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BA Thesis

English Language and Culture

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August 15, 2018

The Celtic Image in Contemporary Adaptations of the Arthurian Legend

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BA Thesis

August 15, 2018

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: dr. Chris Cusack, dr. L.S. Chardonnens

Title of document: The Celtic Image in Contemporary Adaptations of the Arthurian Legend

Name of course: BA Thesis

Date of submission: August 15, 2018

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Abstract

Celtic culture has always been a source of interest in contemporary popular culture, as it has been in the past; Greek and Roman writers painted the Celts as barbaric and uncivilised peoples, but were impressed with their religion and mythology. The Celtic revival period gave birth to the paradox that still defines the Celtic image to this day, namely that the rurality, simplicity and spirituality of the Celts was to be admired, but that they were uncivilised, irrational and wild at the same time. Recent debates surround the concepts of “Celt”, “Celticity” and “Celtic” are also discussed in this thesis. The first part of this thesis focuses on Celtic history and culture, as well as the complexities surrounding the terminology and the construction of the Celtic image over the centuries. This main body of the thesis analyses the way Celtic elements in contemporary adaptations of the Arthurian narrative form the modern Celtic image. The themes of gender, nature and supernatural provide the scope of the analysis of the film *King Arthur* (2004) directed by Antoine Fuqua, BBC’s television series *Merlin* (2008-2012) and the novel *I am Morgan le Fay* (2002) written by Nancy Springer. This thesis attempts to connect the contemporary Celtic image to the images of the past and discerns the mythology, religion and culture that make up the modern-day Celtic image.

Keywords: Ancient Celts, Celtic image, contemporary popular culture

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Introduction

With the recent renewal of the *Outlander* TV series for a fifth and sixth season before the fourth season had even aired, it seems the draw towards Celtic culture is ever alluring in contemporary popular culture. While the *Outlander* series is set in the highlands during the Jacobite risings at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, and therefore portrays only a slim facet of the widespread Celtic image, it does beg the question if this very portrayal is what makes the series so successful. Although this is hardly ever the leading cause for success, the alluring nature of Celtic culture cannot be denied as it has been featured in countless contemporary literary works, movies and TV series. *Braveheart* (1995) is remembered for Mel Gibson's portrayal of William Wallace and its portrayal of Celtic culture. The popular hit series *Game of Thrones* seems to take the Celtic landscapes, with their high cliffs and green hillsides, as an ingredient of their success. Even Disney had a go at their own Celtic story in the form of *Brave* (2012), in which the princess Merida must overcome both the roughness and the magic of her land in order to save her kingdom from peril (and herself from marriage). All of these contemporary works seem to appreciate the allure of Celtic culture and choose specific facets of the culture to incorporate in their media. This is not limited to the bare green hills of the Irish landscape, elements from Celtic mythology and the magic featured in these myths.

Popular culture is saturated with Celtic elements, but the question remains what causes their attraction. The Romans experienced some of the allure of Celtic culture, even if they did label the Celts barbaric, uncivilised brutes in need of a structured religion. They did, however, incorporate several deities from Celtic mythology into their own religion, either in an effort to ease the Celts' way into their empire or because these deities appealed to the Roman populace as well.¹ In the nineteenth and the early twentieth century the general public of Europe became entranced with Celtic culture as the Romanticist movement soared to greater heights. The main focal points were the alluring rurality of not just the Celts as a people, but also the rurality of the Celtic landscapes, the Scottish Highlands and the Irish rolling hills in particular. In combination with nationalistic efforts to create a regional identity to combat that of the English, this cast the Celts as a homogenous people, instead of the separate tribes that historians claim are much more

¹ Dimitra Fimi, *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy: Idealization, Identity, Ideology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 13.

likely to have formed the basis of Celtic culture.

Although Celtic culture and contemporary identity that comes with the label have been thoroughly researched in the last decades, the Celtic image in contemporary works seems to be a void within this research. There is, however, much discussion regarding what the term “Celtic” means, as well as what it meant in other centuries, for instance during the Celtic revival of the nineteenth and twentieth century. These discussions usually pertain to the specific modern Celtic identity and how its basis is merely an invention for nationalistic purposes. This thesis concerns the Celtic image that has been created over the centuries and is a large part of contemporary popular culture. It does not deeper into the discussions pertaining modern Celtic identities. This debate does have consequences for this thesis, though, as one must tread lightly in using those terms in order to keep within the scope of the paper. Either these terms are part of a newly invented Celtic image that attributes elements to the Celtic image that were not inherently Celtic to begin with, or these elements do have firm roots within the culture of the Iron Age peoples that lived in central Europe thousands of years ago. This is a rather complicated issue to research, as it not only focuses on a culture that has been reinvented many times over the centuries, but also originates from a culture that provides few sources of its own, and mainly relies on ancient accounts that were biased towards the Celts as a people. Still, this thesis does attempt to unravel some of the origins of facets of the contemporary Celtic image in order to see if they are part of another reinvention of the culture, or if they have firm roots within Celtic culture.

It has to be recognised that many of the terms used are of a precarious nature. “Celtic” identity and image, as well as “Celticity” in general, are complicated and often challenged. Simultaneously, the adaptations analysed in this thesis are part of the fantasy genre that is still young within the academic community, and many of its facets are still open to change. As Fimi notes: “The theoretical and critical vocabulary to examine (fantasy as a genre) is still in flux.”² This thesis does not dive into the connection between fantasy works and mythology any deeper than strictly necessary. However, the reshaping of myth, legend and cultural associations into contemporary popular culture is the main aim of this paper, providing a study of what parts of Celtic culture seem worth pursuing in contemporary works as well as how they are adapted in that process. This thesis assumes a plan of action that is similar to the one Dimitra Fimi has used in her study of Celtic myth in contemporary children’s fantasy: seeking a balance between the

² Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 2.

reception of Celtic culture in contemporary works as well as the way in which it is adapted.³ The complications she mentions are very much the same in this thesis: that each aspect of Celtic culture originates and therefore belongs in its own time; that the “original” myths and cultural aspects are already part of a pattern of reception and adaptation, because they are derived from oral tradition; and that any of the adaptations might have been particularly biased regarding Celtic culture because of its historical context.

This thesis takes a closer look at three contemporary adaptations of the Arthurian legend: the movie *King Arthur* (2004) directed by Antoine Fuqua; the TV series *Merlin*, broadcast by BBC One; and the novel *I am Morgan le Fay* by Nancy Springer. The Arthurian legend is a narrative that has been reimagined and reinvented about as many times as the Celtic image itself, but nearly always keeps its roots in English soil, featuring the aspects of Celtic culture that this thesis seeks to explore. This is the reason for the choice of three adaptations of the Arthurian narrative, as to provide a base with enough “Celtic”-specific elements to look for connections between past Celtic images and the contemporary view of Celtic culture. Contemporary popular culture is expansive, so one source was chosen for each popular branch of entertainment. Furthermore, three themes that seem to be thoroughly connected to the contemporary Celtic image form the main scope of each of these Arthurian adaptations.

In order to keep this thesis from getting lost in the dark that is the vast expanse of Celtic culture, it concerns a number of specific aspects. First and foremost, this thesis mainly focuses on the representation of the ancient Celtic culture in contemporary works and less so on the modern Celtic identities that claim a connection to this very same culture in order to validate a nationalist identity of the region. This makes the main research question of this thesis: ‘How is the Celtic image constructed through themes of gender, nature and the supernatural in the following contemporary adaptations of the Arthurian legend: the film *King Arthur* (2004), the BBC’s television series *Merlin* (2008-2012) and the novel *I am Morgan le Fay* (2002)?’

Chapter 1 elaborates more on the complications regarding researching Celtic culture, as well as any problematic terms that are featured in this thesis. The second chapter of this thesis explores the theme of gender in the movie *King Arthur* (2004) in connection to the Celtic image. In this chapter the characterization of Guinevere as Celtic and its consequences within the movie are analysed. Also, her character is compared to that of historical Celtic women within Celtic

³ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 18-19.

culture and mythology. The third chapter explores the theme of nature in connection to the Celtic image in the BBC's TV series *Merlin*, specifically the first season of the series. The meaning of nature in this contemporary work is compared to the meaning of nature within Celtic culture, as well as the ancient Celts' religion. The fourth and last chapter explores theme of magic in connection the Celtic image in the novel *I am Morgan le Fay* by Nancy Springer. This chapter focuses on the role of magic within this novel and its connections to Celtic culture, as well as the goddess the Morrígan.

Chapter 1: Celtic culture according to history

The Oxford dictionary offers two definitions of the word “Celt”. The first alludes to the ancient inhabitants of Europe and Asia Minor before Roman times, whose culture vanished after they were overwhelmed and occupied by the Romans and several Germanic tribes. The second definition references any native of the modern nations or regions in which the Celtic languages were or are still spoken, specifically descendants of Irish, Highland Scottish, Manx, Welsh and Cornish cultures.⁴ The duality of the word “Celt” mirrors the complexities of the label. For the purpose of this thesis, the first definition regarding the ancient Celtic tribes is used for the term “Celts” whenever this word is mentioned in this thesis.

In order to gain a sense of what the Celtic image represents in contemporary popular culture, a look needs to be taken at the traditional history attributed to the Celts. The established and most widely accepted history of the Celts suggests that central Europe was their home. It has been proposed that before settling in contemporary France, they originated from along the west coast of Europe during the Atlantic Bronze Age, which lasted from approximately 1300 until 700 BC.⁵ What is generally agreed upon is that they migrated outwards during the fourth and third centuries BC to eventually settle in Britain, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. The Roman Empire soon expanded its territories towards these newly claimed lands, after which the Celtiberian branch of Celtic culture, which had settled in Spain and Portugal, was Romanised and vanished into obscurity. Celtic culture in Britain was also put under pressure of the Roman Empire, with Ireland and Wales as the sole “survivors”.

With the fall of Roman Empire in the third century AD, Celtic tribes in Britain began to compete for territories, and each of the Celtic languages began to take its own course. In the fifth century AD, Anglo-Saxon invaders forced Celtic Britons to the contemporary west of Britain. Some of these Britons migrated to the contemporary north-west of France, which they named Brittany, which became the birth place of the Celtic Breton language. In the ninth century AD, Scottish Gaelic became the established Celtic language in the north of Britain when the kingdom of Scotland was established under pressure of the territorial squabbles between the Picts, the

⁴ *Oxford Dictionaries*, s.v. “celt,” accessed 6 June, 2018, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/celt>

⁵ Barry Cunliffe, “A Race Apart: Insularity and Connectivity,” *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 75, (2009): 61.

“Scotti” pirates and other, smaller peoples.⁶

Celtic culture was not always a vital part of the respective regions’ identities, as these secure Celtic regions were eventually consumed by other nations and each of their identities underwent a metamorphosis. In the sixteenth century, Brittany became part of France and Wales united with England, although it retained some of its sovereignty. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Scotland and England were joined. These unions caused the respective Celtic identities of these regions to be subject to great changes. Dimitra Fimi states that the United Kingdom, for example, incorporated multiple cultures into its own over the centuries, including those of the Vikings and the Normans. In addition to these foreign influences, “the religious aspects of the conflict between Irish and their English overlords still affect Irish politics and identity today”.⁷ The Celtic revival period marked the renewed interest in Celtic culture in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This period, fed by the Romanticist movement, made sure that Celtic elements persevered despite these incorporations from other cultures and that Celtic culture was a “better” history than the politically dominant English had.

The correct use of terms such as “Celts” and “Celtic” has been a subject of debate in recent years. Malcolm Chapman argues in his book *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (1993) that the idea that the ancient Celts had a unified culture is a result of nationalist invention, since before the eighteenth century “there were (...) no Celts in north-western Europe; nobody called themselves or anybody else, Celts”.⁸ This is further strengthened by the fact that within the Celtic regions, separate tribes were constantly competing for territory and resources. The phrase “the invention of tradition” is useful for this discussion as it suggests that terminology such as “Celtic” included invented concepts only meant to promote the national identity of a region.⁹ This also calls into question whether the Celtic myths and legends mentioned in this thesis really are “Celtic”, or simply a melting pot of folklore, mythology and Christian ideas. Most of the medieval sources that are viewed as “Celtic” are sources that first underwent the process of Christianization in order to fit the Christian discourse of the time. Fimi

⁶ This summary of the established Celtic history is based on the following works: Nora K. Chadwick, *The Celts* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); Barry W. Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 21.

⁸ Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: The Construction of a Myth* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993): 120.

⁹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

notes that the available classical sources on the subject of Celtic mythology are “(a) fairly biased description of ‘Celtic’ beliefs and rituals (...) often coloured by the perception of the ‘Celts’ as a barbarian ‘Other’”, and that “(b) material remains of sacred spaces and ritual practices of the ‘Celts’ (...) often show clear signs of syncretism with Roman religion”. Fimi also notes that none of these sources mention any gods or heroes from mythology that are known today.¹⁰ “Celtic” mythology is often a melting pot of Romanised Celtic stories handed down by classical authors and medieval narratives that had undergone the process of Christianization.

In addition to complex and ever-changing terminology, this study must also take into account that its source material is an adaptation of the Arthurian legend. Fimi suggests that the “original medieval texts themselves are already part of a reception (or adaptation) pattern”, since these stories were spread via oral tradition long before they were ever written down.¹¹ The first literary emergence of the character of King Arthur appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* written somewhere around 1130. It is not unlikely that this is a written account of oral stories that were already circulating, given that Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* is a pseudo-history. His work has been adapted countless of times over the centuries, which is why it is such a rich work, but this also means that there is no one “true” version of the Arthurian legend. It also needs to be considered that myths had a very different meaning in medieval times than they do in contemporary times. The Arthurian legend, for example, was seen as part of Britain’s history as much as any historic king or queen. This thesis keeps the complexity of these terms in mind, but does use terms such as “Celtic” to indicate the contemporary association people have today with the ancient culture of the Celts.

Reception of the Celtic Image

It should be noted that from this point on this thesis will focus on the “insular” Celtic culture from the British Isles and less so on Celtic culture that is still present in Central Europe. The representative image of the Celt has been subject to great changes over the centuries. The Greek and the Romans called the Celtic tribes respectively *Keltoi* and *Galli*, but they did not take

¹⁰ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 25.

¹¹ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 19.

accuracy into account when naming these tribes.¹² This imprecise method of naming the tribes of contemporary central Europe plays a part in the contested idea that the Celts were a homogenous people. There is also the fact that after medieval times, the supposed descendants of the Celts, the Irish and Welsh people, increasingly developed their own culture and no longer shared a familiar history. The question remains how the Celtic image changed over the centuries into the Celtic image that can be seen in contemporary popular culture. The available classical sources about the ancient Celts are scarce as well as biased, since the Celts were a threat to the Roman Empire. They were quickly labelled barbarians or children that were in need of a structured religion and culture, resulting in, for example, the obscuring of the Celtiberian culture in contemporary Spain and Portugal when the Roman Empire conquered this region.

The image of the Celts as barbaric tribes in need of civilization is reflected once more in the Celtic Revival period, but with different connotations. The Celtic Revival period emerged along with the Romantic movement and created an image of the Celts as a common people sharing a language, a religion and a homeland, in opposition to the classical sources that recognised the Celts as multiple tribal peoples. The Celtic Revival developed into a tangible movement in the second half of the eighteenth century, when a considerable number of people took a renewed interest in Celtic culture. The start of the movement brought on several substantial disputes, for instance regarding the question of whether or not Stonehenge and similar archaeological structures were built by druids. Linguists attempted to make a close connection between the Welsh and the Hebrew language, but the general public remained indifferent to Celtic culture in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹³

Gregory Castle argues that the Celtic Revival period begins in the eighteenth century when Irishmen take on reformist ideas to restore the belief in “essential piety and nobility of the Irish people”.¹⁴ Castle marks Sir Charles Gavan Duffy and Douglas Hyde as pioneers that shaped the Revival movement: they reminded the public of a time before the famine and penal laws, and that it was time that writers remind the public of what the Irish were once capable before they were only recognised by their ugliness.¹⁵

¹² Chapman, *The Celts*, 25-38.

¹³ Edward Douglas Snyder, *The Celtic Revival in English Literature 1760-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923): 1-3.

¹⁴ Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 4.

¹⁵ Castle, *Modernism*, 5.

Celtic culture and mythology were beneficial for the rise of nationalism in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The countries that could claim a connection to the long-lost Celtic culture did so without hesitation to question the identity supported by the English, who were in charge of the government. English identity at the time was particularly rooted in its Anglo-Saxon history; so when the Scottish, Irish and Welsh saw a connection to “a homogenous ethnic group, more ancient and more rooted in the land of Britain than the Anglo-Saxons”, they were quick to form a nationalistic identity of their own.¹⁶

The romantic image of the Celt was created through the obsession Romanticism had with everything natural, rural and primitive; Murray Pittock argues that “(...) the connection of ‘Celtic’ ethnicity with simple pleasures, rural pursuits and a certain primitive addiction to partying provides an undeniable appeal” formed the basis of the romanticised idea of the Celts.¹⁷ There is a literary theme that was born during the Romantic period, when the Europeans came into contact with the native peoples of America and deemed them savages. Connected to these opposed values of adored rurality versus primitivity, “The Noble Heathen”¹⁸, more commonly known as “The Noble Savage”, is a character often associated with the native inhabitants of a region. Lönnroth explains that this theme usually encompasses a pagan hero showing their nobility without having converted to a different religion or culture, thus demonstrating the inane goodness of man.¹⁹ Despite deeming the Celtic tribes barbarians, the Romans and Greeks already thought of some of the Celtic ways as admirable, which might be one of the reasons why they chose to Romanise the Celts instead of completely wiping the slate clean.

Romantic scholars and writers were also fascinated by anything exotic and out of the ordinary. The culture of the Celts was “perceived positively as ancient, mysterious and wildly exciting” and the image of the Celts adhered to this vision.²⁰ Infamously, James Macpherson, for instance, presented a collection of epic poetry that he had allegedly translated from ancient documents containing the work of the bard Ossian. His work featured the hero Fingal, as well as Ossian himself, and described a landscape “drowned in eternal mist, illuminated by a decrepit

¹⁶ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 22.

¹⁷ Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999): 3.

¹⁸ Lars Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen: a Theme in the Sagas,” *Scandinavian Studies* 41, no. 1 (1969): 2, accessed June 10, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40916971>.

¹⁹ Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen,” 2.

²⁰ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 23.

sun or by ephemeral meteors, it is a world of greyness.”²¹ When Macpherson was asked to show the sources he had translated, he could not; but the ‘damage’ was done and Celtic culture was back in the public’s eye. The countries that claimed to possess a “Celtic” past thus also claimed to possess the attributes of their Celtic ancestors. Pittock has argued that “virtues of primitive simplicity, unimproved rurality, bravery, loyalty, elemental courtesy and honour” are virtues that were attributed to the Celts, but that these virtues were vices at the same time: “Simplicity transmutes into indolence, bravery into folly and violence, honour into intractability and loyalty into untrustworthiness, because of its tribal rather than social nature.”²² This duality was also expressed by the English in response to the Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalist efforts. Especially the Irish were seen as “primitive, backward, uncivilised and disorderly”.²³

Today, Celtic culture is still widely appreciated. The increased awareness created by the Celtic Revival appears to have taken strong root in, for instance, Irish national identity by the use of “The Celtic Tiger”, in reference to the Irish economy in the late twentieth century. In addition, “Celtic” motifs such as the insular knot are popular in tattoo art. Celtic inspired music thrives at music festivals around the world, such as the Celtic Colours International Festival held annually in Nova Scotia, Canada; Paganfest which tours through Europe and Festival Interceltique de Lorient in France. The Celtic languages see more use in the 21st century as conservation efforts seem to take effect. According to the Welsh Language Use Survey of 2013-2015 that 24 percent of Welsh inhabitants over three could speak Welsh, in comparison to the 19 percent of 2011.²⁴ There is, however, also criticism that targets the term “Celts” and the political implications that comes with striving for Celtic uniformity. Malcolm Chapman, for instance, discredits the collective Celtic heritage by discussing that the modern Celtic image is based upon an imaginary homogenous Celtic people.²⁵ In fiction, fantasy writers still greatly appreciate Celtic culture and reimagine Celtic mythology and tradition,, particularly young adult novels, such as Lloyd Alexander’s *The Prydain Chronicles* and Emma Bull’s *The Borderlands*.

The modern Celtic image, or the general populace’s understanding of the Celts, doesn’t

²¹ Henry Okun, “Ossian in Painting,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 30 (1967): 328, accessed June 15, 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/750749>.

²² Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 4.

²³ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 23.

²⁴ *Welsh Language Use Survey*, accessed August 18, 2018. <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/welsh-language-use-survey/>

²⁵ Chapman, *The Celts*.

seem particularly marked by the academic discussions surrounding terminology. Despite multiple arguments from the academic community against the assumption of the Celts being a homogenous people, popular culture still seems to deem them so. However, this is not noticed very often in contemporary works, since works that choose to incorporate Celtic elements often choose to reimagine a single 'local' story; one that only features a single Celtic tribe, often paired against the oppressing Romans or invading Anglo-Saxons.

Chapter 2: The Celtic warrior queen

As the way gender enhances the Celtic image in contemporary popular culture is discussed, it must be considered once more that “Celtic” is an intricate concept with many complexities. As was discussed in chapter 1, the Celts were a widespread people and far from homogenous altogether. Today, these ancient tribes are often gathered under the same Celtic banner. A consequence is that when a specific aspect of the culture is analysed, for instance the position of women, it is often generalised to be the same in every tribe dubbed as “Celtic.” In this chapter, the main focus is on the Celts of the British Isles and the values attributed to these peoples.

The image of the Celtic woman in popular contemporary culture often varies - from that of a reserved noble maiden to that of a warrior queen leading great armies against either the Romans or the Anglo-Saxons. The latter image, that of the warrior queen, is the main focus of this chapter, as it appears to be a modern interpretation of the ancient Celtic woman. This chapter explores the ideas of gender connected to this trope and the question of whether this image is a contemporary adaptation, or if it can be found in ancient Celtic culture as well.

The position of ancient Celtic women within their communities, however, remains obscure to this day because of the lack of reliable sources. The only written sources the Celts left behind include inscriptions in stones, written in the ogham alphabet, all across the British Isles; however, since these are mainly name inscription, they say little about their communities. These days, people are dependent on archaeological sources and the accounts of classical authors to paint an initial picture of the role of Celtic women within their society. Archaeological sources in the nineteenth century often sexed the graves they found, based on the items found within the grave; spearheads and other warfare objects were attributed to males, while jewellery often immediately led to the sexing of a skeleton as female. Arnold suggests that this initial divide could be caused by an inherited “reluctance to accord women significant social status”.²⁶ Grave goods were categorised as male or female until it became possible to sex a skeleton through osteological methods.²⁷ Although there is little proof of any warrior maidens, archaeological sources did determine that women could hold high positions within Celtic society;

²⁶ B. Arnold, “The Deposed Princess of Vix: The Need for an Engendered European Prehistory,” in *The Archaeology of Gender*, eds. D. Walde and N. Willows (Calgary: Archaeological Association of the University, 1991): 372.

²⁷ Arnold, “The Deposed Princess,” 368.

multiple graves with female human remains were found to be adorned with costly burial gifts.²⁸

If the contemporary image of the Celtic warrior woman did not originate from archaeological sources, perhaps classical sources played a part in its inspiration. The classical sources on the Celts provide much more information than archaeological sources, but they are also biased and therefore problematic to analyse.²⁹ The Greek writer Strabo called the Irish Celts cannibals and gluttons and referred to them as having a very free sexual nature, as they even had sex with their close kin. However, even Strabo notes in this passage that he is an unreliable witness, as he was not an eye-witness and had his own sources in local merchants.³⁰ The main classical sources that talk about the Celts are often biased, because they viewed the Celtic tribes as uncivilised and barbaric and the way they wrote about the Celts was considered to give legitimacy to the Roman Empire's quest to civilise its conquered lands. The only classical accounts of Celtic women participating in warfare are the stories of Boudicca, a Celtic queen who revolted against Rome in the first century AD.³¹ The primary sources of Boudicca's revolt were written by Roman historians Tacitus (56-117 AD) and Cassius Dio (150-235 AD) and even these sources give varying accounts of how Boudicca started her war and how she died at the end of it.

In addition to the Celtic queen Boudicca, Celtic mythology seems to be the main inspiration for the image of the Celtic female warrior. There is Medb, queen of Connaught, who started the cattle raid when she desired Ulster's venerated bull. The Morrígan is the goddess of death and war within Irish mythology, and can often be found on the battlefield either by herself or as a triad of goddesses. Romanticists and twentieth century feminists took these figures as proof that women held high positions in Celtic society and even suggested that the Celtic tribes were governed as a matriarchy. Recent sources have refuted this, although popular culture seems to have incorporated the idea into fiction. An example of this is the book series *The Mists of Avalon* from 1983 written by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

King Arthur (2004) was marketed to be more historically accurate and to de-

²⁸ Arnold, "The Deposed Princess," 366.

²⁹ Philip Freeman, "Classical Ethnography and the Celts: Can we trust the sources?," *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 20/21 (2000/2001): 22, accessed June 9, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41219586>.

³⁰ Strabo, *Geography*, IV.5.4.

³¹ Joshua J. Mark, "Boudicca," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, published on November 8, 2013, accessed on June 9, 2018, <https://www.ancient.eu/Boudicca/>.

mystify the Arthurian legend, but critics' opinions varied on whether this was achieved. The historic angle provides interesting deviations from the traditional Arthurian narrative; it explores Roman relations to the Celtic tribes residing in Britain and Arthur's ancestry and religion. The movie is both appreciated and criticised for its historical inaccuracies; the new archaeological evidence which was used to promote the film is inconclusive. David Edelstein said: "it's an endless source of giggles once you realise that its historical revisionism has nothing to do with archaeological discoveries and everything to do with the fact that no one at Disney would green-light an old-fashioned talky love triangle with a hero who dies and an adulterous heroine who ends up in a nunnery."³² The film holds a 31% 'Rotten' rating on Rotten Tomatoes as of August 15, 2018, and the critic consensus states: "The magic is gone, leaving a dreary, generic action movie".³³ In its marketing, Keira Knightley's bosom was enlarged in posters where she poses as Guinevere, resulting in anger from both the actress and the public.³⁴

King Arthur (2004) presents the Celts as a tribal people who are governed patriarchally. The character of Guinevere, however, does provide new ideas as to what the Celtic woman might have looked like. She is presented as the female Celtic warrior, as opposed to how Guinevere's character is usually presented: the damsel in distress. She is, however, in a little bit of distress when she first appears in the movie. She is a Briton who is rescued by Arthur, or Artorius, from being walled up in a Roman estate because of her pagan beliefs. This part seems to coincide with the usual fate of Guinevere; to be kidnapped and eventually rescued by Arthur. Loomis equates Guinevere's situation with the myth of Persephone from Greek mythology, in which Persephone, daughter of Demeter, is taken to the underworld by Hades, dooming the earth to winter each year until she is returned in the spring.³⁵ There are, however, contemporary associations with the myth, where Persephone willingly becomes queen of the underworld; and although Guinevere in *King Arthur* certainly did not mean to be walled up in the Roman estate, she does have more authority than she does in other Arthurian narratives.

The movie *King Arthur* tries to create the sentiment that women in Celtic society

³² David Edelstein, "Arthur: On the Rocks," *Slate*, July 7, 2004. Accessed August 15, 2018, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2004/07/arthur_on_the_rocks.html/

³³ Rotten Tomatoes, accessed August 18, 2018, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1133964_king_arthur

³⁴ Katie Hampson, "My flat chest is a turn-off, says Keira," *Daily Mail*, July 19, 2006, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-395379/My-flat-chest-turn-says-Keira.html>.

³⁵ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000): 49.

would fight alongside their men in times of war, by portraying Guinevere as a very capable archer and fighter who fights alongside Arthur and his knights, as well as alongside her own people, without hesitation. This sentiment is weakened, however, by the fact that there is only one shot of other Celtic women on that battlefield.

Guinevere's character is made up from a spectrum of traits that are usually viewed as either feminine or masculine. She portrays exceptional skill in warfare, a skill often only attributed to men; and she is rebellious, mouthy and aggressive throughout the movie. However, she has feminine traits as well: she shows compassion for Lucan, the child that was walled up in the Roman estate beside her, and can be seen hovering near him protectively in multiple scenes. She worries for Arthur and his morals, but is not subtle in confronting him about it. The fact that Guinevere gets away with masculine behaviour whilst still showing off her femininity, enhances the contemporary image of Celtic society in which men and women were equals.

Guinevere's character also makes it a point to emphasise her "Celtic-ness" by constantly questioning Arthur's morals concerning his faith and origins. Arthur is half Briton, half-Roman in the movie, but serves as a general in the Roman army. Guinevere's main motivation throughout the movie is the freedom of her people to live in their homeland without having their culture Romanised or suppressed, and she hardly leaves an opportunity unnoticed to question Arthur about the struggle between his Celtic roots and his Roman roots. The fact that she, an uncivilised Celtic female barbarian, questions him, a Roman general, on matters such as freedom and ethics and actually succeeds in turning Arthur to her cause, enhances the contemporary image of the Celtic woman.

The choice to make Guinevere a Celtic woman, as opposed to her being descended from a noble Roman family, has large consequences for the movie's narrative. It is because of her that Arthur comes into contact with Merlin and her tribe, and is the main catalyst for Arthur's inner struggle. Guinevere's Celtic background also further cements the contemporary Celtic image in which women fight besides their men and are just as capable in warfare as their male counterparts. The fact that Arthur chooses his Celtic blood over his Roman ancestry because of Guinevere and her passionate speeches about her land's beauty, makes the contemporary Celtic image only more alluring. It suggests that the Celtic image does not differentiate between genders, ancestry or nationality, and that all who want to belong or feel a

connection to Celtic culture are welcome to it.

The women in the TV series *Merlin* are particularly powerful, similarly to Guinevere in *Arthur* (2004). Morgana is Uther Pendragon's ward and rather helpless in the first few episodes, but she soon blooms to be a headstrong, independent character even before her magic, her main weapon, reveals itself to her. Guinevere is a servant girl in the first season, but demonstrates that she is no demure damsel as she fights for her father and position within the castle. The difference with *Arthur* (2004) is that the women in *Merlin* do not partake in physical violence; they fight verbally or with magic, but prove inept when it comes to physical warfare. Morgan Le Fay in *I am Morgan Le Fay* also demonstrates that she is a strong, but complex character as she vanquishes her enemies with her magic, but also loses her love Thomas because she is unwilling to let him go. Morgan's connection to the Irish goddess of death makes her powerful, but it is her human mistakes that enhance the Celtic image she presents. The Celtic woman presented in *Merlin* and *I am Morgan Le Fay* differ from the Celtic woman presented in *Arthur* (2004) in their physical fighting capabilities; the choice of magic as a weapon strengthens the connection to Celtic mysticism.

Chapter 3: Nature as representative of Celtic culture

In contemporary popular culture, nature is often interconnected with the Celtic character of a book, movie or TV series. This is no exception in BBC One's TV Series *Merlin*. This chapter analyses the use of nature in *Merlin* and how this enhances the Celtic image that is presented by the TV series. The nature that this chapter looks at is more than the rural landscapes of the Celtic regions. It is also that which is often attributed to nature itself: life and death, animals and, in the case of this TV series, magic that emanates from the earth itself.

Merlin is loosely based on the Arthurian legend, but presents a more family-friendly version. The series received mixed reviews, but good ratings when it aired in 2008 and was broadcast for a total of 65 episodes spread across 5 seasons. The series does not strive for historical accuracy; it features dragons, magic and not a hint of 5th or 6th century Britain. It is unique in that it offers a version of the Arthurian legend where Arthur and Merlin are the same age, which appeals to a younger audience as the prince and wizard learn together. It is through Arthur and Merlin's rite of passage that Celtic culture and religion are explored in the series.

The theme of nature in *Merlin* is constantly accompanied by opposing values: life and death, strife and peace, danger and safety. The same conflicting values can be found in the Romantic view of the highlands, for instance when the desolate hills of the Scottish Highlands became alluring to people instead of seen as dangerous.³⁶ The natural landscapes presented in *Merlin* are terribly dangerous, but at the same time they are home to the peaceful and talented druids. The castle of Camelot stands in stark contrast with the wild nature around it; the wilds are inhabited by supernatural dangerous animals and other mythological creatures, while the keep is home to the King and his knights, the seat of power and order. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the Celts were venerated by the Romanticist movement for what was perceived to be their close relationship with nature and their rurality, but at the same time they were seen as disorderly and uncivilised by the English. This seems to be reflected in the representation of the dangerous wilderness surrounding the orderly keep of Camelot. In the episode "The Poisoned Chalice", Arthur faces the dangerous wilds as he searches for a cure for the poisoned Merlin that can only

³⁶ Simon James, *Atlantic Celts: Ancient People or Modern Invention?* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999): 48-9.

be found in the caves beyond the wilderness.³⁷ The poison came from a flower that only grows deep within the forest and the same flower had to be found by Arthur in order to heal Merlin, once again associating nature with both life and death and with both healing and sickness. Celtic culture was based around the rurality of the land and the people's dependence on a good harvest. The devotion to the seasons of nature and the cycle of life and death was a large part of Celtic mythology, as their main festivals were centred around these cycles.³⁸ The TV series seems to echo this part of Celtic culture as well.

The Old Religion presented in *Merlin* seems to be a direct reflection of the "lost" Celtic culture. The Old Religion appears to have at its core the notion that everything in the universe is connected and balanced. The magic that is used in the TV series is seen as a direct link to this balance. Gaius, Merlin's mentor in the series, says that this "magic is neither good nor bad"³⁹, but that sorcerers can use it for either. The Celts held a similar belief, seeing the magical and the material as building blocks of the universe around them. The supernatural was merely a manifestation of a natural imbalance or the will of a deity.⁴⁰ In the episode "Excalibur", it is revealed that Arthur was born by way of magic, and that Igraine, his mother died in childbirth to bring back balance to nature. The sorceress Nimueh is also aware of it: "To create a life, there had to be a death. The balance of the world had to be repaid."⁴¹ In the episode "Lancelot", a griffon appears and terrorises nearby villages before making its way to Camelot. Merlin finds out that the beast has been created by magic and that it can only be killed by magic.⁴² The TV series once more uses the balance of nature and the magic it produces as a recurring theme, extending the Celtic beliefs of the balance of nature to magic as well. The Old Religion in *Merlin* is mostly practiced by the druids, who make their first appearance in the episode "The Beginning of the End".⁴³ The druids in *Merlin* are a peace-loving people that live

³⁷ *Merlin*, "The Poisoned Chalice," directed by Ed Fraiman, written by Ben Vanstone (October 11, 2008: BBC One).

³⁸ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Celtic Religion," accessed August 18, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Celtic-religion>

³⁹ *Merlin*, "The Mark of Nimueh," directed by James Hawes, written by Julian Jones (October 4, 2008: BBC One): 7:30.

⁴⁰ Miranda Green, *Exploring the world of the druids* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005): 29.

⁴¹ *Merlin*, "Excalibur," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Julian Jones (November 15, 2008: BBC One): 19:55.

⁴² *Merlin*, "Lancelot," directed by Ed Fraiman, written by Jake Michie (October 18, 2008: BBC One).

⁴³ *Merlin*, "The Beginning of the End," directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Howard Overman (November 8, 2008: BBC One).

out in the woods surrounding Camelot. They have been forced into an exile of sorts because of the Old Religion that they still follow and because of the ban of magic in Camelot itself.

The elemental worship in Celtic religion mostly concerned localised pools, rivers, mountains and the spirits themselves that were reflected by the elements. Murdoch states that the Celts would even swear by the natural objects of the universe: “It was also customary to take oaths by the elements--heaven, earth, sun, fire, moon, sea, land, day, night, etc., and these punished the breaker of the oath.”⁴⁴ The Celts were particularly fanatic worshippers of great bodies of water and gave pools and rivers rich offerings.⁴⁵⁴⁶ Water by itself, however, is often used in the series as a carrier for visions and spells. In the episode “The Mark of Nimueh” a creature is created by the sorceress Nimueh from the water and the earth and in the end it is destroyed by Merlin using fire and wind. This balance between the elements, and between the life and destruction of the creature, coincides with the balance of nature that was so important to the Celts. In “The Gates of Avalon”, Arthur falls prey to mortal-turned fairy folk, the Sidhe, who plan to drown and sacrifice him in the nearby lake so that they may regain their immortal form.⁴⁷ The water is used as catalyst for the sacrifice and the spell, indicating the importance of water to the Celts.

Fire is also used as a catalyst in the *Merlin* series. In “Excalibur”, Merlin uses the Great Dragon’s breath to burnish and create Excalibur in order to slay a wraith that has come back from the dead. At the end of the episode, Merlin throws the sword into the lake to keep it out of the wrong hands.⁴⁸ In the episode “The Moment of Truth”, Merlin summons a great storm that drives off raiders that have come to one of the nearby villages to pillage.⁴⁹

Whenever someone or something ventures out from the castle and into the wilds, they are met with an obstacle of some sort. The same thing happens when something from the wilderness enters the castle, such as the dragon that is held prisoner deep underneath Camelot in the dungeon. The dragon is a creature of the Old Religion, able to sustain the magic of nature by

⁴⁴ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 173.

⁴⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Celtic Religion.”

⁴⁶ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 181.

⁴⁷ *Merlin*, “The Gates of Avalon,” directed by Jeremy Webb, written by Ben Vanstone (November 1, 2008: BBC One).

⁴⁸ *Merlin*, “Excalibur,” 28:05.

⁴⁹ *Merlin*, “The Moment of Truth,” directed by David Moore, written by Julian Jones (November 22, 2008: BBC One).

itself, yet it finds itself imprisoned by Uther Pendragon. This could be inspired by the Celtic rurality that the Romantic movement found so alluring. The dragon, as a mythological creature and the last of his kind, is kept within the confines of civilization, unable to roam free and truly exhibit its beastly nature. This is reminiscent of Celtic culture that was Romanised, Christianised and ultimately obscured.

The nature presented in *Arthur* (2004) appears in foggy, dark landscapes in line with the supposed historical angle of the movie. The Celtic tribes are seen to hide effectively within the smoky forests, while the Romans and their unnatural buildings stand in stark contrast. The paradox between the appealing Celtic rurality and structured civilisation is apparent once more in *I am Morgan Le Fay*, as nature is perilous for Morgan and her companions, but is also her safehouse as she grows up. Not only is the hollow hill where she resides a popular motif in both Celtic mythology and contemporary Celtic works⁵⁰, it is a compromise between the civilisation that doesn't accept her and the wilds that are dangerous to everyone. The balance between life and death is also vital to Morgan's narrative, for every bit of magic she uses comes with a price. Nature is present in all three works in various ways; the paradox between rurality and civilisation remains a popular motif in contemporary Celtic works and is intricately connected to Celtic culture.

⁵⁰ Muriel A. Whitaker, "'The Hollow Hills': A Celtic Motif in Modern Fantasy," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 13, no. 3/4 (1980). Accessed August 15, 2018. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24780270>.

Chapter 4: Mythical connection as Celtic heritage

The reader might have noticed that nature and the supernatural are thoroughly connected in Celtic myth and culture. This chapter makes certain references to the previous chapter.

The main source of magic in the novel is the character of Morgan herself. In *I am Morgan Le Fay*, Morgan's character is immediately associated with shapeshifting, as her mother Igraine recounts how her youngest daughter used to skulk about the castle, using several animal metaphors to describe her. The power of shape-shifting is not rare in Celtic religion and mythology; the gods were said to have shape-shifting powers and it was common for witches to have the skill as well.⁵¹ This was not limited to the shapes of animals; many divines and druids would change their shape into that of another human or divine in order to trick others.⁵² This ability is not a new part of the contemporary Celtic image and seems to have its roots firmly in the Celtic religion of the druids and in Celtic mythology.

Morgan's name as well as her magic are associated with the fay. Thomas, Morgan's love interest, calls her a changeling. In the novel, the fay are immortal, humanoid animals. Cernunnos, god of the hunt, appears before Morgan in the protected realm of Avalon, where many of the fay reside. In the novel, the fay often sporting human and animal attributes in their appearance. Cernunnos, for example, is portrayed as a humanoid stag with antlers and furred shoulders. It is unclear whether the fay in the novel were inspired by the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, who were a race skilled in magic, cast down from heaven because of their expansive knowledge;⁵³ or other divines, since Cernunnos is said to be part of the fay in the novel, but is usually seen as a god that was added to Celtic mythology after the romanization of the Celtic religion.⁵⁴ Morgan and the fay are the only magic users in *I am Morgan Le Fay*. The so-called pedlars travel across the country, selling healing spells and herbs wherever they go, and they are generally known as white witches. These white witches seem to be inspired by the contemporary pagan witchcraft known as wicca or "white magic". Most of the magic users in *I am Morgan Le Fay* are inspired by Celtic mythology, so the modern connotations with Celtic magic all trace

⁵¹ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 320.

⁵² Murdoch, *The Religion*, 322.

⁵³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Tuatha-De-Danann," accessed August 18, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tuatha-De-Danann>

⁵⁴ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 23.

back to Celtic mythology.

In *I am Morgan Le Fay*, a creature by the name of the Morrigan is mentioned several times. This creature refers to the Irish goddess of death, (the) Morrigan. Morgan is associated with the Morrigan multiple times throughout the novel, for instance when Merlin asks if her name is Morrigan.⁵⁵ In *I am Morgan Le Fay*, the Morrigan is an omen of death: “The Morrigan is flying. (...) There will be war. (...) Men are fated to die.”⁵⁶ The Morrigan also has a human form, as she is seen washing the bodies of knights who are about to die in battle. Thomas sees her washing a body and recognises it as his own, signalling his sealed fate to die the very same night.⁵⁷ Morgan is urged by Cernunnos to accept all her selves, which is once more associated with the Morrigan. Morgan receives visions of herself as a matronly woman, but also as the large black raptor circling in the sky, signalling death like the Morrigan does. The Morrigan in *I am Morgan Le Fay*, as well as Morgan’s own character, clearly refer to the Irish goddess of war, Morrigan, who usually appeared as a triad with Neman and Macha.⁵⁸ These three goddesses would often be found on the battlefield together, with Morrigan appearing as a large bird to signal the slaughter of men. The connection between Morrigan and the character of Morgan le Fay from the Arthurian legend is not a newly established one; beyond the similarity in name, both Morgan le Fay and the goddess Morrigan are known to have healing powers and both get extremely vicious when rejected or dismissed.⁵⁹ The character of Morgan Le Fay in *I am Morgan Le Fay* has these exact traits; she heals her love interest Thomas twice, as well as her nurse, but unleashes pure devastation the moment things do not go her way.

In *I am Morgan Le Fay*, magic seems to be an inner force, available to all who have the knowledge to learn spells and enchantments. The strength of one’s magic, however, varies. Morgan herself has very strong magic, while her sister Morgause can only manage small protection spells. Those who have strong magic may receive a milpreve, or adder stone. The stone chooses its wearer; it can enhance that person’s magic into elemental forces and obey their commands. The adder stones seem to have a mind of their own and a close connection to fate itself, as Morgan can only use her adder stone when she accepts the tug of fate that she

⁵⁵ Nancy Springer, *I am Morgan le Fay* (New York: Firebird, 2002): 20.

⁵⁶ Springer, *Morgan le Fay*, 38.

⁵⁷ Springer, *Morgan le Fay*, 104.

⁵⁸ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 71.

⁵⁹ Ana Rita Martins, “Morgan le Fay: The Inheritance of the Goddess,” *Brathair* 15, no. 1 (2015): 157.

constantly feels. The references to adder stones were inspired by Celtic culture, for they were coveted by the ancient Celts and were believed to possess magical virtues.⁶⁰

Fate itself seems to be interwoven with magic in *I am Morgan Le Fay*. The adder stones appear to carry out fate's "will", steering those who wear the stones towards a fate they cannot escape. The moment Morgan accepts her fate, her magic and adder stone start to work together. Morgan, having received a vision of Thomas dying on a battlefield, vows to protect him and creates a gilded cage for him, so that he might be safe and never leave her side. In doing so, she strives to change the fate of the man she loves, but she ends up fulfilling this fate in the end. Thomas tries to escape the prison she has built him and tricks Morgan into relinquishing her adder stone, so that he may venture beyond her sight, and he dies the moment he does. Fate takes on the role of the self-fulfilling prophecy, a concept defined by Robert K. Merton as: "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception come *true*."⁶¹ Nancy Springer confirms that fate is an important theme in her novel: "The Morrigan was a war goddess who flew over battlefields in the form of a carrion bird, and who in her human aspect chose certain warriors to die. In other words, she functioned as a fate. Morgan, as a latterday manifestation of the Morrigan, is fated to be fate."⁶²

The magic that is used in the novel *I am Morgan Le Fay* seems to have a very clear structure, which is reminiscent of the magic used in the *Merlin* TV series. Both sport a magic system that stems from the earth and nature itself and that is bound to a set of rules. In *I am Morgan Le Fay* these limits are bound to the earth and any balance that is shifted, must be re-balanced, lest the magic corrupt the user. In *Merlin*, the magic the followers of the Old Religion use also rigidly follows the balance of life and death. The addition of "rules" to the use of magic appears to be the only aspect of the contemporary Celtic image of magic that is not inspired by Celtic mythology itself. The Celts believed that magic was interwoven with the very material of the universe and that everything around them was a manifestation of this divine power. There were no real limits to this magic; no rules that needed to be followed in order to continue to use

⁶⁰ Murdoch, *The Religion*, 328.

⁶¹ Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (New York: Free Press, 1968): 477.

⁶² "Nancy Springer, author essay," Penguin Random House, accessed June 15, 2018. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/29349/nancy-springer>.

magic.

Magic and the supernatural do not have a place in *Arthur* (2004) as the movie takes a historical approach to the Arthurian legend. The Celtic tribes are therefore portrayed as violent peoples fighting for their land without any magic or mysticism. The mysterious allure of Celtic culture gives way to war-painted, leather clad freedom fighters. In *Merlin*, magic and the supernatural are the basis of the world portrayed and the obstacles Arthur faces are mostly conjured by magic. Interestingly, magic is banned in Camelot; Merlin and the other magic-users have to be careful in order to avoid detection, which makes the mystery of the Old Religion and Celtic culture that it represents more mysterious. The missing magic in *Arthur* (2004) is understandable since the movie takes a historical approach, but it makes its portrayal dark, gritty and lacklustre since magic and the supernatural is a vital part of Celtic culture.

Conclusion

Each contemporary work that has been examined in this thesis has some tangible links to Celtic culture. The fact that these are all adaptations of the Arthurian legend connect, but also limits, these Celtic elements to a narrative that often deals with the same characters and themes. Regrettably, this also limits the analysis of the Celtic elements in these contemporary adaptations. The themes that were chosen for each contemporary work have also limited the analysis possibilities of connecting the Celtic elements to the modern Celtic image.

The value of being Celtic does not appear to be diminished in *King Arthur* (2004), where the Celtic character is female and proud of it. In fact, it appears to strengthen the Celtic image to have a usually demure character fight alongside her male counterparts with determination. The fact that Guinevere convinced Arthur that siding with his Celtic kin is more ethical than remaining under Roman law is vital for the Celtic image the movie produces; one in which the rural, warrior-like way of life can be morally superior to that of an orderly Roman civilization and where no distinction is made between gender, ancestry and nationality.

In BBC's *Merlin*, the Celtic elements pertaining to nature are limited to similarities between the ancient Celtic religion and the Old Religion that is featured in the series. The druids that practice the Old Religion are in tune with nature, choose it above civilization and practice magic according to the balance of life and death. The manner in which nature is worshipped and treated as the fabric of the universe in *Merlin* is very reminiscent of the Celtic veneration of nature. The nature that is featured in *Merlin* appears to follow the example that was set by Romantic writers, namely emphasising the rurality and the dangers of nature in comparison to the relative safety of civilised Camelot.

I am Morgan le Fay's character of Morgan is a clear reference to the Irish goddess of war, the Morrígan, as confirmed by Nancy Springer. The magic Morgan uses and the milpreve stones that guide her magic are intricately connected to the Celtic religion and mythology. Morgan is not only part of a world that is dominated by figures and creatures from Celtic mythology; she herself is a form of the Morrígan.

A link that each contemporary work does seem to have to the modern-day Celtic image is a desire to present a Celtic heritage to its fans, and a common way to achieve this is by creating a link through descent. Celtic ancestry plays a major role in *King Arthur* (2004), as Arthur struggles to choose between his Celtic blood and his Roman blood. The Celtic Guinevere,

however, is quick to make him see the qualities of her land and identity and is not hindered in this by her gender. In fact, her gender seems to put even more emphasis on her Celtic identity and never limits her in her desires. It also does not stop her from playing the warrior princess. In *I am Morgan le Fay*, the connection is between the main character, Morgan, and her fate to become the Morrigan, a major figure in Irish mythology. In *Merlin*, this link is not so apparent, as it resides within the surrounding nature. It features a dangerous and varied landscape, but this is still reminiscent of the British Isles and the Celtic culture that was so connected to these landscapes. Morgan's homeland in *I am Morgan le Fay* features all the landscapes of Celtic mythology, including the rural expanses and a version of the Otherworld, where Cernunnos and other figures reside. *King Arthur* (2004) was supposed to be a historically accurate take on the Arthur legend and features many of the landscapes one would expect to see on the British Isles.

The contemporary works analysed in this study also seem to have a common desire to educate the reader or viewer of its Celtic past. *I am Morgan le Fay* does this by directly referencing deities from Irish mythology. *Merlin* features many mythological creatures and tales from the Arthurian narrative, presenting one facet each episode. *King Arthur* (2004) attempts to make the viewer familiar with the historical issues surrounding the Arthurian narrative, such as Arthur's position within the squabbles between the Celts and the Romans.

It is also interesting to note that neither Nancy Springer nor Antoine Fuqua hails from a "Celtic" region; Springer was born in New Jersey, USA and Fuqua was born in Pennsylvania, USA. This indicates that the creation of a particular identity or image is not limited to writers who have a solid connection to the region in question.

What seems ever present in these contemporary adaptations is the contradiction between the romanticised Celt and the negative associations that accompany it. In *I am Morgan le Fay*, Morgan is constantly feared and ostracised for her 'otherness' and magical abilities. *Merlin* features a community torn apart by the magic of the Old Religion and Merlin and the druids have to constantly hide their powers or face the executioner. In *King Arthur* (2004) the Celts are presented as a war-mongering, primitive people in the eyes of the Romans, but they turn out to have the moral high ground as Arthur fights with them to protect their homeland. To quote Fimi, all Celtic elements presented in these contemporary works reflect "the Victorian stereotypes of the 'Celts': (...) simultaneously spiritual, mystical and artistic, as well as unruly,

‘wild,’ and irrational.”⁶³

It seems then that the contemporary Celtic image has not changed much from the paradox that is the Celtic image that was born during the Celtic revival period. Feminism appears to have a noticeable influence on the Celtic image, as contemporary works feature strong Celtic women who are equal to their male counterparts.

Future research should clarify whether the Celtic image has changed under other historical movements, or if other themes than the ones discussed in this thesis dictate a big part of the Celtic image.

⁶³ Fimi, *Celtic Myth*, 281.

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