

Michael Pham

Paper Proposal

The Magic of Arthur and His Knights: Medieval Magic in Arthurian Literature

(not super sold on the title yet – might change later)

For this paper, I aim to examine the way magic was viewed in the medieval culture through a selection of different texts from the course. Magic, as we know it today, entails spells, deals with the Devil, or witchcraft, and a fictional device incorporated within stories to add an element of fantasy and mysticism. However, when reading through various texts from the course (for example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Knight with the Lion*, or *Lanval*), magic seems to encompass a much larger scope, such as transformation, rings, or fairies. Upon research of magic in medieval culture, magic is a broad spectrum of natural and unnatural things, tied to not only the Devil, but with God and nature, combining both religion and science. Though, initially, I wanted to have a broad analysis of medieval magic, I've decided to focus on recurring instances of magic from the texts this semester: transformation, prophecy, and items.

Transformation magic, as seen in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Turk and Sir Gawain*, and briefly in *The History of the Kings of Britain*, plays an important role in each of the texts, so what might be the significance, and why might medieval authors use this form of magic? There were a couple of sections through my primary sources (from the annotated bibliography) that'll prove useful, like the Williams source for example. In it, she relates it, I believe, to the agency of a character (I might be confusing it). It also seems to play a role in the morality and virtue of character (*Wedding of Sir Gawain*). Prophecy, like interpreting dreams or simply telling the future, plays an important role in Arthurian literature, as we've seen already in

the *Alliterative Morte*, where Arthur's dreams are premonitions of the future and interpreted by monks (I believe they were monks). What importance did prophecy play in medieval culture, and why is it such a big part of Arthurian legend? And finally, items (or relics?) are used, or briefly mentioned in several texts, and sometimes hold some value in them in terms of their use, like in Chretien's works (briefly in *Lancelot*, though), and possibly in Malory's *The Quest for the Sangkreal* (maybe?). I'm not too sold on that last bit and might focus more on the transformation and prophecy.

Overall, I think after your comments on the annotated bibliography have given me a better idea on what I wanted to accomplish with the paper and the idea. I think by narrowing it down to a few recurring things helps the paper.

There is an additional thought/connection I've thought about as well – the relationship to Christianity. Based on some of the research I've done already, "magic" in some cases, have some relationship to Christianity, so I'm thinking while I can talk about/analyze the certain aspects of magic, I can also relate it to Christianity. For instance, in the Bynum introduction her focus is on the way religion plays a role in matter (which can tie into the relics portion of the paper). In addition, some of my other sources connect these aspects to Christianity and its role (in the case of prophecy, it was neither condemned nor widely accepted). This is a more recent development in my thought process (though I briefly mentioned it in my initial email to you), and I think I can incorporate it seamlessly.