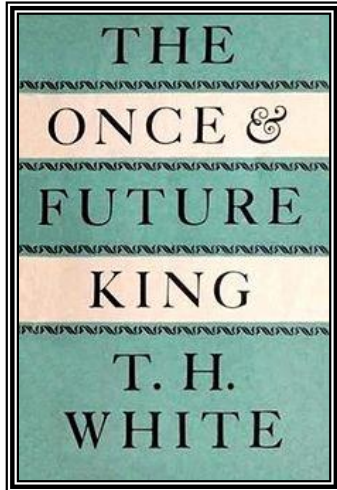


THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

By Rebecca Hodge



The cover of *The Once and Future King*.

Camelot the musical is directly based off T.H. White's 1958 novel *The Once and Future King*, which in turn is based off Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* from the 15th century. Malory had collected the legends of Arthur and formed them into an extended narrative. In his work White did something similar by collecting, revising, and augmenting shorter novels he had written from 1938 to 1941: *The Sword in the Stone*, *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, *The Ill-Made Knight*, and *The Candle in the Wind*. White's version is arguably the most important in terms of the lasting popularity of the Arthurian legends today.

The Once and Future King is written for a post-World War II audience. One the major themes occurring during young Arthur's education is a paradox of war: mankind is drawn to violence, but war is always terrible and evil, even as it is necessary to stop atrocities. Power and violence are at the core of the novel and speak deeply to a mindset after experiencing World War II.

Also notable are White's rich takes on the classic Arthurian characters. He charts Arthur's journey from ideal young man to psychologically complex king. He paints Merlyn as living through time backward. Lancelot, upon falling in love with Guenevere, realizes "the main thing was that she was a real person" - indeed, White's portrayal of Guenevere is sympathetic and deep. His Lancelot is most changed as an intensely tragic figure: ugly, lonely, and chasing after an impossible ideal through Arthur and his notion of chivalry.

Many of these elements are utilized in Lerner and Loewe's musical *Camelot*. Most of the musical is based off the last two volumes of the novel, which focus on the love triangle between Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenevere, but also pulls in some of Arthur's education from the first volume. The ending of *Camelot* features White's idea of introducing Thomas Malory, the 15th century author who chronicled the Arthurian legends, as Tom of Warwick. Without *The Once and Future King*, there would be no *Camelot*.



The author, T. H. White.

Sources: ["Why The Once and Future King is still the best King Arthur story out there" by Constance Grady](#), ["Once and future reckoning" by Jane Smiley](#), [Faded Page](#)