

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]

**Constructing New Camelots:
Representations of Sexuality, Gender and Religion
in Arthurian Legend
and their Manifestations
in Contemporary Writing and Culture**

by
Deneka C. MacDonald

B.A., The University of Victoria, 1995

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

in
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

© Deneka MacDonald, 1999.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 1999

**All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or part, by photocopy or
other means, without the permission of the author.**



**National Library
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada**

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-62483-8

Canada


APPROVAL

Name: Deneka MacDonald

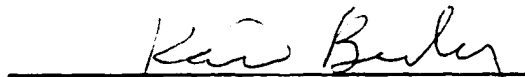
Degree: Master of Arts

Thesis Title: CONSTRUCTING NEW CAMELOTS: REPRESENTATIONS OF
SEXUALITY, GENDER AND RELIGION IN ARTHURIAN LEGEND AND
THEIR MANIFESTATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY WRITING AND
CULTURE.

Examining Committee:



Chair: Max Blouw
Dean of Graduate Studies



Supervisor: Karin Beeler
Assistant Professor, English Program



Stan Beeler
Chair, English Program



William Morrison
Professor, History Program



External Examiner: Don Precosky
Coordinator, English Program
College of New Caledonia

Date Approved: March 29/99

Abstract

The Arthurian Legends have a long history of close association with Christianity and Paganism. As such, the doctrines associated with these religions have become embedded in the Legends themselves. Consequently, early medieval stories of Arthur depict Christianity as a positive force while condemning Pagan religions. Moreover, contemporary Arthurian Legends which rely heavily on medieval sources, such as Thomas Malory, illustrate similar views. In contrast, feminist texts which give little or no credit to medieval sources, speculate about the earlier religions of the Celts and criticize Christianity for its vicious suppression of Pagan Goddess worship. This study explores religion, sexuality and gender in the Middle Ages and the twentieth century while examining selected contemporary Arthurian works.

The Mists of Avalon, by Marion Zimmer Bradley is a feminist Arthurian text which examines issues of religion, sexuality and gender through its fiction. Further, the text supports a strong opposition to social and political hierarchies. Bradley creates a fictional world in which she challenges negative sexual stereotypes and offers a matriarchal arena where “the Goddess” is worshiped as a powerful deity in the world of Camelot. Similarly, *Daughter of Tintagel*, by Fay Sampson celebrates a return to Paganism and the worship of the Goddess. Both Bradley and Sampson resurrect the powerful female character of Morgan le Fey and recreate her relationship with the Goddess.

Filmic adaptations such as John Boorman’s *Excalibur*, Jerry Zucker’s *First Knight*, and NBC’s miniseries *Merlin*, further illustrate western society’s fascination with Arthurian Legends. These films do not have a feminist focus; however they give substantial consideration to female characters. Moreover, films like *Excalibur*, *First Knight* and *Merlin* incorporate motifs of religion, sexuality and gender into their visual representations. The texts and films in

this study do not address these motifs with the same goal; however, the differences in the treatment of sexuality, religion and gender within the various works are significant because they reflect cultural attitudes and social value systems. Thus, this thesis examines aspects of social and cultural history in relation to the reshaping of contemporary Arthuriana.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
The Skeleton	2
The Historical Arthur	3
A Brief History of Arthurian Authors	11
Contemporary Arthurian Authors	17
Contemporary Film Versions of Arthuriana	20
The Focus of this Study	22
CHAPTER ONE	
MOTHER EARTH OR THE VIRGIN MARY?--	
RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN ARTHURIAN LEGEND	25
Christianity in the Middle Ages	27
Paganism: Contemporary and Medieval	30
Feminism and Religion	34
De-centering Christianity	35
Recreating the Image of Woman	38
Religious Dichotomies	45
Temptations and the Goddess	51
CHAPTER TWO	
CAMELOT REBORN: REVISING THE FEMALE	
TRADITION	59
Sexuality	60
Sexuality and the Political	64
Woman as Object	66

Sexuality and Lust	70
Sexuality and Power	73
Female Centered Spirituality	82
CHAPTER THREE	
ARTHURIAN LEGEND AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MAGIC	86
A Brief Overview of Magic	87
Visual Transgressions and Power	89
Sexual Transgressions	94
Conceptions of Evil	102
Divine Interventions	109
CONCLUSION	111
NOTES	114
WORKS CITED	123

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Karin Beeler, Stan Beeler, Bill Morrison, and Don Precosky, for all of their help, encouragement, and confidence throughout the process of this thesis.

*For
My Da, Stephen Allen MacDonald.*

*Because of his undying support, encouragement,
and sincere interest throughout the years—
especially during this process.
And for his never-failing words of wisdom that have
always given me strength.
Thank you @*

Introduction

The story of King Arthur and his legendary kingdom of Camelot continues to fascinate the western world. The concept of Camelot, perceived for generations as the perfect social and political utopia, is an intriguing one. Consequently, the Arthurian Legends¹ have endured throughout the centuries in many forms— as novels, poems, songs, and historical accounts, which have in turn attracted the attention of both scholars and non-specialists. What is it about this particular story which continues to attract such a vast audience? Perhaps it is the historical mystery which surrounds the legend—the search for the truth about this superhuman Arthur. Several people are lured to Arthuriana because of the adventure, magic and sorcery embedded in the stories. Others find comfort in the utopia of Camelot's structure. Unfortunately, there is no single reason for the continued interest in the subject. Yet the fact remains: the world will fund archeological expeditions, listen to stories and songs, view films, and read the vast wealth of literature produced on Arthur of Camelot. This thesis examines the contemporary fascination with Arthurian figures in fiction and film, including feminist representations of the subject which validate the experiences of women.

Arthurian Legends are versatile and diverse; Throughout the centuries they have embraced a variety of social, political, and cultural values within their plots. As authors retell the story of Camelot, they embellish events which have already been told, and often expand upon characters who have previously been one dimensional. In

contemporary literary and film versions of the legend, this phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the treatment of characters such as Morgan le Fay, Gwenivere and Igraine. While contemporary works vary as much as earlier re-tellings, most complete versions retain the skeleton of Arthurian Legend; it is from this starting point that authors embark on their own unique retelling of events and characterization. As Christopher Dean notes, this “fundamental outline has hardened into an accepted medieval canon”(11). An overview of this outline is provided below.

The Skeleton

The complete story of Arthur can begin in a variety of places, but for the purposes of this study we shall begin with the lady Igraine. Igraine is married to Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. They have one daughter together, Morgaine (later known as Morgaine le Fay). At some point (versions vary), Uther Pendragon, High King of Britain, falls in love with Igraine and decides he must have her. Uther kills Gorlois. With the assistance of Merlin the magician, Uther is wrapped in a cloak of magic, which disguises him as the Duke of Cornwall. He is then able to pass safely through the gates of Tintagel. Uther has sex with Igraine, claims her as his own, and makes her his wife. Arthur is conceived from their first sexual encounter.

Since Arthur's conception is so close to the death of Gorlois, questions arise over his legitimacy. Merlin takes Arthur from his parents at an early age and fosters him with a poor family. Morgaine is left to be raised at court for a time.

When Uther dies, Arthur steps in as High King of Britain at a very young age. Early on he proves himself as a remarkable warlord. He moves his court from Carleon to Camelot, and establishes the knights of the Round Table. He marries Gwenivere, whose biggest tragedy is her love for Lancelot, Arthur's Champion Knight. Gwenivere and Arthur never have a child. Morgaine leaves court long before Arthur becomes king. Morgaine and Arthur conceive a child— Mordred. For a variety of reasons, Camelot ultimately falls in the end.

The Historical Arthur

The historical Arthur lived in fifth century Britannia. Although he was a great warlord, he was never a true king. From all the past heroes that it might have chosen, western Europe selected the short reign of Arthur as pattern of a golden age of good government (Morris 118). However, it was not until long after the historical Arthur's death that his story took root in history and in literature. Why then has his story endured and become embellished for centuries?

There is much scholarly skepticism surrounding the true identity of Arthur. In the past, historians have disregarded evidence of his existence in history, claiming that he is an entirely fictitious creation. Further, the convoluted account of post-Roman times in the medieval chronicles has caused many historians to dismiss the reality of Arthur altogether. However, recent archeological finds in Britain have sparked new interest in the historical Arthur, which has led many historians to reconsider their earlier

findings.

Joseph Campbell, an extremely popular critic of world mythology and Arthurian Legend, who has published extensively in the field of myth, studies how these myths take shape within particular cultures². With respect to Arthur's lineage he argues that the history of Arthur goes back much farther than claims made by most scholars on the subject. Campbell asserts that Arthur was revered as a Celtic God as early as first century A.D. He bases his argument on an archeological find made in 1979 by Charles Muses. Muses found a stone tablet in the Pyrenees, west of Lourde, in a small town called St. Pè. According to Campbell, the tablet reads "Lexiia Odannii has gained meritt through her vows to Arthehe" (*The World of Joseph Campbell*). Campbell equates the deity Arthehe with the legendary King Arthur. He further argues that the historical Arthur was "a fourth and fifth century warrior who fought for the Celts against the invading Saxons. He was not a king, he was a Dux Bellorum— a leader in war, trained by the Romans and a native to Rome by the family name Artorii" (*The World of Joseph Campbell*). Campbell maintains that the historical Arthur was confused with the deity Arthur over the centuries so that by 1150 he was revered as a wondrous king.

Some scholars and popular historians speculate that Arthur was a direct descendant of Lucius Artorius Castus, who served as Praefectus Castrorum (Prefect of Camps), for the Roman Legion, in A.D. 180. P.F.J. Turner, whose work on Arthurian

Legend reflects the popular critic's interest in the story of Arthur, argues for the validity of this kinship:

We may think it improbable that Artorius Castus of Second Century Birtannia could have any connection to his namesake Arthur some three hundred years later, but time and change moved much more slowly in the ancient past . . . custom dictated that a son should follow the same profession as his father, and this custom was particularly strong during the long stability of the Roman Empire. . . . It is not only possible, but indeed virtually certain, that for generation after generation the Artorii remained in Britannia, serving in the army and maintaining strong ties to the Sarmatian cavalry forces (162).

According to Turner, under Artorius Castus' extraordinary military leadership, the Romans conquered the barbarian Sarmatian tribe in A.D. 175 and dispatched several thousand captive Sarmatians to Brittania. Turner maintains that the Sarmatians contributed significantly to the Imperial Army; they established a heavy cavalry tradition and introduced the dragon as a martial emblem. Both the symbol of the dragon and heavy mounted cavalry remained in use in Britannia through the post-Roman period. Reports from a variety of sources, including Geoffrey of Monmouth,

associate the Red Dragon or the Pendragon with King Arthur. In addition, Arthur's army was famous for its mounted horsemen who defeated several enemies of Britannia in the Fifth Century.³

John Morris, a prominent medieval historian, acknowledges Arthur's Roman parentage, but does not go into the speculative detail that Turner does in his theory of the historical Arthur. Morris claims that: "The central feature of the legend, the portrait of the strong just ruler whose good government was overthrown by jealous ambition of lesser lords, is fully historical. It is the contemporary picture painted by Gildas, who was probably over twenty years old when Arthur fell. But all the rest is painted fancy of later centuries" (119). Indeed, there is no question that Arthur's story as we know it today has been largely embellished. An example of such embellishment can be seen in Turner's work:

The evidence connecting Arthur to Cornovian Dummonia is overwhelming. Geoffrey [of Monmouth], of course, associates Arthur's origin with Dummonia, or more specifically "Cornwall," where "King Utherpendragon" kept his illicit tryst with Ygerne, wife of Cornovian Dux Gorlois. Various Saints' Lives [medieval religious biographies] also place Arthur in the region, and in A.D. 1113, more than two decades before Geoffrey wrote the *Historia Regum*

Britanniae, the medieval traveller Herman of Tournai reports being told in Devon and Cornwall that he was in "Arthur's Country"(165).

Although Turner notes both historical and archeological evidence for Arthur's existence in the statement above, he does not directly cite other scholarly studies in reference to his own findings. Instead, he refers to several medieval biographies of the religious leaders of post-Roman Britannia (166). He notes that Castellum Cataviae, the Hillfort of Cadbury Castle, which was well suited to give ready access to the entire southwest region of Britannia, was "reconstructed and re-occupied around A.D. 470 and . . . it remained in use until about A.D. 550" (171). This hillfort has been called Arthur's palace in literary sources. Moreover, according to Turner, Arthur is said to have become the commander of the key cavalry base at Cadbury Castle in A.D. 475. Apparently, this base became Arthur's military headquarters. After a series of military successes, Aurelius designated Arthur as his choice for succession to the high office of Regissimus Britanniarum. Turner contends that the designation was made in the Roman tradition by legally adopting the adult general:

Hence Arthur, son of the Cornovian warrior Artorius Castus, also became the son and heir apparent of the Regissimus from Armorica. This dual heritage of Arthur confused medieval historians and gave rise to the fabulous

legend of Arthur's conception during Aurelius's campaign against Dux Gorlois When Geoffrey of Monmouth tells us that Arthur became "king" of Britannia at fifteen years of age, what he really means is that Arthur became Regissimus approximately sixteen years after Aurelius's campaign against Dux Gorlois. Because Geoffrey thought that Arthur was conceived during this campaign he concluded that Arthur was a mere fifteen years old when he became Regissimus some sixteen years later (177).

In fairness, some recent archeological findings⁴ do lend some support to Turner's claims. Moreover, the search for the historical Arthur is one which remains extraordinarily appealing for modern academic historians such as Christopher Dean and John Morris. As Morris correctly notes,

Even today it is possible to raise large sums of money for the excavation of archaeological sites that later tradition associates with Arthur, though no such sums are offered by the public for the exploration of sites connected with Julius Caesar, or Claudius, or Henry VIII. The response is not simply due to the mystery that surrounds Arthur Arthur remains popular because of the mystery that surrounds his

story. . . . (Morris 118).

Morris raises an interesting point in his acknowledgment of archaeological funding. Although we seem to crave archeological evidence which will explain the story and lend credence to particular theories, we nonetheless reject or, at the least, remain skeptical of such finds because the truth, if it exists, destroys the mystery we have embraced for so long.

Still questing for truth about the historical Arthur, Baram Blackett and Alan Wilson, in their recent publication The Holy Kingdom, delve into the subject. The text in part supports past lineage theories, stating that there “were two Arthurs. The first was from Warwickshire; he was a fourth century son of Emporor Magnus Maximus. The second was the sixth descendant and King of Glamorgan”(23). The authors contend that the two “Arthurs” were blended together over the years to create the single powerful Arthur we know today. Moreover, the November 14th, 1998 edition of *The Vancouver Sun* published a full page editorial forum exclusively on Blackett and Wilson’s findings. Basing their argument on an archeological dig, the authors of The Holy Kingdom claim that they have found the true burial place of the second King Arthur. Stating that no reputable historian disputes their claim, Blackett and Wilson argue that their findings clarify the world of Arthurian scholarship. If not for the skepticism surrounding this “legitimate find,” this discovery would destroy much of the magic and fame surrounding Glastonbury and Tintagel Castle. But, as Jamie Portman,

author of "Two men who would be king" in *The Vancouver Sun*, states clearly:

"Mythology dies hard". Thus, although several scholars and popular interest groups are intrigued by Blackett and Wilson's findings, they have by no means satisfied the world's curious search for truth in the Arthur story.

Although one must approach all of the above theories with care due to the lack of historical evidence and documentation, they nonetheless raise interesting points. Moreover, they seem to be satisfying, in part, a hunger for historical fiction on Arthur's lineage that has risen to extraordinary levels in popular culture; the shelves in local bookstores are filled with popular Arthurian interest authors. Perhaps our fascination with Arthurian Legend is due to the mystery surrounding King Arthur, as Morris claims. Or, conceivably, we are still lured toward the legend because of our continual search for a utopic state of government such as Camelot claims to have been. However, because early medieval methods of documentation were insufficient, and hardly any records exist for the period, it is difficult to be entirely certain of Arthur's parentage, or his true place in history. As Morris states, "anything that may ever be learnt of the historical Arthur must always be overshadowed by the power of the legend" (117). Conceivably we will never know who the real Arthur of Britain was; however, what we can be certain of is that his name has survived for centuries and has prompted a wealth of literature that still fascinates many people today.

A Brief History of Arthurian Authors

The literary history of Arthur is a complicated one. The English tradition begins with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* (1136).⁵

Monmouth's sources are obscure: "in places he used scraps of Welsh history and legend, but much of his work was pure imagination, romance in the guise of history, and nowhere more so than in his portrait of Arthur" (Barber 2). Arthur becomes ruler of the western world in Monmouth's text, a hero among the men and women of Britain at a time when they needed one. Monmouth made Arthur,

a conqueror who subdued not only the Saxons, but most of Europe as well; Geoffrey's Arthur served the ambition of Plantagenet kings, but their subjects welcomed and perpetuated a different Arthur, the hero of the Norman poets, gentle, wise and courteous, whose chivalrous knights, just champions of the afflicted, were all that medieval lords should be, but were not (Morris 118).

Although his work was met with some skepticism at the time of its publication, in general it was believed to be true and scholars used it as their basis for an account of the early history of Britain (Barber 10). In the twelfth century, military success went hand in hand with secular glory; thus, military battles mattered above all else for Monmouth. Dean notes that Geoffrey saw military conquest as an admirable activity of a warrior

king: "Arthur is depicted as a conqueror of foreign territories in order to give the highest stature to the British Geoffrey deliberately equates him with Alexander the Great, so that his career must necessarily be one of foreign conquest" (4). In 1155, Wace, a Norman clerk who followed Monmouth's work closely, produced *Roman de Brut*. In this book, Wace adds a detail familiar to modern readers of Arthurian Legend—the Round Table. His work was translated into English by a Worcestershire priest, Laymon. Laymon was pro-British and anti-Saxon. As a result of his Christian faith he identified strongly with the British who represented Christianity in their fight to suppress the heathen Saxons.

Arthur reached his greatest fame when early twelfth and thirteenth century French writers began to show an interest in his story. Crétien de Troyes wrote *Lancelot, or The Knight of the Cart* and *Yvain, or The Knight with the Lion* (c. 1179), both of which "set certain patterns which were to endure throughout medieval Arthurian romance" (Barber 54). It is in *The Knight of the Cart* that Crétien introduces, for the first time, the idea of courtly love.⁶ In this tale, Lancelot is rebuked by Gwenivere when he hesitates to ride in an executioner's cart in order to rescue her from the evil Malagant. According to the rules of courtly love, the lover must be completely submissive to the lady and equally obedient. Although Lancelot rides in the cart to complete the rescue, he is nonetheless rebuked for shaming himself by arriving in a cart. Full of adventures, marvels, and magic, the story centers on the important motif of

Lancelot as lover and rescuer which has marked and followed his character to the present day. As well, Crétien's work set a tradition for Gwenivere's character as central female figure in Arthurian Legend.⁷ However, his stories are male centered, as are Malory's and other early works discussed later in this introduction; they revolve around the activities of men.

Between 1370 and 1390, an unknown English poet produced *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.⁸ The story hinges on two motifs: the beheading game, and temptation, both Celtic in origin. Dean notes that, "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is not the usual romance poem in which a knight follows a quest in alien lands but rather is a test-poem designed to teach us something about chivalry and human nature through the trials that the hero experiences" (85). In addition to the fact that this poem is brilliant in poetic form and content, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* contributed two important things to the legend as it is known today: first, Gawain, who was introduced as a character in Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, became an important figure in Arthurian Legend; he became known for his honor and strength;⁹ second, the "Gawain poet" reinforced the notion of temptation which permeates the tradition of Arthuriana; temptation from sin of all sorts (mainly Christian) has become a motif strongly linked with almost every version of the Arthur story.

Most complete contemporary versions of Arthuriana have their roots in the collection of stories or "novel" written by Thomas Malory in 1460.¹⁰ While different

versions foreground distinct issues and place emphasis on varying aspects of the legend, they also rely heavily on Malory and the earlier works by Crétien de Troyes, Wace, Laymon, Geoffrey of Monmouth and others, for "historical" background and events within the story.

Malory's version of the legend focuses heavily on male activity with a marked Christian subplot. His story is primarily concerned with Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. Thus, the plots in each "tale" throughout the "novel" center around the men. Among this male activity, camaraderie, loyalty among knights, kinship, honor, battle, and a strong Christian motif can be found in Malory's work. He also changes Lancelot's character, previously known primarily for his role as Gwenivere's lover, to a military master and first knight of the Round Table. Malory's priority is clearly to tell a story about what he deems the most important aspect of Arthur and his court—the men. Thus, the most detailed accounts found throughout the text focus on battles, pre and post-war activity, and quests.

For a time after Malory, interest in Arthur's story fades. In fact, with the exception of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, there is no major Renaissance work produced on Arthurian material. Christopher Dean attributes this lapse in interest to a renewed concern for Arthur as a historical figure:

. . . concern for him as a historic figure actually made him
less suitable as a character in works of fiction, since all

authors, not just those interested in establishing his place in British history, tended to avoid the romantic and supernatural elements of his story. Arthur's mysterious birth and final passing, the achievements of his knights, his betrayal by his wife and nephew, and the quest for the grail were all discarded as superstitious or fantastical . . . stripped of his mysterious origins, of his fellowship of knights, and of his fatally attractive queen, Arthur emerged from the heated controversies of the historians lacking much of his poetic appeal and significance (108).

Joseph Campbell, however, attributes the decline in interest of the Arthur story to something more substantial— the Inquisition. He states: “Why stop? You have all heard of the Inquisition! A college of Cardinals all telling you what to think, what God thinks, and how you are to relate to it, rather than the previous experience of God in your own heart” (*The World of Joseph Campbell*). This “previous experience of God in your own heart,” that Campbell notes here refers to the older Pagan religions of the Celts. Campbell blames Christianity and the papacy directly for the decline in Arthur stories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because people were forced to accept something in which they may or may not have believed. Further, he claims that since

the stories of Arthur were fantastical and marvelous in nature, the church deemed them heretical.

Although the story of Arthur loses appeal for almost four hundred years, it was revived in the Victorian period when Alfred Lord Tennyson produced *Idylls of the King*. Barber describes Tennyson's work as "complex, subtle and very rich poems, mirroring not only the Victorians' immense self-confidence, but also the darker side of doubt and despair" (Barber 166). Michael Mason, a Victorian scholar who is particularly interested in the sexual moralism of the period argues that "Victorian middle-class wives . . . suffered an actual deprivation of sexual pleasure because of the moralistic ignorance about women's sexual responses"(38). While Mason questions the moralism of the period, he maintains that behavior is closely tied with belief systems, and further that although the "professed moralism of the period was actually only uttered by a minority of people," it was these people who "commanded the organs of opinion" (40). Consequently, there is a strong Christian thread that follows all twelve of Tennyson's poems, and a clear lack of sympathy for the female characters within *Idylls of the King*. Arthur is the absolute utopian hero who does constant battle with sin, including temptations of the flesh. Unlike earlier authors, Tennyson had no sympathy for Lancelot and Gwenivere, and so he casts them as weak characters. Sin and temptation are major motifs of *Idylls of the King*; Arthur misjudges both Lancelot and Gwenivere whose adultery eventually brings down Camelot. Tennyson uses the legend as a

vehicle to reflect the values and concerns of the period; in the *Idylls of the King*, “[Tennyson] . . . addresses questions of religious faith, and presents various sexual and moral codes, especially on the part of his female characters . . . the king’s success or failure to rule depends upon the moral fabric created by the women who dwell in this decidedly Victorian Camelot¹¹” (Umland 8). Thus, like other versions of the Arthur story, Tennyson’s women of Camelot are morally responsible for the fall of the kingdom. Barber’s analysis of the poems as a reflection of Victorian doubt and despair is clearly accurate; throughout *The Idylls of the King* we are presented with the notion that sin and corruption will lead to the ultimate demise of even the most cherished of Kings.

Contemporary Arthurian Authors

The twentieth century has seen another resurgence of interest in the story of Camelot. Scholars such as Merlin Stone, who reflect the popular critic’s interest in the legends, speculates that this is due in part to the fact that we live in a culture of diverse religious expression. She claims lack of a cohesive cultural religion has sparked a new wave of interest in the legend: “To many of us today religion appears to be an archaic relic of the past” (When God Was a Woman xv). Stone argues that because we are no longer united under a blanket of Christianity, people have a renewed interest in the feminine aspects of Paganism (such as those included in Arthurian legends). Other

explanations include the search for a nirvana of government such as that found in the Kennedy administration, which is affectionately remembered as the Camelot years. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, this renewed interest is both genuine and strong.

Remarkably, the variations in Arthuriana continue to be unique; each retelling is anxious to portray characters from a fresh perspective, embellishing this fictional legend with new details. The legend is "remarkably responsive to changes in symbolic content . . . it possesses a "flexibility" that allows for the idiosyncrasies of individual artists and for each generation to respond to it by virtue of a new idiom furnished for it" (Umland 4). Although motifs of Christianity are still embedded in contemporary works, predictably, the modern reader will notice that central medieval motifs which Malory emphasized (honor, camaraderie, and quests) have been minimized in many contemporary feminist and non-feminist works; those motifs which may have greatly concerned and interested earlier audiences do not necessarily affect contemporary ones. Therefore, we see exciting and radical departures from earlier works, particularly in the re-presentation of female characters such as Morgan le Fay or Gwenivere. Although a large number of contemporary Arthurian narratives exist, the limitations of a Master's thesis permit me to only mention a fraction of them. Since my interest lies in issues of gender, sexuality and religion, I examine texts which are concerned with such motifs or with specific feminist values. I have chosen to look specifically at contemporary

Arthurian texts because, unlike their predecessors, they tend to give more detailed accounts and substantial consideration to female characters.

In 1973 Mary Stewart published *The Crystal Cave*, the first in a trilogy of the Arthur story. To follow were *The Last Enchantment* (1979) and *The Hallowed Hills* (1982). Stewart's work primarily focuses on Merlin, following his character through the various stages of Arthur's life. It does not, however, reshape the lives of the female characters in the text, or give substantial consideration to female figures. It is therefore not given considerable attention in this thesis.

Unlike Stewart, Marion Zimmer Bradley attempts to recreate Camelot in the twentieth century in her feminist publication *The Mists of Avalon* (1985) by recreating female characters. In so doing, Bradley moves radically away from traditional male centered plots (she de-emphasizes Malory's numerous battle scenes), and instead puts at the forefront the women of Camelot. Bradley addresses some of the same motifs as her predecessors such as religion, temptation, adventure, loyalty, and kinship; however, it is clear from both the perspective of the narrator and the treatment of these themes that contemporary attitudes toward these issues have radically changed. Although Bradley's story takes place during the medieval period and her characters are part of a medieval society, she consistently invokes modern attitudes and concerns (specifically regarding religion, sexuality, and gender). She introduces a new voice and a new experience which has not been heard—that of woman. Bradley's text supports a strong opposition

to social and political hierarchy and patriarchy; she confronts issues of power and sexuality; she challenges negative female sexual stereotypes and offers a matriarchal arena for the women in the text; she examines sexual taboos such as incest and homosexuality.¹² Perhaps the most striking aspect of Bradley's text is the notion of Goddess worship, which she highlights as part of her construction of Pagan religions.

In 1989 Fay Sampson published *Daughter of Tintagel*, a feminist focused novel about the life of Morgan Le Fay. Told in five parts, the story follows Morgan's life from childhood to adulthood. The text examines Morgan from the perspective of the people who knew her best: Gwennol, Morgan's childhood nurse and Pagan priestess; Luned, a young nun instructed to watch over Morgan for a time; Teilo, a Smith of Pagan magic; Merlin, master of magic; and finally Morgan herself. Like Bradley's work, Sampson's addresses several motifs important to contemporary female audiences. She examines issues of homosexuality, power, and religion as she reshapes Morgan le Fay and gives us unique insight into her character.

Contemporary Film Versions of Arthuriana

In addition to new literary versions of the Arthur story, several modern cinematic representations of Arthurian Legend exist. It would be remiss in our media-oriented world to ignore this wealth of literature which, in part, reflects social and cultural attitudes toward gender and sexuality. Several of the films to be discussed in this study address issues of sexuality. Unfortunately, while they portray stronger female characters

than their medieval sources, these films also depict beliefs in the danger of sexuality and temptation which is rooted in the strong Christian tradition of the west. As E.D. Hirsch notes, "Traditional knowledge tends to be transmitted [in film] by stereotypes and clichés . . . Hollywood is an expert on cultural literacy in that it researches the values and lifestyles of consumers" (Preface). As we have seen, the story of Arthur is an adaptable one, thus allowing for an easy transition into the filmic genre. Although the prevailing medieval antecedent for Hollywood films is Malory, directors and producers adhere to him only as closely as literary authors of the past and present. Therefore, as the genre of Melodrama demands, the focus of the Hollywood Arthurian film must be on the love triangle, its betrayal/adultery, and its consequences (Umland 76).¹³ Thus, films like John Boorman's *Excalibur* and Jerry Zucker's *First Knight* have such a focus; they "feature prominently the love triangle while ignoring other elements associated with the story. Moreover, [they] freely conflate or alter characters and events in order to adapt the legend to the tight constraints dictated by the filmic medium" (Umland 77).

In 1998, NBC produced the miniseries *Merlin*, which focuses not on the love triangle, but rather on the battle between good and evil, or the battle between rising Christianity and older Celtic religions. While this film portrays strong female characters, it also adheres to the backlash against feminism which we see in *Excalibur* and *First Knight* where strong female characters are either morally weak or dangerously evil.

The Focus of this Study

This thesis has an interdisciplinary focus which seeks to examine the possibility of reading and interpreting specific aspects of cultural history such as religion, sexuality, and power issues from the fiction that is produced within a period. Marion Zimmer Bradley's text is given substantial consideration throughout the thesis for two important reasons: through the text's claim that Avalon is a powerful matriarchal hierarchy within the legend, The Mists of Avalon intersects with the growing interest in the cultural phenomenon of Goddess worship in contemporary society. In depicting the influence and power of pagan women, the text attempts to reconstruct medieval pagan religious practices through its fiction. This study does not seek to prove or disprove the existence of the Goddess within any historical period. Nor does it provide a detailed analysis of Arthurian figures in traditional works of literature by authors such as Thomas Malory or Alfred Tennyson. Rather, it examines contemporary literature and makes reference to specific motifs which are clearly remnants of past works. Thus, I contend that what contemporary authors or directors choose to alter within their fictional worlds is equally as important as what they choose to keep. Consequently, examining why motifs such as religious struggle, camaraderie, kinship, and sorcery have been emphasized or de-emphasized is also crucial.

Most contemporary Arthurian works fall into the genre of fantasy. Because it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do a survey of Arthurian fiction, a narrow focus is in

order. I have offered a selected study of contemporary Arthuriana, which includes both fiction and film. Although Marion Zimmer Bradley's work is my primary focus, I give substantial consideration to another contemporary female author, Fay Sampson (*The Daughter of Tintagel*). Finally, in a society emphatically geared to visual stimulation, I feel it would be remiss to discuss the challenges and developments made through contemporary Arthurian Legends without examining creative film versions. Therefore, I analyze films such as *Excalibur*, *First Knight*, and *Merlin (NBC)* in sufficient detail throughout the chapters of the thesis.

Specifically, this thesis examines contemporary Arthurian works in terms of cultural, social, and political agendas. It also looks at aspects of social and cultural history such as the women's movement and feminism in relation to the reshaping of contemporary Arthuriana. Chapter one discusses important issues of religion within the fiction (such as the dichotomies between Christianity and Paganism, and good versus evil), as they affect individual male and female characters in Arthurian Legends. Chapter two focuses on sexuality and gender as it is depicted in Bradley and Sampson's feminist literary work. As well, the chapter outlines anti-feminist contemporary films (*Excalibur*, *First Knight* and *Merlin*) which have a similar thematic focus, but which make no attempt to bring feminism or female concerns into their stories. Finally, Chapter three examines the fantastical qualities of the Arthur story, dealing specifically with magic, divine intervention, and sexual transgressions. As this thesis has a female

focus, issues of the Grail quests will not be examined in any detail; Grail stories are primarily male centered fictions which exclude the women of Camelot. It is my hope that this thesis will aid in the understanding of gender bias, sexual representation, and religious strongholds within contemporary Arthurian stories.

Chapter 1
Mother Earth or the Virgin Mary?—
Religious Conflicts in Arthurian Legend

"And the thyrd syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to a scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye"
(Thomas Malory 5).

The legend of King Arthur is one rich with elements of early Christianity—priests advised and dictated the political and social power systems; the King was second only to the Christian God; and the legend itself centers around the Grail Quests involving Arthur's knights who search for the cup which held the blood of Christ. As such, both traditional and contemporary texts include religious motifs which are central to the overall plot. As we have seen, contemporary narratives of Arthurian Legend address several new concepts rich with social and political implications. Moreover, gender issues within religion have become a focal point for several artistic representations of the Arthur story. In recent feminist narratives,¹⁴ Morgan, characterized as an evil sorceress by Malory and most other male authors within the tradition, can be seen as a self-affirming powerful woman who refuses to be confined within the boundaries of a patriarchal existence. Similarly, Gwenivere, loudly criticized by early authors¹⁵ for her infidelity, barrenness, and various deceptions, is portrayed as a woman who struggles to find her place in an oppressive, male dominated world. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, Fay Sampson's *Daughter of Tintagel*,

and NBC's *Merlin* address and confront issues of religion among fictional medieval women and men. Both Sampson's and Bradley's texts use religion to explore female sexuality, power, and conformity in order to de-center Christianity within the Arthurian tradition, while *Merlin*, although it focuses substantially on the wizard himself, sets up a dichotomy of good versus evil that is played out between Christian and Pagan religions.

Integral to the religious plot in Arthurian Legends is the magic/witchcraft that is practiced traditionally by the characters of Morgan le Fey and Merlin. Shoshana Felman has argued a definition of female madness which comes close to the manner in which medieval society received and perceived "witchcraft" and/or "outsoken" (intelligent) women during the Middle Ages. Felman suggests that this kind of "madness" can be seen as a construct of society. It is indeed a label applied to those who do not respond to the norms defined by the majority. She argues that

[f]rom her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that of *serving* an image, authoritative and central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter/a mother/a wife. What we consider "madness," whether it appears in women or men is . . . a rejection of [the] sex role stereotype (134).

As such, I will discuss the issue of religion in terms of *social perceptions* within the literature outlined in this thesis.

Christianity in the Middle Ages

By the fourth and fifth centuries the British Isles had been invaded by Indo-Europeans who came into Britain as warrior people. A mixture of Greek, Roman, Celtic and Germanic peoples struggled together in an overlay of cultures. When Christianity began to make its way to Britain, there was an enormous emphasis on ritual, rules, and laws brought over and applied by military force (*The World of Joseph Campbell*). The church was eager to convert the Pagan British to Christianity, and it accomplished this through intense mission work. As well, the church made alliances with kings, queens and nobles who saw advantages in allying with the existing authority in the new territories of Britain. Christian beliefs, in particular those including ideas about women, marriage, family and sex, had mingled with Roman tradition and were then adopted by the Germanic settlers.

Medieval Europe was a highly religious civilization. The church itself was a central part of the power structure. It controlled wealth and wielded judicial and political power. In addition, religious vows played a large part in shaping social norms, sex roles, gender construction, and secular laws (Amt 8). With the introduction of Canon Law, the church was further able to dictate to the individual lives of the lay people. Enforced by local priests, Canon Law gave the papacy the power it needed to

impose its standards of behavior on secular society. Emilie Amt, a medieval historian who studies the lives of women in the Middle Ages, notes that the "Christian writings were the ones that continued to exert the most direct and vital influence on the atmosphere in which Europeans lived and worked throughout the Middle Ages . . . the Bible and the Church Fathers were regarded as having spiritual and practical authority" (12). Consequently, many scholars agree that the writings of certain Saints during the period held remarkable consequences for the average person in Medieval Europe (Hollister 53).

Amt notes in particular the ideas of St. Paul and St. Augustine of Hippo, as their teachings on women became important church doctrines. In the King James Bible, St. Paul commands:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church

(I Corinthians 14:34-35).

Perhaps even more influential were the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who wrote "voluminously against various pagan and heretical doctrines that threatened the Christian orthodoxy in his lifetime"(Hollister 21). Augustine was deeply alarmed by

the danger of Pagan thought to the Christian soul. Thus, he claims to have been inspired by God when he wrote the following alarming doctrine on sex and marriage:

The union, then, of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage. But he makes a bad use of this good who uses it bestially, so that his intention is on the gratification of lust, instead of the desire of offspring. . . . It is, however, one thing for married persons to have intercourse only for the wish to beget children, which is not sinful: it is another thing for them to desire carnal pleasure . . . (qtd. In Amt 27).

Still even more disturbing is a treatise on virginity written by St. Jerome (c. 340-420) which illustrates attitudes toward sex and sexuality which were directed particularly toward the physical and spiritual welfare of women:

But observe more exactly, as we before told thee, what the wedded suffer Now thou art wedded, and from so high estate alighted so low: . . . into the filth of the flesh, into the manner of a beast, into the thralldom of man and into the sorrows of the world. See now, what fruit it has, be now well assured, to cool thy lust with filth of the body, to have delight of thy fleshly will from man's intercourse: before

God, it is a nauseous think to think thereon, and to speak
thereof is yet more nauseous . . . (qtd. In Amt 91).

Christianity in its substance and in its agents thus retained an aggressive and ferocious authority which was not to be ignored. According to Ramsay MacMullen, the enthusiasm with which the church went about ridding Britain of Paganism made it impossible to ignore: "the impression of power it conveyed through its beneficence was enhanced by the report of what happened to its enemies; and their error was not hidden from them" (11). Thus, the church called for annihilation of all that was Pagan. These gods were considered to be devils, and in the name of the true God, Jesus Christ, they must be eradicated. This was the mindset that dictated the missionary work of the monks and Catholic church. It was this mode of thought which controlled the flow of religious doctrine and history from the fourth century (MacMullen 13).

Paganism: Contemporary and Medieval

An alternative to patriarchal religions may be found in the concept of Goddess worship. Several popular scholars such as Merlin Stone, Elinor Gadon, Caitlin Mathews, Margot Adler, and Carl Olsen among others,¹⁶ have made the claim that the worship of the Goddess or a multitude of Goddesses is historical. Claims such as this are not only uncommon, but they fill the pages of a flood of texts found in local bookstores. Popular critics who make such claims often provide little, if any, documentation for their findings in any area of study, and their theories are often

published by non-academic presses. Consequently, serious scholars pay little attention to such unfounded affirmations. Yet, the subject of Goddess worship has been addressed more seriously by academics who seek to provide reasons for this resurgence.

As Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick explain:

Paganism¹⁷ [has] arisen again in modern Europe and America. . . [because] the search for a religion which venerated the Goddess . . . gave women as well as men the dignity of beings who bear the 'lineaments of divinity'. This has been thought necessary by women whose political emancipation has not been paralleled by an equivalent development in their religious status. . . Secondly, in Europe and America a greater respect for the Earth has come into prominence. The ecological 'green' movement has gone hand in hand with a willingness to pay attention to the intrinsic pattern of the physical world, its rhythm and its 'spirit of place'. This has led to a renewed recognition of the value of understanding traditional skills and beliefs and their underlying philosophy, which is generally Pagan (3).

Although there is no concrete validity to the claim that Goddess worship is an ancient religion, Paganism, Neo-Paganism, Wicca and Goddess worship has become a popular

trend in contemporary society which has come to be known as the Goddess phenomenon.¹⁸ Clearly the term Goddess is an umbrella expression used to encompass all goddesses under Nature; those goddesses who serve individual purposes all come together to be known as the Great Goddess, whose womb is all the natural world.

Contemporary writers and critics can be rather creative in their construction of pagan religions because very little of whatever once existed from early Celtic authors in Europe has survived. Christianity, in its triumph, managed to circulate what was written within the Christian community, thus preserving its truth and only its truth. Margot Adler, a contemporary historian who has spent years researching pre-Christian religions argues that witchcraft is a religion which dates back to the Paleolithic times. She insists that the worship of the god of the hunt and the goddess of fertility was an early religion which was universal:

The Old Religion was forced underground, its only records set forth, in distorted form, by its enemies. Small families kept the religion alive and, in 1951, after the Witchcraft Laws in England were repealed, it began to surface again (46).

Adler admits that scholars have met her theories with several criticisms, yet she makes no attempt to satisfy or refute their complaints. Moreover, her sources are obscure, relying largely on oral histories.

According to Adler, the basic notions of these early religions was a worship of nature. This worship, traditionally associated with the female, becomes the worship of the Goddess of fertility and rebirth. The Goddess is symbolic of the strength of nature, earth and sky. In both Witchcraft and other Pagan religions of the past, the female is the primitive principle, the superior sex, the one regarded as worthy of worship.

Francis King, who provides another popular study of the Goddess phenomenon, estimates that between one and two thousand people in Britain were members of covens that practiced traditional witchcraft and Goddess worship, at the time of his publication in 1970 (34). However, his study is questionable since he does not provide a bibliography in his text to document his findings.

This brief history of early Paganism and Christianity in the Middle Ages is the thought and inspiration behind many of the Arthurian Legends. As noted in the introduction, Christian doctrine and Pagan ideals permeate traditional legends in a variety of interpretations. In the twentieth century this phenomenon is no different. Dichotomies between Paganism and Christianity still exist in modern versions of Arthuriana and are, in fact, central motifs for many of the stories. Although it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction in studies of Goddess worship in pre-Christian European societies, clearly Bradley and others have foregrounded their fiction in the notions and speculations surrounding the worship of a female deity. Interest in Goddess worship has become a twentieth century phenomenon influenced by feminism. Further,

it is a powerful concept which serves as an alternative to patriarchal male centered religions. The implications of this surge of interest for Arthuriana are twofold: first, feminist authors are able to give a valid voice to female characters in their fiction thereby transferring power from the male to the female; second, in presenting a world where the worshipping of female deities is possible, authors provide an alternative to patriarchal Christian practices; this reflects a current cultural trend which allows for diverse forms of religious expression.

Feminism and Religion

In *The Mists of Avalon* the social perception of the court and life in Camelot is juxtaposed with sexuality, evil, and religious freedom. The lack of choices given to women within the period and the legend itself may be attributed to the code of gender roles during the Middle Ages. In her book *Feminism and Religion*, Rita Gross argues that labels such as witch, sorceress, seductress, and whore are directly connected with inequality, cultural politics, and religious patriarchal power. *The Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel* challenge these labels as they give voice to the women who have previously been unheard or misunderstood in Arthurian legend. Bradley does this by providing the option of a matriarchal society within the text. Avalon is juxtaposed with Camelot just as Christianity is juxtaposed with Paganism;¹⁹ Christianity is equated with patriarchy as Paganism is equated with matriarchy. In providing this option of a matriarchal society within the fiction, Bradley creates a vehicle by which the silence of

women ends. While *Merlin* sets up a similar dichotomy of Christianity versus Paganism and Patriarchy versus Matriarchy, it does not create female characters who are as sympathetic as the women found in Bradley's text. On the contrary, *Merlin* (like *Excalibur*), portrays powerful women in the Arthur story in the traditional Malorean context. Although *Merlin* is not a Hollywood production, we can nonetheless see similarities within the filmic tradition which Hollywood has established and assume that its production was motivated by a similar social agenda.

De-centering Christianity

Social perceptions of behavior shape our need to define and to label otherness. If we do not accept the norm— in fact, if we reject the norm— a social label will be enforced upon us: “It is clear that for a woman to be healthy she must “adjust” to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex even though these kinds of behaviors are generally regarded as less socially desirable . . . The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture”(qtd. in Felman 134).

Building upon the ideas of feminism and speculating about early Celtic and Pagan religions, Bradley uses *The Mists of Avalon* and the Legend of King Arthur, to bring feminist ideals to the forefront. She advocates anti-Christian religions, arguing for Paganism, female spirituality and sexual freedom. The text sees Christianity itself as the oppressor of women— it is the source of patriarchy in Britain and is thus used to impose oppressive social structures.

One of Bradley's most important steps in de-centering Christianity throughout the text occurs just before the knights of Camelot embark on the infamous Grail Quests. Foreshadowing the events long before the quest occurs, *The Mists of Avalon* attributes the Cup, The Sword, and The Dish to the Goddess. They are the Holy Regalia of Avalon. As Baring and Cashford note in a popular, mass market study of the legend, "The chalice, vessel, cup, dish and stone that are the primary images of the Grail evoke the archetype of the Feminine, which becomes the inspiration, guide and goal of the knight's inner quest" (652). The notion that the regalia of Christ originated with the Goddess is not original to Bradley's feminist vision. In fact, it is one which is maintained by several critics. Among them is Caitin Mathews who contends that early images of cauldrons were forerunners for the Christian grail (*Sophia Goddess of Wisdom* 11). In an interview for the Arts and Entertainment network, Mathews contends: "They played a ritual purpose in the life of the Celts— those that belonged to the Goddess offered enlightenment" (*Ancient Mysteries*). In an attempt to restore the Grail legend to its pre-Christian origins,²⁰ Bradley invokes the notion of the Goddess in her fiction; she alters the grail legend and its association with Christian tradition which effectively diverts the origins from Christ to the Goddess. In *The Mists of Avalon* the grail originates in Avalon and is therefore associated with the matriarchal power of the Goddess. The Christians obtain the regalia only by thievery. Using her power from the

Goddess, Morgaine reclaims the stolen regalia from the priests and returns it to Avalon where it remains. When speaking of the Grail, Morgaine tells Lancelot,

No man can hold and confine it. Those who seek it in faith

. . . will always find it— here, beyond the mortal lands

In the day which is coming, the priests will tell mankind

what is good and what is evil, what to think, what to pray,

what to believe. I cannot see to the end— perhaps mankind

must have a time of darkness so that we will one day again

know what blessing is the light. But in that darkness,

Lancelet, let there be a glimmer of hope. The Grail came

once to Camelot. Let the memory of that passing never be

sullied by seeing it captive on some wordly altar (813-814).

In addition to the Grail, *The Mists of Avalon* claims that the sword Excalibur originates in Avalon— but it is the magical scabbard woven by Morgan herself and induced with all the power and magic of the Mother Goddess which prevents Arthur from ever losing enough blood to be seriously hurt. This is an important challenge to the legend.

Traditionally it is the powerful, masculine, and phallic sword Excalibur which is responsible for Arthur's safety. However, in Bradley's text she diverts the attention from the sword and ascribes the feminine image of the scabbard with the powerful ability to heal all wounds.

Recreating the Image of Woman

As we have seen, Christianity in the Middle Ages had strict rules for the conduct of women. Woman as a sexual being was viewed as sinful and filthy, while the image of a non-sexual woman was revered.²¹ Medieval attitudes toward sex were colored by feelings of guilt and anxiety as Original Sin permeated a woman's existence. These views are clearly seen in the teachings of St. Augustine and St. Paul.²² Consequently, women who rejected this Christian attitude toward sex were viewed as evil. Quite simply, according to scholars like Augustine, no self-respecting medieval Christian woman should be interested in sex beyond the purpose of procreation.²³

Arthurian Legend, perhaps more so than any other long-lasting myth spawned in the medieval era, has adopted this attitude toward sexuality and religion to the point of it being an integral part of the stories themselves. After all, Camelot falls in the end due to Arthur's participation in what Christians would call the most diabolic sin—incest.²⁴ Mordred, conceived incestuously by Morgan and Arthur, must come back to destroy the golden city— a land ruled by a King with such a grave sin on his conscience can not possibly survive;²⁵ Camelot can not survive because the sins of its king have become the sins of the land. Further, early romances by Chrétien de Troyes and the troubadours sparked the “forlorn lover” syndrome that permeates much of the Lancelot and Gwenivere, as well as the Tristan and Isolde stories. Romantic love became fashionable only if lovers did not cross the literal line of consummation. This notion of true

romantic love is indicative of the Christian hold over the period and over the legend itself; it was sinful for romantic lovers to engage in sexual intercourse, but heroic and even admirable to simply yearn for another while adhering to a strict code of rules.

Marion Zimmer Bradley and other contemporary female writers of Arthuriana, such as Fay Sampson, Sharon Newman, and Persia Wooley challenge the views that female sexuality is something to be ashamed of, and that aggressive or non-Christian women are socially mad. *The Mists of Avalon* is unique, and perhaps revolutionary in its treatment of Arthurian legend because it presents a dynamic reconfiguration of matriarchal versus patriarchal agis in the two religions; the notion of Goddess worship is central to the plot of *The Mists of Avalon*. We are presented with a story told from the perspective of woman, and even more unusual, narrated by Morgan le Fay herself. Yet all of the main female characters in the text who reject their expected female roles are rejected by the world of Camelot: Viviane, Lady of the Lake, and later Morgan, are seen by society as devil worshipping sinners for their refusal to be silent in social and political arenas; Morgause, sister to Morgan and Queen of Orkney, is similarly shunned by society for expressing her sexual freedom, speaking out against patriarchal reign, and ruling the kingdom of Orkney equally by her husband's side. Significantly, all of these women also reject Christianity and God in favor of Paganism and the Mother Goddess.

Perhaps more than anything, the text juxtaposes Morgan and Gwenivere, thereby setting up a powerful dichotomy between religion, sexual freedom, lifestyle, and choice.

While Gwenivere is a queen, trapped without choice in a patriarchal kingdom, Morgan is a free spirited priestess who works against the laws of her growing Christian world. However, Bradley does incorporate aspects of medieval history. For example, in the Middle Ages women were often forced to enter into marriage against their will (Amt 34). Thus, while Morgan is able to live freely in Avalon, she is exposed to the laws of man outside in the patriarchal world of Camelot. She is manipulated by both the men and women around her for social and political gain. For example, Morgan leaves Avalon and gives up her station as priestess when she discovers that Viviane sent her to her brother's bed (181). As well, she idly stands by when she is manipulated by Gwenivere into marrying Uriens, who is old enough to be her father, instead of Accalon, the man she truly loves.

The Mists of Avalon begins dramatically with a note from Morgan in the prologue of the text:

In my time I have been called many things: sister, lover, priestess, wise-woman, queen. Now in truth I have come to be a wise-woman, and a time may come when these things may need to be known. But in sober truth, I think it is the Christians who will tell the last tale. For ever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with Christ, only with his priests.

*who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever
held power in this world. At best they say that her power
was of Satan. Or else they clothe her in the blue robe of the
Lady of Nazareth— who indeed had power in her way too—
and say that she was ever virgin. But what can a virgin
know of the sorrows and travail of mankind?*

Clearly the argument put forth in this text is not that the worshiping of Jesus Christ is oppressive. Rather, Morgan questions the male priests who reshape and deliver the message of Christ and who consequently create onerous social structures.²⁶

Morgan, like all priestesses in *The Mists of Avalon*, is a sexually free woman. She has the freedom of choice made possible by her sincere devotion to the Mother Goddess. She participates in the rites of Beltaine where she chooses her lovers; in the outdoors, before Mother Nature, she lets herself go freely to Lancelot; and she chooses to lie with Kevin, Merlin's successor. This freedom has a price to it, however. The Christians within the text consider Morgan to be a seductress witch working under the guise of Satan. Felman cites Freud's description of female sexuality as "an absence (of the masculine presence), as lack, incompleteness, deficiency, envy with respect to the only sexuality in which value resides"(136). She finds that this conception of otherness coincides with madness as a social perception of "rebellious" women who embrace their sexuality as Morgan does. In the character of Morgan we find madness to be equated

with witchcraft and evil. Camelot's social perception of Morgan is not unlike medieval notions of madness— who else but a mad woman would worship a Heathen? Her rebellious nature and devotion to the Goddess alienate Morgan from society.

In *The Mists of Avalon*, Morgan's Paganism is a means of freedom and choice, whereas Gwenivere's devotion to Christianity and consequently her perceptions about sexuality in the text are compared with imprisonment. For the most part, Morgan's world revolves around Avalon. Bradley portrays Avalon as a matriarchal island ruled by woman. Further, the politics and social history of Avalon are dominated by a long heritage of powerful and aggressive women. Gwenivere is jealous of both Morgan's freedom of speech and her sexual indiscretion. Trapped between her deep feelings of unity with Morgan, and her proper Christian/social upbringing, Gwenivere can not help but be resentful of Morgan. It is only when she finally realizes that her love for Lancelot is the first thing in life she has chosen that Gwenivere can allow herself to go freely to him. For a time, Gwenivere abandons her religious piety and questions whether God exists. After she is savagely raped by Malagant, she feels ashamed and used. Since God could not save her from such a fate, she finds comfort in Lancelot's arms. Even then, however, she is haunted by heavy Christian feelings of guilt and eternal damnation.

When Morgan visits Arthur's court as one of Gwenivere's ladies in waiting, she is confronted with a very different life style than she has known. While she was viewed

by the women of Avalon as a wise-woman and holy priestess, she is perceived as a rebellious, erratic, sorceress by the court of Camelot. Her powers of healing, insight and communication with unknown forces, make Morgan a woman to be greatly feared. As always, the unknown is frightening. Bradley uses the traditional metaphor of a woman weaving busily with her hands to represent Morgan's transcendental experiences. While weaving, Morgan becomes entranced and has visions brought to her by the sight of her priestess trained mind:

. . . even in Avalon she had hated to spin . . . if she were a man and could ride out with the Caerleon legion, at least she need not sit and spin, spin, spin, round and round . . . but even the Caerleon legion went round the Saxons, and Saxons went round them, round and round, as the blood went round in their veins, red blood flooding, flooding . . . spilling over the hearth-

Morgaine heard her own shriek only after it had shattered the silence in the room. She dropped the spindle, which rolled away into the blood which flooded crimson, spilling, spurting over the hearth. . . .

"Morgaine! Sister, did you prick your hand on the reel? What ails you?"

“Blood on the hearth— ” Morgaine stammered.

“See, there, there, just before the King’s high seat, slain

there like a slaughtered sheep before the King . . .” (306).

Gwenivere’s ladies in waiting are awestruck by this unexpected religious sending.²⁷

They are afraid of Morgan. Her apparent connection with the spirit world which is not located in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is a frightening concept for them. First, they believe she must be ill (mentally), and then they conclude that she is evil— a witch.

Morgan’s “sending” is *unreal* because it is from the *unknown*. Felman argues that

the supernatural cannot be rationally explained and hence should not detain us and does not call for *thought*... Realism postulates a conception of “nature” and of “reality” which seeks to establish itself, tautologically, as “natural and as “real”. Nothing, indeed is less neutral than this apparent neutrality; nothing is less “natural” than this frontier which is supposed to separate “the real” from the “unreal” and which in fact delimits only the inside from the outside of an ideological circle: an inside which is *inclusive* of “reason” and men, i.e., “reality” and “nature”; and an outside which is *exclusive* of madness and women, i.e., “supernatural” and the “unreal” (143).

This image— a woman entranced by weaving— is not the only time Morgan is visited by a supernatural vision. Several times throughout the text the sight is purposely invoked with mixtures of herbs which make Morgan and the other priestesses lose their senses. This loss of sense can be viewed as an alternate state of mind. When Morgan is under the influence of these drugs, she has a unique spiritual connection with the Goddess. The transcendental qualities of Morgan's relationship with the Goddess make her more unreal, further feared, and adversely judged.

Religious Dichotomies

The juxtaposition of Christianity with Paganism is one found in several versions of the Arthur story. Although it is not always the prevailing motif, religious struggle is nevertheless always present. In 1998, NBC produced a miniseries, *Merlin*, which outlines the story of the wizard from his birth until his old age. Taking many more liberties (with both characterization and plot) than preceding versions of the Arthur story, *Merlin* unequivocally sets up Paganism and Christianity in a good versus evil dichotomy that is sustained throughout the film. Strangely, Merlin, traditionally associated with Paganism, fights for the Christian faith in the name of all that is good. Paganism therefore, becomes associated with evil and is embedded in a split characterization of Morgan le Fay represented by Mab, queen of darkness, and Morgan. As already noted, Morgan le Fay's character has undergone substantial shapeshifting in

this century; NBC *Merlin* shifts it once more by integrating an entirely non-Arthurian character (Mab) into Morgan's traditional position of power and hatred.²⁸

In *Merlin*, Mab is an evil woman who, in her failing power, invokes all her magic to create a successor who will bring the people back to her and the old faith. Merlin is both her creation and her intended successor. Although the film does not explicitly state that the old faith constitutes Goddess worship, it is sufficiently implied. Mab's plan goes awry when Merlin, raised by a good Christian woman for most of his life, discovers the evil of Mab's ways and renounces all magic and power. Consequently, it is magic which becomes the metaphorical evil throughout the film. Through a series of manipulated events, Mab brings Merlin back to magic, forcing him to perform miraculous feats to save innocent lives. Her hope is to bring Merlin back to her; ultimately she fails. However, before the final ruin of her plan to rule (religiously) over Britain, Mab and Merlin engage in a series of magical stand-offs.

Mab's portrayal as a powerful but evil woman is not unlike the treatment of Morgan Le Fay found in *Excalibur* where her character is Malorean in tradition. We can see that *Merlin*, although it does not adhere to any specific source on the whole, is in keeping with a patriarchal image of woman; whereas feminist versions of the Arthur story make Morgan heroic and sympathetic, *Merlin* and *Excalibur* undermine her importance and denigrate her power.

The religious struggle presented in *The Mists of Avalon* is similar in structure to that found in *Merlin*; that is, both stories depict a metaphorical tug of war. Throughout *The Mists of Avalon*, it is the relationship between Morgan and Gwenivere which experiences such an exchange— while the two women grow to have an unexpected and perhaps strange love for each other, both are jealous, fearful, and resentful of the other. From the very beginning of the text, Christianity and Paganism are diametrically opposed. Bradley makes it quite clear that Gwenivere is oppressed by the Christian church; she becomes jealous of the freedom Morgan experiences as a result of her Goddess worship. Gwenivere believes that

[i]t was a woman's proper business to be married and bear children. . . Women had to be especially careful to do the will of God because it was through a woman that mankind had fallen into Original Sin, and every woman must be aware that it was her work to atone for that Original Sin in Eden. No woman could ever be really good except for Mary the Mother of Christ; all other woman were evil, they had never had any chance to be anything but evil. This was [their] punishment for being like Eve, sinful, filled with rage and rebellion . . . (268).

The ridiculous nature of Gwenivere's thoughts depicts the narrator's outrage against the institution of Christianity; just as a great variety of feminist voices have spoken out on religion in the past two centuries, Bradley uses her fiction to unsilence the women of Camelot. In her analysis of *The Mists of Avalon*, Lee Ann Tobin finds the use of Gwenivere's character to show how women lost their power in western civilization to be one of Bradley's more important contributions:

In *Gwenhwyfar*, Bradley describes a woman whose upbringing has been traditional in that she is trained to be submissive by her family and her Christian church. Because it comes after the description of Morgaine's priestess upbringing, however, what is in fact traditional seems strikingly odd. Bradley in effect teaches her reader to see the female goddess religion—and its training of women for power—as natural. *Gwenhwyfar's* "ordinary" training seems anything but ordinary by contrast (72).

To this end then, *The Mists of Avalon* exposes the patriarchy of Christianity in favor of the Goddess. We are told by the narrator that the Christians believe that "there is no Goddess; for the principle of woman is the principle of all Evil" (11); and that women should not presume to read the divine scriptures for they will not know how to understand them properly and should thus "listen to their priests for the true

interpretations (260). In contrast, Viviane Lady of the Lake, looks upon men with scorn as “the natural prey of the Goddess in the form of her priestesses to be taken or denied as seemed right at the moment” (142).

Although not as central to the plot as it is in *The Mist of Avalon*, Christianity versus Paganism is also a primary motif in Fay Sampson’s *Daughter of Tintagel*. The text is divided into five distinct parts, each narrated by someone who had close ties with Morgan throughout her life time. The first section told by Gwennol, Morgan’s childhood nurse, emphasizes the strong hold the Goddess had over Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries. Gwennol is a wise woman, of the old folk, and her mistress Igraine dabbles heavily in the magic of the Goddess. We find a distaste for Christianity as it is compared to and juxtaposed with Paganism. The second section of the text, “White Nun’s Telling” is told from the perspective of Luned, a young nun at the convent to which Morgan is sent. We learn that although Luned is a devoted Christian nun, she is seduced by Morgan’s powers and worship of the Goddess and thus fails in her attempt to convert Morgan to Christ: “You know little of the courage of loving, Luned. It is my fault. I saw coldness and called it strength. I saw discipline and took it for faith. I trusted you... And then she beat me. I doubt if she had ever given such a beating in her life” (243). Brivyth, the Mother Superior of the convent is portrayed as a wicked woman who beats the nuns into submission. Furthermore, we can see that “faith” in the Christian sense is equated with brute force. There is no mistaking the feminist message

that patriarchal Christian rule and worship in any society, medieval or contemporary, is tyrannical in *Daughter of Tintagel*.

It is worth mentioning Merlin's role in both Bradley's and Sampson's texts. Traditionally a much more powerful magician/wizard than Morgan le Fay, Merlin is secondary in his magic in both texts. In *The Mists of Avalon*, Merlin takes orders from the Lady of the Lake and can not make decisions without consulting her. When Kevin (Merlin of Britain after Taleisin), steals the holy regalia and acts without the permission of Avalon, he is punished— Nimue imprisons him in the Oak. Similarly in *Daughter of Tintagel* Merlin works behind the scenes through mortal men and women in order to fight Morgan's magic. Thus, while Merlin is traditionally the male figure of magic who is accepted by society and Morgan is the female embodiment of evil witchcraft, in both Sampson and Bradley's texts these gender demarcations are overturned.

As evident in the literature examined in the introduction to this thesis, the Christian tradition embedded in the legend throughout history ensured that all powerful women were portrayed as evil. Thus, stories by early authors often portray Morgan Le Fey and Gwenivere as evil whenever they assert political or social power. Additionally, the concept of Original Sin enhanced this subversion of women with a holy and legitimate basis which people were too frightened to challenge in the early stages of Christianity. In *Mists of Avalon*, however, the main theme is to challenge this primary stage of the religion. The text presents powerful women who confront and oppose the

mindless Christian priests. Therefore, the story of Arthur (his birth, his reign, his relationship with Morgan and with Camelot), becomes one which revolves around the power of Avalon and its attempt to save the worship of the Goddess in Britain.

Temptations and the Goddess

Not surprisingly, Gwen is tempted by the notion of Goddess worship throughout *The Mists of Avalon*. She is presented as a woman who struggles to find a place for herself in the male dominated world of Camelot. From the beginning of her relationship with Arthur, Gwenivere recognizes her secondary status in the world and reflects that she is only Arthur's "prize of war" and a "broodmare for the High King's stud service" (267-268). When she begins to fear that she is barren, she goes to Morgan for a "charm" to help her conceive: "I think perhaps God cares nothing for women— all his priests are men, and again and again the Scriptures tell us that women are the temptress and evil— it may be that is why he does not hear me. And for this I would go to the Goddess— God does not care" (442). In addition when she fears for her life at the hands of Malagant, it is Morgan and the Goddess to whom Gwenivere appeals: "God did not reward me for virtue. What makes me think he could punish me? . . . perhaps there was no God at all . . . Perhaps it was all a great lie of the priests so that they may tell mankind what to do, what not to do, what to believe, give orders" (519). However, as Sabine Volke-Birke notes, Gwenivere's temptation to practice Goddess worship is

fleeting and short lived; as tempted as she is at times, Gwenivere is not strong enough to oppose those around her:

Gwenhwyfar shows in an exemplary manner that a one-sided decision which denies the opposite pole creates more problems than it solves. Under the influence of a very strict and limiting Christian education, Gwenhwyfar denies, loses, and renounces her inborn faculties. . . Originally, she was a child who would have loved to play music, but was beaten for touching a harp. She had no fear of open spaces to begin with, but this too, was somehow instilled into her as a result of norms and prohibitions. Moreover, she found her way into the mists of Avalon which shows at her first appearance in the novel that she has the rare sensitivity which is necessary to enable an ordinary person to penetrate the boundaries of Avalon. But Gwenhwyfar could not hold out against her education, so she tried to find consolation in a total surrender to the precepts of Christianity (413).

For the most part, while Gwenivere tries to destroy the rule of the Goddess, Morgan does her best to disable the Christian hold over the land. Over and over, the two women

accuse each other of being unintelligent fools, obsessive without reason, and evil because of their individual faiths.

Morgan bears the brunt of the criticism from the world outside of Avalon. It is she who worships a female figure, has connections with this unknown and unfamiliar entity, and speaks and acts freely in Camelot. Such nonconformity in a society which embraces the patriarchy of the Christian priests is frowned upon greatly. Consequently, she is perceived as an evil woman who is feared. Perhaps Morgan's biggest problem is Gwenivere herself, who is convinced that Morgan is a witch. The label of witch is one which carried with it several negative elements in the Middle Ages. However, recently, WITCH, a feminist neo-Pagan group that has reclaimed the term witch, sees the struggle of women to retain their freedom of this organization as an important one in history:

Witchcraft was the pagan religion of all Europe for centuries prior to the rise of Christianity, and the religion of the peasantry for hundreds of years after Catholicism prevailed among the ruling classes of Western society. The witchcraft purges were the political suppression of an alternative culture, and of a social and economic structure Even as the religion of witchcraft became suppressed, women fought hard to retain their former freedom Thus, the witch was chosen as a revolutionary image for women because they did

fight hard and in their fight they refused to accept the level of struggle which society deemed acceptable for their sex (Adler 206).

Although WITCH makes a debatable claim that witchcraft was once a universal religion, the arguments of this organization are nevertheless similar to those presented in Bradley's fictional world; Bradley portrays a comparable struggle for freedom in the character of Morgan Le Fay. Moreover, in juxtaposing Gwenivere and her Christian belief system with Morgan's character, Bradley emphasizes the social ramifications which women like Morgan faced.

Gwenivere is so jealous of Morgan's ability to choose freely without male influence dictating her life, that she sabotages her at every chance. She has internalized the Christian views of women, and she shares them to the point that she cannot articulate her own anger (Tobin 153). She therefore speaks out against women who seem to have more freedom, and when she does exercise agency, it is in support of the patriarchy which oppresses her in the first place: "And finally, ironically, it is this righteous, self-hating (woman hating) anger that makes Gwenivere become active and aggressive" (Tobin 153). She embarks on a mission to save Camelot from all Pagan evil. But in so doing, she forces Arthur to betray his vow to Avalon and indirectly causes the fall of Camelot.

Gwenivere, while a practicing Christian, faces problems with her reputation. She is traditionally known as an erratic and irrational Queen. She throws tantrums on several occasions, lashing out at powerful males or females around her. In *The Mists of Avalon*, Bradley takes this irrational reputation one step further and depicts Gwenivere as agoraphobic. She is a woman who is deathly frightened of wide open spaces. This fear can be seen as a symbol of her fear of freedom and self rule. When she leaves the confinement of her father's home and land, she is free until she arrives at Camelot where she then becomes Arthur's *property*. Never knowing real freedom of any kind, Gwenivere hides in her carriage and has a mild anxiety attack as she waits for the journey to be over. However, Gwenivere was not always desperately frightened of the outdoors:

How strange, Gwenthwyfar thought, to remember that there had been a time when she had like to go abroad under the wide, high sky, not even caring whether there was a wall or the safety of an enclosure; and now she grew sick and dizzy if she went out from the walls; where she could not see or touch them. Sometimes now she felt the lump of fear in her belly even when she walked across the courtyard, and had to hurry to touch the safety of the wall again (Bradley 314).

Tobin argues that this condition of Gwenivere's character is one which is a direct function of her female training. She finds that the text implies that her Christian upbringing and the time spent within convent walls served to magnify her fears²⁹.

"Additionally, the nuns at her convent have told her frightening stories Raised hearing such stories, it is no wonder that a timid child would become more timid" (151).

In addition to the proper Christian training Gwenivere received from the convent, she has also been highly influenced by her father who raised her alone. She intentionally speaks in a shy timid voice so that she will not upset her father (254) and knows better than to speak out of turn even when the business being discussed is her own marriage (260). Tobin notes that "none of this treatment is unusual for the Middle Ages, nor particularly cruel; it is only the contrast Bradley has created that makes it apparent why Gwenivere turns out differently— weaker, shyer, and more at the mercy of men and priests— than Morgaine or other women raised on images of female strength" (151). These explanations give necessary reasons for Gwenivere's behavior.

Traditionally we are not given any kind of an explanation for Gwenivere's character in Arthurian legend. For the most part, Gwenivere's behavior is attributed to her biological ineptness— she is a barren woman. If only she were able to conceive a child as she is supposed to, she could be a rational and a whole woman. Her character has a long tradition of incompleteness. Tennyson, perhaps more so than anyone, solidified her biological deficiency with his harsh treatment of her in *Idylls of the King*,

in which Gwenivere's barrenness is attributed solely to her sinful infidelity with Lancelot. According to Tennyson, Camelot falls in the end because Gwenivere is unable to give Arthur an heir; God has punished her for her sins by making her barren. Without a legitimate heir, Camelot falls to Mordred who was born out of incest (Barber 166). Ironically, Gwenivere herself believes this fallacy. Her acceptance of this condemnation indicates how deeply imbedded the notions of patriarchy are in the women themselves: "What is most painful about Gwenhwyfar's upbringing is the way she has internalized the Christian church's anti-feminism so that she despises herself and feels guilty, especially about not being able to have children" (Tobin 152). Consequently, *The Mists of Avalon* leaves the reader with a commentary on religious practices. It tells us that this is the goal of the medieval and contemporary Christian priests (as well as the moral in the text): If women can be both oppressed by patriarchy and dedicated to their own oppression, then they will willingly remain under a blanket of tyranny.

The feminist visions found in Bradley and Sampson's text are meant to illustrate how patriarchy oppresses and silences women. Although the plots of their fiction revolves around the legend of King Arthur, their message is one that reaches any contemporary female audience. The patriarchy which is embedded within religious organizations has been magnified over the years and has continued to be negative for

women; the vision of these feminist authors is to remove such patriarchy. In this attempt, Bradley and Sampson turn to the concept of the Goddess.

Chapter 2

Camelot Reborn: Revising the Female Tradition

*“Re-vision— the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction— is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival”
(Adrienne Rich 329).*

Without question, the story of Arthur is one which is traditionally centered on the men of Camelot; as the title *Arthuriana* suggests, the focal point for traditional authors is quite obviously “Arthur.” However, in the twentieth century, influenced by the women’s movement and feminism as a discipline in academia, studies of Arthurian legend have moved beyond the male sphere to further examine and explore issues of women; this century has given rise to scholars of Arthurian Legend such as Maureen Fries, Debra Benko, and Elizabeth Sklar, who have made great strides in reaffirming the importance of the women of Camelot. In addition, feminist theorists such as Katherine Rogers and Laura Mulvey have spoken out against “woman as visual object” in both contemporary film and texts. As such, popular female authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Fay Sampson have rewritten the Arthur story to include the perceptions and experiences of women in the fictional world of Camelot. Moreover, film versions of *Arthuriana* have become increasingly popular and have thus played a major role in the revitalization of the legend in this century. Although most film adaptations do not have a feminist focus, several reveal similar themes to those found in the texts concerned in

this study; both texts and film adaptations tend to explore dichotomies between sex/politics, sex/power, and sex/status. Just as we can understand the social and political structures of the Middle Ages through the fiction written in the period (i.e. Christian attitudes toward women and sexuality, lower social position for women, and a sincere devotion to the King), these contemporary stories (both literature and media) are indicative of valuable and current belief systems of the twentieth century (i.e. renewed interest in sexual motifs, continued adherence to Christian attitudes toward women, and feminist approaches to issues of gender).

Sexuality

Sexuality in the medieval period was defined by the religious feelings of the time. As we have seen, Christianity played a major role in the average person's life; thus the concept of sexuality and proper sexual conduct was predominantly a Christian one. However, pluralism and relativism have become a large part of our contemporary western culture and have facilitated a broader range of sexual and religious experiences. Although Christian notions toward aspects of sexuality such as pre-marital sex, abortion, and promiscuity still permeate much of our society, pluralism and relativism have divided western societies so that there is no longer one acceptable religion.³⁰

Homoeroticism and sexuality are motifs that have become more prominent in recent works of fiction, including the texts and films studied in this thesis. However, Marion Zimmer Bradley's work concerning homoeroticism is undoubtedly the most

contentious. Narrated by Morgan Le Fay, Arthur's half sister, *The Mists of Avalon* has a unique feminist³¹ focus which develops sexual motifs on several levels. Bradley amplifies the friendship between Arthur and Lancelot early on in the text, making their connection to each other both physical and emotional. This is an unusual³² expansion upon traditional sources on Bradley's part; the emotions involved in their friendship are much more intense than in previous works of literature and are sexual in nature. The homosexual relationship serves two purposes in the development of this subplot: first, the intensity and depth of Arthur and Lancelot's love for each other makes the infidelity between Lancelot and Gwenivere much more tragic. Because Lancelot and Arthur have this special connection that is deeper than friendship, Arthur is much less willing to accuse Lancelot of adultery and treason, which consequently shames Arthur in public and causes an irreconcilable rift in their relationship;³³ second, the physical relationship serves to draw curious attention to issues of sexuality in Camelot.

The love relationship between Arthur and Lancelot is revealed in subtle ways throughout the course of the text. Bradley makes it clear that Gwenivere and other women at court are suspicious of this unspoken love between the two men, and Gwenivere becomes jealous and resentful. At one point, Lancelot is persuaded to sing a song for the court: "*The old bitterness stabbed at Gwenivere's heart. He sang of his King not of his Queen. His love for me was never more than a part of his love for Arthur. She closed her eyes, unwilling to see them embrace*" (688). These and other

homosexual overtones within the text create a tension between Lancelot, Gwenivere and Arthur, which adds a whole new dimension to the famous love triangle— in Bradley's text the sexual relationship between Arthur and Lancelot is partially consummated. At Arthur's suggestion, Lancelot, Arthur and Gwenivere engage in a ménage à trois under the guise of the love between Lancelot and Gwenivere. Although she is momentarily engulfed in lust, Gwenivere later regrets the encounter and realizes that Arthur did not suggest it as a gift to her, but rather as one for himself: "It has seemed to me that you loved Lancelot more than me. Can you say in truth that it was to give me pleasure, or was it for the pleasure of him that you loved best of all-?"(547) Later on, this suspicion is confirmed by Lancelot's own guilt when he confesses to Morgan:

... yet it is Arthur I can not leave. I know not but that I love
her only because I come close, thus, to him. . . . I - I touched
Arthur- I touched him. I love her, oh, God, I love her,
mistake me not, but had she not been Arthur's wife, had it
not been for- I doubt even she-. . . (482).

Lancelot is engulfed with guilt that he took pleasure in Arthur's touch and acknowledges that even Gwenivere could not forgive him if she knew the truth. This confession reveals Lancelot's devotion to Gwenivere as nothing more than an extension of his love for Arthur whom he can not wholly have. It is inferred that Lancelot has accepted the fact that he and Arthur can never be lovers, so he has unconsciously

transferred his lust to Gwenivere. Moreover, we learn that the sexual chemistry between Lancelot and Arthur is mutual. By the end of Bradley's text, and indeed most versions of Arthuriana, Gwenivere repents her lust for Lancelot. Consequently she is finally able to reject Lancelot, which casts her into a heroic mold; "but it is a male-inspired one: that of the repentant worldly woman, on the model of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Egypt and other formerly sexual females" (Fries 11).

Not surprisingly, the image of a homosexual relationship between Arthur and Lancelot is not one that appears in literary works. For example, other texts and films (*Excalibur*, *First Knight*, *Merlin*, and *Daughter of Tintagel*), discussed in this chapter do not approach the subject of homosexuality. It would seem that transforming a figure as crucial as Arthur with such a relationship is too risky for artists. As Marian Lowe points out, "the stereotypes we accept about sex roles have far-reaching effects. Ideas about appropriate behavior for women and men act as powerful constraints on behavior . . ." (91). Lowe further argues that the cultural boundaries we impose on acceptable sexual activity are ultimately restrictive for males and females (98). A cautionary treatment of sexuality can also be seen in the context of the incest encounter between Morgan and Arthur as represented in various versions of the Arthur story. Unwilling to taint Arthur's reputation, medieval and contemporary authors of the legend rarely make him a willing participant in the act. One might then ask why Marion Zimmer Bradley sought to aggressively approach such taboo subjects as homosexuality and incest in *The Mists*

of Avalon. The answer to such a question lies in Bradley's willingness to introduce aspects of feminism and alternate views of proper sexual behavior in the text. Bradley writes a feminist account of the legend of King Arthur which celebrates a return to Pagan notions of sexuality.³⁴ She explores different views of sex which are anti-Christian but perfectly acceptable within the context of the narrative.

Sexuality and the Political

Feminists have long claimed that sex and politics are invariably joined together in the twentieth century. This was particularly true of the Middle Ages. Government bodies and Church heads dictated political sanctions that dealt specifically with issues of sexuality.

Sexuality is consistently used as a political tool by both men and women throughout Arthurian Legend. Perhaps one of the more striking examples of this, found in many artistic representations, can be seen in the relationship between Igraine and Uther.³⁵ In *The Mists of Avalon*, Viviane, sister to Igraine and Lady of Avalon,³⁶ contrives with Merlin to bring about the conception of Arthur, strictly for political gain. Through a vision only possible by the power of Avalon, Viviane has seen that Arthur shall be born to Igraine and Uther Pendragon. Both Merlin and Viviane approach Igraine and reveal their future plans for Britain. We discover that the birth of Arthur is doubly important because Igraine is of the Royal line of Avalon. Viviane and Merlin are devoted to raising a king to the throne who will have blood loyalties to the older

tribes of Britain. Thus, the ultimate plan is to resurrect the Goddess in Britain and extirpate the growing Christian hold over the land. Although reluctant to be used as a political pawn in the beginning, Igraine eventually participates freely in the orchestration; she agrees to use her sexuality to capture Uther's love. Moreover, she is strong willed and intelligent; she exercises agency, power, and thought relatively freely throughout the text. Merlin gives Igraine a charm to entice Uther, and we are thus told that the two have an intense attraction which draws them to each other. Nowhere else in literature is the interaction between Igraine and Uther as powerful as it is depicted in *The Mists of Avalon*, except perhaps in John Boorman's film adaptation of the legend, *Excalibur*.

Excalibur (1981), although it has been met with substantial criticism by scholars, has found its place in the canon of Arthurian Legend. It opens with a credit to Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. However, like all versions, Boorman's story is mythical: "I think of the story, the history, as a myth. The film has to do with *mythical* truth, not historical truth"(Umland 129). Employing a primarily unknown cast, *Excalibur* attempts to recreate the full story of Arthur³⁷ beginning with the rule of Uther.

Excalibur illustrates the relationship between Uther and Igraine in a highly sexual manner. It is important here to digress for a moment and note two dramatic contrasts between the film and Bradley's text. First, the sexual union in *Excalibur* is not politically motivated. That is, Uther simply sees Igraine and lusts after her. Merlin

discourages Uther from any contact with Igraine because they have worked hard to establish an alliance between the King and the men from the north. However, what begins strictly as sexual lust in *Excalibur* deviates to become a political event; Uther must make war with Cornwall and eventually kill Gorlois before taking Igraine for himself by force. Second, Igraine's character in *Excalibur* is entirely passive. She is unaware of Uther's intentions toward her, and she is nothing more than a piece of property to be passed to Uther when Gorlois dies.

Woman as Object

Unfortunately, film adaptations of the legend bombard audiences with dramatic visual images of women. Most film versions are almost exclusively patriarchal in content, focusing on the men of Arthur's world and their subsequent power over the women in Camelot. Whether it is because the film genre itself is so emphatically visual, or because directors of these films are almost exclusively male, women in film are objectified in ways which are more prominent than in written narratives.

In *Excalibur*, Uther first sees Igraine in his hall at a feast which has been prepared to celebrate an alliance he has just made with the "men from the north". Among them is Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall and his wife Igraine. Gorlois calls to Igraine, who is dutifully waiting with the women, and commands her to dance. In a powerful visual scene Igraine begins to dance. She is dressed in a revealing ensemble complete with a sheer piece of material, which she begins flaring about her as she

dances. The men become excited as she sways back and forth to a Celtic song played on the flute. After several moments the tempo increases, and she begins to thrust her pelvis toward the crowd of men as she is arched backward on one arm. The men simultaneously pound their fists into the table in time with each of her pelvic thrusts, and Uther declares "who is this woman? I must have her!" (*Excalibur*) Merlin replies "Are you mad man? THE ALLIANCE!!" The music plays on, louder and much more intense, until finally Gorlois jumps to his feet and commands "ENOUGH!" Dutifully, Igraine stops immediately.

Clearly, while she dances Igraine becomes an object; the viewer is dominated by her intense oppressed image.³⁸ This kind of highly dis-empowered image coincides with Laura Mulvey's concept of fetishism in film. Undoubtedly the intended audience for this scene (if not the entire film),³⁹ is male. Mulvey argues that in film, "women are displayed for men as figures in an amazing masquerade, which expresses a strange male underworld of fear and desire" (8). Indeed this image of Igraine, dancing, thrusting, and swaying is a male fantasy. For Mulvey, this becomes the starting point for her film theory of the male spectator or the male gaze which she equates with voyeurism:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional

exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire (19).

This is precisely what Igraine signifies for both the male audience watching *Excalibur* and the characters within the film. For it is at exactly this point that Uther becomes entranced by her image and decides that he must take ownership of her.

As previously noted, the character of Igraine in *Excalibur* is a meek woman who does only as her husband (and later as Uther), commands. In contrast, her character in *The Mists of Avalon* is strong willed: Born of Avalon blood, she partakes in the seduction of Uther willingly. In addition, her role in *Excalibur* is short lived (she disappears from the film after Arthur is born), whereas in *The Mists of Avalon* she takes on an active and crucial role throughout the text.

Excalibur illustrates a lustful Uther; after seeing Igraine dance, he is hopelessly in love and decides that he must have her at all costs. He persuades Merlin to assist him, and goes to war with the Duke of Cornwall for ownership/possession of Igraine. When Uther finally comes to Igraine, it is in the image of her husband (Merlin's magic),

and she is unaware that she is being unfaithful to Gorlois. He grabs her roughly, commanding her to his bed. She lets out a muffled scream of surprise, but lets him do as he pleases. He undresses her hurriedly, throws her naked body onto the bed, and begins thrusting himself into her even though he is still fully dressed in his armor. The scene lasts several seconds and focuses on the image of Uther pumping fiercely into her. Igraine is a passive woman who engages in sex with her husband only because she has been commanded that she do so. We are to believe that this woman has no sexual appetite of her own— she is merely an (the) object for male sexual release. From this union we are to assume that Arthur is conceived.

The initial sex scene in *The Mists of Avalon* is quite different. To begin with, Igraine is aware of the disguise Uther wears and willingly partakes in the deception. She willingly goes to his bed as well, and the two participate in passionate love making. We learn that Igraine has a healthy sexual appetite for Uther, whom she loves completely, and they consummate their love for hours.

Although the treatment of the Uther/Igraine sexual relationship is strikingly different in *The Mists of Avalon* and *Excalibur*, it is nonetheless important to note that both works devote considerable attention to it, thereby making sexuality an important motif. This negative portrayal of an otherwise powerful female figure in *Excalibur* is unfortunate. While Bradley makes Igraine an ambitious and sexually alive character, Boorman makes her an object to be exchanged among men. When Igraine's purpose is

served (i.e. Arthur is born), she is discarded from the film. She is merely a “trophy to be possessed by the dominant male in a deadly power struggle between Uther and the Duke” (Umland 134). Consequently, Umland and Umland ascertain that the negative anti-feminist portrayal of Igraine early on in the film (as well as the portrayal of Morgana), can be explained by Boorman’s adherence to Malory’s text; *Excalibur*’s devotion to *Morte d’Arthur* makes it necessary for Igraine’s character to be weak and oppressed; because *Excalibur* begins with a source note to Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, we are expected to both excuse and accept the Medieval depiction of sex for “as was consistent with medieval religious, political and moral theories, men are the agents of the action and women... the instruments” (Fries 8). In keeping with this logic, one can then argue that authors such as Bradley and Sampson, who deviate greatly from Malory, are expected to illustrate stronger female characters.

Sexuality/Lust

Belief systems and attitudes toward sexual activity can vary as much in the film adaptations of the legend as the stories of Arthur themselves. Depending upon the intended audience and the aspects of the story the film wishes to highlight, each version is strikingly different. For example, whereas *Excalibur* attempts to recreate the entire Arthur story, Hollywood’s 1995 melodrama of the Arthur narrative, *First Knight*, chooses to offer “a pristine version of the legend’s central conflict— the illicit desire

between the two characters whom Arthur loves most— and the ensuing destruction that results from their passion” (Umland 94).

First Knight begins with an already established and older⁴⁰ King Arthur who has reigned for several years over Britain and is now ready to settle down and enjoy life as a married man. He seeks an alliance with Gwenivere (the Lady of Leonesse), played by Julia Ormond, who interestingly owns her own property. Gwenivere agrees to the marriage, but as she is traveling to Camelot to marry Arthur (played by Sean Connery), her carriage and entourage are abducted by the evil Malagant.⁴¹ Lancelot rescues her from the clutches of Malagant’s knights, but not before she uses her own initiative and kills a knight with a cross bow. Lancelot attempts to force a kiss upon her and receives a slap in return (Apparently this Gwenivere is a much stronger character than other Gweniveres).⁴² After a verbal exchange, Lancelot promises her that he will never kiss her again unless she asks him to. She replies “that I shall never do” (*First Knight*).

Strangely, in *First Knight* Lancelot is not initially part of the Round Table and has furthermore never met either Gwenivere or Arthur. Instead, the film takes several liberties with his character and depicts him as a soldier of fortune who makes his way in the world fighting unsuspecting opponents for food and shelter. After a series of events, Lancelot finds himself at Camelot where he discovers Gwenivere is to be married to Arthur. Again, in a strikingly odd portrayal of Lancelot’s character, he decides to stay at court for a time in an attempt to win Gwenivere despite the fact that

she is now another man's wife. This Lancelot knows nothing of honor or chivalric codes of conduct.

Throughout the film there is an obvious attraction between Gwenivere and Lancelot, which she continually resists. The relationship is never consummated: it finds its release only in a single kiss, witnessed by Arthur, when Lancelot has decided to leave the court. Although this single kiss is their only instance of adultery, Arthur is outraged. His reaction to the kiss is noteworthy, and one that scholars have discussed:

Arthur witnesses the moment of intimacy and recognizes the restrained passion in it, and his ensuing jealousy prompts a vendetta against his wife and his "first knight". . . . This bowdlerized treatment of the adulterous relationship is perplexing unless one considers it as Hollywood's conservative response to sexual license after the advent of AIDS: There has been a noticeable shift toward depictions of monogamous characters or else portrayals of the dangers of extramarital dalliances. This serves as an example of the film industry's internal censorship, which can be seen in earlier films such as *Fatal Attraction* (Umland 97).

It is important to note that the love triangle in this film is dramatically less horrific than in previous films and texts. Because the relationship between Arthur and Lancelot has

barely developed into friendship at the time of the kiss, it is much less tragic. As well, the kiss signifies nothing more than a sexual lust between Lancelot and Gwenivere—it is not love. Interestingly, attitudes here correspond with contemporary attitudes concerning sexual activity, as Umland points out effectively; *First Knight* purposely omits the incest scene and is furthermore littered with Christian conventions. The fact that it omits the characters of Morgan and Mordred is therefore hardly surprising. Conveniently, it offers up Malagant as the villain instead. By starting the story late (when Camelot is already established), *First Knight* is able to pass over the objectionable motif of incest and thus spare its contemporary audience: “We must never forget Hollywood’s self-appointed role as defender of American values” (Umland 106).

Something that *First Knight* does offer, however, is a sympathetic depiction of Gwenivere as her own person. Although she does require rescuing, as do all other Gwenivere characters, she is a powerful woman in some ways: she owns her own kingdom, plays sports, and has her own financial stability.⁴³

Sexuality and Power:

Sex is used as a tool at a variety of levels in Arthurian legend. The most profound example of this can be seen in the characters of Morgause (sister to Igraine), and Morgaine (half sister to Arthur). In *First Knight* Morgause and Morgaine are completely denied characterization. However, *Excalibur* portrays Morgaine as an active character who uses her sexuality to gain power throughout the film.

Excalibur follows Malory closely in its portrayal of Morgan le Fay.⁴⁴ She is depicted in her traditional evil role as manipulator and destroyer “which coincided with the growth of women-hatred in the latter Middle Ages” (Fries 13). Played by Helen Mirren, Morgana is a sexually charged character who slinks around in a sexy S&M iron bikini, purses her lips constantly and reveals cleavage throughout the film. Sklar notes that this is in sharp contrast to most filmic traditions:

While her aggression is muted in most cinematic and comic-book treatments of Morgan, in that she tends to inspire rather than enact desire, her sexuality is given ample play in all three genres. . . big breasted, wasp-waisted, long-legged, she is an adolescent wet dream gone awry (30).

Not quite the comic-book version of Morgan that Sklar describes above, but still entirely overdone, Morgana of *Excalibur* is incredibly intelligent in a sexually charged fashion; we are to believe that her evil but brilliant mind makes her even sexier. Finally, in a carefully contrived plan, she seduces Arthur purposely so that she can conceive a child that can threaten her brother’s hold over Britain. The *mens rea*⁴⁵ of the incestuous encounter is an important aspect in the story, and often a difficult decision for authors to make. For example, because Morgaine is the heroine of *The Mists of Avalon*, and an entirely sympathetic character, Bradley cushions the incest act by first destroying our notions of sin through Christian belief systems, and further portraying the scene as

innocent because neither Morgan or Arthur is aware of one another's identity.

Therefore, making Morgana purposely seduce Arthur in *Excalibur* further adds to the sense of evil her character exudes. Although it is Morgause who fathers Mordred in *Morte d'Arthur*, both the concept of purposeful deceit and powerful/intelligent woman as evil come straight from Malory's text where we can see the medieval notions of gender; powerful women, indeed educated women, were viewed as dangerous individuals who threatened the patriarchal hold. Thus, women such as Morgan could only retain their status of power if characterized as evil.

Morgan is a character who has always been associated with sexual prowess. She can be seen in several versions of Arthuriana, particularly for our purposes in Boorman's *Excalibur*, Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, and Sampson's *Daughter of Tintagel*. Morgan Le Fay has enjoyed a wide variety of portrayals over the years with the resurgence of the Arthur story. Sometimes a Celtic goddess, other times an evil sorceress, Morgan has undoubtedly received much negative attention. Maureen Fries, in her discussion of Morgan, attributes her negative portrayals to patriarchy:

Her gradual change (one can hardly call it growth) from a connector of life with healing, as mistress of Avalon, into a connector of death with illicit sex indicates the inability of male Arthurian authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms (14).

Feminist versions of the legend, however, have made great strides in defending the character of Morgan Le Fay. Both Sampson's and Bradley's texts focus primarily on Morgan, giving us new insight into this otherwise established character who has been passed down to us from Thomas Malory. In her research on the "Modern Morgan" Elizabeth S. Sklar finds that

In relation to the Morgan of popular culture Arthuriana, one feature of Malory's Morgan is worth separate mention here, and that is her sexual appetite, which underscores the fundamental gynophobia that marks both the Malorean and the modern Arthurian tradition. In Malory's book, female sexuality- active or passive- is by its very nature structurally threatening; by invoking desire and engendering masculine sexual competition, thereby deflecting loyalty from its proper channels and dislocating culturally-endorsed priorities, it subverts the male-male bonding and the allegiance to ethical imperatives upon which the survival of the realm depends (27).

Sklar makes a valid and important observation here. Traditional texts and modern texts or films which follow traditional sources portray Morgan as an evil sorceresses or devilish seductress. This is necessary by the very nature of the work's structure. Male

centered works of fiction which concentrate on the camaraderie, loyalty, and battles among men are threatened by any power found within women. Morgan Le Fay is a woman of power, especially if we attribute Celtic ancestry to her. The only recourse authors of the tradition have had in the past is to portray her as a wicked witch—to do anything different would have been to admit her inherent power and consequently disrupt the patriarchal structure of the work.

Following the Malorean tradition of the Arthur story, *Excalibur* thus depicts a highly motivated and equally devious Morgana.⁴⁶ As already mentioned, Morgana seduces Arthur and bears him a child—Mordred. In addition, she works against Arthur from the time she arrives at Camelot. Her power increases when she convinces Merlin to reveal to her “the sacred charm of making,” which finally entraps him and dismantles his own magical powers. Finally, Morgana is the indirect source of political power behind Mordred; Mordred answers to and is completely loyal to his mother. Thus, she becomes the source of power behind Camelot’s fall. Elizabeth S. Sklar sees this as the most important feature of Morgan’s contemporary status in Arthuriana, as she notes, that in Malory Morgan le Fay plays no role whatsoever in the final demise of Camelot:

In her modern manifestations, however, Morgan Le Fey, like Merlin, is granted non-canonical longevity and is usually portrayed as the orchestrator of Camelot’s collapse . . . the

more ambitious and highly motivated Morgana of *Excalibur* deals the kingdom a double whammy, getting Lancelot banished through her manipulation of Sir Gawain, and seducing Arthur to engender Mordred, whom she grooms as Arthur's nemesis With her meager fictive history and her lack of literary lineage, Morgan le Fey has served as a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which we have been able to inscribe our peculiarly modern cultural aspirations and anxieties (32).

Clearly, the characterization of Morgan has enjoyed a much more active and crucial role in contemporary versions of the Arthur story. Sklar in part attributes this to modern attitudes toward gender and feminism. In addition, scholars such as Charlotte Spivack argue that contemporary portrayals of Morgan which are positive can be attributed to "increasingly popular neo-Pagan movements which have helped to revamp our notions of witches and witchcraft" (19). Indeed, according to Margot Adler,

Neo-Paganism, from its inception, has been less authoritarian, less dogmatic, less institutionalized, less filled with father figures, and less tied to institutions and ideas dominated by males. The religious concepts and historical

premises behind Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft give women a role equal or superior to that of men (208).

Moreover, Adler argues that a return to this female oriented religion has sparked attention in both religious and literary circles. Although Morgana is a compelling and crucial character in Boorman's filmic adaptation of the story, her new identity is nowhere as vivid as in *The Mists of Avalon*⁴⁷ and *Daughters of Tintagel*.

Both Bradley and Sampson give Morgan substantial consideration in their texts. As *The Mists of Avalon* is narrated by Morgan, it makes her the central figure of the text. Similarly, Sampson's *Daughter of Tintagel* is divided into five parts, each of which is narrated by a character close to Morgan, telling the story of Morgan's life at various stages of development. Both texts grant Morgan much more status than she has previously experienced. Thus, the Morgan le Fay who was "put to scole in a nonnery, and ther. . . lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye. And after. . . was wedded to kynge Uryens of the lond of Gore. . . "(Malory 5), becomes a great priestess who resides in Avalon. In addition, Morgan

receives education in herb lore, letter and magic as befits a priestess of the Goddess. And Morgan le Fey's irrational and seemingly unmotivated hatred and opposition to Arthur in *Le Morte d'Arthur* emerge as Morgaine's championing of Goddess worship against an increasingly Christian realm

that denies all gods but its own. The form of speaking a new truth is not only a form of feminist assertion but also a matter of historical accuracy, since Morgan Le Fey is generally agreed to derive from a Celtic Goddess transformed into a female villain by later medieval tradition. Implicitly, *The Mists of Avalon* interrogates *Le Morte d'Arthur* as a form of lie, a text that has actively suppressed an alternative truth . . . (Hughes 106).

The changes that Bradley makes in *The Mist of Avalon* are important ones to Arthuriana. As Hughes argues, Morgan only became a fiend because of male tradition and scholarship.

In *The Mists of Avalon*, Morgan's character therefore shifts once more: from evil villain to avenging priestess; from witch to goddess; from devil to savior. Sklar argues that this is due in part to contemporary attitudes toward gender:

One senses that the cultural encoding lies in Morgan's gender. I would suggest that our rendering of Morgan Le Fey, in both her positive and her negative incarnations, may be read as a response to the increased empowerment of women in the course of this century, that the feminist ideology that informs the rehabilitative treatments of

Morgan in fantasy fiction, generally produced by and for women, has reciprocally engendered the gynophobic response of those mass-cultural texts whose primary target audience is adolescent and post-adolescent males. One unifying feature of the new history of Morgan le Fey that differentiates her from the Morgan of historical tradition is her greatly increased empowerment. Although the structure still dictates that she operate covertly, we have given her a far more powerful ally in Mordred, whose fictive history is inextricably bound to the destruction of Camelot, than Malory allowed his Morgan Thus through Mordred, a male whose malice matches her own, Morgan has been able to transcend the structurally-imposed limitations of her gender, and achieve, as her medieval prototype could not, full realization of her anarchic agenda (33).

Sklar's arguments here hold true for both Sampson and Bradley's texts, which have been characterized as feminist by scholars of Arthuriana. Certainly, *The Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel* make Morgan le Fay a central character.

As a character Morgause has also enjoyed renewed interest, particularly in *The Mists of Avalon*. In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Morgause is the mother of Mordred and

sister to Arthur. She is married to King Lot of Orkney. Between them they have four sons, one of whom is Gawain. Morgause is a sexually aggressive woman in *Morte d'Arthur*, not unlike her portrayal in Bradley's text. She embraces her femininity and is quite the opposite of the meek and well mannered medieval woman. Further, she does not try to hide her sexual exploits. In *The Mists of Avalon*, Morgause is a powerful character who rules Orkney equally by her husband's side. Bradley makes it clear that even as a child Morgause was aggressive. Later, as an adult, she openly admits to having extramarital sex: "... which doesn't mean I slept alone all time when he was away on his wars. Well, why should I? I don't suppose he always lay down alone!" (221). Morgause's aggressive sexual behavior is yet another example of Bradley's female leadership; she empowers the women in the text with sexual authority and agency.

Female Centered Spirituality

Female sexuality in both *The Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel* is most profoundly emotional and spiritual in contrast to the physical relationships found in *Excalibur* and *First Knight*. Specifically in Bradley's work, the women of Avalon form strong sexual bonds with each other that go well beyond physical gratification: "As she lay quiet, listening to the other woman's breathing, she remembered the night she had brought Nimue here, and how Raven had come to her then, welcoming her to Avalon... why does it seem to me now that of all the love I have known, that is the truest"(760).

Bradley introduces this female bonding early in the text when Morgan and Viviane first meet, and she maintains the motif consistently throughout the story as a tool which speaks specifically to her female readership:

Uncovering legend within legend, ancient myth within cultural myth, Bradley retells the Arthurian story to let the face of the Goddess be seen again and to return women to their equally important role in human life despite the denigration of that role historically and spiritually in the centuries since Arthur (Shinn 37).

Clearly, this is a story concerning the women of Camelot and its surrounding areas—thus Bradley creates relationships between the women that go far beyond physical or emotional ties. *The Mists of Avalon* incorporates a phenomenon not unlike that found in Adrienne Rich's concept of the lesbian existence and the lesbian continuum. Rich explains that,

[l]esbian existence suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence . . . *lesbian continuum* [means] to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired

genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support . . . we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism* (Rich 217).

Bradley creates this experience within the plot in order to strengthen both the bonds between female characters and the reader/text relationship: "Morgaine clasped her close and kissed her, rocking her like a child. Then, as if they entered together into a great silence, she held Raven against her, touching her, caressing her, their bodies clinging together in something like a frenzy— woman to woman, affirming life . . ." (Bradley 765). She does not describe a specific "genital sexual experience" as Rich notes, but rather a coming together of femininity that escapes physical interaction and instead focuses on a deep emotional and spiritual connection that only women can experience. Bradley purposely endears her readers to the Celtic mother of the novel, which Morgan and the women of Avalon represent. From the very beginning of the text, and central to the narration itself, Bradley's notions of Paganism dominate over Christianity; the reader can not help but feel emotionally attached to Morgan and her search for

camaraderie among woman. The notion of Goddess worship is essential to this camaraderie.

Similarly, Fay Sampson develops striking emotional bonds between Morgan and several of the female characters throughout *Daughter of Tintagel*. These bonds can be construed as spiritually, if not physically sexual: "Yet that night, I cannot say how it was, my hands reached for her clothes and drew them over her head. Her hair smelt like violets. Her flesh was warm from the day's sun. My hands lingered. . ."(Sampson 186). Luned, the narrator of the above citation, is both spiritually and physically compelled by her love for Morgan in a way that only women can experience. Luned is a Christian nun, told to watch over Morgan and guide her to Christianity and Jesus Christ. However, her desire to connect with Morgan overcomes her duty to Christ, and instead she finds herself compulsively drawn toward Morgan's inner power and spirit.

Sexuality is juxtaposed with power, lust, deviation, and politics throughout Arthurian Legends. Figures such as Igraine, Morgause and Morgan le Fay, who have a long history of eroticism and power, have been cast negatively in the past. Although the image of woman in contemporary literature has changed, there still remains (particularly in film) a striking gender bias in the portrayals throughout the different media. However, feminist texts such as *The Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel* work to present positive and empowering female figures who challenge earlier representations of Arthurian Legend.

Chapter 3

Arthurian Legend and the Importance of Magic

"As for sorcery— well there are ignorant priests and ignorant people, who are all too ready to cry sorcery if a woman is only a little wiser than they are"
(Bradley, *Mists* 7).

Arthurian Legend is part of the genre of the fantastic; in all of its various forms the Arthur story includes marvelous elements which ultimately assist in its categorization. These fantastical events are most profound in the practice of magic which is attributed to Morgan le Fay and Merlin, and in the magical phenomena embedded within the plot: dragons lurk in forests, hands emerge from lakes bearing swords, magical islands suspend time, and people are granted eternal life. In fact, one could say that the legend itself could not exist without presenting these grand episodes. After all, where would Camelot be without the magician Merlin? Whom would authors blame for all the evil doings without the sorceress Morgan le Fay? What search could be more fantastic than that for the magical all-curing cup of Christ? All of these fantastic elements are at the base of Arthuriana, no matter which author writes or rewrites the myth of Arthur. What does differ, however, is the treatment of magic within distinct texts and films; although it is always a primary motif, the notion of magic takes on different meanings within individual artistic representations. Moreover, these meanings are central to the issues discussed throughout this study as magic often plays a central role in visual representations of women, sexual transgression such as incest, and in gender stereotypes.

A Brief Overview of Magic

Magic is a suspension of the normal rules of the universe. It is a phenomenon which occurs without explanation, or if explained, offers only a supernatural explanation. Adler observes that “as intellectuals, we have been raised to have a kneejerk reaction to such terms as ‘magic,’ ‘occult,’ ‘ritualism,’ ‘the supernatural,’ etc., so that we can only think about these subjects in ways we are supposed to”(153). The way we are supposed to view magic, as Adler maintains, is in association with the supernatural and the unknown. Tzvetan Todorov describes magic as the fantastic-marvelous, noting that in these “are the narratives closest to the pure fantastic, for . . . by the very fact that it remains unexplained, unrationalized, suggests the existence of the supernatural” (52).

In John Boorman’s *Excalibur*, magic plays an integral role in all of the marvelous episodes that occur. Some of the more obvious events include Merlin’s embedding of the sword in the stone, the Lady of the Lake’s gift of the second Excalibur to Arthur, the Grail Quests, and Morgan le Fay’s various sorcerous episodes. Here, magic is viewed both as a means of explaining events which have no other explanation, and as a Christian explanation of the divine. Characters within the text rarely question its validity, nor does the contemporary audience. In addition, Merlin is awarded almost all of the power of magic throughout the film. When magic is associated with Merlin and his power, it connotes good and helpful deeds for humankind. However, when it is

associated with Morgana, who steals his magical power from him, magic connotes evil and destructive deeds for humankind.⁴⁸

In NBC's *Merlin*, magic is the dominant feature of the miniseries and the pivotal motif on which all plots rest. Mab and Merlin use magic to battle throughout the film as Mab fights to reclaim her hold over Merlin. In *Merlin*, magic is portrayed as a negative force throughout the film. However, characters tolerate and even welcome magic when it is used with good intentions.⁴⁹ When Mab uses her magic, there is a negative backlash which occurs, whereas in all cases of Merlin's invocation of the power, there is a positive result.⁵⁰ Ironically, the female figure of Mab is associated with Pagan worship, while the male character of Merlin is associated with Christianity.⁵¹

In contrast, the rules of magic and the social implications of magic are quite different in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. Here magic is specifically associated with the Goddess and those who dedicate their life to her worship. Only female priestesses and the Merlin, under the command of the Lady of the Lake, can perform magical spells and events. Magic is introduced at the very beginning of the text and plays an integral role throughout. It represents a vision that is unavailable to narrow minded Christians, but it is all powerful for the women of Avalon who work behind the scenes to bring about change.

Visual Transgressions and Power

As noted, magic in *The Mists of Avalon* is represented by the notion of vision associated with the women of text. This concept is one which works particularly well with Rosemary Jackson's theory of the fantastic text. Jackson's chief concern lies with the social and political implications of fantastic literature through visual metaphors:

... many of the strange worlds of modern fantasy are located in, or through, or beyond, the mirror. They are spaces behind the invisible, behind the image, introducing dark areas from which anything can emerge. . . topography of the modern fantastic suggests a preoccupation with problems of vision and visibility, for it is structured around spectral imagery: it is remarkable how many fantasies introduce mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, eye—which see things myopically or distortedly as out of focus—to effect a transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar (43).

Jackson's point is to draw attention not only to the importance and the abundance of optics in fantasy, but also to what is unseen and unheard in social and political contexts. Her notion of "vision" within society and politics works particularly well with Bradley's concept of magic in *The Mists of Avalon*. Bradley's text emphasizes the concept of the

“sight” awarded to Morgan and to the other trained women of Avalon. This sight is derived from the Goddess and allows the women to see past and future events and receive warnings of danger and ill will. More importantly, as the notion of the sight is associated *only* with the women of Avalon or those with a dedicated faith in the Goddess, Bradley demonstrates a view of seeing that is similar to Jackson’s: the women of Avalon are open minded and *see* in multiple ways— they only object to Christianity because it refuses to *see* other points of view and other religious deities. They believe that all Gods are one, and no one should be refused the right to individual beliefs. In contrast, the Christians in the text only *see* one way— a way which is demeaning to both women and humanity.

Magic and its close association with the visual serves a further purpose in *The Mists of Avalon*. The “sight,” as it is called throughout the text, is a vision which comes to those schooled in the Pagan ways of looking into glasses and ponds for visions, or receiving sendings.⁵² It is a second way of seeing that brings new layers of meaning to the social and political events which occur within the novel. Jackson argues that these metaphors of vision serve a dual purpose: first, they function as an element of the supernatural, the unexplained, the marvelous. Second, they serve as a social statement, a call for recognition and a suggestion for reform. The magical visions that the women have within Bradley’s story serve as multi-faceted ways of seeing— they are there to show that one single view point is a dangerous notion. Bradley’s text attempts to turn

over gender stereotypes and the demarcations of gender by awarding the power of vision to women. She promotes a new way of “seeing” the culture of Camelot in a much more realistic fashion. The fantastic elements in *The Mists of Avalon* do not just lie in the conventions of the genre— strange and supernatural events embedded within the text which can not occur in our natural world— Bradley’s strangest event is that the Goddess and the women are socially and politically powerful. Jackson argues that

[a]n emphasis on visibility points to one of the central thematic concerns of the fantastic: problems of vision. . . equates the “real” with the “visible” and gives the eye dominance over the other sense organs, the un-real is that which is invisible . . . That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-seeable, can only have a subversive function . . . Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the look, through the eye, and of the I of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through this field of vision (45).

Although Jackson is concerned here primarily with optics and visionary metaphors within the fantastic text, we can apply her notion of visibility in another way.

Bradley gives us the voices of the women of Camelot. She makes visible what has previously been invisible in many medieval and contemporary versions of the

Arthur story. Women are both “seen” and “heard” in *The Mists of Avalon*. By extension, the power of these women and the results of their collective voice in Bradley’s patriarchal medieval world is *fantastic*. Moreover, the notion of vision within the text serves to make our contemporary patriarchal world look odd through the alienating device of fantasy.

Jackson’s work deliberately focuses upon the social and political implications of the fantastic text,⁵³ and it is thus not surprising that she criticizes Todorov for ignoring it (6). She sees fantastic texts as a means of promoting social transformation. She argues that demystifying how we read the fantastic text is crucial, as it may lead to undoing how these texts unconsciously work upon us (10). Jackson goes on to suggest that in fantastic literature we find a challenge to those social and political boundaries in which we are confined. This is precisely one of the things *The Mists of Avalon* accomplishes; Bradley’s text uses the fantastic genre to challenge political and social boundaries within the society of Camelot. Thus, in the text, all of the magic (even Merlin’s) comes from the Goddess. Merlin’s power comes through the Goddess, but he can not directly invoke her— he must do his work through the priestesses. Although Merlin appears to be the acceptable magician, while the female magicians are evil witches in polite Christian society, Bradley makes it clear that this is only a facade. Merlin has no real power; he is simply a vessel for them to perform their work in the Christian world. It is

the women who obey, worship, and interpret the Goddess and her magic in *The Mists of Avalon*. Thus Bradley's text coincides well with Jackson's definition of the fantastic:

Fantasy points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside the dominant value systems. The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made "absent". . . . Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inventing elements of this world, recombining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar and apparently "new," absolutely "other" and different (6-8).

The language of Jackson's text illustrates her sensitivity to social and political implications of the fantastic. These implications are precisely what she considers to be the most important elements of fantasy. Similarly, it is also what Bradley considers to be a crucial aspect of her fiction.

Sexual Transgressions

Although treated quite differently in various media, the infamous “incest scene” is present in many versions of Arthurian Legend. Incest is an important transgression which is often treated with caution. As discussed earlier, the concept of incest is an important component of the Arthur story which frequently occurs without Arthur’s knowledge. In NBC’s *Merlin*, the incestuous encounter takes place in a traditional portrayal; Arthur is unaware of Morgan’s identity when they have sex, and Morgan herself purposely goes to his bed with the intention of getting pregnant. With the aid of Mab’s magic she conceives Mordred. As always, the birth of Mordred has disastrous consequences for Camelot. The sin of incest permeates the court, and its fall becomes inevitable. Furthermore, the innocence of Arthur’s involvement is one which is significant.

In all representations of the Arthur story, Arthur is the hero—the protagonist. Rebecca and Samuel Umland find that “the law-bringer, is a natural born leader, dynamic and charismatic. He not only commands the love and loyalty of other men but is also attractive to women, and he is able to rely upon supernatural assistance as well”(133). They argue that this is always the case in the Arthur story and find that the incestuous element of the legend, although important, does not dominate the plot. Furthermore, Umland and Umland state that it is not an element that is exclusive to the Arthurian tradition. For example, incestuous elements are also present in the film *The*

Ten Commandments. Moreover, Umland and Umland find that the concept of incestuous relations in Egyptian history was not uncommon. Rather it was entirely acceptable because it assured that the royal blood line would not be diluted:

The next pharaoh will be named by the current pharaoh. . . who plans to choose either his own son, Rameses, or his adopted nephew, Moses. Egyptian custom dictated that the daughter of Pharaoh was to mate with the heir apparent, even when it involved incest. . . . The incest motif . . . has interesting connections with the Arthurian legend, however, even though the plot is worked out differently. . . . Family upheavals and jealousies, it would seem, make for dramatic possibilities, and love triangles seem most interesting when they are tied to a power base as well (134).

Strangely, the concept of incestuous relations practiced by the ancient Egyptians and depicted in films like *The Ten Commandments* has not been met with the same negativity as it has in artistic representations of the Arthur story. One could speculate that this is a result of social expectation. In *The Ten Commandments*, the Egyptian society is not one to be defended: the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish peoples in the story and thus the focus of the film is their journey toward freedom. In contrast, Arthurian Legends focus on Arthur as a hero who is responsible for reflecting the morals and

values of a Christian society. Interestingly, the acceptance of incest as it is portrayed in *The Ten Commandments* is similar to the way it is viewed in *The Mists of Avalon*.

The incest scene, although not the only one in which magic, hesitation, and the supernatural occur, is a representative one in *The Mists of Avalon*. The fantastic elements present in Bradley's incest scene are similar to those found throughout the narrative. The most defining feature of this scene is the striking dichotomy which exists between Paganism and Christianity. Through the juxtaposition of these religions, the reader is forced to hesitate between condemning the act of incest or accepting it. This necessary moment of hesitation found in *The Mists of Avalon* is a defining feature of the fantastic genre for several theorists, one of whom is Tzvetan Todorov.

One of the most respected theories of the fantastic belongs to Tzvetan Todorov, who outlines rigid definitions and categories of the fantastic.⁵⁴ He takes a strict structural approach to the fantastic, comparing his theory to a scientific methodology (4). Todorov proceeds by deduction, selecting a few representative texts from the genre and producing a hypothesis. He notes that it is not the quantity, but the "logical coherence of a theory that finally matters" (2). Todorov defines what he considers the "heart" of the fantastic as the moment of hesitation found within the structure of the text:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an

event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the events must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he [or she] is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination - and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else reality - but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings - with this reservation, that we encounter him frequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty (25).

For Todorov, hesitation experienced by the reader and embedded within the text by an ambiguous narrative, is the absolute defining feature of the fantastic text; the entire concept of the fantastic is outlined by what is real and what is imaginary (25). From that moment on we either enter into the realm of the marvelous or the uncanny, the two neighboring genres on which Todorov bases his theory. He sees the fantastic text as one caught between the marvelous and the uncanny, and in fact places them as transitory sub-genres within the fantastic (44). Ultimately we always find ourselves within the uncanny, the fantastic-uncanny, the fantastic-marvelous, or the marvelous.

The key to the fantastic, according to Todorov, is the questioning of the implicit

reader. We are then obliged to meet three conditions: 1.) hesitation on the part of the reader between the natural and the supernatural; 2.) the ability of the reader to identify with a main character of the text; 3.) a rejection of allegorical and poetic interpretations within the text (33). Todorov insists that it is the first and third of these conditions which constitute the actual genre of the fantastic.

In considering Todorov's argument surrounding the fantastic, the incest scene in *The Mists of Avalon* is of great importance. Told in elaborate detail, the incest scene in Bradley's text is the consummation of a Pagan ritual whereby the King Stag is bound to the land. Arthur is transformed into the Stag. He must run through the forest with the deer and challenge the real stag to a fight. Morgaine becomes the maiden huntress working her magic to assist Arthur in his battle and in his deception. He is the Horned one, the God and the consort of the Virgin Huntress (175). We are reminded over and over that Morgaine has been metamorphosed— she is the Goddess. And it is as Goddess and God that the incest scene is consummated:

She lay there, feeling the life of the earth around her; she
seemed to expand, to fill the cave, the little scribbled
drawings were painted on her breasts and belly and above
her the great chalk figure of a man or deer, strode with an
erect phallus . . . the invisible moon inside the cave flooding
her body with light as the Goddess surged inside her, body

and soul I am the Great Mother who knows all things,
 who is maiden and mother and all-wise, guiding the virgin
 and her consort (178).

The entire scene is rich with elements of the marvelous and as such it calls for a decision on the part of reader and characters: how will we determine the events which have just occurred? As we have established earlier, Bradley has deliberately set up a powerful dichotomy between Christianity and Paganism within the text. This dichotomy serves here, as it does elsewhere, as the catalyst for our questions— has the Goddess in fact intervened (supernatural)? Or is this all evil trickery brought about by Viviane without the aid of anything divine (natural)? We must decide with whom we will sympathize, and whether we condemn this sexual encounter.

Eric Rabkin criticizes Todorov's strict call for hesitation on the part of the reader saying that ". . . . this hesitation should be seen not in relation to external norms, but rather in relation to microcontextual variations . . ." (qtd. in Beeler 62). Rabkin believes the determining factor should not be based on what the reader accepts as real or unreal, but on the perspective imposed by the characters and narrator within the story:

"Otherwise, we must accept the fact that the genre of the fantastic is totally dependent upon the level of sophistication of the reader and his world view" (Beeler 62). In all Arthur stories we do not question if the incest scene has occurred— authors simply state that it has, and we accept it. However, in *The Mists of Avalon* we do question *why* the

incest scene has occurred. Similarly, this is also the case for most of the magical events that occur in Bradley's text because they are presented alongside the continued struggle between Paganism and Christianity, which demands that we hesitate.

In contrast to Bradley's text which coincides with Todorov's call for hesitation, *Excalibur* does not work for Todorov because we do not identify with the characters in the story. Unlike *Mists of Avalon*, where Bradley has created characters rich with substance, provided plenty of dialogue and a continuous linear narrative, Boorman's characters are one dimensional; he does not provide sufficient dialogue for us to really know how or what a character is feeling or thinking. We are constantly reminded that this is a story he has stolen from Malory; we are presented with one fact after another. Furthermore, we do not hesitate throughout *Excalibur* because it is directed toward a contemporary audience with a certain predisposition toward Malory. As noted, the film credits Malory as the source during its opening. Thus, there is an assumption that we will believe in Christian miracles and divine intervention. Just as the medieval audience would not have questioned the divinity of the Grail Quests, the miraculous reception of Excalibur, or the sorcery of Morgan le Fay, the audience of *Excalibur* does not question these events within the framework of the story; unlike Bradley's text which purposely gives the reader choices to make, the audience of *Excalibur* is given no reason to hesitate or question the validity of the magic.

Jackson argues that non-secularized societies hold different beliefs from secular

cultures in terms of what constitutes reality (23). Secularization of modern society therefore makes us less willing to believe in the divine. Consequently, when we are presented with the incest scene described in Bradley's text, we question the metamorphosis that has taken place. Similarly, when we are told that the sword was pulled from the stone, that Merlin cloaked Uther in magic to bring him to Igraine's bed, or that Morgaine spent four months in the land of Faery, we assess these marvelous elements and question if we will accept them.

Incest is a sexual transgression that has not been accepted in either medieval or contemporary western societies. Thus, there are several social ramifications for the encounter. In almost every version of the Arthur story which chooses to include the incestuous dalliance between Morgan and Arthur, Arthur is criticized for this behavior and must repent his sin, while Morgaine is harshly judged as evil. As a high member of Britain's political system, Arthur must conceal this sin and protect his position as king. But he is unsuccessful, and Camelot eventually begins to fall apart because it has been stained with the sin of incest. Traditionally Mordred usurps Arthur's throne and kills him in a bloody battle. For the medieval audience, once Mordred returns to the story a full grown man, Camelot must ultimately fall; the horrendous sin that has permeated the court can no longer be ignored. As well, most artistic representations make a point of covering up the encounter— the people will not follow a king with such corrupt morals. Interestingly, however, Bradley makes a serious attempt to turn over the social

taboo of incest and give the reader a different perspective.⁵⁵ Therefore, Bradley's apparent defense of incest is radically different from the social structure subscribed to in both a medieval context and a contemporary one.

The reactions by other characters within any given Arthur story to the incest scenario are also worth mentioning. Someone is always to blame, and it is usually Morgan le Fay. This blame always serves to alienate Morgan further from Camelot. Because the characters are shocked, and the general assumption is that an evil and sinful event has occurred, someone must be blamed and punished. Like most acts of evil found in the Arthur story, this act is attached to the Goddess, or to those who practice sorcery and Goddess worship (Morgan le Fay). Although the Goddess in *The Mists of Avalon* is defended by the narrator, she is harshly condemned by the Christians within the text. Pagan worship is also condemned in several versions of the Arthur story such as *Excalibur* and *Merlin*. Consequently, those who actively practice Goddess or Pagan worship are rejected by characters within the text.

Conceptions of Evil

Jackson argues that the relationship of otherness to evil is an important one. She finds that the elements found in the category of other, do not mean "apart from oneself" as Todorov would have it; like Jackson, Todorov also recognizes the importance of the other in the fantastic text—he lists a network of uncanny and marvelous elements that are adopted by fantastic works and divided into two categories which co-exist: themes

of the self and themes of the other. In the former, almost all of the themes Todorov outlines can fall under the category of metamorphosis in one form or another; while the latter can be categorized as transgressions in and around sexuality and desire. Jackson, however sees the concept of other as more important than Todorov. She sees the other as the *social other*, and the *political other*, and thus she takes the implications much more seriously:

The concept of evil, which is usually attached to the other, is relative, transforming with shifts in cultural fears and values.

Any social structure tends to exclude as evil anything radically different from itself or which threatens it with destruction, and this conceptualization, this naming of difference as evil, is a significant ideological gesture. It is a concept at one with the category of otherness itself

Strangeness precedes the naming of it as evil: the other is defined as evil precisely because his/her difference and a possible power to disturb the familiar and known (53).

Bradley works hard to reverse gender roles and power relations within the text, just as feminists have worked hard to reverse them in modern society. She creates a world where things are “turned over” in historical fiction. Where Bradley directly confronts the social and political constraints of Camelot’s culture, *Excalibur* embraces it. The

other in *Excalibur* is dictated by Christian doctrine so that it becomes that which is threatening— female sexuality and female sorcery that invite sexuality and mischief. Similarly, *The Mists of Avalon* provides the reader with the single viewpoint of the Christians; they reject that which is strange and ultimately conclude that strangeness is evil. The difference between *Excalibur* and *The Mists of Avalon* is that for Bradley, this single minded viewpoint of the Christians is presented after she has already endeared the reader to the social structures of Avalon. Therefore, because this sympathy has been firmly established in *The Mists of Avalon*, the Christian notions of evil, and consequently those who are othered from society, become not only less acceptable, but abnormal and ridiculous.

Another common scene found in the Arthur story occurs when Igraine and Uther first have sex. Like the incest scene, this experience holds significance for Arthurian Legend in terms of magic and hesitation. In *Excalibur*, Uther has spent several months besieging Tintagel where Gorlois and his men are protecting Igraine. It is clear that there is no way that Uther can take Tintagel. Finally, Merlin arrives and Uther begs him for help. It is only with Merlin's aid— with his magic— that Uther is finally able to penetrate the walls of Tintagel and take his prize. With the aid of Merlin, Uther becomes cloaked in magic and appears to become Gorlois. He can thereby be freely admitted into the Duke's home and takes Igraine to bed.

Similarly, in *The Mists of Avalon* Merlin assists Uther in passing through the

gates of Tintagel, but there is a pre-sexual encounter that occurs first. When Uther is battling Gorlois for Igraine, they set up a camp and plan an attack in the morning.

Igraine leaves her body and travels as a spirit to where Uther and Gorlois are awaiting their future fight. She transcends space and time, departed from her physical body to warn Uther that Gorlois will attack during the night. Armed with this warning, Uther is able to counterattack, and he wins the battle. It is this mystical act of foreplay which brings about Uther's victory and allows him to return to Igraine and take her to bed:

Body and soul, she had been taught, were not firmly bonded;
in sleep the soul left the body and went to the country of
dreams, where all was illusion and folly, and sometimes, in
the Druid-trained, to the country of truth (91). She had done
it. She seemed to stand before herself, her whole awareness
sharply focused. . . . She did not look back. . . . You must
never look back for the body will draw back the soul- but
somehow she could see without eyes, all around her and
knew that her body was still sitting motionless before the
dying fire (100).

Again, vision takes on a significant role in the text as Igraine finds Uther without seeing with her "eyes". After Uther kills Gorlois, he goes to Tintagel where Igraine waits for him: blessed with the dark and fog of the night, Uther wears the ring of the Duke, and it

is only because Igraine herself rushes out to greet and welcome Uther as Gorlois, that he is allowed to pass freely through the gates and escape suspicion. Igraine is the source of power in this scene, just as women are the dominant sources of power in several scenes throughout the text. One of the goals of *The Mists of Avalon* is therefore to erase or blur the lines of power associated with gender. Jackson argues that

Several themes... derive from thematic concerns, all of them concerned with erasing rigid demarcations of gender and genre. Gender differences of male and female are subverted... in fantasy's attempt to "turn over" "normal" perceptions and undermine "realistic" ways of seeing (49).

These "unrealistic" ways of seeing are synonymous with what she calls monological realities and can here be equated with a patriarchal system of categorization. Whereas traditional stories of Arthur such as *Excalibur* praise Uther for his valiant battle and his strength, and further credit Merlin with the power of magic to transform Uther into the image of the Duke, *The Mists of Avalon* makes it clear that Igraine is the heroine of this scene; Igraine is credited with saving Uther's life, with making it possible through her magic for Uther to win the battle, and with performing the crucial role of admitting Uther into Tintagel.

As Stan Beeler notes, "the incorporation of sexuality into a work of literature is considered by some to be consistent with the standards of fantastic literature" (69).

Beeler quotes Donald Palumbo's notion of fantasy which states:

Its treatment of sexuality- whether sublimated, overt or even pornographic- is a distinctive characteristic of "fantastic literature". . . . The erotic has always been an important aspect of the fantastic. Although there are surely many ways to account for this confluence of sexuality and fantasy, one basic connection worth investigating is the relationship that exists between sexuality and a primary source of fantasy's psychological appeal- its symbolic easing of humanities' fears of the unknown, particularly of its fear of death- in most seminal, long enduring, and artistically satisfying fantasy works (69).

Unlike Palumbo, Jackson see "transgressions within fantastic [as] products of unconscious desires"(63). Not surprising, again her main argument revolves around the visual and optic illusions within the fantastic. Jackson argues that the mirror is nothing more than a metaphor for other selves: "The mirror provides versions of self transformed into another, becoming something or someone else. It employs distance and difference to suggest the instability of the "real" on this side of the looking glass and it offers unpredictable (apparently impossible) metamorphoses of self into other" (88).

Sexuality in *Excalibur* is radically different from the presentation of sexuality in *The Mists of Avalon*. Boorman's film assumes a Christian perspective; it suggests that sexuality is threatening and sinful. This is another example of *Excalibur*'s direct adherence to Thomas Malory since an individual's first love must be to his God, and his second love to a woman, but only if that love is pure. Thus in *Morte d'Arthur*, Lancelot continually refuses to give a maiden a kiss (*Sir Lancelot du Lake* 160) because it would be dishonorable. He refuses to give himself sexually to one of the Queens who holds his life in his hands (*Sir Lancelot du Lake* 152), and he is always true to his chivalric ideal. Like Malory's version of the Arthur story, *Excalibur* illustrates that Lancelot's love for Gwenivere is only forgiven when it is not a sexual love, but rather an honorable one.⁵⁶ Once Gwenivere and Lancelot consummate their love, they commit a most grievous sin, one punishable by the full force of both church and state which serves as a warning to others who presume to take such a path. Gwenivere is a barren queen because of her sinful lust for another man. Since sexual sin is at the very heart of Camelot, the Arthurian government can not survive.

In *The Mists of Avalon* sex is treated much differently. Although Bradley still presents the Christian views of the period, she does so only in such a way as to demean it. The sexual transgressions which occur in Bradley's text are presented in a sympathetic manner. *The Mists of Avalon* is also much more aggressive in its descriptions of sexual activity. As discussed throughout this thesis, we are presented

with homosexual and lesbian scenes, orgies, incest, sex with Gods and Goddesses, sex and magic, and the suspension of time.

Divine Interventions

Divine intervention is a theme that runs consistently throughout most versions of the Arthur story, and which is juxtaposed with the concept of magic. Typically we are faced with the notion of good versus evil and with the question of responsibility for evil acts. In describing Jackson's principles of fantastic literature, Stan Beeler notes her emphasis on responsibility:

In religious fantasies, and in pagan ones, this context of supernaturalism/magic locates good and evil *outside* the merely human, in a different dimension. It is a displacement of human responsibility on to the level of destiny: human action is seen as operating under the controlling influence of Providence, whether for good or for evil (65).

In *The Mists of Avalon* and *Excalibur*, Merlin and the Pagan priestess (lady of the lake) assist the humans in events throughout the story. Sorcery in particular is viewed as an evil intervention in Boorman's film, and from the perspective of the Christian characters it is similarly evil in Bradley. Jackson's notion of destiny within the religious fantasy can be identified in these artistic representations as several events are attributed to the gods, to sorcery, or to magic. Further, there is significant displacement of responsibility

between human and God/Goddess. Whether for good or for evil, the responsibility for events that occur within both works is transferred to the supernatural. Humans are not held responsible for their actions when divinities have intervened.

Magic and the supernatural in Arthurian Legend have serious consequences for the social and political structures of its world. They play an integral role in the plot structure of each artistic representation and further offer interesting consequences for religion and power issues within Arthurian texts and films. Although magic most notably plays upon the good versus evil dichotomy in the stories, it more importantly serves as a catalyst for events and characters.

Conclusion

Religion, sexuality and magic are important components in Arthurian Legends. Closely connected, all three of these motifs reflect cultural attitudes and social value systems being experienced during the period when these individual stories about Arthur were written. As we have seen, Christianity plays a central role in Arthuriana throughout the centuries; consequently the church's views on women, sexuality and religious doctrine became an integral part of the Arthur story. For contemporary literature, as well as for contemporary culture, the notion of a Goddess figure has once again become important. Neo-Pagan movements have been introduced into a large portion of western secular society in the twentieth century, and thus attitudes toward witchcraft and sorcery have become more positive. Further, the concept of woman as deity is becoming a more acceptable one as popular interest in Goddess worship, Wicca, Paganism and Neo-Paganism continues to grow. Whether the literature of the period dictates cultural attitude and change, or whether cultural attitude and change affect literature, is less important than the fact that these changes have occurred. Aided by feminist thought, progressive cultural perceptions now exist concerning sexuality, gender, and religion. More specifically, contemporary belief systems associated with female deities, magic, and sorcery have been reaffirmed in literary texts such as *Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel*.

Medieval views on Paganism and Christianity are certainly not the same as those

held by contemporary western society. Although much early Christian doctrine remains embedded in both our culture and our politics,⁵⁷ the union of church and state has weakened in contemporary culture. Therefore, fears that were valid and prominent for the medieval woman such as punishment for adultery, promiscuity, heresy etc., are no longer as threatening for modern western women. That is not to say that the vestiges of medieval attitudes toward women have completely disappeared from our culture; indeed women are continually faced with patriarchal structures in the twentieth century. However, Christian influence is not as prominent as it was in the Middle Ages. Consequently, feminist historians can ask questions about alternative belief systems without feeling threatened. Moreover, Pagan groups are no longer intolerable and the worship of female deities is a religion on the rise once more.

What does all of this mean for the Arthurian Legends? To begin with, the treatment of female characters such as Gwenivere and Morgan Le Fay has changed a great deal. Although filmic traditions of Arthuriana have maintained patriarchal conceptions more than feminist literary texts of the twentieth century, they nonetheless give substantial consideration to female characters. Thus, although viewed by some as a backlash against feminism, films such as *Excalibur*, *First Knight*, and *Merlin* succeed not only in highlighting female characters but in empowering them. Moreover, feminist texts such as *The Mists of Avalon* and *Daughter of Tintagel* re-conceptualize female characters. Both Marion Zimmer Bradley and Fay Sampson illustrate a return to

Goddess worship that gives credibility and indisputable power to Morgan Le Fay in a positive manner. Thus, contemporary novels and films do not necessarily reform the skeleton of Arthurian Legend, but they give new expression to the voices of women.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of this study the term Arthurian Legend refers to complete stories—those which begin before Arthur's birth and end with the fall of Camelot.
2. Joseph Campbell is an accomplished popular critic of world mythology. *The Mask of the God: Creative Mythology*, and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* are two of his published works on myth.
3. Among other famous battles attributed to Arthur, Turner cites Arthur's victory over the Saxons at Mount Badon (178).
4. *The Holy Kingdom* (1998), by Baram Beckett and Alan Wilson claims that the true King Arthur descended from Emperor Magnus Maximus.
5. Before Monmouth, the Bretons had many songs and stories passed on by minstrels, which were loosely Arthurian in content. Known to us now as Breton Lays, perhaps the most noteworthy lay is *The Lay of Sir Launfal* by Marie de France. The story follows one of Arthur's knights, Launfal, through a contest between the supernatural and the natural world. It is not discussed thoroughly in this thesis because it is merely a poem which uses Arthur as a backdrop and does not have any specific Arthurian content.
6. Barber describes the courtly love tradition as derived from the literature of southern France. It was the troubadours who exaggerated the superiority of the lady, and consequently the worshiping lover's moral worth (54).
7. Although Gwenivere becomes central to the plot in Crétien's stories, she is still

largely marginalized. She exists only for the purposes of being married, rescued, or seduced.

8. The identity of the author of *Sir Gawain and Green Knight* has long been a matter of debate among scholars.

9. Although Gawain's characterization is not crucial in any way to this thesis, it is nonetheless worth mentioning in this brief overview of the legend's history that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* spiraled his character to fame.

10. "The most controversial issue of Malory studies (with the possible exception of his actual identity) has centered on whether his work can and should be viewed as a complete and coherent narrative. This debate was sparked by Vinaver— after William Caxton, Malory's editor— who argued that Malory composed eight separate tales instead of a unified narrative . . . Vinaver chose as the title for his 1947 edition . . . *Works*" (Umland 2).

11. Umland and Umland are referring here to the Victorian period and their negative social and cultural attitudes toward sex.

12. Since *Mists of Avalon*, Bradley has gone on to publish *The Forest House* (1992) and *Lady of Avalon* (1997). They precede the events of Arthur and focus on the Pagan women who later contribute to Camelot. However, neither work has any specific Arthurian content.

13. C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon define melodrama as "based on a romantic plot and developed sensationally with little regard for convincing motivation and with

an excessive appeal to the emotions of the audience" (295).

14. Most notably in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*.

15. Malory and Tennyson are primarily responsible for Gwenivere's negative portrayal throughout the tradition of Arthurian Legend.

16. In addition to the authors mentioned, the following texts were available at two local bookstores: Courtney Milne's *Visions of the Goddess*, Amy Zerner and Monte Farber's *The Oracle of the Goddess*, Lexa Rosèan's *The Supermarket Sorceress's Enchanted Evenings*, Patricia Telesco's *365 Goddess and Goddess in my Pocket*, Teresa Mooney and Jane Brideson's *Wheel of the Year: Myth and Magic Throughout the Seasons*, Maria May Simms *The Witches Circle*, Nicola Pulford's *The Book of Spells*, Teresa Moorey's *Witchcraft: A Beginner's Guide*, and Sarah Lyddon Morrison's *The Modern Witches' Book of Symbols*.

17. Jones and Pennick define Pagan as a term "employed once more in its root meaning to describe a nature-venerating religion which endeavors to set human life in harmony with the great cycles embodied in the rhythms of the seasons" (2).

18. On the verge of a millennium change, many psychics and prophets of contemporary culture have predicted an even greater surge in the worship of female deities, due largely in part to a conceptual change in the way we will view Mother Nature in the years to follow 2000. In addition, several popular contemporary films which specifically approach the idea of Goddess worship and witchcraft have been produced.

Examples of such films include: Witches of Eastwick (1988), The Craft (1996), The Crucible (1996), Practical Magic (1998), and Simply Irresistible (1999).

19. For the purposes of this study Paganism can be equated with Goddess worship.

20. The fact that the Grail Legend originated long before Christianity has been traced by many scholars, most notably by Jessie Weston (1957) in her text *From Ritual to Romance*.

21. Perhaps the most influential non-sexual woman was the Virgin Mary who was revered in both medieval and contemporary times. In addition, the idealization of women in Troubadour poetry was also common.

22. The teachings of St. Augustine and St. Paul and discussed earlier in the chapter under the subheading Christianity in the Middle Ages.

23. See St. Augustine's doctrine on women and sex earlier in this chapter.

24. I am not making a claim that incestuous sexual encounters were equated with non-incestuous encounters in the middle ages. However, as stated, medieval attitudes toward sex were such that any woman who would seduce a man was viewed as evil and sinful. Consequently, Morgan's seduction of any man in the Arthurian Legends is seen in this light.

25. The notion of the land carrying the sins of its king is also profoundly seen in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Fisher King stories of this century.

26. It is important to note that by the end of the novel, Morgan discovers that not all

elements of Christianity are oppressive: "She [Morgan] had thought nuns in Christian convents would be sad and doleful, ever conscious of what the priests said about the sinfulness of being born women, but these were innocent and merry robins talking gaily to Morgaine of their new chapel. . ." (873).

27. A *sending* in *The Mists of Avalon* is a religious vision sent by the Goddess.

28. Merlin Stone maintains: "The image of Maeve [Mab] is a somewhat unusual combination of a Faerie Queen and a martial leader of troops. . . [she] was portrayed as

a judge of protocol and status among the Celtic peoples. . . Later images of Maeve . .

include the Shakespearian Mab" (67).

29. Tobin cites stories told to Gwenivere such as "the women of Avalon were evil witches and served the devils" (*Mists* 255); "evil folk who mocked the Christ were turned into crows (*Mists* 292); and of "a saint who transformed a circle of sorceresses at their evil rites, into a circle of stones" (*Mists* 282).

30. Refer back to Chapter One for the theology behind Christian attitudes concerning women and sexuality.

31. The text has an obvious feminine approach to issues of sexuality such as freedom and liberation. The notions of sexuality explored in *The Mists of Avalon* are not unlike those found in Adrienne Rich's concept of the Lesbian Continuum which is discussed later in the chapter.

32. The portrayal of Arthur and Lancelot as secret lovers is unusual because Bradley takes a step toward tainting the otherwise traditional character of Arthur with a homosexual relationship.
33. In Malory's work the fact that Arthur hesitates to expose the affair is made clear.
34. See Chapter One of this thesis.
35. Traditionally Uther Pendragon sees and falls in love with Igraine, wife of the Duke of Cornwall. Typically he resolves to have her and wages war with Cornwall.
36. Both Lady of Avalon and Merlin are political Pagan job titles.
37. *Excalibur* attempts a complete version of the Arthur story. It begins before Arthur's birth and follows his life until he pulls the sword from the Stone. He then meets and marries Gwenivere, embarks on the Grail Quest, and falls with Camelot, at the hand of Mordred.
38. Igraine's dancing can not be seen as liberating in this scene because she is commanded by Gorlois to both begin and to end her dance. Gorlois controls her movements and is only compelled to have her stop dancing when he sees the excitement it has caused for Arthur.
39. *Excalibur* concentrates highly on male centered activity, beginning with its credit to Malory at the start of the film. As noted previously, Malory's text is extremely patriarchal. Boorman's credit to Malory at the beginning of the film makes it apparent that *Excalibur* will be similar in content.

40. Sean Connery, cast as Arthur, was 64 at the time of the film's release and Richard Gere (as Lancelot), was 45.

41. Malagant is traditionally a figure who claims to be the bastard child of Gwenivere's father. In most versions of the story he captures Gwenivere and rapes her before Lancelot rescues her and kills him.

42. Umland and Umland also credit the *Sword of Lancelot* as portraying Gwenivere as a powerful character.

43. Umland and Umland argue that the portrayal of Gwenivere in *First Knight* can be equated with her character played by Jean Wallace in *Sword of Lancelot*, who is both strong and independent.

44. Critics have offered several reasons for Malory's portrayal of Morgan as evil. Katharine Rogers calls his characterization "misogynistic" (59), and Myra Olstead claims that since "Malory's chief emphasis is upon heroic life and the affairs of men" (133), the evil portrayal is only natural.

45. *Mens rea*: The mental act of a crime.

46. *Excalibur* refers to Morgan le Fay's character as Morgana.

47. Charlotte Spivack calls Bradley's portrayal: "the most compelling and satisfying revisioning of this tantalizingly paradoxical fay" (21).

48. Refer back to Chapter One, page 26-28 for more information on witchcraft and practices of magic by women.

49. In *Merlin*, Merlin welcomes his magical powers when he can use it for positive events such as helping Nimue, Arthur or himself.
50. This phenomenon is also illustrated in *Excalibur*.
51. This is ironic in view of the fact that Merlin is traditionally a Pagan Druid. In almost all instances of his character throughout the Arthurian Legends, Merlin is depicted in his traditional role as Druid magician. In NBC's *Merlin* however, Merlin is associated with all that is good in society and is therefore depicted as a Christian.
52. A sending in *The Mists of Avalon* is a vision sent to someone who has the sight.
53. The fantastic text is one which employs fantasy and thus fantastic concepts throughout the work.
54. Although Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic is somewhat dated (1975), it is still widely respected by academics and scholars of fantastic literature. In addition, it is often used as the starting point for more recent theories of the fantastic.
55. In *The Mists of Avalon*, incest is seen as a valid form of uniting the royal bloodlines. As far as the Lady of the Lake is concerned, there is no sin present, because the bond of brother and sister is an earthly one.
56. Honorable chivalrous love originates with the Troubadours and is essentially the unconsummated love between a knight and a lady.
57. In contemporary western society much of our civil laws derive from Roman antiquity. These periods were greatly influenced by the church. As such, laws concerning abortion, prostitution, marriage and suicide (to name a few), remain

embedded in our twentieth century legal system, and are directly derived from Christian doctrine.

Works Cited

- Adler, Margot. Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Amt, Amy. Women's Lives in Medieval Europe. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Ancient Mysteries. Dir. Leonard Neemord. Arts & Entertainment Video, 1996.
- Barber, Richard. The Arthurian Legends. New Jersey: Littlefield Adams & Co., 1979.
- Baring, Anne, and Jules Cashford. The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image. London: Viking, 1991.
- Beeler, Stanley W. The Invisible College: A Study of the Three Original Rosicrucian Texts. New York: AMS Press, 1991.
- Benko, Debra A. "Morgan le Fay and King Arthur in Malory's *Works* and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*: Sibling Discord and the Fall of the Round Table." The Significance of Sibling Relations in Literature. Eds. JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doublerward. New York: Greenwood Press, 1998.
- Blackett, Baram and Alan Wilson. The Holy Kingdom. New York: Bantam Press, 1998.
- Bradley, Marion Zimmer. The Forest House. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- . Lady of Avalon. New York: Penguin Books, 1997.
- . Mists of Avalon. New York: Ballantine Books, 1982.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1973.
- . The Mask of God: Creative Mythology. New York: Viking Press, 1968.
- Christ, Carol P. Odyssey with the Goddess. New York: Continuum Pub., 1995.

---. Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding the Meaning in Feminist Spirituality. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, 1997.

The Craft. Dir. Andrew Flemming. With Neve Campbell. Columbia Pictures, 1996.

Crétien de Troyes. Lancelot, or, The Knight of the Cart: Le Chevalier de la Charrete. William W. Kibler, Ed. & Trans. New York: Garland Pub., 1981.

The Crucible. Dir. Nicholas Hytner. With Winona Ryder. Columbia Pictures, 1996.

Cunningham, Scott. The Truth About Witchcraft Today. Minnesota: Llewellyn, 1997.

Dean, Christopher. Arthur of England: English Attitudes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987.

Dixon-Kennedy, Mike. Celtic Myth and Legend. London: Blandford, 1996.

Eliade, Mircea. A History of Religious Ideas. Vol. 3. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.

Excalibur. Dir. John Boorman. With Nigel Tary and Helen Mirren. Columbia Pictures, 1981.

Felman, Shoshana. "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." Feminisms: an Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. Eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1991.

First Knight. Dir. Jerry Zucker. With Julian Ormond, Richard Gere, and Sean Connery. Columbia Pictures, 1995.

Fries, Maureen. "Female Heroes, Heroines and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition". Popular Arthurian Traditions. Sally K. Slocum, Ed. Kentucky: Bowling Greenwood Press, 1992.

Gadon, Elinor W. The Once and Future Goddess. New York: Harper Collins, 1989.

Geary, Patrick J. Ed. Readings in Medieval History. New York: Broadview Press, 1989.

- Gross, Rita. Feminism and Religion. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Hollister, Warren C. Medieval Europe: A Short History. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.
- Holman, Hugh C. and William Harmon. A Handbook to Literature. Fifth Ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986.
- The Holy Bible. King James.
- Hughes, Linda. "The Pleasure Lies in Power: The Status of the Lie in Malory and Bradley." The Arthurian Yearbook. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Jackson, Rosemary. Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion. New York: Meuthen & Co., 1981.
- Jones, Prudence and Nigel Pennick. A History of Pagan Europe. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- King, Francis. The Rites of Modern Occult Magic. London: Oxford UP, 1970.
- Kingwell, Mark. Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink. Toronto: Viking, 1996.
- Lowe, Marian. "Social Bodies: The Interaction of Culture and Women's Biology." Biological Woman. Vermont: Schenkman Books, 1980.
- MacMullen, Ramsay. Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997.
- Malory, Thomas. Works. Eugene Vinaver, Ed. New York: Oxford UP, 1978.
- Manchester, William. A World Lit Only By Fire: The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1992.
- Mason, Michael. The Making of Victorian Sexuality. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Mathews, Caitlin. The Elements of the Goddess. Massachusetts: Element, 1989.

---. Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom. Massachusetts: Element, 1987.

Merlin. Dir. Steve Barren. With Isabella Rossellini, Miranda Richardson, and Sam Neill. NBC, 1991.

Milne, Courtney. Visions of the Goddess. New York: Penguin Group, 1998.

Moorey, Teresa and Jane Brideson. Wheel of the Year: Myth and Magic Throughout the Seasons. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997.

---. Witchcraft: A Beginner's Guide. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996.

Morris, John. The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350 to 650. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973.

Morrison, Sarah Lyddon. The Modern Witch's Book of Symbols. Toronto: Citadel Press, 1997.

Mulvey, Laura. Visual and Other Pleasures. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989.

Olsen, Carl. Ed. The Book of the Goddess Past and Present. New York: Crossroad Pub., 1983.

Olstead, Myra. "Morgan Le Feay in Malory's 'Morte Darthur.'" *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society*. 19 (1967): 128-38.

Portman, Jamie. "Two men who would be king." The Vancouver Sun. 14 November, 1998: A21.

Practical Magic. Dir. Griffin Dunne. With Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman. Columbia Pictures, 1998.

Rabkin, Eric S. The Fantastic in Literature. New York: Oxford UP, 1979.

Rabkin, Eric S. and Robert Scholes. Science Fiction: History Science Vision. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.

Rich, Adrienne. Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Ed. New York: Norton & Co., 1983.

- Rogers, Katherine M. The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1966.
- Roséan, Lexa. The Supermarket Sorceress's Enchanted Evenings. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Rumble, Thomas C. Ed. *Sir Launfal*. The Breton Lays in Middle English. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1965.
- Russell, Jeffrey. A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans. London: Thames and Hudson, 1980.
- Sampson, Fay. Daughter of Tintagel. London: Headline Book Publishing, 1989.
- Sheppard, Sallye J. *Arthur and the Goddess: Cultural Crisis in The Mists of Avalon*. The Arthurian Myth of Quest and Magic. Dallas: Caxton's Mod. Arts, 1993.
- Shinn, Thelma. Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Simms, Maria May. The Witches Circle. Minnesota: Llewellyn Pub., 1997.
- Simply Irresistible. Dir. Mark Tarlov. With Sarah Michelle Gellar. Columbia Pictures, 1999.
- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Fifth Edition. M.H. Abrams, Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987.
- Sklar, Elizabeth. "Thoroughly Modern Morgan: Morgan le Fey in Twentieth Century Popular Arthuriana." Popular Arthurian Traditions. Ohio: Bowling Green State, 1995.
- Slocum, Sally K. Popular Arthurian Traditions. Ohio: Bowling Green State, 1992.
- Spivack, Charlotte. "Morgan Le Fay: Goddess or Witch?" Popular Arthurian Traditions. Ohio: Bowling Green State, 1988.

Stone, Merlin. Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood: Our Goddess and Heroine Heritage. New York: New Sibylline Books, 1980.

---. When God Was a Woman. New York: HBJ, 1976.

Telesco, Patricia. 365 Goddesses. New York: Harper Sanfansico, 1998.

---. Goddess in My Pocket. New York: Harper Sanfansico, 1998.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. Idylls of the King. England: Penguin Books, 1983.

Tobin, Lee-Ann. *Why Change the Arthur Story? Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon*. Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Summer 1993, 34:2, 147-157.

Todorov, Tzvetan. The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. New York: Cornell UP, 1975.

Turner, P.F.J. The Real King Arthur: A History of Post-Roman Britannia A.D. 410-A.D. 593. New York: Quality Books, 1993.

Umland, Rebecca A., and Samuel J. Umland. The Use of Arthurian Legend in Hollywood Film: From Connecticut Yankees to Fisher Kings. London: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Volke-Birke, Sabine. *The Cyclical Way of the Priestess: On the Significance of Narrative Structures in Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon*. Popular Arthurian Traditions. Ohio: Bowling Green Press, 1989.

Weston, Jessie L. From Ritual to Romance. New York: Doubleday, 1957.

Witches of Eastwick. Dir. George Miller. With Cher, Susan Sarandon, and Michelle Pfeiffer. Columbia Pictures, 1987.

The World of Joseph Campbell: Transformations of Myth Through Time. Dir. Roy A. Cox. With Joseph Campbell. Public Media Video, 1989.

Zerner, Amy and Monte Farber. The Oracle of the Goddess. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.