



Volume 29 (2014)

Secret Gestures and Silent Revelations: The Disclosure of Secrets in Selected Arthurian Illuminated Manuscripts and Arthurian Films

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Secret Gestures and Silent Revelations: The Disclosure of Secrets in Selected Arthurian Illuminated Manuscripts and Arthurian Films

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This paper explores visual language and iconic systems central to the representation of the Arthurian cycle in thirteenth and fifteenth century Gothic illuminated manuscripts and in two Arthurian films; its focus is the theme of courtly love and crucial revelations of the secret or hidden. This analysis examines the complex interplay of text and image in selected medieval French illuminated manuscripts, seeking to assess the degree to which they can be compared with the blend of dialogue, soundtrack, and montage in two British productions—the twentieth century *Excalibur* by John Boorman and twenty-first century BBC series *Merlin*. While TV writers, directors are very unlikely even to know the original manuscripts, certain parallels that emerge offer an intriguing look at varying and sometimes quite similar visual and narrative responses to roughly the same material. The essay first addresses the circulation of certain conventions in the medieval images of Lancelot and Guenevere's secret love and divided loyalties, the tension between public and private values, and the gradual disclosure that eventually leads to the destruction of the Arthurian Kingdom. It then establishes a connection with the Tristram and Isold story as a narrative and visual prolepsis of Lancelot and Guenevere's secret love and the concept of shame in certain medieval manuscripts as well as in Boorman's film. The study then examines the disclosure of secrets in the TV series, arguing that interference and interaction between different contemporary media, rather than influence from the medieval images, have shaped new visual conventions.

Secrets and Lies: A Structural Function of Images in Medieval Manuscripts

At a time when costly, lavishly illustrated copies of Arthurian prose romances were flourishing from thirteenth to fifteenth century northern Europe for secular, wealthy patrons eager to possess manuscripts, the tale of the secret love and adultery of Lancelot and Guenevere followed standard, well-established narrative and visual codes with easily recognizable variations.¹ A substantial number of manuscripts with Gothic illuminations favor those archetypal scenes involving the disclosure of secret, the public accusation of the lovers, the entrapment scene, and the judgment of the queen. The same sorts of images were applicable to different texts, forming a wide repertoire of icons which served as mnemonic devices. Such scenes occasionally appear on small-scale decorated initials with particularly dynamic means. For example, in *Lancelot du Lac* the queen is accused by her half-sister in front of the king holding his scepter in one of the three initials of the folio.² In another thirteenth century copy of *Lancelot du Lac*, Morgan surprises the lovers under a tree that represents the wider forest in the limited space of a decorated initial.³ In the *Lancelot-Graal-Mort Artu*,⁴ the initial shows the barons accusing the queen, while in the *bas-de-page* the unframed image displays a hybrid animal wearing a mitre, holding a mysterious object, and blessing an hare in front of him. The image in the margin could be related to the text above and to the initial in particular, the whole perhaps functioning as an allusion to the trap awaiting the queen.

These scenes are also treated in fully painted, larger scale images inserted within the text which allow better access to details and magnify the scene, which surely impressed contemporary readers. The red ink rubric serving as chapter heading or brief summary helps identify the image within its gilded frame. In *Lancelot du Lac*, Lancelot is accused by knights in front of Arthur,⁵ but the scenes of accusations more often concern Guenevere. In a number of thirteenth manuscripts of *Histoire de Merlin*, a plot is directed

¹ Roger S. Loomis, *The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Art* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1959).

² Northern France, 13th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 344, fol. 286v. Illuminations from French manuscripts are available at <<http://www.mandragore.BnF.fr>>.

³ Paris, 13th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 339, fol. 86v.

⁴ Tournai, c. 1320-1330, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 1424, fol. 55v.

⁵ Belgique, Hainaut, 1344, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 122, fol. 23v.

against her.⁶ One century later, she is similarly depicted as accused by an anonymous damsel in *Lancelot du Lac*.⁷ Arthur discovers compromising paintings by Lancelot in the section from *Lancelot* in prose, *La mort le roi artu*.⁸ The couple at times also appears together in a close embrace, for example when surprised by Morgane in the forest in *Lancelot du Lac*.⁹ Public occasions like banquets are ideal scenes of accusation: the lovers whisper together while Arthur is engaged in conversation with his barons possibly preparing a plot in *Lancelot du Lac* (2),¹⁰ while Mordred accuses the queen publicly in *Morte Artu*.¹¹

Two late fifteenth century French manuscripts commissioned by Jacques d'Armagnac provide particularly rich and varied examples of the disclosure of secrets.¹² One is a vast compilation of the entire Arthurian legend, including the main episodes from the Tristan legend, known as *Messire Lancelot du Lac*.¹³ Another is the fourth volume from the monumental cycle *Lancelot-Graal*.¹⁴ These impressive manuscripts emphasize the dichotomy between private/public places of unfolding secrets (the bedroom vs. the court), but entail different forms of disclosure. It can be partial (the audience limited to a group of knights or the king), indirect (a compromising painting within the painting indirectly revealing the secret), or direct (the secret publicly revealed after a conspiracy, an entrapment scene, or in public judgment). The illuminations highlight the values of courtly love as well as the conflicting aspect of public and private values. Truth, the main medieval virtue, is not easy to reveal, which has contradictory consequences as secret means divide, and separate (from Latin *secretum* / *secernere*). Revelation brings about shame and “noise,” the destruction of fame, violence, and the shattering of the Arthurian kingdom.

The disclosure of secrets tends to be gradual, artificially maintaining suspense and creating conflicting loyalties while avoiding direct confrontation. In the medieval manuscripts, the reader can follow the disclosure of secrets merely inspecting the inserted illuminations, their strategic placement and the interplay between image and text. There is a direct link between the miniature and the text, as well as with the red ink rubric above or below the image providing introductory lines. Alternating with richly illuminated scenes of battle, the final episodes of the cycle run from partial bedroom disclosure to public revelation in court.

In *Messire Lancelot du Lac* (ms. fr. 112), four illuminations are particularly significant. Agravain first denounces Lancelot (« *comment agravains dist au roy artus que lancelot aimoit la royne genievre de folle amour* ») (fol. 183) [Fig. 1]. A few pages later, Arthur discovers Lancelot's paintings in Morgana's castle (« *comment le roy artus trouva en la chambre de morgrain l'histoire de lancelot dont il se doubta fort de l'amour de la royne genievre et de lancelot* ») (fol. 193v). Then Lancelot and Guenevere are surprised in bed (« *comment lancelot fut trouve couche avecques la royne genievre et se delivra de trente chevaliers qui le vouloient bailler au roy artus pour en prandre vengeance* ») (fol. 203v), and the judgement of Guenevere takes place on the very next folio (« *comment la royne genievre fut jugee par mordret à estre brulee pour la grant desloyaulte qu'elle avoit fait au roy artus son seigneur* ») (fol. 204). The narrative has slowly moved from Agravain's revelation to the king to Arthur's silent discovery of Lancelot's paintings in Morgain's castle (fols. 183-193v), accelerating to bring the reader from the

⁶ Flanders, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 749, fol. 267; northern France, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 19162 fol. 293; northern France, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 24394, fol. 221v.

⁷ Paris, 14th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 1699, fol. 214.

⁸ France, 1470, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 116, fol. 688v.

⁹ Poitiers, 1480, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 111, fol. 109.

¹⁰ England, Pleshey, c. 1360-1380, British Library, Royal 20 D IV fol. 1.

¹¹ Northern France, 14th c., British Library, Royal 14 E III, fol. 89, fol. 152v.

¹² Jacques d'Armagnac, duke of Nemours, had a vast library, which he partly inherited and partly ordered, showing his taste for Arthurian romances in particular. He ordered the copy and illumination of six Arthurian manuscripts. See Thierry Delcourt, *Le roi Arthur et les chevaliers de la Table ronde* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'image, 2009), 10-14.

¹³ France, c. 1470, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 112 (3).

¹⁴ France, c. 1470, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 116.

entrapment scene to Guenevere's judgment (fols. 203-204v), thus enhancing the narrative dramatic tension.



Fig. 1. ms. fr. 112, fol. 183, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

Indirect representation is particularly interesting with the king's silent contemplation of images within the image. Lost in the forest, Arthur finds refuge in the marvelous castle of his sister Morgana and sleeps in the very room where Lancelot had been held prisoner. He discovers the paintings that clearly disclose the stages of Lancelot and Guenevere's adulterous love, confirming the former accusations by Agravain. In ms. fr. 112 (fol. 193v) [Fig. 2] the scene appears on the left corner of the folio in the two-column layout, a less than valorized position compared with the central, full-page images of battles or tournaments in this manuscript; the binary opposition between hiding secrets and celebrating public fame is clear. The image is divided into two spaces. To the left, Arthur stands alone looking at the painted wall to the right, while the rectilinear plane contrasts with the slight perspective of the chamber. The vertical line that separates the king from the painted wall figures the violation of limits and the disclosure of the secret. He seems to be crushed between the ceiling, the pavement, and the painted wall. His open right hand is conventionally held up in surprise and emotion, while his left hand is directed to the ground, a gesture generally identified as passivity.¹⁵ The king wears a golden costume bordered with ermine to highlight his kingly position, as gold is often reserved for painting the supreme or the divine. The figure of the king is set on a pattern of blue squares (the tiled pavement), which recalls the sky out of the barred window. In a former illumination (fol. 183, Fig. 1), he wears a blue costume bordered with ermine, as if set in relief on a red wall. Costly, bright pigments for gold, red, and blue are appropriate, reserved as they were for characters of high rank or revered figures.¹⁶ As of the thirteenth century, blue had become an attribute of kings, from the King of France Saint Louis to Henri II and even the imaginary King Arthur in manuscripts.¹⁷

¹⁵ François Garnier, *Le Langage de l'image au Moyen Âge*, vol 1, *Signification et symbolique* (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1984), 216.

¹⁶ Bright, divine, stable colors obtained with finest pigments represented divine beauty and were organized in a hierarchical order that reflected the wealth of the commissioners (Jacques d'Armagnac here). See Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 139.

¹⁷ The promotion of blue as of the twelfth century moves from the blue of the Virgin Mary to the regal color. See Michel Pastoureau, *Bleu, Histoire d'une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 49-62.



(Left) Fig. 2 ms. fr. 112, fol. 193, Paris, BnF, © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

(Right) Fig. 3 ms. fr. 116, fol. 688v, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

A similar image can be found in the *Lancelot* illuminated by Evrard d’Espinques and his collaborators (ms. fr. 116, fol. 688v). The foliate border surrounding the miniature is richly decorated with conventional patterns adorned with gold, as is the case in most illuminated pages of the manuscript [Fig. 3]. The rubric confirms: « *comment le roy artus vint herberger chez morgain la fee sa seur et elle luy monstra la chambre où lancelot avoit peintes les premieres acointances de luy et de la royne genievre* ». Morgain here plays the part of the “bad counselor” standing behind the king, whispering to him. Proximity between a character and the king in a medieval image suggests perfidious unreliability, whereas a good counselor should stand at a distance, beside or in front of the king.¹⁸ Drawing the monarch’s attention to the frescoes, Morgain points her index finger at the object of accusation in a gesture that conventionally signals covetousness and envy.¹⁹ Indeed for sheer jealousy she explains how Galehaut has helped the lovers and how Lancelot has painted the frescoes on the walls, and then encourages Arthur to avenge himself as soon as he catches them red-handed. Arthur’s hands in the image show his acceptance of the message (one open hand held up), as well as his passivity and embarrassment (his other arm and hand directed to the ground). The fact that the king is seen in profile—very unlikely elsewhere as the dignified position of a king usually entails a frontal gaze—is not necessarily significant here, as it might have been dictated by the organization of the scene and the fact that the frescoes are the focus of the king’s (and viewer’s) gaze.

The king wears a golden crown and a dark costume with ermine. Black is ambivalent as it evokes the king’s dignity, virtue, and authority, following the rise of black costumes for princes and kings from the end of the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century. But it also symbolizes sadness and death, as the scene announces the impending death of chivalry.²⁰ The bright touches of red and blue reserved for Morgain give her the appearance of power, and her high rank is underlined, rather than her wicked magic (she was painted green in most illuminated manuscripts from the fourteenth century, as we shall see later).

The drawings on the wall themselves represent complex, self-reflexive images. The whole wall is outlined in ms. fr. 112, showing in the upper part three scenes of courtship with characters standing, and below, scenes of battle that recall the courtly achievements of Lancelot. The hole created by the window interrupts them, like an internal frame that relieves the king’s painful vision. In ms. fr. 116, the finely

¹⁸ Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 107.

¹⁹ Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 166-167.

²⁰ Michel Pastoureau, *Noir, Histoire d’une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 100-105.

etched shades of grey signal the separate iconic space of the painting within the painting, a technique that precludes any confusion between the different spaces.²¹ Only the upper part of the wall is outlined, but with more detail and refinement: the two characters are sitting with one arm surrounding the other's body (left); Lancelot is kissing Guenevere in a close embrace (central); Lancelot is kneeling in front of the queen who displays her affection with her hand resting on her champion's shoulder (right). Such gestures of possession and passion work both ways here, offering a harmonious, passionate aspect of courtly love. The mere discovery of the frescoes immediately convinces Arthur of the necessity to avenge himself, which he is encouraged to do by Morgain before the entrapment scene takes place.

The final entrapment scene of the lovers in the romances confirms the former instances involving an innocent queen, like that of the Blood Stained Bed or the Poisoned Fruit, when the queen is accused of betraying the king but is technically not guilty of the charge (ms. fr. 112, fol. 196v). In the entrapment scene (fol. 203v), the image in the middle of the right column is richly adorned with a large frame of foliate and flower patterns in the margins [Fig. 4]. The image is divided into two spaces of unequal dimensions. To the left (3/4 of total space), the couple in close embrace in a red canopied bed occupies the whole space of the bedroom; this is a commonplace motif, an almost exact replica of fol. 115 in this manuscript, where Arthur himself conceives a son with a damosel. Including the use of the rich color red, the parallel tends to equal the two couples that exemplify courtly love. The enclosed architectural space of the room has an artificially transparent wall through which the reader can see. The canopy of the bed redoubles the intimacy of the bed for protection and the blanket further hides the bodies, only showing two heads touching one another. In the limited space to the right (1/4 of total space) a threatening knight in full armor stands in the foreground while in the upper right corner, an army of knights figured by their helmets follow him. The knight's dynamic, aggressive position comes from his uplifted foot across the threshold as he steps into the room, thus crossing the metaphorical frontier of secrecy. Along with the vertical lines of the open door, they represent a “*situation sécante*” (separating situation),²² severing both visually and symbolically private and public spaces. The knights' dangerous promiscuity and movements clearly endanger the realm as the proportions bespeak the importance of secrecy.



(Left) Fig. 4. ms. fr. 112, fol. 203, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

(Right) Fig. 5. ms. fr. 112, fol. 204v, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

Guenevere's judgment signals the public revelation of secrecy and precipitates the overthrowing of the Arthurian kingdom. In ms. fr 112 (fol. 204) [Fig.5], the illumination in the upper right corner of the folio

²¹ Pastoureau, *Noir, Histoire d'une couleur*, 106.

²² Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 95.

is adorned with a foliate margin. Dressed in regal blue, the king sits on a throne hung with red. His uplifted hand traditionally represents the delivery of justice and the return to order, while his straight finger exemplifies authority and commandment.²³ Guenevere is held close by Mordred (to the left), and a guard (in the middle) both accuses her and requests the king to judge her, as his left hand in such a context makes clear.²⁴ The queen holds her two hands, a gesture of dramatic importance which shows a character incapable of acting.²⁵ Interestingly, the illuminator has painted in exactly the same blue gown with golden motives as he has painted Isoud's in certain earlier illuminations, enhancing through the visual parallel the equally perfect, yet secret and tragic love of Tristram and Isolde, and perhaps the impending doom of the Arthurian world.

The Tristram and Isolde link in Boorman's Excalibur

Perhaps as if to avoid any direct revelation of a particularly taboo relationship, the story of Tristram and Isolde in juxtaposed tales could be seen as prolepses to the final revelation of Lancelot and Guenevere's adultery in the French manuscripts. These well-known episodes of ill-fated love unfold with the same conventional compression of time. In ms. fr. 112 the illuminations inserted in the manuscript [fols 144-145] reinforce the dramatic impact of the text, following the narrative acceleration that almost juxtaposes King Mark's entrapment of the lovers (« *comment tristan vint en cornouaille et le navra à mort le roy marc en trayson* ») (fol. 144) [Fig. 6] and their death (« *comment messire tristan et la royne yseult morurent bras à bras dont le roy marc fit grant dueil* ») (fol. 145). The choice of color clarifies the narrative parallel, as Yseult and Guenevere wear a similar blue gown adorned with golden motives (Fig. 5). Blue, red and gold had a particularly advantageous status from the thirteenth century on, as we have seen previously, visually valorizing the lovers. In fol. 145, the bed taking up the whole space is painted in the costly *minium* red pigment—a color emphasizing passion,²⁶ perhaps infusing in the Lancelot and Guenevere relationship something of the absolute myth of eternal love that the Tristram and Isolde myth has come to represent in Western culture.²⁷ The character of Isolde also provides an ambiguous counterpoint and, arguably, a complementary aspect to the adulterous sovereign Guenevere, in accordance with the latter's mythical model—the Celtic magician Gwenhyvar.²⁸



²³ Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 166-167.

²⁴ François Garnier, *Le Langage de l'image au Moyen Âge*, vol 2, *Grammaire des gestes* (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1988), 112-115.

²⁵ Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 198.

²⁶ Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, 15-133; Philip Ball, *Bright Earth, Art and the Invention of Colour* (London: Penguin, 2001), 290-297.

²⁷ Denis de Rougemont, *L'amour et l'occident* (Paris: Plon, 1938-72), 251.

²⁸ Sandra Gorgievski, "Guenièvre avec ou sans Iseult? Deux figures mythiques féminines de la souveraineté chez Sir Thomas Malory et quelques résurgences modernes," in *La complémentarité: Mélanges en l'honneur de J. Bidard et A. Sancery*, ed. M.-F. Alamichel (Paris: AMAES, 2005), 89-98.

(Left) Fig. 6. ms. fr. 112, fol. 144, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

(Right) Fig. 7. ms. fr. 100, fol. 91, Paris, BnF © <http://gallica.BnF.fr>

The numerous manuscripts telling the tale of Tristram and Isolde have no doubt contributed to create and confirm the conventions of the entrapment scene as they flourished in the fifteenth century. In *Tristan de Leonois* manuscripts, Mark surprises the lovers at the gates of the castle and threatens to kill them with his sword,²⁹ holding his sword above their heads.³⁰ He is at times represented spying on them from the top of a tree³¹ or while they are at bed.³² This iconic scene was represented in the fourteenth century manuscript of particularly rich illumination *Livre de Tristan et de la royne Yseult de Cornouaille et le Graal*.³³ The framed illumination is isolated—whereas many folios show chronological episodes in two or four images on the very same page—thus creating an impression of narrative slowdown. This complex image shows two successive moments including the entrapment scene in the castle (to the left: 2/3 of the total space) and Tristan’s escape and imminent flight into the forest (to the right: 1/3 of the total space), as the rubric makes clear (« *comment le roy march trouva tristan en la chambre la royne et comment tristan se party par mal talent de court* ») [Fig. 7].

In the castle, the chronological reading from top to bottom shows the entrapment scene first with Mark’s protruding, crowned head spying, and his threatening hand stretched across the partition of the wall that separates him from the bedroom. The wall figures the frontier and the disclosure of secret in the room where Tristan is seen kissing Yseult (her head easily recognizable with its gilded crown). Below, a group of “moving” characters can be seen with uplifted feet and hands held up in agitation. Chronologically, they might be Mark and his companions stepping into the castle, or a group of men watching Tristan flee on his horse after the entrapment. The text partially throws light on the image as Mark is said to come with his companions, Tristan discusses means of escape with his own companions, and Mark brings a hundred armed men to pursue Tristan into the forest.

In the center of the miniature, Tristan rides between the castle and the forest, the civilized and the savage, an uncertain position figured by the door’s black hole replicated in the engulfing dark canopy of the trees. This is a commonplace motif in this manuscript where knights are often painted eloping with ladies (fols. 12v, 47, 89, 126v). The horse’s dynamic uplifted feet suggest rapid flight. Tristan’s backwards looks and head in pronounced rotation suggest that he is either escaping from the knights’ aggression or encouraged to leave by his companions. His stiff right arm sent backwards conventionally bears both a physical and a moral sense.³⁴ The knight is watching his former life with a sense of guilt, fleeing the weight of his past life and his fault. The characters and the castle are sketched in uniformly shaded grey, and only the natural elements—the blue sky, the green forest, the yellow earth—are highlighted.

After a long period of disappearance of Arthurian romances and their repertoire of images from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century’s Arthurian revival—especially in Pre-Raphaelite painting and Beardsley prints³⁵—the metamorphosis of images entails a conflation of both medieval and contemporary icons. In his film *Excalibur* (1981), John Boorman stages the entire legend, from the sword in the stone to the kingdom’s downfall.³⁶ As if borrowing from the many visual and narrative influences of medieval romances, he interestingly weaves into the gradual disclosure of Lancelot and Guenevere’s secret love elements that evoke the Tristram and Isolde myth, in order to enhance the tragic downfall of

²⁹ France, c.1470, Paris, BnF, ms. fr.102, fol. 64v.

³⁰ Paris, 15th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 97, fol. 56v.

³¹ France, 15th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 97, fol. 279; Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 340, fol. 128.

³² Paris, 15th c., Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 100-101, fol. 91.

³³ France, 1301-1400, Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 100, fol. 91.

³⁴ Garnier, *Signification et symbolique*, 147.

³⁵ Elisabeth Brewer and Beverly Taylor, *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Literature since 1800. Arthurian Studies IX* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1983).

³⁶ *Excalibur*, directed by John Boorman (1981; Ireland: Warner Bros., 1981), DVD.

Arthur's kingdom. He perhaps also borrows from the English tradition issued from Sir Thomas Malory's printed *Le Morte D'Arthur* (1485) that incorporates the Tristram section directly into the Arthurian narrative—contrary to Malory's French sources which juxtapose separate tales.³⁷ The Tristram section functions as parallel motive to the Lancelot and Guenevere relationship, working through comparison and allusion so that the reader is constantly made aware of the progression of the secret love between Lancelot and Guenevere through a series of letters, magic tests, and exchange of tokens also involving Tristram and Isolde.³⁸ Beset by secret meetings and tragedy, the ill-fated character of both couples' love is implicit through the structure of the narrative.

The soundtrack of the film reinforces the film's evocation of the myth of eternal love thanks to the use of excerpts from Richard Wagner's Prelude to his opera *Tristan und Isolde*. The Prelude plays each time Lancelot (Nicholas Clay) and Guenevere (Cherie Lunghi) meet. During their first encounter at Leondegrance's castle, the tragic crescendo of the strings corresponds to the climactic love-at-first-sight looks filmed in close-ups and reverse shots. Guenevere's face appears in a high-angle shot standing in the staircase while Lancelot is seen in low angle shot, as if kneeling in front of her. The same extract sounds equally prophetic when he escorts the future queen through the forest. Bars from the Prelude accompany his refusal of Arthur's invitation to stay at Camelot because of the queen's presence. During the ensuing banquet scene at the Round Table, Morgana (Helen Mirren) publicly denounces Lancelot's absence as proof of his secret affair with the queen ("driven by a woman's desire"). This public disclosure provokes Guenevere's passionate flight to meet her lover. The camera pans to a long travelling shot as she rides through the forest to the sound of Wagner's Prelude. The musical tension culminates in passionate reunion, embrace, and love-making. Whether part of the audience's cultural background or not, the Wagnerian piece bespeaks of love and tragedy.

The director also conflates the myth of Tristram and Isolde with the entrapment of Lancelot and Guenevere in a direct borrowing from the French *Tristan* texts. The king surprises the lovers in the utopian shelter of the forest where the lovers go into voluntary exile, in accordance with the iconographic conventions of illuminated manuscripts. Playing the part of King Mark, Arthur (Nigel Terry) takes them unawares at night while they are sleeping naked on the ground. Renouncing to slay them, he embeds his own sword between the two bodies. Contrary to Mark—who interprets the presence of Tristan's sword separating the lovers as a sign of their innocence—Arthur finds Lancelot and Guenevere in a close embrace with no sword separating them. He embeds his own sword as a sign of their fault as well as of forgiveness [Fig. 8].

³⁷ Charles Moorman, "Courtly Love in Malory," *English Literary History* 27 (1960) 163, n.1, 172-174.

³⁸ Isoud writes to Guenevere (8.31) while Tristram writes to Lancelot (9.5). Morgan le Fay sends a magic horn to test Guenevere's loyalty but Isoud is eventually put to the test (8.34). They exchange rings (8.12; 20.4), and Isoud writes to Guenevere that there are within the world but four lovers (8.31). The references are to William Caxton's edition. See Sandra Gorgievski, "The Arthurian Legend in the Cinema," in *The Middle Ages after the Middle Ages*, ed. M.-F. Alamichel and Derek Brewer (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), 153-66.



Fig. 8. Lancelot (Nicholas Clay), Guenevere (Cherie Lunghi), *Excalibur* @ John Boorman, Orion Pictures

Boorman also succeeds in establishing a connection between Tristram's sense of guilt when fleeing to the forest after the entrapment scene (as seen in the *Livre de Tristan et de la royne Yseult de Cornouaille et le Graal*) and that of Lancelot. The latter departs from the court even before the public revelation of his secret love. Here the director achieves a careful balance between the French tradition which discloses the characters' inner feelings and thoughts, and the English one, which emphasizes a biased presentation of the accusers in scenes of public disclosure, thus victimizing the lovers. In *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Malory departs from his French sources, showing Arthur's reluctance to recognize Lancelot and Guenevere's guilt.³⁹ Meleagaunt (Book XIX), Mordred, Gawain, and his companions (Book XX) are presented as unscrupulous, heinous knights spying constantly over the queen. They are perceived as the guilty ones who break the silence, creating awful "noise" (emblematic of shameful action), and bringing scandal to the Arthurian world. In a shame-motivated society which relies on shame and honour more than on guilt and innocence, the disclosure of a secret leading to the public recognition of evil endangers the very stability of the kingdom perhaps more than the adultery itself.

Such complex presentations revive a medieval conception of evil: as law circumscribes the experience of sin to the public domain, only what is recognized and judged as such is considered actually faulty. Evil relies on the distinction between the public avowal of one's committed sin and the private consciousness of committed or intended sin—the Western sense of guilt which is central to the contemporary era. The Arthurian world of romances is ruled by reputation and honour more than by spiritual values—a shortcoming that the failure of the Grail Quest severely underlines; but Lancelot and Guenevere's secret is tolerated so long as it does not, at least apparently, endanger the reputation of the kingdom.⁴⁰ The visual and narrative conventions to represent the unfair or tragic disclosure of secret at the expense of the good reputation of the kingdom arguably stem from the opposition between the public domain of justice (ordeals, judgments) and the private domain of moral conscience.

In *Excalibur*, a new problematic revelation responsible for the downfall of the kingdom is Merlin's disclosure of his magical secrets to Morgana. The traditional episode of Merlin's entrapment by the damosel of the Lake (*Le Morte D'Arthur*, Book IV, 1) or by Vivienne in the continental tradition, and his

³⁹ In spite of Morgan Le Fay's repeated warnings (Book 6), Arthur will not hear of this secret, and after the entrapment, even laments that the dissension caused by the accusers is worse than the queen's judgment because he has lost his companions (Book 20.10).

⁴⁰ Sandra Gorgievski, *Le mythe arthurien, de l'imaginaire médiéval à la culture de masse* (Liège: Céfal, 2003).

disappearance from Arthur's court are postponed to coincide with the entrapment of Lancelot and Guenevere. As the magic sword Excalibur is embedded by Arthur between the lovers' bodies, the link between the king and his kingdom is severed, unleashing uncontrollable forces. Lancelot exclaims: "The king without a sword! The land without a king!" and is driven mad. Yielding to Morgana's seductive schemes, and disclosing his magical formula, Merlin is entrapped in a crystal cave by the sorceress, who has also committed incest with her brother Arthur (in an interesting fusion of Vivienne, Morgain, and Morgause). The kingdom becomes a wasteland, with the Grail Quest issued to restore the king's health and the land's welfare.

The central role played by Merlin (Nichol Williamson) [Fig. 9] testifies to the renewed interest in Merlin as a major character in twentieth century Arthurian fantasy and comic books.⁴¹ He undoubtedly contributed to establish *Excalibur* as a widely recognized "cult film" creating its own cinematic archetypes, influencing later productions, in the sense used by Umberto Eco.⁴² His example has generated new secrets to hide and new icons on the screen. The argument now turns to what extent medieval images have survived in the twenty first century context of large consumption of audiences in the new TV series media.



Fig. 9. Merlin (Nichol Williamson), *Excalibur* @ John Boorman, Orion Pictures

Intermedia Collage in the Merlin Series

Released in Great-Britain (2008-12), the BBC TV series *Merlin* has achieved a particularly large reception, no doubt due to the targeted audience of teenagers.⁴³ The narrative emphasizes the coming of age of two teenagers—inexperienced magician Merlin working for Arthur under the guidance of an old physician Gaius, and immature Arthur, before and after his access to the throne. Intermedia influence, rather than direct connection with the medieval set of images, is evident. Arthur's infancy is straight from T. H. White's modern retelling *The Once and Future King* (1958) and its popular screen adaptation by Walt Disney. The influence of Boorman's film can also be recognized in many sequences, particularly in the humorous complicity that binds old Gaius and his young apprentice Merlin, guiding Arthur to the

⁴¹ Sandra Gorgievski, Sandra, "Vingt ans de production arthurienne 1970-1990," *Bulletin des Anglistes Médiévistes* 55 (Spring 1998): 55-74.

⁴² Umberto Eco, "Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage," in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988-1997), 446-455.

⁴³ *Merlin*, Television, various directors (2008-2012; England, Wales, and France: BBC, Shine TV, Universal Pictures/BBC Home Entertainment, 2008-2012), DVD. The series has attracted an average audience of over 6 million viewers and has rated 7 million with season 5 (2012), selling to over 50 broadcasters in 183 countries internationally, not to mention the DVD audience and the proliferating web audience of videos and comments posted online. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2012/merlin-final.html>>

throne. Arthur and his servant Merlin get on all too well and share a number of heroic adventures, as in any American buddy film in a process of cinematic cross-fertilization.

The *Merlin* series allows several heterogeneous aspects of secrecy and disclosure that partly rework the medieval texts and also pay tribute to the modern era. The main secret to maintain is that of Merlin's magic as well as the link of any character with the supernatural – a forbidden power which must remain secret upon pain of death, as sorcery is strictly prohibited in Uther's kingdom, a clear tribute to the contemporary, rational era. The socially prohibited love affairs between Arthur and Gwen and between Lancelot and Gwen remain minor secrets, like any other enigma sustaining a marvelous adventure.

TV series generally rely on the genre's specific narrative structure and length of episodes, and on the codes of cycles inherited from nineteenth century popular serials and transmitted through twentieth century popular novels, comic books, and literary series.⁴⁴ In each of the sixty five episodes of *Merlin* narrating hazardous adventure and meaningful action, a mystery has to be solved, hence the necessary disclosure of secrets, external, or internal threats endangering the kingdom (like poisoned water/weapons, unidentified evil knights seeking vengeance and destruction, quest, abduction, wicked magic, and gruesome monsters). While the medieval tradition entails a chronological reading (including embedded stories), the thirteen stand-alone episodes of each season in *Merlin* are discontinuous and can be seen independently (like any TV series) with no prior knowledge of the previous episode, and the repetitive return of the main characters who hardly age.⁴⁵ In place of the rubric in manuscripts, each forty-two minute long episode is introduced by a recap—a brief summary of the former episode(s). The variety of secondary characters provides the impression of a new adventure, yet based on the same narrative scheme: order is threatened then restored; instability and evil are always ready to resurface.

This is a hybrid series, because on the one hand, a coherent cycle emerges and the five seasons constitute a totality to be seen successively like any serial; but on the other hand, there is also a sense of diegetic continuity,⁴⁶ provided by the epic musical score and the voice-over introducing each episode: “In a land of myth, and a time of magic, the destiny of a great kingdom rests on the shoulders of a young boy. His name: Merlin.” What's more, characters undergo evolution. Young Arthur is arrogant and sarcastic (season 1), grows more humble and reliable, and has temporary access to the throne (season 3), reaches maturity and experiences doubts (season 4), and eventually faces his wife's treason and Merlin's revelation (season 5). Relationships evolve between the characters (love, friendship, alliances). Morgana develops her magical powers (season 2), becomes villainous against her half-brother Arthur, exerts relentless treachery (season 3), endangers the kingdom (season 4), overthrows it, and manipulates the queen (season 5). A druid who had escaped from Uther's relentless witch hunt (season 1), Mordred is made knight but, torn between divided loyalties, joins Morgana in the last battle (season 5). Merlin resorts to his legendary metamorphoses. The series turns into a more general, disturbing fight between the good or evil use of magic. The main mission is forever postponed—a marketing trick or compensation for the repetitive patterns.

In medieval manuscripts as well as in modern media, the main paradox lies in the fact that suspense as conventionally understood does not exist in the Arthurian cycle, and pleasure comes from the reiteration of famous adventures. In the TV series, suspense is limited to that of serials for Arthurian readers who are already familiar with the legend. Merlin's youth and the unwritten chapter of Arthur's youth offer new perspectives; there are only minor distortions to the legend, and the major archetypes of the myth are present, like the Round Table, the Sword in the Stone, and Arthur's marriage with Gwen (season 3, episode 1). The series also relies on the narrative tension to be found in any whodunit, whether the viewer has prior knowledge of the events or follows Merlin's shrewd deductions. As in any series, the

⁴⁴ Gorgievski, *Le mythe arthurien*, 19-27, 66-71.

⁴⁵ Anne Besson, *D'Asimov à Tolkien: Cycles et séries dans la littérature de genre* (Paris: CNRS-éditions, 2004), 43.

⁴⁶ Stéphane Benassi, *Séries et feuilletons TV* (Liège: Céfal, 2000).

main characters are not likely to die, and the disclosure of secrets provides the necessary suspense for the viewer. In the final episodes, Merlin is forced to reveal his secret, trapped in a cave by Morgana, and Arthur dies in the final battle (season 5, episode 13).

The interest of each episode lies in the gradual discovery of the culprit motivating a quest or endangering the kingdom. Classical series of shots/reverse shots on the one who spies (Merlin or Gaius) to discover the threat and trap the culprit, display an “objective” angle of vision which is not necessarily Merlin’s viewpoint. A high angle, medium shot crushes Arthur (Bradley James) and Merlin (Colin Morgan), framed by the dark vaulted staircase of the castle, as if viewed by the invisible enemy they are chasing (season 1, episode 6). The torch in the foreground throws light on their anxious faces and *regard-caméra* that startle the viewer, enhancing the emotional impact of the next reverse shot [Fig.10]. Or a low angle shot on the two friends strictly framed by architectural lines shows that such unrealistic, non-frontal shots create sensation and suspense in a way frontal shots hardly ever do. What is heard off-screen (or partially seen) tantalizingly whets the viewer’s curiosity.



(Left) Fig. 10. Arthur (Bradley James), Merlin (Colin Morgan), *Merlin* ©Shine TV

(Right) Fig. 11. Lancelot (Santiago Cabrera), Gwen (Angel Coulby), *Merlin* ©Shine TV

The conflicting loyalties of the love triangle Lancelot/Arthur/Guenevere have been transposed as there is no adultery, no doubt due to the intended reception of teenagers. The relationship between Lancelot and the queen is briefly staged over one episode (season 2, episode 4), as if the story-line had been so much integrated into the collective unconscious that the directors simply could not do away with it. It is presented as forbidden, as Gwen and Arthur have already been secretly falling in love but not yet married. Lancelot (Santiago Cabrera) has just rescued Gwen (Angel Coulby) from a dangerous situation before Arthur interrupts them, precluding any further intimacy. A frontal close shot reveals the tense faces of both characters lit by a torch in the foreground [Fig. 11]. Their common looks directed at off screen Arthur focus on the potential couple and the force of passion, as if idealized by the romantic candles behind them. The close-up strikes the audience in a way the miniatures could not. Arthur is literally excluded from the screen, appearing in counter shot separately. The growing tension and jealousy in fact goad Arthur into making his mind about marrying Gwen. A mere commoner, Lancelot is eventually made knight, but he conveniently disappears from the series. The taboo of social ascension has replaced that of adultery.

This brief love affair also functions as a prolepsis for the socially unacceptable love between Arthur and Gwen, who also is a commoner, Morgana’s servant. It prepares the viewer for the motif of divided loyalties and the transgression of conventions in the mutual attraction between a servant and a king. These secret loves are forbidden because of social standards, rather than adultery. The romance episodes of the False Guenevere have been transposed at the end of the series, as she becomes a puppet in Morgana’s hands who works for Arthur’s downfall until Merlin releases the spell (season 5, episodes 7-9).

There is a conspiracy against Arthur and Gwen (season 3, episode 10) involving Morgana, who is planning to regain her expected place on the throne. She manipulates her father Uther, goading him into accusing Gwen of enchanting Arthur and causing him to love her. Reached in only ten minutes, the entrapment scene partly reenacts the entrapment of Tristram and Isolde by King Mark in the forest—in fact a mere tribute to Boorman’s cult images rather than to the medieval manuscripts. The complex system of conventions to be found in the French and English texts has been replaced by intermedia borrowing and artificial suspense created by the cinematic cutting. Arthur and Gwen have secretly met in the forest which houses them safely away from the court. Following her organized plot, Morgana and Uther surprise them while riding in the forest.

The viewer discovers the different points of view thanks to varied camera movements and rapid montage. A frontal close-up on the couple flirting, lying in a clearing, pans to a side shot on the couple seen in profile, kissing voluptuously at the sound original piano music expressing innocent, romantic love, thus creating an empathic effect that never quite reaches the tension found in Wagner’s Prelude. By contrast, the calm, peaceful shelter of the clearing intensifies the suspense. The camera zooms in to a partial shot on horses’ feet trampling, followed by a panoramic shot revealing Morgana and Uther approaching, ready to take the lovers unawares—a dire threat which the eerie music emphasizes. After a medium shot on the lovers, the camera pans upwards from behind to disclose the intruders swooping down on them. A lateral shot on the surprised couple shows Gwen crying out as the camera zooms in on their frightened faces and open mouthed dismay. A low angle shot pans in on the flabbergasted king and Morgana, quickly followed by a reverse frontal shot on Arthur now facing his father while Gwen is turning her head and hiding her eyes in shame. A reverse medium shot on the accusers makes them appear more threatening as the music resonates, reaching a climax on Morgana’s ironic, treacherous, and victorious smile.

The tension reaches its peak at the end of the episode when Uther (Anthony Head) stages the public accusation, even though the lovers are not adulterous and the queen is technically innocent of the charge of using magic. The scene partially reactivates medieval iconic images [Fig.12]. The king is filmed in middle shot, pointing an accusing finger at off screen Gwen and condemning her to banishment. Meanwhile, Morgana (Katie McGrath) sits at a distance in the background, relishing her success, frowning at Gwen in accusation. Morgana could be identified as the “bad counselor” from medieval manuscripts not because of her gestures, which are not codified as in the medieval miniatures, but according to the choice of color. She wears a green dress—an ambiguous color from the end of the Middle Ages to nowadays, which either signals hope or life force from the green world, or evil creatures and fateful events. As of the fourteenth century, it was increasingly associated with the devil and magicians, especially with felonious Morgan in illuminations, and later in paintings.⁴⁷ Morgan Le Fay puts Gawain to the test against an ambiguous, green opponent in the fourteenth century anonymous poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, while in *Le Morte D’Arthur*, Lancelot (VI, 10-11) and Tristram (X, 68-69) meet malevolent, supernatural creatures. Pre-Raphaelite painting later reestablished green as the favorite color of sorceresses, like Edward Burne-Jones’ melancholy, voluptuous fairies in velvet green or Anthony Frederick Sandys’ *Morgan Le Fay*, which might have in turn shaped Morgana in the series. Green is particularly appropriate as it has extensively been used in films reworking medieval demonology, especially in the typology of color in science-fiction and fantasy films. Green signals otherness and supernatural essence, contrary to red which signals a particular form of evil and damnation.⁴⁸ In *Excalibur*, the magic sword’s eerie green irradiates its surroundings, as it does in *Merlin*. In the public judgment of Guenevere, Morgana unquestionably appears as the weird, arch-dangerous magician endangering the kingdom, taking revenge on her father Uther and her half-brother Arthur.

⁴⁷ Michel Pastoureau, *Vert, Histoire d’une couleur* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 89-111, 159-162.

⁴⁸ Gorgievski, *Le mythe arthurien*, 151-154.



Fig. 12. Uther (Anthony Head), Morgana (Katie McGrath), *Merlin* ©Shine TV

Uther plays the part of both accuser and judge. His stiff, emphatic gesture of accusation apparently forms an incidental analogue with the medieval codified gesture of accusation in the manuscripts, but as it is repeated in a number of episodes against evil knights, offenders, and companions alike, either in tournament, at court, or in private spaces, it instead highlights the dictatorial character he embodies. In this scene, he is outraged by his son who challenges his authority, and the suspicion that Gwen is a sorceress endangering the kingdom, whereas King Arthur in the manuscript looks comparatively serene, dignified, and impartial while sending his queen to the stake. The cutting moves from shots on the accuser to reverse shots on the accused, a very handy way for the directors never to frame them together and keep them separate, in a way the illuminator would not.

In spite of the common thematic disclosure of secret love, the connections with the visual conventions in the manuscripts are often casual or remote. Yet the series is worth considering as it achieves more than what an adventure movie would do and recaptures the main aspect of the Arthurian myth, movement towards the final destruction of the Arthurian kingdom. Truth is a conflicting notion for Arthur's knights. The shortcomings of the Arthurian chivalric code which opposes earthly and spiritual values show that secrecy is necessary to ensure the stability of the realm, so that revelation brings about suffering. The series uses another type of secret which finds no analogue in the medieval manuscripts to embody this conflict. Merlin cannot reveal his true identity as a magician to Arthur—a painful necessity that he must learn to accept, just as Arthur accepts his responsibilities as king. This major secret is never to be revealed, and Merlin operates under the guidance of Arthur's old physician Gaius and an underworld dragon. Magic indeed ensures the stability and survival of the kingdom, as Merlin often comes to the rescue with his magical abilities, and much of the suspense relies on this nearly revealed secret (whether by accident or intentionally), fulfilling the targeted audience's expectations and the marketing strategy. Secrecy is shown as indispensable since Uther's world is too rational, rejecting magic in spite of its potential worth when exercised for good. Uther's paranoia and cruelty towards magicians create the seeds of his own destruction with Morgana's relentless need for revenge.

Before the main secret about Merlin's magic is eventually revealed, he has already shared it in private with a number of characters, including his friend Gaius (Richard Wilson), another initiatory, Merlin-like figure [Fig. 13]. Gaius is close to Merlin in Boorman's *Excalibur*, a lenient, good-humored character who sometimes comes off as goofy, sometimes sententious. Merlin in the BBC series is also a conflation of both young Arthur and young Perceval in *Excalibur*: for example the first meeting of young, naïve Merlin and Gaius in the kitchens of Camelot swarming with a whole miscellany of physicians and jesters seems to be a collage from the first meeting between Percival and Merlin in *Excalibur*. Although Merlin is always nearly discovered, secrecy is maintained through generic close-ups on the two friends hiding and plotting in the kitchen. Generic close-ups/medium shots on Merlin hiding behind a tree in the forest or behind a door in Camelot reveal the subjective point of view with his pondering looks—emotionally rich

moments of enlightenment contributing to the success of the series. Those darkly lit scenes of secrecy contrast with those involving the brightly lit public space. Merlin's overshadowed face reveals his divided self and the unresolved tension created by withholding his secret. What's more, the optical depth of field sets into relief Merlin's face on a blurred background, unlike the depth of field based on an effect of artifice in the fifteenth century manuscripts discussed, where the richly illuminated margins on an even plane contrast with the slight perspective of the text and miniatures they frame.



Fig. 13. Gaius (Richard Wilson), Merlin (Colin Morgan), *Merlin* ©Shine TV

The Arthurian cycle necessarily comes to a dramatic end with the public revelation of secrets, the spreading of evil, the destruction of the kingdom, Arthur's death, and the promise of his eschatological return. In the TV series, the last battle leads to Mordred's death (season 5, episodes 12-13), but mortally wounded Arthur survives for Merlin to disclose his secret to him, then for Gaius to disclose it to Gwen, and finally for Morgana to be destroyed thanks to Excalibur. After the dragon prophesizes Arthur's return, which brings the legend to a close, Merlin plays the traditional part of Bedevere casting Excalibur back to the lake while a barge brings Arthur's body to Avalon. Avoiding adultery, condemnation, and the repentance of Lancelot and Gwen, reducing her evil side to Morgana's manipulation, the series even highlights the queen's positive role – a tribute to contemporary feminism. Arthur's death brings her to the throne, and Arthurian chivalry apparently survives to the anthem of "God save the Queen"—a nod to the British audience.

After having been temporarily drained of his magical powers and entrapped in the crystal cave by Morgana (season 5, episode 12), Merlin rises again with renewed force (episode 13), in images straight from Boorman's film when Merlin waves his stick to encourage Arthurian knights (Fig. 9). In a variation form Boorman's handling of the legend, Merlin's final revelation of his secret powers to dying Arthur—rather than Morgana—brings about the necessary cancellation of the series, as surely as Arthur's death does (season 5, episode 13). The wizard's private confession to his king is not particularly dramatic or lavishly lit compared to other sequences: it takes place in the dark shelter of the forest, and its stunning effect on Arthur is only temporary, as Gaius encourages their reconciliation and restores their humorous buddy relationship. The disclosure of Merlin's hidden identity has no shattering effect, appearing instead like the painful coming out of a repressed wizard. Although he cannot change the fate of Arthur, Merlin briefly reappears walking the earth in contemporary times at the end of the series, in a sort of eschatological shot which replaces the legendary belief in Arthur's return.

The possible return of Merlin has been a matter of discussion in terms of marketing strategy rather than of mythical fulfillment. But after a long period of hesitation, the series were cancelled in December 2012 by producer Shine TV and Fremantle Media Enterprises, and BBC 1 has switched to another fantasy series, *Atlantis*. Related material during and after the show had foreshadowed a never-ending series with games and fictional spin-offs made by web fans themselves in contemporary transmedia storytelling. A

documentary (*The Real Merlin and Arthur* directed by Mark Procter, BBC Wales, 2009) featuring the two main actors, an exhibition (Warwick Castle “Dragon Tower”, 2011), a two part recap announced to fuel audience expectations, the whole concurred with the web discussions as to who would survive, and even a possible reboot.

Conclusion

The gorgeously illuminated Gothic Arthurian manuscripts hardly survived the new media of printed books at the end of the fifteenth century, only to reappear in the nineteenth century medieval revival. Arthurian images have perhaps better survived the appearance of the new media of silent pictures, which profoundly modified the status of images at the turn of the twentieth century. From American swashbucklers to 1950s pocket-sized British TV series maintaining the public taste for the medieval, Arthurian moving images have successfully found their way through the consumption of collective archetypes and the adoption of new icons in films, and popular literary series alike. Cult films like *Excalibur* have in turn influenced other films at the turn of the twenty-first century, like the *Merlin* TV series. *Merlin* no longer relies on the manuscript illuminations, as new sets of images, audience expectations and story-telling conventions have emerged. The harmonious process of intertextual borrowing from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century copyists and illuminators has been replaced by a new, hybrid intermedia activity involving more or less conscious quotations and collage, and the new paradigm of an increasingly active TV and web audience. The types of secrets to be kept hidden and disclosed have indeed changed, but the notion of truth—so central to the knightly values—has remained unchallenged.