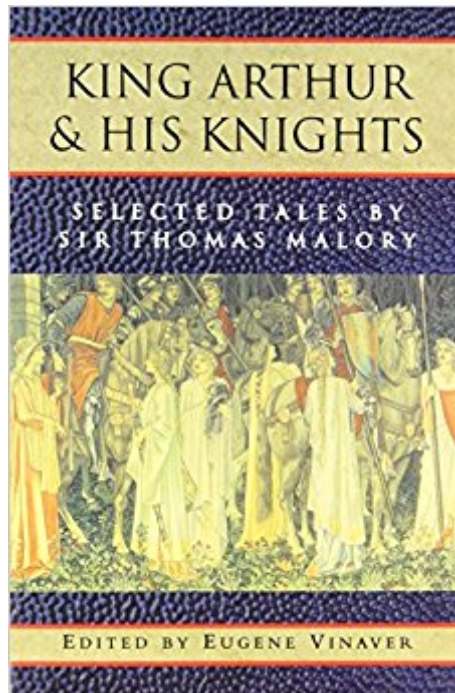


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King Arthur And His Knights: Selected Tales



Synopsis

This thoroughly readable collection of Malory's famous stories of King Arthur includes the familiar legends, plots, exploits, and characters which have become part of the cultural tradition of the English-speaking world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've used this text to teach upper-division college classes on the Arthurian legend, and I'd say that this is the best text for that purpose. First, although there are some useful and interesting tales missing (such as the tale of Sir Lancelot, and the tale of Sir Gareth), most the truly vital ones are there -- and the death of Arthur is presented in its entirety. Second, Vinaver DOES modernize the spelling. But you can't modernize the spelling of an archaic word and, since he is NOT writing a translation but providing a modern-spelling edition, he simply standardizes the spelling of the archaic words and provides a gloss on each one. This is much more useful than the banal translations by Keith Barnes and Richard Barber (Legends of Arthur, from Boydell and Brewer). This edition is the best way to get used to Malory's beautiful style without having to figure out Middle English spellings (which isn't really very difficult in Malory's case). It's a well organized book, and makes Malory appealing without compromising on the language -- which is one of Malory's greatest facets. The only problem I have with this text is Vinaver's insistence on re-ordering the tales according to Malory's French originals. "The Knight of the Cart" should be presented AFTER "The Poisoned Apple," and certainly not before the Quest of the Holy Grail. It makes much better sense

where Malory put it, where it shows Lancelot's deteriorating morals as his relationship with Guenevere intensifies. Also, I'd like to see either more from the Quest for the Holy Grail, or nothing at all. The tiny fragment of the story presented here is almost incomprehensible to first-time readers.

Eugene Vinaver is the editor of the standard version of Malory, "Works." Here he has selected a few of the author's tales, largely the stories leading up to Arthur's death. However, this remains essentially a skimming of Malory's work, somewhat akin to a condensed version, collected I suspect for academics wishing to teach the Arthurian romances without having to delve too long or deeply into Malory's entire narrative. As such it provides a glimpse into Malory's version of the legend, yet remains in part fragmentary---especially the story of Pellias and Ettard---thus limiting its impact. Also, Vinaver continues his practice from "Works" of footnoting certain words he has chosen not to translate. I found this annoying as I could perceive no apparent reason in his choice not to complete the translation, and though in most cases I was able to interpret their meaning within their context, their footnoting continued to drag my eye to the translation provided at the bottom of the page, interrupting the flow of the narrative. If a credible reason for this practice can be provided, I would love to hear it. Those who wish to read only what the editor has chosen to highlight in Malory's tale may be satisfied. For all others, I would direct you to Vinaver's complete edition, "Works."

I read this book to get a taste of Arthurian legend and to determine whether I'd like to read the whole "Le morte d'Arthur". For my part, I think this edition of the "Selected Tales" will suffice. The plots are dry and not as adventurous as I expected, but many of the episodic elements are often unintentionally hilarious. For example, King Arthur kills 100,000 Roman men and is crowned Emperor. Then Arthur agrees to kill his wife because someone choked to death during a dinner she cooked! And as far as I can tell from these tales, in Arthur's day, jousting fulfilled the same purpose as hand-shaking does today. Lancelot and Galahad are the two most likable characters who rise above the others being consistently petty, stupid, rash, prideful, and violent. All in all, this volume is well worth reading, but unfortunately Vinaver selected tales mostly devoid of Merlin, who appears very little in these selections.

This nice collection of tales of King Arthur and his knights of the table round is a wonderful reading for anyone concerned with the history of western civilization and the thought that helped shape it. The book begins with Merlin, and really King Uther Pendragon and the wife of the Duke of Cornwall,

Igraine, and the conception of one King Arthur. Following are tales of knight errantry, profiles of brave souls such as Guinevere, Arthur, Merlin, and perhaps most notably, Sir Lancelot and his erstwhile beloved Elaine, and their child, Sir Galahad. The tales are highlighted by prophecies, magical kingdoms, chaste maidens and not so chaste queens. These are, of course the christianized versions of these stories, but it is a strange christianity indeed. The eucharist holds no sway here, where instead, the sankgreall, or holy blood, just appears, sometimes from a cenosoma dove bears it in its mouth, other times leeching from a long sword bore by Christ Himself (to Sir Galahad). Angels bear away noble souls to heaven, while sorcery and magic are promulgated side by side with christian feasts and observances. The thin line between paganism and christianity is blurred to the point the stories bear an uncontested occultic thread from beginning to end which is to good effect here. This is a book when once bought, will be treasured. Hopefully still for many years to come!

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