

Chapman University

Chapman University Digital Commons

English (MA) Theses

Dissertations and Theses

Summer 8-2020

'Amore Captus:' Turning Bedtricks in the Arthurian Canon

Candice Yacono

Chapman University, yacono@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/english_theses

Recommended Citation

Yacono, Candice. *'Amore Captus:' Turning Bedtricks in the Arthurian Canon*. 2020. Chapman University, MA Thesis. *Chapman University Digital Commons*, <https://doi.org/10.36837/chapman.000185>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English (MA) Theses by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

‘Amore Captus:’

Turning Bedtricks in the Arthurian Canon

A Thesis by

Candice B. Yacono

Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

August 2020

Committee in charge:

Eileen Jankowski, Ph.D., Chair

Justine Van Meter, Ph.D.

Morgan Read-Davidson



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

WILKINSON COLLEGE OF ARTS,
HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Department of English

The thesis of Candice B. Yacono is approved.

Eileen Jankowski, Ph.D.
Eileen Jankowski, Ph.D., Chair

Jk Van Meter
Justine Van Meter, Ph.D.

Morgan Read-Davidson
Morgan Read-Davidson

July 27, 2020

‘Amore Captus:’
Turning Bedtricks in the Arthurian Canon

Copyright © 2020

by Candice B. Yacono

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor Eileen Jankowski, for her boundless helpfulness, resource sharing, and cheerleading—not to mention her profound knowledge. Despite the extraordinary situation we have all found ourselves in this year, she has always been happy to meet—originally at California Pizza Kitchen and then on Zoom and even, with masks donned, in parking lots for last-minute book exchanges.

I also would like to extend my appreciation to my committee members, Justine Van Meter and Morgan Read-Davidson, for their vast expertise in both folklore and literary theory—not to mention their inspiration and truly excellent senses of humor.

Finally, my thanks to the late Mary Stewart for first introducing me to the Arthurian world.

ABSTRACT

‘Amore Captus:’

Turning Bedtricks in the Arthurian Canon

by Candice B. Yacono

Over the past 1,400 years, the many retellings of Arthurian legend have served as a lens by which readers have been able to explore issues of power, ethics, and identity. The Arthurian canon has been appropriated by different generations, cultures, and ideological groups over the centuries to subtly (or not so subtly) promote their own priorities. But regardless of the culture and social structure in which a text is composed, one trope continues to be reused across the centuries, despite the stretch of imagination it requires. In the plot device known as the bedtrick, people are duped into having sex with someone who is pretending to be someone else. This form of rape, while usually not violent, still raises questions of gender, power, and identity, particularly within the Arthurian world’s strict codes of gender performativity.

Within Arthurian literature, there are two occasions in which the bedtrick ploy is used with the specific intent of engendering a prophesied child. Each involves a third-party enchanter who uses magic and disguise to bring about the encounter. The first is the conception of the future King Arthur by Uther and Igraine with the assistance of the enchanter Merlin. The second is the conception of Galahad by Lancelot and Elaine with the assistance of the enchantress Brusen. A comparative analysis of several early and modern interpretations of these two bedtricks shows how the actions and motivations of each character either reflect or

subvert expected societal and gender roles, both within the text itself and within the larger world at the time in which the text was written. Over time, clear perpetrators and victims are lost in favor of moral ambiguity, reflecting literature's overall transition into modernity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Bedtrick.....	2
1.3 The Knightly Pageant	8
1.4 Damsels in Distress?	11
1.5 Casting a Spell	14
2 LA BELLE DAME SANS AGENCY: IGRAINE OF CORNWALL, THE HIGH KING UTHER, AND MERLIN	17
2.1 Overview.....	17
2.2 ‘Uror nimis amore Igrænae’ - the <i>Historia Regum Britanniae</i> and Wace.....	20
2.3 ‘A passyng good woman’ - <i>Le Morte d’Arthur</i>	25
2.4 ‘She is the song’ - <i>The Crystal Cave</i>	28
2.5 ‘A new rage’ - <i>The Mists of Avalon</i>	38
3 ‘NAKED AS A NEDYLL:’ ELAINE OF CORBENIC, LANCELOT, AND DAME BRUSEN	48
3.1 Overview.....	48
3.2 ‘The name she could never truly recover’ - the <i>Lancelot propre</i>	52
3.3 The ‘dolerous lady’ - <i>Le Morte d’Arthur</i>	62
3.4 ‘A shrinking virgin’ - <i>The Mists of Avalon</i>	70
3.5 ‘He had lain with a snake’ - <i>Queen of Camelot</i>	75
4 CONCLUSION	80
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	83

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

From the many faces of Morgan le Fay to Monty Python's "huge tracts of land," Arthurian legend and its many retellings can serve as a useful mirror by which we may examine our own ethics, power structures, and gender negotiations. The Arthurian canon has been appropriated by different generations, cultures, and ideological groups in different ways over the centuries to subtly (or not so subtly) promote their own priorities. Elizabeth Sklar and Donald Hoffman note in the introduction to *King Arthur in Popular Culture* that "[l]ike the Grail, holy or unholy, the Matter of Arthur may be seen as an empty receptacle, waiting to be filled with whatever substance may speak to the individual or cultural moment . . . all have invoked the legend to limn the temper of their times" (6). Medieval Arthurian stories, for example, explored issues of politics, the law, and culture, reflecting the ideal way for royalty, barony, gentry, and even peasantry to behave. Within the medieval era, the English Geoffrey of Monmouth sought to teach knightly ideals in his chronicle, while the *Quest for the Holy Grail* in the Vulgate cycle was written by French Cistercian monks to increase the interest in and perceived glory of the Crusades. Other French medieval Arthurian texts exuded the mores of the court of Marie de Champagne and her interest in the nascent concept of courtly love, while Scots writers used the stories to instruct readers about the atrocities and failures of the English. "The structure of the Arthurian kingdom . . . creates a link with the world outside romance" (xvii), Elspeth Kennedy states. But regardless of the culture and social structure in which a text was composed, one trope continues to be reused in Arthurian literature over the past thousand years, despite its unethical footing: the bedtrick.

1.2 The Bedtrick

The bedtrick, a particularly egregious method of harnessing sexual and political power, is found in several key literary works. It adds a layer of emotional betrayal onto the physical debasement and betrayal of rape. In the bedtrick, people (most often women) are duped into what Wendy Doniger defines as “sex with a partner who is pretending to be someone else” (1). This deception of course raises questions of gender, power, and identity, she notes in *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade*. The genesis of the term “bedtrick” comes from Shakespearian scholars investigating the Bard’s frequent use of this trope. But the bedtrick itself is one of the world’s earliest literary clichés, recorded by Thompson in his *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* under the categories of D658.2 - “Transformation to husband’s [lover’s] form to seduce woman” (382) and D659.7 - “Transformation: wife to mistress. Transformed wife substitutes for husband’s mistress” (441). It is seen from the Levant to the first Hindu texts, Doniger tells us—a worldwide phenomenon as old as the Old Testament and perhaps even older, from the time of prehistory and an exclusively oral tradition.

The bedtrick can be thought of as both tragic and comic, Doniger says, pointing out that “the very word ‘tragicomedy’ was first coined to describe a play about a bedtrick (Plautus’s *Amphitryon*)” (2). None other than Zeus himself performs it in this play, pretending to be Amphitryon in order to sleep with his wife. In the Hebrew Bible, figures like Tamar, Rachel, and Leah perform variations of it. Shakespeare uses the trope many times in plays like *Measure for Measure* and *All’s Well That Ends Well*. A cavalcade of characters in Western tradition next takes up the charge in stories like Chaucer’s “The Reeve’s Tale” and novels like *The Three Musketeers*, where D’Artagnan impersonates the Comte de Wardes in order to access Milady de Winter’s

bed; it becomes a frequent plot device in a wide range of operasⁱ as well. Meanwhile, the *One Thousand and One Nights* Middle Eastern folk tale compilation is rife with bedtricks, a Japanese story from the eleventh century features it, and in Hindu literature, the stories of the goddess Parvati, the blind Dirghatamas, and the sage Vyasa have similar parallels. In more modern versions we arrive at movies like *Some Like It Hot*, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and *Revenge of the Nerds*, along with television shows such as *Family Guy*, *Friends*, the *X-Files*, and *How I Met Your Mother*—this proliferation in spite of the fact that the bedtrick raises well-grounded questions of both ethics and plausibility, particularly in the age of electric lights.

There are many possible forms of the bedtrick. Most commonly, someone who seeks to engage another romantically pretends to be that person's intended bedmate, using any of a range of deceptions such as disguises, alcohol, or even magic. A third party may come into play here to assist in the deception, and often becomes as critical a figure as the two figures in the bed itself. In another common version, a person trying to get out of a romantic engagement substitutes someone else in their place, as in the case of Rachel and Leah, or Iseult and Brangane in Arthurian literature. But regardless of the reasons, methods, or reception, bedtrick theorists consider the act to be a form of rape. Doniger notes that "the same acts have different consequences when men or women engage in them" (195). Male characters generally commit bedtricks for the sake of lust, revenge, or power, and usually experience no loss of power or station by doing so. Women, in contrast, perform them in order to gain something: usually marriage—either a new one or a strengthened one—or a child. However, due to their subjugated status, women risk losing everything in the bargain. The cumulative effect of these examples across time and culture results in a distorted view of women, Doniger asserts. "You don't have to be a radical feminist to realize that men do an awful lot of really lousy things to women in these stories. In texts written by men

(which is to say most texts), the woman is almost always the other, and the other is frequently incomprehensible and irrational” (187). Socially—and, in many situations, even legally—men are not thought to be capable of being victims of rape. However, there is much more to rape than the physical act itself, as the examples we will evaluate in Arthurian legend show. Because the bedtrick instigator is not who their partner believes them to be, informed consent has not been given. A bedtrick that involves no physical violence or was not contested at the time of the act can and does still result in a sense of violation on multiple levels, as well as emotions like humiliation, anger, and fear, or long-term effects like pregnancy. An exploration of the reasons for this trope’s longevity is beyond the scope of this topic, but an analysis of several key occurrences in Western literature reveals fascinating insights into its lasting influence: What is it about the bedtrick, about being coerced in the most intimate way, that has made it so compelling to both creators and consumers of story since time immemorial?

For the purposes of this paper, I will examine two bedtricks in Arthurian literature, both of which involved an Othered third party who enabled the bedtrick to bring about a prophesied heroic figure. The first is the conception of the future King Arthur by Uther and Igraine with the assistance of the enchanter Merlin. The second is the conception of Galahad, the Good Knight who goes on to achieve the Holy Grail, by Lancelot and Elaine with the assistance of the enchantress Brusen. While there are many variant name spellings across the texts, such as Uter, Ygraine, Launcelot, Elayne, and Brisane, I will use the names Uther, Igraine, Merlin, Lancelot, Elaine, and Brusen in this discussion for consistency and clarity.

Through analysis and close reading of several early and modern interpretations of these two bedtricks, I will show how the actions and motivations of each character in each accounting either reflect or subvert expected societal and gender roles, both within the text itself and within

the larger world in which the text was written. The point-of-view characters' roles and motivations shift in these versions; in some cases they are the perpetrators while in others they are the victims. These bedtrick participants' natures change over time to reflect the societies in which they are written, often resulting in versions introducing many layers of moral ambiguity. Male perpetrators are no longer lauded as clear victors with no moral culpability, just as women perpetrators are no longer undeveloped villains or the pliant instruments of their fathers. Likewise, their victims become less objectified—or, in many cases, less blameless. But while the perpetrators and victims have become more nuanced, bedtrick third parties maintain their moral ambiguity as well as their Otherness throughout the thousand years of retellings recounted here.

Igraine was a victim with no back story or even dialogue in the earliest texts when she was conned by the High King Uther into sleeping with him in place of her husband and then giving birth to a prophesied baby who was immediately spirited away by Merlin. But in modern versions she is often complicit, if not culpable, in the “rape at Tintagel” and is a fully developed character. Likewise, Uther himself becomes more sympathetic and in even takes on the mantle of victimhood in some ways, while Merlin's role expands beyond that of *deus ex machina*.

Elaine of Corbenic has, since she was first written as a nameless “grail maiden,” been a liminal figure in the stories: one who assumes a mantle of masculine power when she uses her feminine beauty and the help of the enchantress Brusen to essentially rape Lancelot while pretending to be Guinevere, and then again to entice him as herself the next morning. At first, Elaine operates under her father's orders, following the prophecy that a child of their line will come into possession of the Holy Grail, the cup used by Jesus in the Last Supper and used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch drops of Christ's blood at his crucifixion; it is believed to have mystical healing powers. Later, however, she gains agency, even while she loses morality, as the

chief instigator of the bedtrick, with or without assistance. Likewise, Lancelot the “Peerless Knight” is considered blameless in early versions but later is depicted as knowing, at least in part, that he was not actually with Guinevere. However, over time Brusen steps back into the shadows, either being subsumed by Morgan le Fay or disappearing altogether as Elaine becomes a sole agent.

Several other examples of bedtricks and similar scenarios in Arthurian literature do not follow this pattern but bear brief mention. For example, Queen Isolde’s lady-in-waiting Brangane sleeps with King Mark while pretending to be Isolde so the queen can be true to her lover Tristan, but Brangane does not bear a prophesied child to him. Within the Vulgate cycle, the False Guinevere, a half-sister of the queen who purports to be the true Queen Guinevere, entices Arthur away from the actual Guinevere for an extended period. However, while she pretends to be someone else, she also does not do so in order to bear a prophesied child. Likewise, depending on the version, Arthur unknowingly seduces his half-sister Morgause (or Morgause seduces Arthur) and she bears him a prophesied child and future bane, but neither does so while pretending to be someone else. The story also does not qualify for this survey because it was not performed with the explicit goal of producing a prophesied child.

While much has been written about the bedtrick as used by Shakespeare, the bedtrick in Arthurian literature remains relatively unexplored. Despite citing hundreds of examples of bedtricks both large and small across world literature, myth, and legend, when it comes to Arthurian legend, Doniger rarely mentions the Arthurian tales. She briefly notes the sex scene between Uther and Igraine in the film *Excalibur* and catalogs Elaine and the False Guinevere as part of a list, although she includes the full story of Isolde, Brangane, and Tristan. However, the

illustrations she provides of the surprisingly numerous varieties of bedtricks can be fruitful lenses for future analysis of the bedtrick examples found in Arthurian literature.

For the Igraine/Uther bedtrick, I will explore the story's evolution from its first appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* through later versions by Wace and Malory, then in two modern interpretations written by women: Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. For the Elaine/Lancelot bedtrick, I will begin with its earliest iteration in the Vulgate cycle, followed by Malory and then the later treatments by women in Bradley and Nancy McKenzie in her *Queen of Camelot*. Jack Zipes suggests that myths, fairy tales, and folk tales can illustrate for readers what could be possible were we to try "taking history into our own hands and creating more just societies" (3). The gap between the world of a folk narrative and the world in which we inhabit can be an unthreatening place from which to examine new ways to live. In this case, I will analyze the characters who take part in these two bedtricks—the perpetrators, victims, and accomplice enchanters—as well as the act itself within the aforementioned range of both early and modern interpretations. Each of these bedtrick perpetrators plays with notions of signified—the person being impersonated—and signifier, that person's visual appearance. While the two selected bedtrick stories appear to be warped mirror images of each other, an analysis of both, including motivations, actions, and the role of point-of-view characters, provides a helpful view as to how gender norms and performativity have changed (or stayed the same) over the centuries and across cultures, and by extension how they have both turned a mirror to and influenced the societies for which they were written.

1.3 The Knightly Pageant

Before examining these stories, it may be useful to provide an overview of both the fictional society in which they take place, along with that society's expected gender norms, and those of the real world in which these texts were written. The Arthurian story has its roots in Welsh and Irish legends but first became popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, published in the late 12th century. In this Arthurian social structure, the High King Arthur rules over a bevy of sub-kings and lesser nobles in a quasi-feudal hierarchy. However, the focus of Arthurian literature is on the knight or "companion" of the Round Table, particularly once Arthur finishes battling and then treating with the enemy Saxons, Angles, Jutes, and Picts from nearby areas and establishes a kingdom that he runs for a generation in a state of peace. Arthur generally takes a back seat at this point and knights such as Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, and Sir Bors move center stage, going on countless adventures because this period of peace allows stalwart knights to take up arms against more local troubles such as giants, enchantresses, bandits, and rogue knights in the forest of adventure, all while assisting damsels in distress. The knights of the Round Table are the biggest British celebrities of their time; maidens throw themselves at them and *vavasours* vie to have them visit or protect their strongholds. Over time, the next generation of knights begins to resent the lack of action caused by this peace and rallies around Mordred, Arthur's bastard son by his half-sister, who tries to claim the kingdom for himself. Lancelot and Guinevere's illicit love affair also plays a role in the decline of the Arthurian age. Acts such as this cast a light on the legend's central tragedy: how the supposed deception of women both erodes trust in the Arthurian community and results in the death of Arthur himself.

The knights of the Round Table must perform repeated quests and acts of chivalry in order to maintain this collective patriarchal seat of power. Molly Martin notes that “Each individual production of masculinity, each act that constitutes or defines masculinity, contributes to the knightly society’s communal male gender identity and its romance ethos” (23). They rely on a range of exaggerated signifiers, from their naming conventions to their armor (the masculine form of clothing, which covers and protects, as compared to feminine apparel) to their frequent forays into the forest of adventure to perform and proclaim their gender. Dorsey Armstrong calls feminist theorist Luce Irigaray to mind when she suggests that this masculine identity performance is a “masquerade” that, “as it seeks to establish a clear gender hierarchy in relationship to that which is defined as feminine within a scheme of compulsive heterosexuality, also simultaneously and paradoxically licenses and permits an enactment of the masculine/feminine binary within the bounds of the male homosocial knightly community” (73). Mel Brooks skewers this outsized medieval masculine performativity, which seeks to deflect from any hint of femininity while evoking it at the same time, in a song-and-dance routine from his film *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*:

We’re men—we’re manly men!
We’re men in tights—yes!
We roam around the forest looking for fights.
We’re men—we’re men in tights.
We rob from the rich and give to the poor, that’s right!
We may look like pansies, but
Don’t get us wrong or else we’ll put out your lights.

Judith Butler argues that “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity that it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (25). In other words, I act, therefore I am

masculine. The knightly pageant is therefore indeed just that. Specific language designates and cements individual and group identity through, for example, the use of the word “Sir” before a knight’s name. The appellation implies that a man and his performance have been found worthy in the highest social order of the Arthurian world. A “Lady,” by comparison, usually becomes so designated by luck of birth or an auspicious marriage, which is arranged by the men in her life. Knights in the Arthurian community also make extensive use of costume pieces such as badges, sigils, marked or colored shields and armor, and other physical signs to identify their rank—both as individual exalted warriors, each with their own pedigree, and as privileged individuals. Their performativity also implicitly reinforces their gender. Through its repetition or “citing” and its growing familiarity in the eyes of the receiver, Butler suggests, the original or subconscious reasons for the sign’s use are concealed. Uniforms, such as they are, allow for the continual repetition of gender norm performance; this tradition continues today in traditionally masculine structures such as the military, public safety organizations, and sports teams. Though women are now members of these cadres in most countries, their actions while on the job and wearing the job’s uniform suggest what are traditionally believed to be masculine roles. Even women beginning to enter the professional workforce in the 1980s began by co-opting men’s business uniforms, donning power suits and bowties, believing this masquerade to be a first step toward parity.

Meanwhile, forests in Arthurian literature, like strongholds held by those other than the Pendragon clan, tend to be liminal zones away from court where the Other is permitted, enabling gender and code of conduct breaches as well as magical events. The forest of adventure is the site of masculine performativity by the knights of the Round Table. They affirm their masculinity variously by interacting with rogue knights or by assisting damsels. Armstrong claims that “[in]

effect, Malory's knights participate in a never-ending performance, continuously asserting the hegemony of heteronormativity and the rigid, binary, and asymmetrical conception of sex-derivative gender necessary for the maintenance of this social model" (67). The knights of the Arthurian world follow the honor code of chivalry: that is, they must perform acts of bravery and martial prowess while also extending grave *courtoisie* to and performing gallant acts for ladies. Malory reflects this code when Arthur's knights take the Pentecostal Oath to always bestow succor to "ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes, strenghe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, uppon payne of dethe" (76). These ladies, damsels, etc. in turn are expected, though their code is not written anywhere, to facilitate, enable, and mediate knights' acts of chivalry, Armstrong claims. But she also posits that it is impossible to create "the fiction of knightly identity" (44) without relying on the repressed and subsumed feminine as counterpoint. Within the Round Table schema in which the men who created it sit at its center, masculine behavior affirms the knights' identity "while the feminine hovers at the margins" (67). However, without the feminine, the masculine could not exist. Indeed, even the Round Table itself, which sits at the physical center of this cadre of men, was a bride gift to Arthur upon his arranged marriage to Guinevere. Armstrong calls the purported stability of gender identities in this world "a fiction, a story that the masculine reassuringly tells itself" (82).

1.4 Damsels in Distress?

One of the more common tropes within the body of Arthurian legend is that of the silent and decorative noble lady waiting to be married off, rescued, or seduced. Despite her privileged role and title, she is similar in many respects to the armies of nameless, interchangeable damoiselles who are sprinkled throughout the forest of adventure for whom knights perform

tasks, avenge, tempt, are tempted by, or have their way with in texts such as the Vulgate cycle.ⁱⁱ Maidens aside, Arthurian literature for most of its history has had little use for mothers or—horror of horrors—crones, unless they served some useful purpose as a plot device; the mother of a child who is spirited away in a boat, or a witch, perhaps, who could concoct a useful love potion for a damsel. Neither female character would be likely to appear again in the text. Such tropes continue today in film adaptations of classic fairy tales like *Tangled* (the physical and psychological contrast between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel comes to mind), or in roles like the long-suffering wife or the manic pixie dream girl, who arrives on the scene to help the male lead get his groove back while experiencing no personal growth herself.

The role of women has changed dramatically across 900 years of Arthurian literature and enables us to evaluate the ways in which women's power was downplayed in medieval texts, thereby causing them to be downplayed in society. Literary scholarship and criticism, like their source texts themselves, also have undergone something of a revolution over the past few decades. Roberta Krueger says women characters in the original texts were cast "more often as desired objects rather than as active subjects in chivalric adventures or quests" (137). Men perform active (masculine) actions, while the feminine is passive. But within the canon of Arthurian literature, women characters who were once relegated to dreaming in towers or swooning over knights occasionally take center stage as subjects rather than objects. And likewise, Arthurian criticism has finally begun to explore the lives of these women characters, both in their role as problem-creating object in the original texts and in their newfound agency in modern texts. "As a whole, and always with the possibility of exceptions, the study of female literary characters has been regarded until recently as a minor critical genre," Thelma Fenster notes in her volume of classic and recent critical essays, *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*:

It does not seem exaggerated to say that the advent of female literary criticism has helped to establish both the intellectual and the institutional validity of such studies. Analyses of female characters written during more than two decades now have often come under the umbrella of feminist literary history and theory, and/or have heeded its call to attend to women in literature, or have simply enjoyed the freedom that feminist critical praxis has made possible (xviii).

She goes on to state that even the term “Arthurian Women,” with which she chose to title her text, serves to separate female figures from the canon. “The term mirrors the texts: despite their extraordinary malleability from culture to culture and through the centuries, female Arthurian figures seem to arrive in each new work with a full set of already-givens that carry the freight of the problem that is woman” (xx).

In her essay examining women’s roles in *Arthurian Women*, Maureen Fries describes the vagueness of these roles within the Arthurian community. She notes how they frequently have been Othered by having no permanent home or being associated with evil, with the old religions, or with magic. Fries states that the writers of the original texts (who were nearly all men) saw all women as the daughters of Eve, equally sharing her faults in an unbroken line of descent. “Certainly there were very few heroic role models for females in medieval life,” she writes. “They were said to be weak, vain, lustful, and needful of the guidance and headship of men, who were supposed to curb their pride and insubordination in order to make them pure, humble, and submissive” (59). Like their male counterparts, women in the Arthurian world also perform their gender through their outside appearance, their words, and their actions. By simultaneously privileging and marginalizing women—particularly noblewomen—in these texts, authors were able to model for their female readers how this unsustainable role should be their ideal. The

reader determined what is desirable in femininity by observing how the male gaze within the texts measures various women—as well as how women in the texts view other women. Likewise, the rules for male gender performance are just as strict, if not more so. While various types of women may be considered desirable in different ways, from the noble lady to the nubile maiden of the forest, men in the Arthurian world are judged primarily by their prowess at arms. This notion was reinforced in future centuries; Tennyson helped inspire the concept of the “angel of the home” in Victorian society, and it still exists to some degree in many cultures and social groups today.

But by extension, the feminine has the potential to thwart the masculine by not performing in expected ways, though women cannot do so in exactly the same ways as men. Armstrong notes that Othered female characters must “pierce the masculine fellowship from without to present the opportunity for adventure” (57). Armstrong’s verb choice here seems intentional: in order to participate in a man’s game, women must take up the methods and weapons of men but do so while still concealed by a feminine mystique—a masquerade, or what Irigaray calls mimesis. This concept is a helpful way to understand how women can manipulate their prescribed gender identities to gain power. Irigaray refers to it as “a wish or a need to seduce you by pretending to be what you say they are” (102). Most commonly, this means a woman must appear desirable without actually appearing to possess desire.

1.5 Casting a Spell

Enchanters hold a tricky, liminal position within the Arthurian world. Neither entirely masculine nor entirely feminine, they are subject to scorn from characters at either extreme. This can be exacerbated or ameliorated by the enchanters’ other intersectional positions. Merlin, for

example, assumes the privilege that is afforded to men as well as to those of noble birth, but still treads between two worlds because of his use of magic. As the son in most versions of a princess and a succubus and/or the Prince of Darkness, his role as Other is assigned at birth.

Magic is almost always seen as a feminine act because it is not done in the light of day, so to speak; it is a more passive, private, subversive act, as opposed to the public clash of swords on a tourney field. While healing magic is frequently linked to women and is more condoned as a domestic art in medieval texts, other forms of magic such as shapeshifting and love potions are not condoned because they represent a theft of power from the traditional patriarchal power structure—unless, that is, they are performed to support that power structure, in which case their casters are still Othered but are willingly used as tools by those in charge. Merlin, in choosing to bring together Uther and Igraine to bring about the fabled King Arthur, becomes a much more sympathetic figure throughout the thousand years of Arthurian literature than Morgan le Fay, who uses women's magic to steal the magical sword Excalibur from Arthur in a ploy that evokes metaphors of castration. Morgan is the Arthurian canon's most extreme example of this ability to cross into either world. She routinely rattles the foundations of the Arthurian patriarchy through her wide range of destabilizing, subversive gambits that are not designed to enhance the rule of men. She is more powerful in some ways than Merlin because she is able to overcome and subvert gender expectations in addition to performing her magical acts.

But within the context of the original bedtricks, the characters of Merlin and Brusen both exemplify this ability to step between worlds. Uther, paragon of male power and performativity, uses Merlin as a vehicle to his love success but does not hold him in high esteem otherwise. Brusen, who holds a dual role at the court of King Pelles as lady-in-waiting and enchanter, is only brought in to assist with his family's magical seduction of Lancelot; her reported story—

and thereby her literary life—ends afterward. But though her scope in the stories is limited, she nevertheless is able to take part in the exercise of power through her ability to step into the world of men upon request. This limited role may be why Marion Zimmer Bradley decided to supplant Brusen with the more major character of Morgan le Fay (whom she calls Morgaine) in *The Mists of Avalon*.

Both Merlin and Brusen are cast in pivotal roles in the success of their respective bedtricks. They both operate under the auspices of something larger than themselves rather than to purely selfish ends. This perhaps helps to ameliorate their actions within the reader's own mind, particularly since the end goals of each of the two bedtricks—Arthur and Galahad—are meant to be paragons of virtue and male primacy. If these prophesied children's births were too polluted by selfishness, their footing as great men would be less certain. But as we will see in both *The Mists of Avalon* and Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave*, endowing a bedtrick enchanter with point-of-view narration and interiority allows for a much richer and more nuanced inner battle as they balance personal desire with political or religious priorities.

2 La Belle Dame Sans Agency: Igraine of Cornwall, the High King Uther, and Merlin

2.1 Overview

In most pre-twentieth century versions of the Arthur origin story, in the fifth century the High King Uther Pendragon of Britain calls all of his nobles to London after routing the enemy Saxons, thanks in part to the wise counsel of his staunchest supporter and most loyal and trusted general, the grizzled Duke Gorlois of Cornwall. At a feast, Uther first catches sight of Igraine, the duke's beautiful young wife. This kingly glance marks Igraine's first appearance in the legend and firmly establishes her as an objectified body. Uther becomes besotted and begins making advances in full sight of his court, plying her with wine and falling over himself to catch her eye. Igraine modestly refuses him. Her near-silent role in this first interaction establishes her both as an ornament of beauty who imbues the desired characteristics of a courtly woman and as a perfectly modest foil for Uther's lust. Her husband displays his power and agency by dragging his objectified wife back to Cornwall in the dead of night, defying both orders and convention. Igraine, true to her conventional role, puts up no fight; once again, her words are not recorded.

Destroying his relationship with his general as well as defying logic and convention, Uther mounts an offensive against Gorlois, using their hasty departure as an excuse to pursue Igraine in an even more direct and forceful way. Gorlois installs Igraine in the "impregnable" fortress of Tintagel in Cornwall; Tintagel, incidentally, is derived from the Cornish for "the

fortress with the narrow entrance” (English Heritage 3), further calling the wordplay of the location to mind. Gorlois stations himself and his retainers at Dimilioc, a nearby fortress, where Uther lays siege. No mention is made in the source texts regarding how Igraine feels about being barricaded with an array of fighting men at a military fortress. By this point, she is merely waiting to be rescued from temporary captivity as well as an uncertain future—either by her husband or by her High King. Although she is presumably no longer a maiden, she is ascribed the tokens of one: the great, youthful beauty; the impregnable tower; the lack of communication with the outside world; the waiting to be claimed by whichever man will arrive for her.

In the midst of the siege, Uther begs Merlin’s assistance to gain access to Igraine. Merlin, citing a prophesy that the child conceived that night would be the greatest king the world had ever known, tells Uther that he will help him achieve his heart’s desire in exchange for the child. Uther readily assents. He assigns the siege to his trusted captains and Merlin magically transforms him into the likeness of Gorlois, also transforming himself and Ulfin, one of Uther’s men, into the forms of two of Gorlois’ men.

The three men “breach” Tintagel through this deception and Uther claims Igraine in a rape that he considers to be a legitimate exercise of his power, the *droit de seigneur*, all while pretending to be Gorlois. Because of his gender and station, Uther’s actions are above reproach. As man, in the time prior to the Arthurian code of chivalry, he has primacy over women; as High King, no one may question his actions. Igraine, as subjugated Other, is “allowed” to be faultless in the act, perhaps making her more sympathetic to Stewart’s audience, but also is expected to be deferential to her king. She believes Uther to be her husband and thereby her honor and her virtuousness remain intact. Gorlois dies in a skirmish that same night and Uther, upon hearing the news, explains his trick to Igraine, who in most versions either has no comment or evinces

“grete joye” about it. Indeed, exactly what she says or thinks is never deemed important enough to record in most early source texts. Gorlois’ death makes Igraine available for marriage, so Uther waits the minimum acceptable amount of time before wedding her. Igraine exists in stasis until the wedding, where she serves as a pretty ornament, and then again while she is pregnant. The prophesied child, Arthur, is born nine months later and spirited away by Merlin to grow up shielded away from men’s eyes, legitimate yet under protection. Yet again, Igraine’s response is generally not worthy of notice; the men around her take responsibility for determining all of her most major life choices. Igraine’s opinion is never solicited or given; one might legitimately posit that a woman’s inner thoughts were not of interest to these writers. As an object—alternately collector’s piece, foil, or womb—she has no agency or power.

Just how knowledgeable or willing Igraine is in her commitment of adultery is answered differently in a variety of medieval texts, and in many places not addressed at all (Fenster xxxv-xxxvi). In its worst versions, as seen above, the Uther/Igraine story is one of rape and deception through masculine power, which asserts itself through Merlin’s use of feminine magic and through physical violence and deception, yet is justified by the arrival of the miracle baby Arthur as an example for feudal readers of how might makes right. In these early texts, Igraine is a silent object of lust (and later a silent broodmare) who is deceived and then raped by a king as part of a feudal culture steeped in the primacy of divine right, which maintained that a king’s actions and their very existence were preordained and blessed by God. But these depictions in early chronicles contrast heavily with more modern interpretations, particularly those written in the flourishing of Arthurian literature written by women over the past 40 years. Because so little was written about the early and interior lives of women characters like Igraine, modern authors may feel freer to explore those untouched areas, as compared to reworking an established tradition. In

contemporary Arthurian literature, Igraine is much more of a willing participant—usually complicit in the duplicity against her husband. And in *The Mists of Avalon*, written some 1,400 years after a historical Arthur may have trod Britain, Igraine finally gains her own voice and takes on the mantle of subject, though she still goes on to live an unhappy life. In attempting to rehabilitate the original story and make it more palatable to modern audiences, the authors doubtless ran into difficulty recasting these primary characters in a more positive light.

2.2 ‘Uror nimis amore Igranae’ - the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace

The Uther/Igraine story was first told in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s enormously popular, pseudo-historical *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the middle of the 12th century, rather than in the romances of the period. This served as the first origin or birth story provided for Arthur. Unless Geoffrey pulled his retelling from an earlier version that has been lost to time, he created the story out of whole cloth. In this chronicle, which was written in Britain just prior to the arrival of the fad of courtly love from Provence, the author is primarily concerned with issues of primogeniture and nationalistic propaganda. “Though Geoffrey’s influence on the courtly romance was very great, he is one of the most uncourtly of writers where the relationship between the sexes is concerned” (71), Rosemary Morris writes. She says his writing “set up a conflict within the genre which caused some heart-searching in later authors” (72) when they sought to take on the interiority of the famed characters. “All the women in the *Historia* are either victims or villains, and the more ‘womanly’ they are, the more they incline towards the former category,” Morris writes. “To survive in Geoffrey’s fiercely politicized, man’s world, a woman must have the pride, cunning and ruthlessness of a man” (72).

It is interesting to note that ingrained patriarchal privilege and practices developed during this time still influence the world's legal system through the dissemination of English common law. In France, the similar Salic law was in effect, whereby women were specifically excluded from inheriting titles or land. Many countries and regions still adhere to systems of primogeniture today. The runaway success of the British *Downton Abbey* television show, in which an earl's eldest daughter is unable to inherit his estate due to her gender, meant that the discussion entered popular culture; as a result, British Parliament has finally taken up the issue of reform. This poses a question: Do the situations presented in the world of Arthurian literature (and *Downton*) represent the beliefs of the worlds in which they were written, or do they influence their real worlds? Most likely, the answer is a combination of both.

In the case of the 12th century, propaganda against women would certainly have been a useful way of maintaining the status quo. Morris notes that in the *Historia*, women serve as either victims or villains; the "villains," by defying gender norms, are unwomanly and ruthless, and the victims are gentle beauties, which

proves to be their doom by drawing masculine ferocity upon them. It arouses love, but to Geoffrey 'love' and 'lust' are practically synonymous. The onset of love in the man is always sudden and violent: he 'incauit', he is 'amore captus'. No mention is made of the woman's response: in this context it is irrelevant (72)

For example, when Uther encounters Igraine in the *Historia*, he tells one of his men that

Uror nimis amore Igerinae, uxoris istius ducis quem obsedimus nec corporis mei aut vitae periculum evadere existimo, nisi ea potitus fuero. Tu igitur adhibe diligentiam, sicut me diligis, ut ea fruar, aut scias me diu sustinere non posse quin mortis periculum incurram (169).

(“My passion for Igraine is such that I can neither have ease of mind, nor health of body, till I obtain her: and if you cannot assist me with your advice how to accomplish my desire, the inward torments I endure will kill me.”)

Uther’s urge is thus presented as something impossible to control, which will result in death if he is unable to have his heart’s desire. Geoffrey perhaps hoped to justify Uther’s behavior by this, and also by writing that Igraine and Gorlois have no children, suggesting that their marriage was not a love match—particularly considering Igraine has no difficulty in conceiving in her very first encounter with Uther. This and her future ability to produce children would have suggested she was happy with Uther. Because she has no children when Uther lays claim to her, Igraine also offers no dynastic threat in this way to Uther’s future progeny. The king lays waste to Cornwall in Geoffrey’s version, burning both towns and castles in his equally fiery forward surge to Igraine’s person. When he reaches the duchess, he merely transfers his battle prowess into the bedroom and applies the same mentality to this new project. This male-dominated mindset is perfectly captured in the *Historia*’s first draft of the conception of Arthur. Uther gets his woman; indeed, it is explicitly stated that he “satisfied his desire by making love with her. He had deceived her by the disguise which he had taken. He had deceived her, too, by the lying things that he said to her, things which he planned with great skill” (White 29). Geoffrey’s language here almost praises Uther’s ability for duplicity. But because the thoughts of women in Geoffrey are unshared, while this is clearly a rape, the reader is not told how Igraine reacted to Uther’s transgress once she learned the truth—or even if she was ever told. We only know that she was beautiful, that she “credula” (152) (trustingly) accepted Uther-as-Gorlois into her bed, and that she married Uther shortly after his “siege” and bore him further children after Arthur, implying their marriage had some degree of conventional success, at least on the surface.

Needless to say, this depiction runs at odds with what Igraine actually has experienced. “The reactions of people who discover that they have been the victims of a bedtrick include disbelief, fury, sadness, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, and sometimes madness,” Doniger writes of real-life victims. But these responses often do not extend to the texts that include them. “Most texts don’t even describe the reactions to the bedtrick, assuming that they are obvious: the experience of loss, imperfection, and abandonment” (78). Though such a rape would have had significant psychological repercussions for the character of Igraine, they were completely discounted in the text, thereby further removing any sense of agency or personhood from her and omitting her reaction from the record. Further, Phoebe C. Linton states that according to the medical beliefs of the Middle Ages, it was impossible for a woman to conceive a child in a rape situation. If a woman became pregnant as a result of a sexual act, she by definition must have been consenting. This extended into the way such cases were handled in legal suits: because a woman could not conceive if she was raped, if rape charges were pressed in the case of a woman who had become pregnant, the charges were thrown out.ⁱⁱⁱ By extension, in medieval law a raped woman pressed with marriage had the right to refuse the man. However, because Igraine conceived, she would therefore not have been seen as a raped woman and her consent may not have been necessary.

About 15 years after the publication of the *Historia*, Wace crafted his *Roman de Brut*, based on the *Historia*, for the Angevin court. Wace was one of the earliest writers to be influenced by the spread of the cult of courtly love, and as such, his Igraine (Igerne) is finally gifted with more than mere beauty and fertility. Wace, attempting to introduce courtly standards to his readers, describes her as follows in his verse history, which was written in his vernacular Norman: “Nen ot plus bele en tut le regne / Curteise esteit e bele e sage / E mult esteit de grant

parage” (Tolhurst 56) (“She was the fairest in the land / Courteous, beautiful, and wise / and high of rank”). This addition of courtesy, wisdom, and rank to beauty became a sort of template with which most noble women were described in works of courtly love during the Middle Ages. Much of Wace’s work is a near-verbatim translation of Geoffrey with few embellishments, such as the addition of Excalibur. But in his recounting he adds that Uther loves and desires (“cuveitee e amee”) (Tolhurst 56) Igraine before he has even met her, due to her famed reputation. By doing so, Wace, knowledgeable of his audience and influenced by the new models of writing blossoming in the Norman court, attempts to assign more nobility to Uther’s obsessive yearning, turning him from an uncouth warlord into a chivalric figure.

Gorlois, meanwhile, is made to be much less courtly than Uther, displaying rage and unseemly behavior. In this way, Uther becomes a more sympathetic protagonist. Wace also depicts Igraine as a courtly figure, acting with utmost decorum. But we also learn that this Igraine is revolted by and afraid of Uther, which is what necessitates his need to impersonate Gorlois. “Not surprisingly, after this abandonment of courtesy, Wace feels little inclination to dwell on either the seduction or the marriage” (78), Morris tells us. However, later Wace makes a major departure from his source material by describing Uther and Igraine living “pariter” (Tolhurst 23) (as equals). However, despite Igraine’s high status, her role in the narrative as well as in her world is still hampered by societal expectations. We are not privy to her response or to her inner thoughts in her marriage to the man who was responsible for her rape and her husband’s death, but Wace ushers us further along the road to the chivalric ideal that Sir Thomas Malory will take up 300 years later.

2.3 'A passyng good woman' - *Le Morte d'Arthur*

Working from the previous texts, Sir Thomas Malory published *Le Morte d'Arthur* in 1485. Malory, like the Uther he pens, is said to have been a rapist himself, and is believed to have written the *Morte* while in jail for any of a wide variety of crimes (Davidson, "Prison and Knightly Identity" 57). Fifteenth-century England experienced a time of heightened civic disorder, which resulted in a wellspring of texts glorifying chivalric behavior that served as a mirror to teach the nobility the best ways to live and to govern. For example, while it was common in other texts for Arthur to participate in various extramarital trysts and romantic interludes, within Malory, Arthur is always faithful to Guinevere, except when he is duped by the False Guinevere in an extended bedtrick.

Malory begins his tale *in media res*, with Uther and Gorlois in the midst of an unexplained feud when the text begins. This situates the entire tale in a masculine, chivalric construct from its outset. The political rivalry gives Uther a more socially justifiable position from which to attack than his simple desire for Igraine (here Igrayne) would, although the reader is given the typical description of Uther's insatiable lust. As usual, Igraine's effect on Uther does not give her any additional power or agency; she is simply the mirror for Uther's power to be displayed. However, Martin suggests a decline in masculinity for Uther during his lovesickness. "Malory's text then becomes a cycle of absence and wholeness. The acts of war and sex by which Uther reinitiates himself into the masculine economy both represent specifically male forms of power. Uther's relative invisibility in both scenarios—he is not a physical participant in the war and he comes to Igrayne disguised as her husband—result from his kingly, rather than knightly, version

of masculinity, in which the risks and rewards of battle are often not undertaken by the king himself” (20).

Such narratives do not work only to illustrate proper gender roles for readers. Indeed, this situation evokes the folklore theory by Claude Levi-Strauss that “[t]he total relationship which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place” (15). The “groups of men” here are clear: Uther must work with his council to get permission to attack Gorlois and then to receive permission to marry Igraine, exemplifying to Malory’s 15th-century audience how proper courts should operate. The council assents, which supports Uther’s unchivalric claim on Igraine, Armstrong notes (45). She goes so far as to say that “such exchanges and relationships form the foundation of the Arthurian social order” (55). Armstrong suggests that perhaps the conflict between Cornwall and Britain itself is what makes the duchess desirable to Uther. Igraine herself once again is reduced to a heteronormative trophy—an object—of conquest.^{iv} Igraine becomes an Othered object around which subjects—men like Uther and Gorlois—array their armies. Merlin sweeps in at Ulfyn’s bequest as a sort of *deus ex machina* to resolve the stalemate but names his price: the child Arthur.

The two warlords themselves are fairly interchangeable, Armstrong posits: “both men are leaders of chivalric courtly communities with similar values, desires, and gender-identity ‘templates.’ When ranged face-to-face on the battlefield, they and their armies are as mirror images, just as two armored knights on horseback reflect back to each other the picture of masculinity each is attempting to establish and maintain as his own” (46-47). Igraine becomes the locus from which their machinations are played out, and then predictably is transferred like

property from Gorlois and Cornwall to Uther and Britain. Because of their similarity, the act of sweeping Igraine and Cornwall itself into Uther's holdings is essentially effortless. "Despite the fact that Igraine plays a pivotal role in founding the new kingdom which sees the warring regions of Cornwall and England united, her voice in events which lead to the birth of Arthur is left largely unnarrated," Linton notes. Although Igraine is theoretically, as the late duke's wife, owner of Cornwall and all within it at this point, she is not consulted as to its future; she is bestowed as a commodity.

In Malory, Igraine is frequently referred to as "a passyng good woman" (3). She is totally loyal to her husband until his death and then, if and when she mourns, it is done in private. The same words are used to describe her silent mourning of Uther upon his death. When she is given by the council to Uther, the man who killed her husband, she does not complain. Upon learning that Uther had raped her while pretending to be Gorlois and is the father of her child, she "made grete joye" (7). With her compliance, Igraine, who only appears in the first 30 pages of a more-than-700-page text, is the embodiment of an ideal woman within this chivalric setting. Indeed, Armstrong maintains that "Igrayne stands out as the exemplary female in Malory's text, quickly and silently adapting to the needs and wants of the men who fight over and exchange her" (47). This despite the fact that, as Desens notes, "The bed-trick thus depicts betrayal on the most intimate level. The deceived person is betrayed not only by the arranger of the bed-trick and by the substitute in the bed but by his or her own body, which responds sexually to the wrong person" (Doniger 9).

2.4 'She is the song' - *The Crystal Cave*

The archetype of Igraine as a model silent and pliant woman continued well into the twentieth century. Even in John Boorman's 1981 groundbreaking film *Excalibur*, based on Malory and, by extension, Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, Igraine is thoroughly deceived; she only learns of Uther's doings when Merlin returns for the child. But many Arthurian novels of the past few decades, particularly those written by women, have finally given Igraine some degree of agency. In contemporary literature such as Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave*, published in 1970, and Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1982 *The Mists of Avalon*, Igraine falls in love with Uther prior to their coming together and remains devoted to him for the rest of her life. She is no longer a passive object who is passed from kingdom to kingdom; instead, though their love helps to negate Uther's culpability for rape, it introduces her culpability in taking an active part in the duplicity against her husband.

The Crystal Cave is told from the outsider point of view of Merlin, nephew of Uther. In Stewart's version, all the main characters' motivations are gray except those of Gorlois, who only seeks to protect the wife he loves. Merlin, a somewhat androgynous magic user, doctor, and engineer, is single-mindedly driven by his god to assist Uther in his conquest of Tintagel, following visions of a great king to result from the coupling of Uther and Igraine. Merlin is not a warrior. He does not participate in acts or appearances of male performativity and is frequently Othered by others in the text for this. His attitude toward women ranges from disinterested to distrustful to outrightly misogynist, which aligns with the character of Merlin as written in previous versions as well with as the pre-feminism culture of the early 1970s. This Merlin denies himself any romantic entanglements. Indeed, his single attempt at romantic love in the text results in a near-death experience foreshadowing his future entombment by a woman after she steals his

magical arts: “her body drew me into that tight and final darkness, no air, no light, no breath, no whisper of waking spirit. A grave inside a grave” (301). But Stewart allows her female characters’ strength and motivation to achieve prominence despite the traditional perspective of her protagonist. Although the story is told from Merlin’s ascetic point of view, Stewart still allows us deep glimpses into the psyches of women characters such as Igraine through description, body language, and dialogue. While Merlin may not recognize their full potential or their power, such characters fully grasp the possibilities afforded to them within the limitations of their time and culture—as well as the time and culture in which they were written. While they cannot take an active part in the political life of their country, they can affect it in other, less traditionally “masculine” ways.

Stewart’s Uther is a successful warlord and notorious womanizer who takes no wife. Then, upon meeting the wife of his fiercely loyal, much older duke, he becomes besotted. Gorlois tries to ignore Uther’s attentions to his wife but eventually cannot pretend anymore. Upon seeing Uther, Merlin realizes this lovesickness is unlike any he has seen in the king. Stewart’s Uther is not seeking a rape; he claims his and Igraine’s attraction is mutual. A man of few words and no poetry, Uther finds himself using language he would never have otherwise used: “She says nothing. She smiles, with her eyes on the ground, and says nothing. But I know. I know. It is as if all the other times I played at love were only single notes. Put together, they make the song. She is the song” (337). This radical change in Uther’s motivation across the centuries, from physical lust to true love, shows Stewart’s goal of rehabilitating the character of Uther—perhaps inspired by Stewart’s prior history as a writer of popular women’s romantic suspense novels which featured enigmatic, mysterious men—while also giving Igraine a more active role.

Uther makes the first of several mythological allusions regarding Igraine in Stewart's text when he tells Merlin that Gorlois keeps her "guarded like Danaë" (335). In Greek lore, it was prophesied to the father of Danaë, a Greek princess, that his daughter's son would kill him. The king decides to keep her locked in a bronze tomb-like edifice to keep her from ever conceiving a child. When Zeus sees her and desires her, he accesses her using a bedtrick of his own: he takes on the form of golden rain that enters the tomb and impregnates her, resulting in the child Perseus. Mother and child are cast into the sea but, with Zeus' assistance, they are taken in by another king and the child is reared in a royal house. Perseus goes on to fulfill the prophesy, killing Danaë's father by chance in a freak accident. Igraine, who is locked in a remote, famously impenetrable fortress by her fatherly husband, conceives Arthur following a similar story arc. While Uther does not turn into golden rain in his bedtrick, he still disguises himself using magical arts to access Igraine, and the future Arthur goes on to live a similar childhood to that of Perseus. When he is sent away across the sea by Uther, Arthur is raised in another court and accedes to greatness. While he does not go on to kill his father, he is present at Uther's death and ready to take on the mantle of kingship. Uther's use of a mythological reference shows how he elevates himself and Igraine to the level of the fabled lovers of history. He also implies that Gorlois, Igraine's lawful husband and Uther's own loyal general, is merely a tyrannical father figure to Igraine, thereby defending and even justifying his reasons for "rescuing" her and burying his own guilt and culpability.

Merlin is Gorlois' friend, so he experiences considerable distress and regret about the situation. He nevertheless allows the tryst between Uther and Igraine—for it is a romantic tryst now, with the only victim of the bedtrick being Gorlois—to occur. When Merlin meets the young Duchess of Cornwall, Merlin is unable to see the woman before him because he has a vision. She

instead is reduced to an object: “it was no woman that I saw. Nor did I see the room or the people in it. I saw only the flashing and beating of the light as in a globed crystal” (342). We are not given any details about Igraine’s actual beauty until subsequent pages because unlike Uther, Merlin does not place importance on such things. Merlin’s prioritization of prophecy over person exhibits his mental distance from the people he is bringing together; his only motivation and priority are the child Arthur. Merlin’s position in society as privileged, gifted Other—one who is able to travel with ease between the world of men and the world of women—allows him to be the perfect panderer. Igraine displays her complicity through a convincing act of mimesis, acting like the model woman while in Uther’s court but telling Merlin that she seeks to lie with Uther. Merlin tells Igraine that many women would not be capable of such an act. “I am not ‘many women,’” (344), she replies proudly. Prior to this moment in the text, Merlin only saw women as sluts (to use one of his words), broodmares, or saints. But here, Merlin recognizes and acknowledges Igraine’s unusual power. “She was very lovely, and no man’s toy,” Merlin observes. “If Uther wanted her, I thought, he would have to make her Queen” (344). Stewart’s Igraine then notes in an extended speech that she respects her husband and doesn’t know how else to achieve her heart’s desire without destroying her kingdom.

I am no trashy Helen for men to fight over, die over, burn down kingdoms for. I don’t wait on the walls as a prize for some brawny victor. I cannot so dishonour both Gorlois and the King in the eyes of men. And I cannot go to him secretly and dishonour myself in my own eyes. I am a lovesick woman, yes. But I am also Ygraine of Cornwall (344).

This Igraine, despite her passion, shows through logic and effective rhetoric how dissatisfied she is with her duty and her lack of control over political affairs, but also is aware of her potential to subvert men’s expectations of her position and her gender to her own ends. She recognizes that she is part of a long royal lineage and has a “good” husband, for whom she would

have followed prescribed gender roles as a faithful wife, despite acknowledging she would “starve and die there in Cornwall” by doing so. But she implies that meeting Uther has catalyzed a feeling and thereby a fate that she cannot halt now that it has begun. However, because she values honor, she does not see how to get her way. She, like Uther, will use her political power to compel the Othered Merlin to act her own ends, but does not realize that he sees further than she does; that she, like Uther, is actually a pawn in Merlin’s own game. Also like Uther, she compares her plight to that of Helen, an icon of Greek mythology, yet finds herself superior to Helen. She ironically foreshadows her own future by saying she will not “wait on the walls for some brawny victor,” yet does not realize that is to be her fate. Her cautious, rational nature will not allow her to be swept up by emotion.

This logical ability also is shown in what she does next. In contrast to previous texts, in *The Crystal Cave* Igraine and Gorlois do not immediately escape from Uther’s feast to their Cornish fastness, inciting a war. Instead, Merlin recommends to Igraine that she pretend to be pregnant and therefore ask to return home to Tintagel. A pregnant Igraine also would remove herself from the sexual marketplace according to the mores of the time. However, Igraine is not sold on the idea, still fearing the effects on her kingdom. “Yes, she would be a queen,” Merlin observes to himself. “She was on fire for Uther as much as he for her, but she could still think. She was cleverer than Uther, clear-headed, and, I thought, stronger too” (347). Merlin is able to see through his own prejudices to recognize that women are capable of a greater range of behavior than he thought possible. He promises that there will be peace in Cornwall after their coupling, but the way this will be achieved is with God. Igraine is content with this assurance but curses him to be betrayed by a woman if the tryst results in bloodshed. This added, clever foreshadowing plays out later when Merlin’s chosen successor and eventual wife takes his magic from him and

leaves him, albeit accidentally, entombed while still alive; Stewart here ascribes almost mystical powers to Igraine as the purported author of Merlin's unfortunate fate. As in other accounts, women are successfully able to subvert their own subordinate stature in order to upend the Arthurian ideal in ways their male counterparts could never imagine. At Uther's crowning, Merlin sees Igraine performing her mimetic part as the ill, pregnant wife, but now reverts to his former misogyny. "I shall never cease to wonder at women," he muses, directly pondering her mimesis. "Duchess and slut alike, they need not even study to deceive. I suppose it is the same with slaves, who live with fear, and with those animals who disguise themselves by instinct to save their lives" (350) Merlin, from his place of privilege, reduces women and slaves to the same level as animals, implying they all operate based on emotion, though earlier he had praised Igraine's cold logic.

Uther overdoes his faux rage when Gorlois and Igraine disappear, this it does not matter, Merlin observes: "so bright now was Uther's star, so dazzling the luster of the crowned Pendragon, that London would have forgiven him a public rape. They could less easily forgive Igraine for having refused him" (351). His remarks speak to both patriarchal and celebrity culture, which even today still venerate men in positions of power as they commit atrocities while expecting women to be honored by their unwanted attentions. When it comes time for the foray into Tintagel, Merlin relies on costumes rather than magic to disguise the king and himself. Disguises—masquerade—are a feminine, passive trick, much like shapeshifting magic. Igraine, fully complicit, bids Uther strong welcome upon his arrival and ushers him into her chamber. Merlin describes the scene in which royal red conquers passive, virginal white with a romantic touch of firelight. He even allows himself a moment of levity with a play on words in which he equates Igraine's conquering with that of her castle, adding himself into the equation and evoking

a sense of group assault: “The scarlet cloak swung round both of them, engulfing the white . . . Then the King said: ‘Come,’ and with the great cloak still covering them both, he led her into the firelight, and the door shut behind them. So we took Tintagel” (361). Merlin displays his moral ambiguity as well as his certainty in his higher calling when he uses the language of the feminine object when he says that “ I can no more help what I am doing than a reed can help the wind of God blowing through it” (357). Merlin also shows his lack of interest in the pawns of his game, implying in his moment of power that he is willing to sacrifice people’s lives to ensure the coming of Arthur. This lack of concern also appears to be shared by the other participants of the bedtrick, whom he has fully objectified to an active “tool” and a passive “vessel” (357). Uther is willing to sacrifice the livelihood of one of his noblest men in order to attain his desire, and Igraine will end what she has admitted is a good marriage for the sake of another conventional marriage alliance, despite being more of a subject in this text than we have seen in previous versions—just for the sake of the illogical feeling of love. Merlin makes himself even less than an object here: he is more of a catalyst who enables what he sees as a fated future to occur. By ascribing everything to a greater fate, all three participants are able to absolve themselves of guilt and the only “victim” of the bedtrick-that-is-no-longer-a-bedtrick is Gorlois.

Later, when Gorlois dies in a skirmish and Uther lives, Merlin feels deep guilt for the death but still maintains that he is “fate’s creature . . . and the future’s hostage” (366) for three reasons: he knows he will spend the rest of his life serving the child he just helped engender, he is aware of Igraine’s curse that he will be betrayed by a woman, and he has already seen glimpses of that living death in his visions. One of Gorlois’ men, learning of the treachery, calls Merlin a “pandering whoremaster” (367), Othering him and further casting him out of the ranks of chivalrous men, but Merlin still believes that at the end of the day his decision is justified.

Afterward, a disgusted Uther points out that if they had waited a day, Igraine would have been a widow and safe for the taking, and their son would have been legitimate. “But tomorrow you would have begotten a different child” (371), Merlin counters, though eggs and sperm would not be discovered until the 17th century. This begs the question as to whether Stewart intended for Merlin to have scientific knowledge beyond his culture’s ken or whether she included this simply to move the story forward. It also suggests the star charts and other astrological tools used by religious figures and wise men at this time to schedule an auspicious birth, though Merlin does not make use of these tools in this text. Uther says he will never listen to or trust Merlin again, calling his powers “human trickery” that he uses to take advantage of others without disclosing his price (371-372). Uther calls Merlin’s masculinity into question here, as he often does throughout the book by calling him a “catamite” or any of a variety of epithets. Despite Uther’s opposition to Gorlois in the matter of Igraine, they still belong to the same community of political leaders and warriors and exert effort to sustain this patriarchal structure. But his insult in this case is less direct; it implies Merlin’s femininity by his use of the arts of magic and masquerade. Yet Uther willingly participated in the masquerade when he donned the appearance of Gorlois and performed Gorlois’ role in order to sleep with Igraine. It is only in the light of day that he feels he can differentiate between the tactics of battle and the tactics Merlin uses, which both result in the same end.

In the book’s sequel, *The Hollow Hills*, Merlin believes that his magical power departed when Arthur was conceived and flooded instead into Igraine’s body, where it is working to produce the Once and Future King (23). He then refers to himself later as “barren” (79). This language further links his use of magic to femininity and increases his Otherness. But Merlin also is a realist and knows how to play the masculine game of politics. He tells a friend that “[t]he

nobles and the King's advisers must know the truth, but the common folk will find the tale of magic, and a blameless Duchess, better to believe—and, God knows, easier—than the truth.” (19). Merlin acknowledges the shaky moral territory on which they all stand, as well as how the people would respond to a woman who performs masculinity in order to achieve her ends. Merlin acknowledges his guilt and grief, but his privilege and biases are still evidenced in his wondering whether death would be kinder than being wracked with self-doubt. The ability to ponder such things is a luxury; the men who died due to his plan had no say in the matter. Stewart's Merlin is willing to kill his friends to further his god's ends, even if he is not wholly content with the outcome. His feminized actions as Other go directly against the Arthurian chivalric code, but without his actions, Arthur would never have come to be.

Each of the three characters feels justified in their actions; the ambiguity of their morality is decidedly postmodern. As compared to the clear delineations of good and evil in texts like Malory, such concepts are much harder to identify in contemporary texts such as *The Crystal Cave*. When Igraine, now in her third trimester, calls for Merlin to meet her in secret again, he vacillates between feminine empathy and masculine performativity. He observes how her chamber and the fortress are like a cage; Igraine, who is full of potential power, was briefly introduced to the outside world in London but is now held captive again by “the weight of his child.” (70). By doing so, he shows that recognizes, at least in part, the plight of women in his world. It is possible that Stewart also intended for readers to consider how this same issue persists today. While the original plot point of Arthur's being raised in secret is maintained, Stewart chooses to grant Igraine the maximum amount of involvement in her son's life until the moment he is taken away. She is not surprised by Merlin's appearance at the childbed, nor is she kept entirely in the dark as to his future.

In Stewart's version Merlin also becomes more aware over time of the systemic oppression of women in his society and becomes more sympathetic to their plight even before he falls in love and develops his first relationship with a woman. In the third book of his trilogy, *The Last Enchantment*, he notes when Igraine is about to meet the now-King Arthur for the first time that Igraine has sumptuously decorated the room she is staying in, and recognizes this behavior as a way of legitimizing herself physically to counteract the potential illegitimacy of her marriage to Uther; she believes this also helps her appear stronger to Arthur, the child she sent away and has never met. "The scarlet and gold, the scents and waxlights, were this ageing woman's shield and enchanted sword" (30). Although Uther has died, she still uses his colors in a display of the only illusions of masculine power she is privy to as his widow, now that her sexual attractiveness can no longer be used as a weapon.

Igraine, while maintaining gender conventions in her loyalty to her lord and her performance in court, is not above using traditionally masculine methods to achieve her ends. More importantly, she does not seem to possess the stereotypical mothering instinct to be involved in all aspects of her son's life, which would have cast her firmly into the realm of Other in earlier texts but here coincides with the second wave of feminism in which theorists like Betty Friedan suggest that there is more to women's fulfillment than the keeping of a home and the raising of children. Igraine thus becomes a character displaying an odd blend of tradition and modernity.

2.5 'A new rage' - *The Mists of Avalon*

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) was the first popular Arthurian novel to be told entirely from the female characters' points of view. Fenster claims such new works "redeem the feminine face of Arthurian legend, a face that was always there, paradoxically both oppositional yet complementary, and certainly integral" (xxxvii). Igraine's section is related in the text through free indirect discourse, which weaves in and out of her thoughts as her story unfolds, as well as a back story. Like her counterpart in *The Crystal Cave*, she is a great beauty living in an arranged marriage with a kind, doting, much older man. Igraine is the daughter of Merlin and sister of the Lady of the Lake at Avalon. She is a study in contradictions; usually she is "resigned into submission" (10) by her marriage, but at other times she is furious about being abandoned to her fate. Her husband openly sleeps with other women yet does not permit her even to receive a male messenger alone, showing the double standard imposed on women in the world of this text.

Because the reader is granted access to her interiority, they learn the depths of her emotional scarring. Merlin tells Bradley's Igraine several years into her marriage that she is prophesied to engender Arthur with Uther Pendragon, thus bringing together the Christian and pagan worlds to produce the perfect king. Igraine was left traumatized by her early sexual relations with Gorlois, leaving her to think that "[r]ape would have been easier because I could have run away to die afterward" (16), so she cannot imagine being with another man sexually. She is caught between a life she does not want and a change she does not want, reflecting how the movements of women in her society are proscribed by those in power—even, it seems, in the matriarchal culture of the Great Goddess, where women take on men's roles as religious leaders.

The reader then begins to observe Igraine's slow transition from faithful, passive wife to active object in her own fate. When she meets Uther, she unexpectedly experiences romantic and sexual yearning for the first time. While she delights in her newfound feelings, they leave her torn because she is aware that Merlin and her sister have colluded to partner them through love charms, dreams, and other means. She wonders whether her feelings are genuine or whether she is a pawn in their game. She later happens upon Uther crying in a graveyard after the death of his uncle, the High King Ambrosius. She is struck by his naked grief, which is not seemly for him to show in public. Angry and defensive at being caught in a moment of weakness, with his masculine performativity called into question, Uther half-jokingly asks if she will tell Gorlois that she saw him "hidden away to weep like a woman" (44); he knows such a feminine display would damage his reputation in the eyes of his leaders. The pair discuss religion and politics, showing the reader that their relationship is founded on a base of equality with mutual interests. This exchange contrasts with Gorlois' reluctance to talk to her as an equal about real issues, so the contrast in the men is obvious both to her and to the reader.

Gorlois appears and breaks up their tête-à-tête. Uther switches instantly into his usual hearty, "hail friend; well met" performance as Gorlois' friend and lord, but Igraine is not so experienced at dissembling. Her guilt and culpability in the nascent relationship are symbolized when she falls off the tree branch she is perched on, exposing her drawers and ripping her skirt. Gorlois later chastens her for being alone with Uther. She fights back until he strikes her and commands her to avoid Uther, threatening to beat her "in earnest" (48) for threatening his status as man and Christian. Igraine threatens her husband in return, beginning to realize her power as daughter of Merlin and sister of the Lady of the Lake. When Gorlois condescendingly gives Igraine money and sends her to the market to shop, Igraine flip-flops back to her usual submissive

wife routine. She enjoys exploring the London markets, as her gender role has taught her to do, though she is careful to shop frugally per her husband's expectations. The uncertainty and emotional upheavals with which Bradley imbues her character are symbolic of the difficulty many women experienced in asserting their power at the time of the book's publication, in a culture where the default behavior was (and still often is) to submit to one's husband. Igraine eventually experiences a vision of her past life with Uther. "She was bound to Uther by a bond which made her tie to Gorlois merely superficial and momentary. She would do as they willed; it was part of their destiny . . . What had Gorlois to do with her fate, except to make her ready?" (59). When the day of Uther's crowning arrives, she "put on her new gown and brushed her hair until it shone like fine copper" (61) in hopes of catching his eye. No demure miss, this. The reader, granted the ability to see inside her mind, encounters a woman undertaking the act of mimesis. As she beautifies herself, performing her femininity, she hopes to catch the eye of a man who is not her husband, thereby taking on the masculine role of conqueror and seducer. She despairs over whether this will happen, showing how women—even those born to the "royalty" of the Avalon matriarchy structure—are pitted against each other to "catch" the best man.

When Uther and Igraine meet after his crowning, he confirms he feels as if they had known each other as lovers for years. He then boasts like a teenage boy of his great experience with bedding women, performing his masculinity reflexively in front of a woman whom he already knows is his, seemingly unable to help himself. He asks plaintively, "What can we do?" (63). Igraine weeps at the unfairness of the situation; all her prior certainty dissolves and she is left in confusion. Gorlois materializes, grabs Igraine's arm, and remonstrates the new High King for making his wife cry. She responds with anger. Uther tells Gorlois, "Loose her arm, or I will make you. Husband or no, no one shall handle any woman roughly in my house" (64), turning a

key character and moment of the Arthurian story that had been an example of male lust and power for hundreds of years into an almost feminist statement. In private, Gorlois calls her a “faithless whore” (65) though she proclaims her faithfulness. She begins to throw all of the presents he has given her—including her new gown, which she removes—back at him. By saying she will only wear or use the things she can make or supply for herself, she embraces masculine power as self-provider. She rages, calling him the “whoreson foul-mouthed cullion who tries to buy my goodwill for his own lusts because the priests have made him half a eunuch! (65).” Here Igraine finally gives voice to the suppressed anguish she feels at knowing her husband has impregnated other women, including her own servant, while not allowing her even the hint of a relationship with another man. Her use of epithets like “whoreson” and “half a eunuch” undercuts his masculine prowess and calls the power he derives from his gender into question. Bastardy is one of the most Othering traits it can be possible for a man in her culture to possess. By removing her gown and throwing it at him, Igraine also uses her feminine power to beguile him.

But this time, Gorlois does not meekly apologize. He hits her so hard that she is knocked to the ground, then threatens to rape her to teach her a lesson. The primary reason for his anger turns out to be her near-nakedness; he chides her for “tearing off your clothes so that I will go mad with looking at you like that! Is that how you seduced my king into your arms?” (65) By this statement, he shows he has disregarded or ignored everything she said, as well as discounted logic; he is operating with “feminine” jealousy. He begs her to forgive him but she coldly refuses. By this point in the argument, they have experienced a total gender role reversal; she holds the power to forgive, while Gorlois grovels. No preceding Igraine is given this amount of agency and power. But because her daughter is still at Tintagel, she has to cooperate with him. This

situation calls to mind the modern plight of victims of domestic violence who cannot get out of relationships because of their children.

While in the original versions Igraine meekly went away with her husband to her Cornish fastness, here she is dragged. Gorlois concludes Igraine had put an enchantment on Uther, which Igraine recognizes is Gorlois' pride speaking. "Even if he believed she had betrayed him, he would not want his soldiers to think that his young wife preferred another man to himself" (70). Gorlois' entire gender identity would be called into question and his masculine performances would be for naught. His chivalric power would be invalidated. Instead, he tells Igraine that he will take her to Tintagel and get her with child to distract her while Uther goes to fight the Saxons and forgets her. Gorlois reveals that Uther had asked Gorlois to divorce his wife, further distancing his character from those of past versions; this Uther is willing to parley and to avoid needless death, though he still seeks his objectified prize. Igraine becomes filled with drastically modern ideas, feeling "a new rage, that even Uther should think of her as a woman to be given away without her own consent . . . Was she a horse to be sold at the spring fair, then?" (70). It is difficult to imagine any of the previously examined Igraines experiencing anything akin to rage. She realizes that she hates Gorlois and also feels hate for Merlin: "He had used her as men had always used their daughters since the Romans came, pawns who should marry this man or that as their fathers desired, chattels like a horse or a milk goat!" (71). Gorlois repeatedly tries to rape her on the way back to Cornwall but is unable to rouse himself. He wonders if he has been cursed. She laughs at this, enjoying her revenge and mocking him. By now she has seen through the illusion of courtly love and is thoroughly disabused of the traditional gender roles society has assigned.

Igraine receives no news of Uther for months, then sees a vision of him that tells her he will arrive at Tintagel at Midwinter. Igraine has a sexual response when she considers that he is willing to fight Gorlois on her behalf, in a display of both masculine lust and feminine subordination. Meanwhile, Gorlois tells Igraine he wants to put their daughter in a convent “so that the great evil she has inherited from your old blood will never taint her . . . A holy man told me once that women bear the blood of their mothers, and so it has been since the days of Eve, that what is within women, who are filled with sin, cannot be overcome by a woman-child; but that a son will bear his father’s blood even as Christ was made in the image of God his father” (86). Igraine is horrified and furious at what she now recognizes is Gorlois’ ingrained misogyny but decides to use mimesis to act as the pliant wife again, knowing that arguing with him will not further her cause. She has become a more nuanced political player in this gender conflict. Rather than react to everything Gorlois does with disdain or aggression, she is learning to choose her battles. Gorlois tries to bed Igraine and is again unsuccessful, so he beats her again and accuses him of having “put an enchantment on my manhood, you damned witch!” (87). She realizes that even if she does everything he wants, she will still be treated as if she had fought back. “Suddenly, and with violence, she hoped Uther would kill him” (87). She considers the greater political and societal implications of the charade of a war she finds herself at the center of, like Helen of Troy, whom Stewart’s Igraine also invoked. She recognizes the folly of Gorlois’ masculine performativity when war is called and is filled with contempt of it:

And all this for what he called honor; he would deprive all Britain of her High King, leave the land naked like a woman to be ravished by the Saxon hordes—all because he was not man enough for his wife and feared that Uther would be (87).

Despite her disgust, Igraine displays her concern for the larger political implications for Gorlois' hasty decision to stop backing Uther, made at a time when their country faced invasion from Saxons and Scots. This shows her intelligence; despite Gorlois' belief that she is incapable of understanding such matters, her priority as a noblewoman is the survival of the realm, whereas he is willing to throw it away because of a private matter. She acknowledges the existence of wartime rape—albeit by the Saxons. And she also acknowledges that Gorlois' male performativity is the core reason for his irrational behavior. Because he is unable to complete the sexual act with Igraine, he wants to keep Uther, who is known to be virile, away from her. He actively begins to commit treason. She considers murdering Gorlois herself, an act which would achieve the greatest possible degree of agency and subversive power; the act of murder is the ultimate performance of the masculine act of violence. But she also comes to realize that she has never been able to rely on herself; she has always been dependent on an older, wiser figure, from Viviane to her husband to the Tintagel priest.

An indigent peddler woman arrives from Avalon with a message for Igraine for her sister to “remember her dreams and not lose hope”. The peasant woman has a good laugh at this. “What good are dreams, except perhaps to you ladies in your great houses, not too much good to those of us who wander the roads in the fog” (89), she cackles. This woman knows what all the major, noble characters who storm across the landscape of the novel do not: that for the vast majority of people, both in novels and in real life, lofty ambitions are a luxury of privilege, regardless of gender. Historical fiction is overwhelmingly about the lives of “great” personages and those whose lives intersect with them, not the everyday folk whose toil sustains their leaders' grand homes and lifestyles. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail's* anarcho-syndicalist filth farmers come to mind:

Peasant Woman: Well, 'ow'd you become king, then?

Arthur: The Lady of the Lake—her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite—held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I am your king!

Peasant Man (laughing): Listen. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government! Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony!

Likewise, Igraine comes to realize that despite her title, she is powerless in the situation because of systemic gender oppression. “She could do nothing but wait. It was a woman’s fate to sit at home, in castle or cot—it had been so since the Romans came” (90). But she possesses one more tool as a woman of Avalon: magic. She casts a spell that allows her to fully dissociate from her body and goes to Gorlois, who is planning a surprise attack on Uther. She moves next to Uther and warns him with her thoughts, saving him and his army. Igraine has never had such a direct role in the success of Uther’s war before.

At Midwinter, Uther finally arrives in the form of Gorlois thanks to a glamour spell cast by Merlin, whose role is relatively minor in this version. As in Stewart, Uther wears Gorlois’ ring and cloak, but in this case he had sliced the ring off Gorlois’ hand in battle. Igraine, who can see through the glamour, marvels that no one else can. She conspires to quickly get Uther into her chamber before anyone else realizes the truth. Here we are given the first unobstructed, two-sided view inside the famed Tintagel bedchamber in this survey; as usual for Bradley, it is not a straightforward affair. “Inside, his arms were stretched to sweep her into his embrace . . . but she did not move toward him” (100). Igraine is shy with him at first; she feels a combination of sexual fear and guilt. As before, they converse of affairs of state rather than acting upon their overwhelming emotion, showing that their love runs deeper than lust. Uther explains to Igraine that his motivations are noble; this is, he says, because Gorlois acted traitorously. “Mistake me

not, Igraine, I came here by right, not as a thief in the night; the glamour is to save your reputation in the eyes of the world, nothing more” (100). Once again, he shows himself as relatively feminist in this man’s world; he does not seek to conquer Igraine but to share in their mutual love. Bradley enables him to do so while not breaking a law because Gorlois has committed treason and has thereby legally forfeited all he owns to the crown. Traitors are another form of Othered character, which means that Uther is able to shove Gorlois aside in the traditional mode of conquest even as he tells Igraine that he is there “by right.”

As in Stewart, Uther and Igraine are mutual accomplices who together warp the bedtrick against Gorlois. But though Uther does not commit rape in this version, his gender and position still enable him to bed Gorlois’ wife while Gorlois is still alive. However, this feminist Uther asks for and reclarifies her consent several times throughout the scene. He asks, “Igraine, Igraine, did I dream it, after all, that you loved me, wanted me? Should I have left you in peace?” (102). Finally, when Uther kisses her, Igraine feels pangs of lust for the first time in her life. But rather than give in to them, she is frightened by them. When he tries to remove her gown she flinches, shrinks away, and cries. Uther says softly, “Have you been so mishandled, my love? God strike me if you ever have anything to fear from me, now or ever” (104). She realizes that he fears losing her and this knowledge of his vulnerability finally frees her to be his willing romantic partner. She tells him, “You are my love and my lord and my king, and I will love you as long as I live, and as long thereafter as God wills” (105). Igraine is astonished by their subsequent experience. “Never, never had she guessed that it could be like this” (105). Her healing process has begun. “What had been with Gorlois duty and acceptance had become delight almost unendurable, as if she had been reunited with some hidden part of her own body and soul” (105).

Where Igraine was once a passive victim of Uther's lusts, she is now Uther's consenting, full, and willing partner.

News of the duke's death comes the next morning and Merlin tells the Tintagel priest to marry Uther and Igraine immediately. Now that she can be sure of his love, Igraine immediately begins to dismantle all the forms of subversive feminine power that she had taken advantage of in her acquisition of Uther. While mourning for her dead husband, she fights "the temptation to play upon [Uther's] love for her, to turn him, as she knew she could do, from thoughts of kingdom and state to think only of her" (107). She also throws away another of her feminine tools when she tells Merlin she will never meddle with sorcery again. In her last moments of close third-person narrative role in the text, she realizes with her last remnant of feminine magic that she is going to bear Uther's son. While we lose her interiority in subsequent sections of the book, Igraine's character goes on to find herself racked with guilt for her actions with Uther for the rest of her life. Like her Stewart counterpart, following her brief foray into masculine power, she lives a largely passive, traditionally feminine and submissive life after marrying Uther.

One of Bradley's primary achievements with her take on the story of Uther and Igraine in *The Mists of Avalon* is to start with the skeleton of the original story but to add her own connective tissue, such as spousal abuse, a more feminist take on Uther, and the use of feminine magic, which make the basic stage directions of the story more palatable without completely rewriting them. This makes the couple more rounded and thereby sympathetic to her modern readers. She raises important questions about gender relations and patriarchal power, using the Arthurian setting to also shine a light upon the real world in which she lives.

3 ‘Naked as a nedyll:’ Elaine of Corbenic, Lancelot, and Dame Brusen

3.1 Overview

Maidens and damsels throughout the earliest sagas of the Holy Grail were largely interchangeable and nameless. Happening upon chivalric knights in the forest of adventure, they call upon these paragons of valor to perform various tasks for them, from slaying giants to retrieving objects. These women use Irigaray’s concept of mimesis to great effect, maximizing their seductive “damsel in distress” situation in order to persuade knights and take advantage of their chivalric code. Tennyson plays upon this trope in his poem “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” by taking the chivalric code to its natural conclusion, showing how a knight-at-arms can be led to his own death by the machinations of an evil damsel.

Elaine of Corbenic appears at first glance to be the usual female commodity in the Arthurian world. Beautiful and highborn, the descendent of Joseph of Arimathea who was said to have brought the Holy Grail to Britain after Jesus’ death, she exists as an object of exchange between the men in her life. She is the daughter of King Pellens, the keeper of the Holy Grail, and is tasked to fulfill a prophecy stating that, in uniting Lancelot’s line to her own, she will conceive Galahad, the purest knight in the world. Manipulated by both her father and by several woman including Morgan le Fay, she nevertheless displays a surprising amount of ingenuity when assigned to perform her bedtrick.

In situations in which women use the bedtrick against men, an Othering takes place—one in which men take on the role of object rather than subject and are assigned “female” characteristics such as having been “conquered.” The dominant gender’s power is taken away, albeit temporarily. Doniger claims that men also may experience guilt at their enjoyment of having sex with the wrong woman, more so than women may experience after a man uses a bedtrick on them. The man takes on more of an active role in his own seduction, perhaps because women always have the possibility of pregnancy in the back of their minds. As Doniger puts it, “In this sense, at least, a woman can certainly rape a man; it is as if his own body raped him” (80). In *Arthurian Women*, Fenster notes that women displaying such one-sided carnal desire “disturb the universe far more than the knight who rapes or abducts” (xlix).

In most early versions, Elaine carries the sacred chalice in a procession before a variety of Grail-seeking knights. She is first met by Lancelot when he rescues her from a bathtub full of boiling water. Then she is bidden by her father to seduce Lancelot, though she is a virgin. To achieve this goal, Pelles and one of Elaine’s ladies in waiting, Dame Brusen, conspire to bring Lancelot to Elaine’s bed. Brusen tells Lancelot that Queen Guinevere has arrived and wishes to speak with him, so she leads him to a bedroom and uses magic to make him not see that the person in the bed is Elaine. Unlike in the case of Uther and Igraine, in this case the perpetrator of the bedtrick, Elaine, is the person already lying in the bed; the person coming to the bed believes its occupant to be someone else. Lancelot engenders the prophesied Galahad with Elaine and, in his shame, goes back to Camelot with his proverbial tail between his legs.

Elaine’s transgression threatens the traditional purview of man as conqueror. In the earliest texts, though Lancelot comes upon a passive Elaine-as-Guinevere and performs the sex act himself, she is able to undermine the patriarchal order that decrees women are passive objects

of exchange and commerce. Elaine mimics the masculine act of seduction here. By making Lancelot have sex with someone he believes to be someone else, she turns the tables on the usual power dynamic between men and women in the Arthurian world, though acting upon her own father's decree. Likewise, by making Lancelot break his vow of fidelity to Guinevere, she is able to affect the emotions and living situations of those in the highest places of power. Elaine takes an active role in her transaction with Lancelot. She is not recorded as having second guesses or being forced into her decision, he does not deceive or seduce her, and she must be the one to perform the acting role, both as Guinevere and as lover—not as victim but as willing participant. She performs a masculine role in the encounter, in a distorted version of Uther's trick upon Igraine. Elaine takes on the masculine role of aggressor, despite not posing any physical threat to such a famed knight, while Lancelot is left in the passive "feminine" position, though he still performs the act in the traditional masculine sense. Her actual bed performance is traditionally feminine, but the actions and reasons leading up to it and motivating it are profoundly "masculine." Her position as the daughter of the lord of the castle where Lancelot is staying means that he is expected to follow the code of hospitality and show her an even higher level of *courtoisie* than another noblewoman—although Pelles and Elaine presumably also were obligated to follow the same practice.

However, in some ways Elaine still operates within the prescribed boundaries of accepted feminine behavior, in that her actions are aligned with the desires of her father. Though fornication while an unmarried woman is a sin that would usually result in being cast out of one's home, in this case Elaine does not need to sacrifice her kin relationships because the act was sanctioned by her father. But while she is her father's property in the patriarchal structure, he can only dictate her sexual behavior to her—not access it directly or commit the act for her. She

serves as instrument; he is the instigator. Through her actions, she essentially transgresses the sexual role prescribed to her by the chivalric community.

Both Uther and Elaine operate on relatively untrodden ground, ethically speaking. Uther, Arthur's predecessor and therefore not subject to the Arthurian chivalric code, acts purely from a place of lust and masculine privilege, while Elaine simply seeks to bear the prophesied child, which to the early writers was a much more noble goal—so much more so that they claim God himself declares the bedtrick to be an appropriate act in its earliest telling. To conceive Galahad, Elaine is willing to cast off her expected gender and societal performance as the virgin daughter of a king or lord. But Elaine's and Brusen's motivations are completely different from Uther and Merlin's and reflect their gender roles. They do not even particularly need or want Lancelot to know what happened. He only learns about Galahad when his friend and cousin Bors comes to court and informs everyone there of what he has discovered in Pelles' castle.

Elaine customarily commits a second bedtrick after this, in Guinevere's own room at Camelot, and Lancelot is banished by the queen for his transgression. He spends some time wandering the woods as a madman before ending up back at Corbenic, where Elaine nurses him back to health, with the help of the Grail. Lancelot then leaves her with their son to continue pursuing adventure.

3.2 ‘The name she could never truly recover’ - the *Lancelot propre*

Elaine first comes into existence as a nameless “Grail maiden” in the *Lancelot propre* section of the Vulgate cycle, a massive, anonymous 13th-century selection of chivalric texts produced in France. Like Igraine in *The Crystal Cave* and *The Mists of Avalon*, this Elaine eschews gender expectations when she invites a man into her bed. But unlike Igraine, Elaine is the powerful masculine force in the transaction. Elaine, while espousing ideal femininity in her conventional beauty and her subservience to her father, nonetheless is one of the most powerful women in the text, becoming an important figure in several scenes rather than one of the nameless ladies who exist to help knights achieve their ends. Lancelot is both uninterested and unavailable, but Elaine is able to conquer both obstacles to achieve her ultimate goal.

Lancelot, as the greatest knight, is the pinnacle of male knightly performance, both with respect to his unsurpassed combat skills and the *courtoisie* he bestows through his devotion to various ladies and damsels—none more so than Guinevere. Lancelot’s countless battles and clashes with other knights in venues like the forest of adventure, along with his assistance to countless damsels in distress, prove his dedication not just to maintaining his gender but to maintaining the very institution of knighthood. Kenneth Hodges claims his quests “seem to test what it means for a knight to be subordinate to women.” Lancelot’s quests ask questions of the reader such as, “how much freedom does a knight lose by serving women? Is he feminized? Is he cut off from the society of fellow men?” (73–74).

The remote setting of Tintagel allows for Merlin’s magic to occur; likewise, the Grail castle of Corbenic could be seen as a liminal gateway to the Otherworld where events can occur that might never be possible elsewhere. Elaine seems similar to Igraine at first blush. She is the

pious, submissive maiden daughter of a king and is rescued by a mighty knight—in this version, from a bathtub of boiling water. Presumably, her fate will be to be married off as an object of exchange to someone deemed worthy of alliance with her noble father Pelles, the son of the maimed Fisher King. But her actions after her rescue by Lancelot send her into revolutionary territory.

In this earliest telling, Lancelot hears a maiden inside Corbenic calling, “Holy Mary, who’ll get me out of here?” (236). When Lancelot sees Elaine in the boiling bathtub, he quickly pulls her out by the arms. She falls to his feet, kissing them and thanking him. Although she is presumably still naked, “the room immediately began to fill with ladies and knights; everyone in the town gathered to see the maiden and led her to a chapel to thank Our Lord” (236). Women, this insinuates, are a form of public property. They then take him to a cemetery and show him a tombstone reading, “This tombstone will not be lifted until the leopard, from whom is to descend the great lion, puts a hand to it, and he will lift it easily, and afterwards the great lion will be begotten in the beautiful daughter of the King of the Land Beyond” (236). This message carved in the stone thus informs both Lancelot and the reader of the prophecy: Not only will Lancelot, through Elaine, create the greatest of all knights, but this prophesied descendant will rescue Pelles’ entire country and achieve the Grail, which has been made visible to many knights who visit Corbenic but can only be approached by the pure; it punishes those who are unworthy.

Lancelot, as is his wont, lifts the stone easily; a “more horrible and fiendish dragon than any he had ever heard of” (236) is underneath. He kills the dragon because he is “unafraid of any adventure that might befall him” (237); Lancelot, as the greatest knight, is never one to back away from an act of male performativity, though he can be obtuse when prophecies are laid out in front of him. At the celebration afterward when King Pelles of the Land Beyond introduces

himself, Lancelot does not put two and two together about the tombstone. The king tells him, “Thank God, you’ve come at last. Mark me well; we’re in great need of you, for our land has been so long destroyed and made waste” (237). Brusen (here Brisane), the maiden’s tutor, speaks privately to the king later, asking what they should do with this knightly gift from God. “I don’t know,” the king replies, “except that he’ll have my daughter to do with as he will” (238). At this point in history as well as in the story, a man’s daughters are his belongings to dispense with as he pleases. The crone reminds the king that Lancelot only loves Guinevere and the king gives her the latitude to do whatever she needs, “because it must be done” (238).

The Grail procession begins and the nameless Elaine enters; “she was so beautiful and attractive in every respect that Lancelot himself acknowledged he had never before seen such beauty in a woman” except Guinevere (238). Brusen tells Lancelot she had just seen the queen, who is staying at a castle two leagues away. Lancelot, shocked, says she must be lying to him. “So help me God, I’m not” (239), Brusen says. By swearing in this way, she shows the reader that not only is she a liar and a panderer but also blasphemous, further establishing her status as Other. She invites Lancelot to go there with her, then tells Pelles to send his daughter to Case Castle; she and Lancelot will follow.

When we arrive there I’ll convince him that she’s the queen. I’ve mixed a potion I’ll give him, and after he’s drunk it and it’s gone to his brain, I’ve no doubt that he’ll do everything I want, and so what we’re all seeking will come about (239).

Brusen takes full responsibility for arranging the bedtrick and fooling Lancelot. She prepares the potion herself and speaks only of herself when she says, “I’ve no doubt that he’ll do everything *I* want.” Her power here, including over the king, is fully masculine. We are given no indication at this point of how Elaine feels about their plans for her; only that she is “prepared,”

goes to the castle, and lies down in the bed, “according to the wishes of those who had brought her” (239). This Elaine appears to be fully pliant, silent, and respectful of her elders, recalling early versions of Igraine. Brusen recruits another maiden to help her with the potion, telling her “don’t bring him anything else until he’s drunk it” (240). Only women, it seems, can be active parties in this trick.

The actual act here would be almost comical if it were not so demeaning for Lancelot. Upon arriving in the dark room, he asks where the queen is and is told she’s already sleeping. Lancelot drinks two full cups of the potion and becomes “more animated and talkative than usual” (240), presumably from the effect of the potion. He asks Brusen again about the queen. Brusen realizes he is “completely transformed; he did not know where he was or how he had come there; he really thought he was in the city of Camelot and was talking to a lady who had been the queen’s principal lady-in-waiting” (240). This shows the depth of Brusen’s need to engender the child; not only does her potion mask the identity of Elaine but it also makes Lancelot completely insensible of where he is and who anybody else is. Its effect seems to be more akin to Rohypnol than a typical love potion, causing disinhibition, memory problems, and severe confusion. Lancelot says he will only go to her if she sends for him, demonstrating his chivalric honor. Brusen puts on a show of pretending to talk to the queen, then tells him to come over. Lancelot immediately takes off his clothes until all he is wearing is his undershorts and shirt, implying his romantic relationship with Guinevere is longstanding, and gets into bed with Elaine.

And she, who wanted nothing so much as to possess the man who as the light of earthly chivalry, welcomed him happily and joyfully, and he entertained and delighted her as he would have his lady the queen. And so the best and most handsome knight who ever lived and the most beautiful and highest-born maiden of that day were joined together (240).

Here we finally are given a glimpse of the first Elaine's motivations. The author notes that their desires came from different places: "she did it not so much for his beauty or from lust or bodily desire, but so as to receive the fruit that would restore that entire land to its original beauty" (240). In other words, she is an obedient daughter who is mindful of the place she holds in ending the plight of her nation. She has apparently been trained on what happens in bed with a man and is able to make the transition from trapped in a bath of boiling water to happy, joyful lover within the course of a day. But Lancelot did not desire her for her beauty; rather, the author says sanctimoniously, it was because he believed she was the queen,

and this inflamed him to know her as Adam knew his wife, but not in precisely the same manner, because Adam knew his wife faithfully and by the command of Our Lord, whereas Lancelot knew her in sin and adultery and in opposition to God and Holy Church (241).

The author makes it clear to their readers here that adultery is not acceptable. But they also tell us the Lord looked differently than usual on this particular coupling because the "fruit" it resulted in would restore the wasteland: "the flower of virginity that was corrupted and violated there blossomed forth in another flower"—namely, Galahad, "the virginal, the most excellent knight" (241). This rationalization reinforced the value of maidenhead to its young woman readers of the time, who were trained of its critical importance in their futures as young brides. It is interesting to note that although Elaine is the one who instigated the bedtrick, her maidenhead "was corrupted and violated" in this telling, implying passivity. There is no mention in this pious aside that Lancelot himself was violated, but the author notes that Lancelot took from her "the name she could never truly recover." Though she was a maid that evening, "her name had changed to woman by morning" (241). This is a rather ironic statement, given that the author never bestowed a proper name on her in their text, but the Elaine figure transitions at this point

in the text itself from being called a maiden to being called a young woman—from one object to another.

Elaine performs a masculine role in this encounter in a distorted version of Uther's bedtrick upon Igraine. She takes on the masculine role of aggressor, while Lancelot is left in the passive "feminine" victim position, though he still performs the act in the traditional masculine sense. In this, Elaine commits mimesis. Her sexual act itself is traditionally feminine, but the actions leading up to it and following it are profoundly "masculine." As Marliiss C. Desens notes,

The bed-trick explicitly requires that at least one partner not have informed consent to the sexual contact. The absence of physical violence in most bed-tricks should not become a pretext for ignoring the physical and emotional violation that occurs whether the deceived person is female or male . . . At least one partner is always physically and emotionally violated in a bed-trick; while that person has chosen sexual involvement, he or she has not chosen it with the person unwittingly embraced in the dark (Doniger 76).

Armstrong notes that, generally speaking, "Many of the quest maidens encountered by Lancelot through his tale resist the position of the feminine through a performance of that very feminine identity, by imitating that which knights think they are, and eliding the difference between 'appearing' and 'being'" (100). But none takes this performance as far as Elaine, who takes an active role in her sexual transactions with Lancelot. She performs the part, "appearing" as Guinevere and "being" as lover—not as victim but as willing participant. Lancelot does not deceive or seduce her; she instead is given that power. She also is not described as trying to back out of or of being forced into her decision. She is what Angela Carter might call one of the wise and resourceful girls of folklore: willing to use feminine deception to gain power in the form of marital stability and/or children.

As discussed earlier, the men of the Arthurian chivalric order fail to recognize the threat posed by their placing women in a submissive posture. Once they recognize the opportunities presented by their own oppression, Arthurian women are able to subvert their assigned gender roles using mimesis. But upon realizing that they have been tricked, Arthurian men might respond with the full power of their fury until they (or if they) recall their chivalric code. In the case of Lancelot, the next morning he awakens and asks the woman who she is. The potion “began to weaken as soon as he knew the maiden carnally,” implying that perhaps he realized at some point in their night of love that his partner was not actually Guinevere. Elaine identifies herself to Lancelot and he quickly dresses and dons his armor. He opens the window, beholds the maiden in the light, and, “so grieved he thought he would go out of his head,” draws his sword to “avenge himself without delay” (242). He tells Elaine she will be the death of him. “So you too must die, for I don’t want you ever to trick another man as you’ve tricked me” (242).

Lancelot’s very identity has been called into question when he realizes he has been seduced by a woman. “Since we tend to believe that the sexual act reveals the most intimate truth about both our partners and ourselves, our deepest sense of self may be challenged when this assumption is shattered by the violent deception of the bedtrick” (78), Doniger writes. While rape by a woman carries less societal weight than rape by a man—one thinks of the metaphor of swordplay as an ultimate chivalric masculine power move—rape by a woman still carries significant consequences if it is known to the greater community, and how much more so when applied to the greatest knight in the world? Rape could, if it were known, destroy Lancelot’s carefully cultivated masculine persona and, more importantly, Other himself before the other knights of his fellowship, worse than if he lost a battle against a foe. If his idiom is to protect

women from marauding men, where does that leave him if he is unable to protect himself from a woman? His Pentecostal oath cannot be perfectly maintained.

Elaine pleads for her life, asking for Lancelot to take pity on her “as God did for Mary Magdalene” (242). He stares at her, noting her beauty but also seething with rage. As she continues to plead, wearing nothing but her shift and kneeling before him, he vacillates between his versions of justice and mercy as he stares at her eyes, face, and mouth; he is amazed by her beauty. He finally tells her, in an aggrieved tone, “My lady, I leave you as a man overwhelmed and defeated, a man who doesn’t dare take vengeance on you, for I would be far too cruel and false were I to destroy such great beauty as you possess” (242). He then begs her forgiveness for drawing his sword. Amazingly, the only thing that appears to have stopped him from murder is her beauty; he does not mention her station as a princess, his role in the chivalric order, the prophecy, or any other reason for his decision. Beauty, then, is the most important shield a woman in this world can possess, trumping even noble birth.

Lancelot leaves abruptly and the king arrives at Case Castle later in the day, finding his daughter “dispirited” (242) because Lancelot had almost tried to kill her. He decides to treat her with great honor and they celebrate three months later when she realizes she is pregnant. Later, Arthur calls all his vassals to a Pentecostal feast and Elaine, “who had loved [Galahad’s] father Lancelot as much as any woman can love a man” (287), gets her father’s permission to take her child and a large contingent to Camelot, where all present, including the queen, laud her beauty. This is the first time the author hints that Elaine loves Lancelot, despite their only knowing each other for one night, which leads one to wonder what “love” consisted of in this world, as it certainly was not based on a deep relationship of mutual respect. Lancelot remarks to himself

that killing her would have been far too cruel because of her beauty, again reinforcing that beauty is only the reason he had let her live, and avoids her because of his shame at lifting his sword.

Elaine complains to Brusen that she set her heart on such a high-born man who does not even look at her. Brusen replies that she should not be dismayed; “God help me, before we leave here, I’ll put him in your power so that you’ll have whatever you desire from him” (288). This is quite a strong statement—a mimetic *carte blanche*. Guinevere tells Lancelot she will send a messenger to fetch him that evening, which Brusen overhears; she goes to Lancelot before the messenger can reach him and asks him to follow her to the queen’s spacious room, where Elaine has been given a far corner. Lancelot, the author says, believes she is the queen’s messenger, but it is unclear whether Brusen has cast a spell or whether he does not remember her from their last meeting; it also is not clear why he doesn’t realize he isn’t being led to Guinevere’s customary bed. When he gets to Elaine’s bed, they “joy and delight” in each other, “and each was extremely glad, he because of his lady whom he believed he held, and she because of the man she loved most in the world” (289). But no mention is made here of magic potions or glamour spells, either, which raises questions about Lancelot’s gullibility and culpability. Guinevere, wondering where her lover is, sends her cousin to find him in his usual lodgings but the cousin is unsuccessful. When Lancelot moans in his sleep, the queen hears him and instantly knows that he is with Elaine. Filled with sorrow and rage, she “sat up and began to cough” (289). Lancelot realizes then that the woman he is with is not Guinevere, so he tries to sneak out of the room but Guinevere, who has snuck up to catch him in the act, grabs his hand and cries, “Ah, scoundrel, you disloyal traitor who have indulged your debauchery in my room and in my presence, get out of here, and take care never to come to any place where I am” (289).

Lancelot, naked, makes his way outside Camelot's city gates and mourns, ripping his hair out and scratching his face until it bleeds. "You would have seen a man deranged" (289), the author tells us. The knight contemplates exile and death until daybreak, when he gazes at the city he loves and realizes how much he will miss it as well. "Death, Death, hasten to me, for I have had quite enough of life!" (290). Lancelot then goes into the forest and "lost his mind so completely that he did not know what he was doing" (290), attacking men and mistreating women. Elaine, meanwhile, boldly goes to the queen and tells her off for sending Lancelot away, telling her she will regret her decision. Guinevere tells Elaine, using courtly language, that it is her fault and that "if I have the chance, I will repay you, for such a wondrous repayment was never made" (290). Elaine has no response to this, knowing in her heart that Guinevere is right; she and Guinevere both weep separately for what is lost.

Lancelot spends years as a madman, presumed dead, before happening upon Corbenic again. No one recognizes him in his state but they treat him honorably. One evening, Elaine and her maidens go into the garden where he is sleeping and find him there. They put him in the Palace of Adventures where the Grail has appeared to various knights. The Grail cures Lancelot and Pelles promises to give him "my land, my wealth, and the authority over my men, so that you will be able to do as you wish with my kingdom, just as I can myself" (301). While Lancelot never marries Elaine, by engendering her son he becomes something like a common-law son to Pelles. When word reaches him that the queen wishes to see him again, he decides to go immediately but Galahad, now ten, asks to accompany him. "When his mother learned that Galahad was to go away, she was near to distraction, and would have let nothing keep her from going with him had her father the king not forbidden it, and so she stayed there" (303). This point, near the end of the volume, is the last we hear of this first iteration of Elaine of Corbenic;

despite her described pleading, her son goes on to marvelous adventures but she is given no further life of her own. After seducing the greatest knight in the world, bearing his child, and then spending years recuperating him from madness, he and her son both leave her and she is forced to stay behind without even the legitimacy of a wedding vow to sustain her.

3.3 The ‘dolerous lady’ - *Le Morte d’Arthur*

Elaine may have been an anonymous maiden in the Vulgate cycle but she becomes a full-fledged character by the time of her appearance in Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*. When we first encounter her in the text, she is a “dolerous lady” (478) whom Morgan le Fay and the queen of North Galys have forced to lie for five years in a boiling tub because of her great beauty. This back story is not given in the Vulgate version, nor is Lancelot’s masculine response to her. In the Vulgate, Lancelot merely pulls her out of the water and nothing more is said about it. But Malory gives Lancelot (here Launcelot) and the reader an extended male gaze upon her; Lancelot, upon looking into the bath, finds “the fayryst lady . . . that he ever sawe, and she was as naked as a nedyll” (478). Malory’s fanciful simile, casting allusions to shiny, sinewy young firmness, serves to cast objectifying images into the mind of the reader as well as Lancelot. But her gratitude, her great beauty, and the access her nakedness proposes do not tempt Lancelot, who only has eyes for Guinevere. After the knight rescues Elaine, prays, and is asked by the townspeople to go to the tombstone, he reads in this version that the man who slays the dragon will “engendir a lyon in this forayne countrey whyche lyon shall passe all other knyghtes” (478). But there is no mention that the knight or his son will fix the wasteland, as in the Vulgate version.

The deed completed, the “good and noble” (479) King Pelles asks Lancelot’s name and invites him to a feast where he is able to view the Holy Grail, borne by a fair maiden. Pelles immediately begins to plan how to have Lancelot lie with his daughter,

and for this entente: the kynge knew well that sir Launcelot shulde gete a pusyll [virgin] upon his doughtir, whyche shulde be called sir Galahad, the good knyght by whom all the forayne cuntrey shulde be brought oute of daunger; and by hym the Holy Grayle sholde be encheved (479).

While Elaine may be the person to commit the bedtrick itself, she and her line must maintain at least some of the trappings of noble behavior in order to be worthy of engendering the Good Knight, so once again a third party is needed to intervene. Pelles does not determine himself how this bedtrick is to be completed; as in the case of Uther, this job again is delegated to another. Malory’s Brusen is newly given youth, beauty, and much more traditionally masculine power as the instigator of the bedtrick. Dame Brusen is described by Pelles as a “fayre lady” (479) and by the narrator as “one of the grettyst enchaunters that was that tyme in the worlde” (479). Brusen is not described as being in a relationship with any man; instead, calling to mind Merlin, she is a maiden who is allowed to collude with King Pelles and to act in masculine ways. While beautiful, she nevertheless embodies both extremely masculine and feminine traits, Othering herself in the usual way of Arthurian enchanters and thereby able to upend expectations of gender and power. But unlike Merlin, Brusen does not appear to come from any royal background or privilege; she must rely on her wits rather than her pedigree.

Brusen informs Pelles that because Lancelot only loves Guinevere, she will make him believe that Elaine is the queen. The king questions whether this is possible. “‘Sir,’ seyde she, ‘uppon payne of my lyff, latte me deale’” (479). Brusen is willing to forfeit her life in order for Elaine to bear Galahad, though we learn nothing in Malory of her motivations. She is able to

make things happen completely independently of her gender—a privilege normally afforded only to men. Elaine, by contrast, maintains clear gender categorization because her transgression is sanctioned and mandated by her father; otherwise, she is a model daughter and later mother. Our only experiences with Brusen, however, show her subverting gender norms.

Compared to the Vulgate, we are not privy to Elaine's thoughts or opinions on the matter of her coupling with Lancelot—even whether she has been informed of the plot—until after the deed is done. All we learn is that Elaine is sent with twenty-five knights to the nearby Case castle. Brusen somehow sends a ring of Guinevere's to Lancelot, who immediately asks where she is. He is told to go to Case castle and upon his arrival is received “worschypfully” (479) by the people there. Lancelot's knightly status is thereby maintained and revered even in this place where he is to be brought low. Brusen brings him to what he believes to be Guinevere's bedroom. “And than dame Brusen brought sir Launcelot a kuppe of wyne, and anone as he had drunken that wyne he was so asoted and madde that he myght make no delay but wythoute ony let he wente to bedde” (479). She does not use an accomplice in this version; instead, she acts alone. Brusen also has enchanted the doors and windows to prevent daylight from entering the room. Elaine, it should be noted, is not present in the text until Lancelot goes to what he believes to be his lady love's bed. When Lancelot sees “Guinevere,” he and Elaine are both happy, “for well she knew that that same nyght sholde be bygotyn sir Galahad upon her, that sholde preve the beste knyght of the worlde” (480). Malory thereby shows us that, as in the Vulgate, Elaine is complicit in the affair but only because it will produce the prophesied child.

When Lancelot opens the window the next morning, he thereupon breaks the enchantment in this version; it does not wear off over time, as in the original. This perhaps makes his realization more pronounced. “Than he knew hymselff that he had done amyssse” (480),

presumably when he is able to see that the figure in the bed is not Guinevere. Malory steps up the emotional energy here; Lancelot's reaction shows his revulsion and horror at having been fooled, reiterating the danger of the reversed power dynamic that led to the coupling and the threat of his diminished masculinity. Lancelot calls himself shamed and picks up his sword, bellowing "Thou traytours! What arte though that I have layne bye all this nyght? Thou shalt dye ryght here of myne hondys!" (480). Elaine, in a performatively feminine act that calls to mind the prototypical damsels of the forest of adventure, "skyped oute of her bedde all naked" then kneels before Lancelot, praising him and reminding him of his kingly heritage. "Therefore I requyre you have mercy uppon me! And as thou arte renowned the moste noble knyght of the worlde, sle me nat, for I have in my wombe bygetyn of the that shall be the moste nobelyste knyght of the worlde" (480).

It is important to note that Elaine makes no move here to remind Lancelot about the prophecy until he threatens her life. When she begs forgiveness from the famed protector of ladies, she performs the role expected of her: helpless and in need of a knight's defense. However, she holds power in this move, displaying Irigaray's concept of mimesis in an almost textbook sense: performing femininity but gaining masculine power from the very act. This Elaine acts without fear, deploying all of her rhetorical tools to preserve the life of her unborn son. In contrast, the Vulgate Elaine is not nearly so skilled in rhetoric. She does not praise Lancelot or remind him of the prophecy. The Malory Elaine uses mimesis to greater effect to appear as the supplicant damsel in distress while also praising him, sharing the prophecy, and showcasing her great beauty (to the point of displaying her full nudity) to the gazes of both the reader and Lancelot. The Vulgate Elaine wears a shift when she begs Lancelot; Malory seems to have

invented the titillating visual of her skipping out of bed naked and kneeling before him for the gratification of his readers.

Lancelot demands to know her identity and, upon learning it, says he will forgive her, presumably due to her high station and her beauty, while the Vulgate Lancelot does so entirely based on her beauty. “And therewyth he toke her up in his armys and kyssed her, for she was a fayre lady and thereto lusty and yonge, and wyse as ony was that tyme lyvyng” (481). The knight is unable to resist the young lady’s beauty, lust, youth, and intelligence, and so he actively reasserts his masculinity by taking her in his arms. Perhaps, by doing so, he is able to reclaim some of his lost power. But this act also represents another power gain for Elaine, in that it solidifies that he will not harm her or her child. Lancelot is bound by the Round Table code to maintain heteronormativity by performing whatever is needed for a lady, even when he has been seduced. This act hints at how the Arthurian chivalric social order, with its mandate to protect ladies at all costs, is as unsustainable and shaky as a house of cards. A knight cannot protect women while also fighting them. By extension, what does a knight do when two ladies demand contradictory requests? His yielding to Elaine is in direct violation of his publicly proclaimed loyalty to Guinevere. But his subservience to Elaine also is reminiscent of his subservience to Guinevere, which is one of the main reasons the Round Table is eventually overturned in its sad denouement. Paired with Arthur’s unknowing seduction by his half-sister Morgause, who uses mimesis to its most devastating effect to bring about the birth of Arthur’s bane, Mordred, Lancelot’s love triangle with two strong, subversive women shows how unsustainable the chivalric dream can be.

Brusen is not present for this morning-after seduction, but Lancelot tells Elaine that Brusen will “lose her hede for her wycchecraftys” (481) because no knight had ever been as

deceived as him. Elaine tells him more of the prophecy her father told her, using pathos to great effect by reminding him that her worth as an object of exchange has been decimated by their act: “And by hys commaundement to fullfyll this prophecie I have gyvyn the the grettyst ryches and the fayryst floure that ever I had, and that is my maydynhode that I shall never have agayne” (481). This declaration shows Lancelot that while she used masculine powers to achieve her ends, she nonetheless did not emerge from the act unscathed, as a man might, and reminds Lancelot of his relative power. Appeased, he takes his leave “myldely” and returns to Corbenic.

Nine months pass and Galahad is born. A knight who has long loved Elaine arrives in Corbenic, seeking to marry her, suggesting her earlier claim about her “fayryst floure” may not have been entirely true. Elaine tells him that she loves Lancelot and no other, thereby rejecting him. By giving birth to her son, Elaine essentially removes herself from the marriage marketplace and gains an increasingly powerful role as a more independent woman; we are not told in any of the stories surveyed in this paper that her father later seeks to wed her off to another man. As Irigaray puts it in *The Sex Which Is Not One*, “mothers, reproductive instruments marked with the name of the father . . . must be private property, excluded from exchange” (185).

Bors eventually returns to Camelot and tells the court of Lancelot’s son, to Guinevere’s great dismay. Doniger says “All three of the key players in a bedtrick—the trickster, the victim, and the impersonated partner—may feel the ground of their identity shifting beneath them. The person whom the bedtrickster imitates or replaces becomes disoriented when he learns that he has an imposter” (91). As queen and undisputed keeper of Lancelot’s love, Guinevere is unaccustomed to being challenged. All of her traditional power as High Queen cannot protect her from such a betrayal. It is implied that Lancelot never followed up with Elaine after he left; he only learns of Galahad’s existence when Bors visits Corbenic by chance, learns of Lancelot’s

child, and then returns to inform the court of his findings, this despite Lancelot's having been told by Elaine that she believed she was pregnant with a prophesied child. He also apparently never told Guinevere of what happened. It is further suggested by this narrative that Elaine did not even particularly need or want Lancelot to know what had happened; she only needed his participation in the bedtrick to engender the prophesied child.

Elaine comes herself to court after Bors breaks the news for her. Her father gives her permission and unlimited funding to go to Camelot in great state, along with giving her unsolicited advice on how to showcase her beauty and her new child as well as her newfound freedom and power as noble mother rather than maiden, in hopes of attracting Lancelot into a long-term relationship. Pelles shows in this that while he has not shamed Elaine for not getting a wedding vow as part of her exchange with Lancelot, he still holds out hope for this conventional arrangement, which would cast glory upon his house and his line. As in the Vulgate, Elaine is recognized as the fairest lady by both Arthur and Guinevere when she arrives, but Lancelot's shame at threatening her life rather than at being taken advantage of by her is so great that he will not allow himself within her presence. He was forced in a difficult situation to do something below his standards as the perfect knight and recognizes that his greatness was impacted by his misstep. That said, he now recognizes her as the most beautiful woman he has ever seen, while at Corbenic he had seen her as the most beautiful woman *other* than Guinevere. His opinion of her therefore has grown during her absence, further driving a wedge between himself and Guinevere.

Elaine once again responds emotionally to Lancelot's cold shoulder, telling Brusen that his unkindness "sleyth myne harte nere!" (486). We see here that she loves Lancelot as more than just the father of her child and that she has come just to see him; she displays an odd blend

of traditional femininity, as a woman codependent for her man, and masculine assertiveness in her coming to court without her father. Brusen replies that she will make Lancelot come to Elaine again. Conveniently, as in the previous version, Elaine is housed “all undir one roof” with Guinevere. Malory stirs the pot a bit more than his source text when he has Guinevere ask Lancelot to come to her chamber, taunting him that she is sure he would go to Elaine’s bed otherwise. “A, madame!” he replies. “Never ay ye so, for that I ded was ayenste my wyll” (486). Brusen hears the conversation and reports it to Elaine; together, they make plans for a second bedtrick. This time, as in the previous version, there is no mention of another child; Elaine seeks to use the bedtrick only to be with her man. She seeks to use her feminine power purely for selfish reasons. Brusen disguises herself and then brings Lancelot to Elaine again.

Guinevere banishes Lancelot when she learns of Elaine’s latest deception and, as before, he goes mad. With the core of his masculine performance—his unparalleled closeness with the queen—at risk, the rest of his assumed identity loses its meaning. As for Elaine, Guinevere summons her and initially greets her with false cheer, but their discussion quickly degrades. The two powerful, subversive women exchange barbs at each other, each jealous of the other, although neither woman now can lay claim to Lancelot. Elaine complains that Lancelot will never love her because of Guinevere’s existence, but conveniently leaves out her culpability in her couplings with Lancelot. Instead, she strives to depict herself in front of her audience as the model courtly woman. Guinevere still banishes Elaine, though, threatened by her power as well as her attractiveness, particularly as they both relate to her relationship with her paramour. Elaine asserts that had Guinevere left him alone in the first place, he would not have gone mad, and the queen surprisingly agrees with this. In the midst of his long period of madness, Lancelot finally stumbles back into Corbenic. Malory makes Elaine a more self-actualized person here, rather

than a maiden playing games in the garden. Elaine offers her service in exchange for what she took from Lancelot, dedicating herself to take on the traditional and nurturing feminized role as healer. She therefore cedes all her power and relegates herself to a conventional gender role, but in doing so, she displays her keen ability to read a situation and adapt to best suit it. It is implied that the pair live together as de facto husband and wife for years, raising Galahad, before Lancelot returns to his true love without marrying her. This character development will be used to great effect in future texts that examine Elaine's back story and motivations in more detail.

3.4 'A shrinking virgin' - *The Mists of Avalon*

In addition to offering interiority and more fleshed-out characterizations, new women-authored versions of the classic stories can produce new motivations for some of the legends' most famous events. Since the mid-twentieth century, these stories have both reflected women's new roles in real life and modeled what is possible. In *The Mists of Avalon*, Elaine casts aside the role of dutiful daughter and sets her gaze on Lancelot for purely selfish reasons, embracing her agency while firmly doing away with the idea that a maiden is a passive object and a model of ethical good. This Elaine is perhaps the embodiment of the motto that the ends justify the means, though her impetuosity does not give her a happily ever after.

This Elaine is Guinevere's cousin and King Pellinore's daughter, but the two do not meet until Guinevere (here Gwenhwyfar)'s marriage to Arthur. Elaine resembles Guinevere somewhat and is five years her junior. Elaine harbors a long crush on the disinterested Lancelot. She tries unsuccessfully over the years to engage his interest, asking him once about when he will marry.

He gallantly responds, with foreshadowing, by saying that ““On the day when your father offers you to me, lady Elaine, I will not refuse him. But it is likely your father will have you wed a wealthier man than I, and since my lady here is already wedded’—he bowed to Gwenhwyfar but she saw the sadness in his eyes—‘I am in no haste to marry’” (395).

Morgaine, Igraine’s daughter and the novel’s Morgan le Fay protagonist who also takes the place of the Brusen character in this telling, observes that Lancelot is fond of Elaine—“fond as he might be of a friendly little dog” (536). It is clear here that he harbors no romantic interest. Elaine, after her varied attempts to attract Lancelot’s attention, finally asks Morgaine for help in seducing him, requesting a charm that will make her attractive to Lancelot. Morgaine holds a high place in Bradley’s version of the Arthurian world and walks squarely between the world of men and the world of women. She has a much more substantial role in this version than Brusen did in previous iterations. While she appears on the surface to be a traditionally feminine member of Guinevere’s court at this point in the story, she also is capable of enacting her own power plays, both romantic and political. However, in this version, Morgaine has long been in a state of unrequited love with Lancelot herself so is reluctant to help Elaine, not believing Elaine would be able to sustain his happiness. In a nod to the modern world, she hates the way Lancelot is attracted to fair, willowy, extremely feminine women like Guinevere and Elaine, believing herself to be a far stronger, more capable match for him. She also recognizes that Guinevere’s and Lancelot’s relationship will be the ruination of Camelot and seeks to prevent its further development; marriage would surely help keep him away from the queen, she thinks. She displays a Machiavellian ruthlessness at times, perhaps due in part to her being raised by Vivian after she was taken from Igraine as a child. As we saw earlier, Vivian routinely sent women into unhappy marriages to foster political alliances.

Elaine's role in this text differs from that of her predecessors as well. Her interest in Lancelot is purely as a man, rather than as the potential father of her child. She is confident and believes herself to be just as valid a contender for his love as the queen, though this confidence is perhaps misguided. Unlike her predecessors, she is not put up to the act by her father or by Morgaine, the latter of whom actively tries to talk her out of her plans. "Do you truly know what kind of a man he is?" Morgaine asks her. "Is this a fancy which could endure for all the years of a marriage? If you wanted only to lie with him—that I could arrange easily enough. But when the glamour of the spell had worn off, he might well hate you because you had tricked him. And what then?" (523). Elaine responds that she will go to a convent if she cannot have Lancelot; she does not believe in happy marriages. While she is naïve and rash, Elaine demonstrates a level of realism here. Her opinion of marriage is likely based on observations of real people rather than the stories of bards. She then challenges Morgaine's willingness and ability to help her, displaying her ability to be persuasive. Morgaine tells her that she will grant her wish but that she does not believe Elaine will be made happy by the result. She also enacts a fee for her services. Morgaine experiences a vision in which she sees Galahad as well as Elaine's firstborn daughter, whom she tells Elaine is to be raised at Avalon. This version of the story mirrors that of Arthur's birth: A powerful enchanter agrees to help a lovesick, would-be paramour achieve their heart's desire, but only in exchange for a prophesied child. But in this version, the woman Morgaine holds all the power—not the male enchanter Merlin.

When the time comes, Morgaine drugs Lancelot's wine with an aphrodisiac potion. Closely paralleling previous versions, she tells Elaine to sleep in a pavilion that night and says she will deliver Lancelot a message that Guinevere wishes to see him. "And so he will come to you, in the darkness. I can do no more than that—you must be ready for him" (535). She warns

the girl that Lancelot will not be able to stop himself and will soon know that she is not Guinevere, so she instructs Elaine to wear Guinevere's scent. Elaine finds this distasteful and unfair. "It is unfair," Morgaine tells her. "Make up your mind to that. What we are doing is dishonest, Elaine, but there's good to it too. Arthur's kingdom cannot long stand if the King is known a cuckold" (535-536). While preparing the potion, Morgaine enters a liminal state. "It seemed she was both within and without the castle, that a part of her was out on the hills, following the Pendragon banner which Lancelet sometimes carried" (536). She then has a vision of Lancelot slaying the Questing Beast, a dragon that Pellinore has hunted for years. He approaches it, "thrusting his long spear directly into the body." A "crazed banshee scream" and a "great gush of blood" (538) foreshadow the coupling that is to come. The Morgaine who sends Lancelot to Elaine then displays a full awareness of what she is asking the parties to do, as compared to a Merlin who coldly exacts his price. She realizes she is sending Lancelot to

not an experienced woman and his paramour, but a shrinking virgin. . . . For a moment Morgaine stopped to pity Elaine, because what she was cold-bloodedly arranging was certainly something like rape. Much as Elaine longed for Lancelet, she was a virgin and had no real idea of the difference between her romantic dreams of his kisses, and what really awaited her—being taken by a man too drugged to know the difference. Whatever it was for Elaine, and however bravely she endured it, it would hardly be a romantic episode (537).

Morgaine is not directly acting as a panderer here, as she is not providing a powerless victim to a man. But as a sexually experienced woman, she recognizes she is giving a woman agency to conduct a morally dubious act. She also recognizes that the woman in question is not fully aware of that which she will experience. Morgaine possesses a woman's awareness of and empathy for how she will hurt Elaine, a fellow woman, both emotionally and physically. She therefore decides to give Elaine some of the potion too, allowing the virgin girl to experience

desire and lessening her anticipated pain. This also will enhance Elaine's mimesis, allowing her to better emulate Lancelot's longtime lover's fervor. It is difficult to imagine Merlin having this stroke of empathy were he in the situation instead.

Morgaine goes to Lancelot and gives him the message along with a "token" from Guinevere—one of Elaine's kerchiefs, drenched in Guinevere's scent, because "one kerchief is like to another" (541). This also applies to women when they are used as sexual objects. When he departs, she tries unsuccessfully to stop imagining him in bed with Elaine. We are not given a first-person view of their pairing because Morgaine is the point-of-view character here. Later, Morgaine goes to Pellinore and brings him with witnesses to where the couple are in bed, "watching with cruel triumph as Pellinore's outraged face was lighted with the torch" (542). This new addition, the inclusion of the parents, furthers Lancelot's mortification at his being deceived.

Interestingly, given that she is Igraine's daughter and Merlin's granddaughter, Morgaine's actions emulate those by Merlin that resulted in her own father's death and half-brother's birth. Yet the multi-generational power shift she enacts here is perhaps more than she would have been able to attain as a man. Morgaine has achieved a quadruple power move in one stroke: Her future acolyte has been conceived, Elaine has received her heart's desire, Arthur's successful reign will be in less jeopardy, and Lancelot has been punished for not loving her.

3.5 'He had lain with a snake' - *Queen of Camelot*

As was the case in *The Mists of Avalon*, in Nancy McKenzie's 2002 *Queen of Camelot*, Elaine is Guinevere's cousin and King Pellinore's daughter. But while McKenzie's Elaine has many similarities to previous iterations, her character and motivations are drawn largely from McKenzie's own imagination. McKenzie based her Arthurian world on the one created by Mary Stewart but adds to the characters of Elaine, Lancelot, and Galahad when she tells the story from Guinevere's perspective in *Queen of Camelot*. In this novel, the young princess Guinevere is sent from a small Welsh kingdom to Gwynedd to live as a ward in her extended family's castle. Guinevere is meek, kind, and selfless. Elaine, her cousin, initially takes it upon herself to befriend the family's new dependent and take her under her wing. Upon a cursory glance, Elaine is the model of a young princess in her society: she eagerly spends time learning the feminine role to which she aspires—queen of the realm—and conducts herself in public accordingly. But Elaine is only interested in the traditionally feminine parts of the job that will gain her glory and attention. For example, when the queen of Gwynedd gives her and Guinevere the rare opportunity for academic study at the same level as that of her sons, Guinevere embraces her lessons but Elaine balks and skips classes. Despite being a beauty herself and princess of a far more important kingdom, Elaine resents being in Guinevere's shadow and sets upon doing everything she can to upstage and outshine her "backwoods princess" (402) cousin using amateur attempts at mimesis, including an awkward attempt to seduce an Irish hostage to whom she falsely believes Guinevere is romantically interested. This act foreshadows Elaine's later pattern of attempts to seduce men in her life. With her mother's eager complicity, she sets her sights in childhood on marrying no less than the new High King Arthur. But when Guinevere is selected to be his bride instead of Elaine, her pent-up jealousy and inadequacy come out in full force. Elaine unsuccessfully

bargains with Guinevere prior to her marriage, asking if she can marry Arthur instead while Guinevere marries Lancelot, then spends the following years quietly stoking her love for Arthur like a low fire in an idol's temple. Elaine bides her time until the opportunity to supplant Guinevere becomes available, demonstrating the long-game approach of masculine characters like Uther but using the tools available to her as a woman. She conspires to have Guinevere kidnapped and raped, hoping to inspire Arthur to put the queen away and leave himself available for marriage. McKenzie's Elaine commits a hyper-masculine power grab with its commensurate lack of empathy, which are far beyond the pale of accepted feminine or even masculine courtly behavior. Elaine also attempts to slip into Arthur's bed while Guinevere is kidnapped, in her second attempt at mimesis and her first attempt at a bedtrick, but is unsuccessful in seducing him. It is worth recalling here that in the original texts Elaine commits two bedtricks, both upon Lancelot, out of her deep love for him. But in this version, her first bedtrick is tried on Arthur himself before she moves on to Lancelot—not out of love for him but out of spite for Guinevere.

Elaine's plan since childhood to marry Arthur fully backfires when Arthur publicly proclaims in response to the attempted rape of Guinevere that he will never separate from his wife, showing the author's feminist take on him. But Elaine responds to this by stepping up her game. Upon the queen's rescue by Lancelot and subsequent return, Guinevere banishes Elaine but charitably allows her to remain in Camelot for a few more days until Elaine's parents arrive for an upcoming feast, reminiscent of the Vulgate and Malory circumstances in which Elaine tries her second bedtrick upon Lancelot. Elaine sees that Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot are drugged with an aphrodisiac by her nursemaid (and Brusen stand-in) at the feast. Arthur and Guinevere, upon feeling the effects, leave together; Lancelot is left alone and vulnerable. He

begins wandering the town, reminiscent of the Vulgate, and is beguiled by Elaine, who wears a copy of Guinevere's gown and mimics the queen's voice to beckon him into a pavilion.

Lancelot claims to Guinevere afterward that he was powerless to resist her, but the truth later emerges that at least part of him knew what he was doing. He tells Guinevere that he never sought a maiden but his mind played tricks on him, making him believe the aphrodisiac would make Guinevere escape the king and find him instead. "I was looking for you. I was—driven. To find you. And then I looked up and you were there" (234), he says. "She was standing in the doorway of a tent and beckoned me inside. Her gestures were yours. Inside the lamp was low. There was an inner chamber. She—said very little. But then, I did not give her much chance" (235). He finally admits to Guinevere that his logical side had known Elaine was not the queen, but his physical passion took over; "I took her thrice, and she was virgin" (236), he says, while literally prostrate with grief. He says he was jealous, knowing Guinevere was with the king, and finally let down his long-held defenses in a moment of weakness caused by the aphrodisiac. "When I saw someone who resembled you, I shut my mind to the truth and believed the lie. I am responsible" (236), he says.

Lancelot's reaction here is a textbook version of what Doniger says is a common victim response in situations involving the bedtrick; because they subconsciously (or consciously) want to be fooled, they are more willing to ignore even the most obvious logical truths. "Bedtricks work because the victims do half the work themselves, often projecting their own desires, or the image of the one they desire, over the actual trickster" (445). The duplicate may even be preferential to the real person, she says. But while she claims people who are more willing victims are likely to deny the truth or lie about it to others, the greatest knight in the world comes to Guinevere in *Queen of Camelot* the next day like a supplicant, with a freshly scrubbed face and

penitence running in every line of his body, Guinevere realizes. This feminist yet chivalric Lancelot, despite his victimhood, is fully willing to admit his culpability, acknowledge that he is responsible for others' pain, and seek to do right.

But for Elaine, while the encounter was pre-planned, it also was entirely transactional. This Elaine has never loved or even been attracted to this Lancelot, whom she complains has an ugly broken nose and smells of stables. She acted entirely to spite Guinevere by doing something the virtuous queen could not, with the one person the queen loves most in the world. But Elaine miscalculates the level of Lancelot's honor as well as that of the chivalric code. Lancelot, upon being caught *in flagrante delicto* by King Pellinore and his queen, betrothes Elaine on the spot, displaying even more honor than in the comparable scene from *The Mists of Avalon*. McKenzie's Elaine, for whom honorability is a performative act rather than an ingrained trait, does not anticipate this; nor does she anticipate that he will take her across the sea to Brittany to live in his kingdom, bear his name, and breed his sons as Queen of Lanascoll. This is a massive departure from previous versions in which Lancelot unsheathes his sword and debates killing Elaine. Naturally, Elaine is furious that her own actions resulted in that which she wanted least. "She counted on his honor to bind him to her. Now she must obey his honor's demands" (256), Guinevere acknowledges with a bitter laugh. The queen would have been able to stop the marriage had she told Lancelot that Elaine had planned the queen's kidnapping and rape, but recognizes that to do so would destroy him: "He would feel as if he had lain with a snake, and the shame of it would eat at his very soul, as the shame of Morgause ate at Arthur" (237). So she keeps this truth to herself instead.

The now-pregnant Elaine tricks Guinevere into meeting with her for one final showdown before her departure to Brittany. She taunts the queen with a prophecy of Arthur's death as well

as the coming of Galahad: “‘And a son of Lancelot,’ she hissed at me, opening her cloak and spreading her hands upon the hard mound of her belly, ‘shall, with a bloody sword and a righteous fury, renew the Light in Britain before she goes forever down into the dark’” (259). But Guinevere’s empathy for the plight of women in her world, which limits their power to that which is bestowed by their beauty, their marriage options, and their family position, makes her forgive Elaine for her actions, despite Elaine’s boasts to the barren Guinevere that she was able to conceive Galahad in one night. When Arthur comes into the room, Elaine tries to kiss him again in one last desperate act of mimesis, saying he should have chosen her, but is soundly rejected and is sent across the sea. Elaine later grows to hate Lancelot for taking her away from her family, even though she was the one responsible for his marrying her.

Throughout the text, Elaine demonstrates a staggering level of traditionally masculine power, executed either through mimesis or through pure masculine action. She displays her ability to participate in political schemes, building a relationship with the king of the Summer Country and then ultimately convincing him to kidnap and attempt to rape Guinevere, as well as recruiting a representative from the Lady’s shrine in Avalon to serve as intermediary. In the meantime, she plants false stories and misdirection in Camelot in hopes of negating the queen’s own defense of her rape attempt. Elaine rejects countless suitors in her years-long, single-sighted effort to have Arthur for her own, thus rejecting her expected role as wife and broodmare in the Arthurian ethos. Indeed, she only has this role thrust upon her due to her own deceptions, and thus is snared by the very social codes she sought to subvert. While always looking on the surface like a model princess and then lady in waiting, the Elaine of *Queen of Camelot* displays an almost sociopathic lack of empathy and self-centeredness that proves to be her undoing.

4 Conclusion

Regardless of which form it takes, the bedtrick sits at the center of the legend of King Arthur. Without it, authors would have been unable to assign a miraculous birth to the Once and Future King as well as to the only knight who is pure enough to achieve the Grail. As we see in other Arthurian examples such as Mordred, the pre-ordained births of many major Arthurian figures all depend on some form of deception at their core, although the mental and emotional effects of these deceptions on their perpetrators and victims, as well as on the children themselves, were not explored for hundreds of years. Likewise, character motivations have changed over time.

Sara Douglass perhaps tells it best in her bald assessment of the early texts: “Arthur was not conceived by husband and wife in the safety and legitimacy of the marriage bed; instead, he was conceived amid the betrayal and deception of his mother’s rape” (Ch. 5). This fact is hardly unusual in texts describing larger-than-life figures. Rosemary Morris notes that “[i]t is a commonplace of mythology that heroes should be conceived, born and brought up in striking and mysterious circumstances, as an adumbration of their future greatness. It is interesting to note that, in many cases, these circumstances are morally dubious” (71). Morris mentions various cases in Western literature, including the seduction of Lancelot by Elaine to produce the child Galahad, but focuses in her piece on the conception of Arthur. She says there are various reasons why a legendary hero can be the product of a disreputable birth, including the transmission of the sins of the fathers, which seems to be the case here. Armstrong supports this, saying “Arthur is

doomed to repeat, in all innocence, his father's sin of adultery in a far more serious form and . . . to sow the seeds of his own downfall" (44).

In a world in which women may only improve their lot through marriages negotiated by the men in their lives, it is sadly appropriate that the original Elaine is able to achieve agency only by serving as an operative of her father. But by honoring him and obeying her duty to him as well as to her family line, she is able to achieve some of the most astounding examples of feminine power in the texts, short of being an enchanter herself. While all is not well that ends well, the early authors do not demonize her; instead, they suggest that her actions bring about one of the most remarkable acts in the stories' Christian arc. In later texts, she becomes fully responsible for her own decisions, which raises new questions of morality.

In sum, beneath the pennants snapping in the wind, there is a deep inner anxiety around gender identity in this Arthurian world, as well as what Armstrong calls "the need of the masculine to objectify, marginalize, and construct the feminine as passive and vulnerable, thereby maintaining the stable masculine heterosexual identity essential to the maintenance of patriarchy" (55). This precise dynamic can be seen in the bedtrick between Uther and Igraine. Yet even as the chivalric order attempts to maintain gender order and stability, it reveals the cracks underneath. The lack of recognition of the existence of this instability is actually the system's main threat, as is shown in the bedtrick between Lancelot and Elaine in which gender expectations are turned on their head.

Old texts are re-read even as new ones are written. The repetition of these stories over time allows character motivations to be recast to suit the audiences and the sensibilities of the eras in which they were written. Each rewriting introduces, reinforces, or subverts expected gender roles and power schemas for new generations of readers, solidifying both what is desirable

and what is deviant in the minds of readers. More so, the Arthurian stories and archetypes are woven into and reinterpreted in new stories and media. Actions such as the bedtrick may become tropes, but to those experiencing them for the first time, they can prove to be formative experiences. Bedtricks raise important questions about identity, power, and truth, and the trope's universality across time and culture reveals firmly embedded, universal concerns about the nature of love.

ⁱ Doniger notes such operas include “Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*, Richard Strauss’s *Rosenkavalier* and *Arabella*, Johann Strauss’s *Fledermaus*, and Richard Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* and *Götterdämmerung*” (1).

ⁱⁱ Such figures are perhaps the medieval equivalent of the non-playing character (NPC) who sends players on side-quests that add nothing to the overall plot in video games like *Skyrim*.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is interesting to note that this notion still has its proponents today, even in the highest halls of power. Responding in 2012 to a question about whether pregnancy by rape would be an appropriate instance for a woman to obtain an abortion, United States then-Congressman Todd Akin said that “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.”

^{iv} Igraine’s thoughts on this are not disclosed in Malory but by the time modern authors write her, she can recognize her similarity to Helen of Troy; see the analysis of *The Crystal Cave*.

Bibliography

- Archibald, Elizabeth, A.S.G. Edwards and Anthony Stockwell. *A Companion to Malory*. D.S. Brewer, 1996.
- Archibald, Elizabeth, and Ad Putter. *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*. University Press of Florida, 2003.
- Ashe, Laura. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Limits of Chivalry." *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, edited by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjevic and Judith Weiss. D.S. Brewer, 2010, pp. 159-172.
- Batt, Catherine. *Malory's Morte D'Arthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Berthelot, Anne. "Merlin and the Ladies of the Lake." *Merlin: A Casebook*, edited by Peter Goodrich, Routledge, 2003, pp. 160-182.
- Bogdanow, Fanni. "Morgan's Role in the 13th Century French Prose Romances of the Arthurian Cycle." *Medium Aevum*, vol. 38, 1969, pp. 123-33.
- Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*. Random House Publishing Group, 2001.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990.
- Capps, Sandra Elaine. *Morgan le Fay as Other in English Medieval and Modern Texts*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1996.
- Carter, Angela. *Angela Carter's Book of Fairy Tales*. Virago, 2014.
- Cartlidge, Neil, ed. *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*. D.S. Brewer, 2008.
- Chrétien de Troyes. *Arthurian Romances*. Penguin Books, 1991.
- Davidson, Roberta. "Prison and Knightly Identity in Sir Thomas Malory's 'Morte Darthur.'" *Arthuriana*, vol. 14, no. 2, Scriptorium Press, 2004.
- . "Reading like a Woman in Malory's *Morte Darthur*." *Arthuriana*, vol. 16, no. 1, Scriptorium Press, 2006.
- Desens, Marliiss C. *The Bed-trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender*. University of Delaware Press, 1994.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Douglass, Sara. *The Betrayal of Arthur*. Pan Macmillan Australia, 1999. Accessed 18 May 2020 at <https://books.google.com/books?id=LfLWAAAAQBAJ>.

- Dover, Carol. *A Companion to the Lancelot-Grail Cycle*. D.S. Brewer, 2003.
- Edwards, Elizabeth. "The Place of Women in the Morte Darthur." *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald, A.S.G. Edwards and Anthony Stockwell, D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 37-54.
- English Heritage. *Tintagel Castle, Cornwall*. St. Ives Westerham Press, 1999.
- Fenster, Thelma S. *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*. Routledge, 2015.
- Fries, Maureen. "Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter-Heroes." *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, edited by Thelma S. Fenster, Routledge, 2015, pp. 59-74.
- Fenster, Thelma S. "Introduction." *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, edited by Thelma S. Fenster, Routledge, 2015, pp. xvii-lxiii.
- Goodrich, Peter. *Merlin: A Casebook*. Routledge, 2003.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth, J. A. (John Allen) Giles, and Aaron Thompson. *The British History of Geoffrey of Monmouth: In Twelve Books*. J. Bohn, 1842. Accessed 17 March 2020 at babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=dul1.ark:/13960/t07x3px18
- . *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Nutt, 1844. Accessed at books.google.com/books?id=ywQ-AAAaAAJ.
- . *History of the Kings of Britain*. Penguin, 1996.
- Heng, Geraldine. "Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory." *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, edited by Thelma S. Fenster, Routledge, 2015, pp. 97-113.
- Hodges, Kenneth. *Forging Chivalric Communities in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Holbrook, Sue Ellen. "Nymue, the Chief Lady of the Lake in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*." *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, edited by Thelma S. Fenster, Routledge, 2015, pp. 171-190.
- Irigaray, Luce. *The Irigaray Reader*. Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- . *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Kennedy, Elspeth. "Introduction." *Lancelot of the Lake*, translated by Corin Corley, Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Krueger, Roberta L. "Transforming Maidens." *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, edited by Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, pp. 146-191.
- Krueger, Roberta L. "Questions of Gender in Old French Courtly Romance." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, edited by Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Beacon Press, 1969.

- Lacy, Norris J. *The Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*. Garland, 1993.
- Lacy, Norris J. *The Lancelot-Grail Reader: Selections from the Medieval French Arthurian Cycle*. Garland, 2000.
- Lacy, Norris J. *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*. Garland Publishing, 1991.
- Lacy, Norris J. and Geoffrey Ashe. *The Arthurian Handbook*. Garland, 1988.
- Larrington, Carolyne. *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition*. I B Tauris, 2006.
- Linton, Phoebe C. "The Public and Private Boundaries of Motherhood: Queen Igraine in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* and *Lazamon's Brut*." Accessed 3 April 2020 at hortulus-journal.com/linton/
- Loomis, Roger Sherman. *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*. Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Malory, Sir Thomas. *Works*, edited by William Caxton and Eugene Vinaver, Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Mandel, Jerome. "Constraint and Motivation in Malory's 'Lancelot and Elaine'." *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1984, pp. 243-258.
- Marie de France. *The Lais of Marie de France*. Penguin Books, 2011.
- Martin, Molly. *Vision and Gender in Malory's Morte Darthur*. Boydell & Brewer, 2010.
- Matthews, John. *An Arthurian Reader: Selections from Arthurian Legend, Scholarship and Story*. Aquarian, 1991.
- McKenzie, Nancy. *Queen of Camelot*. Del Rey, 2002.
- Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, Python (Monty) Pictures, 1975.
- Morris, Rosemary. "Uther and Igerne: A Study in Uncourtly Love." *Arthurian Literature IV*, edited by Richard Barber, D.S. Brewer, 1985, pp. 70-92.
- Neufeld, Christine M. "Coconuts in Camelot: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in the Arthurian Literature Course." *Florilegium*, vol. 19, 2002, pp. 127-147.
- Nolan, Barbara. "The Tale of Sir Gareth and the Tale of Sir Lancelot." *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald, A.S.G. Edwards and Anthony Stockwell, D.S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 153-182.
- Paton, Lucy Allen. *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*. Ayer Publishing, 1960, 1903.
- Porter, Pamela. *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts*. British Library, 2003.

- Radulescu, Raluca. "Liminality and Gender in Middle English Arthurian Romance." *Medieval English Literature*, edited by Beatrice Fannon, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 30-44.
- Rasmussen, Ann Marie. "Medieval Romance." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, edited by Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 183-102.
- Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. Directed by Mel Brooks, 20th Century Fox, 1993.
- Rudd, Gillian. "Shifting Identities and Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Medieval English Literature*, edited by Beatrice Fannon, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 45-59.
- Sklar, Elizabeth S. "Malory's Other(ed) Elaine." *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, edited by Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst, Scriptorium Press, 2001, pp. 59-70.
- Sklar, Elizabeth S. and Donald L. Hoffman. *King Arthur in Popular Culture*. McFarland, 2002.
- Sommer, H. Oskar. *The Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances*. 7 vols., Washington, D.C., 1909-1913.
- Stewart, Mary. *The Crystal Cave*. Fawcett, 1970, 1989.
- . *The Hollow Hills*. William Morrow, 1973.
- . *The Last Enchantment*. William Morrow, 1979.
- Strong, David. "The Natural Rights Exerted in Shakespeare's Bed-Tricks." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 41, no. 1A, Johns Hopkins University Press, July 2017.
- Thompson, Raymond H. "Morgause of Orkney: Queen of Air and Darkness." *Quondam et Futurus*, vol. 3.1, Scriptorium Press, Spring 1993, pp. 1-13.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Indiana University Press, 1955-58.
- Tolhurst, Fiona. *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of the Arthurian Legend*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Vines, Amy Noelle. *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*. Boydell & Brewer, 2011.
- White, Richard, ed. *King Arthur In Legend and History*. Routledge, 1998.
- Winy, James. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Middle English Text with Facing Translation*. Broadview Press, 2007.

- Radulescu, Raluca. "Liminality and Gender in Middle English Arthurian Romance." *Medieval English Literature*, edited by Beatrice Fannon, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 30-44.
- Rasmussen, Ann Marie. "Medieval Romance." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, edited by Roberta L. Krueger, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 183-102.
- Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. Directed by Mel Brooks, 20th Century Fox, 1993.
- Rudd, Gillian. "Shifting Identities and Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Medieval English Literature*, edited by Beatrice Fannon, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 45-59.
- Sklar, Elizabeth S. "Malory's Other(ed) Elaine." *On Arthurian Women: Essays in Memory of Maureen Fries*, edited by Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst, Scriptorium Press, 2001, pp. 59-70.
- Sklar, Elizabeth S. and Donald L. Hoffman. *King Arthur in Popular Culture*. McFarland, 2002.
- Sommer, H. Oskar. *The Vulgate Version of Arthurian Romances*. 7 vols., Washington, D.C., 1909-1913.
- Stewart, Mary. *The Crystal Cave*. Fawcett, 1970, 1989.
- . *The Hollow Hills*. William Morrow, 1973.
- . *The Last Enchantment*. William Morrow, 1979.
- Strong, David. "The Natural Rights Exerted in Shakespeare's Bed-Tricks." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 41, no. 1A, Johns Hopkins University Press, July 2017.
- Thompson, Raymond H. "Morgause of Orkney: Queen of Air and Darkness." *Quondam et Futurus*, vol. 3.1, Scriptorium Press, Spring 1993, pp. 1-13.
- Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*. Indiana University Press, 1955-58.
- Tolhurst, Fiona. *Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Feminist Origins of the Arthurian Legend*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Vines, Amy Noelle. *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*. Boydell & Brewer, 2011.
- White, Richard, ed. *King Arthur In Legend and History*. Routledge, 1998.
- Winy, James. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Middle English Text with Facing Translation*. Broadview Press, 2007.