

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

by T.H. White



THE AUTHOR

Terence Hanbury White (1906-1964) was born in Bombay, India where his father was a member of the British colonial civil service. He graduated at the top of his class from Queen's College in Cambridge, then spent six years as a teacher of English at a British prep school. In 1936, he left education to devote himself entirely to writing. His first book was the autobiographical *England Have My Bones*, published in 1934. While he wrote short stories and poems throughout his life, he is best known for the four books that make up *The Once and Future King*, White's imaginative retelling of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The first three books were published separately between 1938 and 1940, around the onset of World War II, while the fourth book, *A Candle in the Wind*, appeared for the first time with the publication of the entire set in one volume in 1958. His account of the Arthurian legend became the basis for the musical *Camelot* (1960) and the Disney animated feature, *The Sword in the Stone* (1964). White was a lifelong reclusive bachelor who loved hunting and fishing, kept a variety of unusual pets, and struggled with alcoholism and homosexual tendencies, for which he underwent psychological treatment. He died at sea off the coast of Greece while returning from a lecture tour in the United States.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Book I, *The Sword in the Stone*, we are introduced to a young boy named Wart. Wart was abandoned as a child at the castle of Sir Ector, and is being raised as the old knight's ward along with Kay, who is the heir to Ector's lands and castle and is a few years older than Wart. Wart, we are told, is destined to become Kay's squire when the latter achieves knighthood. Kay often bullies Wart, but most of the time they get along reasonably well. One day Kay mishandles one of the family's hawks and loses it in the forest. Kay goes home in a fit of temper, but Wart remains to try to retrieve the hawk. While there, he encounters King Pellinore, who has devoted his entire life to the pursuit of the Questing Beast. He soon gets lost and stumbles upon the cottage of an eccentric magician named Merlyn, who announces that he is to become the Wart's tutor. They retrieve the hawk and return to Sir Ector's castle, where for the next six years Merlyn educates Wart by turning him into different kinds of animals, a perch, an ant, a hawk, a goose and

a badger among them. The experiences Wart has among the different kinds of animals involve mostly discussions about war, justice, and what makes a good society. He and Kay also get to meet Robin Hood and Maid Marian (White sets the novel in the early thirteenth century). Shortly after Kay is knighted, the family journeys to London so he can participate in his first tournament. When they arrive, they hear that the king, Uther Pendragon, has died without an heir, and that the next king of England is to be the man who can extricate a sword that has been driven through an anvil and into a rock in a nearby churchyard. Thus far, no knight has been able to achieve the feat. When Kay goes to the tournament without his sword, Wart is sent to find it. He is in a hurry, so he grabs the sword out of the stone, not realizing its significance. Once people realize that he is in possession of Excalibur and where it came from (despite the fact that Sir Kay tries to claim that he pulled it out), he is asked to repeat the feat; he does so countless times, and no one else is able to do it. He is then proclaimed King Arthur (his real name); at this point few realize that he is the illegitimate son of Uther Pendragon who was conceived through the rape of Igraine, the wife of the Earl of Cornwall - this fact will stir up untold troubles in the books that follow.

In *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, we find Arthur at war with rebellious knights within his kingdom led by King Lot of Orkney and his four sons, Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth. While the war is going on, King Pellinore, Sir Grummore, and the African knight Sir Sir Palomides are bumbling around in Orkney. Pellinore is depressed because he has been separated from his love, the daughter of the King of Flanders, and the Questing Beast. Sir Grummore and Sir Palomides decide to cheer him up by disguising themselves as the Questing Beast and enticing him to chase her once more. Meanwhile, Piggy (the nickname of the daughter of the King of Flanders) and the real Questing Beast have arrived from the mainland. Pellinore finds Piggy and is revived at once, but the Questing Beast sees the other two knights in costume and falls in love with what it thinks is its mate, chases them up a cliff, and besieges the castle.

Unbeknownst to Arthur, King Lot's wife Morgause is the daughter of The Earl of Cornwall and Igraine, and is thus his half-sister. Morgause, a sorceress and a completely self-centered woman, has neglected her sons, but has also raised them to hate the English, and especially Uther Pendragon and all his family. Though all but Agravaine are basically good-hearted, they become a source of endless trouble for Arthur. Arthur and his forces successfully put down the rebellion, and he proceeds, with Merlyn's advice, to construct a new order of knighthood - the Round Table, in which knights would use their strength only to help the weak rather than taking advantage of them. He brings to the Table the most promising young knights from around the world, including the sons of Lot and Morgause. When Morgause brings her sons to Camelot, she casts a spell on Arthur and seduces him. She becomes pregnant as a result of the incestuous encounter, and the result is Mordred.

In *The Ill-Made Knight*, we meet Lancelot, a French lad who is the son of King Ban and who aspires to become a knight of the Round Table. He puts himself through exhausting training to prepare himself for the task, and journeys to England to seek his hero, King Arthur. After arriving, he meets a black knight at a ford in a river; they joust, and Lancelot defeats the knight, only to find that it is Arthur himself whom he has unhorsed. He joins the Round Table, and eventually becomes its greatest knight and Arthur's best friend. He also falls in love with Arthur's young bride, Guenever, and she with him. In order to avoid the moral dilemma presented by this love affair, Lancelot leaves Camelot for several years of adventures, the last of which leads him to an enchanted castle where he rescues a young girl bound by a spell to sit in boiling water until

the best knight in the world should deliver her. She later tricks him into sleeping with her by pretending to be Guenever; she conceives, and the child who is born becomes Sir Galahad, the eventual discoverer of the Holy Grail. When Lancelot returns to Camelot, he and Guenever become lovers, but the Queen grows increasingly jealous of Elaine (the boiling girl), eventually driving Lancelot out of Camelot and out of his mind. He then roams the countryside for years as a wild man, while rumors circulate that he has been killed. Eventually, Elaine nurses him back to health. He feels guilty about the affair with Elaine even though she tricked him, but he cannot stay with her. Meanwhile, Arthur's Round Table is falling apart because the knights, having eradicated all the dragons, giants, and foul knights left in England, have begun turning on one another in a fierce competition to see who is the greatest. Arthur decides to set them a spiritual quest and sends them out in search of the Holy Grail. Only Sir Galahad, Sir Percivale, and Sir Bors are pure enough to find it, and the first two are translated in the process; Lancelot, though he is not permitted to discover the Grail, witnesses the Mass in which the other three see it. Bors returns to Camelot to tell the tale, while most of the other knights come back in worse condition than they left. Lancelot returns a chastened and deeply spiritual man, determined not to renew his affair with Guenever. She is angry, of course, and tries everything to get him to sleep with her again. Finally, she is kidnaped by a rogue knight named Sir Meliagrance. Lancelot rescues her, Meliagrance accuses her of treason (adultery), Lancelot fights as her champion and kills Meliagrance, and they begin their affair once more.

In *The Candle in the Wind*, Mordred, now arrived at Camelot, plots against Arthur's kingdom with the help of Agravaine, who holds a grudge against Lancelot (the Orkney faction seems to hold grudges against everybody - they murder King Pellinore after he accidentally kills King Lot in a joust, Agravaine kills his mother Morgause when he find her in bed at the age of seventy with the teenage son of Pellinore, Sir Lamorak, and they later ambush Lamorak and Mordred stabs him in the back - and the brothers constantly fight among themselves as well). Everyone knows about the affair between Lancelot and Guenever, but no one wants to do anything about it, including Arthur. The king has been trying to replace the failed principles of the Round Table, by means of which Might was used for Right, with Civil Law, which was designed to eliminate Might altogether. Mordred uses this new tool to entrap Arthur, insisting that, if evidence can be provided, Lancelot and Guenever must be prosecuted under the new law, which would mean beheading for the knight and burning for the Queen. Mordred and Agravaine gather a dozen other knights and lie in wait when Arthur is away from the castle. Lancelot is summoned to the Queen's chamber and, after being warned by Gareth, forgets his sword. The conspirators trap him in the Queen's room, unarmed and dressed in nothing but his nightshirt. He manages to kill all of them and escape, but spares Mordred because Arthur had asked him to spare his son. Mordred then becomes a witness against Lancelot and Guenever. As Guenever is tied to the stake, Lancelot rides in and rescues her in the nick of time, much to Arthur's relief. In the process, he unwittingly kills Gaheris and Gareth, who are unarmed, thus earning the everlasting enmity of Gawaine, the only surviving full member of the Orkney clan. Lancelot spirits Guenever away to his castle in France, and Arthur takes his army, under the leadership of Gawaine, to besiege the castle. Lancelot turns aside one sortie after another. Meanwhile, Arthur receives word that Mordred, who has been left in England as regent and Protector of the Queen, has put out the word that Arthur is dead, has seized the throne, and forced Guenever to agree to marry him. At this point, both Arthur's army and that of Lancelot sail to confront Mordred. Gawaine dies shortly after landing of wounds he had received from fighting Lancelot, but Arthur and Lancelot and their

forces defeat Mordred, and the young wretch is killed in the battle. Lancelot and Guenever survive, but enter a monastery and a convent, respectively. Arthur, rumored to have died in the battle, is spirited off to the isle of Avilion, whence he will return one day to reestablish his kingdom.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- King Arthur (Wart) - Raised by Sir Ector and tutored by Merlyn, he pulls the sword out of the stone and becomes the king of England. He seeks to establish a reign of peace and justice, but is frustrated by the evil inherent in human nature. His kindness and inherent decency keeps him from dealing with the evil in others as it deserves, and the society he builds ultimately crumbles around him under the weight of his own sin (the birth of Mordred) and the sins of others (the love affair of Lancelot and Guenever and the lust for revenge by the Orkney faction). After he dies, he is spirited off to the isle of Avilion, from which he is someday to return to restore his kingdom (thus the title of the book).
- Merlyn - The wizard who tutors Arthur in his boyhood years by turning him into a variety of animals and becomes his advisor in the early years of his reign, Merlyn is finally enchanted by the beautiful witch Nimue and sealed in a cave.
- Nimue - A witch with whom Merlyn falls in love; she enchants him and seals him in a cave, from which he is recovered in C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*.
- Sir Ector - A country knight who raises Wart, the boy who was abandoned on his doorstep as an infant.
- Sir Kay - Ector's son, he torments Wart as a young boy, but eventually becomes one of knights of the Round Table.
- King Pellinore - The eccentric pursuer of the Questing Beast, he eventually marries the daughter of the King of Flanders and settles down, passing his quest off to Sir Palomides. He kills King Lot in a joust, and is murdered by the Orkney faction.
- Sir Grummore Grummursum - An elderly knight who lives near Sir Ector, he and Pellinore become best of friends after they engage in a prolonged and ridiculous joust.
- Uther Pendragon - King of England and Arthur's father by Igraine, the wife of the Earl of Cornwall. White tends to equate him with William the Conqueror in some passages of the novel.
- Morgause - Daughter of the Earl of Cornwall and Igraine (and thus Arthur's half-sister) and mother of the Orkney knights Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth by her husband King Lot. She bewitches and seduces Arthur and produces by him Mordred, the destroyer of the kingdom. She has many affairs, and is eventually murdered by Agravaine when he catches her in bed at the age of seventy with Sir Lamorak, the teenage son of King Pellinore.

- Sir Gawaine - The eventual leader of the Orkney faction after the accidental death of King Lot at the hands of King Pellinore in a joust, Gawaine is red-haired and hot-headed, though he has a good heart. He joins the Round Table, becomes the leader of Arthur's army after Lancelot is banished, and dies of wounds he receives from combat against Lancelot in France.
- Sir Agravaire - An angry and bitter knight, he kills his own mother, plots against Arthur, traps Lancelot in Guenever's bedroom, and is killed by Lancelot in the ensuing fight.
- Sir Gareth - The youngest of the Orkney clan, he is a gentle and reasonable young man who idolizes Lancelot and is eventually knighted by him. Gareth tries to stop the plot against Lancelot and Guenever, warns Lancelot of what is about to happen, and is killed when Lancelot returns to rescue Guenever because he refused to take up arms against his friend.
- Mordred - The illegitimate hunchbacked son of Arthur and his half-sister Morgause, he grows up hating his father. He plots to overthrow Arthur by uncovering the affair of Lancelot and Guenever, gathers around him a group of thugs called the Thrashers who sound an awful lot like the Hitler Youth, and eventually tries to supplant Arthur and marry Guenever. He is killed in battle when Arthur and Lancelot return to England with their armies.
- St. Toirdealbhach - A "lapsed saint" who is the tutor and spiritual advisor to Morgause's children, he moves from Pelagianism to a denial of clerical celibacy to outright apostasy.
- Guenever - Marries Arthur in an arranged marriage, though the two do come to love each other and she supports his efforts to reform society. The true love of her life, however, is Lancelot. She draws him into an affair that eventually contributes to the fall of the kingdom. She is beautiful, self-centered, and jealous. She enters a convent after Arthur's death.
- Sir Lancelot - The ugly son of King Ban, Lancelot trains from childhood to serve Arthur, whom he idolizes, as a knight of the Round Table. He becomes the greatest knight in the kingdom and Arthur's best friend. He also becomes Guenever's lover. The moral conflicts with which he must struggle make up much of the second half of the book. He is both noble and morally weak, desiring to do right but often failing to live up to his own principles. After the death of Arthur at the end of the book, he enters a monastery.
- Uncle Dap - Lancelot's uncle, trainer, and squire.
- Elaine - A young woman rescued by Lancelot after having been put under a spell condemning her to boil forever in a cauldron, she tricks Lancelot into sleeping with her and bears Galahad as a result. She is jealous, manipulative, and clinging, and eventually commits suicide when Lancelot leaves her for the final time.

- Sir Thomas Malory - The author of the famous medieval romance about Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, he appears as a page at the end of the novel. Arthur sends him home before the climactic battle, charging him with the task of telling the story of the kingdom Arthur had built. His *Le Morte d'Arthur* served as the basis for White's novel.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“The Wart was not a proper son. He did not understand this, but it made him feel unhappy, because Kay seemed to regard it as making him inferior in some way. Also it was different not having a father and mother, and Kay had taught him that being different was wrong.” (p.14)

“Sir Ector's dog boy was none other than the one who had had his nose bitten off by the terrible Wat. Not having a nose like a human, and being, moreover, subjected to stone-throwing by the other village children, he had become more comfortable with animals. He talked to them, not in baby-talk like a maiden lady, but correctly in their own growls and barks. They all loved him very much, and revered him for taking thorns out of their toes, and came to him with their troubles at once. He always understood immediately what was wrong, and generally he could put it right. It was nice for the dogs to have their god with them, in visible form.” (p.43)

“Education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance.” (Merlyn, p.46)

“There is nothing ... except the power which you pretend to seek: power to grind and power to digest, power to seek and power to find, power to await and power to claim, all power and pitilessness springing from the nape of the neck Love is a trick played on us by the forces of evolution. Pleasure is the bait laid down by the same. There is only power. Power is of the individual mind, but the mind's power is not enough. Power of the body decides everything in the end, and only Might is Right.” (King Pike, p.52)

“The extraordinary thing was that he could not ask these questions. In order to ask them, he would have had to put them into ant language through his antennae - and he now discovered, with a helpless feeling, that there were no words for the things he wanted to say. There were no words for happiness, for freedom, for liking, nor were there any words for the opposites. He felt like a dumb man trying to shout ‘Fire!’ The nearest he could get to Right or Wrong, even, was to say Done or Not Done.” (p.124)

- A. We are more numerous than they are, therefore we have a right to their mash.
- B. They are more numerous than we are, therefore they are wickedly trying to steal our mash.
- C. We are a mighty race and have a natural right to subjugate their puny one.
- D. They are a mighty race and are unnaturally trying to subjugate our inoffensive one.
- E. We must attack them in self-defence.
- F. They are attacking us by defending themselves.
- G. If we do not attack them today, they will attack us tomorrow.
- H. In any case we are not attacking them at all. We are offering them incalculable benefits.” (Ant Queen, p.129)

“But what creature could be so low as to go about in bands, to murder others of its own blood?” (Lyo-lyok, p.170)

“Only fools want to be great.” (Merlyn, p.180)

“If I were made a knight ..., I should insist on doing my vigil by myself, a Hob does with his hawks, and I should pray to God to let me encounter all the evil in the world in my own person, so that if I conquered there would be none left, and, if I were defeated, I would be the one to suffer for it.” (Wart, p.181)

“The best thing for being sad ... is to learn something. That is the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then - to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting.” (Merlyn, p.183)

“Here, all you embryos, come here with your beaks and whatnots to look upon Our first Man. He is the only one who has guessed Our riddle, out of all of you, and We have great pleasure in conferring upon him the Order of Dominion over the Fowls of the Air, and the Beasts of the Earth, and the Fishes of the Sea. Now let the rest of you get along, and love and multiply, for it is time to knock off for the weekend. As for you, Man, you will be a naked tool all your life, though a user of tools. You will look like an embryo till they bury you, but all the others will be embryos before your might. Eternally undeveloped, you will always remain potential in Our image, able to see some of Our sorrows and to feel some of Our joys. We are partly sorry for you, Man, but partly hopeful.” (Badger, p.193)

“Arthur was happy. Like the man in Eden before the fall, he was enjoying his innocence and fortune. Instead of being a poor squire, he was a king. Instead of being an orphan, he was loved by nearly everybody except the Gaels, and he loved everybody in return.

“So far as he was concerned, as yet, there might never have been such a thing as a single particle of sorrow on the gay, sweet surface of the dew-glittering world.” (p.226)

“No. There is one fairly good reason for fighting - and that is, if the other man starts it. You see, wars are a wickedness, perhaps the greatest wickedness of a wicked species. They are so wicked that they must not be allowed. When you can be perfectly certain that the other man started them, then is the time when you might have a sort of duty to stop him.” (Merlyn, p.232)

“I have been thinking ... about Might and Right. I don't think things ought to be done because you are *able* to do them. I think they should be done because you *ought* to do them.” (Arthur, p.246)

“My idea is that if we can win this battle in front of us, and get a firm hold of the country, then I will institute a sort of order of chivalry. I will not punish the bad knights, or hang Lot, but

I will try to get them into our Order. We shall have to make it a great honour, you see, and make it fashionable and all that. Everybody must want to be in. And then I shall make an oath of the order that Might is only to be used for Right. Do you follow? The knights in my order will ride all over the world, still dressed in steel and whacking away with their swords - that will give an outlet for wanting to whack, you understand, and outlet for what Merlyn calls the foxhunting spirit - but they will be bound to strike only on behalf of what is good, to defend virgins against Sir Bruce and to restore what has been done wrong in the past and help the oppressed and so forth. Do you see the idea? It will be using the Might instead of fighting against it, and turning a bad thing into a good." (Arthur, p.248)

"The magician stood up straight as a pillar, stretched out his arms in both directions, looked at the ceiling and said the first few words of the Nunc Dimittis." (p.248)

"But the curious thing about him [Lancelot] was that under the king-post of keeping faith with himself and others, he had a contradictory nature which was far from holy. His Word was valuable to him not only because he was good, but also because he was bad. It is the bad people who need to have principles to restrain them." (p.339)

"What I meant by civilization when I invented it, was simply that people ought not to take advantage of weakness - not violate maidens, and rob widows, and kill a man when he was down. People ought to be civil. But it has turned into sportsmanship. Merlin always said that sportsmanship was the curse of the world, and so it is. My scheme is going wrong. All these knights now are making a fetish of it. They are turning it into a competitive thing." (Arthur, p.365)

"Why did not Lancelot make love to Guenever, or run away with his hero's wife altogether, as any enlightened man would do today? One reason for his dilemma was that he was a Christian. The modern world is apt to forget that several people were Christians in the remote past." (p.367)

"All these problems and feelings fade away when we get the seventh sense. Middle-aged people can balance between believing in God and breaking all the commandments, without difficulty. The seventh sense, indeed, slowly kills all the other ones, so that at last there is no trouble about the commandments." (p.378)

"It was a mistake because the Table itself was founded on force. Right must be established by right: it can't be established by Force Majeur. But that is what I have been trying to do. Now my sins are coming home to roost. Lancelot, I am afraid I have sown the whirlwind, and I shall reap the storm." (Arthur, p.428)

"Don't ever let anybody teach you to think, Lance: it is the curse of the world." (Arthur, p.432)

"Morals are difficult things to talk about, but what has happened is that we have invented a moral sense, which is rotting now that we can't give it employment. And when a moral sense

begins to rot it is worse than when you had none. I suppose that all endeavours which are directed to a purely worldly end, as my famous Civilization was, contain within themselves the germs of their own corruption.” (Arthur, p.434)

“Morals ... are a form of insanity. Give me a moral man who insists on doing the right things all the time, and I will show you a tangle which an angel couldn't get out of.” (Lionel, p.443)

“Do you know, I shall be talking about God a great deal, and this is a word which offends unholy people just as badly as words like ‘damn’ and so on offend the holy ones.” (Lancelot, p.461)

“Funny ... how the people who can't pray say that prayers are not answered, however much the people who can pray say they are.” (Lancelot, p.469)

“Mordred and Agravaine thought Arthur hypocritical - as all decent men must be, if you assume that decency can't exist.” (p.478)

“This knight's trouble from his childhood - which he never completely grew out of - was that for him God was a real person. He was not an abstraction who punished you if you were wicked or rewarded you if you were good, but a real person like Guenever, or like Arthur, or like anybody else ... and he was somehow in love with this Person.” (p.483)

“In those days people loved each other for their lives, without the conveniences of the divorce court or the psychiatrist. They had a God in heaven and a goddess on earth - and, since people who devote themselves to goddesses must exercise some caution about the ones to whom they are devoted, they neither chose them by the passing standards of the flesh alone, nor abandoned it lightly when the bruckle thing began to fail.” (p.529)

“It is not as if you would have to fight the Queen's champion in your own person, Mordred. You could plead infirmity and hire the strongest man you knew to fight for you, and the Queen would, of course, get the strongest man she knew to fight for her. It would be much the same thing if you each hired the best arguer you knew, to argue about it. In the last resort it is usually the richer person who wins, whether he hires the most expensive arguer or the most expensive fighter, so it is no good pretending that this is simply a matter of brute force.” (Arthur, p.557)

“When I was a young man I did something which was not just, and from it has sprung the misery of my life. Do you think you can stop the consequences of a bad action, by doing good ones afterwards? I don't. I have been trying to stopper it down with good actions, ever since, but it goes on in widening circles. It will not be stoppered. Do you think this is a consequence too?” (Arthur, p.579)

“He had been taught by Merlyn to believe that man was perfectible: that he was on the whole more decent than beastly: that good was worth trying: that there was no such thing as

original sin. He had been forged as a weapon for the aid of man, on the assumption that men were good.... But the whole structure depended on that first premise: that man was decent.” (p.628)

“For if there was such a thing as original sin, if man was on the whole a villain, if the Bible was right in saying that the heart of man was deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, then the purpose of his life had been a vain one. Chivalry and justice became a child’s illusions...” (p.629)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Discuss the use of anachronisms in T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*. How do references to events and people in modern times help the author to tell his tale more effectively? Be sure to use specific examples.
2. To what extent is King Arthur in T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* a Christ-figure? Are the similarities deliberate on the part of the author, or are they part of the legend, yet incidental to the author’s purpose? Why do you think so?
3. Discuss the importance of historical context in T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*. In what ways was White’s opinion of war shaped by the fact that he wrote the book during the early years of World War II? What parallels does the author draw between the story of King Arthur and the conflict between Britain and Hitler in his own day?
4. Discuss the view of war conveyed by T.H. White in *The Once and Future King*. Evaluate the author’s view on the basis of Scripture. Be sure to use specific examples and references in building your arguments.
5. T.H. White, in *The Once and Future King*, uses the education of Wart to educate the reader. What lessons does he teach? Choose three specific incidents in the education of the young king and discuss the lessons the author is attempting to teach through those incidents. Be sure not to treat them in isolation, but to connect them to an overall theme or themes in the novel.
6. To what extent may T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* be considered a cultural critique? What specific aspects of mid-twentieth-century British culture is he criticizing? Do you consider his critique relevant to the present day, or is it outdated? Why?
7. Discuss the view of human nature found in T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*. What does the author believe to be the fundamental characteristics of human beings? Is his view biblical? Why or why not? Be sure to use specifics in supporting your conclusion.

8. Compare and contrast T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* with J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. What do you believe are the main similarities and differences between the two works of fantasy? Both contain Christian themes, but is one more distinctively Christian than the other? Why do you think so?
9. Both T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* were written in the shadow of World War II, and both reflect that context to some extent. Compare and contrast the views of war found in the two literary fantasies. What might explain the similarities and differences you observed?
10. Compare and contrast Wart's visit to the ant colony in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* with the society portrayed by George Orwell in *1984*. What are the chief similarities between the two societies? Were both authors satirizing the same thing? Why do you think so?
11. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, is the protagonist a tragic hero? Is he a noble man who is brought down to destruction because of a flaw in his character? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
12. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, the author describes Lancelot in the following words: "His Word was valuable to him not only because he was good, but also because he was bad. It is the bad people who need to have principles to restrain them." Discuss the insight into human nature reflected in this quotation, and evaluate it on the basis of Scripture. Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
13. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Arthur speaks the following words: "What I meant by civilization when I invented it, was simply that people ought not to take advantage of weakness - not violate maidens, and rob widows, and kill a man when he was down. People ought to be civil. But it has turned into sportsmanship. Merlin always said that sportsmanship was the curse of the world, and so it is. My scheme is going wrong. All these knights now are making a fetish of it. They are turning it into a competitive thing." Discuss the insight into human nature reflected in this quotation, and evaluate it on the basis of Scripture. Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
14. Evaluate Lancelot's treatment of Elaine in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. After she tricked him into getting her pregnant, what should he have done? Be sure to use Scripture in your discussion of the rightness or wrongness of his behavior.
15. In the last chapter of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, an elderly King Arthur tries to understand the root causes of war, and suggests a number of possibilities. Evaluate the different answers he gives, using Scripture as a basis. Is the answer at which he finally arrives the right one? Are *any* of his answers more than partially right? Why or why not?
16. In your opinion, who is the real hero of T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*? Is it Arthur, Lancelot, Merlyn, or some other character? Support your choice with specifics from the novel.

17. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, does Arthur deserve to be considered a great man, or was he simply an administrator who put Merlyn's ideas into practice? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
18. A *foil* is a character who brings out the traits of another character by contrast. Who serves as the most potent foil for King Arthur in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*? Is it Lancelot, or perhaps Gawaine? Support your argument with details from the novel.
19. Discuss the contradictions inherent in the character of Lancelot in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What contradictions may be found in his character? What is the cause of these contradictions? How do they affect the outcome of the story?
20. Discuss the contradictions inherent in the character of Lancelot in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What contradictions may be found in his character? How do they help the author develop his themes? Do they make Lancelot a more realistic character than many of the others in the book?
21. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Guenever claims to love both Arthur and Lancelot. How were her loves for the two men different, and how were they the same? Is it possible to love two people at the same time? Why or why not?
22. Choose one of the three members of the central love triangle in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and discuss the impact of Christianity on that person. How is the character you have chosen influenced by Christian faith? Is that faith deep or shallow, real or nominal? What does this show about the author's view of Christianity?
23. The legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table arose in the early Middle Ages, when England was just beginning to come under the influence of Christianity. When anyone retells the story, however, he always brings his own perspective to the tale of chivalry. Using T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* as a basis for your essay, discuss the extent to which the Arthurian legend is at root Christian. What Christian themes appear in the plot itself, as opposed to those introduced by White as the teller of the tale? Are the overall themes Christian? Support your assessment with specifics from the story.
24. The legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table arose in the early Middle Ages, when England was just beginning to come under the influence of Christianity. When anyone retells the story, however, he always brings his own perspective to the tale of chivalry. Using T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* as a basis for your essay, discuss the extent to which the author's treatment of the story is a Christian one. Does White give a Christian interpretation to the legend, or does he use it for purposes of his own? To what extent could those purposes be called Christian? Bring out the major themes of White's retelling in your essay and support them with details from the novel.

25. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, why does Arthur's kingdom ultimately fail? Is your conclusion different from that of the author? Why or why not? Be sure to use specifics from the novel to support your arguments.
26. Discuss the significance of the Round Table in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What is its symbolism? Is its promise fulfilled? Why or why not? Is your reason for its ultimate outcome the same as that of the author? Be sure to use specifics from the story to support your arguments.
27. Discuss the significance of the Questing Beast in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What is its purpose in the narrative? How does it relate to the major themes of the story? Support your arguments with specific details from the book.
28. The Holy Grail was supposedly the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper, and was one of the most sought-after of relics during the relic-happy Middle Ages. Discuss the significance of the Grail in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What does it represent, and how does it help the author develop the themes of his narrative? Support your arguments with details from the story.
29. Compare and contrast the upbringing received by Kay and Wart to that received by Gawaine and his brothers in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. How do these similarities and differences affect the characters involved, and in turn affect the plot? Use specifics to support your argument.
30. Compare and contrast the characters of Merlyn and St. Toirdealbhach in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. How do these similarities and differences affect the characters tutored by these men, and in turn affect the plot? Use specifics to support your argument.
31. If T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* is a story of innocence, fall, and redemption, what event constitutes the Fall - the sin from which all later troubles flow? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
32. Does T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* end with failure or does it end with the hope of redemption? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
33. Jesus tells us that, in the last days, "a man's enemies will be those of his own household." To what extent is that true in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*? Support your argument with specifics from the novel.
34. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Merlyn occasionally makes references to psychoanalysis. To what extent do Freudian concepts find support in the narrative? Consider particularly the roles of sex and violence in the Freudian scheme, the interrelationships of the id, ego, and superego, and the idea of Oedipal behavior on the part of children. Use details from the story to support your arguments.

35. Discuss the significance of the seduction of Lancelot by Elaine in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Why is this incident important in the development of Lancelot's character? What role does it play in influencing the plot? In carrying forward the themes of the novel?
36. Discuss the willful blindness of Arthur to the affair between Lancelot and Guenever in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Is his refusal to confront the faithless pair an act of kindness or weakness? What are its consequences? Evaluate his actions on the basis of the Bible's teachings about dealing with sin in the lives of those around us.
37. Compare and contrast the Crusades to the search for the Holy Grail as it is presented in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Is it true that the Crusades were at bottom a way to allow knights to blow off steam without killing one another in the process? How would White have evaluated the Crusades? Support your arguments with details from the novel and from the history of the Crusades themselves.
38. Discuss the treatment of women in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Are there any really noble women in the story? While it is true that the England of the Middle Ages was a man's world, is the relegation of women to the sidelines of the story justifiable? Was White a misogynist? Support your conclusions with details from the story.
39. T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* contains a strong anti-war message, yet often glorifies battles. Is this a contradiction on the part of the author, or is there a purpose within the context of his overall theme for which he treats incidents of warfare as he does? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
40. Discuss the theory of education propounded by the author in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. What is essential to a sound education? Use details from the novel to support your exposition.
41. Evaluate the assessment of sports conveyed in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. How does the author view sports? Do you agree with him? Why or why not? Use details from the story to support your arguments.
42. Not only is T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* full of anachronistic references to places and events of modern times, but it also plays fast and loose with time within the framework of the novel itself. Given the references to the death of Uther Pendragon in 1216 and the appearance of Thomas Malory at the end of the story, Arthur would have lived from 1201-1485. In effect, what White does is telescope almost three hundred years of English history and social development into the backdrop of a single narrative. What does he gain by playing such games with time? Why do you think he did it? Support your arguments with specifics from the story.

43. Compare and contrast the critiques of the Age of Chivalry found in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Which do you think is the more effective critique of the medieval romance? Why? Support your conclusion with details from the two books.