

Experimenting with Myth: Adaptation or Destruction (A Case of Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of Arthurian Fanfiction)

Experimentar el mito: adaptación o destrucción
(un caso de análisis del *fanfiction* artúrico
desde la perspectiva de la lingüística cognitiva)

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with the ways Arthurian myth exists in the contemporary world, looking into the correlation between the ontologically basic narrative and the newly evolved phenomenon of the digital age - fanfiction. Myth is proved to be not a relic of the past, but a tool for cognizing the world. Experiencing myth proceeds through its personalization, requiring adaptation. Fanfiction stories explore the limits of possible transformations by making the concept different yet still recognizable. After analyzing stories that change one core characteristic of the concept of King Arthur we conclude that the other characteristics become reinforced and the more abstract ideas are brought to the linguistic level through the repetition of significant concepts like *story*, *legend*, *myth*, *hero*. The myth evolves through experimenting with the image, reinforcing the stereotypical characteristics, for it exists only through the narrative told by people.

RESUMEN: El artículo trata de las formas en que el mito artúrico existe en el mundo contemporáneo, observando la correlación entre la narrativa ontológicamente básica y el fenómeno recientemente evolucionado de la era digital: *fanfiction*. Se demuestra que el mito es una reliquia del pasado, pero una herramienta para conocer el mundo. Experimentar el mito procede a través de su personalización, adaptación. Las historias de *fanfiction* exploran los límites de posibles transformaciones, haciendo que el concepto sea diferente pero reconocible. Después de analizar historias que cambian una característica central del Rey Arturo, concluimos que las otras características se refuerzan y las ideas más abstractas se llevan al nivel lingüístico mediante la repetición de conceptos significativos como historia, leyenda, mito, héroe. El mito evoluciona a través de la experimentación con la imagen, reforzando las características estereotípicas, sólo a través de la narración contada por la gente.

KEYWORDS: Arthuriana, conceptualization, categorization, fanfiction.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Artúrico, conceptualización, categorización, *fanfiction*.

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Myth is [...] a vital ingredient of human civilization;
it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force.

MALINOWSKI, 1955: 101.

Introduction

Think “myth” and either an image of Prometheus - the cultural hero of a distant past - or some tales of Africa may come to mind. In line with this image the traditional definition reads as follows: “myths may be defined *as traditional prose narratives*, which [...] are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past” (Bascom 1965: 136). Ontologically, myth is the story or the source that other texts frequently turn to, and that reappears many times onwards (Uspensky 1996: 26). A myth at the most basic level is the narrative being created, told and revisited. Less obvious, however, are the myths that gradually paved their way to the contemporary world or emerged in the age of reasoning and even in the digital age. These are either the old myths that were adapted to live on or the new myths we are now living by. The basic definition, while being true for discussing myths in their prototypical sense, seems rather inconsistent when trying to comprehend what myth is nowadays. And indeed, with advances in philosophy, psychology and

myth studies, a strong impact of mythology became apparent and finally was given a just place in human consciousness and culture at large: “philosophers who have been eager to abolish myth have realized that a vacuum is immediately created if the contribution made by myth to culture is explained away” (Honko 1984: 8). Upon a closer inspection, mythology turns out to be not a relic of the past, it has not vanished into a thin air with the appearance of science and realistic reasoning, but it keeps up with the changing world creeping into the narratives, still emerging nowadays.

One of the most exceptionally popular myths throughout the centuries and even today is the myth about King Arthur, who manifests some archetypal features of the human psyche and consciousness. Fundamentally, the myth about King Arthur is the embodiment of power, a vivid example of a just ruler and protector for people - “rex quondam, rexque futurus”. What is more, this myth is inevitably about self - and national identity and has been revived to tell an everlasting story of magnificence, bravery and honour. The myth about King Arthur has triggered numerous interpretations and it is still a rich and valued source of inspiration. Yet, it differs most drastically from the prime example of the archaic myths in that it stepped beyond the boundaries of time and emerged into the modern world and language, still retaining much of its archaic charm and mythological features while modernizing other aspects. Being rooted in history (the four existing accounts¹ of the historical prototype are well-studied so far (Higham 2005), Arthur’s image is much more ancient and really far-outreaching, lying beneath “history” as well as functioning according to its own rules. Furthermore, the development of Arthur’s image not only in medieval but also in the modern world follows some rules of mythological development.

His probable mortal prototype has nothing to do with the immortal hero depicted in the works of art. Quite ironically, he has fulfilled the

¹ To begin with, Arthur as a historical personality was mentioned by Gildas, who wrote *On the fall of Britain* ca. 540 (*De excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*) to denounce the vices of his time. Secondly, the fullest, apparently historical account of Arthur comes much later, in Nennius’ *History of Britons* (*The Historia Brittonum*), written in about 800. Thirdly, there are two other relevant entries in the 10th century *Annals of Wales*. The fourth mention is found in *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* by Bede the Venerable 8th century. These four texts provide the bases for interpreting the historical roots of Arthur.

prophecy becoming king again - the famous legend that he is not dead but sleeping in a cave with his men “ready to awaken when his people are in their hour of need, when he will rush forth with his army to defeat the enemy. He has been reborn to the world century after century from the pen, brush and imagination of numerous writers, artists, poets and politicians” (Blake & Lloyd 2002: 8).

The principal feature of a myth as an ontologically primordial story is that it belongs to no one and at the same time to everyone. With the evolution of humanity and narration myth has been transformed into tales (Propp 2013) and specific interpretations by different authors. So, the interpretations of Tomas Malory, Alfred Tennyson, Mark Twain or T. H. White are part and parcel of the canonical story. However, with the emergence of the Internet, which facilitated sharing information, the monologue of The Author was complimented by the polylogue of people taking part in the discussion, appropriating the story. Thus, the myth has returned to its original medium with *fanfiction* playing an interesting role in testing novel interpretations. Today, the myth of King Arthur manifests itself not only through books and films, but also through advertising and internet. It is found in numerous short stories published online featuring various aspects of Arthuriana and creating new blends. This new phenomenon brought about by a new medium is called *fanfiction*. The internet has drastically transformed the way the myth lives today and is lived by. In the loads of material available in the internet, two major tendencies could be observed: complementation and destruction. The first one concerns dwelling on the moves and characters that were not studied well in the previous interpretations. The second presupposes making Arthur as different from the concept we are used to. The latter seems particularly interesting as these interpretations explore the limits of possible changes the myth can endure and yet be recognizable.

Myth and fanfiction: a story worth telling

At this point a broad definition of myth is needed, for it would allow us to include fanfiction more naturally into the analysis. By the notion of “myth” we understand not only the narrative or a set of narratives in the

narrow sense, but the myth-oriented works in general, e. g. those that make up the myth of King Arthur. The figure of King Arthur is the nucleus of a myth that has always been transforming to fit a new political, cultural and historical agenda. Myths never disappear because they are so fundamentally connected with what constitutes a human being as such: mind and soul, cognition and imagination.² While transforming, they engage in a dialogue with the archaic past on what makes up the core of the myth - the image of King Arthur as the embodiment of everlasting notions of honor, power, heroism etc. Together with his central figure the whole Arthurian myth transforms as well.

Since “the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction [...]” (Levi-Strauss 1955: 428), it amounts to being a tool for cognizing and constructing the world or even a whole cognitive paradigm that is largely anthropocentric and anthropomorphic, since “through the word the historical event is evaluated to the point of self-consciousness” (Losev 2001). Levi-Strauss himself stressed that the basic patterns observable in mythology all around the globe account for “a basic need for order in human mind”, thus making evident the fundamental rules by which a human mind functions. The rules of thought were considered to be basically/ fundamentally similar to the rules of grammar that are prominent in any language.³

Therefore, myths in contemporary studies are considered to be neither beautiful lies nor detached stories, but “networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular *ways of interpreting the world*” (Midgley 2011: 1). In fact, myths store the structured knowledge. The creative impetus or the imagination drive and a potential to define cultural values set mythology most clearly apart from other patterns of knowledge resulting “of dynamics of the mind as an operating source” (Tychkin

² “Instead of dying, they transform themselves gradually into something different, something that is often hard to recognize and to understand” (Midgley 2011: 5).

³ Already in L. Levy-Bruhl’s work on mythological thinking, various thought structures were identified to “exist in one and the same society and often, perhaps, even always, in the same consciousness” (Levy-Bruhl 1924: 7). Similar ideas are explicit in works of the philosopher of the language A. Potebnya, who drew attention to syncretism and the timeless nature of the mythological way of thinking, which “is not peculiar to one time, but to people of all ages, standing at a certain stage of development of thought/consciousness [...]” (Potebnya 1989: 154).

2015: 461). When discussing human cognition we deal with two basic processes: conceptualization and categorization, that is, establishing similarity and contrariness between the conceived objects of the world. The second process has received considerable attention and is therefore clearly and strictly defined: categorization accounts for “pattern finding”, “class identification” or “our ability to identify entities as members of groups” (Evans 2006: 169). Conceptualization, in its turn, is a more complex phenomenon lying “at the core of the black-box problem of the human mind” (Nuyts 1997) as it reveals itself through indirect manifestations: narrative/language and action. Considering conceptual and linguistic knowledge as distinct, yet closely interrelated types of knowledge we proceed to list some peculiarities of mythological thinking that still reveal themselves as narrative in the narrow sense and can be subjected to cognitive linguistic analysis. Mythological cognition is characterized by “diffusion, syncretism⁴ and emotional charge (impetus)” (Meletinsky 2014: 24-25). This cognitive-oriented perspective becomes essential when looking into the development of this myth in the contemporary world, for myth is therefore understood not as a text but as a piece of structured knowledge accompanied by imaginative patterns and strong evaluative potential. It determines what is important and what is not, what is good and what is bad, thus defining the axiological sphere of the society and individuals.

Within the dimension of the Internet, the “literary word” is viewed not as a as a standpoint with a fixed and stable meaning, but as the intersection of planes of discourse, as a dialogue between various types of writing - the writer himself, the recipient, and finally the narrative formed by the present or previous cultural context (Kristeva 2000: 428). The Internet has become a testing ground for all sorts of experiments, a place for destructing everything familiar for the sake of realizing the strangest possible ideas. It was the Internet that made such a phenomenon as fanfiction exceptionally popular. However, the peculiarities of

⁴ This syncretism is reflected on the many ways the image is constructed as well as on the linguistic features of fanfiction, such as a mix of direct and indirect and free indirect speech. The characters of a similar order are sometimes mingled together, like all the female characters capable of enchanting and casting a spell: Morgane, Igrane, Lady of the Lake, Nimue.

these texts consist not only in the medium of their dissemination, but in their secondary nature in relation to the source of inspiration. Fanfiction, unlike other types of secondary texts, relies on the character of the work, it is “image-centred” (Hellekson 2006: 5-7). The myth of King Arthur is image-centred as well. Therefore, it is a viable model for studying the development of the concept of Arthur; it may be compared to a “barometer” for measuring the popularity of certain plots and characters and identifying social problems as well as expectations and inspirations. Even if myth tells the story of the past, it is oriented towards the present and highlights what is of paramount importance today. Therefore, the idea put forward by Liszka transferring attention from the Myth as a sacred narrative to a myth as “a work-horse of culture, a means of evaluation, interpretation, and creative change” seems fundamentally true (Liszka 1989).

Fanfiction shows a plethora of possibilities either mapped out or fully realized. Unlike the fully-fledged interpretations that we find in books and films these stories are short and provide just the first level of artistic impulse: “what if...?”. These stories are experimenting with myth *in vitro*, while the authorized interpretations have more space for testing the initial ideas within the full complexity of artistic life - *in vivo*. It has not escaped the notice of both scholars of the genre and fanfiction writers that the literary creative process and the fanfiction process are very much alike in the core: “to attack the reuse of preexisting characters as being inherently wrong is to deny something central to the storytelling impulse” (Keen 2016).

Since myth is a means for comprehending consciousness, myth-creation is the immanent function of human mind and “the way of reproduction of culture in society as well as a means of social construction of reality” (Voevodina 2002: 17). By means of fiction allowing for different points of view on reality, and the psychological possibility inherent in humans to be able to view from and operate on several personal planes, people gets the opportunity to realize themselves on another level. “Fiction is an invention that empowers humanity with self-expansion” (Izer 2008: 2) and originates from a strong personal affect (Chander & Sunder 2007; Hellekson & Busse 2006). The authors of fanfiction write stories to prolong their existence in the world they became fascinated

with. They usually take the preexisting hero (already in an abbreviated, standard, functionally reduced version), separate it from the primary work, and transfer it to another artistic world with other possibilities. This leads to, on the one hand, personal interpretation, and on the other, nevertheless, to crystallization of the most stereotypical and the most generalized features of the character in question as the authors tend to preserve carefully the original characteristics of the hero. This process of the most “violent” individualization and interpretation was termed “textual poaching” (Jenkins 2012).

Despite the often problematic and lively debates regarding the relationship between mythology and fan literature, this issue has not been settled yet. Although mythologies are not in any way fanfiction stories, “mythological thought operates essentially through a process of transformation. And the rules of these transformations are *contrariness, contradiction, inversion and symmetry*” (Lévi-Strauss 1955). Therefore, the rules of this transformation can shed light on both issues: the development of myth in general and in specially constructed settings, and the basic rules of myth evolution approached within various frameworks. Another classification is found in the semiotic trend of myth research. *Transformation comes with difference, opposition and variation*: “Explanation may be able to provide a set of answers to the origin of myth and its general structure and how it functions within the cultural whole; but in doing so it reduces the phenomenon to an observed entity rather than a lived experience” (Liszka 1989: 10).

To apply these rules to fanfiction we need to build a concept of the main character - Arthur. As a term, concept⁵ has to do with both - the mental activity of the humans and the language where it is naturally verbalized in. When the myth evolves, the concept underlying it changes too. Therefore the mythological concept is constructed on the basis of textual representation, for it is well acknowledged that linguistic behavior “is relatively privileged as a source of information [...] because it is a type of behavior which explicitly encodes and transmits conceptual information” (Nuyts & Pederson 1999: 4). These ideas become even

⁵ According to Koubriakova a concept is defined as “an operational meaningful unit of memory, mental lexicon, conceptual system, brain language, and the whole picture of the world reflected in the human mind” (Koubriakova 1996: 90).

more viable for studying fanfiction, since the process of actualizing the implicit into explicit is a notable peculiarity of all secondary texts and fan stories are no exception.⁶ Glancing across the analyzed material we may notice that the conceptually marked works (*noble, hero, legend, myth*) appear very often, anchoring the new text to the existing conceptual framework or a mental space.⁷

The central concept making up the framework of the whole myth is King Arthur. He has always been and is the center of attraction for, as we know, in the Middle Ages his story attracted many other separate plots (e. g. Tristan and Isolde). He is the center of the most stable characteristics, comprising the concept and building up his identity. To the core elements of the concept we can ascribe the following clusters: 1) a cluster of external characteristics: space, country, time markers with a reference to the past, occupying a high position in the social hierarchy and thus power; 2) a cluster of personal characteristics: bravery, heroism. We outlined these two clusters after analyzing 38 dictionaries and encyclopedias as they preserve only the most typical characteristics (Sharapkova, 2015). Since identity can be understood as “a total sum of our accumulative knowledge about ourselves” (Komova 2005: 6), about our social and cultural position, J. Howard argues that “cognitive schemas, abstract and organized packages of information are cognitive versions of identity” (Howard 2000: 368). To modify this character means to construct another concept that is realized in the work of art.

Given that the concept is central to the myth structure and evolution the major aim of the present paper is to investigate the concept of King Arthur in the most distanced interpretations, those that transform the very core of his image by 1) changing the time-reference 2) changing the place reference 3) changing the gender. Three fanfiction stories were chosen for analysis conforming to several criteria: as they are based on the generalized image of King Arthur existing in the cul-

⁶ “all in the prototext that becomes clear only on the level of the global purport of the text comes down to the semantic level in the secondary reformulation” (Verbitskaya 2000: 198).

⁷ “[a] mental space is a medium for conceptualization and thought. Thus, any fixed or ongoing state of affairs, as we conceptualize it, is represented by a mental space” (Lakoff 1987: 281).

ture and not on some particular book or film (there are rather popular interpretations based on *Le Morte Darthur* or the film *Merlin*), most non-typical interpretations do not build up a straight line of evolution but create diversity.

Changing the core: exploring the limits

This section considers the stories where one element of tradition is destroyed. The Arthurian stories comprise a substantial part of the fanfiction stories hosted by www.fanfiction.net, a website with thousands of fan stories structured around a plethora of characters. The identity of King Arthur pertaining to its categorization is shaped by a set of obligatory features. Therefore, once one characteristic is altered the identity of King Arthur is also transformed. The degree of approximation to the prototype is reduced, and the difference is highlighted intentionally.

The primary focus of our attention is the destruction and de-mythologization of King Arthur, as his image is also a symbol, a sign that supports the identity of the whole Anglo-Saxon world. Nevertheless, since the contemporary postmodern, internet-driven culture is eager to play with signs, the process of disrupting the form and the meaning occurs. Sometimes this destroys the existing signs and sometimes it brings about the process of resignification. Chander and Sunder, exploring the phenomenon of inserting an idealized personal representation into a popular work, argue that “semiotic democracy requires the ability to resignify the artifacts of popular culture to contest their authoritative meaning” (Chander & Sunder 2007: 601). This contesting in more or less successful manner gives rise to a personalization pertaining to what we called earlier - the appropriation of myth.

Since the character of King Arthur is borrowed from literature, he has gone through numerous stages of alienation from the prototexts, preserving or eliminating some characteristics. Prior to becoming an image of fanfiction it has proved to be already capable of adjusting at the periphery of the image, still being rather stable at the core. A comprehensive account of numerous literary works based on the Arthurian myth appears in the encyclopedia “The Arthurian annals” (2006), star-

ting with numerous medieval romances that culminate with interpretation of Malory (1485) and continuing with Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1885) and many other works in 20th and 21st century. Even if the image of such order is not by any means easy to modify, it serves as a reference, a reference to the prototext - the mythological core. If there is a break with that prototext, it is only natural that a question arises: to what extent this transformation is possible? In other words, how much reference should be preserved in the secondary texts in order to evoke the necessary level of recognition for the reader? To what extent is the game of variants possible and what will remain at the very end before a conglomerate of meanings becomes blurred? Is it enough to give the character a known name, but to change it completely?

1) *Changing the place*

Let us start by analyzing the story "Noble" by *Chaos Of A Butterfly*, published in www.fanfiction.net, where the time of action is changed drastically, the author places the heroes into the contemporary world, yet this fictional world is rather closed, divided from the real one and mystic in its core. King Arthur becomes colonel Arthur Castus, arriving to become a head of *Camelot*, a special military unit. Following the tradition, the story is preceded by a brief summary of the plot and the major opposition: 1) Arthur is a commanding officer, who gets assigned to an already formed, small group of special, elite soldiers. 2) These soldiers immediately hate him, as he is actually going to be in charge. And none of the men hate Arthur more than the temperamental, arrogant major, Lancelot.

It is important to note here that from the very beginning the character is introduced by specifying his high place in the social, military hierarchy and, hence, the characteristic of possessing power still remains. He is vested with authority over people as a commander, a military leader. This characteristic was developed historically and in this story fits into the system of the contextual power relations and to some extent restores precisely a more archaic element in the image: the military leader, *bretwalda*. Power is a cultural and historical category, which is often

personalized, associated with its embodiment (Komova 2005: 22). Interestingly, the power still needs to be tested and proved and the full authority gained. This move is repeated in nearly all the interpretations: in the canonical Malory's text King Arthur is the son of Uther, yet he needs to prove himself through pulling a sword and putting the barons into order, here the newcomer needs to prove himself in the field.

Arthur receives an appointment in the special unit "Camelot", consisting of outstanding soldiers. The group is closed, elite, like the brotherhood of knights. Subconsciously, the fanfiction author returns to the archetype of the Round Table: King Arthur cannot be alone, he is always in command of the group, and this group, despite having a rigid hierarchy, is built on personal authority rather than the system of strict orders. In the text, the unit "Camelot" is called *team* or *group*, and the first occurs exactly twice as often as the latter, which is also not accidental (10 to 5). *Team* is a single entity with common goals, while the group is made up of individuals. By the time Arthur arrives, "Camelot" has already been formed and is characterized by close unity. Therefore, Arthur needs to become a true leader of the division.

The name of Arthur in the complex "King Arthur" is replaced by Arthur Castus, which verbalizes the idea of a privileged position, of his "blue blood". Morphologically, it resembles English *caste* meaning "one of the fixed social classes, which cannot be changed" [LD]. This reproduces the medieval system of inborn nobility by blood and refers to preexisting authority. At the morphological level, this idea is supported by the Latin suffix *-us*, which refers to the Roman origins of the historical Arthur, and to the idea of aristocracy, as well as military skills, because the Romans have always been considered professionals in the art of making war. It is interesting that the author explicitly refers to the privileged background of Arthur, restoring the aristocratic lineage of the prototypical image: "However, he was Arthur Castus, *the son of the great war hero*, and they had told him he could have anything he wanted". This is introduced to hint at the heroism of the character; perhaps, the author wanted to develop this turn of the plot further, but as many fanfiction stories it was left unfinished. In any case it allowed to introduce one of the representative words of the concept in the text. Arthur is not a typical military man, as described by his author: "They didn't look like

a *conventional army team*; though, Arthur supposed, he didn't look like a *conventional army man* either, what with his shaggy, curly dark hair and beginning of a beard". In this case, contrasting the typical - atypical images draws attention to Arthur's appearance. There are some archaic features in his image: curly shaggy hair and a starting beard, which are closer to the past than to the current image of a military man.

Another word describing King Arthur is the word *leader*, which should reflect the essence of social relations that go beyond the instruction and are based on personal qualities. To become the head is not enough, Arthur must become the leader as well. This lexeme is used quite often in the text, however, we do not get a definite answer to the question - did Arthur become a real leader? "Maybe they thought, they did not have enough time to think up the ways to terrify the new colonel, and then we'd have a '*real*' leader for longer." The sentence contains both a lexically expressed modality, *maybe*, and a grammatical one within the conditional sentence. Moreover, the use of scare quotes expresses an obvious irony. The Camelot division consists of famous Arthurian characters given military posts: Colonel Arthur Castus, major Lancelot, captain Dagonet, warrant officer Bors, Gawain, recon specialist Tristan, Corporal Galahad. The unit⁸ is famous for its combat effectiveness, courage and professionalism, it is made up of the best fighters possible, - that is why it was named Camelot, referring to its quality as a mysterious city.

The team is also known for the character of both the members and the field work they do. "Before I give you this post, I must ask. Did you want to *be in charge in the field*, or act as a *handler of the team*. Their last 3 Colonels have been handlers - the latest one said he was going to be in the field, but changed his mind not a week into the job." The hero chooses to work in the field, which tells about his possible courage and apparently no lesser strength and professionalism. Colonel Arthur Castus is shown as a calm, well-trained man, whose emotions are shown only by means of somatisms: *Arthur asked, frowning*; *Arthur nodded, thinking about it*; *Arthur frowned at him...*

⁸ Note that the idea of a military secret service saving the whole world was realized in the film "Kingsman" (2015), that was wittily called by critics "Knight Bond" or "spies of the round table" for numerous allusions to the myth.

He agrees to lead this complicated military unit, which is also described as *uncontrollable*, *unpredictable* and even *aggressive*: “It was a bit of a *rogue team*, with *no attachments*, and had always been considered a *wild card*, Well... not *volatil*, per say, but... you’ll see. They don’t *exactly*... like newcomers”. They seem to be in no particular need of a leader for they are more than capable of running themselves. It may be possible that Arthur Castus will be able to tame this volatile team and teach them how to follow the orders: “The General simply raised an eyebrow, deciding that it would be best not to try and explain the... volatile aspect of the team to Arthur Castus”. The last remark remains unclear, since, like many other works of fan fiction, this story is left unfinished. The story ends at the first verbal battle between Colonel Castus and Major Lancelot, with the latter being reluctant to follow the orders of the newcomers.

The analysis of this story allows us to draw the following preliminary conclusions: with a serious reorganization of the concept underlying the work, the prototypical characteristics will always be the backbone. Even in the maximally and intentionally altered story of “Noble”, the hero is connected with military work, he is brave, exists in the enclosed (and thus mysterious) space of a mythical military unit, and is identified as a potential leader. It is probable that through his leadership he could also gain authority, especially as the author briefly notes that he was going to support a naval maritime brotherhood: “the strength of the brotherhood of the Marines”.

The change of setting leads to further strengthening of other prototypical characteristics, such as leadership and strength of character. Moreover, it is necessary to exercise them in difficult, almost conflicting situations. When one of the hero’s nuclear characteristics is destroyed, compensation is achieved through the schematization of other prototypical characteristics. Changing the setting is the most complex modification, since the conceptualizations of space and time are basic for the mythological worldview. Arthur still acts in the limited space of the secret military group, he is still not completely accepted in the modern world, perhaps the action takes place on the island, that is again connected with the idea of the island of Avalon, where the defender of the homeland awaits his time. A significant role in maintaining identity

is fulfilled by the hero's name, albeit altered, but quite recognizable, and therefore fulfilling the necessary function of reference.

2) *Changing time*

Another attempt to transfer the hero to the contemporary world is the narrative "*King Arthur: Modern day respin*" by the author *nikkiemjinkx*. Although the author manifests in the title and in the short description for the story that Arthur will act precisely in the modern world, the author cannot get away from the myth and its framework, and this determines his placement of the actions in some private school on the island of Avalon. As the plot unfolds in the classical myth, all the situations are repeated with great attention to each and every detail, substituting only the roles and social status of heroes in the medieval world for positions in the school hierarchy: "The pupil goes to school, meets his classmates: Guinevere Dame and Lance, as well as teachers: Ms. Clarke, Merlin. He received a note from Morgan, *his future enemy*". The attitudes these characters have towards the king in the myth are also preserved: some become his friends, while some become his enemies. All the important components of the concept are used: Avalon is a very strange island, disconnected from the outside world and living according to the laws of circular mythological time repeating itself. The language in which the schedule is written in is difficult to read and understand, which is most likely a variant of Old English or Middle English. Through this detail a reference to the past is established "[...] I was just wondering what this time was saying, would you kindly help me?"; "And after some time, I was now used to Avalon, [...] used to *their language* [...]" Yet this interesting detail stays undeveloped. The only attempt to mimic archaic language is the direct speech of Morgan at the end of the story: "Thy life is at risk". During the final scenes of the story, the author directly asserts that the Middle Ages break into modernity: "Arthur what's happening? I was reading in the library when the walls came down and people-they were *killing each other with swords! Middle ages!*" The similarity between the prototype and the hero is shown in the hero's name: Arthur Pendragon is left unchanged as in many fanfiction stories.

In the context of the story, this means that the hero returned in order to retrieve the sword from the hands of the Lady of the Lake, fight with Morgan and Mordred, and again either die for the next return to Avalon, or survive this mortal battle and rule the island-school. We learn all this at the history lesson, where the myths and legends of King Arthur are studied and the teacher hints at the pupil with a well-known name thus preparing him for following the legend as he was destined: “Hold on to the second you have the same name as, Arthur Pendragon that King of Camelot. You know, the story of Merlin, Guinevere, King Arthur and Uther?”

The story explicitly creates a set of references to Arthurian myth through the extensive use of demonstrative pronouns: that Arthur, that stuff, that old thing, that Avalon, that story. Through the linguistic category of deixis, the connection with the past is established. A definite article is often used where its use can only be justified stylistically: with the names like “Arthur”. “It’s too late now, it’s time-you need to start *the war*. I need to tear down *the walls*.” Yet, we find nothing in the text about the war everyone is talking about, one can only guess. However a reader that is familiar with *Le Morte d’Arthur* or with the general framework of Arthur’s myth repeatedly invoked in culture, will remember the last battle of the king against Mordred, who wished to take his throne. The use of a definite article makes this knowledge self-evident and frames fanfiction into the theory of intertextuality: “Being taken away from Uther and Igraine, being sent to Sir Ector, retrieving the sword from the stone, battling against Morgan Le Fay and Mordred then arriving on *the mists of Avalon*”. “The very same” Arthur for the first time is aware of his fate and his role in history and understands that in Avalon school he is expected to be tested. Linguistically this is expressed by the phrase *the mists of Avalon* again with a definite article. This phrase, in addition to its immediate meaning, is a reference to the famous book by M. Bradley (1983), which tells the Arthurian myth from the point of view of female characters.

An important center of prominence in the story is the abundant repetition of the words *story*, *legend*, and *destiny*. “I am going to die I know it. That is in the *legend*; I will do that just as *legend* says; The *legend* is right-you’re going to be mortally wounded!” It is impossible to bypass

the legend, the canon dominates the image, and the development of the plot goes exactly according to the given scenario with only one difference: due to the fact that Guinevere answers his true love, runs up to the mortally wounded Arthur and kisses him, Morgan's spells are destroyed, and King Arthur remains alive - a sharp, unexpected and illogical ending, strongly reminiscent of fairy-tale endings. As for Arthur's image, he is depicted very schematically, in spite of the attempt to lead the narrative in the first person.

3) *Changing gender*

The most unexpected change for Arthur's concept is regendering; however, it is quite traditional for fanfiction at large. This modification is one of the most complicated, since the gender of the hero constitutes the essence of his social and personal characteristics. Deconstructing gender entails considerable changes in the plot, substantial transformation of the personal qualities of the hero, and even in some cases a modification of the social context. Regendering⁹ is partially brought to life by a larger proportion of female writers among the fandom, ready to challenge traditional gender stereotypes, and partially by the heated debates about the role of women in traditional narratives from the perspective of contemporary feminism. Arthuriana is a very attractive material for attempts to rethink the story from the point of view of female characters, since they are paid the least attention in the original myth, which features men as fighters and women as "damsels in distress", serving as pleasant ornament for male actions. Reinterpretations of the myth from the point of view of existing female characters appeared, potentially reinterpreting Arthur himself and his nearest cycle: these stories focus on the characters of Guinevere, Morgan, Igraine and others. Their subordinate role in a male world does not fit into the modern socio-cultural framework and thus triggers a more detailed discussion in the fandom. Consequently, in the evolution of the myth, women are given promi-

⁹ "These regendered texts embrace wider political concerns about representation, creative and economic opportunities, and the psychological effects of misrepresentation in all its available senses" (Baker 2016: 25).

nence and their personalities are developed. This process at the basic level allows to rebrand the cultural role the character played in the story. In fanfiction, however, there are many more female characters, who are either taken from the works themselves, or are invented and introduced into the existing canon.

The Romance of Arthur, Vortigern's Daughter by the author Judith P. Soath is a story about a girl, Ardora, who after surviving a rape is no longer accepted in her family and is sent to the camp of Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon with the child she had. She faces the cruelty and unfairness of a male world based on the right of the strongest. This makes it possible to further explain the basic feature of Arthurian reign: that he was a just and peaceful ruler and a protector of his people. It also suggests that the knightly ideal could most logically emerge in a woman's characteristics. The story consists of three parts, reflecting the main stages in the formation of the heroine: *Ardora and Ardurius*, *The Cup and the Sword*, and *Morte de la belle Artu*. Note that the names of the parts correspond to the canon: the name Ardurius recalls the Roman origin of the prototype of the myth, the sword and cup remind of Excalibur and the Holy Grail, and the title of the final stage echoes the famous *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Three parts indicate the gradual identity change of the female version of Arthur: from a young girl experiencing her own dishonor to an unknown avenger to the King of England. First, the heroine changes her appearance, learns to ride a horse and becomes a good swordswoman. A young man, Lancelot, helps her in mastering the military art, teaches her many hints and becomes her friend, brother-in-arms and ally. She is characterized by three concepts that are true for the prototypical Arthur, yet these are not the most important in the traditional image: *virtue, vengefulness, wisdom, heat and violence of the king's heart* are introduced one after another. Two of these are closely related to the concept of Arthur, and the image of an avenger is the development of the archaic concept of war. The Arthur of fairy tales and even in Thomas Malory's novel is cruel, vindictive and less likely to be merciful, although the notion of mercy is linked to the knightly ideal. After Ardora decides to change her role in the male world, she also changes her name to Arthur and departs with the army from Brittany (where she stayed before) to the island. In the army, she turns

out to be quite useful, because she not only knows several languages, but is also a skillful and well-trained warrior: “she spoke many British dialects, her mother’s Germanic tongue, French, Latin, and the Alan tongue as well-and in her mastery of weapons and horsemanship”.

Talking with the wives of Uther and Ambrosius about how she sees Britain in the future as the possible heir to the throne, she paints a picture of a peaceful life, without hatred and evil. They together dream about a knightly ideal of protecting women, that will be a must for all noble men. “Now the women began to sigh and to speak of the Britain they longed to see: a land at peace, where every man offered his protection to every woman, where lords sat at peace with each other instead of building towers in which to hide from each other [...]”. She tells the wife of Ambrosius about his unworthy actions (he raped her) and is able to verify the truth of her words. Eopa wants to take revenge and accepts a silver bowl with poison, in which she mixes the medicine to heal the wound that her spouse he received from Ardora. Upon discussing the possibility of her becoming a ruler of the nation with her already grown-up sons and other noble ladies, Ardora receives a sword that was previously owned by Uther, Ygerne’s husband, from her own hands in the church near the lake. In fact, the idea of obtaining a symbol of power from a woman prominent in the medieval interpretation of the legend remains (the sword is given to King Arthur by the Lady of the Lake and the Round Table comes with Guinevere as her dowry). It is provided with another explanation and fits into another context, yet by changing only one word creates a pattern of similarity with the canon. “Now they dressed Arthur *as befitted a king*, not a wandering tinker, and indeed *she looked like a king*, young and shining with her new purpose. *The sword given her by the lady at the lake hung at her side.*” In the story, the number of cross-references to the original myth is played upon, and the connection between the known plot and the novel interpretation is established. The questions about what we see and what really exists arise. She looks like a real king and finally she becomes a real king, the images of Ardora and Arthur finally blend. Following some battles with those disagreeing, her victory is final. She is recognized as the new king both by Arthur’s allies and enemies, “and an era of peace ensued”. Meanwhile, she establishes herself as an active and just ruler; this is

proved by the use of action verbs that are typically used in relation to Arthur in the fairy tale and in Thomas Malory's novel: "made a good treaty, collected the remained of the army, began to fight against, fought a battle." However, as her major intention was to bring peace to the island in war, she successfully ceases battles and wars and hides her female identity. The court is located in Camlan¹⁰ (*held court at Camlan*).

The important political and personal dilemma introduced by Thomas Malory was preserved and one of her children was sent to be brought up in the North. The child named Moderatus (Moderatus or Morthor - the name given by Ardora) grew up in hatred for the King of Britain. His advisor is Morgan, the daughter of Ambrosius, killed through actions of Ardora, still waiting for revenge and carefully plotting it. Therefore, inspired by Morgana, Moderatus asks Arthur to fight with him, not knowing that the king is his mother Ardora. So, the Arthurian canonical plot and the essence of the dilemma is again preserved given the different motifs. She does not want to kill her own son, but in an attempt to parry the blow, she inevitably does it. Being nearly killed by her grief, she reveals her identity, and, taken away from the field by Lancelot, kills herself that same winter. As the author writes, people did not understand what really happened at the battlefield and why did some women took the body of Moderatus and placed his helmet and sword next to him. They decided that their king Arthur had died: wounded and taken away by Lancelot to be buried. Everything seems to be completely consistent with the classical legend, except for the motivation and gender of the main character.

At the same time, Arthur's prototypical conceptual characteristics and linguistic features remain very close to the canon. This story is worked out in a more detailed manner, so we can identify the structure of the concept. The core comprises verbs of active action, manifestations of cruelty, the wisdom of the ruler, and the ability to fight in battle, while the periphery includes fame, the desire to create a knightly ideal,

¹⁰ The space created in this story is close to the archaic idea of knightly power and government. Camlan instead of Camelot appears for a valid reason, for it is most tightly connected with the Arthurian myth as the final battle with Mordred is supposed to be here. This site is more historical compared to the fully mythological Camelot and was mentioned in The Annals of Wales - one of the four accounts of the "historical Arthur" (Annals Cambriae).

peaceful rule, and knowledge of languages. The major tool as well as the conceptual dominant is the clash of identities of Ardora and Arthur. This is clearly expressed in the culmination of the story: “Who shall measure *the heat and violence* of the *king’s heart* when caught and tangled in a *woman’s body*?” The author explores the limits of women’s power and the possibility of reshaping the gender-biased image of the king. The questions about women’s rights are raised indirectly. The antonyms work on the contextual contrast: heart-body, king-woman, heat-cruelty. Yet, in spite of Ardora being as successful as Arthur, she could not change her female identity.

Conclusion

Analyzing the conceptual features of King Arthur in fanfiction, we can argue that the most interesting interpretations are based on transforming one of the core characteristics. The authors seem to work with the generalized mythological concept extracted from a number of texts devoted to King Arthur. Changing or destroying the core features is a challenge for fandom authors, for it needs extensive reformation of the mythological world to eliminate the arising controversies and contradictions. When one core feature is reorganized or transformed, then the others are reinforced so that the image remains connected to the original one, which serves as the “norm”. The conceptual operation of comparing to it is the basis of categorization. The author and his readers categorize the new character, but since this process is not by any means creating a new one, there should despite the fact that fanfiction authors create the novel interpretation out of the misbalance they feel or their desire to make it different, they still resort to the norm. They create the character not from scratch but based on the already established ground, filling in the possible “what ifs?” that arise when associating themselves with the mythological world.

The next important feature of the analyzed stories is the reliance either on the plot of the canon, carefully repeated with the new interpretation added, or on the key thematic words of the general discursive field of the myth: *hero, legend, myth, wisdom, cruelty, hard* (in terms

of character), among others, which bind together the shaken, destroyed concept. The connection between fanfiction and the evolution of the myth needs to be stressed to account for how the myth gradually finds a proper place in a changing world: with the transition of myth to the stage of commercialization (as it usually happens to popular characters in a consumerism culture), the “right to own myth” is claimed by large trade and film corporations. A tension between the presupposed consumption of myth and its closeness to the masses arises, waiting to be balanced by active interpretation. The myth is fixed and canonized through the norm, but lives on among the people, through the people and in the people. Moreover, the more massively it is distributed, the more lively and adaptive it is, whether it takes the form of a fairy tale, novel, or film. G. Jenkins justly noted: “Fan fiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk” (Jenkins 2012: 139). And this is as true for the contemporary myths as it is for the centuries-old myths.

To conclude, fan stories create a polyphony of views, ideas, and characters. This polyphony is a vital ingredient for anything innovative to emerge into a full interpretation able to occupy a just place within the mythological canon. The inexhaustible curiosity, the intrinsic need for adding a personal story to the neutral myth, give the archaic plots a new impetus. The desire to exhaust the topic, to find the unknown and determine it leads back to the all-encompassing element of the archaic myth. The myth changes and therefore evolves.

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