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THE TRANSMEDIAL GRAIL: MALORY'S *LE MORTE D'ARTHUR* (1485), BEARDSLEY'S *THE ACHIEVING OF THE SANGREAL* (1893–1894) AND BOORMAN'S *EXCALIBUR* (1981)

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The field of transmedial studies is an ever-growing one due to the ongoing development of different forms of media. While transmedial storytelling, for example, has been studied extensively and transmedial analysis has been applied in ample studies, they have concerned mostly systematically developed franchises or other fictional worlds with a relatively clear narrative.

The work on transmediality is increasingly being extended to other storyworlds resembling that of the Arthur cycle, of which the quest for the Holy Grail is arguably one of the most well-known themes. However, there has been no research into the process of transfer the Holy Grail as a transmedial object undergoes, as most investigations have related only to the history, symbolism, or various appearances of the Grail. Thus, the present thesis deals with the implications stemming from the transmedial Grail and the perspective of the reader/observer/audience, an object which has been adopted continually into different cultures, societies, and times.

The thesis begins with an introduction which contains an explanation as to the reasoning behind conducting an analysis in the field of transmedia and choosing the Holy Grail as well as the source materials. In the literature review, the concept of transmediality is thoroughly examined and defined along with transmedial storyworlds and transfer as well as the visual and symbolic features of the Holy Grail. The empirical section consists of a transmedial analysis of the main features of the Grail in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Aubrey Beardsley's *The Achieving of the Sangreal* and John Boorman's *Excalibur*. Finally, the conclusion summarises the results of the analysis and the ensuing implications as well as the significance of these findings in the field of transmedia.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, there have been certain legends – that is, traditional stories which try to "reconstruct reality in a believable fashion" and usually refer to "verifiable topographic features or historical personages" (Tangherlini 1990: 372) – which continue to resurface in different time periods and forms, and from the British Isles comes an especially prominent one – the Arthurian legend. Dating back to around the beginning of the 9th century, originating from the writing of Nennius, a scholar from Wales (Matthews 1998: 16, 17), the legend is extensive, spanning centuries and spawning countless adaptations in different times and media. While there has been much debate as to whom the actual conception of Arthur as he is known today can be attributed to (Higham 2002: 1), it is generally agreed upon that Geoffrey of Monmouth was responsible for the creation of the character (Barber 2001: 2) in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, written in the 12th century (Lacy et al 1997: 1). Still, Nennius' accounts of the twelve battles, before which Arthur appears – placing him in around the beginning of the 6th century (Matthews 1998: 16, 17) – are significant, as this is the Arthur that is considered to be the historical version (*ibid.*: 22). It is possible that the popularity of the Arthurian legend can be attributed to the obscurity of this period, allowing for various different legends to emerge with few contradictions (Lacy et al 1997: 4). However, the most well-known source for the Arthurian legend is Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485). It is also the first Arthurian text published in the English-speaking world which includes the quest for the Holy Grail (Pfanner 2008: 25), arguably one of the most well-known themes[1] of the Arthurian legend today.

In light of this thesis and the background of its corpora, it is important to note that around 1190, Robert de Boron develops the idea of the Grail being connected to the Last Supper and it being the object "which Christ himself used at the Last Supper and in which

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[1] Meaning principal "ideas" (Holman 1985: 443).

Joseph caught Christ's blood" (Morgan 2005: 11, 45–46). Boron establishes this link in his *Joseph of Arimathea*, essentially laying the foundation for later Grail narratives in which the holy object is, in one way or another, connected to Christian rites (*ibid.*: 11–12). After this, as the Holy Grail continues to appear in various Arthurian narratives, the religious link remains, enabling authors to attribute Christian ideas to the quest for the Holy Grail, depicting it as a mission not unlike a pilgrimage.

Since the quest as a whole is an insurmountable topic to analyse within the limitations of an MA thesis, it is more feasible to narrow it down to a more specific element of it – the Holy Grail. Besides this, the apparitional and mystical Grail is an interesting research object, as well as how it is depicted in different media in the course of its transmedial process. The Grail's roots are argued to be found in early religious practices (Wood 2008: 2), Celtic history (Loomis 1949: 335), and even earlier pagan myths (Reid 2014: Ch. 2, para. 22). The legend of the Holy Grail has been adapted in various media even as a stand-alone theme, such as in Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal* (1882), or films such as Victor Saville's *The Silver Chalice* (1954), and Stephen Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), among others. It is clear that the Holy Grail is a symbol which has survived centuries and has been adopted into different cultures and societies time and time again. This might be testament not only to "the cyclical nature of human existence and culture" but also to the flexibility and fruitfulness of this legend (Barber 2004: 15), as it is possible to utilise it in many different contexts to convey ideas important in any given time.

Ample research has been done on the legend of the Holy Grail, whether it be in terms of its history (Barber 2004; Wood 2002, 2008), its symbolism (Barber 2004), or its appearance in films (Harty 2015), all of which will certainly prove helpful in my study. Additionally, the field of transmedial studies is an ever-growing one because of the ongoing development of different forms of media, and has been further developed by Henry Jenkins

(2006, 2011b, 2016), Marie-Laure Ryan (2016), Irina O. Rajewsky (2005), James Dalby (2017), and many other scholars. While a considerable amount of research has been done, for example, on transmedial storytelling, it has mostly concerned franchises or other fictional worlds with a relatively clear narrative, such as Star Wars (Guynes and Hassler-Forest 2018), Stephen King's 'multiverse' (Proctor 2018) and the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Brinker 2016). The work on transmediality is increasingly being extended to other storyworlds much like the Arthur cycle; however, I am not aware of any previous treatments of transmedial transfer in the analysis of the Holy Grail. On the basis of Jenkins' (2011b: para. 9) definition of the word *transmedial* as "across media", this means that there is a lack of research into the process and outcomes of transferring the central element of the quest, the Grail, from one medium, such as written records, into another, such as visual arts, music, or film. Considering the prominence of the Grail as a symbolic object in history and the prevalence of transmediality in the contemporary world, it is a topic worth studying and discussing, and would provide a fresh look into the legend of the Grail. This necessitates the categorisation of the Holy Grail as a transmedial object and mapping out its main features, which can then be analysed more in depth in terms of transmedial change. Thus, I will conduct an analysis of the Holy Grail as the mythical object of the quest[2] of the Arthurian legends, and I will explore how it is conveyed *transmedially*; that is to say, "across media" (Jenkins 2011b: para. 9), in a written record, an illustration, and a film.

Taking all of this into account, this thesis aims to find an explanation to the following: what are the implications stemming from the depiction of the transmedial Grail and thus also the perspective of the reader/observer/audience? Due to the sheer extent of the history of the Grail, as well as its transmedial nature, three works have been chosen to conduct a deeper analysis into the changes the object goes through in its various transmedial transfers.

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[2] That is, only appearances of the literal Holy Grail in its various forms will be included, thus excluding instances where the name is used figuratively.

Furthermore, this analysis should provide a perspective on the reasons these changes take place, whether they are related to the given medium, society, or time.

As for the corpus, I will first look at Malory's prose text *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), since it is a relatively important source for the Arthurian legends based on which later authors have built their own adaptations (Taylor and Brewer 1983: 2, 3). Furthermore, Malory's work is described as a fitting base for these adaptations as the prose lacks any specific detail about location, time, or "religious practices", and thus easily allows for locatively and temporally varying adaptations, and different objectives to be linked to the legend of Arthur as well (*ibid*.). This prose work can be considered "an end to the chivalric lifestyle" in its own time (Wood 2008: 2), and it has inspired Aubrey Beardsley, the illustrator of an edition of *Le Morte D'Arthur* released in 1893–1894 (Morgan 2005: 119). Beardsley was explicitly asked to illustrate this particular edition of Malory's work (*ibid.*), the first illustration he made being *The Achieving of the Sangreal*, and thus, it is possible to analyse a visual depiction of the Grail based on the textual material. In Ryan's (2004: 139) words, "illustrative narrativity is admittedly a rather weak and subordinated mode", which does not necessarily designate it as "parasitic"; on the contrary, it may offer "visualizations, emotional coloring, or facial expression" which may provide additional information as to the motives of characters and depictions of them as well as other objects relevant to the story. She adds that it would be ideal for a text and its illustrations to "blend in the mind of the reader-spectator into one powerful image, each version filling the gaps of the other" (Ryan 2004: 139). John Boorman's film *Excalibur* (1981) is also partly based on Malory's work (Boorman 2003: 236) making it possible to look at the representation of the Grail in yet another medium. The activities of the film are set in the 15th century, the time perhaps most often associated with Arthurian legends. It is regarded a classic Grail adaptation, and while it does not follow the whole of Malory's story faithfully (Harty 2015: 98, 99), it does offer

a renewal of the "medieval currents of thought about the nature of vision and the physical world" by way of "the art of cinema" (*ibid*.: 99). *Excalibur* would therefore be an acceptable option through which to analyse the representation of the Holy Grail in film.

All things considered, the concept of transmediality and its various definitions are discussed in depth in the first chapter of the present paper, where the literature review and theoretical framework for the discussion of the transmediality of the Holy Grail are presented. Then, the outline of the history of the Holy Grail and its various manifestations in different times is presented to determine the representative features of the Grail. The main corpus to be analysed consists of a written text, an illustration, and a motion picture. The empirical section of this thesis includes an overview of the methodology as well as a brief description of the Grail quest in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Finally, a transmedial analysis of the chosen works – in addition to Malory, Beardsley's *The Achieving of the Sangreal* and Boorman's *Excalibur* – is conducted based on these features. The results are discussed at the end of the empirical section and summarised in the conclusion, along with their significance in the world of transmedia.

1. TRANSMEDIALITY OF TEXTS

Besides transmedia, there are a few related terms which are used to convey the interaction and relationships between media that must be discussed here, such as *intermediality*, *multimediality*, and *transfictionality*. Kattenbelt (2008: 20–21) defines intermediality as "the co-relation of media in the sense of mutual influences between media"; a fitting example would be the relationship between Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations and the Dent-published version of *Le Morte D'Arthur* they appear in (Morgan 2005: 119). As for multimediality, it can be defined as "the occurrence where there are many media in one and the same object" (Kattenbelt 2008: 20). This could be illustrated by the film *Excalibur* (Boorman 1981), where one medium, film, contains another medium in addition to picture, such as sound. Transfictionality is a term coined by Saint-Gelais (2005: 612) and it refers to a certain element (a character, location, event, etc), which is shared between two or more different texts, but is utilised as if it "exists independently" (Saint-Gelais 2011: 20). Pearson (2019: 148) specifies that transfictionality on its own is usually restricted to "single-medium" processes, but that "transmedia transfictions are a subset of transfictionality, crossing over two or more media". In any case, this type of classification is not necessary at this stage, as it would make more sense in a study where some type of motif is transported into a different time and/or setting, while this research focuses more on the changes inflicted upon a transmedially transferred object.

The term *transmedia*, however, has many definitions, as well as numerous slightly differing variations, and to avoid ambiguity, needs to be discussed and defined here. As mentioned in the introduction, transmedia literally means "across media" (Jenkins 2011b: para. 9). Concurrently, Rajewsky (2005: 46) defines transmediality more specifically as "the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media", but she adds that it is not connected to one particular medium; "rather, it is transmedially

available and realizable, i.e., available and realizable *across* media borders". Kattenbelt (2008: 23) offers a further explanation for transmedial change and notes that it concerns the absence of "the specific features of the source medium" in the target medium. Wolf (2005: 253), on the other hand, describes "transmedial phenomena" as being able to highlight the "similarities between" different types of media; furthermore, he explains that transmediality may manifest itself in the form of repeating motifs or "archetypal subjects".

It is possible to infer from this that essentially, transmedial practices are not new, but transmedia as a concept is a relatively new phenomenon. One of the first appearances of the term *transmedia* is documented to be in the beginning of the 1990s in Kinder's book *Playing with Power* (1991), where she studies "entertainment super systems" dispersed across different media. Some scholars, however, such as Steinberg (2012: viii), have traced the concept back to the 1960s Japan, where "Japanese television animation, or *anime*" emerged. From this, *media mix* – a term denoting the Japanese transmedia – developed, which some consider the beginning of the "transmedia movement" (*ibid.*). As for the significance of transmediality, Dalby (2017: 99) suggests it has an important function in developing media, and it is helpful when it comes to storytelling. For example, if a narrative which has hitherto existed only in one type of medium is converted into another – such as a written record into a theatrical performance – it offers the opportunity of adding "a new layer" to the comprehension and evolution of the narrative. Moreover, such a transfer helps the story remain relevant and in the public consciousness, not to mention attracting those who are already familiar with it from its previous versions, and as such, it is an intriguing way to introduce a narrative to larger audiences by further enhancing it as well. Furthermore, adapting an already familiar narrative enables the authors to reinterpret the events in it or add new elements to them, so that it can convey certain important ideas or beliefs pertinent to a given time and/or society the narrative is reawakened in.

While some researchers who have operated in the field of transmedia, such as Clark (see Möller 2012) believe transmedia has become too vague a term and should have a more straightforward definition – possibly prompting his quip regarding East and West Coast transmedia which will be explored later – others suggest that it can have different meanings and aiming to assign a single definition to it may only unnecessarily limit its potential (Freeman and Gambarato 2019: 2) and the possibility of using it in various studies. According to Ryan (p.c. 2020), a notable scholar in the field of transmedia, transmediality is a rather fluid concept and may be defined in such a way that it suits a given research, provided that it is within the field of transmedia.

Jenkins (2006: 96) has defined, more specifically, a *transmedia story* as one which is developed "across multiple media platforms", where each addition contributes to the world but could be consumed on its own without the need to read every book, watch every film and play every game available related to the story. While it is important to note that this definition is provided with the concept of franchising in mind, it can be broadened to include stories which do not belong into a larger, prearranged framework, but which nonetheless constitute a world where anything could be considered "canon" – as an accepted part of the story. This, admittedly, is a classification not easily made due to it being "highly subjective" (Parody 2011: 38).

The fact that transmedia has been defined "through very different disciplinary lenses" such as literacy, storytelling, and world-building, among others (Freeman and Gambarato 2019: 2), could also be adding to the often-described ambiguity surrounding the term. For example, Wolf (2012: 29) explores the term *world-building*, which, on occasion, can conflict with *storytelling*. Concerning the latter, he says that new writers are often told to "pare down their prose and remove anything that does not actively advance the story", while in world-building, exposition is exactly what helps to literally 'build the world', even though it might

slow down the pace of the narrative. He adds that a storyworld may consist of numerous different stories, but its existence does not have to be determined by any of these stories (*ibid.*), which is a definition that at first glance, the legend of the Holy Grail seems to be compatible with; it has essentially created a world around it which does not particularly rely on one specific story, but it remains a world, nonetheless. However, Wolf (*ibid.*: 30) goes on to add that he mostly focuses on stories in which "world-building generally does not occur beyond that which is needed to advance the story", implying that there must be a central storyline to advance in the first place. In any case, it is difficult to ascertain the amount of world-building that is necessary for narrative progress. Ryan (2016: 4) approaches the term *transmedia world-building* by defining it as an instance where there are many different versions of a particular story in different media, but it is not necessary to consume all versions to enjoy the story. Yet, similarly to Wolf's explanation, the existence of a "Mother Ship" – a version which must be consumed first to properly understand the overall story – is still necessary.

Briefly touched upon in the previous paragraph, *transmedia storytelling* is a concept which, it could be argued, is encountered the most in the field of transmedia. According to Jenkins (2006: 21), transmedia storytelling essentially entails building a world, and it is a concept which necessitates a high degree of involvement on the part of consumers who, by cooperating, can piece together a grander picture of this world, the *Matrix* franchise being the main example he brings. Transmedia storytelling has seen a rise in popularity in recent decades, what with franchised worlds and countless possibilities of spreading them across different media. However, according to Freeman, it seems that transmedia storytelling has become more focused on "corporate ideas of authorship" as opposed to the mostly single authorship of franchises of the 20th century (in Jenkins 2017: para. 12). Nonetheless, while it has been established that much of the language used in transmedia studies stems from the

world of franchising, transmedia practices are not unique to the systematically developed franchises mostly encountered in the USA (Dena 2009: 4), and thus, it is possible to apply this language in analyses concerning non-franchises which are non-medium-specific.

Indeed, both *transmedia* and *transmedia storytelling* are terms which are somewhat open to interpretation. While there has yet to be any widely accepted divisions of transmedia, Clark has proposed a distinction between East and West Coast transmedia. Although he has since admitted that it was largely intended as a joke (in Jenkins 2011a: para. 4), Ryan has taken the opportunity to broaden this idea and has provided examples of what exactly could be included under either subsection (2016: 3). She explains that in the East Coast section, "content is deliberately distributed across multiple means of expression or delivery channels", such as in the case of installations where augmented reality technology, audio-guides and paper maps are used; alternate reality games where players must find clues by searching through websites, emails and even real-life posters; and interactive TV where additional information is provided through apps or websites (*ibid.*). She further describes this as "top-down use of media" and explains that these examples are not considered actual transmedia by many, while the examples included under the West Coast section are (*ibid.*: 4).

The most obvious examples belonging into West Coast transmedia would be "mega-franchises" such as "*Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter* and *The Matrix*" (*ibid.*: 3). However, Ryan goes on to discuss the inclusion of narratives that have not been developed systematically in the form of transmedia franchises, such as "the Bible, /…/ Greek mythology, /…/ Sherlock Holmes, /…/ Jane Austen's novels" (*ibid.*: 4). She even goes as far as to present Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling[3] and explains how most of the

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[3] "Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins 2007: para. 2).

well-known franchises of today do not correspond to it, as they have been developed bottom-up. That is, their storyworlds have been transmedially developed upon a "monomedial narrative" which has already found success previously, and as such, they could be considered West Coast transmedia (*ibid.*). While this kind of division may not seem necessary, it does help to shed light on different types of transmedia and to ascertain the place of the Grail storyworld in this realm.

Regarding the concept of *transmedial storyworlds*, these are defined by Klastrup and Tosca (2004: 409) as "abstract content systems from which a repertoire of fictional stories and characters can be actualized or derived across a variety of media forms". The first commercially produced storyworlds started appearing around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the Western world, the most notable being *The Wizard of Oz* and *Tarzan* (Freeman 2017: Introduction). However, only at the start of the 1980s did storyworld become a "dominant narrative form", some examples including *Harry Potter* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, among others (Pearson 2019: 148). Moreover, the first introduction to transmedia storytelling in the Western world could very well have taken place already in 1740 with the release of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, the first best-selling novel in England, its 'storyworld' consisting of various related merchandise, parodies, and continuations (Prior 2013: para. 12–13).

This leads to the question of whether the world of the Holy Grail could be considered a storyworld, and for this purpose, there are two definitions to consider. Firstly, the description of storyworlds provided by Klastrup and Tosca refers to them as "abstract content systems" which can produce a variety of stories and characters to be used "across a variety of media forms" (2004: 409). Secondly, there is the definition provided by Ryan and Thon, which describes a storyworld as a representative narrative which "transcends media" (2014: 2). Even when considering the existence of a Mother Ship as a criterium for a world

to be considered a storyworld, one could argue that it is necessary to be familiar with the legend of the Grail to understand allusions and references made in adaptations, especially in media where exposition is difficult or impossible, such as art. Moreover, in the scope of the corpora chosen for this paper, Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* could be considered the Mother Ship of the storyworld constructed by his, Beardsley's, and Boorman's works. Although the Holy Grail is not part of an intentionally developed franchise – that is, a systematically developed brand which unravels across various media (Thompson 2007: 5) – considering its transfer between different media, it can be part of a storyworld, despite its lack of medium-specificity.

In order to continue, it is necessary to define the Holy Grail as an object in terms of transmedia. Based on Jenkins' (2006: 96) definition of a transmedia story as being developed over various media with unique contributions from each addition, describing the legend of the Holy Grail as a transmedia story would be suitable. Furthermore, as it has been concluded through Ryan's analysis (Ryan and Thon 2014: 2) that the definition of transmedia does not seem to be accompanied by strict limitations, the Holy Grail can be considered a transmedial object insofar as the world of the Grail can be considered a storyworld. This designation is further supported by the definition provided by Rajewsky (2005: 46) that is centred around the transfer of non-medium-specific motifs, aesthetics, or discourses across media. In addition to this, Kattenbelt's (2008: 23) definition of transmedial change and Wolf's (2005: 253) definition of transmedial phenomena are also appropriate in that they refer to the addition and absence of the basic features of the Grail determined in the next subchapter.

1.1. Transmedial objects

First and foremost, it is necessary to elaborate on the proper terminology to be used in reference to the changes which take place in the transmedial transfer of the Grail. Jenkins (2006: 113) explains that a sufficient number of "elements" unique to the mythos must

appear in an adaptation for it to be easily recognisable as a part of a specific storyworld. Thus, the term *elements* can be used in reference to the visual and symbolic changed in transmedial processes. Furthermore, based on Kattenbelt's (2008: 23) definition of transmedial change introduced earlier, it is suitable to use the synonym *features* for this purpose as well, and these two denominations are used interchangeably throughout the paper.

The idea of the Holy Grail, at least as a chalice with religious connotations is somewhat well-known, in the sense that any drastic alterations would immediately stand out. Thus, it is possible to infer that there are certain visual and symbolic features of the Grail which repeat throughout its manifestations and could not be omitted for fear of the altered Grail differing too much from the widely known version. Taking into account these reoccurring elements, if any omissions were to take place, the explanations behind these could be either *external* – relating to the intentions of the author – or *internal*, signifying contradictory changes in the specific storyworld (Thon 2019: 377), and these are explored as well for additional insight. For example, the antecedent versions of the Holy Grail originated in Celtic myths, where pagan gods are worshipped and magic performed (Matthews 1998: 40–41), while in contrast, in his *The Quest of the Sangraal*, Hawker (1864) approaches the Holy Grail from a religious angle, thus reflecting a change from a vessel related to pagan practices into a religious symbol. Based on this, the external explanation for the modification is most likely Hawker's own piety, as well as his doubt in his contemporary, Tennyson's, capabilities in handling the legend of the Grail (Taylor and Brewer 1983: 87). Based on the visual and symbolic features of the Grail that are established, these changes become apparent and are discussed as the analysis is carried out. To determine these most often occurring features of the Grail, it is necessary to look into the history of the object and its various intermedial manifestations.

The Holy Grail has represented many different ideas in different forms throughout history, depending on what each of these representations were inspired by, as well as the cultures and societies they appear in. It has been a symbol of mystery for centuries no matter its shape (Lacy et al 1997: 77). However, much like there is an important question to ask in the Grail legend, the question of the purpose of the Grail exists outside of the legend as well and is difficult to answer definitively (Barber 2004: 1). Barber (*ibid*.: 3) explains that the Grail as an object as it is more or less known now was created around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Its stories were written for knights – "a new social class" – and through them, "a new set of ideals to create a knightly culture" was developed. Seizing the opportunity, the Church developed its own sectarian interpretations of these ideals, and if all this is considered in addition to the "previously unknown degree of political stability and an economy which enabled the knights to enjoy increasing leisure and even luxury", the merging of "literary imagination and religious ideals" aided the creation of the Grail stories (*ibid*.).

Barber (*ibid*.: 4) says that the time of the Grail romances was one of "huge innovations in a society where tradition was highly valued" and in addition, he suggests that the Grail represents, among many other ideas, "a heated debate about the central mysteries of the Christian faith". This was further facilitated by the Grail developing into "a powerful religious icon" despite not being officially acknowledged by the Church (*ibid*.). As time moved on, the spiritual ideas at the core of the Grail stories became "a matter of bitter and violent controversy at the Reformation", but as they were rediscovered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they were reconstructed according to the culture and society of the times. Ultimately, no matter its different manifestations throughout history nor its religious or secular origins, unattainable perfection for humankind has become its most frequently emerging symbol (*ibid.*: 5).

While the first written mention of the Grail was in Chrétien de Troyes' 12th century romance *Le Conte del Graal* [The Story of the Grail] (1999) – the origins of which may lie in Celtic mythology (Loomis 1949: 335, 342) – it is necessary to give an overview of its history up until its use in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur.* This is especially important considering that one of the major sources for the Grail adventures in his work was *La Queste del Saint Graal* – the French Vulgate Cycle, henceforth referred to as the Vulgate *Queste* or the Vulgate Cycle – which was created as an expansion of Chrétien and Boron's work (Wood 2002: 233). Thus, to ascertain the main features of the Grail to look for, it is important to consider earlier works as well.

The Grail gains the meaning of "the Chalice of the Last Supper and the cup in which Christ's blood was collected at the Crucifixion" in Robert de Boron's addition to Chrétien's unfinished work (Lacy et al 1997: 73). According to Lumiansky (2019: 187), in the Vulgate *Queste*, "the failure of most of the French Grail knights [in the quest for the Grail] symbolizes the failure of mankind generally"; however, he explains that Malory interprets the Grail as a symbol of "the ultimate failure of Arthur's would-be ideal secular civilization". Wood's (2008: 11) discussion on the frequently occurring motifs in Grail romances concludes that the "wasteland motif" appears frequently; some even suggest that the quest could be interpreted as a kind of antagonist to the Round Table, being indirectly liable for "a moral decline" (Lacy et al 1997: 318). All this further corroborates the often-emerging idea of unattainable perfection and the implicit failure in relation to the quest of the Holy Grail; that is, while the Grail is predominantly seemingly achieved, there is always some sort of failure which occurs in conjunction.

While some regard the Grail "as emblem of a secret tradition within the Christian Church" – i.e., as a symbol of "the doctrines surrounding the Mass", it has been debated that the Grail romances can be interpreted as an attempt to fight against the power of Rome "in

the history of the propagation of the doctrines of the church, and to substitute another authority for that of St Peter" (Gracq in Barber 2004: 302–303). Some have equated the quest for the Grail to a quest to recover "the lost tradition" – initiated guardians keeping the Grail safe in an unknown location and handing this practice down – which predates both Christian and Celtic origins (Guénon in Barber 2004: 304, 305). Thus, it is apparently possible to extract secular ideas from the representations of the Holy Grail throughout its appearances and if these should arise in the analysis, they will be discussed accordingly. However, while Malory, for example, is often described as diverging from the exorbitant piety of the Vulgate Cycle he was inspired by, the prevailing religious connotations are undeniable.

According to Morgan (2005: 43), the Holy Grail is not yet "a specifically Christian artefact" in Chrétien's *The Story of the Grail*, but it is placed in "a Christian context" which later authors would emphasise. While in Chrétien's work, the Grail is "a temporary container for the sacred Host", it becomes "the centre of its own religious service" later, and these religious interpretations continue to appear frequently. The Grail is mostly encountered in a procession or "service", carried by a young maiden, but it can appear and disappear "of its own accord" (Barber 2004: 98). Scenes in which it appears often have "liturgical overtones", with the appearance of angels and priests, and the celebration of Mass (*ibid.*), so "the Grail liturgy is therefore represented as the ultimate celebration of the Mass, in which Christ Himself /…/ recreates his own sacrifice" (*ibid.*: 99). The concepts of the holy blood in the "sacred vessel", and purity come from medieval French romances, and these ideas are often replicated in later manifestations (*ibid.*: 283–284).

The Christian "idea of purity" from French medieval sources has heavily influenced later manifestations of the Grail and it has become central to the image of it, further stressing that the Grail only feeds those who are pure (Barber 2004: 284). This was conceived primarily by the Vulgate *Queste*, in which "earthly chivalry" is contrasted with "celestial

chivalry", thus stressing the importance of serving God as opposed to serving "love and /…/ the lady" (Lacy et al 1997: 70). As such, purity implies both moral virtue as well as abstinence and in the context of the Grail quest, these 'rules' become so strict that only Galahad is able to succeed in the quest (*ibid*.). In addition, it is often alluded to indirectly, for example, in the form of the colour white, which has long been associated with "innocence of soul, of purity, and of holiness of life" (Ferguson 1961: 152).

In addition, according to Wood (2008: 11), the Grail is often connected to a King, sometimes called 'the Fisher King', 'the Grail King' or 'the Maimed King'. Thus, the quest for the Holy Grail is often motivated by this wounded king who, in turn, is frequently connected to his kingdom, in that his lands remain barren if the quest does not succeed and he is not healed. To be more specific, the knight questing for the Grail must ask the correct question after witnessing the Grail procession (*ibid*.: 10, 11) – a sequence in which the Holy Grail along with other hallows[4] is carried through a room in which the King and the knight are speaking. While it is never revealed how the question 'unlocks' the healing of both King and land, it does seem to be connected with the blood of Christ in the Grail, and it triggers the healing ability of the holy object to a much larger degree than it has appeared until that point in the quest. Regarding the holy blood, it is seemingly what has granted the Grail its magical nature, and this may be evidenced in Volume I of *Le Morte D'Arthur* as well, where the healing referred to is made possible by the presence of the blood of Jesus Christ (Malory 1920: 71).

The life-sustaining ability touched on previously, and by extension, a food-giving ability are some of the basic elements of the Holy Grail which seem to occur often throughout the stories recounting the quest (Wood 2008: 10; Lacy et al 1997: 318). Moreover, while the Host and the chalice appearing together symbolise "the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross"

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[4] Holy objects which accompany the Holy Grail, most often "a lance with blood dripping from its point" (Lacy et al. 1997: 317).

(Ferguson 1961: 167), it seems that the ability of the Grail "to sustain life" is explained by the "mass wafer /…/ placed in it" every day as well (Lacy et al 1997: 316). All this results in the food-giving ability signifying a spiritual nourishment rather than physical. This reinforces the representation of the Grail as a decidedly Christian object, and whether or not its roots indeed lie in Pagan myths, these Christian elements steer it further away from its suggested Pagan origins, where "cauldrons of plenty" are often described (*ibid*.: 317).

All in all, it appears that the main symbolic elements to look for are unattainable perfection for humankind and a failure therein; religious connotations – most often the connection with the Last Supper and celebrating Mass – along with the idea of purity; the link between the Grail, the Fisher King, and his land; a life-sustaining ability; and a final imperative question which triggers the healing of the kingdom.

In addition to this, the visual features of the Grail need to be discussed. Barber (2004: 93) explains that in Chrétien's work the Grail is "a large dish" from which "a brilliant radiance comes", and which "is made of gold and decorated with the richest of precious stones"; the expensive nature of the jewels is especially highlighted (Raffel 1999: 103). Indeed, the Grail is most often described as a valuable object covered with jewels (Wood 2008: 1; Lacy et al 1997: 316) and emitting or being accompanied by a bright light (Raffel 1999: 102–103; Harty 2015: 99), but it also usually contains the blood of Christ (Ferguson 1961: 163). While the Grail's association with some sort of illumination has generally remained, its physical form has changed into a cup, which appears in most versions following Chrétien's, and is now the main form it is recognised by. In addition to this, the Grail often appears hidden in some way, whether it be invisible (Comfort 2000: 57), veiled by a cloud (Barber 2004: 272), or covered by cloth, which is how it often appears in the Vulgate *Queste*. In this work, the Grail is concealed by "white cloth" once (Comfort 2000: 19) and "red silk cloth" twice (*ibid*.: 228, 244). Thus, the Grail in the form of a magnificent

shining chalice containing blood, covered with precious stones as well as red or white cloth, or some other way of obscuring encapsulates the visual features that could possibly appear in the versions of the Grail quest analysed in this paper. In addition to this, the Grail procession introduced earlier may be considered as well, as it is the manner in which the Grail is often first presented to the readers.

2. THE TRANSMEDIAL HOLY GRAIL

This chapter of the thesis presents the analytical approach and the empirical analysis of the Holy Grail as it appears in three different types of media: more precisely, a written work, an illustration, and a film. The analysis section presents an overview of all three chosen sources – *Le Morte D'Arthur* by Thomas Malory (1485), *The Achieving of the Sangreal* by Aubrey Beardsley (1893–1894), and *Excalibur* by John Boorman (1981). At the beginning of the analysis, *Le Morte D'Arthur* in relation to its sources and background will be studied in order to determine the visual and symbolic features of the Grail that it presents. These are contrasted with the elements demonstrated in *The Achieving of the Sangreal* and *Excalibur*, both of which will also be studied in light of their respective societies and times. Finally, the emerging transmedial changes will be discussed, taking into consideration the social and temporal contexts of each of the three manifestations of the Grail.

2.1. Methodology

Ryan (2004: 33) outlines a number of "methodological challenges" that may present themselves in the case of analysing the transmedial change of a narrative representation. As a solution, Ryan (*ibid.*: 34–35) offers a "diversified program of investigation", which is a compilation of approaches offered by different scholars who contributed to *Narratives Across Media* (2004) with their essays. Some that are especially pertinent for this thesis are the following:

> /…/ Define the conditions under which nonverbal media can tell stories. /…/ Identify and describe narrative genres, devices, or problems that are unique to a medium. /…/ Explore phenomena of remediation, especially the problem of transferring a narrative from one medium to another. /…/ Explore "what can medium *x* do that medium *y* cannot" and ask how media can push back their limits. /…/ Study the contribution of the various tracks to narrative meaning in "multimedia" media. /…/ Ask if the properties of a given medium are favorable or detrimental to narrativity /…/ (Ryan 2004: 35).

Ryan (*ibid.*) suggests that an approach which takes these points into account would be beneficial to both media studies as well as narratology. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, it would be useful to bear in mind specifically the issues which arise from the transmedial

transfer of a narrative, the limitations of different media and how these can be challenged, and the advantages and disadvantages a medium possesses when adapting a narrative. As Ryan explains, narratology would benefit from "the consideration of nonverbal forms of narrative" in terms of a new perspective on its function and would also gain the opportunity to breathe new life into itself (*ibid.*). Therefore, as a definitive methodology is yet to be established in transmedia studies, keeping in mind the previously presented solutions, the chosen method involves data collection, analysis, and presentation.

The choice of works for the purpose of this transmedial analysis has been made considering that the Holy Grail is the main focus of all three – or at the very least, the object at the heart of the climax of each narrative. Furthermore, both Beardsley's illustration and Boorman's motion picture are inspired by Malory's written work. Thus, they each provide the possibility of analysing the representation of the Grail in different media as well as the modification of the transmedial object from one medium to another. What is more, two additional important works which have been referred to previously are occasionally consulted. The first is Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval: The Story of the Grail*, and as I am relying on the translated version, it would be more suitable to refer to its translator Burton Raffel throughout the paper. The second work to be used is *The Quest of the Holy Grail* or the Vulgate *Queste*/Cycle, the author of which is unknown; but as I will be using the translated version of this work as well, its translator William W. Comfort is referred to in citations.

The data analysis section will present a short overview of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* before moving on to collect and systematise the descriptions of the visual and symbolic features of the Holy Grail. This is done by inspecting all references to the different denominations of the Grail: vessel, Holy Grail, and Sangreal. The resulting data is discussed simultaneously and can then be contrasted with the findings from Beardsley's *The Achieving*

of the Sangreal and Boorman's *Excalibur* in the process of a transmedial analysis. This data is analysed in comparison with the predetermined primary visual and symbolic features associated with the Grail, and parallels between the societies and times of each of the three manifestations of the transmedial object are discussed. Finally, as a result of the analysis, the following question will be addressed: what are the implications stemming from the depiction of the transmedial Grail and thus also the perspective of the reader/observer/audience?

2.2   The Grail in *Le Morte D'Arthur*

To begin the analysis, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the story of the Holy Grail in Malory, as most of the examples to be analysed are from the sections of the book which handle the quest specifically. King Arthur announces the beginning of the quest for the Grail, knowing that he will not see many of his knights again as a result of this mission. The Grail manifests itself to the knights, providing everyone present with food and drink, and after disappearing, the knights soon embark on the journey to retrieve it. After having gone through a host of trials, some knights fail in the quest, some die, and eventually, three knights – Percivale, Galahad and Bors – manage to achieve the Holy Grail. While there is one exception which will be analysed, there are many mentions of the 'Sangreal' outside the storyline of the quest as well, but these are limited to just references to it and no additional information is provided.

The version of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* used in this paper, originally compiled by William Caxton in 1485, was edited by Alfred William Pollard and published in 1920. It is divided into two volumes (I, II) consisting of Books 1–9 and 10–21 respectively, the whole work being 970 pages long. In Volume I, Malory refers to the Grail only as 'Sangreal', and that is mostly when referring to the quest of the Sangreal that the knights would take in Volume 2. While 'vessel' is also used frequently and 'Holy Grail' is used on four occasions,

'Sangreal' is how Malory refers to the Grail most often throughout the text. This prompts a question regarding the etymology of the name, especially considering the possible ways to interpret it. Wood (2008: 139) presents an argument wherein the word 'sangreal' is a misinterpretation of "the phrase *sang real* or *royal (holy) blood*". However, it is worth taking both possible divisions of the word into account – *sang real* and *san greal*, as the fact that the resulting compound word has a double meaning provides more ground for analysis. To elaborate, *san* stands for 'holy', which Malory demonstrates as well by referring to "the Holy Grail" (Malory 1920: 232, 235, 256, 331).

Now, it may seem implausible that Malory would have been researching the origins and possible interpretations of the word 'sangreal', and thus, the two possible divisions of the word would not make sense in this analysis. However, after the pivotal scene whereupon Launcelot witnesses the Holy Grail healing a sick knight, he laments that "mine old sin hindereth me and shameth me, so that I had no power to stir nor speak when the **holy blood** appeared afore me" [emphasis mine] (Malory 1920: 254). While the sick knight does say "Fair sweet Lord, which is here within this holy vessel" (*ibid*.: 252), there are no references to blood anywhere in the scene. The presence of the blood of Jesus Christ in the chalice is known, but Launcelot referring to the Grail as "the holy blood" is curious nonetheless and might hint at Malory being at least somewhat aware of the different interpretations of the name 'Sangreal'.

Looking into the Vulgate *Queste* does not clarify the circumstances; in the same scene, Launcelot says "For when I ought to have reformed my conduct, the devil destroyed me by taking from me my sight so that I could not see **anything that came from God**" [emphasis mine] (Comfort 2000: 60). The reference to the Grail is much more general here, and in connection with the chalice, the holy blood is mentioned only towards the end of the story. Thus, Malory makes the choice of referring to the Grail as the holy blood himself. As was

speculated in the literature review, it seems that the Grail gains its abilities because it contains the blood of Jesus Christ, and references to the blood appear throughout the work (Malory 1920: 71, 200, 254). This is further supported by the climactic and perhaps most spiritually significant scene appearing near the end of the book, in which Galahad and his fellow knights see the Holy Grail:

> And therewithal beseemed them that there came a man, and four angels from heaven, clothed in likeness of a bishop, and had a cross in his hand; and these four angels bare him up in a chair, and set him down before the table of silver whereupon the Sangreal was; and it seemed that he had in midst of his forehead letters the which said: See ye here Joseph, the first bishop of Christendom, the same which Our Lord succoured in the city of Sarras in the spiritual place. /…/ With that they heard the chamber door open, and there they saw angels; and two bare candles of wax, and the third a towel, and the fourth **a spear which bled marvellously**, that three drops fell within a box which he held with his other hand. And they set the candles upon the table, and the third **the towel upon the vessel**, and the fourth **the holy spear even upright upon the vessel**. [emphases mine] (Malory 1920: 345–346)

Here, the holy blood is described only as dripping from the tip of a spear, which is later placed "even upright upon the [Sangreal]" (*ibid*.: 345), but the blood entering the chalice is not described at this point. It seems that this section contains somewhat of an oversight, as before the spear is held over the Grail, "the towel" is placed over it, whereas in the Vulgate *Queste*, the cloth is placed next to the Grail and the spear over the Vessel so the blood could drip into it; only then is the cloth placed over the chalice (Comfort 2000: 240). Even for the purpose of healing the Maimed King does Galahad touch the blood on the spear (*ibid*.: 347). This might seem overscrupulous in regard to such a seemingly trivial discrepancy, but considering that the Vulgate *Queste* was Malory's "major source" for the quest of the Grail and he rarely deviated from it (Norris 2008: 161–162), it is a curious matter nonetheless.

Continuing on the topic of the visual features of the Grail, the cup is also characterised by a "glimmering" (Malory 1920: 200) or a bright light emanating from candles surrounding it (*ibid*.: 252, 286, 337, 345), often so much so that it becomes especially inviting (*ibid*.: 251), or even impossible to see (*ibid*.: 337). This is clearly referring to the holy, but also dangerous nature of the Grail since divine objects such as this are not meant to be handled

by just anyone. Despite the blinding light, there are a few times when it is possible to make out other visual elements of the Grail. The only time the actual appearance of the Grail itself is described is towards the beginning of Volume 2, where a maiden holds "a vessel of gold" in her hands (*ibid*.: 178). The Grail is referred to as a cup only once (*ibid*.: 326), which confirms that it is most likely in the form of a chalice rather than a bowl. Besides this, the samite often covering the Grail is described; once it is depicted as covered in "white samite" (*ibid*.: 232), and twice in "red samite" (*ibid*.: 337, 348), inspired by the Vulgate *Queste*, as in "there entered the Holy Grail covered with a white cloth" (Comfort 2000: 19), "the Holy Vessel covered with a red silk cloth" (*ibid*.: 228) and "the Holy Grail /…/ covered with a red silk cloth like a napkin" (*ibid*.: 244). Samite was an expensive and luxurious fabric used in Medieval times, and its use here signifies that the Grail is a precious object not to be seen, much less touched by everyone. However, in the Vulgate *Queste*, the fabric used is silk, samite therefore being Malory's addition, probably done to further stress the importance of the Holy Grail using a material relevant to the era, especially since samite was most likely often used by royals in his time. Also, a golden and luminous Grail is described in Chrétien's work as well, as it has been pointed out earlier, with the addition of jewels (Barber 2004: 93), which is never mentioned in Malory. In any case, taking into account that Chrétien's Grail was most likely more of a dish, this discrepancy is largely irrelevant, and the general idea remains clear – the Holy Vessel is of high value, but still remains mysterious.

Apart from the quality of the fabric, the colours play an important role as well. Red and white are the liturgical colours of the Roman Catholic church and are referred to in the Book of Revelation, for example, wherein the garments of the holy are washed white by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). Delving deeper, Pulliam (2012: 5) stresses that while context is essential and "the meaning of a color changes according to period, place, economic status, /…/ purpose, /…/ audience, and object", there do exist some "general trends" in terms of

colour symbolism. For example, she explains that because "true white" is challenging to produce and preserve, it was "the perfect symbol of aspiration to an unobtainable ideal of perfect purity and innocence" (*ibid*.: 5–6). As Barber's (2004: 284) analysis concluded, the notion of purity in relation to the colour white has Christian origins and most likely stems from French medieval sources. This is connection is supported by Ferguson's (1961: 152) definition, where he points out that the colour white symbolises innocence, purity, and holiness, and is often described as "the color of light". Malory employs this as well, when he describes the pure and chaste knights who see the Grail as "with the covering of white" (*ibid*.: 282).

Malory's use of the colour throughout *Le Morte D'Arthur*, but most importantly in connection to the Grail, certainly demonstrates purity and holiness. While the Grail appears covered in white samite first (Malory 1920: 232), it later appears covered in red samite twice (*ibid*.: 337, 348). Malory does not make the connection between the red silk and the Holy Ghost explicitly (*ibid*.: 290), but this connection is made very clear in the Vulgate *Queste*, where it is explained that "the red silk cloth" signifies "the grace of the Holy Spirit" (Comfort 2000: 146). As this association is shed light on – albeit with the help of one of Malory's sources – the appearance of red samite earlier in *Le Morte* becomes clearer: "an hand showing unto the elbow, /…/ covered with red samite, /…/ and held within the fist a great candle which burned right clear" (Malory 1920: 286). Thus, this is a representation of the Holy Spirit. Red is also considered "the color of fire", which represents this part of the Trinity (Ferguson 1961: 152). In all cases where red samite is described, there is also a disembodied voice which speaks to the knights present, commenting on their progress in the quest, and the voice is, thus, that of the Holy Ghost.

While in the Vulgate *Queste*, the Grail appears covered in "white cloth" once (Comfort 2000: 19) and "red silk cloth" twice (*ibid*.: 228, 244) – exactly as in Malory – it is never

described as being covered by anything in Chrétien's work, and is once even described as "uncovered" (Raffel 1999: 105). This certainly highlights the lack of importance Chrétien apparently applies to the Grail in his work, especially as it is rarely described again, while on the other hand, the Vulgate Cycle makes a point to stress the mystery of this holy object. Taking into account the extent to which Malory relied on the Vulgate *Queste* for writing his work, the reason for the transfer of the white and red cloth is clear. However, the use of colours is nonetheless important, especially if the circumstances of the time are considered. It has already been established that white may symbolise purity and innocence; yet, the change from the white samite covering of the Grail to the red samite covering is unexplained both in the Vulgate *Queste* and in Malory, particularly since Malory utilises the two important colours heavily throughout the work. Looking into Malory's life at the time of writing *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Kaufman (2004: 64) explains that he may have been imprisoned at that time due to partaking in "a failed rebellion" after a change in his "political interests". Namely, he was apparently first allied with the House of York, known for being represented by a white rose, but then changed his alliance over to the House of Lancaster, represented by a red rose (*ibid.*). Even if coincidental, this informs an intriguing parallel between the colours alluded to in the prose and Malory's political leanings in real life. In Malory's work, the Grail remains a mysterious object throughout its appearances under the white samite; later, the red samite covering predicts the voice of the Holy Spirit who either encourages or warns the questing knights at different points in the story. Considering that *Le Morte D'Arthur* is very much "a politicized text" in general (*ibid.*: 63), these examples are at least grounds for speculation, and do not necessarily mean to imply the opposition of the colours in a liturgical sense. In any case, the work could in some ways be considered as a yearning towards an "ideal society" from a reality of strife and war (Barber 2004: 184).

When delving into how the Grail is presented to onlookers, it is often heralded by a white dove carrying a "little censer of gold" in its beak (Malory 1920: 178, 182). While the dove has often symbolised peace as well as purity, it is most importantly used to symbolise the Holy Spirit (Ferguson 1961: 15–16), and the censer symbolises "the pleas of the worshiper" for their prayers to be accepted (*ibid*.: 163). Furthermore, the Grail is sometimes carried by a maiden (Malory 1920: 178, 182, 200), but often appears floating in the air, carried by an unseen presence (*ibid*.: 232, 252), or in a separate room on a "silver table" (*ibid*.: 337, 345, 348).

In order to smoothly transition into the study of the symbolic features of the Grail, it is necessary to consider the final, sensory feature often preceding the Grail – a "savour", or a "sweetness" (Malory 1920: 182, 232, 339, 349); that is, an odour as strong as all the spices of the world combined (*ibid*.: 178, 183, 185, 200, 232). While the use of the word 'savour' to describe smells in general is not remarkable in Malory's time, he stresses the intensity of the odours present both when the Grail appears as well as when describing corpses (*ibid*.: 86, 503). One instance is particularly compelling, where the words usually describing the smell in the presence of the Grail are combined to describe Launcelot's dead body. When the other knights discover him dead in his bed after fasting for a long time, he lies there with a smile on his face and "the sweetest savour about him that ever they felt" (*ibid*.: 503). Considering that Malory uses similar structuring in his descriptions when speaking about either the Grail or those who have died, it may be due to the Grail's association not only with giving life, but also death. In addition, this scene may imply that Launcelot has achieved the Grail before his death, but in order to preserve the mystery before the ultimate achieving of the Grail, this is not confirmed.

The "savour" appears once again a short time after Galahad, who is fated to achieve the Grail, is born. The holy object is not shown yet, but when a dove holding a censer

appears, food is provided (Malory 1920: 182). The smell in the room is not described directly after this, but only after a maiden has carried in the Grail and prophesised Galahad's success in the quest (*ibid.*: 183). The correlation of the Grail with birth (healing ability; Galahad's birth) and death (the "savour" of both the Grail and the deceased; achieving the Grail resulting in death) is therefore alluded to throughout the story. The savour is often described along with the Grail's food-giving capability (Malory 1920: 182, 232, 339, 349) with which it provides food and drink for the characters to sustain them, further evidencing the cup's healing feature; this is also the first description of the Grail appearing in Volume II. When Launcelot is invited to dine with King Pelles, the table is said to be suddenly covered in all types of appetising food and drink before the Grail even appears (Malory 1920: 178).

Perhaps one of the most common elements of the Grail is its healing ability. There is a connection between being holy and having a healing ability: the word 'holy' is derived from the same root as the word 'heal' (*kailo-*, meaning "whole, uninjured") (Harper n.d.). While most of the descriptions of the Grail take place in Volume II, the Grail's healing capability is referenced for the first time in Volume I, Book 2, Chapter 16. There, it is said that the wounded King Pellam will be healed by Galahad "in the quest of the Sangreal" (Malory 1920: 71). After this, when the quest eventually begins, the Grail's healing ability is demonstrated several times. For example, its proximity heals Sir Percivale and Sir Ector, even though only Percivale could see it (*ibid.*: 200), implying that its powers may work for the 'unworthy' as well, although those deemed unworthy are rarely allowed into its presence. This may be an oversight, or it may imply certain degrees of worthiness. That is, perhaps there is an extent to which one can be unworthy yet still healed by the Grail in its presence, which indicates a point past which the Grail does not interact with an individual at all due to their unworthiness.

Another example of healing would be Sir Launcelot being healed mentally by the Grail (Malory 1920: 207, 211), this being the only occasion where mental health in such a manner is mentioned; however, his physical ailments are not remedied, as he remains lying in a bed for weeks due to "soreness". Later, Launcelot witnesses a sick knight being healed, and though he sees the Grail and sees the miracle happening before him, he is untouched by it (*ibid*.: 252). What precedes this is intriguing as well; Sir Launcelot comes upon an old chapel but cannot enter it, although "he had great will for to enter" (*ibid*.: 251), implying that he senses the presence of the Grail. It is not clear whether this a nod to Launcelot possessing at least some degree of purity, or to the sheer extent of Grail's holiness or Launcelot's own astute senses. Then, he suddenly becomes tired, settles down to sleep, and wakes to a sick knight being carried to the chapel. After praying to God, the Grail appears and heals him, but Launcelot is not able to do anything, as he is seemingly unable to move in his half-asleep state (*ibid*.: 252). This could be interpreted as a vision or a dream sequence, but the now healed knight is shown to take Launcelot's helm, sword, and horse before leaving, which, upon waking, Launcelot discovers has really happened (*ibid*.: 253). This implies that the Grail, or the Holy Spirit protecting it, possesses some kind of free will or perhaps a divine self-defence mechanism, not allowing Launcelot to approach it at any cost; indeed, at that moment, Launcelot is still unworthy of achieving the Grail. It is noteworthy that the previously sick knight stealing Launcelot's equipment and horse is mentioned in passing and is not considered a sin in the 'eyes' of the Grail or the Ghost. Thus, the scale based on which the sinfulness of individuals is assessed remains unclear.

One of the final instances of healing by the Holy Grail takes place when the knights achieve the Grail. The Maimed King is finally healed with the blood dripping from the spear (Malory 1920: 347); however, while the wasteland motif appears on a handful of occasions throughout the books (*ibid*.: 250, 251, 317, 327), no mention of the land being healed is

made, whether it would be due to the Grail or due to the Maimed King being healed. In the Vulgate *Queste*, the wasteland is described (Comfort 2000: 143, 176) and is even equated to hell at one point (*ibid.*: 143), but once again, the healing of the land does not take place, or is at least not mentioned. Furthermore, no kind of important question is ever emphasised. In both the Vulgate Cycle and *Le Morte* when Jesus appears to the worthy knights and holds the Holy Grail, he asks Galahad if he knows what it is, to which he replies that he does not, unless he tells him (Comfort 2000: 242; Malory 1920: 346). That, however, is the only somewhat important question that appears in the narrative.

It is possible that more importance is attributed to the purity and piety the knights need to possess in order to achieve the Grail, and the healing of anyone else besides knights or characters who help further the narrative is inconsequential, as is the purpose of the Grail. Moreover, although a lot of importance is ascribed to purity, it seems that it is not so much a prerequisite for the Grail's healing ability as the important question is in previous authors' works. Still, scenes where the knights', especially Launcelot's purity, are brought into question are often especially highlighted. For example, when Launcelot is granted a glance at the Holy Grail after a long period of struggle, he sees it in its covered form (Malory 1920: 337), which already alludes to the fact that he is not yet worthy. In the same scene, there is a priest praying alongside it, who apparently becomes so overwhelmed that he is about to faint. However, when Launcelot tries to help him, the knight is punished with a strong gust of wind seemingly "intermeddled with fire" (*ibid.*). The Holy Spirit's association with fire has already been mentioned, and the being seems to be heralded by wind as well (Ferguson 1961: 94). This obviously points to the protection of the Grail by the Holy Spirit, and thus, it seems it cannot discern between real and seeming intentions and protects the Grail first and foremost. Or perhaps it can make this distinction, and the readers are not enlightened to this fact, as Malory does seem to intend to uphold the mystery of the Grail throughout the

books. Ultimately, as the voice of the Holy Ghost did warn Launcelot beforehand (Malory 1920: 337), he disobeyed a holy order and was punished accordingly for approaching the Grail while not yet free of sin.

Thus, it is clear that the Grail symbolises purity, and only the pure of heart can achieve it. Malory has a character explain that the Christian values of "charity, abstinence, and truth" are necessary to achieve the Holy Grail (Malory 1920: 290). Launcelot's struggle with his sinful nature permeates almost the whole story; he even admits himself that "never did I battle /…/ but for to win worship and to cause me to be the better beloved" (*ibid*.: 255). At one point, a hermit explains to him that he must "hear mass daily" but must not eat flesh nor drink wine in order to achieve the Grail (*ibid*.: 276). After Guenever's death, Launcelot fasts until his last days, and when he eventually dies, it is implied that he has achieved the Grail vision (*ibid*.: 501–503). This is never explicitly stated, however, and whether or not it is true, Launcelot's struggle serves as a representation of unattainable perfection. While the other knights manage to achieve the Grail and it is described as a joyful experience, the moment when Jesus Christ says that after having appeared to the knights, the Grail will disappear from the world, is a much more disheartening one. He says that because the holy object is not respected by the people of that land, "therefore I shall disherit them of the honour which I have done them" (*ibid*.: 346). It is possible to interpret this scene as an execution of "divine election", in that it is not the knights' effort which guarantees success, but a choice of the Holy Trinity (Lacy et al 1997: 318); however, it may instead be another reference to the unattainable perfection often alluded to in Grail narratives, as well as to the idea that achieving the Grail requires individual work. At one point, the Grail is described as "the richest thing that any man hath living", but also that it will cause the fracturing of the Round Table (Malory 1920: 178), foreshadowing the events of the rest of the story as well as highlighting an important failure; the conception of the Round Table is a pivotal event and

due to the quest, most knights of the Round Table lose their lives. This references the failure inherent in the Grail quest, and the fact that the healing of the land is never described further reinforces this, indicating a kind of failure of humankind.

Thus, based on the analysis of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, it can be concluded that visually speaking, Malory's Holy Grail is a golden precious chalice, often glimmering brightly in an inviting yet dangerous manner, and containing the holy blood. It is often covered somehow, either by white or red samite, and it appears in its uncovered form only to the worthiest. Moreover, it is frequently preceded by a white dove and a pleasant smell, after which it is borne by a maiden or an invisible entity, most likely the Holy Ghost. As for the symbolic features of the Grail, it often demonstrates life-sustaining abilities, providing nourishment as well as physical and mental healing to those who are worthy, even sometimes to characters who are not worthy enough to see the Grail itself. The chalice seems to represent both birth and death, but while the wasteland motif does appear, the Grail does not help to heal the kingdom, even though the holy blood is used to heal the Maimed King. Furthermore, there is no important question which triggers any kind of healing, but rather it is the questing knights' purity which may affect this ability. Therefore, purity is apparently the most important symbolic feature of the Grail in Malory's work, and the lack thereof is what causes Launcelot to fail in the quest when he is alive, representing the unattainable perfection which the Holy Grail often alludes to in other works.

2.3 The Grail in *The Achieving of the Sangreal*

The analysis continues with Aubrey Beardsley's illustration *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (1893–1894). When asked to illustrate *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Beardsley, a Pre-Raphaelite artist, had to produce a sample work in order to demonstrate his style to Dent, the publisher intending to publish an illustrated version of *Le Morte* (Morgan 2005: 119). This work turned out to be *The Achieving of the Sangreal*, in which Beardsley "combines Italian

influences with pictorial ideas drawn from the Japanese woodcuts which had become increasingly popular" at the time (*ibid*.). In addition, he was part of the decadent movement, which Denisoff (2007: 33) describes as challenging "Western thought processes" without conforming to a single style or viewpoint. Moreover, Spackman has noted that decadence "emphasises the artificiality inherent in any effort at representation", and this representation does not hide the fact that it is a copy, highlighting its dependency "upon the thing copied" (in Denisoff 2007: 33). Finding "the greatest beauty /…/ at the cusp of a society's destruction" was one of the vital contradictory characteristics of decadence (*ibid*.). However, Lockerd's (2014: 143) description of decadence is particularly noteworthy in that he relates British Decadence to Roman Catholicism and equates it to "an aesthetic of failure" – especially fitting in light of this analysis.

In Beardsley's illustration, the Holy Grail is presented to Sir Percivale and Sir Ector by a celestial being (see Figure 1 for the illustration *The Achieving of the Sangreal*) (Corbeau-Parsons et al 2020: 25). This is referring to the scene in Volume II, Book XI, Chapter XIV, where a maiden "all in white, with a vessel in both her hands" appears to the two knights (Malory 1920: 200). As saints and "other sacred persons" are usually depicted with plain circular halos (Ferguson 1961: 149), Beardsley might be referring to the divinity of the cup and the saintly nature of the figure, or perhaps he uses the halos to signify the light that often emanates from and near the Holy Grail. According to some, however, this contradicts other elements that can be inferred from the illustration. For example, Kooistra (1990: 70) says that the "angelic figure" presenting the Grail could be described as rather "ambiguous", considering her dark-coloured clothing and wings. This is a valid point, as Beardsley's depiction contradicts Malory's description in which the maiden is dressed in white. In addition, the wings are reminiscent of peacock feathers, which could signify unfounded pride and narcissism as an ironic comment on the "chivalric ideal" (*ibid*: 64, 70).

Peacock feathers are a motif repeated throughout Beardsley's illustrations for the book as well as his work in general (Kooistra 1990: 64), the feathers being one of the "emblems of decadent style" (Birkett 1986: 247). He was largely inspired by James McNeill Whistler's work, in particular his Peacock Room (Corbeau-Parsons et al 2020: 42).

On the other hand, while this definition of peacock feathers is supported by Ferguson (1961: 23) in his overview of Christian symbols, it is also likely that the peacock feathers represent St. Barbara. She is the "patron saint of artillery" and is called upon for protection against "accidents and sudden death". (Ferguson 1961: 107). Furthermore, Ferguson (*ibid.*) explains that of all female saints, she is the only one who is occasionally depicted bearing "the sacramental cup and wafer". There is always the possibility of certain elements being added into illustrations just for the sake of art; however, the connection between the feathers, St. Barbara, and the Grail is too significant to ignore. Considering that only a handful of saints are named in Malory's work – and that, too, in passing – the addition of St. Barbara into the narrative presented by Beardsley offers additional Christian symbolism to be interpreted from his illustration. This supports Ryan's (2004: 139) overview of illustrative narrativity, in which a text and its illustrations should expand on the narratives of both, even if it comes at the cost of changing details in the original narrative.

While colour symbolism plays an important part in Malory, Beardsley was a "black-and-white artist, depending on form rather than colour to create character and setting" (Whitaker 1975: 69). Indeed, Beardsley uses shading, tones, shapes, and patterns to offer a varied image, drawing attention away from the fact that it is actually colourless. Whitaker (*ibid.*) suggests that this contrast between black and white could also refer to Beardsley's "ambivalence", allowing him to only convey "the antitheses of good and evil, innocence and guilt, pleasure and pain". Although she adds that this choice of colours was likely due to aesthetic reasonings and less due to metaphorical insinuations (*ibid.*), the decision to clothe

the maiden in such dark colours could still be considered rather unorthodox. The main element that is similar to Malory's is the white cloth with which the saint holds the Grail. While there is a "glimmering" and it is difficult to see the chalice, the white samite does not appear in this scene in *Le Morte* and the Grail remains uncovered. Beardsley may have added the cloth in the illustration to offer a more complete image of the holy object, as this is probably one of the first illustrations the readers see when opening the Dent-published version of the book. It is also the only image in which the Grail appears, so it is possible to view it as Beardsley's sole chance to depict perhaps the most important object in the work, hence the heavy symbolism as well as many of the elements typical to his other work and decadent art in general.

Glancing back at the topic of peacock feathers, both perspectives of these support the storyline conveyed by Beardsley. The peacock feathers may represent St. Barbara, the only female saint shown to bear the Grail, and the characteristics represented by the feathers are present through the whole *Le Morte D'Arthur*, as these are the reasons most knights fail in the quest. In *Le Morte*, King Pelles says rather unequivocally that the Grail will bring about the fall of the Round Table (Malory 1920: 178). Such symbolism is difficult to convey in an illustration without the use of words without it being overly expository; nonetheless, it is possible to infer it. He introduces a unique feature into his illustrations and in the process, establishes its meaning and manages to express a prevalent idea of the book in such a small space without a single word.

Intriguingly, at first glance from a distance, the decorations of the chalice form almost skull-like features. Considering that this is what stands out almost immediately when looking at the illustration, it seems that Beardsley has chosen to highlight the mortality of the quest. Moreover, the Grail is facing the spectator which, of course, is expected, but it is important to note that it is facing away from Percivale and Ector, who are both looking down in prayer.

This could signify the truth behind the Grail and the perils of the quest as well as the Grail itself, which the knights are warned of, but nonetheless blind to. Upon closer inspection, birds appear to be emerging from the Grail, and while it is difficult to ascertain the species, they most resemble swallows. Interestingly, swallows were seen to symbolise "resurrection" and at the beginning of spring as "rebirth from the death-like state of winter" (Ferguson 1961: 26). This could be a representation of the Grail's life-sustaining abilities and the Grail's association with birth, providing a clear opposite to the symbol of death mentioned previously. The achieving of the Grail could be seen as a sort of resurrection for the knights as well. When studying the chalice more closely, a face surrounded by a mass of wings can be found on it; wings likely refer to angels but are also described as symbols of "divine mission" (Ferguson 1961: 46). Thus, this is a clear reference to the quest of the Holy Grail.

Regarding how the Grail is presented, Kooistra (1990: 70) points out the "tongues of flame" surrounding the chalice. In a scene in Malory analysed earlier (see Malory 1920: 337), Launcelot is hit with a fiery gust of wind; this is mentioned fairly briefly, but nonetheless points to the protection of the Grail by the Holy Spirit, considered to be represented by fire (Ferguson 1961: 94). In the illustration, however, once the flames are detected, it is not possible to overlook them; in that sense, the permanent nature of illustrations may prove to be a disadvantage for preserving mystery, while it certainly takes longer to 'piece a puzzle together' which permeates a story hundreds of pages long. Nonetheless, the amount of symbols Beardsley has hidden in the illustration has arguably even strengthened the mystery, adding layers absent in the Grail narrative in Malory's work.

The appearance of features typical to Christianity corresponds to the idea of decadence explored earlier; the beauty found in destruction and failure. The skull may represent the impoverishment of the kingdom as well as the past and future deaths of many of the knights. The halos behind the Grail and the head of the saint, and the angel together with the birds,

on the other hand, may represent purity, holiness, and rebirth; perhaps even the unattainable perfection, as the knights' eyes are turned away from the Grail. This demonstrates exactly how still pictures, such as the illustration at hand, can reinforce the symbols already represented in a narrative and even provide an additional layer of meaning to it.

It is a given, of course, that there are certain elements which cannot be reproduced in an illustration; or rather, they can in different circumstances. In the scene chosen for this drawing, it would be difficult to depict the Grail's functions if not through symbolism. For example, its food-giving properties and healing ability may be alluded to through the imagery of the birds and the maiden, St. Barbara – who, as established earlier, is the only female saint to appear with the Grail and a wafer. The holy blood is a feature of the Grail which Beardsley apparently chose not to incorporate into this scene, but this can be inferred perhaps from the halo accompanying the chalice. In addition, the thorned plants in the foreground may allude to the crown of thorns Christ was forced to wear at the Crucifixion. This is supported by Ferguson (1961: 38), who adds that "growing briars" may signify major sins. Thus, besides the crown of thorns, these plants may allude to the sins committed by the knights who fail in the quest; more specifically, Sir Ector, who does not see the Grail nor the maiden carrying it in Malory, despite being healed by it as well (Malory 1920: 200).

All in all, intriguing strategies can be used when transferring certain elements of an object from a written narrative into an illustrative one. While it is true that it is easier to analyse an illustration which is based on a specific scene, allowing one to make direct comparisons between the features added or omitted in the adaptation, it is possible to add only a limited number of elements without 'overwhelming' the image. The Holy Grail, of course, is in the spotlight. Beardsley has not given any indication as to the preciousness of the Grail, but he signals it through the symbols he has attached to the chalice. It is possibly held by St. Barbara and accompanied by several holy elements: the halo, cloth, many-winged

angel, swallows, and flames imply holiness and divinity which, by extension, reference the Grail's value. These elements also symbolise divine protection, purity, and rebirth, while the optical illusion caused by the placement of the decorations on the Grail implies danger and possible death, which is supported by the ambiguity of the figure presenting the Grail. However, while Malory included the wasteland motif from time to time but did not demonstrate its healing, Beardsley conveys neither. Although the land in the background does seem to be oddly empty, the flora both in the foreground and the background of the illustration seems to be blooming and healthy. It may be, though, that as Malory did not accentuate the ailing, barren lands, so did Beardsley decide not to include this motif at all and draw attention away from what is happening in the front of the picture.

Many of the features such as a life-sustaining ability, an important question, the wasteland motif, the holy blood, unattainable perfection, and failure can be inferred from symbolism, but it is also possible that Beardsley opted to omit certain elements in favour of others. There is a limited amount of information that can be conveyed in a single image and most of it must be done through analogies and allusions. Moreover, it is much easier for the author to explain their or their characters' point of view in written text, but in pictures, it is possible to convey emotion and appearances, the latter being especially pertinent in this case. Malory's descriptions do not offer much in terms of the Holy Grail's appearance, while Beardsley has the opportunity to present exactly the kind of version of the chalice that he likes. In a way, this eliminates the possibility of using one's own imagination, but then again, the added layers of symbolism might make the holy object all the more mysterious.

2.4   The Grail in *Excalibur*

Now, the discussion continues with Boorman's film *Excalibur* (1981). The film is two hours and twenty minutes in length but features the Holy Grail towards almost the very end. In his autobiography, Boorman (2003: 236) has said that in his mind, the Grail cycle

represents "the past, present and future of humanity", which is a metaphor he undoubtedly employs in the structure of *Exaclibur* as well. The film is, in essence, the story of King Arthur from the time when he was conceived up until his death, but Boorman presents the society and time he grows up in alongside his story. He explains that after the emergence of "man", the world is pillaged and devastated, and suggests this is similar to "our present" (*ibid*.: 237). As for the future of humankind, he describes his representation of the Grail as a "feminine symbol of wholeness and harmony", and of unity with nature. Thus, in the making of this film, Boorman seems to have been very much inspired by the state of the world in his time, as well as many works interpreting the Grail quest; among them, for example, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Jessie L. Weston's *The Grail in Myth and Romance*. He elaborates more on the topic of Malory's version of the Grail quest, which he describes as "eccentric but practical" (Boorman 2003: 236). The final credits of *Excalibur* themselves evidence *Le Morte*'s status as Boorman's major source (Boorman 1981: 02:17:44).

Regarding the appearance of the Grail in the motion picture, it appears relatively late in the narrative. It is likely the Grail quest which is mentioned in the first half of the film, when Lancelot says he is "sworn to the quest" (Boorman 1981: 00:59:12–00:59:15); however, the Grail has not been brought up until this point, nor are they on any particular quest. Then, in the last forty-five minutes of the film, the Grail section begins. Namely, when Arthur is injured and his lands fall into ruins (*ibid*.: 01:34:54-01:35:17), his knights go to the sick King and receive the following message, "We must find **what was lost**. The Grail. **Only the Grail can restore leaf and flower**. Search the land, the labyrinths of the forests, **to the edge of within**. Only the Grail can redeem us. Search. Seek" [emphases mine] (Boorman 1981: 01:35:30–01:36:00). When asked where to search for the Grail, Arthur replies "portents, signs, follow" (*ibid*.: 01:36:00–01:36:14). First of all, this suggests that the Grail has been found before, but has since been lost. Second of all, Arthur has knowledge of the

Grail, which is not explained nor questioned here, and finally, the line "to the edge of within" suggests that the Grail might not be represented only in a physical form, but in a figurative one as well. In addition to this, Arthur reveals that only the Grail can heal the lands, and thus, emphasis is already laid on the wasteland motif. Considering Boorman's interpretation of the Grail of as a symbol of femininity and harmony with nature, this may be an allusion to infertility.

To begin with the visual features of the Grail, it is necessary to explore the Grail vision Perceval receives when he is captured by Morgana and Mordred. Namely, he is hanged, and while struggling to stay alive, he faints. Then, a bright light shines upon his eyes, clearly referencing the holy light present in Malory, and it is accompanied by an almost alien-like sound; possibly implying that what is to come is not of this world (Boorman 1981: 01:43:41–01:43:44). Perceval opens his eyes, looks into the light, and it is shown then from his viewpoint, as if the people watching the scene unfold are opening their eyes themselves. The Grail manifests itself, floating in the air, golden and glimmering. There is no procession, but the brilliant light it is bathed in certainly stresses its preciousness, as light is employed heavily throughout the film. In addition to this, it can be seen vaguely that something is dripping into the Grail (*ibid*.: 01:43:52–01:43:56). It is doubtful that this is accidental or meant as a 'trick of the light', and thus, it could represent the Holy Blood entering the chalice.

As it is already known based on earlier sources, the blood usually drips from the spear which pierced the side of Jesus Christ. Considering the conflation of Arthur and the Maimed King in the film, it would be possible to interpret this as foreshadowing, as towards the end of the film, Arthur's son Mordred kills him with a spear. However, where the blood drips from is obscured by the fact that at this point, the Grail is manifesting; possibly referring to the holiness of the action which cannot be seen by Perceval yet. The liquid stops dripping before the golden chalice takes a clear form. Then, the Grail tips and blood begins pouring

out of it (*ibid*.: 01:44:05–01:44:08). Accompanied by the score, the scene assumes a rather horror-like quality, which is also reflected in the behaviour of Perceval. It is possible to interpret this as a defence mechanism, or rather a divine test in which Perceval must prove his worthiness. When a disembodied male voice asks "What is the secret of the Grail? Who does it serve?", he flees in terror (*ibid*.: 01:44:17–01:44:40). The source of the voice is not revealed, although at first, it may hint at the Holy Spirit, what with the presence of red blood; additionally, it has already been established that the mystical voice speaking to the knights in Malory's work belongs to that of the Holy Ghost, so this conclusion would not be unfounded.

In terms of other religious connotations or perhaps the Grail's covering in the form of a cloth, there is only one instance, and an intriguing one at that. In the second Grail vision Perceval receives, the disembodied voice asks him once again who the Grail serves. When Perceval answers correctly that the Holy Grail serves his lord and king Arthur, who is the Grail itself, the chalice transforms into Arthur, standing upon a flight of stairs, a light-coloured veil cascading from his crown down to the floor (*ibid*.: 01:53:25–01:54:03). This veil is the only instance of covering in the film, and paints Arthur as somewhat of a saint or the Grail covered in cloth. This is further supported by a shot from a greater distance, in which the light that accompanied the Grail before is now situated behind Arthur's head, heavily resembling a halo. There is also an instance at the end of the film where Arthur is dying on the battlefield and is shown with a blurred red sun behind his head, producing a halo-like effect (*ibid*.: 02:13:15). The colour red is considered to represent martyrdom by the Church and red halos could be used as symbolic of martyred saints (Ferguson 1961: 152). Indeed, pierced by a spear and dying for his kingdom, King Arthur may be regarded as somewhat of a holy figure. Furthermore, when Perceval insists Arthur drink from the Grail, his statement "you and the land are one" (Boorman 1981: 01:54:25–01:54:27) further

reinforces this, implying Arthur's status as a Messiah. Considering that the true secret of the Grail turns out to be Arthur and the fact that he is connected to both the Grail and the land, the veil covering part of Arthur together with the halo of light or the sun makes sense; it is not just the Grail that is hidden as a holy object, but also Arthur himself. This echoes the interpretation presented by a number of documentaries and books, perhaps most notably Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, wherein the division of the name 'Sangreal' as *sang real* implies that "the Holy Grail is a person not a physical object" (Wood 2008: 139). From this, it can be concluded that the holiness Arthur possesses cannot be inherited, which calls into question the implications in the film that since Arthur inherits the power to wield Excalibur from his father, Uther Pendragon, this also connects him to the land and to the Grail. Still, while Launcelot declares "the King without a sword, the land without a King" (Boorman 1981: 01:32:26–01:32:32), it is noteworthy that he does not refer to Excalibur specifically. It may be that Excalibur and the Grail are entirely separate in a sense; in that wielding Excalibur and becoming a holy being due to a connection to the Grail have nothing to do with each other.

As established earlier, light plays an important role in the representation of the Grail. While it is extensively described in Malory and somewhat illustrated in Beardsley, it is constantly utilised in Boorman to imply some type of holy presence. Elsholz in Harty (2015: 100) has said that for medieval philosophers, light was not as much of a symbol as it was quite literally "the very essence of things and the source of all beauty". Furthermore, Harty (2015: 101) explains that light was often thought to symbolise enlightenment, knowledge, and truth, adding that the "'lights' of the material world /…/ can illuminate the mind, which can then experience the wholeness of intelligible light". The scene in which Perceval is awakened by a bright light shining upon his closed eyes, and then sees the Grail materialise before him exemplifies this, as the light could be interpreted as the bringer of knowledge.

The section covering the visual features of the Holy Grail in *Excalibur* concluded, it is now necessary to explore the symbolic features of the chalice, although a few have been touched upon already. It seems that besides being the bringer of knowledge and truth in the film, light can also be seen as the bringer of punishment, such as when Arthur is suddenly struck down by lightning. This is sometimes thought to be the result of him and Morgana conceiving the incestuous child Mordred. While this definitely triggers the lightning strike, Harty (2015: 102), however, suggests that since Merlin spends a great deal of the film trying to teach Arthur that everything in their world is connected, Arthur's downfall begins due to him driving his sword Excalibur back into a stone and by extension, into the Earth. Essentially, he has pierced the body of the "dragon" – that which represents the unity of the world – which Merlin exclaims as well, as he, too, is suddenly shown with a sword stabbed through his back (Boorman 1981: 01:30:10–01:30:35). Upon seeing Excalibur, but there being no sight of Arthur, Lancelot says that the land loses its King if the King loses its sword (*ibid*: 01:32:26–01:32:32). Since Arthur is still alive and well at this point, Harty (2015: 102) explains that this statement is illogical, but gains meaning later, as the following events unfold.

Afterward, a ritual takes place where all the knights, including Arthur, are present. A priest prays for God to "save us from Morgana and save us from her unholy child", as he raises a cup not unlike the Grail containing some sort of liquid towards the sky. At that very moment, lightning strikes through the crucifix-shaped window and hits Arthur (Boorman 1981: 01:34:27–01:34:32). While it is true that this scene carries some religious connotations, what with the reference to God, the window in the shape of a crucifix, and some kind of rite carried out by a priest, there is a stark contrast as well. The hooded figures officiating the ritual, the darkness in the chapel and a liquid being poured into a chalice which is then elevated bring to mind pagan rites. In addition, when Perceval fails in

achieving the Grail, he asks for forgiveness not from God or Christ, but from Arthur (*ibid*.: 01:45:01–01:45:06), possibly foreshadowing the connection between the Grail and King Arthur. It is interesting to note that none of the Holy Trinity are brought any particular attention to and are only mentioned in passing up until this point in the film; throughout Malory, the knights ask for forgiveness from God for failing, but in *Excalibur*, this is the only instance where this is done, and even then, the apology is directed at King Arthur. At one point in the film when speaking to Morgana, Merlin says that "the days of our kind are numbered. The one God comes to drive out the many gods" (*ibid*.: 01:02:50–01:02:56), and this illustrates the issue with religion in the film. It seems that humanity is at the cusp of a transition, as there are scenes such as Guinevere and Arthur's marriage which seem to carry somewhat pagan-like undertones, and Merlin constantly lamenting the changing times and forgotten traditions. This film may present a time in which Christianity is only just emerging, or it may represent the supposed true origins of the Grail, allowing for a less religious adaptation in general.

Nonetheless, the events leading up to the injury of King Arthur symbolise the unity permeating the whole film, as well as the cost of even one part of it being harmed. When the ailing King Arthur tells his knights that it is necessary to "find what was lost" (Boorman 1981: 01:35:30), the idea expressed here becomes clearer; as he is referring to the Grail, it could be said that he is referring to the unity that they have lost, or perhaps the knowledge of this unity, allowing themselves to be torn apart by conflict. Additionally, this may be symbolic of Arthur losing his purpose or even losing himself, considering the merging of King Arthur, the Maimed King, and the Holy Grail, calling to mind The Parable of the Lost Son – he must be returned home, but has lost the power to do so himself, and thus, his 'holy essence' must be found by someone worthy.

Much like Harty (2015: 103) says that "what is part of the dragon can be driven into its own spine" – referring to Excalibur – so it can be said that what is part of the dragon can be used to replenish it. That is, when Perceval receives the Grail vision for the second time, he is prepared. When he replies correctly that the Grail is, in fact, Arthur himself, he has officially achieved the Grail. Interestingly, when he goes back to Arthur to give him a drink from the holy object – presumably, it contains the blood of Jesus, but this is not revealed – Arthur is healed. The fact that Arthur is shown as both the Grail and the person healed by the Grail is noteworthy. This illustrates the unity discussed previously and connects to what Arthur says when he first speaks of the Grail, that the knights must search "to the edge of within" (Boorman 1981: 01:35:47–01:35:51). It is implied that the healing comes from within oneself. This resembles the views of "New Age Grail enthusiasts", as Barber (2004: 318) calls them, for whom the Grail serves as the prime focus for various meditations and other practices through which it is possible to achieve "spiritual self-healing and a heightened spiritual awareness". In his mind, this goes sharply against the idea of "universal redemption", which the Grail used to be a symbol of (*ibid*.: 319–320). In any case, unity is strongly referenced here in the appearance of the life-sustaining ability of the Grail, more so when after King Arthur's healing, his lands are shown to heal as well.

A sequence follows where Arthur and his knights ride through a grove of blooming trees, demonstrating the recovering land (Boorman 1981: 01:56:10–01:56:52). Multimediality – the occurrence of many media in one object (Kattenbelt 2008: 20) – is exemplified here as Carl Orff's "O Fortuna" plays in the background. This is a pivotal scene which takes place before Arthur and his knights arrive in battle, where Arthur is inevitably killed. This is an especially relevant example as to how film can contribute to transmedial transfer; the addition of the rousing soundtrack in this scene in particular helps to sway the viewers, somewhat. That is, it aids in heralding the battle ahead, but also signifying hope as

well as Arthur's influence and strength. Sound plays an important part in the scene where Perceval encounters Lancelot as well. Perceval comes upon a bleak scene of barren land, a pit of bodies, and a procession of sorts, the people in which wail and cry, resulting in a deafening cacophony. The chaos and misery of the land is plainly exemplified in the noise, which also functions as a distraction from all that is unfolding before Perceval, overwhelming the senses of the viewer. The procession carries the dead body of a child, after which comes a man with a book, and then Lancelot, holding a silver-coloured, yet dull and plain Grail (Boorman 1981: 01:50:13–01:51:20). The parallels between the presentation of the Grail here and in *Le Morte* are thought-provoking, as the actual Grail is heralded by a bright light and otherworldly singing, while a regular cup – albeit symbolising the Holy Grail in that instance – is carried through barren lands in a procession much like the ones presented in Malory's work and even earlier written sources. The use of a decidedly Christian motif in such a depressing scene helps to highlight the holy and precious nature of the real Holy Grail and provides a strong contrast between the two cups. Instead of the Grail usually presented in a mysterious procession, Boorman emphasises the Grail which represents a living, holy being by using special effects to change the image of the Holy Grail into that of King Arthur. This exemplifies an instance which warrants a modification of an object through its transmedial transfer.

In regard to Lancelot, Perceval is shocked to encounter him in such a state. As in Malory, Lancelot seems to represent an ideal throughout the film, an almost unbeatable knight loved by many and seemingly pure; but he falls victim to sin. He goes into exile, Arthur is wounded, and it is implied that Lancelot is driven to madness due to this. Thus, when Perceval meets him again after many a year, Lancelot is bewailing the surrounding death and the absence of God and Christ from the world. When he sees Perceval, he exclaims:

Look at the great knight! Peace and plenty they promised. But what did they give us instead? Famine and pestilence and death. **Because of their pride, and because of their sin, God has left the world.** They made themselves God and Christ has abandoned us. [emphasis mine] (Boorman 1981: 01:50:55 – 01:51:38)

Here, the Round Table – or more specifically, the knights are blamed for the desolation of the world, as opposed to the Grail being the implied culprit in Malory's text and the Round Table fractured due to it. In addition to this, what Lancelot says is reminiscent of the Holy Grail's departure from the world after it has finally been achieved in *Le Morte*; indicating that perhaps the Grail had been achieved at one point but is now lost again due to sin. Additionally, this highlights the sinfulness of pride, which is an element that is illustrated in both Malory and Beardsley's work. This is also what Lancelot himself fails at, as he is always depicted as vain, but kind, and at one point he even swears his loyalty to the quest; yet he still acts upon his feelings towards Guinevere, committing adultery and betraying Arthur as well as triggering the following events. Being that he is depicted as an almost ideal knight, his failure indirectly represents the failure of the quest and the unattainable perfection represented in *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Thus, there is a clear overlap as to what banishes the Holy Grail from the world in *Le Morte* and *Excalibur*. What is necessary to achieve it, however, emerges from the analysis of Perceval. After his first Grail vision, the camera cuts back to him hanging in a tree among many other dead knights, another knight's spurs having almost cut through the rope he is suspended by. In the dream, just as he manages to escape, the rope severs in the real world and he survives (Boorman 1981: 01:44:46–01:44:57). This sequence is an allusion to the fact that he is not yet worthy of the Grail, nor is he worthy of death, as these have a clear connection, alluded to in Malory and Beardsley as well. He then laments his unworthiness and asks for forgiveness from Arthur (*ibid.*: 01:45:01–01:45:06). He continues on his quest and his worthiness is demonstrated as time passes. At one point, the knight Uryens is apprehended, and before his death, he falls to the edge of a river, his face plunging into the water (Boorman 1981: 01:48:36–01:49:20). Considering that later in the film, water plays a

seemingly important role in washing away Perceval's sin, in a sense, this scene with Uryens may serve as a comparison to Perceval. In contrast, Perceval falls into the water, is fully submerged, casts off his earthly armour, and emerges pure.

Yet, Perceval's purity is exemplified best in a scene that takes place before his first Grail vision, which is possibly triggered by this example. Mordred leads Perceval into Morgana's cave by promising him the Holy Grail. There, he sees many of his fellow knights, most notably Bors, who is one of the knights who achieves the Grail in Malory's version. Morgana tries to convince Perceval that "there is no Grail, as these good knights have found; they serve me instead", as the knights offer him a drink from various golden cups. Morgana goes on to explain that "there are many pleasures in the world, many cups to drink from" and promises them all to Perceval. This is where his worthiness stands out – he does not trust her and denies her claims. It is revealed that it was all a vision or hallucination of some sort, and he is taken to hang (*ibid*.: 01:39:40–01:43:03). The point where Perceval may have seen through Morgana's deception is when she says that Perceval could have all the grails he wishes, diminishing the importance of the Holy Grail and enhancing the importance of selfish pleasure; however, she also underestimates Perceval's selflessness. It is not his goal to succeed in the quest because of selfish reasons, but to aid in Arthur's return and the healing of his kingdom. His humble beginnings have certainly aided in this, as on first joining the knights, he works as a squire, attending to the knights of the Round Table.

Much later, after meeting the now maddened Lancelot, the latter pushes him into a river, and Perceval is further beaten down by Lancelot's suffering followers. Perceval sinks into the water and he struggles at first, but when he begins shedding his armour, he is able to rise to the surface, and eventually, he emerges clothed only in light-coloured trousers (Boorman 1981: 01:51:28–01:52:43). The symbolism of rebirth is clear here; having seen only misery and death, Perceval has lost almost all hope, and the breaking point is witnessing

the unhinged Lancelot, once the embodiment of perfection to Perceval. In his Grail vision, Perceval enters the Grail castle with determination, now pure of sin, and answers Arthur's questions correctly.

This highlights the final symbolic feature usually connected to the Grail as well as the Maimed King and the wasteland. Throughout various works depicting the Holy Grail, there is frequently an important question to be asked, but this is not employed in Malory's work. However, it is clearly used in Boorman's, but in an inverted manner, as the questing knight must not ask the question, but answer it. This is somewhat reminiscent of the well-known Sphinx riddle, and the result here is the healing of a kingdom, not unlike the original legend in which the Sphinx does not allow anyone to enter or leave Thebes unless the riddle is answered correctly. In any case, the important question is incorporated into the film to serve as a satisfying solution to the Grail quest, enabling Perceval to use the Grail to heal Arthur and thereby trigger the healing of 'the union' of the world. The lands are shown to be blooming, Arthur goes to fetch Excalibur from Guinevere, Merlin is reawakened, and even Lancelot is brought back from exile and madness. This unity is further exemplified by Arthur's death near the end of the film as he is murdered by his son Mordred, conceived through sin, whom he subsequently murders using Excalibur.

In conclusion, when considering the visual appearance of the Holy Grail, it may seem not to differ much from the version presented in Malory's work; the golden shape of a cup is immediately familiar, and it floats in the air, but the Grail metamorphosing into Arthur presents a stark contrast to *Le Morte*. Firstly, this could be considered both a visual feature – in that Arthur's appearance can be described as that of the Grail's as well – and a symbolic feature, in that the Grail here refers to a part of Arthur that he has lost. This connects to the earlier-mentioned Parable of the Lost Son as well, as King Arthur saying that something that was lost needs to be found (Boorman 1981: 01:35:30) implies that the Grail needs to be

returned to him in order to be whole again. Secondly, the fact that anyone so much as touching the Holy Grail would have been unthinkable in the Vulgate *Queste* (Lumiansky 2019: 190) further emphasises this contrast of a seemingly earthly entity being equated to a holy object. This is especially significant when considering the instance where the Grail is referred to as "the holy blood" in Malory (1920: 254).

On the topic of the holy blood, the presence of it serves as a frightening factor at first, scaring off the thus far unworthy Perceval, but later fulfils its purpose as a bringer of knowledge and truth when Perceval returns, pure and clean of sin. The holy blood is always represented as something to be respected, but not feared in *Le Morte*; rather it is something to anticipate, as it brings fulfilment and sustenance. It seems that the pride and selfishness of humans is the ultimate sin; this is demonstrated in *Le Morte D'Arthur* as well as *The Achieving of the Sangreal* to some extent, but in *Excalibur*, it is further elaborated on, stressing the importance of the unity of humans. It is implied that perhaps it is through this pride that King Arthur loses a part of him. In Malory's work, many different kings are presented as the Maimed King – possibly due to the contradictions between the stories contained in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, resulting in the "seams" of the work often being noticeable (Lumiansky 2019: 15). However, in *Excalibur*, the characters of Arthur and the Fisher King are blended together. The healing ability of the Grail is underscored in the scene where Perceval helps Arthur drink from the Grail. He is healed by consuming liquid contained in the Grail, but as the liquid in it is never quite accentuated, and Arthur stresses that it is the Grail that is the answer, it is logical to assume that the Holy Grail itself possesses this ability. However, the line in which Launcelot claims that Arthur losing Excalibur equals the land losing its king may also imply that possessing the powerful sword is a prerequisite to retaining the Grail. On the other hand, this claim can also be interpreted quite straightforwardly, in that Arthur losing the means to protect himself is the same as the land

losing its King who is its protector. This is especially likely if one considers the second Grail vision Perceval receives, wherein King Arthur and the Grail are revealed to be one.

At any rate, there is a strong connection between the king, the land, and the Holy Grail, as well as the holy blood; especially as King Arthur and the Fisher King are one. According to Boorman (2003: 238), this was done so Arthur could be included "in the final section of the story", and therefore, it brings King Arthur back into the forefront, where he has not been in the two previous works. This is especially important since after the earliest Arthurian legends where King Arthur takes part of the Grail quest, he has been relegated to the position of a side character, the religious journey of the other knights emphasised as Arthur laments the loss of his Round Table. This brings about a kind of 'full circle moment'; by merging King Arthur and the Maimed King, the character of Arthur is once again accentuated simultaneously with the healing of an injured king and the wasteland. This also echoes Barber's (2004: 15) view of the continual use of the Holy Grail symbol as representative of the "cyclical nature of human existence and culture"; while new layers of symbolism are constantly added to the holy object, old ones reoccur and are brought back to the fore according to the ideas and beliefs of the respective times.

Furthermore, while the religious connotations in *Excalibur* remain, the ambiguity of the symbols as well as the whole legend is underlined, allowing for deeper analysis and thus, more research into the background of the Holy Grail. This is not to say that it is necessary to conduct extensive research to truly appreciate a piece. Rather, if a work refers to a known motif, incorporating different elements from different works and media into it, it allows the consumer to assemble a larger and more extensive story in addition to the seemingly straightforward narrative presented by the chosen version. This recalls Jenkins' (2006: 21) definition of transmedia storytelling introduced in the literature review, where he explains that a high degree of involvement of the consumers is imperative to piece together a grander

picture of the built storyworld. Metaphorically speaking, *Excalibur* includes a scene in which it is almost as if the viewers are placed into the protagonist's shoes – when Perceval receives the first Grail vision, the viewers witness the bright light emanating from the Holy Grail first-hand, and like Perceval, are enlightened to the world of the Grail and presented some sort of knowledge or secret they had not been aware of before. As has already been established, the definitions provided by Jenkins and many others used in the field of transmedia are largely derived from studies based on systematically developed franchises, but they can nonetheless be broadened to apply to instances which may not appear to fit under the category of transmedia at first. Even if considering the definition of transmedial storyworlds – that is "content systems" based on which a variety of stories and characters can be produced in various different media (Klastrup and Tosca 2004: 409) – the legend of the Holy Grail in essence could be considered a "content system" from which objects like the Grail and Excalibur, and characters such as King Arthur and Sir Perceval can be lifted and then inserted into a different narrative.

CONCLUSION

The field of transmedial studies is rapidly growing due to the ongoing development of different forms of media. While transmedial storytelling, for example, has been studied extensively and transmedial analysis has been applied in ample studies, they have concerned mostly systematically developed franchises or other fictional worlds with a relatively clear narrative. The Holy Grail narrative is a seemingly clear and famous one; however, in such an extensive storyworld as the Grail's, the possible variations in the features of the chalice are endless. Moreover, considering the far-reaching history of the Holy Grail and its countless adaptations, an analysis into the process of transfer the Holy Grail as a transmedial element undergoes is appropriate. For this purpose, three works were chosen – Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), Aubrey Beardsley's *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (1893–1894) and John Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981) – and these were analysed to determine the implications arising from the transmedial Grail and the viewpoint of the reader, observer, or audience.

Concerning its history, the Holy Grail's origins are definitively undetermined thus far, broadening a background already immense enough if considering one single origin point. While it is not feasible to embark upon a research into its whole storyworld, it is possible to assemble various manifestations of the chalice into smaller storyworlds representative of a single version of the Grail. In such a case, while the versions of the Grail may differ from each other greatly, they nonetheless represent the same Holy Grail in each medium. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to consider the process in which a consumer of a prose, illustration, or film consults different sources, part of transmedia or transmedia storytelling. In a metaphorical sense, when the viewers see the Grail for the first time together with Perceval in *Excalibur*, it is exemplary of the advantages of transmedial transfer; it invites the viewers to partake in the quest and experience it alongside the characters.

It stands to reason that while this thesis covers a single, smaller storyworld – that of Malory's Holy Grail – the adaptations inspired by his work undoubtedly utilise ideas from other works as well, whether it be consciously or otherwise, thus including this smaller storyworld in a conglomeration of storyworlds. Moreover, the Holy Grail is a well-known object, and presenting it in different forms, times, and media could be argued to unintentionally add into its storyworld, no matter the differences between the various adaptations. Regarding the storyworld constructed by the prose, illustration, and motion picture handled in this paper, the Grail manifested in each is essentially the same, but in every case, certain features of it are either emphasised or omitted entirely. The features based on which the analysis was conducted were symbolic and visual. The symbolic elements included unattainable perfection and the failure therein; religious connotations and purity; the connection between the Grail, the Maimed King, and the land; a life-sustaining ability; and an important question leading to healing. The visual elements were comprised of luminosity – a bright light emanating from or near the Grail; value signified by precious materials and some type of covering; red or white cloth accompanying or hiding the Grail; and a Grail procession in which the chalice is presented, either carried by a maiden or an unseen entity.

In all versions, the Grail is a holy object which is desired because of some type of connection, whether it be to Eucharistic rites as in Malory and Beardsley, or to the Grail King and wasteland as in Boorman. Its healing ability remains throughout all manifestations, but while it is testament to its holiness generally, it implies a kind of 'self-fulfilment' or healing through the self in Boorman' work; especially if one considers the idea of Arthur and the Grail being one. By extension, this allows to interpret the Holy Grail as representative of rebirth as well. In Malory, it is often utilised to cure various ailments, whether physical or mental; in Beardsley, the emergence of swallows from the Grail

functions as the symbol of rebirth; in Boorman, Perceval re-emerges from the water anew, as if from the water of the womb. In contrast, it is undeniable that death accompanies the Grail frequently. In *Le Morte*, the wonderful savour heralding the Grail is often present around dead individuals as well, the most notable being Launcelot who is implied to have achieved the Grail vision upon his death; in *The Achieving of the Sangreal*, an optical illusion is utilised to represent the mortality of the quest; and in *Excalibur*, graphic depictions are shown of the knights who have died in the process of the quest. In addition to this, *Excalibur* heavily emphasises the wasteland motif as well, to which achieving the Holy Grail is the only solution.

Regarding how the Holy Grail is presented appearance-wise, it is always connected to saints or virginal women clothed in white. Malory's saints seem to be fairly regular maidens with no allusions to any specific saints, and Beardsley's saint is most likely St. Barbara, if one considers the symbolism he employs in depicting her. Boorman's saint, however, is King Arthur himself, twice depicted with a halo and once partly covered with a light veil; moreover, equating Arthur with the Grail does not only indicate his saintly status, but a more divine origin. This is a fascinating point, as some kind of cloth is depicted in each version of the Grail. Malory's books include appearances of white and red samite, but Beardsley's version, like Boorman's, features a light-coloured cloth. The use of the cloth implies some kind of mystery that must be hidden until a certain point where it can be unveiled, and the use of the colour white implies holiness, innocence, and purity. To further emphasise the holy nature of the chalice, the presence of the Holy Ghost is often declared with the use of the colour red (Malory), fire (Malory and Beardsley), or an otherworldly voice (Malory and Boorman). In the motion picture, however, this voice turns out to be that of Arthur, which suggests the conflation of not only Arthur, the Maimed King, the Holy Grail, and Christ, but the Holy Spirit as well. While this was done mostly due to time limitations and to include

Arthur in the last section of the film, it provides ground for further discussion on the topic of religion. In *Excalibur*, while God is referred to and vaguely religious rituals are performed, there are noticeable pagan undertones. In Malory's and Beardsley's works, however, religion is ascribed more importance; in a decidedly expository manner in Malory, but a more symbolic one in Beardsley.

Thus, as was the case with Beardsley and his illustration, transferring a certain object from a written work into a motion picture allows for different kinds of symbolism to be presented in different types of media; that is, not only can information be conveyed by exposition in film, but it can also be hidden in the imagery, light, and sound. While illustrating the Grail-achieving scene in Malory, Beardsley was able to demonstrate emotions, appearances, and different colouring and tones to enhance his version of the Holy Grail, but the medium of film offers arguably more leeway to present the kind of rendition Boorman wanted. Moreover, film enables the director to adapt many scenes from the original written work, but at the same time, the number is very limited when handling a whole quest. Hence, the Grail section is relatively short compared to the rest of the film, but nonetheless presents the conflict and climax of the work. Furthermore, as the achieving of the Grail was perhaps the most spiritually important moment in *Le Morte* (see Malory 1920: 345–346), so does the Grail section in *Excalibur* present a momentous scene in which the Holy Grail transforms into King Arthur, implying that he has been the secret all along.

Transmediality possesses the obvious advantage of renewing a narrative, so to speak, by transporting it into a new medium, allowing it to be represented through a host of new ways. Not only will this provide a fresh look into the story and help it remain relevant, but it might also attract those who are already familiar with it from its previous versions, and as such, possibly introduce the narrative to larger audiences by further enhancing it as well. In addition, adapting an already familiar narrative enables the authors to reinterpret the events

in it according to their culture, time, and society, and to add new elements to these events; by doing so, they can more appropriately convey important ideas or beliefs pertinent to a given time the narrative is reawakened in, as it has been established in the preceding analysis. Malory's *Le Morte* is undoubtedly concerned with a relatively faithful retelling of the Vulgate *Queste*, and he does convey the piety heavily alluded to in his source; yet, he diminishes the religious undertones somewhat. In addition, he attributes a new name to the Holy Grail, and by calling it the Sangreal, he enables diverse interpretations to be made, whether intentionally or otherwise. When Boorman uses special effects to combine the Holy Grail and King Arthur in *Excalibur*, it certainly offers the controversial idea of an earthly human equating to a divine being, allowing the religious connotation of the Grail to be viewed from a different perspective. Moreover, making Arthur one with the land reinforces the idea of unity and harmony with nature, allowing Boorman to attach issues relevant to his time to this influential object, emphasising them through symbolism. Beardsley's illustration exemplifies the decadent art of his time, the opportunity of illustrating *Le Morte D'Arthur* allowing him to employ elements with religious connotations, but which are also typical to his style and decadent art in general.

Although the notion that it is possible to convey ideas and issues pertaining to specific times through the transmedial process is not an innovative one, the extent to which symbolism and different media are used for this purpose offers ample ground for research. Each medium possesses their own technical advantages and limitations, due to which alternatives need to be found. Beardsley's black and white art style may not allow for the use of liturgical colours which symbolise certain ideas, but by approaching the issue in reverse – i.e., depicting elements which allude to the colours, such as the flames around the Grail alluding to the colour red – the symbolism becomes clear. With the use of music and special effects, Boorman emphasises the importance of the connection between King

Arthur/the Maimed King and the wasteland, as well as the Holy Grail itself. While similar connections can be drawn in a written text, such as Malory equating the holy blood to the Holy Grail in his *Le Morte*, they can be directly demonstrated in a film, allowing little room for ambiguity. Yet, the transformation from the Grail into Arthur still remains somewhat of a mystery, in that how was such a connection created or how it relates to the sword Excalibur, for example.

While the analysis conducted in this thesis is certainly not comprehensive, it does offer a glimpse into the world of not only one of the most well-known and often used symbols, but also into the field of transmediality, the limits of which remain largely ambiguous. The research would definitely benefit from a study from the perspective of media studies, enabling to delve deeper into the advantages and disadvantages of various media and how these are dealt with in the course of a transmedial analysis.

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APPENDIX 1

Figure 1 The Achieving of the Sangreal *by Aubrey Beardsley*

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Eva Jänes

The Transmedial Grail: Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), Beardsley's *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (1893–1894) and Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981)

Transmediaalne Graal: Malory *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485), Beardsley *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (1893–1894) ja Boormani *Excalibur* (1981)

(magistritöö)

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Annotatsioon:

Magistritöö eesmärk on analüüsida transmediaalse Graali ülekannet ühest meediumist teise kolme teose põhjal ning sellest tulenevate tulemuste alusel teha järeldused. Kuna transmeedia uuringute valdkond areneb püsivalt, sest pidevalt lisandub erinevaid tüüpe meediume, on seda keeruline selgelt piiritleda. Sellegipoolest on võimalik teostada analüüsi transmediaalsete protsesside kohta, mida Püha Graal elemendina läbi meediumide rännates läbib.

Töö sissejuhatuses selgitatakse läbiviidava analüüsi tagamaid ning antakse ülevaade kasutatud kirjandusest ja valitud põhiallikatest. Teoreetilises osas arutletakse transmeedia valdkonda kuuluvate mõistete teemal ning defineeritakse töös kasutatavad terminid. Seejärel kaardistatakse põhilised kõige tihemini esinevad visuaalsed ja sümboolsed tunnused, mis Püha Graali iseloomustavad.

Töö empiirilises osas tutvustatakse kolme valitud põhiallikat, mis esindavad erinevaid meediume: Thomas Malory *Le Morte D'Arthur* (tekst), Aubrey Beardsley *The Achieving of the Sangreal* (pilt) ja John Boormani *Excalibur* (film), misjärel viiakse läbi nende teoste transmediaalne analüüs tuginedes varem kindlaks tehtud tihti esinevatele elementidele. Toetudes lisaks põhiallikatele ka muudele teostele, kus on kujutatud Püha Graali, ning samuti varem tutvustatud teoreetilistele allikatele püütakse kindlaks teha muutused, mida Graal ning selle tunnused läbivad. Analüüsi käigus ilmnes, et peale meediumi-spetsiifiliste muutuste esines muutusi, mis tulenesid konkreetse teose autorite enda tõekspidamistest ning aja- ja koha spetsiifikast.

Märksõnad: transmediaalsed uuringud, transmediaalne ülekanne, Püha Graal, Arturi legend.

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