

The Paper in Her Hand* – an extra credit 50 pts “on your own” essay for *The Once and Future King

Instructions: Read the questions that are printed below. Write an original response for each of these questions. Treat each question as a mini-essay prompt. That means you need to write using correct grammar, have a thesis, and back that thesis up with specifics. **These are due the day you take your final, and will only count (for credit) if you have read the book.**



Question 1: What specific influences from White’s life can you see in *The Once and Future King* – you may do more research – but you should be very specific (both with his life and with the book). Please don’t repeat what others have said before in the forum.

Question 2: Why the choice of this subject matter for his novel? Connect specifics from the novel about war with White’s choice to be a conscientious objector during World War II. Make sure you reference Malory’s own imprisonment (refresh yourself with a little research from your text book or the web).

Question 3: The other day a student in class while discussing the possible suspects for the paper in Lady Macbeth’s hand as she was sleepwalking, said that even if you were able to ask Shakespeare he wouldn’t likely know (what was in her hand). Does knowing an author’s life ultimately truly help us understand their intentions or meaning while writing a text? Is knowing what an author meant or their motivation in writing something – even knowable? Be specific in your answer and be sure to bring in what you wrote about and learned when finding out about the tragic story of John Gardner and its relation to the novel, *Grendel*. You should also connect this with what you wrote about for questions 1 & 2 (though it may contradict what you wrote).

T.H. White – excerpts from a Wikipedia Biography

Terence Hanbury White (29 May 1906 – 17 January 1964) was an English author best known for his sequence of Arthurian novels, *The Once and Future King*, first published together in 1958.

White was born in Bombay, British India, to English parents, Garrick Hanbury White, an Indian police superintendent, and Constance White. Terence White had a discordant childhood, with an alcoholic father and an emotionally frigid mother, and his parents separated when Terence was fourteen.

White went to Cheltenham College in Gloucestershire, a public school, and Queens' College, Cambridge, where he was tutored by the scholar and occasional author L. J. Potts. Potts became a lifelong friend and correspondent, and White later referred to him as "the great literary influence in my life." While at Queens' College, White wrote a thesis on Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and graduated in 1928 with a first-class degree in English.

White then taught at Stowe School, Buckinghamshire, for four years. In 1936 he published *England Have My Bones*, a well-received memoir about a year spent in England. The same year, he left Stowe and lived in a workman's cottage, where he wrote and "revert[ed] to a feral state", engaging in falconry, hunting, and fishing.

White also became interested in aviation, partly to conquer his fear of heights. White wrote to a friend that in autumn 1937, "I got desperate among my books and picked [Malory] up in lack of anything else. Then I was thrilled and astonished to find that (a) The thing was a perfect tragedy, with a beginning, a middle and an end implicit in the beginning and (b) the characters were real people with recognizable reactions which could be forecast[...] Anyway, I somehow started writing a book."

In February 1939, White moved to Doolistown, Ireland, where he lived out the international crisis and the Second World War itself as a de facto conscientious objector. It was in Ireland that he wrote most of what would later become *The Once and Future King*; two sequels to *The Sword and the Stone* were published during this time: *The Witch in the Wood* (later retitled *The Queen of Air and Darkness*) in 1939, and *The Ill-Made Knight* in 1940. The version of *The Sword in the Stone* included in *The Once and Future King* differs in several respects from the earlier version. It is darker, and some critics prefer the earlier version.

J. K. Rowling has said that T. H. White's writing strongly influenced the *Harry Potter* books; several critics have compared Rowling's character Albus Dumbledore to White's absent-minded Merlyn, and Rowling herself has described White's Wart as "Harry's spiritual ancestor." Author Neil Gaiman was asked about the similarities between Harry Potter and Gaiman's character Timothy Hunter, and he stated that he did not think Rowling had based her character on Hunter. "I said to [the reporter] that I thought we were both just stealing from T. H. White: very straightforward."¹

Gregory Maguire was influenced by "White's ability to be intellectually broadminded, to be comic, to be poetic, and to be fantastic" in the writing of his 1995 novel *Wicked*, and crime fiction writer Ed McBain also cited White as an influence.