated. I didn't know where to go. I was cold and sweating and trembling. My mouth was dry. I was afraid of dying. And that's when I rounded the corner and saw them dragging Bertie away. (Ibid., 235-236)

Crucially, Arthur shows empathy for the man he hurt in the fight, even though he almost got killed by him: "[E]veryone agrees the Venetians were asking for it, but I keep thinking of that man. His blood leaped over my boots and stained them. His nose! I didn't mean to. I was just trying to protect myself" (Ibid., 237). While Arthur himself views his interventions as necessary to protect others and himself, it is Lord Stephen and Milon who praise them as "naked bravery" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.4443).

Arthur's interventions, I argue, are not fearless acts of risk-taking, but behaviour that demonstrates *courage* and therefore reflects his caring masculinity. "The essence of courage", Kinsella et al. (2017, 4) explain, "is the unyielding choice to fight and resist, but not necessarily in a physical sense, and to be proactive regardless of the possible consequences". While bravery is a defining feature of physical-risk heroism, courage, in contrast, is "central to social heroism", which "serves social ideals and needs" and requires "perspective-taking, empathy, and concern for the welfare of others over an extended period" (Ibid., 9). This description fits closely with Arthur's characterisation. Importantly, the etymology of the term 'courage' is connected to the French word for heart, *coeur*. I therefore maintain that bravery is related to the knight of the body's physical-risk heroism, while courage defines the knight of the heart's social heroism, and that Arthur is aligned with the latter. Importantly, in contrast to bravery and physical-risk heroism, courage and social heroism are "not tethered to a gender stereotypical behaviour" – they are neither masculine- nor feminine-coded (Ibid., 7). Viewed in this light, it becomes difficult to interpret Arthur in terms of a hegemonic, physical-risk masculinity that is located in the closed centre.

While Arthur performs physical acts of bravery and, in doing so, commits violence and risks injury or death, I contend that he does so due to his social heroism, which is driven by his concern and compassion for others. The wound that Robertson sees as a sign of "action and honour" thus becomes a symbol of Arthur's care ethic. It is this care ethic that also takes precedence at his knighting ceremony – an event that he describes as his "crossing-place" and that appears to be the most meaningful to him in terms of his future: "My vows will echo and travel with me all the days of my life" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 76). When the cardinal who is knighting him asks Arthur why he wants to become a knight, this is the boy's response:

> 'I wish to become a knight so I may serve our Lord Jesus Christ. Pure in heart, strong in body.'
> 'A knight is a guardian,' the cardinal continued. 'Whom will you guard?'
> 'I will do all I can to defend and care for people less fortunate than I am,' I replied.
> As I said these words, I thought at once of Gatty. I could see her hoeing her croft, and singing. I thought of Jankin and Howell, and all the villagers at Calidcot. I thought of Tanwen, and Kester.
> 'In the kingdom of Britain,' I said, 'many people suffer. Many go to bed hungry. It's not just.'
> Cardinal Capuano looked down at me and rubbed his chin. I knew this wasn't quite what he had expected me to say.
> 'My child,' he said, 'all of us are equal in the eyes of God.'
> That's what Oliver told me. And he told me poverty is part of God's will. I don't believe that. I think a knight is bound to do everything he can to look after the people in his manor. (Ibid., 80-81)

The individuals Arthur considers while taking his vow are people he deeply cares about, for whom he has stood up in the past, and with whom he has been enjoying relationships despite their position outside the nobility. Most of them he has not seen since leaving for the crusade, yet their names are at the forefront of his mind at such a crucial moment: the rite of passage that will see him enter the knightly community. This demonstrates that, for Arthur, chivalry and leadership do not translate to physical-risk heroism and domination, but to social heroism and caring. Protecting those one cares about and those more vulnerable is, of course, part of the chivalric ideal. As Larrington (2017, 262) writes, medieval chivalry is "predicated on altruism, on the requirement to help the weak and enforce justice on the overbearing". Within the Arthurian context, Malory's Pentecostal Oath famously and explicitly requires knights to swear that they will protect the weak. In Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy*, I contend, this chivalric altruism is re-written, with issues of domination and superiority losing significance in Arthur's characterisation and his embodiment of a caring, more open masculinity.

Interacting with and Negotiating Shifting Masculinity Ideals and Mentorship Models

I now turn to examine the different mentorship approaches that Arthur encounters and the shifting masculinity models he interacts with, judges, and is contrasted with on his path to manhood. Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* introduces the reader to three distinct male mentorship models, embodied by Lord Stephen, Sir William, and Merlin respectively, who try to socialise Arthur into the knightly order in their own particular ways. As I will argue in this section, the characterisation and narrative trajectory of Arthur's father figures, Lord Stephen and Sir William, serve as a contrast to his own caring masculinity, while the portrayal of their distinct hegemonic, privileged embodiments of masculinity demonstrates the continuous reconfiguration of masculinity models. I will illustrate that, although there is a focus on male role models and homosocial settings, Crossley-Holland's trilogy presents a protagonist who resists integration into the closed masculinity models embodied by Lord Stephen and Sir William, and who benefits the most from the mentorship style provided by Merlin, a male character outside the estate system. Crucially, I argue that, only once the influence of the father figures in his life wanes and once he returns the obsidian, can Arthur fully embrace his caring masculinity – under Merlin's continued guidance.

I begin my discussion of mentorship models with Lord Stephen, who Arthur describes as "not very manly in body" although "always robust in spirit", a man with "strong feelings" who "cares for other people's feelings as well" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc. 1182; loc.2245). Lord Stephen deliberately passes on his wisdom and advice to the protagonist-narrator, who appreciates and welcomes lessons, praise, and approval from his "almost father". Lord Stephen's method of mentoring resembles the Socratic method. He continuously asks Arthur questions, such as, "Why do Christians dislike Jews?" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.1941), "What would you say, Arthur, makes a man powerful?" (2001, loc.4349), or "What is our crusade?" (2003, 31) Through answering Lord Stephen's questions, Arthur develops his worldviews, as the following passage illustrates:

> 'What would you say, Arthur, makes a man powerful?'
> 'His birth,' I replied.
> 'You can be born powerful and still forfeit that power.'
> 'His men, then,' I said. 'His followers. The loyalty he commands.'
> 'Yes,' said Lord Stephen, 'and what keeps a man loyal?'
> 'If his lord is just,' I said, 'and generous to him.'
> 'Generous?' Lord Stephen asked.
> 'With gifts and praise. And feats. If he opens his palm.'
> 'Aha!' said Lord Stephen, smiling. (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.4349)

Lord Stephen also frequently dispenses wisdom without engaging Arthur through questions. The advice he gives Arthur right before the boy's dubbing is particularly paramount in terms of masculinity:

> '[M]y own father told me a knight should have two hearts: one adamantine as a diamond …'
> 'Adamantine, sir?'
> 'Unbreakable. And the other heart, he said, should be soft as hot wax. A knight should be hard and cutting when he's dealing with cruel men. He should give them no quarter. But he should allow himself to be shaped and moulded by considerate and gentle people. A knight must be careful not to allow cruel men anywhere near his heart of wax, because any kindness extended to them would be wasted. But he should never be harsh or unforgiving to women and men who need care or mercy.' (Crossley-Holland 2003, 74)

Robertson argues that Lord Stephen's advice here "highlights the conflicting expectations of hegemonic masculinity" (2019, 93). I would add that, more specifically, it emphasises the conflicting expectations of the chivalric ideal, and that, crucially, the passage illustrates how Lord Stephen aims to *pass on* this ideal to Arthur, just as his own father had passed it on to him, suggesting a seamless continuation of masculinity models from one generation to the next. The passage, I contend, also exemplifies the perceived importance of male guidance for the adolescent boy, who must be "shaped and moulded" like wax. At the end of the trilogy, Arthur refers to Lord Stephen's comment about the two hearts after watching the Grail King tell Sir Perceval, Sir Galahad, and Sir Bors: "You know a man is never worthy to become a knight simply because of his prowess. Strengths and skills are only means; they're not ambitions or ideals. A knight always has duties …" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 334) Arthur then writes about these duties, not as listed by the Grail King, but from his own point of view – and his list is clearly influenced by Lord Stephen's teachings: "Yes, to have one heart hard as diamond, one heart soft as hot wax. To be open-minded, open-handed and generous." (Ibid.)

While Lord Stephen is depicted as Arthur's mentor and role model and is held in high regards by the protagonist-narrator, Arthur's biological father, Sir William, acts as his son's foil and anti-role model. He is described consistently in negative terms: as impulsive, angry, violent, selfish, and abusive. Throughout the trilogy, the reader is positioned to dislike Sir William – through references to his wrongdoings, but also through descriptions of his inappropriate and gross behaviour. In one scene, Arthur describes how "Sir William stuck his left forefinger into one of his nostrils and twisted it. […] He inspected his forefinger and then wiped it on his sleeve" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.1680). In another passage, Arthur mentions that, when they first met as father and son, Sir William "kept barking and shouting at me. He raised his fist" (Ibid., loc.3737). And in volume three, a scene in the magical obsidian sees Sir Kay describe three knights as "[b]ad, worse and worst […] A man who betrays his wife. A man who betrays his son. And a murderer" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 68) – Arthur's biological father has in fact committed all of these wrongs. As Vanessa Joosen (2018, 41) writes in relation to age norms, "[w]hen a particularly dislikeable character expresses age norms […] these norms may provoke resistance". Similarly, the gender norms implicitly and explicitly expressed through Sir William's characterisation can play a crucial role in the young reader's assessment of and perspective on masculinity ideals within Crossley-Holland's narrative.

Sir William not only differs from Lord Stephen in terms of characterisation, but also in relation to how he tries to socialise Arthur into the knightly order: he attempts to force his son to be 'manlier' by shaming him. Jill Heinrich (2014, 250-251) writes that, when guiding boys, adult men have two choices: *imposing* upon them traditional masculinity ideals or *mentoring* them "in a liberating and empowering way that will transform boys' lives and the society in which they live". The first of these approaches often occurs by *shaming* boys into "measur[ing] up to the hegemonic masculine ideals that will afford them power and privilege and that will insulate them from ridicule and shame" (Ibid., 250). Sir William regularly tries to shame Arthur. For instance, when he finds out about Arthur's desire to join the crusade, he remarks, "Shrimps don't last long when they get washed out to sea" (Crossley-Holland 2000, 245). Interestingly, Arthur later repeats this comment verbatim to the younger squire, Bertie (2003, 16), which illustrates the continuation of harmful masculinity norms as well as the ways boys and men are both emasculated by other males and perpetuate this cycle themselves. Another example of Sir William's approach to socialising Arthur occurs on the crusade. When the boy becomes desperate about the ruthlessness of war and battle, lamenting the absence of rules, Sir William "snorted. 'Rules!' he exclaimed. He stepped towards me, and punched me on the shoulder. 'You'll soon get used to it.'" (Ibid., 210). In his approach, Sir William represents voices from the Mythopoetic Men's Movement and boy crisis discourses that are opposed to the 'soft male', embodied in the trilogy by Arthur.

Comparisons between Sir William and Lord Stephen in terms of their mentorship, I argue, reflect contemporary ideas surrounding fatherhood. The former exhibits characteristics of "the detached authoritarian father", a model which is increasingly being replaced by "an involved, nurturing" one (Miller 2012, 199; see also Morman and Floyd 2002), partially embodied, in the trilogy, by Lord Stephen. As Randles (2018, 519) explains, more "[h]ybrid constructions of fatherhood specifically idealize good fathers as nurturing 'new men,' not stoic 'traditional men' who are emotionally and/or physically absent from their children's lives". Importantly, however, Arthur cannot be fully himself in front of either Sir William or Lord Stephen. For example, he writes about not being able to tell Lord Stephen about almost being strangled by his armourer, worrying that he "might think I'm too weak, and not really able to look after myself. I'm not a milkweed!" (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.820-847) Arthur later repeats this concern to his half-brother, Tom (2001, loc.1579-1585), suggesting a concern with demonstrating his independence, capability, and manliness to Lord Stephen.[156]

Arthur's foster father, Sir John, is also interesting to consider in terms of fatherhood: he is firm but fair, has strict views on duties and everyone's place in the social order, but simultaneously views knighthood as going beyond just fighting. Arthur particularly minds Sir John's "cold silences. I mind the way my father doesn't understand me" (Crossley-Holland 2000, 82), suggesting a more detached fathering style. If we view the two fatherhood models – authoritative and nurturing – as two ends of a spectrum, Sir John would be located closer to the authoritative end and Lord Stephen closer to the nurturing side. Sir Walter also needs to be mentioned. He is described as a kind man

156 How he appears to others (other men in particular) in terms of his masculinity generally worries Arthur, reflecting the expectations of normative masculinity and the pressure for boys and men to (at least appear to) follow the norms for the sake of how they are viewed by others.

and good father to Arthur's love interest, Winnie. Arthur writes: "In the firelight, Sir Walter took my right elbow and squeezed it warmly. I like the way he listens to me." (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.3036) Passages like these reflect the protagonist's – and the implied author's – understanding of ideal fatherhood, characterised by listening and understanding, and both emotional and physical closeness. The narrative thus constructs the ideal father as similarly embodying a caring masculinity.

Besides offering a comparison of fatherhood models, the juxtaposition between Lord Stephen and Sir William can be read, more broadly, in terms of a struggle between and evolution of different masculinity models. Both men embody masculinities that are hegemonic and located in the privileged, closed centre; however, Lord Stephen's masculinity can be described as chivalric, while Sir William embodies epic masculinity. The two men's masculinities can also be distinguished according to Hadas' (2019) differentiation between the predatory and the courteous knight, which he discusses in his article on hegemonic and counter-hegemonic masculinities in the Middle Ages. A predatory knight, Hadas asserts, is one "who hardly curb[s] his unruly energies, attacking savagely at the head of his troops, his urges propelling him toward conquest and seizure, i.e. the gratification of murderous drives" (2019, 259). A courteous knight, on the other hand, is "obliged to subdue his impulses and internalise patterns of fidelity, solidarity and noble honour"; he has, however, the same desire to fight and kill as the predatory knight (Ibid.). The reason I am wary to use this distinction and to pursue this line of argument is because of the focus on violence in Hadas' argument. Overall, Lord Stephen fights primarily out of duty; his disposition is not "essentially structured by the desire to fight and the drive for killing" (Ibid.). In volume one, Sir John tells Arthur that "there's more to knighthood than fighting skills. A good deal more, though not all knights seem to think so" (Crossley-Holland 2000, 310). Sir William certainly is one such knight. As discussed in the Introduction, the epic male is "first and foremost a fighter and a leader", a man of "prowess and skill in battle, physical strength and courage, and loyalty" (Doyle 1995, 28). With the exception of loyalty, this is an apt characterisation of Sir William – although, as I will discuss shortly, his advanced age complicates his performance of epic masculinity.

As Moelker and Kümmel (2007, 296) highlight, "nobles in medieval times were not civilized or chivalrous to begin with". Warriors needed to be 'tamed' – and so they were, through the introduction of the chivalric code and the increasing importance of courtly manners. No code of conduct, however, can tame Sir William, who exemplifies what contemporary research terms hypermasculinity, i.e., "problematic male behaviour (including sexual aggression, extreme risk-taking and sexist attitudes towards females)" (Seager and Barry 2019, 111).[158] That Sir William does

[158] I use the term 'hypermasculinity' rather than 'toxic masculinity' because the former "does not automatically confer stigma upon the whole masculine gender. Instead, the term implies that such behaviour is more exceptional, an extreme version of masculinity and not inherent to masculinity as a whole" (Seager and Barry 2019, 112).

not operate according to any code is clear from his first appearance. Challenging Arthur to a swordfight, the older man wins, but only through foul play, which results in Arthur being wounded. When the boy refers back to this fight later, he states: "I don't have to be helped by the people who have wounded me, Serle, Sir William. I can help myself. My own efforts can set me free." (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.2790) Arthur, here, has recognised something that Springer's Mordred cannot: that his own actions can liberate him. This can be viewed as Arthur's resolution to resist and combat the harmful hypermasculine ideals embodied by his biological father and foster brother and to develop a masculinity that is detached from the ideals and values they exemplify.

Sir William's hypermasculine behaviour stands in contrast to his continuous portrayal as old man. His numerical age – sixty-five at the start – is highlighted on several occasions, and so are his aching bones and partial blindness. The repeated emphasis on his old age and declining health could be interpreted as ageism. However, I argue that this emphasis serves another, twofold function in the trilogy. Firstly, Sir William's aggression and misogyny are compensating behaviours reflecting his threatened masculinity – hegemonic masculinity is connected to youth, and Sir William's is long past, meaning he has to find other ways to assert his manhood. Secondly, the focus on ageing helps to stage Sir William's production of masculinity as outdated and in decline. As Arthur writes: "I looked at [Sir William's] right hand. The back of it is covered with brown spots. The half-moons on his nails have almost completely disappeared, so maybe he won't live much longer" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 108).

As can be seen, although both Lord Stephen and Sir William embody privileged masculinities in the centre, they are portrayed as radically different in terms of their masculinities, their worldviews, and their ideas of directing Arthur on his path to manhood. Because of these differences, Sir William and Lord Stephen increasingly come to argue during their time together on the crusade. When the former discovers that the latter had been helping Arthur to find his biological mother, the struggle between the two culminates in a physical confrontation, which highlights the contrasting characterisation of the two men by juxtaposing Sir William's hypermasculine, aggressive, and violent nature with Lord Stephen's calmer, more respectful and non-violent disposition:

> My father was sodden with wine, blind with anger.
> 'You worm!' he bawled. 'You lump of filth! How dare you? Behind my back.'
> Lord Stephen didn't reply, but Sir William's anger was fuelling itself. […]
> My father kicked at a broken jug and advanced to the near end of the table. I could see his right eye glittering. Then he saw me.
> 'Talk of the devil!' he snapped, and he lurched towards me […]
> My father belched, then he turned towards Lord Stephen again, and spat in his face. 'Black bubbles!' he muttered.
> Lord Stephen drew himself up a little. 'No, Sir William,' he said. His voice was quiet and firm. […]
> My father drew his knife from his belt.

> I clenched my fists.
> My father stepped forward.
> 'No!' I yelled. 'No!'
> Sir William lumbered towards Lord Stephen and pulled back his right arm.
> Lord Stephen just stood there, blinking. 'Dear God!' he said in a surprised voice. He didn't even move.
> I leaped down from the gallery.
> I was too late.
> Sir William stabbed him. (Crossley-Holland 2003, 280-281)

Again, Sir William's bad temper and violent nature are emphasised; he is depicted behaving grossly, almost animal-like – belching, spitting, kicking, growling, bellowing, and roaring – which is particularly ironic considering that, in the same scene, Sir William calls cowherds and stablemen, i.e., men of lower social status, "bloody animals" (Ibid., 279). In a drunken rage, the older knight aims for Lord Stephen's heart, stabbing his shoulder instead, and causing him to fall over backwards and crack his head on the stone floor. At this point, Arthur manages to intervene, grabbing his father from behind and holding onto his wrist. This, I argue, is a crucial moment of maturation for Arthur: he stands up to the hypermasculine bully that is his biological father – a blood relation that is emphasised by the repetition of the phrase "my father" – thereby metaphorically rejecting the older knight's harmful, hegemonic, and closed masculinity. As Sir William tries to release himself, he falls forward, accidentally driving "his blood-blade deep into his body […] bur[ying] the knife in his own heart" (Ibid., 280-282). Eventually, it is not old age that kills Arthur's father, but his impulsiveness, rage, violence, and heightened sense of superiority. Both "body" and "heart" are mentioned in the description of the old knight's death, implying that he had not been a 'knight of the heart and the body' like Sir Lancelot. Lord Stephen's heart, however, is spared, symbolising his status as a knight of the heart. Relating this scene to Mythopoetic Men's Movement and boy crisis discourses, Sir William can be viewed as a voice of the movement, continuously telling his son to stop being 'soft' and give up looking for his mother, i.e., to distance himself from the feminine. He is the passionate 'wild man' of the Mythopoetic Movement, who, in Crossley-Holland's Arthurian adaptations, is ultimately killed.

Importantly, neither Sir William's nor Lord Stephens' embodiment of masculinity emerges as victorious or dominant model at the end of the trilogy: Sir William dies, while Lord Stephen suffers a (likely mortal) wound. In this sense, Lord Stephen can be compared to King Arthur in the stone. The classic scene of the final interaction between Sir Bedivere and the king on the battlefield becomes, in Crossley-Holland's narrative, a parallel to the protagonist-narrator and his relationship with his mentor: "'My lord Arthur!' cries Sir Bedivere. 'My king! Without you, what will become of me?' The king gazes at Sir Bedivere. His eyes are dim. 'Here and alone?' 'I can no longer help you,' the king says quietly. 'You must trust in yourself.'" (Ibid., 385) With Lord Stephen wounded, Arthur, too, is now on his own and must show independence and responsibility by taking Lord Stephen back to his family.

Unlike Sir William and Lord Stephen, Arthur survives the altercation without physical wounds – although not without mentally being affected: he feels guilty for his biological father's death and worries about Lord Stephen's recovery. In the aftermath of the confrontation, the evolution of masculinity ideals continues as Arthur is revealed as a 'knight of the *head* and the heart' by none other than his greatest admirer, Lord Milon. After the deadly incident, Milon again praises Arthur: "[A] good young knight […] Very good,' Milon said. He tapped his head and then his heart. 'I watch you. You hope; you care […] And you bravee" (Ibid., 287). The 'knight of the head and the heart' masculinity model resurfaces on Arthur's journey back, when he gets his palm read by a Saracen:

> 'He says he's never seen this before,' Simona replied. 'Your head-line and your heart-line are not separate. They are one. […] He says you will never have a thought in your head without your heart feeling it – joy or hope or fear or sorrow. And you will never feel emotion in your heart without your head seeking to understand it.'
>
> 'I hope that's true,' I said.
>
> 'He says this can be a great weakness or a great strength,' said Simona. 'That's up to you.' (Ibid., 311-312)

The fact that the palm reader has never encountered such lines before suggests that a new masculinity model has evolved with(in) Arthur. At the end of the trilogy, the stone presents three men as "knights-of-the-head-and-heart. Vessels of the spirit" (Ibid., 335): Sir Perceval, Sir Galahad, and Sir Bors – the Grail Knights, known for their 'purity of heart'. Having returned from the crusade, Arthur asks himself whether he has changed, answering, "I must find out. My head, my heart: I'll keep asking them questions" (Ibid., 357). The omission of any reference to the body in later passages such as these indicates a rejection of physicality, thus subverting both chivalric and contemporary normative masculinity ideals.

While both Lord Stephen's and Sir William's mentorship of Arthur has ended, the closure sees the return of Merlin, who, throughout the narrative, provides Arthur not with direct guidance, but with an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, independence, and agency, thus counteracting the approaches to male mentorship exhibited by Arthur's father figures. Unlike the other men in the protagonist's life, Merlin does not project any expectations onto Arthur; he does not provide any answers but wants Arthur to discover them himself. As Arthur writes: "The trouble is that Merlin never says yes or no. He closes his eyes and then he tries to find out the question behind my question." (Crossley-Holland 2000, 228) This stands in stark contrast to Lord Stephen and others, who lead Arthur to acknowledge and accept their own views and opinions, which is marked by the often-repeated phrase "Yes, sir" as Arthur's response. Crucially, Merlin is presented as different to other men from the start. As Arthur ponders, "Merlin isn't a lord or a knight, but he isn't a priest or a monk or a friar. He isn't a manor tenant or a laborer; he doesn't do any days' work for my father. And he isn't a reeve or a baker or a brewer or a beadle. So what is he?" (Ibid., 74) Merlin, I argue, exists outside the estate system – accordingly, he is not 'compromised' by a specific masculine ideology, which perhaps contributes to his method of guidance.

Like the legend itself, the figure of Merlin has developed throughout time, and his portrayal differs across the vast number of sources, in which he takes on various roles and functions. One of the most prominent of these is that of King Arthur's counsellor and mentor, which involves the "training and advising of the young king" that "establish the qualities of Arthur's rule" (Goodrich 2003, 1). Miller (2019, 40) explains that one of the reasons the Arthurian legend continues to permeate popular culture is "its educational aspects: most particularly, the educational narrative that describes the relationship between Merlin and Arthur". This narrative, Miller argues, remains one of the crucial elements in modern versions of the legend. Miller describes Merlin as "a pedagogical hybrid", positioning Merlin and Arthur "as the ideal teacher and the ideal student" (Ibid.). He maintains that modern Arthurian adaptations such as T.H. White's do not portray the young Arthur "as an antique character of privileged genius but as a modern character whose innate qualities burgeon due to the good training he receives from Merlin", who is presented as "the guide who leads his pupil toward self-awareness and individualism without engaging in traditional and repressive educational methods" (Ibid., 44-45). In Crossley-Holland's adaptation, I argue, Merlin takes on a more passive role. He is absent during the crusade, one of the main "crossing-places" on Arthur's maturation journey, and he does not act as a provider of wisdom or knowledge. Instead, and in contrast to Lord Stephen and Sir William, Merlin lets Arthur discover things for himself, encouraging him to keep asking questions. Goodrich highlights Merlin's function throughout the centuries "as the master narrator and architect of Camelot" (2003, 2). Crucially, in Crossley-Holland's adaptation, it is not the mentor, Merlin, that takes on that function, but young Arthur himself, narrating and interpreting the story of Camelot, and becoming the architect of his own 'kingdom', Catmole Manor.

One of Merlin's major contributions to Arthur's education, I contend, is gifting Arthur the seeing stone, which offers an opportunity for the boy to observe, judge, and critically evaluate male behaviour in situations that he can relate to. Arthur engages deeply with what he sees in the obsidian, which Robertson argues, "has relevance for him and the choices he is required to make as he enters manhood and assumes an influential role in the society in which he lives" (2019, 70). I maintain that, within this argument, it is important to emphasise Arthur's awareness of the differences between the 'mythical manhood', located in a mythical past and embodied by the knights in the Arthurian story, and his personal reality and abilities. While Arthur relates his own feelings and experiences to those of the knights in the stone – he sees himself reflected in King Arthur, Lancelot, Mordred, Tor, and Bedivere, for instance – he does not try to emulate these men, demonstrating an understanding of the mythical quality of their masculine embodiments: "I know I'm a knight and I've sworn to oppose evil and defend the helpless, but what could I do? I'm not Sir Erec or Sir Lancelot. I wasn't even armed, and I can't fight nine men at the same time." (Crossley-Holland 2003, 91) Arthur is also critically aware of the contrast between his own reality and the events he sees in the stone. For example, relaying his experience of digging the trenches, he writes: "I know now what a rabbit trapped in its burrow feels like. Quivering. Helpless. Overhead are humans, shouting and stamping, and stinking ferrets. In a siege like this, there's no chivalry, no courtesy." (Ibid., 215) Later, he states: "Sometimes I wake up sweating and trembling. I've seen things I wish I'd never seen. In my stone, warfare is so glorious. It is quick and clean, almost painless, not foul and excruciating. Right fights against wrong. But really it's nothing like as simple as that." (Ibid., 323-324) Passages like these illustrate the trilogy's move away from glorifying Arthurian, medieval(ist) masculinities, and towards encouraging the reader to critically engage with the stories they encounter.

Through the stone, the *Arthur Trilogy* offers its readers a retelling embedded in a variation. This firstly means that the audience need not be familiar with (Malory's version of) the Arthurian story. More importantly, the integration of the retelling within a variation increases the potential for subversion. In retellings, medieval ideologies are preserved – consciously or not, and to varying extents. This is also the case in Crossley-Holland's retelling within the *Arthur Trilogy*. However, by inserting Arthur de Caldicot as a narrator and interpreter[159] of the Arthurian stories, departures from the traditional Arthurian heroic ideology become even clearer compared to variations that assume some familiarity with the legend. It is this direct dialogue, I contend, that facilitates the challenging and breaking down of masculinity codes and gender schemata that I discuss in this chapter. While Sir William tries to shame Arthur and Lord Stephen attempts to mould him, Merlin offers Arthur a way of mentoring that allows him to become a self-sufficient, independent learner and critical thinker. Crucially, Merlin teaches Arthur the one lesson that forms the core of his developing identity and worldview: never stop asking questions. This lesson, which remains with Arthur wherever he goes, leads the boy to question and challenge the norms, ideals, and behaviours relating to gender(ed) practices, and allows him to reconfigure the masculinity models he encounters into a caring, more equitable form of masculine embodiment.

[159] Arthur acts as the narrator of the legend; he describes what he sees in terms of external narration. Hence, the narrative situation is similar to the third-person narration of classic retellings, except that Arthur offers interpretations based on his own life, knowledge, and experiences, which the reader has also access to.

Upon returning to the Marches Arthur inherits Sir William's manor, Catmole – an anagram for Camelot. The taking over of the manor bestows 'full manhood' on the protagonist-narrator. This 'full manhood' seems to be characterised by independence. Independence, according to Sir William, is granted to a man once he is knighted: "You can make your own choices then." (Crossley-Holland 2000, 244) Effectively, however, Arthur only becomes independent once the father figures in his life – his role model and his foil – lose influence over him through death (Sir William) and severe injury (Lord Stephen). As he prepares to take Lord Stephen home, Arthur thinks: "I have to choose which way we are to go, and it made me excited and nervous. I must decide. It is up to me." (Crossley-Holland 2003, 308) For the first time, Arthur can make his own decisions. At the start, it was Sir John, who decided whether he would become a clergyman or a knight; then, Lord Stephen was teaching – or, rather, moulding – the boy, while his biological father tried to shame him into compliance with hegemonic norms. Now Arthur is able to embrace his caring masculinity, and it is this embrace, I contend, that signals his maturity and entry into the adult order. Crucially, the protagonist continues to engage with Merlin, who promises to stay at Arthur's manor if he treats him well and keeps asking questions (Ibid., 399). Arthur indeed has achieved a sense of independence in relation to his embodiment and performance of masculinity; however, the closure also highlights his continued need for relationships and interdependence, as well as his rejection of dominance, further strengthening the portrayal of his caring masculinity.

Care, Emotionality, and Interdependence

In this final section I examine the ways the trilogy's denouement highlights Arthur's caring masculinity in the aftermath of his father's death and Lord Stephen's injury – in relation to his emotional expressiveness, and with regards to Arthur's long-awaited union with his mother. Shortly after the altercation between his father and his almost-father, Arthur meets a nun, Sister Cika, who becomes a figure of support for him, helping him through his recently experienced traumas. In a speech on "Boys and the Boy Crisis", published in the *Journal of Boyhood Studies* (2009), Tom Golden makes an interesting observation based on his examination of anthropological material on tribes around the world, namely that "almost all of the tribes will give grieving men tasks. They'll give the men something to do. They'll give the men activities, and they give the women a place to emote. […] [W]hether it's caring for the body, digging the grave or taking care of all the people" (196).[160]

[160] In my view, Golden's speech perpetuates dichotomous views on gender. Based on his own experience as a mental health professional, he asserts that women and men grief differently, and hence require different therapy methods. He refers to feminine and masculine modes, but it is clear that, in his view, these modes apply to women and men, respectively. Golden cites Shelley Taylor's research on women and stress (2002), which, he argues, illustrates the difference between women's grieving as an interactive process and men's as an active one – a difference which, Taylor's research apparently shows, is related to hormones and hence *physical* (Golden 2009, 197). Nevertheless, I find Golden's observation drawn from anthropological research highly relevant in relation to how Arthur's grieving is portrayed.

Arthur's personal response to his grief is to talk through his emotions with Sister Cika, while Lord Milon tasks him with returning the injured Lord Stephen to the Marches. Again, there is a clear distinction between the protagonist's personal needs and the external imposition of a masculine-coded coping-mechanism for grief. Interestingly, however, the 'masculine' task set by Milon sees Arthur take on a nurturing, almost mothering role, as he looks after Lord Stephen, who is compared to an infant: "Lord Stephen's like a baby, except he doesn't howl. He sleeps and sleeps, he wakes to drink and eat a little, he passes water and messes himself, and then he goes to sleep again." (Crossley-Holland 2003, 308) The denouement thus highlights the protagonist's caring masculinity in its most explicit form as he takes on the role of Lord Stephen's carer.

The denouement further underscores the emotional aspect of Arthur's caring masculinity, not only through his expression of grief, but also through the explicit acknowledgment that boys and men also have emotions and should be able to express them. In volume two, Arthur's half-sister Grace "announce[s] that boys are unfeeling", a statement that Arthur strongly disagrees with: "Grace is wrong. Boys are not as different from girls as she supposes. […] I have strong feelings too." (Crossley-Holland 2001, loc.1632; loc.2587) As Arthur and Grace reunite at the end of the trilogy, the girl confirms her change of her mind: "'Boys do have strong feelings,' she said. 'You were right.'" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 378) Grace, here, stands in for the implied reader, who may have begun Arthur's story socialised into believing that emotional expressiveness is not masculine, but who, at the close of the trilogy, is presented with the idea that boys and men have feelings too, and that it is important for them to be allowed to express these.

Emotions and care, long considered "practices belonging in the feminine sphere" (Requena-Pelegrí 2017, 145), are hence reconfigured in Crossley-Holland's trilogy as crucial aspects of a masculine heroic. That boys and men do not need to repudiate the feminine is further supported by the closure's focus on Arthur's first encounter with his biological mother, symbolising a union with the feminine that his hypermasculine father – guilty of raping Arthur's mother and killing her husband – had been trying to prevent. Importantly, Crossley-Holland does not provide a closure for the Arthur-and-Winnie romance storyline by depicting a heterosexual union through betrothal or marriage – although it has to be noted that the trilogy operates within the limited sphere of heteronormativity. Crossley-Holland also does not portray the protagonist's heroic death, his ultimate sacrifice and proof of chivalric masculinity. Instead, the ending of the *Arthur Trilogy* sees the beginning of Arthur's relationship with his biological mother, whom he has been searching for ever since he discovered his true parentage. As he tells Bertie, meeting his mother "matters more to [him] than anything in the world", even his knighthood (Crossley-Holland 2003, 45). Indeed, the highlight of Arthur's knighting ceremony is his acceptance of a sword, gifted to him by Lord Milon, who had engraved it with a picture of a mother and her child, the same picture decorating a ring that Arthur had been sent by his mother, and that Sir William had discarded into the sea. Arthur tears up at Milon's gift, wondering, "Wouldn't my mother be proud for me now? She would, wouldn't she?" (Ibid., 82) The important role of mothers is indeed highlighted throughout the trilogy, also via King Arthur, who states: "Lucky the man with so loving a mother" (Ibid., 179). Once the protagonist finally meets his mother, they both weep tears of joy. When she worries about being a burden and suggests leaving his manor, Arthur shouts, "Not now! Not ever!", promising that those who had been trying to hurt her would no longer be able to do so (Ibid., 390-391).[161] Arthur's quest has finally been fulfilled – his dead, hypermasculine father cannot prevent him from embracing his mother.

The ending further highlights Arthur's caring masculinity by focusing on the ways he will involve, take care of, and stay connected to all the people, the "forty-three souls" on his manor (Ibid., 399). "[W]hat I want at Catmole", Arthur writes, "is one fellowship. One ring of trust. I want everyone in the manor to know we all need each other and each one of us makes a difference" (Ibid., 392). The idea of the Round Table is reconfigured to include not only knights but all people at the manor, suggesting a clear distancing from domination and hierarchies. Already in book one, Arthur refers to – and, importantly, demonstrates – what he terms his "concern for other people, all the people living on [Sir John's] manor" (Crossley-Holland 2000, 191). I therefore argue that Arthur's maturation journey strengthens his initial caring masculinity that is based on social instead of physical-risk heroism. This stands in stark contrast to Terence, whose coming-of-age experiences lead him away from a hybrid, nurturing masculinity, towards a physical-risk heroism that is proved in battle, thus signifying a move into the closed centre. Arthur's maturation process is also strikingly different from Mordred's, who, guided by father hunger, continually fights to embody a masculinity that is located in the privileged, closed centre. Arthur's experiences and rites of passages, in contrast, make him realise that he does not need to imitate the masculinity ideals others perform and impose on him, but can reconfigure them for his own purposes, needs, and preferences – and, crucially, for the greater good. Lord Stephen's chivalric model of masculinity partially lives on in him, so do Camelot's masculinity ideals; however, in Arthur we encounter a new, more open configuration of masculinity that rejects domination.

Writing on female and male coming of age in turn-of-the-century American youth's companion serials, Laura Apol (2000) argues that "while girls are socialized *out* of autonomy and into traditional other-directed relationships", maturation works the other way around for boys: they are "socialized *out* of relationships and into independence" (66; emphases in original). While

[161] Indeed, it is almost as if Arthur is also making this promise to himself. Those who had been trying to hurt him – especially Sir William – will now no longer be able to do so.

Arthur's autonomy and independence are indeed highlighted at the end of the trilogy, Crossley-Holland also emphasises his need for continued guidance and relationships, illustrated by Arthur's admission that he still requires help, telling Merlin, "I need you" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 397).[162] Claire Duncanson (2015) argues that the key to unravelling hegemonic masculinities and undoing gender hierarchies "lies in the relational aspect of gender" (233). She explains: "Rather than forge their identities through relations of opposition or domination, men and subjects in general need to construct their identities through recognition of similarity, respect, interdependence, empathy, and equality with others" (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Karla Elliott (2016, 241) emphasises the necessity for masculine identities to reject domination and integrate "values of care, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality". The values pinpointed by Duncanson and Elliott characterise Arthur de Caldicot from the start, are highlighted in crucial moments of maturation, and are confirmed in the closure, which retains a focus on community and connection rather than power and heterosexual union, and sees Arthur embody a more experienced and confident version of his younger self. Catmole Manor has seen the replacement of the aggressive, hypermasculine, aging patriarch Sir William with the caring young Arthur, demonstrating a move from one masculinity model to the next – one that is more equitable and rejects the "main principles of patriarchy includ[ing] male dominance, female subordination, and militarism" (Shires 1992, 418).

Conclusion

Discussing his *Arthur Trilogy*, Crossley-Holland states: "I have tried to create a character who, without stepping outside the boundaries of his own time, questions and keeps questioning" (2005, 64). Indeed, this aptly summarises Arthur's embodiment of masculinity. He does desire to occupy the hegemonic position of a knight, but while (on the path to) occupying this position, questions and reflects on hegemony, the privileged centre, and the status quo, observing and criticising the masculine embodiments of the men around him. Much like the Arthurian legend and the knights that he encounters in the stone, Arthur's gendered identity is multifaceted. Crucially, the portrayal of the protagonist-narrator subverts the harmful masculinity scripts of dominance and superiority, physical-risk and violence, limited emotional expressiveness, and the repudiation of the feminine. In terms of socialisation, the *Arthur Trilogy* centres male guidance – as do Mythopoetic Men's Movement groups and conservative voices within the boy crisis debate. However, the mentorship style provided by Merlin, the protagonist's autonomy in relation to the formation of his masculine identity, as well as the union with his mother in the closure provide a more balanced picture in which agency and independence are presented as fundamental to male adolescent development.

[162] This also reflects "[t]he ruler's need for wise counsel" as a theme across medieval literature and as part of medieval historical reality (Barnes 1993, x).

On the crusade, Lord Stephen tells Arthur: "Don't believe everything you hear" (Crossley-Holland 2003, 175) – a message that the boy later passes on to the young squire Bertie (Ibid., 293). This again suggests that any guidance from others is not to be taken without reflection. Importantly, Arthur ultimately constructs a gender identity for himself that revises harmful normative masculinity scripts, embodying a caring masculinity that rejects domination and embraces vulnerability, relationality, empathy, and care. In a society built on strictly defined expectations regarding gender and class identities and relations, young Arthur de Caldicot matures through being inquisitive and reflective. He recognises – to use Elliott's (2020b, 32) words – his "moral responsibility as privileged member[] of society", embraces a more equitable configuration of masculinity, and sets out to build his own March Camelot.

Chapter 4
"I should have stayed a girl"
Cross-Dressing Masculinities, Complicating Gender Binaries, and Challenging the 'Strong Female Protagonist' Trope in Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur* (2007)

The previous chapters have focused on texts that follow the maturation journey of cis male protagonists. However, the adaptation discussed here – Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur* (2007), winner of the 2008 Carnegie Medal – presents the development of two cross-dressing characters. As this chapter will demonstrate, Reeve's narrative challenges essentialist and binarist notions of gender, complicates the (male) maturation process, and defies theoretical conceptions about cross-dressing. It offers an interpretation of the legend that re-imagines its central hero as a petty warlord and tyrant whose bard Myrddin – Reeve's non-magical version of Merlin – spins stories of victory and grandeur to promote him as a leader. Set in South-west Britain around 500 A.D., *Here Lies Arthur* is not a historical novel but, nevertheless, as Bradford suggests, "assumes many of the features of historical fiction" (2015, 34). The story is told retrospectively by Gwyna, a character invented by Reeve. Gwyna is an orphan slave girl who is taken in by Myrddin and comes to accompany Arthur's warband on their raids. To do so, however, she has to give up her female identity and learn to live as a boy. One day, Gwyna, now Gwyn, meets Peri (Peredur), who, despite being born with a penis, was assigned female at birth by his mother who wanted to raise him as a girl to keep him from participating in war. Having encountered Arthur's warband, Peri wants to become a warrior, but, ill-equipped for such a life, has to be protected by Gwyna, who has now started to live as a girl among the warrior's ladies.[163] Reeve's novel thus employs the cross-dressing device in both its female-to-male and male-to-female form – although, as my analysis will show, these labels prove too simplistic.

It is helpful to begin by looking at cross-dressing and gender nonconformity in medieval history. Contemporary society believes that gender fluidity is a privilege that has been largely denied to medieval people. However, there is evidence for this fluidity within the European Middle Ages, both in literary and historical sources. Karras and Linkinen (2016), for example, discuss the case of John/Eleanor Rykener, a cross-dressing prostitute from late medieval London, while Mills (2015) looks at sodomy in the Middle Ages "through the lens of transgender" (84).[164] Mandel (1999, 78) further notes that records exist on a number of female transvestite saints – St Joan of Arc being the most famous – and highlights the tale of the legendary female transvestite, Pope Joan.[165] Medieval attitudes towards sexuality were also not as rigid. As Alexandra Sterling-Hellenbrand (2001, xii) explains, even though essentialist thought dominated, "[t]here was room for negotiation and 'play,'" at least to a degree.

Cross-dressing also plays an important role in medieval literature, both in chivalric and specifically Arthurian texts. Chivalric romances regularly portray characters crossing gender boundaries, especially in the form of females assuming a chivalric identity. One such text that has received significant critical attention is the (non-Arthurian) Old French *Roman de Silence,* the manuscript of which was only discovered in 1911. In an allegorical debate, Nature and Nurture struggle over Silence, a girl raised as a boy who later chooses to live as a man, excelling as a minstrel and knight (Ryder and Zaerr 2008, 22). The ending, however, sees the protagonist's return to a conventional female role (Ibid.). Examples of cross-dressing are also found in Arthurian literature. For instance, Malory's Dinadan dresses in women's clothes, "a prank so hilarious that the queen falls from her chair, helpless with laughter" (Larrington 2017, 269). Arthurian female-to-male cross-

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163 Peri/Peredur's background story is based on the earlier romance versions of Perceval. The story generally begins as follows: Perceval's father and brothers were slain during war and combat, leading his mother to raise him secluded from and ignorant of the chivalric world. After meeting a group of knights one day, initially believing them to be angels and then finding out about Arthur's court, Perceval decides to travel there to become a knight himself. Peredur is, as Christopher W. Bruce (1999, 400) explains, "the Welsh counterpart, and perhaps the origin" of Perceval, a character that first appeared in Chrétien de Troyes' romance of the same name (c.1190). In the *Author's Note* to his *Here Lies Arthur*, Reeve briefly addresses his inspiration for the character of Peri: "Peredur is the hero of one of the stories in *The Mabinogion*, a collection of Welsh myths and legends. In later mediaeval romances he became Perceval, the most human of Arthur's knights, and finds the Holy Grail. (And, yes, he really does spend his childhood dressed as a girl in several versions.)" (Reeve 2007, *Author's Note*)

164 Mills criticises the lack of medievalist scholarship taking a transgender perspective considering the power of this lens to "bring[] into sharper focus the significance of gender crossing and transformation in medieval visualizations of behavior deemed 'sodomitic'" (2015, 84). Regarding transgenderism in medieval times, Gabrielle Bychowski's essay "Where there Transgender People in the Middle Ages?" (2018) is crucial reading.

165 Mandel notes that, not surprisingly, "there are no significant male transvestite saints", since medieval society considered a woman's desire to be a man 'natural', while "a man's attempt to imitate a woman was thought to be perverse" (1999, 78).

dressing first appears in Edmund Spenser's early modern adaptation, *The Faerie Queene* (1590), where the historical context of writing under the protection of a powerful female monarch opened up imaginative possibilities for cross-dressing female knights epitomising the highest virtues of chivalry. Indeed, Spenser's Britomart radically challenges early modern assumptions regarding gender (Ibid.).

As a narrative device, cross-dressing is also common in texts for the young, both in its female-to-male and male-to-female form (Flanagan 2008, 2).[166] As various children's literature scholars have noted, the potential of the cross-dressing device is vast: it can make young readers aware of the socially constructed nature of gender and the artificiality of the dichotomous categories (Brugger-Dethmer 2012; Flanagan 2002, 2008, 2010; Harper 2007; Nikolajeva 2009). However, there is generally a significant difference between female-to-male and male-to-female cross-dressing in texts for the young. While male characters dressing up as females frequently do so "in a gesture of male rowdiness" to a comic effect, the experience for females is liberatory (Flanagan 2002, 80). Further, the portrayal of cross-dressing characters can also confirm gender stereotypes and essentialist views, as I have illustrated in Chapter 1 in relation to Terence. As I will argue later in this chapter, this is also the case in another Arthurian YA adaptation, Jane Yolen's *Sword of the Rightful King* (2003), which, particularly in its ending, offers a stark contrast to Reeve's narrative.

Gwyn/a's [167] cross-dressing reveals the ways gender and gender roles are socially constructed, learned, and performed, which I discuss in the first section of this chapter. I highlight the various rules and behaviours Gwyn/a has to learn to first perform masculinity, and then femininity, and discuss how Reeve transforms the traditional role of Perceval in his depiction of Peri/Peredur. I also examine the ways that both Gwyn/a's and Peri/Peredur's various cross-dressings complicate theoretical approaches to this narrative device. The second section focuses on how Gwyn/a's experiences and reflections highlight the pressures on boys and men to conform to hegemonic masculinity ideals and embody a masculinity that is located in the closed centre. Of particular importance in this regard are Gwyn/a's observations of Arthur's hypermasculine behaviour and Bedwyr's transformation from boyhood to manhood, interrupted by an injury that leaves him unable to perform hegemonic masculinity and thus ostracised by the male community. The final section considers the ways in which the novel's denouement challenges gender binaries and interpretations of the protagonist as 'strong female protagonist'. Gwyn/a has indeed been

166 Flanagan (2008, 2) writes that a third model, transgender, only rarely occurs in children's literature. The past decade, however, has seen an increase in novels for the young that feature transgender and other non-binary protagonists and characters. In the Conclusion I address how this has impacted the corpus of Arthurian YA adaptations.

167 To avoid confusion and to highlight the fluidity of her gender identity, I refer to the character of Gwyna/Gwyn as 'Gwyn/a' throughout this chapter. Similarly, I use 'Peri/Peredur' to discuss Reeve's other cross-dressing character.

discussed in terms of this common YA trope. Tolhurst (2012a) suggests that, compared to portrayals of girls and women in other Arthurian adaptations, Gwyn/a embodies "healthier ideas of womanhood", arguing that Reeve "presents a female protagonist who is engaging because she functions as both heroine and virgin-hero, boy and girl" (70; 74). Even though Tolhurst rightly emphasises the novel's revelation of gender and gender roles as socially constructed and performed, her interpretation of Reeve's novel, I argue in the final section, sustains binarist views on gender that erase genderqueer experiences. Encouraging a queer reading of Reeve's text, I argue that the narrative's denouement challenges the interpretation of Gwyn/a as a 'strong female protagonist', offering a space for the reader to come to their own conclusions.

Acquiring and Performing Masculinity and Femininity

As noted earlier, the portrayal of cross-dressing characters can both confirm and subvert gender stereotypes. In this section I focus on five aspects that determine the success and limitations of the device regarding the subversion of gender and, more specifically, hegemonic masculinity: the purpose of the disguise, the 'transformation process', the success and limitations of the performance, insights the character gains from the experience, and the 'outcome'. I begin with a discussion of the protagonist. The purpose for the disguise and who made the decision are crucial factors that impact how cross-dressing operates in a text. At the start of Reeve's novel, Arthur's bard, Myrddin, encounters the frightened slave-girl Gwyna as she is trying to escape the chaos and death that Arthur and his warband have unleashed onto her master's manor. Recognising a chance to boost Arthur's reputation, Myrddin enlists the girl to act as the Lady of the Lake, handing Arthur a sword from under the water in order to convince the warlord's non-Christian followers that he has the Old gods' support and protection. Instead of leaving Gwyna to her fate after her service, the bard decides to take her in and 'transform' her into a boy so she can join Arthur's warband. This is important: Gwyna does not deliberately choose a male disguise; she does so because, being triply disempowered – being female, a child, and a slave – she has no other option: "Better a boy than a frog, or a stone-cold corpse", she thinks (Reeve 2007, 34). Gwyna's cross-dressing occurs out of Myrddin's will – a powerful male adult thus imposes a new gender identity onto a powerless female child.

Descriptions of the cross-dresser's transformation process can highlight the artificiality and constructive nature of gender signifiers such as clothes, behaviour, and activities, which, according to Judith Butler, do not come *from* a person's gender (2007). Rather, gender must be viewed "as a *corporeal style*" (Ibid., 189; emphasis in original). It is created through *repeated stylised acts*, which Butler understands "not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*" (Ibid., 188; emphasis in original) Indeed, Gwyn/a's 'transformation' highlights gender identity as *compelling illusion*. Through the adoption of a 'masculine' name, a new haircut, the wearing of clothes culturally coded as masculine, a change in behaviour, and the partaking in masculine-coded activities, Gwyna – now Gwyn – 'masks' the female sex she was assigned at birth and becomes socialised into Arthur's homosocial community. Clothing is "the most visible socially-encoded signifier of gender and sexuality" (Kochanske Stock 1997, 7). Gwyn/a's transformation demonstrates how "such a simple artifice" as clothes (Jurney 2001, 5) can serve to easily mask her sex assigned at birth. However, as Gwyn/a lets the reader know: "There's more to being a boy than wearing trews and cutting off your hair, of course, and don't let anyone tell you different" (Reeve 2007, 42). Various instances throughout the novel see the protagonist-narrator directly invoke an unspecified narratee, presumably the implied reader. An intradiegetic narratee has a distancing effect on the reader (Genette 1980, 260); hence, an extradiegetic narratee who merges with the implied reader pulls him or her closer. Direct address invites active engagement from readers by drawing "attention to the fact of their reading while demanding a response to what they have just been told" (Wyile 1999, 198). It is telling that Gwyn/a addresses the reader directly in a moment that focuses on gender norms.

Gwyn/a goes on to explain how she has to learn certain behaviours, referring to them as "rules" that boys "don't talk about", but "just seem to be born knowing" (Reeve 2007, 42). The keyword here is "seem": although it appears that boys are *born* knowing these rules, they acquire an understanding of them through copying the behaviour of older boys and men. Similarly, Gwyn/a learns these rules "by watching Bedwyr and the others" (Ibid.). Instead of having a specific male mentor – a position that the bard Myrddin would be ill-equipped for, considering his positioning outside the inner circle of the warband due to his non-martial masculinity – Gwyn/a learns how to perform masculinity through observing her cis male peers and their role models. Putter (1997) describes how "upbringing and routine […] naturaliz[e] our daily choices" as we make selections from what he calls "the menu of cultural signifiers: dress, make-up, or gesture" (279-280). The cross-dresser reveals how a different selection from this menu is "all it takes to upset the certainty of our gender assignment" (Ibid., 279). Gwyn/a's transformation exposes how routinely choosing new, masculine coded behaviours and activities indeed naturalises these choices to the extent that she 'forgets' she was assigned female at birth: "Even I was coming to think of myself as a boy […] A year has passed. It's my second summer as a boy. I've almost forgotten that I ever was a girl" (Reeve 2007, 45; 59). This shows how masculine identity develops through social interaction, exemplifying Butler's theory of performativity and illustrating that "there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires" (2007, 190).

Gwyn/a's socialisation into the male order causes her to *internalise* masculine warrior ideals. For example, despite being forbidden by Myrddin, Gwyn/a joins a battle, explaining that "boys will be boys, even the ones who are only girls dressed up" (Reeve 2007, 96). Disobeying Myrddin is "a fearful thing, but not as fearful as facing the jeers of all the others calling me a coward" (Ibid.). Having lived among boys and men and socialised to follow masculinity norms, Gwyn/a feels that she has to participate in the battle in order to avoid being condemned or excluded. However, "hear[ing] the shouting blur into a roar", Gwyn/a regrets the decision before the fighting has even started (Ibid., 97). When the battle is over, Myrddin asks Gwyn/a whether she enjoyed it:

> I nodded, of course, but he knew I was lying. 'I am never, never, never going into a war again,' I promised myself. And I felt sorry for Bedwyr and the other boys. They must have been as scared as me, but they'd be men soon and would have to keep on plunging into fights like that until they got into one they would never come out of. (Ibid., 101-102)

Flanagan (2002, 83-84) writes that, in female-to-male cross-dressing, the sex the protagonist was assigned at birth[168] is usually "not discovered for at least a portion of the text […], she is considered to be a genuine male by the other characters with whom she/he interacts". Indeed, Gwyn/a convinces (almost) everyone with her successful performance of masculinity, "highlight[ing] the constructedness of socially prescribed gender norms" (Flangan 2008, 253). Eventually, however, Gwyn/a's sex assigned at birth is remarked upon by King Maelwas, who doubts her 'disguise' "will work much longer" (Reeve 2007, 123-124). One of the main issues with the depiction of cross-dressing characters is that the body is often portrayed as a limitation. This, again, "reinscribes the polarization of mature female and male bodies" which "become so different that successful cross-dressing is placed in jeopardy" (Harper 2007, 515). However, showing the female body as the sole limitation to Gwyn/a's performance of masculinity indicates that performances of masculinity and femininity are only impeded by the still-dominant belief that masculinity and femininity are bound to specific bodies.

Because of her maturing body, Gwyn/a has to surrender her acquired, now familiar gender identity and learn to occupy a female role – she needs to be 'feminised'. Even though she was assigned female at birth, Gwyn/a "knows nothing of the ways of women. She knows about horses, and the hunt. […] But of being a maiden among other maidens she knows nothing at all" (Reeve 2007, 133). The years Gwyn/a has spent almost solely surrounded by boys and men become a disadvantage, making it difficult for her to adapt to feminine-coded skills and activities. The role of the physical body is again emphasised when Gwyn/a, now living as Gwyna among the warband's women, menstruates for the first time. A parallel to recent sociological findings can be drawn here:

[168] Flanagan does not use the phrase 'sex assigned at birth' but instead talks about 'biological sex'. This terminology, however, is outdated and has been revised. At this point I would like to thank Stacy Collins from Simmons University (Boston, MA) for helping me better understand current gender terminology.

> [I]ndividuals assigned female at birth who practice masculinity may experience specific contradictions between their bodies and masculinity, and through the discursively sexed meanings of certain bodily developments (such as breasts and menstruation) […] People assigned female at birth then often experience a degree of bodily anxiety […] (Messerschmidt 2018, 150)

This anxiety, I argue, applies to Gwyn/a. Having performed masculinity for years and come to prefer life as a boy, Gwyn/a feels betrayed by her own body, convinced that "[t]here'd be no way back into boyhood for [her] now" (Reeve 2007, 135).

In her new role as Gwenhwyfar's maid, Gwyn/a discovers the stark differences between the 'men's world' and the 'women's world', which, in her words, are "as different as night and day, air and water" (Ibid., 142). The more Gwyn/a learns about the 'ways of women' and how these are dictated by patriarchy and male privilege, which constitute women as a subservient class, the less she likes living as one. Further, Gwyn/a has difficulty performing her new role and experiences conflict as the new demands set upon her do not concur with the views and actions she learned among the boys and men. This again highlights how Reeve portrays gender as acquired rather than innate. Because of her 'un-womanly' conduct, Gwyn/a is excluded and ridiculed by her female peers who negatively assess her behaviour and dislike her for being "strange and clumsy and [for speaking] too loud" (Reeve 2007, 142). The behaviour of her peers demonstrates how, not only among males but also among females, a lack of adherence to or transgression of socially prescribed norms leads to ridicule and social alienation. Despite initial difficulties, Gwyn/a soon learns to conform to a conventional female gender role, still dreaming, however, about being a boy again.

When Gwyn/a cross-dresses again, it is her own choice. To save Peri/Peredur, who now identifies as male and is part of Arthur's warband – a development that I will explain shortly – Gwyn/a dresses up as a boy and, despite her now-mature body, performs masculinity successfully: "[The people] nodded and welcomed me again, and said how I'd grown, and never thought to notice I'd grown into a girl" (Ibid., 226). During this second experience of cross-dressing, Gwyn/a realises that both living as a boy and as a girl has its advantages and disadvantages. She had to experience both sides to arrive at this conclusion:

> Riding alone, listening to snatches of their banter blowing back to me on the breeze, I got to missing my life among the girls. I never thought I would, and never a day went by I didn't feel glad to be up on a horse and going somewhere instead of trapped indoors, but I wished I'd had Celemon there to tell some of my inward thoughts to. Girls tell each other things, in honest whispers, when the night is drawing on. Boys just brag. (Ibid., 230)

Gwyn/a's reflections on gender inequality highlight the oppressiveness of a rigid, binary, normative gender system. The oppressiveness of this system also extends to the issue of sexuality. The constraints of heteronormativity are emphasised when Gwyn/a cannot show her feelings towards Peri/Peredur while they both perform masculinity. This exposes biases about sexual orientation espoused by characters in the fictional world and, potentially, implicitly or explicitly harboured by readers in the real world, testing the dominance and naturalness of the heterosexual paradigm, even if the novel is otherwise characterised by heteronormativity.

Usually, cross-dressing is a form of gender transgression that "is for a specific purpose and is bound by a strict time frame" (Mallan 2001, 7). As Mallan writes, "[t]o make the change permanent would complicate the male-female boundaries by challenging the ways in which being male and being female are naturalised in western societies" (Ibid.). Masked characters must therefore be 'unmasked'. I contend that such language reflects binary notions of gender and prevents a more complex understanding of cross-dressing and gender dynamics. In *Here Lies Arthur*, 'masking' and 'unmasking' takes place multiple times, until it is no longer clear what the 'mask' is. The confusion caused by the continuous adoption and shedding of gendered identities highlights the malleability of gender that is evident throughout the novel. Particularly towards the end, Gwyn/a repeatedly switches between her female and male identities. This reflects current sociological theory, which suggests that "how we understand ourselves as masculine and feminine varies according to time, place and circumstances" (Paechter 2006a, 261). As Flanagan (2008, 14) notes, "female cross-dressing narratives [for the young] often construct masculinity and femininity as options which the cross-dresser is able to adopt and disregard at will". This is seemingly the case with Gwyn/a, who appears to have acquired a dual identity, "a divided self alternating between male and female" (Bradford and Hutton 2015, 22). One scene towards the end of the novel particularly confirms what Rabinowitz (2004, 23) calls "the slipperiness of gender and the problems of trying to contain it neatly": "The boy watched me like I was a spirit sprung out of the flames. Even with my hair grown I looked boyish in those clothes. Whatever I'd learned of grace and girlishness, the night had wrung it out of me. Cadwy couldn't tell what I was." (Reeve 2007, 215)

In Gwyn/a's case, the cross-dressing device is thus complicated, and it is even more complex in the case of Peri/Peredur, who grows up as a girl because his mother wanted to spare him his brothers' fate of being killed in war. After a visit from Arthur and his warband, however, Peri/Peredur is changed: "The visitors enchanted her, and filled her eyes for weeks […] But she didn't want to marry any of them. She wanted to be *like* them. She wanted to have a horse, and go riding far away into the wide world on it, and leave the lonely hall behind" (Ibid., 152; emphasis in original). Peri cuts her hair, begins to dress in man's clothes, which she makes herself "[u]sing her maidenly skills" (Ibid., 232), and learns how to throw a spear. Essentially, the 'girl' Peri begins to cross-dress as a boy. While this could be interpreted as Peri/Peredur following some sort of 'innate calling', I argue that the change in behaviour can be read, firstly, in terms of female-to-male cross-dressing: having seen Arthur and his band and heard Myrddin's stories, Peri/Peredur develops a desire to leave the boring, hidden life of a maiden behind. Like other traditional female-to-male cross-dressing characters s/he seeks "to inhabit the male world and experience many of the liberties denied [her] in their female form" (Flanagan 2002, 79). Secondly, Peri/Peredur's changed behaviour can be compared to the transgender experience. Transgender people, as Tate et al. (2020, 3) note, "are people who experience their gender as different from their gender assigned at birth". Reeve thus complicates ideas about gender and theoretical conceptions of cross-dressing in his depiction of Peri/Peredur, who experiences his/her gender as different from the one s/he was assigned at birth.

As in Gwyn/a's case, the body comes to play an important role. Peri/Peredur "had not thought to shave. There in the sharp, raking sunlight of the burial-place there was no mistaking her for anything but what she was" (Reeve 2007, 155). Because beards are masculine-coded, people view Peri/Peredur as male. The reaction of those surrounding Peri/Peredur further provides important insights into the differences between female-to-male and male-to-female cross-dressing: "She – he – looks round at the ring of shouting faces. Righteous anger, mostly, but with a bit of hard laughter mixed in, for what could look more ridiculous than this tall, gormless young man dressed in an embroidered gown?" (Ibid., 155) While others calmly react to Gwyn/a's cross-dressing, Peri/Peredur's wearing of feminine-coded clothes elicits anger and ridicule, confirming a distancing from the feminine as essential to masculinity. The commentary Peri/Peredur faces further demonstrates that society treats boys'/men's gender transgressions more harshly.

Having learned that he is considered a man because he was born with a penis, Peri/Peredur leaves his home and old life behind to realise his dream of joining Arthur's warband. Gwyna, now among Gwenhwyfar's maids, sees Peri/Peredur ride towards them in his make-shift warrior gear – clothes that don't fit, a curtain as cloak, a kitchen pot as helmet, a carving knife as weapon – and feels ashamed on his behalf: "He doesn't seem to know how dim-witted he looks […] he sits there beaming at us as if he thinks he's the finest warrior in the whole island of Britain" (Ibid., 160). When raiders suddenly appear and kidnap a girl, Peri/Peredur rushes to save the 'damsel in distress'. Fearing for Peri/Peredur's life, Gwyn/a follows, attacking the raider before he can strike down the inexperienced new warrior. After the raider drowns in the river, Gwyn/a leads Peri/Peredur to believe that it was him who had fought and killed the enemy. "[C]onfused but happy to find himself so suddenly a man", Peri/Peredur returns to Gwenhwyfar's girls, who had initially ridiculed him for his un-warrior-like appearance and "womanish" gestures, but who now revere him for his 'victory' (Ibid., 168; 160). This change in attitude illustrates women's complicity in upholding hegemonic masculinity ideals. As Talbot and Quaile (2010) note, women should not be viewed "as passive consumers or recipients of masculinity", but as "active agents in its construction" (256; see also Messerschmidt and Messner 2018, 40-41), a point clearly reflected in this passage.

Despite his initial 'triumph', Peri/Peredur finds it hard to fit in. As Gwyn/a observes: "I think the world of men was not turning out to be quite as he'd expected. He was not quite what they'd expected, either. He didn't speak the language of men. He didn't know the rules I'd learned in my time among the boys" (Reeve 2007, 172). Consequently, the other boys and men treat Peri/Peredur as a "simpleton; a sort of mascot" (Ibid.), while the girls and women laugh at him. Nevertheless, Gwyn/a is worried that Peri/Peredur will "be swallowed into the warrior-life, and learn to hide all his sweetness under bluster and ironmongery" (Ibid. 169). However, Peri/Peredur does not "hide what he was feeling, the way the others had *learned* to" (Ibid., 231; emphasis added). There is one lesson, however, that Peri/Peredur has internalised: a 'real man' fights, he is not a coward. War is closely connected to masculinity, linked to honour and power, and "often construed as a test of manhood – primarily of courage – that 'real men' are expected to perform" (Goldstein 2003, 107-8). When it comes to battles and war, cowardice is "worse than being killed" (Reeve 2007, 93). When Peri/Peredur rides out to battle, Gwyn/a again follows to protect him, this time dressed as a boy. Both ultimately end up fleeing the battlefield, which upsets the injured Peri/Peredur. Gwyn/a tries to explain that it is not "womanish" to run, but "natural" human behaviour, considering the deadly chaos of battles. However, Peri/Peredur refuses to believe her, having "bathed too long in stories of heroes and battles" in which men show courage, not fear (Ibid., 241). The gruesome experience of real battle leads Peri/Peredur to say, "I was so afraid. I should have stayed a girl", and Gwyn/a to think, "[s]o should I" (Ibid., 243).

Peri/Peredur's character is based on Perceval, whose story – in its Middle English verse romance version, *Sir Perceval* – "could stand as the exemplary masculinity romance" (Neal 2008, 226). Based on Chrétien de Troyes' late 12th-century *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, this Middle English text is "more explicit than most romances in making masculinity depend on a turning away from the feminine" (Ibid., 10). As Neal (2008) explains:

> [T]his is a clear story of masculine formation through earning one's place in a male peer group. Indeed, Perceval enters that group so successfully that in the end he escapes feminine powers entirely and dies fighting in the Holy Land: he leaves women behind […] (Ibid., 226)

Reeve takes this story of ideal masculine development and uses its protagonist to highlight the harmfulness and oppressiveness of warrior masculinity, i.e., the narrative's version of hegemonic masculinity. Following his embrace of a cis male identity, Peri/Peredur does not seamlessly integrate into the male order, but, recognising the expectations and dangers, regrets his attempt to join Arthur's warband. After the terrible experience in battle, Peri/Peredur cross-dresses as female, again demonstrating the malleability and fluidity of gender categories.

Highlighting the Oppressiveness of Hegemonic Masculinity

Both Peri/Peredur and Gwyn/a's admissions that it would have been better to "have stayed a girl" are a strong, explicit example of the novel's critique of hegemonic masculinity as a form of masculine embodiment that exerts power and domination over others, thereby maintaining inequalities. As this section will demonstrate, the oppressiveness and harmfulness of hegemonic masculinity is also emphasised in the depiction of Arthur's hypermasculine behaviour and the portrayal of Bedwyr, whose development towards manhood, interrupted and complicated by an injury that leaves him unable to fight, demonstrates the power dynamics among men.

Reeve's portrayal of Arthur as a selfish, power-hungry tyrant is not very common in the tradition. Indeed, it is only medieval accounts of Welsh saints, composed in Latin, that usually depict Arthur as "petty, lecherous tyrant" (Bruce 1999, 42-43), an antagonist to the saint or the Church. As Lupack (2007, 22) highlights, this portrayal is "at odds with the heroic image found in many of the chronicles and romances" as well as in post-medieval iterations of the legend. The "petty, lecherous tyrant" image certainly applies to Reeve's interpretation of the legendary hero. One character in the novel, King Maelwas, describes Arthur as a "wild, roving man, like Uthr before him" (Reeve 2007, 123). Reeve's portrayal of Arthur is comparable to Crossley-Holland's depiction of Sir William. Similar to Sir William, Arthur abuses his wife – as Gwyn/a writes, "[h]e would make the blood of the Aureliani bloom under her skin in purple bruises" (Ibid., 178). Arthur is guided only by his hunger for power, and, like Sir William, does not have a moral compass, which the reader learns early on.

The novel begins with destruction, which, to Gwyn/a's – and most likely also the reader's – surprise, is caused by Arthur and his men. Myrddin asks:

> 'You know who those riders are, Gwyna? They are the war-band of Arthur. You've heard of Arthur, haven't you?'
>
> Well of course I had. I never thought to meet him in my own woods, though. Arthur was someone out of stories. He fought giants and rescued maidens and outfoxed the Devil. He didn't ride about burning people's shippens down. (Ibid., 14)

Once on the road with Arthur and his band, Gwyn/a becomes a regular witness to Arthur's aggressive nature, depicted by Reeve in vivid terms:

> The landowner looked grim, and said he had already paid tribute.
>
> 'Then you'll pay it again,' said Arthur, and he jumped down off his horse and walked past Myrddin and knocked the man down. He didn't draw his sword, just kept kicking and stamping until the man's face was one soft mask of blood and his teeth were scattered all about in the dry grass, yellow as gorse-flowers. (Ibid., 60)

Arthur's violent and aggressive behaviour culminates in the killing of his nephew, Bedwyr, upon discovery of the young man's affair with Arthur's wife. Reeve's vivid description of Bedwyr's murder confirms Arthur's wild rage, comparable to Sir William's during his attempt to kill Lord Stephen:

> On the floor lay a red and white thing that jerked like a killed pig. Arthur stood over it. He raised Caliburn high and grunted as he hacked down. […] Arthur was bellowing again, shouting at his men to look at what became of traitors. […] While Arthur's men stood at the pool's edge and watched as Arthur swung Bedwyr's head by its hair and flung it from him […] (Ibid., 204-205)

Hourihan (1997, 98) writes that, traditionally, in hero stories, "it is his status as a great warrior, able to destroy the enemies of his people, which marks the hero out". By portraying Arthur, the ultimate warrior hero, in negative and hypermasculine terms, and providing gruesome, violent details, Reeve undermines the warrior-hero image while highlighting the harmful effects of hypermasculinity, which the character of Bedwyr experiences first-hand.

Bedwyr is Arthur's nephew and one of the boys in his warband who Gwyn/a grows up with. The portrayal of Bedwyr, firstly, highlights the ways masculinity norms gain in importance and become more restrictive as boys develop. Gwyn/a's observations of how things change as Bedwyr grows up and becomes (considered) a man are crucial in this regard. When Gwyn/a and Bedwyr are still children, the latter is frequently described as showing feelings of warmth. For instance, when Gwyn/a tells Bedwyr the (invented) story of her parents' death, "his eyes fill[] with tears" and he hugs her – albeit, as Gwyn/a explains, "in a brotherly, bearish way he'd copied from the fighting men" (Ibid., 40). In her guise as Gwyn, the first change she notices in her friend occurs after his first battle, which sees him kill a man for the first time. Bedwyr says, "'I killed a man. I killed him Gwyn. We won.' He hugs me hard. He smells of sweat and other people's blood. And when my face presses against his I feel a prickling where his first, thin, boyish beard is starting to grow." (Ibid., 100) While Bedwyr still demonstrates warmth towards Gwyn/a after this first battle, she describes the first signs of his beard – a physical sign of Bedwyr's maturation, and a symbol of his developing manhood.

"[A]lmost a man, with a scruffy stubble of beard that he was vastly proud of", Bedwyr soon spends his time drinking and objectifying women, "forever seeking out those girls, swapping stories about them and wrangling over which one was the prettiest or friendliest" (Ibid., 114). The following passage illustrates the way Gwyn/a notices men's sexualisation of females:

> They watched them at the marketplace. Their heads turned like the heads of watchful birds when Gwenhwyfar's handmaidens passed them in the street. They laughed, and scoffed, and compared one with another, and I couldn't join that talk. It uneased me to hear the way they spoke. How hard they thought of girls' bodies, and how little of their feelings. Like women were just creatures to be used and traded. They respected horses better. (Ibid., 130)

The 'manly' practice of objectification and subordination through observation and judgment of females based on their physical attractiveness is highlighted as harmful in this passage, which sees Bedwyr fully integrated into the adult male order and embracing a masculinity that is hegemonic and located in the closed centre. Crucially, the masculinity emulated by Bedwyr and the other young men is clearly based on Arthur's. The final comment in the passage above refers back to an earlier one which sees Gwyn/a comment that, watching at Gwenhwyfar, Arthur has "the same look that he gets when he is thinking about buying a horse, or taking a new stretch of land" (Ibid., 110). Returning to Arthur's group as a girl later, Gwyn/a hardly recognises her boyhood friend: "[Bedwyr] was a warrior now, with a warrior's windy vanity, and five notches cut in the edge of his shield to show the men he'd killed. He'd put his life as a boy far behind him, stuffed it away as if it shamed him […]" (Ibid., 145). "Stuffed it away" is a particularly evocative phrase, and, together with the word "shamed", highlights the negative connotations of boyhood as opposed to manhood.

However, when Bedwyr is wounded in a battle, leaving him unable to walk, let alone fight, his life and position in Arthur's group radically change, revealing the power and domination of hegemonic masculinity not only over females but also other men. The injury severely impacts how others view and treat Bedwyr. Arthur's wish that "Bedwyr had been killed outright" and his ruthless opinion, "[b]etter a dead hero than a living cripple" (Ibid., 179) highlight that a man is only a 'real man' if he is able-bodied and prepared to demonstrate his physical prowess. The injury also impacts Bedwyr's own behaviour and feelings:

> The pain and shame of his bust leg left him bitter. He didn't think he'd ride again, or fight, and what good was a man who couldn't ride or fight? He snapped at the girls Gwenhwyfar sent to tend to him, until we hated going. He had a girl of his own […] but he sent her away, as if it made the shame worse to have her there weeping for him. (Ibid., 176)

In her role as maid, Gwyn/a wants to help Bedwyr, but decides against it: "Watching him go, it was all I could do not to run and give him my arm to lean on. But I wasn't his friend Gwyn any more, and he was a man now. It would shame him if a girl offered him help." (Ibid., 177) Shame is indeed the emotion that seems to define Bedwyr's new life in the margin. When he falls down trying to walk, Gwyn/a describes what happens:

> Bedwyr was wobbly as a baby and as slow as an old, old man. Halfway to the cistern he fell, and knelt there, sobbing. […] And I stood in the shadows behind the folded-back doors, and watched, and didn't move or speak, because Bedwyr would hate it if he knew someone had seen him crying like a child. (Ibid.)

Gwyn/a's observations and her decision to withhold help highlight that, despite having been removed from the privileged centre, there is a continued need for Bedwyr to follow hegemonic norms. Indeed, it is his desire to at least *feel* like a man, even if other men don't consider him to be one, that leads him to begin an affair with Gwenhwyfar. As Gwyn/a observes:

> The best future he can hope for is to be a half-man, riding patrol along the field-banks, watching over Arthur's cows and barley. The pain in his bad leg always, souring him. Gwenhwyfar makes him feel like a man again. Arthur has no use for a broken warrior, but Arthur's wife has.

> […] She takes him so seriously. And isn't that what all boys want, and all men too? Just to be taken seriously? (Ibid., 189-190)

The affair, in turn, leads not only to Bedwyr and Gwenhwyfar's murders, but the death of almost everyone in Arthur's warband. Similar to Springer's *I am Mordred*, Reeve's novel thus suggests that a man's desire to feel manly and his ensuing actions cause the death of Arthur's men. In Reeve's narrative, Arthur himself also dies, with no hope of return. Having watched him die on the battlefield, Gwyn/a helps herself to Arthur's "rings and his belt and his boots and the old gold cross he wore round his neck", thinking she'd "earned them" (Reeve 2007, 283). Her subsequent statement that "[t]he real Arthur had been just a little tyrant in an age of tyrants" (Ibid., 286) cements the transformation of the legendary hero into a hypermasculine warlord, an anti-role model for modern readers. Gwyn/a seizing his possessions metaphorically also removes Arthur's power, with the ultimate fate of his story and reputation now in her hands.

Challenging Binaries and the 'Strong Female Protagonist' Trope

Gwyn/a and Peri/Peredur are the only members of Arthur's warband to survive the final battle. Endings, Stephens (1992, 43) notes, "reaffirm what society regards as important issues and preferred outcomes". A return to the norm is a common conclusion to cross-dressing in children's fiction. As Nikolajeva (2009, 111) writes, "the outcome of the carnival is predictable. Unless the girl in disguise perishes, she is inevitably reintroduced into the stereotypical feminine matrix". In *Here Lies Arthur*, however, Gwyn/a does not end up in a stereotypical feminine role. As "Gwyn, son of Myrddin", s/he travels the country with Peri/Peredur as companion (Reeve 2007, 286). Gwyn/a's choice to be viewed as Myrddin's *son* does not imply conformity to the kind of normative masculinity that the novel criticises. Instead of becoming or pretending to be a heroic male warrior, Gwyn/a takes up her late master Myrddin's role: a harper passing on stories about Arthur and his companions. Like Myrddin, Gwyn/a decides to tell of Arthur's "high deeds" rather than divulging the truth to the people she meets on the road (Ibid.). However, she does so for the purpose of earning enough money "to buy passage with a trader, outbound for somewhere better" (Ibid., 288), and the novel itself is her true testimony.

After Gwyn/a has revealed her story and various gender performances to Peri/Peredur, they share several kisses; however, it does not clearly transpire whether the two commit to a romantic relationship. The focus of the ending is not on the heterosexual union between the two cross-dressing characters, but on how Gwyn/a's lack of agency and identity at the beginning of the story are replaced by a more confident and meaningful sense of self. Tolhurst (2012a, 76) comments on the ending: "When Gwyna chooses to live as a man and creates the legend of Arthur, she demonstrates that women can – and apparently should – displace powerful men." Such an interpretation foregrounds the female sex Gwyn/a was assigned at birth, conflates external and internal notions of gender identity, and confirms the notion of masculinity and femininity as strict binary opposites, while assuming a closure with a fixed meaning. It suggests that even though Gwyn/a identifies as Gwyn, she cannot evade her 'true' sex assigned at birth. I contend that the ending allows for multiple interpretations. As a retrospective first-person narrator, Gwyn/a states in the beginning of the novel, "When I was a boy I rode with Arthur's band" (Reeve 2007, 4). There is no information regarding the temporal distance between narrating and experiencing self; the statement, however, suggests that the narration takes place some time after adolescence. "When I was a boy" is ambiguous: it could refer to a narrator who tells the story as an adult male, an adult female, or someone with a non-binary gender identity. We are not given clear information on how Gwyn/a chooses to live out or describe her gender (and sexuality, for the matter) once she has left the realm where Arthur is known. In addition, the gender identity Peri/Peredur assumes remains ambiguous: in the final passages, Gwyn/a only refers to him as "travelling companion" and "my beautiful young friend" (Ibid., 286).[169] However, Gwyn/a also uses the phrase "my Peri and I" (Ibid., 288), choosing Peri/Peredur's female name. These observations further emphasise the novel's preoccupation with the instability and fluidity of gender categories and identities.

An important question in relation to cross-dressing that needs to be addressed is whether Gwyn/a is only a "hero in drag" (Nikolajeva 2009, Paul 1990). "Stories in which a conventional heroic role is played by a woman" give readers the impression that "women must strive to behave as much like men as possible" (Hourihan 1997, 206). Such stories, Hourihan explains, do not challenge "the heroic definition of ideal manhood, for the women display the same courage, prowess, arid rationalism and rigid sense of purpose" (Ibid.). The passage that most conspicuously draws attention to Gwyn/a's potential status as hero in drag is the kiss between her and Peri/Peredur at the end, which sees traditional gender roles inverted. Returning to Peri/Peredur from the battlefield and finding him in feminine-coded clothing, Gwyn/a feels that she deserves to kiss 'her' Peri/Peredur: "I felt like I'd ridden a long way, through battles and bad country, and he was my girl, waiting for me at journey's end" (Reeve 2007, 285). Throughout the novel, in his attempts to perform masculinity, Peri/Peredur gets himself into trouble and assumes the role of the 'damsel in distress'. However, I contend that Gwyn/a is not a hero in drag since she does not reject her femininity or show aversion to her body (except briefly in the menstruation episode). Most importantly, the novel sees Gwyn/a reflect on the inequality between and among men and

[169] Our understanding of Peri/Peredur's interior life is limited, since we do not learn about his experience and feelings through personal narration; he is a focalising character in Gwyn/a's story.

women, recognise the problematics of gender binarism, and question the notion of heroic, normative masculinity.

The ending of *Here Lies Arthur* stands in stark contrast to the repressive ending of another Arthurian YA adaptation that uses the literary device of cross-dressing: Jane Yolen's *Sword of the Rightful King* (2003). Contrary to Reeve's novel, Yolen's narrative withholds the cross-dressing character's sex assigned at birth from the reader until the final chapters. Set some time in the Middle Ages and narrated in third person with various characters as internal focalisers, Yolen's adaptation focuses on the episode of the sword in the stone and the twenty-two-year-old Arthur's achievement of legitimacy. One of the central characters is Gawen, who arrives at Arthur's court to become a knight, a hope that the king's advisor, Merlinnus, quickly destroys, instead taking him in as his servant and protégé. Well-read and solution oriented, Gawen comes to advise the king almost as much as Merlinnus; he also saves Arthur by destroying a potion concocted by the North Witch to weaken the king and prevent him from drawing the sword from the stone. Through wit, Gawen even manages to retrieve the sword meant to be taken only by Arthur – by using melted butter. When Arthur and Merlinnus learn about Gawen's trick, they – and the reader – discover that Gawen is actually not a thirteen-year-old boy, but the twenty-one-year-old 'maid', Gwenhwyfar.

After this 'unmasking' – which, in Yolen's novel, is unproblematically presented as such – Gwen immediately receives a marriage proposal from King Arthur and abruptly adopts a conventional female gender role. Right in time for the wedding, her "fair hair had grown out to near shoulder length" and the guards "all nodded at Gwen, and more than a few felt themselves moved by her undisguised beauty […] she was as fetching a woman as had been seen in the castle for months" (Yolen 2003, 344). The closure thus sees a reaffirmation of the feminine beauty ideal and a return to stable gender relations. A repressive ending, in Jurney's (2001, 9) words, "nullif[ies] any sense that the rest of the text may have given of alternatives to strict gender roles". As Flanagan (2002, 80) explains, not every text involving a female cross-dresser achieves "to destabilize the polarized conceptions of masculinity and femininity". It appears that this is the case in Yolen's novel, where "cross-dressing is secondary to the main events", and, as a result, "less successful in reassessing conventional gender codes" (Ibid.). Reeve, on the other hand, provides an Arthurian cross-dressing narrative with a more open ending that leaves the important space to imagine a non-binary protagonist, thereby confirming the fluidity and malleability of gender.

Conclusion

Prominent scholar Jack Halberstam writes that masculinity "becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white middle-class body" (1998, 2). This is indeed the case in Reeve's

Arthurian novel. Presenting two cross-dressing characters, *Here Lies Arthur* demonstrates how both masculinity and femininity are acquired through gendered processes of socialisation, how gender is learned behaviour rather than innate, and how it is *performed*. Both Gwyn/a's and Peri/Peredur's various cross-dressings, their embrace and shedding of different gender(ed) identities, complicate theoretical views on the cross-dressing device and illustrate the malleability and fluidity of gender categories, undoing essentialist and binarist views. The protagonist's observations of the harmful effects of hegemonic masculinity and the processes by which both women and men are subordinated, reveals the potential of the Arthurian legend to critique both past and present masculinity norms and practices without replacing those models with new ones, but by destabilising masculinity altogether. Most crucially, the denouement allows the reader to imagine a protagonist in the open margin, finding liberation in queerness.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have discussed the ways contemporary Anglophone YA narratives re-imagine medieval masculinities and male maturation through the use of the Arthurian legend as intertext and by exploiting medieval trappings more broadly. I have explored the means by which these narratives and the discursive constructions of masculinity they contain reiterate and/or revise medieval(ist) models and ideals, how they are in dialogue with the ideological structures of the Arthurian tradition, and how they reflect prominent discourses, ideas, and anxieties about boy- and manhood at the time of their publication. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the boy crisis debate and the Mythopoetic Men's Movement were sites for such discourses, ideas, and anxieties, with conservative voices within the former and proponents of the latter highlighting the role of male mentors and a distancing from the feminine as crucial for achieving 'real' manhood. My discussion of selected Arthurian YA adaptations has illustrated the prominence of male mentors and role models whose masculine embodiments and teachings protagonists can "learn from, resist, or adopt" (Kennon 2017, 31), and highlighted the ways these texts engage with a distancing from the feminine. In reading Arthurian adaptations and their representations of masculinities in relation to turn-of-the-century masculinity discourses, I have modelled an interdisciplinary framework, demonstrating the potential of using sociological concepts such as the theory of hegemonic masculinities in conjunction with newer approaches like Elliott's margin-centre framework to discuss fictional constructions of masculinities. I have illustrated the ways protagonists displaying 'hybrid' masculinities move between closed and open configurations of masculinity, at times embodying *reconfigured* hegemonic masculinities that, despite challenging some traditional scripts, continue to legitimate gender inequalities. Such a reading demonstrates that looking beyond 'character types' and 'hybridity' is essential. My analysis has clearly modelled the ways that close reading using an interdisciplinary approach can reveal these nuances and *movements* in fictional representations of masculinity.

In the conclusion to her seminal monograph on child-focused Arthuriana, Elly McCausland explains that, after the (posthumous) publication of John Steinbeck's Arthurian adaptation in 1976, "authors began to manipulate Malory's text in ever more creative ways, to depict the adventures of bold, intuitive child protagonists as metaphorical journeys towards self-discovery" (2019a, 178). As my discussion has shown, recent Arthurian narratives for adolescents – always directly or indirectly influenced by Malory's *Morte* – indeed increasingly centre the interior lives of protagonists on their path towards self-discovery. However, as the chapter on Gerald Morris's *Squire's Tale* series has illustrated, contemporary re-imaginations of the Arthurian legend can remain situated within a nostalgic frame, presenting, to use McCausland's words, "a series of tests to measure progression towards idealised masculinity" (Ibid.). In Morris's Arthurian adaptation, this idealised masculinity is recast as a 'deep' masculinity that is developed in homosocial situations and clearly superior to other, especially feminised, masculinities. As Nancy Springer's *I am Mordred* demonstrates, contemporary Arthurian adaptations can also explicitly work against nostalgic appropriation, critiquing a seamless progression towards and embrace of a chivalric hegemonic ideal by offering a protagonist who continuously attempts to measure up to an ideal, but, ultimately, is punished for it. Perhaps Camelot, and Mordred himself, could have been saved, had he only embraced a more open masculine embodiment, and had King Arthur been able to do the same. In contrast to Morris's work, Springer's novel, through a focus on the split self, reveals the fragility of the masculine self and the potential of listening to non-hegemonic, non-male voices in the development of one's gender identity, embodied in the novel by the protagonist's guide and closest ally, Nyneve. Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy* similarly presents a protagonist who wants to occupy the hegemonic position of a knight, seemingly pursuing a masculinity that is located in the closed centre, but who ultimately rejects the norms imposed on him by others – adult males in particular – choosing to follow his moral compass, embracing his caring masculinity and leading the way towards gender equality. Finally, Philip Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur* makes processes of gendered maturation and socialisation visible by detaching masculinity from the cis male body and femininity from the cis female body, by transforming the legendary king into an example of harmful hypermasculinity, and by imagining Arthurian characters that do not necessarily identify as either female or male, but whose gender embodiment may lie somewhere in between.

My study has highlighted the intricate relationship between medievalisms, masculinities, and young adult literature, illustrating how the texts under scrutiny use the medieval, Arthurian context in different ways to comment on masculinity and male maturation: in a nostalgic manner (Morris's *Squire's Tale* series), in terms of barriers and limitations (Springer's *I am Mordred*), as opportunity for growth (Crossley-Holland's *Arthur Trilogy*), and as a time and space to question deep-rooted beliefs about gender as binary and essential (Reeve's *Here Lies Arthur*). The practice of *queering* the Arthurian legend, of using the medieval to challenge and revise persisting views on gender and sexuality, illustrated by Reeve's adaptation, is indeed becoming more prominent within recent YA adaptations, which are increasingly not only including but *centring* characters with alternative gender and sexual identities, thereby making visible and attributing legitimacy to queer adolescent identities within the frame of a traditional hero story. A prime example of such an adaptation is Amy Rose Capetta and Cori McCarthy's *Once & Future* duology (2019-2020). Set in space in the distant future, and located at the intersection of fantasy, science fiction, and dystopia, the text problematises current understandings of gender and sexuality.[170] It does so by portraying a society that has moved past the need to regulate gender expression and sexual orientation, a society that celebrates diversity and values an inclusive and effectively degendered form of heroism. As such, the duology not only queers the Arthurian legend, but reflects the emerging discourses surrounding inclusivity that shape contemporary Western constructions of gender and sexuality, revealing how the medieval, the Arthurian tradition in particular, can be put in dialogue with current identity politics.

The characters in *Once & Future* are reincarnations of the well-known Arthurian cast but reflect diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. The only 'original' characters are the ancient wizard Merlin – who, cursed to age backwards, is now a teenage boy – and the sorceress Morgana, who has lived through the ages, reduced to the form of a spectre. Due to human negligence, Planet Earth is no longer a habitable place, though it is still being secretly exploited by Mercer, the oppressive corporation that is in control of the government and resources across space. When eighteen-year-old cis-girl Ari retrieves Excalibur, Merlin awakens. Now a teenager, he sets out on his mission to find the 42nd reincarnation of King Arthur, train him, put him on the nearest throne, make him defeat the greatest evil, and finally, unite humankind. Never before has a reincarnation of Arthur achieved this last stage, which is why the cycle keeps repeating itself. Ari, an illegal immigrant in this galaxy, is the first female[171] Arthur in the cycle – the current reiteration of which takes place in a society different from any that Merlin has experienced so far: one devoid of patriarchy, sexism, gender binarism, and heteronormativity.

170 The duology's premise is comparable to DC Comics' *Camelot 3000*, written by Mike W. Barr and illustrated by Brian Bolland (1982–1985). This text cannot necessarily be described as YA fiction, but, as a comic, it may certainly appeal to adolescent audiences. An Arthurian adaptation set in the distant future, *Camelot 3000* also engages with gender and sexual identity and depicts queer characters. In the Introduction to the 2008 complete edition, Mike W. Barr explains that his inclusion of "a transsexual knight, lesbianism, incest and other various Code-breaking plot points" might seem "somewhat tame by today's standards" but was rebellious and "as far as [he] would go" at the time of the text's original publication (2008, n.p.).

171 Only few YA adaptations present a female King Arthur: K.M. Shea's self-published, seven-volume *King Arthur and Her Knights* series (2013-2016), a recent graphic novel adaptation, *The Once & Future Queen* (2017), which I discuss shortly, as well as the screen adaptation of Meg Cabot's novel *Avalon High*, which makes the female protagonist not, as imagined in the novel, the reincarnation of the Lady of the Lake, but the reborn king. In a thrilling twist, Tracy Deonn's *Legendborn* also presents a cis girl as the direct heir to, or *Scion* of, King Arthur.

The *Once & Future* duology references these biases and ideologies through a critical lens, deconstructing binary views on gender and sexuality and challenging heteronormative notions of heroism, effectively demonstrating how gender and sexual identities as well as heroic ideals are temporally, historically, and culturally constructed. The adaptation achieves this, firstly, by creating what Roseann Pluretti et al. (2016) would call a "gender-full" utopia[172] that highlights gender and sexuality as a spectrum and allows individuals agency in their identity construction, and, secondly, by queering medieval(ist) concepts of heroism. The latter is realised through a queering of the trope of the female adolescent hero common in the YA genre the text blurs, the problematising and queering of chivalry, as well as the highlighting of 'human' rather than gendered traits as defining the heroic subject. Capetta and McCarthy's version of the Arthurian legend utilises dual character focalisation, as well as temporal and spatial presence/distance to foreground the strangeness and alterity of both the Middle Ages and twenty-first-century Western society. This dialectical relation between past, present, and future creates a critical point of view from which the adaptation engages in the subversive task of calling into question the patriarchal, masculinist, binarist, and heteronormative biases found in the Arthurian legend as well as in contemporary society. Importantly, this recent adaptation captures the complexity of the human experience in terms of gender and sexuality, thus serving as an example of what modern medievalism and Arthuriana can accomplish within literature for young people when employed with an eye to destabilising binaries and categories regarding gender and sexual identity. Pugh and Weisl propose that children's and young adult literature is perhaps the most authentically medieval "in its construction of a past that can speak to and incorporate the values of the present" (2013, 56). *Once & Future* utilises the medieval successfully within this premise, while illustrating the potential, continuity, and mutability of the Arthurian legend, and the Middle Ages more broadly, within young people's literature and culture, demonstrating, to use Korte and Lethbridge's (2017, 16) words, "[h]ow the heroic [can] be made over to suit new social realities".[173] These new social realities are influenced by novel ways of looking at masculinities and gender relations, an increasingly more prominent understanding of gender and sexuality as existing on a spectrum, and the need to recognise, acknowledge, and combat privilege on various levels.

The heroic is similarly rewritten to fit such new realities in a graphic novel adaptation of the legend, *The Once and Future Queen* (Dark Horse Comics, 2017), which, like Capetta and

[172] While *Once & Future* offers a utopia in terms of gender and sexuality, it presents an otherwise dystopian society defined by the aftermath of environmental catastrophes and ruled by capitalism and consumerism.
[173] For an in-depth analysis of the first novel in Capetta and McCarthy's duology, see my article, "'Queer King Arthur in Space': Problematising Gender Binaries, Heteronormativity, and Medieval(ist) Heroic Ideals in Amy Rose Capetta and Cori McCarthy's *Once & Future*" (2020).

McCarthy's narrative, centres on the premise of a genderqueer, non-heterosexual[174] King Arthur who was assigned female at birth, while exploring the idea of a more inclusive Round Table both in terms of gender and sexuality and in relation to race and ethnicity. Set in contemporary US-America, *The Once and Future Queen* presents King Arthur as nineteen-year-old mixed-race Rani, who falls in love with Gwen, a lesbian or bisexual girl from Britain, and also develops feelings for Lance, a Black American asexual teenager. Together, and with the support of Merlin, they try to save the world from evil outside forces, while exploring their sexualities and building a polyamorous relationship. This adaptation reflects, firstly, the noticeable publishing trend of comics and graphic novels within the last two decades – in general and in relation to the Arthurian legend[175]. Secondly, it expands, as Capetta and McCarthy's duology, the meaning of the heroic using a medievalist, specifically Arthurian, context.

As these adaptations illustrate, contemporary Arthuriana slowly but surely is beginning to disrupt not only gender binarism and heteronormativity, but also the tradition's severe lack of racial and ethnic diversity, reflected in the scarcity of non-white characters – an issue I addressed in the Introduction. The second novel in Capetta and McCarthy's duology anticipates the 'historical accuracy' debate that Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Tracy Deonn have commented on. Having returned to the Middle Ages from the distant 'gender-full' future, Merlin's observations indicate his surprise at the diversity he encounters in the past, reflecting, perhaps the readers' own astonishment:

> [I]t wasn't a homogenous medieval dance crew. For some reason, he had expected everyone to be whiter than the puffy clouds above the tournament ring. A single look proved that wasn't true. While some girls were white and wildly freckled, others had smooth bronze complexions. There were pale blonds and paler redheads, as well as maidens with warm brown skin and tight black curls tumbling out of their braided crowns. One girl had a Middle Eastern set to her features and jewel-bright eyes much like Ari. […] He went back to scanning the – also surprisingly diverse – crowd for his friends[.] (Capetta and McCarthy 2020, loc.133-141)

Not having any memory of medieval times like Merlin, but an understanding of the past through history, genderqueer Lam also comments on this: "'Camelot is not what we thought.' Looking around, Merlin had to agree. […] he was delighted to be wrong about certain things – such as the total whiteness of ye olde Britain" (Ibid., loc.194). Indeed, one type of discrimination that the queer

174 I am aware that this term foregrounds heterosexuality as the norm. However, it seems to be the preferred term in scholarship on sexuality. As Phellas (2012, 2) writes, even though "the description 'non-heterosexual' has gaucheness – the feel of an awkward and catch-all category", it is useful because it does not limit the discussion "to those who are exclusively orientated to the same sex" – i.e., the term non-heterosexual allows me to view sexuality as a spectrum rather than a hetero-homosexual binary.

175 Examples of Arthurian comics and graphic novels for children and young adults include: *King Arthur: Excalibur Unsheathed* (2007) and *Tristan and Isolde: The Warrior and The Princess* (2008) in the *Graphic Myths & Legends* series; *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* (2009) retold by M.C. Hall and illustrated by C.E. Richards for Graphic Revolve; Tony Lee's *Excalibur: The Legend of King Arthur* (2011), illustrated, coloured, and lettered by Sam Hart; M.T. Anderson's *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion* (2017), illustrated by Andrea Offermann; and Usborne's *The Adventures of King Arthur* (2017) by Russell Punter with Andrea da Rold as illustrator.

Arthurian cast of the future does not have to fear is poor treatment "based on skin tone" (Ibid., loc.313). Merlin highlights the ways portrayals of the Middle Ages, particularly in the media, impact society's limited understanding of the period:

> I'd forgotten that things were actually better if you went this far back. I'd even grown used to the notion that people of color were not featured in this era of European history. I don't know who started *that* lie, but Hollywood was quite talented at spreading it. Did you know that enough poorly cast movies can whitewash a time period you've lived through? Because I didn't. (Ibid., loc.313-318; emphasis in original)

Passages like these anticipate and diffuse potential criticism along the lines of 'historical accuracy', countering narratives and arguments of exclusion.

Tracy Deonn's YA novel, *Legendborn* (2020), set to be a series, also approaches the topic of exclusion through the Arthurian legend, while, similarly to Capetta and McCarthy's narrative, offering an exciting and innovative storyline including queer characters. A *New York Times* Bestseller and Coretta Scott King Award winner, Deonn's variation is set on a college campus in the contemporary US-American South, and, according to bestselling YA author Dhonielle Clayton, "[a] King Arthur reimagining that adds seats to the Round Table, inviting new readers to find themselves within its lore" (cited on the back cover of *Legendborn*, 2020).[176] In an attempt to discover more about her mother's death, the cis female African American protagonist, Bree, infiltrates a secret and exclusive society consisting of teenage descendants of Arthurian knights. Her observations of the society's past reveal the strong contrast between the long history of the legend – reflected in the lineages of the Arthurian descendants – and her own family history: "To be able to trace one's family back that far is something I have never fathomed. My family only knows back to the generation after Emancipation" (Deonn 2020, 135). This thought understandably upsets her and makes her wonder: "[W]ho could have written down my family's history as far back as this? Who would have been able to, been taught to, been allowed to?" (Ibid.) The truth behind Bree's own magical powers and connection to the legend, revealed at the end, is intrinsically connected to the history of slavery and systemic racism in the US, lending new meaning to the past and the Arthurian story.

Deonn's protagonist exemplifies the ways the (Arthurian) heroic can be rewritten in more inclusive ways. Such rewritings are indispensable, especially within youth literature. As Melanie Ramdarshan Bold writes: "[R]epresentation in cultural output for children and teenagers is particularly important since [a] lack of inclusivity influences how 'diverse', young readers see

[176] Deonn herself describes *Legendborn*, in 'fan-fic' terms, as "a canon-divergent Arthurian alternate universe […] set in the real world with an original character" (2021, n.p.).

themselves and how readers, from dominant groups, see and understand 'diversity'." (2019, 7)[177] If we look at the Arthurian legend "as a means of reconstructing and rewriting the past in the service of the present" (Semper 2012, 174), a discourse of exclusivity, legitimised by its apparent connection to the past, is unsustainable. Writing on the *Harry Potter* series, Pugh and Wallace (2006, 264) contend that "to depict a convincingly twenty-first-century world", queer characters *need* to be included, as their omission would "erase[] a substantial population". For the same reason, a more diverse cast including non-white characters need to be written into the Arthurian world.[178]

Deonn's novel also reflects another, much earlier key development in modern Arthuriana that continues within twenty-first century YA fiction, namely an increasing focus on cis female perspectives. Female-driven Arthurian works, as Pugh and Weisl (2013, 75) state, "recast the gendered politics of Arthurian romances by exploring the knightly world of chivalry through the perspectives of such characters as Guinevere [and] Morgan le Fay" or through newly invented cis female characters. These stories provide a (largely) cis female audience[179] with access to versions of the legend "that displace the male-centered and overtly Christian worldview palpable in medieval texts" (Tolhurst 2012a, 69). Often authored by women, female-driven Arthuriana offers portrayals of boyish characters and women warriors who skilfully "handle swords and spears, bows and arrows", while frequently reflecting a focus on romance (Davidson 2012, 10-12).

As noted in the Introduction, research has discussed YA and adult Arthuriana focusing on and written by females. However, there has been a lack of interest in the construction and performance of gender by cis male characters in these female-driven texts. I contend that it is crucial to consider these, firstly, to reveal whether and how the portrayal of cis male characters might reflect the so-called "seesaw effect" noted by Anna Altmann (1994) in her analysis of fairy tale rewritings. This effect refers to a practice "where the promotion of previously downgraded groups (women)" occurs "at the cost of others (men)", which contributes to the maintenance of "the very gender dichotomy that these texts seek to question" (Joosen 2017, 115). Likewise, Pennell (2002, 56) highlights that fictions offering pro-feminist portrayals of feminine subjectivities frequently perpetuate gender binarism, while depicting masculinities in pejorative terms: "[T]he

177 The lack of inclusivity is worrisome across the young adult book market. As Ramdarshan Bold notes, "the majority of YA books, particularly best-sellers, feature white, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual protagonists" (2019, 6). A number of grass-roots organisations and campaigns have been established in response to this: e.g., We Need Diverse Books, Disability in Kidlit, Rich in Color, Diversify YA, and Gay YA (Ibid., 6-7).

178 While not specifically addressed to young adults, a soon-to-be-published anthology, *Sword Stone Table: Old Legends, New Voices*, edited by Swapna Krishna and Jenn Northington, contains a variety of "gender-bent, race-bent, LGBTQIA+ inclusive" Arthurian tales by a number of diverse authors (*Goodreads.com* 2021b, n.p.), furthering the vital development of Arthuriana towards more diversity.

179 I do not intend to perpetuate gender binarism by referring to 'female audiences' here. As Lem and Hassel (2012, 119) explain, the use of binary terms is meant "to reflect reading audiences that have been both constructed by the publishing industry and echoed by scholars of reception theory who have addressed the phenomenon of gendering and YA literature".

process of pluralizing and resignifying feminine subjectivities often mean[s] a concomitant demonizing of masculine subjectivities". Wooden and Gillam (2014, xi) make a similar argument in their analysis of PIXAR's animated film *Brave* (2012): "[C]heering its revolutionary representations of 'gender,' critics largely ignored (or enjoyed!) the fact that its boys and men populate a spectrum that stretches only from animal to imbecile, providing comic relief but little else to its ostensible girl-power message".

The depiction of cis male characters in female-driven YA is especially relevant in terms of their role as romantic interest, a topic that YA scholarship has recently begun to focus on (e.g., Clasen 2017, Mukherjea 2011, Pattee 2011, Seymour 2016). Clasen (2017), for instance, analyses masculinity in female-driven heterosexual YA romance, contending that, as a predominantly female arena, this genre "defines masculinity in relationship to female desire" (230). (Heteronormative) YA romances create certain gendered relational expectations that guide readers' "social understanding of how both men and women should behave in [heterosexual] relationships" – expectations that can be unrealistic (Ibid.). Male love interests in contemporary heteronormative YA romance, Clasen explains, reflect the image of the "woman's man" and as such are "allowed to deviate from traditional concepts of hegemonic masculinity" in three key ways: in terms of "their physical appearance, their language and communication style, and their value of love and romance" (Ibid.). Analysing contemporary YA dystopia, Seymour (2016) makes a similar argument, stating that positively depicted cis male characters in such narratives "are compassionate, emotionally intelligent, pacifist, non-heteronormative, and actively opposed to victimizing women and sexist behavior" (632). On the other hand, twenty-first century YA paranormal romance such as the *Twilight* series (2005-2008), continues to portray "old-school gentleman-vampires who are, certainly, sensitive and evolved in some ways", while also embodying "physical prowess, fighting skills, chivalrous manners, and eternal, gorgeous youth" (Mukherjea 2011, 3; 14). These vampires are idealised to the extent that "they are more manly than mere men could be" (Ibid., 14).

Future studies could focus on how romance-genre-specific tenets impact masculinities in YA Arthurian adaptations that are cis-female driven. Questions that could be addressed include: How are chivalric heterosexual cis male love interests portrayed? What attributes are presented as desirable? Where are the masculinities of love interests located – in the centre or the margin, and is there movement between these positions? How do these characters relate to the 'strong cis female protagonist', a trope that continues to permeate contemporary YA fiction?[180] Besides cis-female-driven YA fiction, there is also a rapidly growing amount of Middle Grade Arthurian variations with protagonists of different genders, which deserve scholarly attention in terms of masculinity.[181]

The reasons for the continued popularity of King Arthur's court are manifold. Naturally, the stories offer entertainment. The fascination, however, is also rooted in the legend's resonance with current and past politics and culture, in the ways the tales create nostalgia for a distant, glorious, ideal past, and in the seemingly timeless, universal values the court's (cis male) heroic protagonists are said to embody. The Arthurian stories are part of a cultural – and, in the British context, national – heritage considered worthy of preservation. If there is indeed a need for preservation based on cultural heritage arguments, the question that needs to be posed is: How can we both preserve the Arthurian legend as literary and cultural heritage and, at the same time, rewrite parts of it to interrogate its core ideologies with the aim of making changes that can positively impact our society?

The answer to this question may lie in the space, or relationship, between more traditional adaptations and variations. Perhaps Arthurian retellings/abridged versions and variations *depend on* and *relate to* each other. Sanders (2016) argues that

> it is the very endurance and survival of the source text[182] *alongside* the various versions and interpretations that it stimulates and provokes, that enables the ongoing process of *juxtaposed readings* that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships. (34; emphasis added)

Similarly, Stephens (1992) maintains that "[t]he narrative representations of ideology and power can also be explored in texts which exist in explicit dialogue with other texts, especially re-versions [i.e., variations] and sequels. The *dialogic effect* throws the ideology of both texts into sharp relief" (45; emphasis added). "The significance of the story" would then be situated "in the process of interaction between the texts" (Ibid., 88). Does that mean that more traditional, conservative retellings, which inevitably preserve and reinforce gender ideologies that are no longer acceptable and maintainable, need to exist and continue to be read, so variations can be in dialogue with, challenge, and subvert them? How is meaning created by the juxtaposition of and dialogue between

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180 Examples of Arthurian adaptations that could be studied in relation to the questions suggested above are: Meg Cabot's *Avalon High* (2005) including its graphic novel sequels (2007-2009) and TV adaptation (2010); Anne Crompton's *Merlin's Harp* (1995), *Gawain and Lady Green* (1997) and *Percival's Angels* (1999); Lisa Ann Sandell's verse novel *Song of the Sparrow* (2007); K.M. Shea's highly popular, self-published series *King Arthur and Her Knights* (2013-2016); Kathryn Rose's *Metal & Lace* trilogy (2014-2016); Tom Wheeler's *Cursed* (2019), illustrated by Frank Miller and adapted by *Netflix* (2020); Kiersten White's *Camelot Rising* books (2019-); and Tracy Deonn's *Legendborn* series (2020-).
181 For a list of Middle Grade Arthurian variations, see the Appendix.
182 Within my argument, the 'source text' refers to traditional Arthurian retellings for children, often based on Malory's *Morte*.

retellings and variations? I believe such questions would prove suitable for empirical work with real adolescent readers.[183] Indeed, Arthurian scholarship – especially the study of adaptations for children and young adults – would benefit from an expansion beyond theoretical methodologies. As cultural products, literary texts affect how readers view themselves and how they relate to others. In terms of masculinity, empirical research could, for instance, address the question of how cis male readers relate to cis male protagonists in novels such as the ones discussed in this dissertation and how their engagement with the text(s) influences their perception of masculinity norms and gender roles in their everyday lives. Similarly, cis-female-driven Arthurian texts could be used to discuss the ways adolescents' identification with the protagonist "contribute[s] to their gender identity construction, actions, or performance" (Kokesh and Sternadori 2015, 142). It would also be fascinating to see how young readers of all genders and sexualities respond to more inclusive Arthurian adaptations.

A plethora of fascinating avenues remains to be explored, using a variety of methods and ever-evolving concepts and theories. As I have shown, looking at a literary text from an interdisciplinary viewpoint and engaging with critical debates from different fields opens up new possibilities. Arthurian and medievalist scholarship enriches the study of children's literature and vice versa. Contextualising YA texts that are in dialogue with these discourses allows for more nuanced, more historically, socially, and culturally situated readings, not only of masculinities, but of the text more broadly. The meanings discovered in the YA text, in turn, reflect back on the tradition, shedding new light on older texts, traditions, and scholarship, opening up new centres, new paths to explore the legend. Further, I have demonstrated that the study of fictional masculinities becomes more refined when drawing on sociology, psychology, and history, which, as disciplines, can also learn from the insights gained through literary analysis. For example, how do fictional 'hybrid' masculinities – as reconfigurations of hegemonic masculinities, as marginalised masculinities, as non-hegemonic masculinities – relate to 'hybrid' masculinities theorised and studied in the 'real world'? Finally, I have illustrated the potential of using the lens of maturation in studying masculinities. Maturation plays a crucial role in fictional texts, particularly those for the young; it impacts socio-political discourses about gender and sexuality; and it manifests in

[183] Overall, there is still a dearth of empirical studies in relation to YA literature. Hayn et al. (2011) found only 27 empirical articles published between 2000-2010, "a small number when compared with the rest of what is published about YAL" (178). Studies such as Kimberly N. Parker's "My Boys and My Books: Engaging African American Young Men in Emancipatory Reading" (2008), Erin Spring's work with teenage readers in relation to place and identity (e.g., 2015, 2018), and Kristie Escobar's analysis of LTBTQAI+ teens' interpretations of YA novels "as sexuality and sexual health information resources" (2020) offer some interesting examples of empirical approaches to YA fiction. Although these scholarly works are located within very different contexts, they provide ideas on how real adolescent readers may be brought into the study of Arthurian YA narratives. In relation to general fiction, Janice A. Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984, updated in 1991) offers an interesting model revolving around reader response criticism.

sociological and psychological studies on masculinities (e.g., Kimmel 2008a, Pascoe 2007). Much insight could be gained were non-literary disciplines to engage with maturation discourses in fiction, especially texts produced for adolescents: How does the 'real world' (groups and individuals) define 'moments of maturation'? What kinds of masculinities do not only cis boys and men but cis girls and women as well as genderqueer people embody in such moments and why? How does privilege manifest itself in these processes? And how does all that relate to the theories, concepts, and debates on masculinities and gender and sexuality more broadly – theories, concepts, and debates that continue to evolve and to reflect 'new social realities'?

As I have demonstrated in this study, in the twenty-first century, the transition from boyhood to manhood continues to be embedded in and influenced by medieval(ist) Arthurian and chivalric discourse – in nostalgic but also increasingly subversive ways. In this sense, contemporary Arthurian narratives for adolescents illustrate, to use Howey's (2015a, 45) words, the power of two impulses: "to play with fragments and to conform to the legend". The persistent popularity of Arthur and his knights, as Pugh and Weisl (2013, 8) write, "exemplif[ies] the continued appeal, and the continued rebirth, of medieval masculinities in the modern world". At the same time, however, new additions to the Arthurian literary tradition demonstrate how Arthurian medieval heroes "can always be re-envisioned to incarnate distinct and unique versions of masculinity reflective of modern desires" (Ibid., 80). McCausland (2019a, 192) writes that it is the "versatility of the legend, its existence at a variety of crossing-places, that enables it to endure within the cultural imagination". Indeed, the divergent notions of masculinity and male maturation portrayed in Arthurian adaptations for young adults illustrate this versatility and malleability of the legend. As Lacy notes, "the king and the legend are, or can be, whatever we want them to be" (2009, 121). However, Lacy also worries "whether the anchor of authoritative texts will hold or whether the legend will henceforth drift in any or all directions. And if the latter occurs, will Arthur still be Arthur?" (Ibid., 135) Wishing for both the continuity of the legend, but also an expansion, an *opening up* – by including and centring characters and voices from backgrounds different to those defining 'traditional' Arthurian texts – I indeed hope that the legend *will* drift in other directions. Maybe Arthur won't "still be Arthur" then – but he will be something *more*, and so will the tradition, enriching our cultural imagination through diversity. I began this dissertation with a quote from Tennyson's *Idylls*, and I would like to close it with another, which, I hope and believe, anticipates the future development of the Arthurian legend in twenty-first-century young adult literature and culture:

> And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
> 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new[.']
> (Tennyson 1859/1996, 387)

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Appendix
Selected Arthurian Variations for the Young

Young Adult Novels

Elizabeth E. Wein, *The Winter Prince* (1993) – part of *The Lion Hunters* series, which also includes *A Coalition of Lions* (2003), *The Sunbird* (2004), *The Lion Hunter* (2007), *The Empty Kingdom* (2008)

Anne Eliot Crompton, *Merlin's Harp* (1995), *Gawain and Lady Green* (1997), *Percival's Angels* (1999)

Jane Yolen, ed., *Camelot: A Collection of Original Stories* (1995) [short story collection]

Alan Brown, *Sword and Sorcery* (1997)

Nancy Springer, *I am Mordred* (1998), *I am Morgan Le Fay* (2001)

Gerald Morris, *The Squire's Tales* series: *The Squire's Tale* (1998), *The Squire, His Knight, and His Lady* (1999), *The Savage Damsel and the Dwarf* (2000), *Parsifal's Page* (2001), *The Ballad of Sir Dinadan* (2003), *The Princess, the Crone and the Dung-Cart Knight* (2004), *The Lioness and Her Knight* (2005), *The Quest of the Fair Unknown* (2006), *The Squire's Quest* (2009), *The Legend of the King* (2010)

Kevin Crossley-Holland, *Arthur Trilogy*: *The Seeing Stone* (2000), *At the Crossing-Places* (2001), *King of the Middle March* (2003); nonfiction: *The King Who Was and Will Be: The World of King Arthur and His Knights* (1999)

Felicity Pulman, *Shalott* series: *Shalott* (2001), *Return to Shallot* (2002), *The Final Journey* (2003)

Sarah L. Thomson, *The Dragon's Son* (2001)

Catherine Fisher, *Corbenic* (2002)

Nancy McKenzie, *The Chrysalis Queen Quartet*: *Guinevere's Gift* (2002), *Guinevere's Gamble* (2003)

Jane Yolen, *Sword of the Rightful King: A Novel of King Arthur* (2003)

Meg Cabot, *Avalon High* (2005); graphic novel sequels: Meg Cabot, ill. Jinky Coronado, *Avalon High: The Merlin Prophecy* (2007); *Homecoming* (2008); *Hunter's Moon* (2009)

Vivian Vande Velde, *The Book of Mordred* (2005)

Philip Reeve, *Here Lies Arthur* (2007)

Lisa Ann Sandell, *Song of the Sparrow* (2007) [verse novel]

Nicky Singer, *Knight Crew* (2009)

Edward Willett, *The Shards of Excalibur* series: *Song of the Sword* (2010), *Twist of the Blade* (2014), *Lake in the Clouds* (2015), *Cave Beneath the Sea* (2015), *Door Into Faerie* (2016)

Glynis Cooney, *Daughter of Camelot* (2013)

Robert Treskillard, *The Merlin Spiral* series: *Merlin's Blade* (2013), *Merlin's Shadow* (2013), *Merlin's Nightmare* (2014)

Kathryn Rose, *Metal & Lace* trilogy: *Camelot Burning* (2014), *Avalon Rising* (2015), *Excalibur Reigning* (2016)

Vesper Lyons, *Arturus Rex* (2017)

T.J. Green, *Tom's Arthurian Legacy* series: *Tom's Inheritance* (2016); *Twice Born* (2017); *Galatine's Curse* (2018) – republished as *Rise of the King* series: *Call of the King*, *The Silver Tower*, *The Cursed Sword*

Tom Wheeler, ill. Frank Miller, *Cursed* (2019)

Cori McCarthy and Amy Rose Capetta, *Once & Future* duology: *Once & Future* (2019), *Sword in the Stars* (2020)

Kiersten White, *Camelot Rising* series: *The Guinevere Deception* (2019), *The Camelot Betrayal* (2020), *The Excalibur Curse* (2021)

Tracy Deonn, *Legendborn* series: *Legendborn* (2020)

Middle Grade Novels

Jane Yolen, *The Dragon's Boy* (1990)

Bevan Clare, *Mightier Than the Sword* (1991)

Martyn Beardsley, ill. Tony Ross, *Sir Gadabout* series (1993-2008)

Michael Morpurgo, *Arthur High King of Britain* (1994), *The Sleeping Sword* (2002)

T.A. Barron, *Merlin* series: *The Lost Years* (1996), *The Seven Songs* (1997), *The Raging Fires* (1998), *The Mirror of Fate* (1999), *A Wizard's Wings* (2000); also by T.A. Barron: *The Great Tree of Avalon* series (2004-2006), *Merlin's Dragon* series (2008-2010)

Jane Yolen, *The Young Merlin* trilogy: *Passager* (1996), *Hobby* (1996), *Merlin* (1997)

Robert Leeson, *The Song of Arthur* (2000)

Pamela Smith Hill, *The Last Grail Keeper* (2001)

Dean Wilkinson, *The Legend of Arthur King* (2003)

Anne McCaffrey, Black Horses for the King (2004)

Michael Morpurgo, ill. Michael Foreman, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2004)

Richard Yancey, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Alfred Kropp* (2005)

Stephanie Spinner, *Damosel* (2006)

Laura Anne Gilman, *Grail Quest* books: *The Camelot Spell* (2006), *Morgain's Revenge* (2006), *The Shadow Companion* (2006)

Gerald Morris, *Knights' Tales* books: *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot the Great* (2008), *The Adventures of Sir Givret the Short* (2008), *The Adventures of Sir Gawain the True* (2011), *The Adventures of Sir Balin the Ill-Fated* (2012)

Cheryl Carpinello, *Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend* (2009)

Katherine Roberts, *Pendragon Legacy* series: *Sword of Light* (2012), *Lance of Truth* (2012), *Crown of Dreams* (2013), *Grail of Stars* (2013)

Nils Johnson-Shelton, *Otherworld Chronicles*: *The Invisible Tower* (2012), *Seven Swords* (2013), *The Dragon King* (2013)

Julia Golding, *Young Knights* series: *Young Knights of the Round Table* (2013), *Pendragon* (2013), *Merlin* (2014)

Josh Lieb, *Ratscalibur* (2015)

Julie Leung, *The Mice of the Round Table* books: *A Tail of Camelot* (2016), *Voyage to Avalon* (2017), *Merlin's Last Quest* (2018)

Carol Goodman, *The Metropolitans* (2017)

Eric Kahn Gale, *The Wizard's Dog* (2017)

Audrey Mackaman, *Cavall in Camelot* books: *A Dog in King Arthur's Court* (2018), *Quest for the Grail* (2019)

Mari Mancusi, *The Camelot Code* series: The Once and Future Geek (2018), Geeks and the Holy Grail (2020)

Earlier 20th-Century Juvenile Variations

Annie Fellows Johnston, *Two Little Knights of Kentucky* (1899), *Keeping Tryst: A Tale of King Arthur's Time* (1906)

Allen French, *Sir Marrok: A Tale of the Days of King Arthur* (1902)

Lillian Holmes, *Little Sir Galahad* (1904)

Horace M. Du Bose, *The Gang of Six: A Story of the Boy Life of Today* (1906)

Phoebe Gray, *Little Sir Galahad* (1914)

Eleanore Myers Jewett, *The Hidden Treasure of Glaston* (1946)

Eugenia Stone, *Page Boy for King Arthur* (1949), *Squire for King Arthur* (1955)

Clyde Robert Bulla, *The Sword in the Tree* (1956)

E.M.R. Ditmas, *Gareth of Orkney* (1956)

Catherine Owens Peare, *Melor, King Arthur's Page* (1963)

Gwendolyn Bowers, *Brother to Galahad* (1963)

Susan Cooper, *The Dark Is Rising* sequence: *Over Sea, Under Stone* (1965), *The Dark is Rising* (1973), *Greenwitch* (1974), *The Grey King* (1975), *Silver on the Tree* (1977)

Jane Curry, *The Sleepers* (1968)

Donald J. Sobol, *Greta the Strong* (1970)

Tom McGowen, *Sir MacHinery* (1971)

Pamela F. Service, *New Magic Trilogy*: *Winter of Magic's Return* (1985), *Tomorrow's Magic* (1987), *Yesterday's Magic* (2008), *Earth's Magic* (2009)

Jane Yolen, *Merlin's Booke: Stories of the Great Wizard* (1986)

L.J. Smith, *Wildworld* series: *The Night of the Solstice* (1987), *Heart of Valor* (1990)

Peter Dickinson, ill. Alan Lee, *Merlin Dreams* (1988)
Katherine Paterson, *Park's Quest* (1988)
Ann Curry, *The Book of Brendan* (1989)