

10 Questions with Nicole Evelina
About her non-fiction book *The Once and Future Queen*

1. What inspired you to write *The Once and Future Queen*?

I was asked to give a presentation on Guinevere for Women's History Month in March 2017 at a local library. I was thinking, "Ah, she's not real so what am I going to talk about?" So I decided to look into how she has changed over time. The result was 30,000 words worth of notes – and a thesis that I thought was very interesting: the idea that Guinevere changes over time along with society's views on women.

At a presentation the previous November, one of the audience members suggested I write non-fiction, so I thought this was the perfect opportunity to take his advice. Besides, I was an English major in college so this was fun for me – like writing a really long research paper!

2. What types of research did you do to write the book?

I read a lot of scholarly critical research and many, many theses and dissertations. I really wanted to write this book because while the information is out there, it's not readily accessible to the general public. Most people don't know how to use the databases you need to find it, nor do they have the time to search for it. So I wanted to put it in one easy to find and read location.

3. 1,000 years of history is a long time. How did you choose which authors to feature?

Good question. Obviously I couldn't cover every book, or even most of them. If I had, the size of the book would be off-putting. I tried to keep in mind that my target audience for this book is non-academic people who are interested in Arthurian legend, so I chose books that I felt like most people would be familiar with, either from school or from pop culture.

A few people have noticed that toward the end of the book I focus much more on female authors. I want to explain why there aren't more men in that section. If I was doing an overall survey of Arthurian legend I would have included people like Bernard Cornwell or Stephen Lawhead – and I mean no disrespect by not focusing on their works – but this is specifically a book on Guinevere. My reason for not including them is that none of them really focus on Guinevere. She's there, of course, but it's easier – and I would argue more effective – to analyze changes in the character when she's a main character as opposed to secondary or tertiary.

I do discuss T.H. White at length, as well as Parke Godwin, so it's not that I abandoned male novelists when talking about modern books. But I believe the shift from male authors having total control over Guinevere's story historically to female authors telling her story from a female point of view for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s cannot and should not be underemphasized. We know that men portray female characters differently than female authors do (just as female authors write their male characters differently than male authors do), so analyzing how she changed at their hands tells us a lot about society and the views of readers.

4. What is the balance of traditional vs. modern stories covered in your book?

It's probably about 50/50. There is one chapter on Celtic literature, five chapters on the Middle Ages, two on the Victoria era, and eight on 20th and 21st century portrayals, not including the one on my own books.

5. You have a chapter in the book on your own novels, but yet you don't use your reviews as critical analysis like you did with Lavinia Collins. Why is that?

To be honest, I didn't think I could be objective in choosing the reviews of my own work that best epitomize the praise and criticism of my work. The last thing I wanted was to come across as saying mine is the best portrayal of Guinevere ever. That isn't fair to the other authors or in keeping with the spirit of the book. Therefore, I thought it best to explain my rationale and then direct readers to Amazon and Goodreads, where they can read and form their own opinions. Besides, no one wants to read their own bad reviews!

6. How long did it take you to write *The Once and Future Queen*?

The research was about three months, not counting the stuff I went back and did after I started writing. I think it took me about two and a half months to write and then another two months or so of editing. Maybe it's all the papers I wrote in school, but I find non-fiction a lot easier than fiction.

7. How did you come up with the title?

Obviously, it's a play on T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. Changing that famous title to fit Guinevere felt right to me because while she may not be prophesized to come again, she's never really left; she simply changes as society needs her to.

8. Why the switch to non-fiction?

I seriously never thought I would write non-fiction. I mean, I do it for my day job in marketing, but I always thought a non-fiction book was beyond my capabilities –

probably because my master's isn't in literature or history. (It's in public relations, which is what I do during the day.) But just as the need to tell a character or historical woman's story motivates my fiction, the desire to share my thesis and research with others motivated me to write this book.

9. What is the book about, beyond the character of Guinevere?

It's also a commentary on women and how our rights have changed over time. Because of that, it is a highly feministic book, as well as somewhat historical. I really enjoyed delving into how women were treated and expected to behave in the various time periods. It's fascinating to see what has changed and what hasn't.

10. What's next for you as a writer?

I am determined to finish *Mistress of Legend*, the third and final book in my Guinevere trilogy. I'm also working on a biography of Marie Rose Ferron, who was a mystic and stigmatic from Rhode Island in the early 1900s, so that one likely will be next after *Mistress*.

After that, I'm not sure. I'm also working on another non-fiction book tracing the history of feminism in the United States, which I'd love to have published around the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in August 2019. Related to the Guinevere trilogy, I want to write Isolde's story and Sobian wants her own novella. There is also the story of a WWII heroine from France that I really want to tell. I have more ideas than I know what to do with!