



Writers to Readers Weekly



Writers to Readers Weekly is a weekly newsletter for teachers of English, highlighting short works by contemporary writers for children and teens

March 18, 2020

Ed. 1, Issue #4

The Mysterious Manuscript: *Le Morte D'Arthur*

The origin of the King Arthur story is shrouded with mystery. So is at least one source for the English language versions of the tales: a fifteen century English book called **Le Morte D'Arthur (The Death of Arthur)** by Sir Thomas Malory. **Le Morte D'Arthur** is very long – 21 “books”, 507 chapters and over 300,000 words.

The first mysterious thing about **Le Morte D'Arthur** would soon be obvious if you tried to read it. In those days, although Modern English was spoken, there was no standard spelling and some now archaic letters and words were used, so the original **Le Morte D'Arthur** is very hard to read. Here's a sample:

Hit befel in the dayes of Vther pendragon when he was kyng of all Englonde / and so regned that there was a my3ty duke in Cornewaill that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme

(It befell in the days of Uther Pendragon when he was king of all England and so reigned that there was a mighty duke in Cornwall that held war against him long time)

Sir Thomas Malory himself is also something of a mystery, because no one is really sure who he was. There were at least six Thomas Malorys alive at the time that **Le Morte D'Arthur** was written. The top contender, according to most scholars, was a knight, politician, thief and attempted murderer! How he found the time to write such a long book is also

something of a mystery. Malory refers to himself in the text as a “knight prisoner”, so it's likely that he wrote much of his book in jail.

Although **Le Morte D'Arthur** was published as a printed book in 1485, the final mystery about it began in 1934. In that year Walter Fraser Oakeshott was cataloguing the library at Winchester College, a 600-year-old boys' school in Hampshire, England. In a safe in the school warden's bedroom, he discovered something that had been catalogued as an “imperfect” copy of “The History of Prince Arthur”.

Oakeshott soon realized that in fact what he had found was a manuscript (hand written) copy of **Le Morte D'Arthur**. This manuscript had been lost, hiding in the library for over 400 years! No one knows how the manuscript got into the library, or who the scribes who wrote it out word by word with black and red ink and quills were.

What was discovered by studying the manuscript is that it had been used as one of two source manuscripts for the first printing press publication of **Le Morte D'Arthur** in 1485. Where is the other manuscript? That's another mystery.

By Gabrielle Prendergast
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About this week's author: G.S. (Gabrielle) Prendergast

Gabrielle Prendergast is an award winning writer, teacher and designer living in Vancouver, Canada. She writes picture books and middle grade and YA contemporary and historical as Gabrielle Prendergast. Her science fiction and fantasy is published as G.S. Prendergast. She has won the Monte Miller Award, the Westchester Fiction Award and The BC Book Prize as well as being nominated or short-listed for numerous other honors. Gabrielle has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and has taught writing at Sydney University, San Francisco State University, UBC, Royal Canadian College and at numerous conferences. www.gsprendergast.com



Writers to Readers Weekly Study Guide



Comprehension Questions:

1. When was *Le Morte D'Arthur* written? When was it published as a printed book?
2. What language was used to write *Le Morte D'Arthur*?
3. Where is it thought that much of *Le Morte D'Arthur* was written?
4. Who found the mysterious manuscript of *Le Morte D'Arthur*?
5. What was discovered by studying the manuscript?

Discussion/Essay Questions:

1. Arthurian legend has been retold in books, films, TV shows and even comic books. Find an example to read/watch and write a review.
2. Why do you think Arthurian legends have been popular for so long? Write a paragraph with your answer.
3. Imagine what else might be hidden in Winchester College Library or another old library. What would you love to find and why?

Vocabulary – Use each word in a sentence

Shrouded	Contender	Manuscript
Archaic	Cataloguing	Quills

Books
By
This
Week's
Author:

