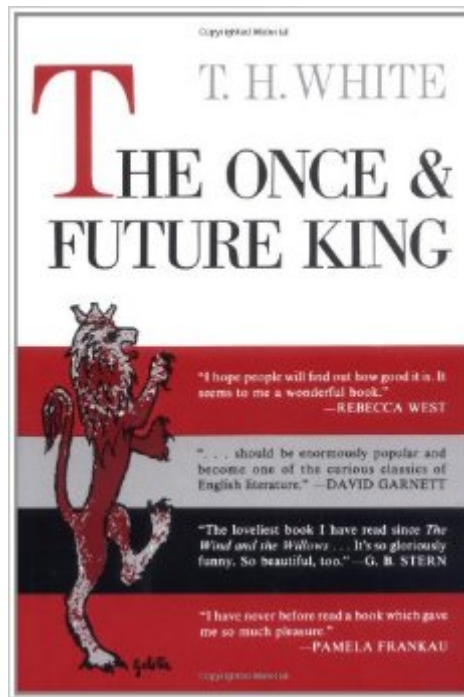


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The Once And Future King



Synopsis

T.H. White, whose *The Sword in the Stone* has been read by hundreds of thousands, now at last has turned his hand to retelling the entire Arthurian Epic. *The Once and Future King* takes Arthur from the glorious lyrical phase of his youth through the disillusioning early years of his reign to the mature years in which his vision of the Round Table develops into the search for the Holy Grail and finally to his weary old age. In part, T.H. White has drawn on published material which he has revised and reworked heavily to bring form and continuity to an overall work, a tetralogy which will stand as unique and vivid and quite apart from the individual effects of the various particular books. And in part the author has created new material as enchanting as any he has ever set on paper.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (677 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

As this is my favorite book, I couldn't help but take a look at all the reviews. It seems to me people either love it (4 or 5 stars) or hate it (1 star to remarks of minus 50). This may be very confusing to prospective buyers. It's very simple, folks: if you're looking for accurate, 'historic' information on King Arthur or the Middle Ages, if you're the type that likes to finish a book in an hour's reading, if you're only interested in fantasy/action packed novels of the 'Lord of the Rings' type (also an excellent book by the way), if you don't like vast, almost poetic descriptions of landscapes, seasons, moods, etc., or if you simply don't like complicated storylines, then steer clear of this book. There are many other novels which will give you far better value for money. For the others: it takes empathy and erudition to fully grasp the depth of this book. Empathy will make you love it when you're young and erudition when you are older and wiser. Added plus: each time you read it you'll discover something

new. For the details, I refer to other reviews...

Somehow, I missed this classic when growing up, so when my daughter was assigned this book for her eighth grade honors English course, I eagerly picked it up. I was well rewarded for my efforts. *The Sword in the Stone*, the most famous of the quartet and the first, was for me the least interesting, perhaps because of its lack of driving conflict. It concerns the education of Arthur, called *The Wart*, in often hilarious scenes as Merlyn sets out to instruct him in the way of all creatures. *The Queen of Air and Darkness* is a better story than the first, though it lacks the substance of the two later books. It tells of the history and childhood of the Orkney clan (Sirs Gawaine, Gaheris, Agravaine, Gareth, and Mordred) as well as preparing for the emotional battles about to begin. *The Ill-Made Knight* is simply brilliant, giving Sir Lancelot a humanity I never thought possible, not for a knight living in legend. The love triangle of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenever (called Gwen by Arthur and Jenny by Lancelot) is given life and understanding, real force. When I finished this book, I had to stop and swallow all the angst and love before I could continue. *A Candle in the Wind* begins with some of the most monotonous descriptive writing possible, with White devoting ten solid pages to Lancelot and Guenever looking out a window onto medieval England. I began to believe that White was desperate to incorporate all his research. Once the story got going, however, I couldn't put it down as the tragedy of King Arthur's life unfolded. Although these four separately published books are often described as a modern retelling of the legend of King Arthur, readers should be aware that they were written in the late thirties and early forties, a time when readers tackled demanding reading more readily than people do today. Do not expect to breeze through the volumes; even *The Sword in the Stone*, long regarded as a children's classic, is written in language far too complicated and scenes much too descriptive for a casual reader. White engages in expository pages - about Arthur's philosophy, the history of the feudal system, the evolution of courts of law, etc. - that for me watered down the narrative drive. This is my reason for taking away a star from the rating. The characters, however, are drawn with precision. I took delight in White's imagining of Sir Gawaine ("*Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight*", if you can remember from freshman English) and his rough-and-tumble brothers. Lancelot and Guenever are drawn with affectionate details of their strengths and failings. Mordred is a wonderfully villain, a man both mad and cunning, with a history that makes his actions seem not only believable but inevitable. Arthur, too, is given flesh, although his generosity and lack of brilliance make him less interesting than the others. I could write on and on about this book, but .com has a word limit. Read *The Once and Future King*, and see for yourself.

"The Once and Future King" is children's fantasy as it should be, a delightful read for both kids and adults. Author T. H. White manages to mingle the humorous and the sad portions of the King Arthur story successfully, and he never talks down to his audience or tries to oversimplify the events. The result is a wonderfully entertaining book that never slows down, one that's both amusing and serious. I won't try to summarize the entire book. Suffice to say, White covers the entire story of King Arthur's life and remains pretty faithful to the traditional version of events throughout the book. What's really amazing, though, is the way that he captures the spirit of the times, making you feel like you're actually in England during the Middle Ages, watching the tournaments and quests and battles yourself. His descriptions are beautiful without ever being unnecessarily lengthy, his characters seem to come alive (especially Arthur, Guenevere, and Lancelot), and his handling of some of the classic scenes is unforgettable.

I first read this book when I was 14 years old in 1963. Since that time, I have reread it six times, the last being c. 10 years ago. I now feel a need to read it again as I approach my 50s. First time I read it, I read it much as a fairy tale. In latter readings, it came across very much as an adult novel. Something for everyone in it -- love, war, good, evil, quest for the Holy Grail, etc. My readings of the Once and Future King caused me to read Mallory's *Le Morte de Arthur*, Tennyson, as well as some of the original French and English legends about the subject. So, it incited a life-long passion in Arthurian drama although I don't think any of them ever approached the majesty of *The Once and Future King*.

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