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GUENEVERE'S CONFLICT: PAGAN LOVE OR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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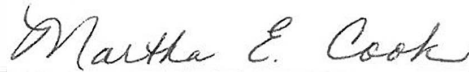
GUENEVERE'S CONFLICT: PAGAN LOVE OR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Jacquelyn Sweeney Johnson

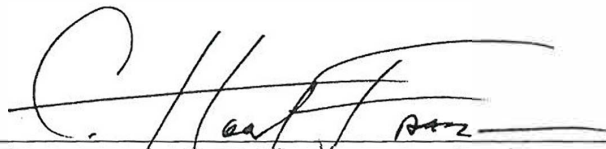
A thesis in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in English degree at Longwood University.



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August 21, 2003

Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Quentin and Doris Sweeney, whose love for Broadway show tunes first introduced me to the magical land of Camelot.

Acknowledgments

I thank my husband, Reed, and daughter, Leslie, for their patience, love, and support throughout this endeavor. I am particularly thankful for the techno-wizardry of my doughty knight, Reed, who routinely rescues me from computer disaster. Though I am proud of my academic accomplishments, nothing compares to the sense of wonder I feel every time I see the incredible human being who is my daughter or the fulfillment gained from the life of adventure that my husband has enabled me to live. I love you both.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Few relationships within the traditional Arthurian legend have captured the imagination as dramatically as those among King Arthur, Queen Guenevere, and Sir Lancelot. Through the centuries, writer manipulation of this central relationship has captivated a continued reader interest in the legend. Pre-twentieth versions, including Malory's well-known fifteenth interpretation, generally focus on the male characters whose power or integrity is compromised by Queen Guenevere. However, during the latter half of the twentieth century, feminist writers introduced a new perspective on this legendary love triangle. Though the modern feminist versions incorporate aspects of the traditional legend as presented by Malory, the newer adaptations focus on Guenevere and other important female characters who struggle to survive in an evolving society.

Successful literature often reflects the times in which it is created and frequently mirrors changing societal belief systems and behaviors. During the second half of the twentieth century, an incredible upheaval in gender roles occurred as well as a youthful yearning to return to a simpler time which focused on community and the land. A result of this popular back-to-the-land movement was the rise of neo-paganism which, with its affirmation of women, enhanced the strengthening female persona. As the world was evolving, so too did the Arthurian legend evolve as feminist writers set the legend in a changing pagan world that would now be told through a female voice.

Malory's Morte D'Arthur is set in the only world that would have been acceptable to a fifteenth century audience. It was a foregone conclusion that King Arthur would be high king of a Christian court in a Christian Great Britain. This would be a land that only recognizes Christian rites, holidays, and morals. In this land, where the priests emphasize

the superiority of men, women--recognized as descendants of the immoral Eve--are relegated to low stature. They are depicted as breeders, corrupters, or martyred virgins. Indeed, Malory's first page introduces the beautiful wife of the Duke of Cornwall, Igraine, who is desired by King Uther. Merlin assures Uther that he will have Igraine and will father the future high king of England by her. After the birth of Arthur, Igraine is rarely mentioned again. This scenario occurs repeatedly throughout Morte D'Arthur as women are used to progress the story and then are quickly discarded. In a Christian world dominated by men, the woman's role is strictly to support the life, or storyline, desired by the men.

In contrast, Marion Zimmer Bradley's Mists of Avalon, published in 1982, immediately shocks the reader of traditional Arthurian legend with a startling change in setting. Bradley, in response to a growing feminist climate, changes the taken-for-granted Christian England to a land of transition. In Bradley's heretofore pagan England, women were held in highest esteem and even venerated as the embodiment of the Goddess. This idea complemented the growing neo-paganism that was emerging in the latter twentieth century, as well as the general awareness of female potential and equality. The first paragraphs of the "Prologue" from The Mists of Avalon quickly inform the reader that this tale will differ from the traditionally Christian-biased legend. References are made to "the Christians" with "their Christ" and "his priests." Conversely, deferential references are made to the "Great Goddess" and the "Holy Isle of Avalon." Bradley tells her readers through the voice of Morgaine that they will learn about King Arthur as "*the tale should be told as it was before the priests of the White Christ came to cover it all with their saints and legends*" (Bradley ix).

The first lines of Chapter One in The Mists of Avalon promptly present the reader with a sense of transition. The castle Tintagel “was a haunted place” and some still “believed the castle had been raised . . . by the magic of the ancient folk” (Bradley 3). The Romanized Duke of Cornwall, Gorlois, dismisses these beliefs as antiquated nonsense. Nevertheless, he is married to Igraine, herself reared on the Holy Isle of Avalon, where her elder sister, Viviane, reigns as Lady of the Lake. Bradley uses these expository passages to provide the first glimpse of society that is changing from matrilineal belief in the Goddess to the patriarchal Christianity. Igraine is grateful to Gorlois because he *allows* her to raise Morgaine in the emerging patriarchal society. Often husbands would cast off the girl child so the woman would be immediately available to provide a son; therefore, Bradley’s Gorlois’s action showed the unimportance of women in the new society.

Igraine, the mother of Arthur, is manipulated into marrying a man not of her choice, but, as a child of Avalon, she does what she is told “whether it meant going to death in sacrifice, or laying down her maidenhood in the Sacred Marriage, or marrying where it was thought meet to cement alliances” (Bradley 4). However, by being thrust into a marriage to a boor of husband “who has absolute power . . .” (Bradley 66), Igraine, and by association those who believe in the Goddess, become the sympathetic characters in the novel.

Igraine’s marriage to Uther is part of the Goddess’s plan ultimately to bring forth Arthur, high king of the imminent Christian Great Britain, as someone who will also embrace the Goddess and her believers. Igraine’s plight as an Avalon-reared follower of the Goddess who must cope in a microcosmic world ruled by a tyrannical Christian

husband and a manipulating priest is indicative of the changing society in which the novel is set.

Like Bradley, Rosalind Miles also sets her Arthurian legend trilogy in a Great Britain that is leaving behind the Goddess and moving toward the patriarchal belief systems of the Christian church. Miles's trilogy consists of three novels entitled Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country, The Knight of the Sacred Lake, and The Child of the Holy Grail. The first novel, published in 1998, opens with Merlin and Arthur discussing the desired acceptance of the Christians. Arthur says: "Our people here follow the old faith . . . the old Gods will never die" (Miles Guenevere 4), establishing the pre-Christian slant of Arthur's background. However, as in The Mists of Avalon, Merlin recognizes that it is imperative to find a means of compromise with the Christians in ruling Great Britain. In addition to the dialogue about ancient gods, Miles incorporates other subtle clues that early on place the plot in a pre-Christian land. The Druid Merlin, the first character introduced in the novel, has memory of many lives before the present and is able to foretell Arthur's destiny, arrange for his kingship, and even foresee peril resulting from a marriage to Princess Guenevere: "She's born to be a trouble to her husband, that one" (Miles Guenevere 7).

After establishing the youthful Arthur as High King, Miles quickly moves the setting to the Summer Country where Princess Guenevere lives a blissful life in a land that honors queens as its primary leaders. Again, Merlin is mentioned, in fear, as sightings of him often portend doom: "Where Merlin goes, dreams, rumors, and phantoms always follow him" (Miles Guenevere 11). Guenevere's introduction during the feast of the pagan god, Penn Annwyn, establishes that in Guenevere: Queen of the

Summer Country, Guenevere is clearly not a Christian. However, unlike Bradley's dismal Tintagel that exists in a misogynistic society, Guenevere's castle, as presented by Miles, is in a land of sunshine and warmth subtly suggesting the strength of the female characters and the respect directed toward them: "Childhood was one long summer in sunlit meadows clad in white and gold . . ." (Miles Guenevere 9). The Summer Country is the last of British lands not to become Christian, and when Guenevere becomes Queen she is the supreme ruler even above her father, King Leogrance. He says: "' . . . your mother has held this kingdom, and the Sacred Isle, and the white towers of Camelot itself. She had it from her mother, and her mother had it from her mother, back to the days of the Old Ones, from the One who is Mother of us all'" (Miles Guenevere 35).

By presenting the legend's setting in a transitional Great Britain, both Bradley and Miles differ from Malory's traditional point of view which focused mainly on the male characters. Bradley's focus is primarily on her female characters and periodically alternates between the omniscient third person and first person. This is an important technique that reveals a character's emotions and motives responsible for behavior. Through understanding the emotional inner conflict experienced by the characters, the reader naturally sympathizes with the characters by accepting that, even though the results may be disastrous, ultimately the motives for the behavior are based on good intentions.

The Mists of Avalon opens with the novel's protagonist, Morgaine, speaking directly to the reader: "*. . . this is my truth; I who am Morgaine tell you these things . . .*" (Bradley xi). Morgaine states not only is she going to give an account of King Arthur's court, but also she is acknowledging actual participation in the events that shape the

legend as presented by Marion Zimmer Bradley. Though the novel is narrated by Morgaine, whose perspective remains a constant throughout the novel, hers is not the only voice offered. By using italics to directly address the reader in the “Prologue,” Bradley has signaled to the reader that thereafter whenever the eye meets italics, a character’s thoughts are being presented, and through this method Bradley provides the thoughts of nearly all the female characters in the novel. Understanding the unspoken thoughts of characters increases empathy and acceptance of actions that may not always be considered ethical behavior.

The High Priestess of Avalon, Viviane, sets in motion circumstances that propel the action of the story. She arranges for Morgaine, unbeknown to her, to be impregnated by her half-brother, Britain’s future High King, Arthur Pendragon. Unlike the Christians, those who followed the Goddess did not consider sexual relations between a brother and sister as a sin. Nevertheless, Viviane’s thoughts reveal the despair she feels from the manipulation of Morgaine: *“She is the daughter I owed the Goddess . . . The royal line of Avalon must not be contaminated by commoner blood . . . Done is done! I cannot spare her. But with all my heart I wish there had been some other way . . .”* (Bradley 193). Though the consequences are devastating, understanding Viviane’s reasons creates empathy rather than hostility toward her character.

Italics also reveal the thoughts of male characters in The Mists of Avalon. However, even in the midst of private rumination, the focus still remains on the women’s power. During a telepathic communication between Uther and Viviane, Uther acknowledges:

There is a bond between us, not one I would have desired; we have not been friends, sister-in-law. But I trust to your vision, for what you spoke came always true. And you are the only one to make sure that the next High King of Britain can take what is rightfully his. (Bradley 193)

In a huff Viviane reminds the dying king that Arthur qualifies as king through Igraine's royal blood, but Uther's last thoughts lead Viviane to recognize that in this new Christianized era the female bloodline is losing importance; it is Arthur's Pendragon blood that will enable Merlin to convince the lesser kings of Arthur's sovereignty. Scenes such as this simultaneously reinforce the importance of women to the legend as well as acknowledge the tumultuous times in which the legend is set.

Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country also uses both first person point of view and omniscient narration. Though not used as extensively as in Bradley, Miles employs italics to indicate the thoughts of her characters. Again, this technique reveals the conflicts and motives experienced by the legend's participants. Guenevere's thoughts, in particular, mention the prevalence of the Goddess before the arrival of the Christians. Guenevere is the protagonist who repeatedly offers silent prayers to the "Mother, Goddess . . . ," and reinforces the role of the Goddess in the lives of the inhabitants of the only country left in Great Britain that still worships the Goddess and whose kings are merely the consorts of the ruling queens.

Though Bradley gives voice to many of the characters in The Mists of Avalon and reveals their motivations, little attention is given to Christian clergy and lay people. Instead, the Christian ethic is revealed through indirect characterization by the women who, for the most part, are either biased toward the Goddess or, if Christian, held in

contempt by the priests. Igraine refers to Father Columba as a “black crow of ill omen” (Bradley 79) and wonders about the Christian God who “was supposed to be a God of fear and punishment” (Bradley 42). Morgaine thinks she would go mad if she spent even a short time in a nunnery: “The thought of dwelling within those walls even for the three nights of the crowning, called to come and go, night and day, by the hellish jangling of those bells, made her blood run cold” (Bradley 209). When Igraine mentions that her dead children are with Christ, Morgaine muses: “. . . *what a way to think of a God, with all the generations of the dead clinging to him!*” (Bradley 210).

While the women of the Goddess view the Christians as irritants, the priests regard the priestesses as a serious threat as implied when a jesting Arthur tells Morgaine that the Archbishop believes “. . . the women of Avalon are evil sorceresses or harpies, all” (Bradley 219). Even pious Christian women are viewed with disdain by the clergy who, in turn, teach and advise the community. Duke Gorlois tells Igraine:

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.

(Bradley 86)

Though men were considered sinful, women as descendants of Eve, were deemed innately more sinful which reinforced their subservient status as taught by the Church. This belief system often sets up the women as scapegoats for whatever bad luck might befall the men as evidenced when Father Columba tells Morgaine that Igraine has not had

another son “... because your father was angry with her, and God withheld a son to punish her for her sinful will” (Bradley 79).

Miles, on the other hand, gives a clear voice to the clergy, many of whom are manipulative and ambitious. The first depiction of the Christians who arrive unwelcome at Guenevere's mother's funeral is unfavorable. The monks, “. . . swarming like black beetles up the grass . . . look more like swineherds than holy men” (Miles Guenevere 70). The negative implications about the monks are further emphasized when Brother John tells Queen Guenevere: ““God has forbidden women to have authority over men”” (Miles Guenevere 71). When she dares to argue with him, he holds up a cross and declares: ““Get thee behind me, Satan!”” (Miles Guenevere 71). Encounters with the representatives of the Christian Church highlight the impending conflict between those who practice the rites of the Goddess and those who follow the priests' teachings of God's Word. Guenevere recognizes the threat of a paternalistic society when she understands that “*the Christians want to overthrow the Goddess and bring in the rule of men*” (Miles Guenevere 74).

Unlike Bradley, who employs indirect characterization to present the priests' point of view, Miles provides scenes where interactions between Church members reveal, through thought and action, an unethical plot to crush the pagan beliefs of Camelot. When Brother John brings the news of Guenevere and Arthur's marriage to the Abbot, their conversation reveals a scheme to steal the golden cup from Avalon and use it as Christ's cup, that is, use it as the Communion chalice, in front of the masses. Later, the Abbot arrives in Camelot under the guise of helping Arthur cope with Merlin's mental breakdown; however, the Abbot's thoughts reveal his true intention of using the

unwitting Arthur as a method of wiping out Goddess worship. The monk's eagerness to embrace this misrepresentation of Avalon's royal cup and the Abbot's deception betray their façade of virtue and intensify the depiction of hypocrisy within the Church, but the Church, of course, is expected to epitomize truth.

That that which is presented first becomes more acceptable than what was heretofore taken for granted is pointed out in Lee Ann Tobin's essay, "Why Change the Arthur Story?" Tobin suggests that the placing of events within the legend's presentation may manipulate the reader's sympathy for a character or a particular point of view. For instance, Tobin points out that, in The Mists of Avalon, Guenevere's training as an appropriately submissive woman would have been the normal instruction of a young medieval girl. However, since Morgaine's priestess training is presented first, the reader tends to accept this behavior as normal and more acceptable than that of Guenevere's realistically depicted upbringing (Tobin 150). Traditionally, Arthurian legend was set in a Christian land inhabited by knights and kings whose good intentions were often thwarted by the evil doings of female characters. To circumvent this negative bias toward the legend's women, both Bradley and Miles initially provide a pre-Christian backdrop to the legend which automatically establishes the Goddess worship as an accepted way of life that is being negatively impacted by the arriving patriarchal Christians who seek to undermine the power of women. Bradley even goes beyond the present day of the novel to establish the existence of Goddess worship thousands of years before Christ as revealed through archaeological evidence. In her book, When God Was a Woman, Merlin Stone discusses the predominance of Goddess worship from as early as 25,000 B.C. (10). Bradley reflects the antiquity of these beliefs through several trance-like

scenes that involve Arthur's mother, Igraine. Igraine dreams of knowing Uther in previous lives that predate Christianity by thousands of years (Bradley 57). Stone provides archaeological evidence dating from 4000 B.C. that connects Goddess worship with serpents which probably symbolized "wisdom and prophetic council" (199) and gives credence to the pre-Christian worship in an out-of-body experience where Bradley's Igraine envisions herself and Uther with golden serpents encircling their arms (Bradley 93). Furthermore, in Bradley's present-day setting, important male characters such as Arthur, Mordred, and the Merlin all have serpents tattooed on their wrists to indicate relationship to the Goddess.

Though not as extensively as Bradley, Miles subtly suggests the existence of Goddess worship in the centuries predating the novel's present. When Guenevere must attend the burial of her mother, the site is presumably Stonehenge: "... a circle of standing stones, ancient gray giants brooding in the mist. . . . Here every Queen of the Summer Country had been laid to rest since time began" (Miles Guenevere 67). The implication of Stonehenge, which dates from about 2900 B.C., in the sacred rites of those who believe in the Goddess clearly provides a bias against the arriving priests. Miles, like Bradley, also uses pagan festivals to add to the sense of antiquity; it is on the eve of the Beltane fires, when women are choosing their partners, that Guenevere becomes Queen.

Bradley and Miles set their novels during a time of religious upheaval. Stone states that the worship of a female deity probably existed up to around 500 A.D. (18), and in King Arthur: King of Kings, Jean Markale suggests that even when Britain officially converted to Christianity, "... the bulk of the rural population remained pagan" (84). By

recognizing the existence of a Goddess worshipping society being overcome by Christianity during the time when the legendary King Arthur may have reigned, the authors are able to bring a new perspective to the traditional telling of the Arthurian legend. Both authors acknowledge the changing times of medieval Britain through setting and a female point of view. Guenevere is no longer the traditional villainess who brings down King Arthur through her adultery; she is now depicted as a real human being maneuvered into an unwanted marriage. Similarly, an unsuspecting young Arthur becomes High King of a country that is being attacked by Saxons and, more subtly, the Christian Church. Finally, Lancelot is a knight not only struggling with his own religiousness but also attempting to remain loyal to his king and courtly to Guenevere despite her being Arthur's wife and Lancelot's own beloved.

Each of the characters within the love triangle of Guenevere, Arthur, and Lancelot must deal not only with conflicted consciences created by their tenuous inter-relationships but also with learning to rule in conjunction with the increasingly influential Church. The female perspective presents each character and the choices available to him or her in an evolving Christian land. Marion Zimmer Bradley and Rosalind Miles show that it is not necessarily the adultery that causes Camelot to fall. Instead, it is the behavior of over-zealous Christians or the ambitious manipulations under the guise of devotion that ultimately topples the fragile balance of Camelot's leadership.

Chapter Two: Maiden

The dynamics played out in the Arthurian legend depend largely on the crucial role of its queen, Guenevere. In Morte D'Arthur, she is portrayed in terms of the patriarchal Christian world which would have been the only acceptable setting for Malory, whose Christian milieu taught that people are sinful by nature since the Fall and that women, being more embodied because of menstruation, childbirth, and lactation, are more passionate and less intellectual, hence more sinful, than men. Because of Guenevere's between-the-sheets shenanigans with Lancelot and her inability to bear Arthur a child, it is her and Lancelot's actions that, together with political betrayals by members of the House of Lot, bring about the downfall of Camelot. Yet, Malory's depiction of Guenevere is not entirely negative. Ann F. Howey points out in Rewriting the Women of Camelot that Guenevere often appears in her role of queen of the court; she hosts tournaments and dinners and generally contributes to the court's stature with her beauty and fame (24). Howey further explains that, as a courtly lover, Malory's Guenevere plays a pivotal role by motivating and showcasing many of Lancelot's heroic actions, many of which are required in rescuing her (24), an action he performs several times, when she is abducted by Meleagaunt, accused by Sir Mador of poisoning Sir Patryse, and taken to the stake by Arthur.

Writers of the mid-to-latter twentieth century incorporate many of the elements that shaped the traditional legend and design them to provide a contemporary, more human characterization of Guenevere. Their portrayal is largely based on Guenevere's point of view as influenced by her background. Bradley's Guenevere is raised behind convent walls, while Miles's pagan Guenevere is raised as a princess at her mother's side.

Yet both Gueneveres have difficult fathers, are forced into marriage by forces beyond their control, are obligated to provide an heir for the realm, are required to deal with their husband's bastard son, and are destined to fall in love with the handsome Lancelot. Both Gueneveres live in an evolving society, surrounded by citizens eager to disrupt the peaceful realm. It is the upbringing of the queens Guenevere that influences their decisions which, in turn, shapes the plot of the legend as presented by each author.

In The Mists of Avalon, Guenevere is first introduced as a scared, lost little girl who has managed to wander away from her convent onto the holy isle of Avalon. There, she encounters Lancelot and Morgaine, who are on the brink of consummating a slowly escalating passion. However, the young Guenevere's beauty is stunning: "She was very young and dazzlingly pretty; she seemed all white and gold, her skin pale as ivory just stained with coral, her eyes palest sky-blue, her hair long and pale and shining through the mist like living gold" (Bradley 157). Concerned for the young girl's plight, Lancelot turns away from Morgaine, and, in a gesture foreshadowing a lifetime of rescuing, effortlessly picks up the whimpering Guenevere and helps her to dry land. This meeting demonstrates early on not only Lancelot's gallantry and nearly obsessive desire to be needed, but also Guenevere's neediness and self-doubt, a byproduct of her Christian religion that takes a lifetime for her to reconcile.

The first description of Guenevere sets her up as a pale, helpless foil to the novel's main protagonist: the dark, capable Morgaine. Guenevere is dressed in a proper white dress that accentuates her blondness and contrasts with Morgaine's muddy gown and long, unkempt dark hair. Though it is Lancelot who rescues the helpless Christian

Guenevere, it is Morgaine, the priestess of the Goddess, who leads both Lancelot and the girl back to the convent.

Guenevere is portrayed as fearful from the start; she is, after all, just a little girl. Yet Lee Ann Tobin suggests that it is “her sheltered upbringing [that] has magnified her fears” (151). After being taught that demons and witches who detest Christ live on Avalon, Guenevere is, in Tobin’s words, “a timid child [who] would become even more timid” (151). When first they meet, Morgaine offers her hand to Guenevere, but the girl recoils, stating, “‘Are you one of the fairy people? You have that blue sign on your forehead. . . . No, you cannot be a demoness, you do not vanish when I cross myself, as the sisters say any demon must do—but you are little and ugly like the fairy people’” (Bradley 158). Later, Morgaine hears Guenevere say to Lancelot, “‘But *you* don’t belong to this horrible place, do you? *You* don’t look like one of the fairy folk, you’re not little and ugly’” (Bradley 158). Thus, within moments of her arrival, Guenevere is portrayed as needy, doubtful, fearful, and very much distrustful of anyone she may perceive as un-Christian. These traits bestow additional negative emphasis upon a character who is already at a disadvantage because she is a latecomer who stumbles upon the landscape of the already established and sympathetic setting of the Goddess’s Avalon.

Unlike the convent confined Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon, the Guenevere in Miles’s Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country is an adolescent princess who grows up understanding that, as the daughter of the Queen in a pre-Christian matriarchal land, she will one day inherit the throne of Camelot. In the opening pages of the novel, Guenevere is accompanying her mother to a pagan festival where the knights compete to

become the Queen's champion. A tragic accident results in the death of the Queen, and within hours young Guenevere finds herself the new Queen of Camelot.

Like Bradley, Miles uses these early pages, before Guenevere is Queen, to establish the character of Guenevere. Where Bradley's Guenevere has no mother and only misogynistic priests and harbingers-of-doom nuns to guide her, Miles's Guenevere is raised by a loving mother. Unlike the Christians who desire sons and have disdain for daughters, the people of Camelot worship the Goddess and accordingly cherish their daughters. Consequently, Guenevere has had the opportunity to learn what will one day be expected of her by observing her own mother. As the monarch of Camelot, she will be expected to be a wise and capable ruler; she must also be willing to go into battle if necessary to protect her land and people. Unlike the Christian girls who learn to be weak and submissive, Guenevere is taught that a strong character is expected of her and that weakness will not be tolerated. It is implied that Guenevere's mother, Maire Macha, foresees danger, and, as she walks away from the young princess, she calms her daughter's worried face using the words that have been said since the princess was a small child, "no tears, no fears" (Miles Guenevere 14). Moments later, Guenevere is Queen of the Summer Country.

Unlike her mother, a firmly established queen, the young Queen Guenevere is immediately forced into a confrontation with the monks who seize the occasion of the pagan sacred funeral rites to attempt to challenge Goddess worship and Guenevere's queen-making ceremony at the Beltane fires. Declaring the Maire Macha's death as a sign from God, Brother John tests Guenevere's mettle by challenging, "What you do here is against the laws of God! God has forbidden women to have authority over men.

Men were made in His image to fulfill His aims. Your Queen-making is the work of the devil, and against God's will!" (Miles Guenevere 71). Guenevere responds by brandishing a sword in the monk's face and acknowledging: "Yet I am Queen here in spite of you!" (Miles Guenevere 71). Though she realizes that "*the Christians want to overthrow the Goddess and bring in the rule of men*" (Miles Guenevere 74), the young queen makes it clear to the Christians as well as to her own people that she intends to rule by the same ancient laws as her mother.

Not only does Guenevere struggle with the monks, but also she must defend herself against the advances of men who seek to use her status as an opportunity to satisfy their own ambition. Lucan, her mother's champion and favorite lover, tries to convince Guenevere to make him her first champion as well as king and father of her children. He reminds her that this was what her own mother had done: "Your mother took your father as the first of her chosen ones. She made him King, and the father of her child. He never lost these rights, though the Queen took younger men when the time came" (Miles Guenevere 76).

Similar to Bradley's introduction, the character of Miles's Guenevere is revealed within a few pages of her first appearance. Though young, she is faced with her mother's death and the subsequent queenship that is immediately challenged. Often asking the Mother Goddess for strength, Guenevere confronts each difficult situation with a strength and courage that showcase how she will handle her challenging future.

In a patriarchal society, a daughter's future is determined by her father. In the Mists of Avalon, Guenevere is the child of King Leodegranz, a lesser Christian king. Guenevere has returned from the convent to the home of her father, who is negotiating

with Lancelot the purchase of horses for Arthur to use in battle against the Saxons. This is the first time that Guenevere has seen Lancelot since he rescued her as a child, and she becomes quite smitten with him. Even though her father expects her to marry, Guenevere, who previously panicked when outside the castle, has been afraid of marriage, even wishing she were back in the “dear convent where she had felt as snug as a mouse in her hole” (Bradley 252). However, she occasionally daydreams of having her own home, and, when she perceives Lancelot’s interest in her, “she felt herself blush with delight and happiness. For the first time she felt pretty and bold and brave” (Bradley 256). Bravely, she speaks admiringly of Lancelot to her father who senses her interest in Arthur’s young captain. Unfortunately, any hope of a marriage to the man she is destined to love is squashed by Leodegranz, who views his beautiful daughter as little more than an opportunity to advance his own ambitions: “‘You can look higher than that one. . . . Why marry a king’s captain? If all goes as I plan, you’ll wed the High King himself!’” (Bradley 256). Leodegranz dismisses her fears of becoming High Queen and reminds her that as her father he knows what is best for her. Rather than react with anger and fight for what her heart feels is her one true love, Guenevere meekly accepts her father’s decision: “*But how, she thought wildly, can I complain of the best of fathers, who has only my own welfare at heart?*” (Bradley 256).

Lee Ann Tobin suggests that Guenevere’s primary role in The Mists of Avalon “is to show how women lost power in Western civilization. In Guenevere, Bradley describes a woman whose upbringing has been traditional in that she is trained to be submissive by her family and her Christian church” (Tobin 150). Accordingly, Guenevere is meek and acknowledges her father’s decision as if he were, in fact, speaking the words of God.

Though she outwardly accepts Leodegranz's judgment regarding her future, Guenevere seethes at having no voice in her own future: "She had wanted to be a nun and stay in the convent and learn to read . . . but that was not suitable for a princess; she must obey her father's will as if it were the will of God. (Bradley 268). Throughout the novel, Guenevere struggles to do what is right as determined by her upbringing and her church, all the while inwardly resenting her loss of self. According to Tobin, Guenevere's anger is manifested when she neither cries nor attempts to attend the funeral of Leodegranz, who dies years after her marriage to Arthur (151).

Though raised in a society that values women's independence, Miles's Guenevere also experiences a difficult relationship with her father. Guenevere resents his impatience for her to marry; she tells her mother, "The King sees husbands for me everywhere" (Miles Guenevere 10). Later, after her mother's death, she summons her father who is now resentful because, where once he was the father with control over his daughter, the daughter is now Queen, and he must be deferential to her. Leogrance has come under the influence of Guenevere's evil uncle, Malgaunt, who lusts after his niece and seeks to be king of Camelot. She feels betrayed when her father advises her to take a champion, preferably Malgaunt, and she is appalled when he tells her to "forget the old ways" (Miles Guenevere 78) and keep her champion for life rather than seek new "thigh-friendship" as she pleases. When Guenevere reminds him that the women of Camelot have always loved freely, Leogrance simply says, "The Christians do not permit it" (Miles Guenevere 79). She begs him to be her champion and help her, but he refuses, telling her that she should choose Malgaunt for, ". . . the man who fights for you by day should lie with you by night. You need a partner of bed as well as sword. . . . Heed

Malgaunt now, for he will have his way'” (Miles Guenevere 79). She realizes that her father thinks, “...*you are nothing, without a man*” (Miles Guenevere 78), that he has resented being second to the Queen, and that he sees the new Christian religion as a means for men to gain control.

After Guenevere's marriage to Arthur, both Bradley and Miles, following Malory, more or less remove King Leogrance from the story. Though Bradley's Christian king is assumed to have achieved the power and status he desired through the marriage of his daughter, he receives little mention other than a brief reference to his death. Miles's Leogrance, who wants his daughter to forsake the pagan rites of the Goddess in favor of the patriarchal Christian church, remains King of the Summer Country and ends his days as a doddering deaf old man, suggesting the weakness of a man's rule. The king who once looked at his daughter with disdain as if she were nothing without a man is, in fact, worthless without the strength of his daughter, the queen.

Chapter Three: The Marriage

After leaving her father, Guenevere marries Arthur to become the High Queen of Great Britain. In The Mists of Avalon and Miles's trilogy, Guenevere has little choice in the circumstances leading up to her marriage. Bradley's Leodegranz barter off Guenevere for prestige, and Miles's Guenevere must marry quickly in order to escape the pressure of a marriage to Malgaunt and the force of his Christian inclinations. Though Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon grows to love her husband, Guenevere of the Summer Country goes to her marriage bed with an already abounding love for her husband. Pagan or Christian, desirous or not of marriage, each character enters the union intending to be a good and noble wife. Neither Bradley's nor Miles's Guenevere anticipates the havoc caused by religious upheaval or an extramarital liaison.

In The Mists of Avalon, Guenevere does not want to marry or become High Queen; she wants to remain within the safe confines of the convent. Nevertheless, she is dismayed that, if she must marry, she cannot marry the handsome young Lancelot who once rescued her as a child and has now captured her heart. As expected of an obedient daughter, she accepts her father's decision and marries Arthur, and, though her heart belongs to another, Guenevere sincerely wants to love her husband: "*I want so much to love him. . . . 'Oh, God, holy Mary Virgin, help me to love him as I ought to do, he is my king and my lord and he is so good, he deserves someone who will love him more than I can love'*" (Bradley 303).

The role of Queen in The Mists of Avalon is little more than a privileged housewife. Guenevere sees to the day-to-day routine of her household, and she keeps an

eye on the chastity of her ladies-in-waiting. Her days are spent spinning and gossiping with the women, often waiting for the men to return from battle in order to break the boredom of the women's routine. Raised as a proper Christian lady, Guenevere criticizes independent women such as her sister-in-law Morgaine, who as "... a priestess of Avalon, ... need not ask leave, even of the High King, to come and go as it pleases [her]" (Bradley 494). Guenevere also disapproves of Arthur's aunt, Morgause, who shared Orkney rule with her husband King Lot and then ruled on her own after his death and openly enjoyed the favors of young lovers. Yet, for all her criticism, she is resentful when she considers her own diminished freedom: "... *I must do as I am bid, like any woman, no matter what I want!*" (Bradley 382). The resentment increases as her affections for Lancelot grow; she tells him, "At least you can choose whether to stay or to go, but I was given into Arthur's hands without even so much as 'will you or no?'" (Bradley 432). About Morgaine she thinks, "Why should Morgaine please herself? No other woman was allowed to do her own will ... Arthur should exert his authority and get Morgaine properly married ..." (Bradley 375). She tells Arthur, "... the Holy Apostle said that women should submit themselves to their husbands" (Bradley 602). During one of her first attempts to convince Arthur to forsake the Pendragon banner, she thinks to herself, "*Morgause is accepted as one of Lot's councillors, and Viviane never stinted to speak of matters of state!*" (Bradley 379). Though Guenevere denounces the behavior of Morgaine and Morgause, their actions cause her to question her own lack of freedom and influence; consequently, she becomes increasingly indignant as Arthur repeatedly refuses her requests to revoke his promise to honor the beliefs of the pagan tribes.

Twice Guenevere tries to make independent decisions, each time resulting in disaster. Though pregnant, she risks her life and those of her knights to return to Caerleon during the threat of Saxon invasion. This episode not only results in a power struggle between Guenevere and Arthur, who appears to be dismayed by the untimely pregnancy, but eventually results in a miscarriage. Later, while Arthur is away, she tries to reconcile a problem concerning the wicked Meleagant's claim to the Summer Country. Raymond H. Thompson says in The Return From Avalon: A Study of the Arthurian Legend in Modern Fiction, that Guenevere in an "obstinate self-assertion in defiance of common sense" (133) rejects Cai and Morgaine's advice that it would be too dangerous for the Queen to negotiate with a known conspirator. When Morgaine offers to accompany her, Guenevere bristles: "'In God's name . . . I am not a child who cannot stir forth without a nurse!'" (Bradley 507). Unfortunately, the Christian Guenevere's struggle to step out of the submissive mold, to be decisive and independent like her pagan sister-in-law, ends with a brutal rape. Therefore, Guenevere is literally beaten and defiled for daring to step out of the passive role demanded by her church. The Queen realizes after the rape that her religion, with its abhorrence of women, has so poorly equipped her to deal with life without the benefit of a man that she is incapable of making decisions based on sound judgment. This episode becomes a defining moment for Guenevere as she contemplates what she feels is an injustice forced on her by virtue of her gender, her God, and her marriage.

Miles's Guenevere in Guenevere: Queen of Summer Country has no problem making decisions. She was raised by her mother and learned from an early age that she must be responsible for her own self as well as that of her kingdom. After her marriage

to Arthur, she sees no reason to step down from her responsibility. Raised to be a strong leader, she has the confidence to make critical decisions which include overriding the King's command by ordering soldiers on the battlefield.

Shortly after her marriage, Guenevere is in the position of observing the brutal battle between King Lot's massive army and King Arthur's knights. Overlooking from a ridge, she sees that Lot is slowly making his way toward Arthur's back. The Queen sends a messenger to alert King Ban's army to ride onto the field. Guenevere's self-confidence and quick thinking save the King's life. Later, after Lot's death, Arthur orders King Pellinore's son, Lamorak, to accompany Lot's widow and Arthur's half-sister, Morgause, back to the Orkneys where he will remain in her service as long as she desires. Guenevere realizes this is a bad decision: "*But Lamorak and his father killed King Lot. He and King Pellinore made a widow of Queen Morgause*" (Miles Guenevere 231). Had Arthur taken her advice, much bloodshed could have been avoided in the years to come. Unlike Bradley's Queen, this Guenevere is not brutalized for being a strong leader; she enjoys the satisfaction of knowing her decisions are often more sound than those of the King.

Arthur is from the Middle Country where Christianity holds sway, and, though he is respectful of the Goddess and Guenevere's worship of her, he nevertheless believes in the superiority of men. Guenevere becomes more and more frustrated as her ideas and decisions are continuously overruled. This domestic upheaval is reflective of the overall discord occurring throughout the realm as the Christians gain strength and influence over the King.

One of the first instances of Guenevere's frustrations occurs when she notices that Arthur is showering his newly found half-sister, Morgan, with an inordinate amount of attention. When he informs Guenevere that he has surprising plans for Morgan, she wonders: "How long had he been planning this without a word? Long enough, she saw with annoyance, to have decided already what he was going to do" (Miles Guenevere 233). With this unacknowledged jealousy toward her sister-in-law combined with her irritation with Arthur's disregard for her input, "A worm of resentment turned in Guenevere's heart" (Miles Guenevere 234).

A crucial element of the Arthurian legend is Queen Guenevere's inability to conceive a child. It is the absence of an heir that traditionally opens the door for Arthur's illegitimate son Mordred to challenge the throne. Other than keeping the household running smoothly, the main purpose of a Christian wife is to produce children, preferably sons. Unfortunately, by not providing the realm with an heir, Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon, as in Malory, cannot perform her most important function. Lee Ann Tobin points out that the church's antifeminism has so influenced Guenevere "that she despises herself and feels guilty, especially about not being able to have children" (Bradley 152). She thinks lowly of herself, "It was all her fault; he should put her away as barren, and take a wife who could give him a child" (Bradley 329). Indeed, many of the people agree with her: "'The King is a fool,' said King Uriens. 'He should put her away and take some woman who would give him a son'" (Bradley 574). Yet, though the King also longs for an heir, he loves Guenevere and often tries to reassure her that her barrenness does not affect his feelings for her: "'... you are my wife, beloved, my own dear wife, and

nothing on earth could part us. If I wanted only a brood mare to get me sons, God knows I could have had enough of them!” (Bradley 546).

Many times Bradley’s Guenevere believes herself to be pregnant but just as often discovers that she is not. Though she is occasionally ambivalent about pregnancy because of the possibility of its reversing Lancelot’s feelings towards her, Guenevere yearns for a child because, “Whatever else a queen might do for her lord, her first duty was to give a son, and she had not done that duty, though she had prayed till her knees ached” (Bradley 309). Her yearnings turn to bitterness as she sees other women, younger than she and married for much shorter time periods, already with several children. Her bitterness leads to desperation as she thinks to herself: “*If only Morgaine were here, I would indeed beseech her for that charm which could make me fruitful . . .*” (Bradley 329). Later, she uses Arthur’s illness as a reason to request sending for Morgaine, whose knowledge of healing might aid in the king’s recovery and give Guenevere the opportunity to ask for a charm.

King Arthur continually reminds Guenevere of his love for her, but he also acknowledges that they must do whatever is necessary to provide an heir to the throne. Recognizing her feelings for Lancelot, Arthur tells her:

Guenevere, I would like it well if God sent us a child, whoever should work God’s will in fathering him—do you understand me? And if it should so happen that the one who so did the will of heaven were my dearest of friends and the closest of kinsmen to me, then would I bless him, and the child you bore. (Bradley 334)

The pious Christian, Guenevere, is understandably shocked by her husband's suggestion of adultery. She protests to Arthur, who points out that the Goddess would not consider this act sinful: "'You know the ways of Avalon. . . where when a man and woman come together in this wise, the child is said even to be born of the God'" (Bradley 334).

Arthur's proposal sends Guenevere into a moral quandary. The same religion that says she should obey her husband also says the act he wants her to commit is a sin, and she wonders: "How could she, a woman, make that decision?" (Bradley 335). She finally decides that through the Goddess she may satisfy both her husband and her religion; she resolves to ask her priestess-trained sister-in-law for a fertility charm. Though she previously considered Morgaine's skills as sorcery, Guenevere figures, "if Morgaine enchanted her so that she had no choice but to love Lancelot, then she would be freed of that fearful choice" (Bradley 336).

The Queen, desperate for a child and willing to risk damnation by her God, finally musters the courage to ask for the charm:

My sister. . . is it true that you know—all manner of charms and spells for fertility? I—I cannot live with it any longer, that every lady at court watches every morsel I eat to see if I am breeding, or takes note of how tight I tie my girdle! Morgaine, if indeed you know these charms they say you know—my sister, I beg you—will you use those arts for me?

(Bradley 440)

Guenevere believes she has been a virtuous and faithful wife, but God has not rewarded her with the child that she so desperately wants and needs so that she "*would not think night and day of this love* [for Lancelot] *which tempts my* [Guenevere's] *honor, for all my*

thoughts would be given to Arthur's son" (Bradley 441). Morgaine counsels Guenevere that "charms often work as you would not that they would do" (Bradley 442) and wonders why her sister-in-law, always so piously Christian, now seeks the aid of the Goddess when her own God will not grant her motherhood. Guenevere replies, "I think perhaps God cares nothing for women—all his priests are men, and again and again the Scriptures tell us that women are the temptress and evil. . . . And for this I would go to the Goddess—God does not care" (Bradley 442). Contemplating the magic of which she is about to partake and its possible consequences, Guenevere further blasphemes God: "*I do not care, if so be it I can bear my king a son. . . if a God would damn me for that, what have I to do with him?*" (Bradley 444).

Guenevere wears the charm around her neck the evening of Beltane Eve, a pagan festival where fires are burned in honor of the Goddess and the fertility she brings to land and wombs; as Morgaine warned, the charm reaps unexpected results. Following the drunken celebration, Guenevere finds herself in the bedchamber with both her husband and Lancelot. Arthur tells Lancelot, "Guenevere has no child—and do you think I have not seen how you two look at each other? . . . a friend is one to whom you will lend your favorite wife and your favorite sword. . . . A son of yours, Lance, would be heir to my kingdom. . . ." (Bradley 448). Arthur turns to Guenevere and says, "should a child come of this then you may swear without any untruth that this child was conceived in your marriage bed, and none of us need ever know for certain" (Bradley 449). The charm has brought Guenevere and Lancelot together with her husband's blessing, but Lancelot notices the charm as he turns towards her. He questions her about it, and Guenevere, who has often thought with dismay how Lancelot would gaze upon her

pregnant belly, flings the charm across the room thereby eliminating the charm's assistance with what could be her only chance of providing Arthur with an heir to his throne.

As established by tradition, Guenevere in Miles's Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country also has a difficult time becoming pregnant:

Every month her body seemed to fill with spirit children, little laughing sprites who leaped into her womb and danced about till she was as sick as any woman breeding for twins or more. Then the moon would swell and grow big in the sky. And every time her pale face lit the earth, Guenevere lost what she was carrying, and her body did not swell. (Miles Guenevere 227).

Miles's Guenevere wishes for children, particularly a daughter, but not with the longing desperation of Bradley's Christian Guenevere, who eventually turned toward the Goddess for an opportunity of motherhood. Miles's pagan queen accepts that her life with Arthur will unfold as determined by the Goddess: "When the time came, . . . the Mother would let them know. Till then, they were happy, and would take life as it came" (Miles Guenevere 227).

In a surprising turn from tradition, Miles's Guenevere eventually gives birth to a healthy son. Unlike the Christians, Guenevere has desired a daughter, and her disappointment in the appearance of her son is immense: "*Maire, my daughter, where are you, where did you go? Mother, Mother, help me now. I can't love him. I don't want this child*" (Miles Guenevere 281). However, her discontent is brief: when she looks upon

her son's face for the first time: "Something surged within her that she had never known before" (Miles Guevere 281).

Giving birth to the future king and having a child to love enables this Queen Guevere to enjoy a serenity that Bradley's Christian queen rarely experiences. Indeed, the only distress occurring during the years following the birth of the boy is created when Christian beliefs are imposed upon her. Following the Abbot's suggestion, Arthur insists upon baptizing their son. Guevere is horrified: "'Christened?' She could not believe it. 'Baptized by the rites of the Christians?'" (Miles Guevere 284). Her discomfort increases when she realizes Arthur also plans, without her, to take the child away for the baptism: "*I*, he said, not *we*. A chill crept round Guevere's heart. This was something that Arthur planned to do alone—to bring her child to an alien faith" (Miles Guevere 284).

Conflict arises once again when Arthur arranges against his wife's wishes to take their young son to a battle against the Saxons. Guevere begs, "'Arthur, this is not just a skirmish. . . Men fighting for their lives will fight to the death'" (Miles Guevere 302). The Christian king, who has increasingly left his wife out of any decision-making, uses her own beliefs to convince her that it is time that their child experiences war: "'You'd never say [no] if he'd been born a girl! . . . [she] would be practicing her swordplay now, not hanging around her nurse's knee reading books. . .'" (Miles Guevere 303). Guevere reluctantly agrees to let the boy go, and, as she feared, he is killed by an arrow, thus leaving Arthur without a legitimate heir.

Regardless whether Miles's Guevere enters her marriage eagerly or reluctantly, she does indeed come to love and respect her husband. Both Bradley and Miles present

an Arthur who loves his wife, and, though anxious for an heir, he does not reproach her for lack of one. Nevertheless, in both novels, the marriage weakens and events create a turning point which changes Guenevere to such an extent that the marriage never regains the vitality of its early years.

In The Mists of Avalon, Guenevere loves Lancelot before her marriage to Arthur is arranged. Arthur, for his part, has proclaimed that, because she was his first sexual partner, he will always love Morgaine: “. . . all my life I shall remember you because you were the first, and I shall always think of you and love you” (Bradley 201). Nonetheless, Guenevere and Arthur enter their marriage anticipating a successful and happy future. However, their marriage mirrors the discord occurring throughout their realm as the Christians gain power and impose their beliefs upon the citizens of Caerleon. Though fostered in a Christian court, Arthur respects the worship of the Goddess and participates in the pagan king-making ritual that signals to the “Old Ones” and the tribes that he will honor their beliefs. Furthermore, he vows to the Lady of the Lake that he will never forsake the Goddess: “. . . [I] will deal fairly with Druid as with Christian, and . . . [I] will be guided by the sacred magic of those who have set [me] on this throne” (Bradley 203). Unfortunately, Arthur’s Christian wife cannot tolerate any beliefs other than those taught to her by her priests: “She resented the unearthly word *Avalon*; it frightened her to think that Arthur was sworn to protect their heathenish ways” (Bradley 328). From the beginning of their marriage, she encourages Arthur to discontinue flying the Pendragon banner, representing the Old Gods, and carry only the flag of the cross. He refuses: “I have sworn my protection to Avalon” (Bradley 331). The stress caused by the friction over the banner continues to strain their marriage even after Arthur finally

yields to Guenevere's wishes. Even though her "heart [lifted] with a wild joy. . . [she] thought he looked very sad" (Bradley 393), and, when he smiled at Guenevere, "there was little gladness in the smile" (Bradley 394).

The need for an heir weighs heavily on his mind; he is adamant about not letting the kingdom fall into turmoil as it did when his father died before naming an heir. Even after he has named Lancelot's son, Galahad, as heir apparent, Arthur does not give up hope that Guenevere may still bear him a son. He tells her: "'You are not old, God may yet bless us with children if it is his will'" (Bradley 545). Though Arthur never reproaches her, Guenevere nevertheless feels the strain of her barrenness and admits: ". . . they could have been happy, could she only have felt free for one moment of the guilt of her childlessness" (Bradley 330).

It is neither her infertility nor what she believes as the pagan sorcery of Avalon that eventually causes Guenevere to openly rebel against her marriage. After her rape by Meleagant, she believes it is the Christian God that has failed her:

God did not reward me for virtue. . . . perhaps there is no God at all, nor any of the Gods people believe in. Perhaps it is all a great lie of the priests so that they may tell mankind what to do, what not to do, what to believe, give orders even to the King. (Bradley 519)

Guenevere decides that since neither God nor her husband rescued her from the devastating experience with Meleagant, she will not feel guilty being with the man who does save her. She makes love to Lancelot, then openly holds his hand as they leave the castle. Guenevere holds her head up "high with joy and gladness. This was her true love, and never again would she trouble herself to hide it from any man" (Bradley 519).

In contrast, Miles's Guenevere is blissfully in love with Arthur in Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country. He appears just in time for her to evade the pressure of marrying Malgaunt, and, with the blessing of the Lady of the Lake, she and Arthur eagerly wed and begin their new life as the High King and Queen. Arthur is a Christian king who accepts that many of his subjects still believe in the old ways, and, though Guenevere disagrees with his Christian beliefs, she concedes: "a good ruler should be King to all his people, not just a few" (Miles Guenevere 285).

Throughout Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country, Arthur experiences periods of weakness, either from battle wounds or mental anguish, when he must rely on his pagan queen's strength to rule the land: "'Do not ask me, the Queen will deal with this'. . . Kings and lords came and went, as did those seeking justice, and the poor and needy too, and Arthur sat by Guenevere's side to receive them, a noble shell" (Miles Guenevere 254). Guenevere, a queen in her own right, readily accepts the shared responsibility of ruling the kingdom. However, as the novel progresses and Arthur increasingly comes under the influence of the priests, Guenevere gradually becomes resentful as Arthur not only makes more and more decisions without her but totally discounts her objections.

The king's insistence on taking their son into battle is not only a tragedy that ends with the boy's death but also the beginning of a chain reaction that destroys the royal marriage: "' . . . tell the King, I never will forgive [Arthur for our son's death]. I will not look upon his face again'" (Miles Guenevere 310). Miles's Guenevere returns to Avalon, but is shocked when the Lady of the Lake tells her: "'Arthur turned to the Christians when you left him alone'" (Miles Guenevere 322). Later, Guenevere returns to Caerleon

ready to rekindle her love for Arthur only to find him in bed with his half-sister, Morgan. Though Arthur acknowledges that Morgan, the one-time nun, bewitched him into incest, he cannot forgive himself, and Guenevere watches as he “turned more and more to the black-hooded monks who padded around the chapel”(Miles Guenevere 348). Though Guenevere tries to be a wife to her husband, “The loving between them was dead. . . . Her body was closed to Arthur like her heart, and she could not force it open to him again” (Miles Guenevere 349).

The final blow to their marriage happens when it is learned that Morgan has given birth to Arthur’s son, and he commands the death of all newborn males. Despite Guenevere’s objections, the king carries through the infanticide, but Morgan and her son escape. Following the deaths of the newborns and Morgan’s escape, Guenevere “cursed [Arthur] in her heart and wished him dead” (Miles Guenevere 373). With her love for Arthur dissolved, Guenevere reciprocates the attention and affection of her handsome new knight, Lancelot.

Both Bradley and Miles present Guenevere as a young bride eager to love and please her husband. However, whether it is Arthur’s stubbornness which leads to his child’s death or his negligence in rescuing Guenevere from a rapist, it is ultimately Arthur’s betrayal in The Mists of Avalon and Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country that creates a turning point in their marriage. Once love and respect for her husband dissolves, Guenevere is able to legitimize and act upon her true feelings for Lancelot.

Chapter Four: True Lover

An important element in many versions of the traditional Arthurian legend is the adulterous relationship between Guenevere and Lancelot. Like Malory, Bradley and Miles both include the extramarital affair in their versions. In all three writers' work, Lancelot is characterized as the epitome of the noble knight sworn to the protection of his queen. Unfortunately, he becomes so helplessly besotted by her that he forsakes everything sacred and risks his reputation, his friendship with Arthur, and even his life in order to act upon his genuine love for her. However, unlike Malory, whose Guenevere is depicted as jealous, manipulative, and possessive throughout her decades-long affair with Lancelot, Bradley and Miles present the emotional roller coaster ride of an extremely conflicted Guenevere who struggles to reconcile her feelings for her lover and those for her husband whom she alternately loves, despises, and respects.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon and Rosalind Miles's Guenevere trilogy's first book, Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country, both begin with strong foreshadowing of the demise of the royal marriage. In her essay, "Recovering Malory's Guenevere," Sarah J. Hill points out that Malory's Merlin explicitly warns Arthur that Guenevere will commit adultery with Lancelot (Malory [1971] 59) (272), yet both Bradley and Miles prefer to build suspense through innuendo. Interestingly, the mere suggestion of potential discord encourages further character development of the female characters as it is the woman's perceptive intellect that reveals the disharmony surrounding the about-to-be married couple.

As stated previously, Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon is initially rescued as a young girl by Lancelot, and later, as a marriageable young woman, becomes quite enamored with him. However, her father puts his own ambitions above her wishes and negotiates her marriage to Arthur. Her submissive belief system as dictated by her Christian upbringing demands that she obey her father, and she reluctantly enters her marriage secretly in love with another man:

. . . suddenly she knew what it was she felt. In spite of her dutiful messages of love and obedience to Arthur, it seemed that she would sell her soul if time would only turn back and she could tell her father that she would marry no man but Lancelot. (Bradley 278)

Both Merlin and Igraine are aware that Lancelot may possibly play a role in undermining the monarchy. Merlin may not be aware of the exact nature of Lancelot's future actions; nevertheless, he is clearly concerned about the young knight's trustworthiness when he tells Arthur that Gawain is "More trusty even than Lancelot, Arthur, though it grieves me to say so. . . . Oh, yes, with your life you may trust him [Lancelot], I am sure. . . . I am not sure he will not break in the final test. . . ." (Bradley 262). Though Igraine has foresworn the "Sight," and does not necessarily foresee the future, she is aware of how Guenevere and Lancelot look at each other. Igraine realizes the two young people are in love and worries to herself:

Dear God! Uther looked so at me when I was Gorlois's wife—as if he were starving and I were food high out of his reach. . . . What can possibly come of it if they love each other? Lancelot is honorable, and

*Gwenhwyfar, I would swear, virtuous, so what can possibly come of it
except misery?* (Bradley 271)

Igraine witnesses “. . . the almost visible haze that seemed to hover between them [Guenevere and Lancelot], an aura of hunger and desire and longing” (Bradley 272), and wonders if there is an honorable way for Arthur to get out of the marriage contract. She takes her concerns to Merlin, who says that it would be impossible to cancel the wedding without offending Guenevere’s father, Leodegranz: ““Arthur cannot afford more enemies, and Leodegranz would be a bad one. He’d better marry the girl, and I think I would say the same even if he’d found her in bed with Lancelot—which he hasn’t and isn’t likely to”” (Bradley 279).

Indications of future marital disharmony are more subtle in Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country. The Lady of the Lake herself offers obtuse prophecies to Guenevere:

We have many lives to live, and women may dance more than once in the
course of their days. One man alone cannot make all the music of the
world. . . . Ahead for you there lies a great and mighty love – a love you
do not hope for – cannot dream – . (Miles Guenevere 134)

Guenevere misinterprets this revelation as a sign that it is Arthur who will become her true love. Later, intermittent shadows of feeling briefly interrupt her happy musings about the future. When she and Arthur are optimistically discussing their future, “. . . something caught around her heart. She could feel the cold wind of death and the breath of sudden loss, but of what, she did not know” (Miles Guenevere 137). Later, Arthur

swears his love to her on the eve of their wedding: “But as he spoke, a gust of air brushed her cheek, and she heard the shadow of a sigh” (Miles Guevere 168).

More blatant warnings are given by Merlin. Unlike Merlin in The Mists of Avalon, who believes it politically impossible to stop the wedding, Miles’s Merlin tries desperately to prevent it. He tells Arthur that Guevere is already betrothed, and, when that scheme fails, he provides an unmistakable warning: ““When you take her [Guevere] as your wife, you put your life at the mercy of this queen. And she will have no mercy.”” Later, he continues: ““But she will be faithless to the marriage bed. She will betray you with one of your own knights”” (Miles Guevere 157, 158).

Regardless of the dire warnings and intuitive feelings, the novels’ characters cannot alter the fate of the lovers. Tradition demands that Guevere marry Arthur and engage in an adulterous affair with Sir Lancelot. The circumstances leading up to their first intimate encounter vary dramatically between Bradley and Miles; nevertheless, pagan or Christian, the union does occur and Guevere, Arthur, and Lancelot must all live with the consequences of the affair.

Keeping with tradition, both Bradley and Miles present a Guevere and Lancelot who step beyond the boundaries of courtly love into the realm of true love. L. Kip Wheeler writes that Barbara Tuchman discusses the convention of courtly love in her book, A Distant Mirror. Wheeler claims that Tuchman describes courtly love as an idealized love which, because it is not based on material gain or family empowerment, transcends the marriage union as a purer love (Wheeler). According to Wheeler, Tuchman suggests that courtly love, though it usually resulted in a tragic denouement, progressed through several stages including initial worship, declaration of devotion,

rejection by the lady, renewed wooing, and many heroic deeds and adventures. Love was rarely consummated because of the married status of the woman (Wheeler). However, if the lovers give in to their all-consuming passion and embark on a sexual union, the status of their relationship advances to that of true love as they jeopardize everything.

Guenevere, in The Mists of Avalon, is in love with Lancelot even as she declares her vows of fidelity to Arthur. Locked in her marriage, she spends several years fantasizing about making love to Lancelot, an act that can never be realized if she obeys the laws of her church. Yet her love reveals itself whenever she gazes upon the face of Lancelot, whose face also betrays his feelings, “. . . [Gwenhwyfar] could not help it, she was bound as if on a string by Lancelet’s eyes . . . and Lancelet was looking at Gwenhwyfar as a hungry dog looks at a dripping bone” (Bradley 285). Other than furtive glances and Lancelot’s public and respectful kisses upon her hand, their relationship, keeping within the bounds of a Christian court, remains chaste. Knowing they must never be together, Guenevere nevertheless feels “a pain within her breast” (Bradley 315) when she remembers Arthur suggesting marriage to Lancelot, who declared he would never marry because “*My heart is so full of my queen I have no room there for any other lady*” (Bradley 315).

Yet, for all their good intentions, Guenevere and Lancelot’s resolve begins to crumble during the aftermath of Arthur’s illness. “In these months of Arthur’s illness, it seemed he [Lancelot] had been ever at her side, and such a rock of strength to her that she knew not what she would have done without him” and, when it looks as though Arthur may die, Guenevere thinks:

He [Lancelot] is Arthur's cousin, even as Gawain. He stands as near to the throne, the son of Igraine's own sister; if aught came to Arthur, then would he be as much a king as we have need of. . . . in the old days the king was naught but the husband of the queen (Bradley 330)

Ashamed of her secret musings, Guenevere immediately dismisses them and is shocked when the recovering Arthur suggests the unmentionable; he gives her permission to have sexual relations with Lancelot in a grand scheme to get her pregnant as both men simultaneously share her bed (Bradley 334).

Though Arthur misinterprets Guenevere's weeping as a sign that she prefers to remain a chaste wife, he has indeed given his wife the key that unlocks the door of emotion that she has so long struggled to repress. The Christian Guenevere is riddled with self-doubt about what she should do. She is terrified of the possibility of Lancelot's rejection, or the shame she would feel if she dared to discuss it with a priest. While deciding what to do, she resolves to give the appearance of "a good and virtuous queen and a Christian woman – she could never even think of being anything else" (Bradley 336). Yet, as Lancelot prepares for battle, "she flung her arms around him. . . . It was the first time she had had courage to do such a thing. She stood pressed against him, holding her face against his shoulder, and his arms went around her" (Bradley 372). With Arthur's permission to take Lancelot as a lover, she begins to justify the act in her mind: ". . . yet it was written that the Christ had said himself, *whoever looks upon a woman with lust has committed adultery already with her in his heart* . . . so she had sinned with Lancelot, and there was no mitigation, they were both [already] damned" (Bradley 428).

Perhaps sensing Guenevere's newly-kindled availability, Lancelot asks her to leave Camelot with him and go to his estate in Brittany: “. . . Would you come with me away from this court? I—I know not, perhaps it would be the more honorable way, than stay here at Arthur's court and make love to his wife” (Bradley 432). After so many years of desperate longing, Guenevere finally has confirmation of Lancelot's feelings: “*He loves me, . . . he wants me, this is the honorable way*” (Bradley 433). He points out that they could never return to Britain and would most likely be excommunicated from the Church. As the son of the Lady of the Lake, Lancelot has little concern about the Church: “. . . I am not so much a Christian as all that” (Bradley 433). Nevertheless, he is concerned about the spiritual well-being of Guenevere, who points out that because of their lustful thoughts they have already sinned. Lancelot acknowledges:

. . . we have had all the evil and the guilt, and none of the pleasure which is said to come from sin. And I am not so sure I believe the priests—what sort of God goes about every night like a night watchman, peeping here and prying there like an old village gossip to see if any man beds with his neighbor's wife—. (Bradley 433)

Guenevere acquiesces: “. . . it seems to me sensible, and then again I wonder if it is the Devil's work to lead me into evil. . .” (Bradley 433). Lancelot urges: “We have paid for sin already. . . ,” and, at last, “Gwenhwyfar let herself surrender to the kiss, his eager hands searching at her breast” (Bradley 433). But, just as they are about to succumb to their love, a messenger arrives, and they must reluctantly separate.

When the inevitable consummation of their love occurs, it is hardly the romantic liaison fantasized by either Guenevere or Lancelot. It, in fact, takes place following a

drunken dinner hosted by Arthur and Guenevere. Guenevere is distressed that many of their subjects still practice the sexual rituals practiced on the eve of the pagan Beltane. In an effort to ease her mind, Arthur agrees to give a party that will entice the people to the castle rather than the fires. Ironically, in her endeavor to Christianize the people, Guenevere participates in her own version of Beltane-eve. Lancelot accompanies the intoxicated Arthur and Guenevere to their room; but, as the knight turns to leave, Arthur repeats the request he once offered Guenevere:

There is an old saying among the Saxons, a friend is one to whom you will
lend your favorite wife and your favorite sword. . . . A son of yours,
Lance, would be heir to my kingdom, and better that than it should go to
Lot's sons. . . . (Bradley 448)

As he sees the conflict and desire cross his cousin's and wife's faces, Arthur justifies his request by the old pagan practices: "For many hundreds of years, our forefathers have done these things without shame, in the very faces of our Gods and by their will" (Bradley 44). Within minutes, Guenevere finds herself in the arms of the two men she loved:

It seemed that the whole world had dwindled down to this, this perfect
awareness of herself, of her own body aching with desire, a hunger she
had never believed she could feel. . . . Ah, but she loved them both,
loved Arthur all the more that he could be generous enough to give her
this . . . they were both holding her now, and she closed her eyes and put
up her face to be kissed, not knowing for certain which man's lips closed
over hers. (Bradley 449)

Unlike Bradley's Guenevere, whose love for the gallant knight precedes her marriage to Arthur, Miles's Guenevere does not acknowledge an attraction to Lancelot until after her love for the king has begun to wane. However, though she tries mightily to dismiss her feelings, once the passion for the young knight is ignited, it cannot be ignored.

Guenevere's dilemma in Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country is quite different from that of Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon who, as a Christian queen fostered at a convent, believes she must at all costs remain faithful to her husband. Guenevere in the trilogy, however, was raised by her mother's kindred and observed her mother choose a different lover every seven years. Nevertheless, she fancies Arthur as the love of her life and promises to be faithful to him always: "Let us make the sacred marriage then, not as our mothers made it, changing with the years, but in a new mating, to become forever the mother and the father of this land!" (Miles Guenevere 137).

Yet legend suggests that Guenevere and Lancelot fall in love. Miles's Arthur's order to kill all newborn males following his incestuous coupling with his sister-in-law is also the death blow to Guenevere's waning love for the man she once thought she would love forever. Lancelot introduces himself during this vulnerable turning point in Guenevere's marriage, and her attraction for him is instantaneous: "It was all she could do not to say, 'Hush, my love.' She placed her finger on his lips. 'I know who you are'" (Miles Guenevere 361). As their lovesick preoccupation with one another escalates, they become the epitome of courtly love, which "decreed that the queen of a knight's heart should be a woman he could never possess" (Miles Guenevere 367). Determined to honor her vow of wifely chastity, Guenevere is in a state of constant turmoil as she

wrestles with her growing feelings for Lancelot: “. . . *Guenevere, use your mind! You're a married woman, married to a man who can still move your heart. . . . That is love, not some madness born on a night in summer when the fireflies dance in a stranger's eyes . . .*” (Miles Guenevere 365).

Unlike the Gueneveres in Morte D'Arthur and The Mists of Avalon who stubbornly keep Lancelot close at hand and jealously discourage any marital opportunities for him, Miles's Guenevere intentionally sends Lancelot away so she can sort out her unsolicited feelings of love. However, the lovers are powerless against the destiny that once again brings them together when he rescues her from the dreaded Malgaunt, who abducted her in an effort to take control of the kingdom: “She had fled like a child from the fear of Lancelot's love. But the force of fate had drawn him here, and her love for Arthur lay in ruins now” (Miles Guenevere 416).

Guenevere and Lancelot cross the threshold of true consummated love when the gallant knight climbs through the window bars into her bed chamber. After their lovemaking, Lancelot feels remorse and dishonor: ““Loving you as my lady is permitted in chivalry—but lying with my lord's wife is a forbidden sin!”” (Miles Guenevere 437). However, Guenevere assures him their love is sanctioned: ““True lovers will risk everything for love. So they gain more than they lose, by becoming better than they were”” (Miles Guenevere 438).

Acknowledging true love does not come easily to Guenevere in The Mists of Avalon. She engages in sexual relations many times with Lancelot, and she does so initially “with her husband's own will and permission” (Bradley 448). In a sense, though she willingly makes love to Lancelot, Guenevere can justify her actions as the wishes of

her husband who wants an heir for his kingdom. Like Guenevere in Miles's trilogy, it is Guenevere's abduction by Meleagant that propels Guenevere and Lancelot further into true love. Lancelot rescues Guenevere following her brutal rape by Meleagant. For Guenevere, this event becomes the turning point in her marriage:

Arthur had not protected her from ravishment. . . . It had been by Arthur's doing that she had first lain with Lancelot, and now she would do what she would. . . . This [Lancelot] was her true love, and never again would she trouble herself to hide it from any man. (Bradley 519)

Though no longer afraid to hide her feelings towards Lancelot, Guenevere is still tormented by guilt. However, it is not her unabashed love for Lancelot that troubles her; she fears the repercussions of the rape, specifically Arthur's reaction to it. Her sister-in-law, Morgaine, reminds the queen that it is not her fault that she was raped, and Arthur has no right to blame her. Even so, Guenevere is a Christian who was taught that she, as a descendant of Eve, is responsible for man's temptation to sin. Observing the Queen, Morgaine envisions:

the voice of a priest speaking to the trembling Gwenhwyfar . . . saying that no woman was ever ravished save she had tempted some man to it, as Eve led our first father Adam into sin; that the Holy Virgin martyrs of Rome had willingly died rather than lay down their chastity. . . it was *this* made Gwenhwyfar tremble. (Bradley 527)

Morgaine realizes that Guenevere truly believes the rape is her own fault and that, because of it, Arthur has every right to kill her. Morgaine further suspects: "*she*

[Guenevere] *feels this guilt over Meleagrant so that she need feel none for what she has done with Lancelot. . . .*” (Bradley 527).

Guenevere in Miles’s trilogy also feels guilt after she and Lancelot consummate their love. Whereas the guilt in The Mists of Avalon is created by Christian rules of conduct, the guilt in Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country is based more on honor as Guenevere feels remorse over the broken vow to her husband: “Deceiving Arthur was a daily ache” because, as she explains to her maid: ““When I married Arthur, I promised him that I would not take another chosen one”” (Miles Guenevere 452, 453). Yet, even though the Christians are gaining strength in Arthur’s Middle Kingdom, and her love could be viewed as treason, Guenevere still hotly defends the Mother-right. She consistently defends her beliefs. In Miles’s second novel in her trilogy, Knight of the Sacred Lake, Guenevere argues with her sister-in-law, Morgause, who has a secret young lover: ““You’re a ruling queen, and free to choose for yourself. You have no husband to lay claim to your body, as the Christians do”” (Miles Knight 59). Nevertheless, Guenevere still regrets her broken vow of fidelity to Arthur and desperately wishes for a resolution to the conflict between what she believes is her right to lie with Lancelot and the Christian ethic which considers it a traitorous act not only to her husband but to God.

In many versions of the legend, at some point Guenevere and Lancelot temporarily separate following their lovemaking. In Malory’s Morte D’Arthur, Lancelot sets out upon his quest for the Holy Grail. Interestingly, neither Bradley nor Miles uses the Grail quest as cause for the lovers’ separation. Both authors, with their focus on the female character, prefer the women, rather than the priests or other male characters, to create motivation for Lancelot’s initial departure.

In The Mists of Avalon, it is Guenevere's sister-in-law, Morgaine, who sets the events in motion that cause Lancelot to leave. Observing his frequent visits to Guenevere's bedchamber, Morgaine is well aware of the couple's amorous activities. As rumors spread throughout the court, she worries about the effects upon her brother, King Arthur: "I would not see shame brought upon him, as soon or late it must be" (Bradley 523-24). Later she resolves: "But if Lancelet were gone from the court, then would the scandal be quieted" (Bradley 528). She suggests as much to Lancelot who reluctantly agrees. As he prepares to leave, Guenevere is light and friendly, but, underneath the cool demeanor, she "was fighting rage and despair" (Bradley 533). It is while he is away that Morgaine prepares a potion that tricks him into his marriage to Guenevere's cousin, Elaine. Because of the marriage to Elaine, who eventually dies during childbirth, Guenevere and Lancelot are separated for many years with only an occasional visit during which time Lancelot "spoke as courtier to his queen, not as lover to lover" (Bradley 628). Throughout this long separation, though the speculative gossip about the queen and Lancelot continues to drift among the members of the court, Guenevere devotes herself to becoming the perfect example of Christian piety. However, after his return following the Grail quest, the two resume their affair.

Likewise, in Miles's trilogy, Guenevere is separated from Lancelot, and, similar to Bradley's portrayal, it is a woman who motivates the action. In Malory's Morte D'Arthur, it is the Christian Lancelot who must, in order to save his soul from further sin, vow never again to be with the queen. However, it is Miles's pagan Guenevere who, in her guilt over her infidelity to Arthur, decides that Lancelot must go away. She comes

to this realization during a tournament when Arthur is seriously wounded. As he lays in a coma-state, she worries over him and laments their lost love:

Arthur, you were my husband, my first love, the father of my child. . . . you were my partner in the springtime of our love. How did that fail? How did our love grow cold? And why did I punish you by taking another man? . . . Forgive me, Arthur, . . . Forgive me and love me again.

(Miles Guenevere 478)

In her sadness, guilt, and desperation, Guenevere turns to the Goddess in prayer, asking for Arthur's recovery. During her prayer, she bargains: "*And in return, I will send Lancelot away, and lie with him no more*" (Miles Guenevere 479). And so, Guenevere tearfully bids farewell to her love, who assures her that "'Wherever I go, you will be always there. And wherever you go, my prayers will be there before. What we have between us is stronger than life, older than fate or time'" (Miles Guenevere 481). She asks where he will go and he promises that, though he must leave now, he will return to her: "'If the quest leads to the ends of the earth and beyond, I shall return'" (Guenevere 482).

Shortly after the last parting of Guenevere and Lancelot, Arthur awakes from his coma. Remembering his responsibility for the death of their son and his sexual encounter with his half-sister, Morgan, Arthur offers to release Guenevere from their marriage:

"'In your country queens may change their consorts when they need a better man. Even in mine, a king may live alone, I will do whatever you want that will make you happy now'" (Miles Guenevere 487). Remembering her bargain with the Goddess, Guenevere convinces Arthur that she does not want to be alone. Though Guenevere does not confess

her love for Lancelot, she does admit to Arthur that she shares responsibility in the failure of their marriage: *“So Arthur and I are one. Both of us have suffered the cruel loss of love. We share a common currency of pain. We can help each other through the times ahead”* (Miles Guevere 497).

Guevere and Lancelot separate, but, unlike Bradley’s lovers who part for many years with only brief, platonic visits, the two reunite within a year. In Miles’s Knight of the Sacred Lake, Lancelot returns to France where he visits his foster-mother, the Lady of the Lake. There, he sees a vision of Arthur receiving yet another near-fatal wound and rushes back to England to help rally the king. Within days, Lancelot finds himself in the arms of Guevere, who is helpless in honoring her promise of marital fidelity to the Goddess: *“Lies and deceit, a picture of false innocence. . . . Goddess, Mother, forgive the woman I have become”* (Miles Knight 190).

When Arthur and his knights nearly catch the two lovers in the queen’s bed, Guevere assures Lancelot that *“Our love is above the honor code of men”* (Miles Knight 200). Nevertheless, she tells him that he must leave for Arthur’s sake. Later, as she jealously envisions him making love to beautiful young maidens, she watches Lancelot ride away. While he is away, the broken hearted Guevere struggles to maintain the façade of a harmonious royal marriage.

In Miles’s version, Guevere has only intermittent visits from Lancelot for more than ten years. Though many of their separations are preceded by Guevere’s jealous accusations, Lancelot always returns to Arthur’s court and Guevere’s bed. While away, Lancelot participates in many adventures, and he is also tricked into fathering the son of Elaine of Corbenic, who is unsuccessful in her attempt to gain his love. Jealous at

first, Guenevere eventually believes Lancelot was duped, and upon his return from accompanying his son, Galahad, on the Grail quest, the two rekindle their love affair.

In The Mists of Avalon and Miles's The Child of the Holy Grail, Guenevere and Lancelot progress through all the stages of courtly love and cross the threshold of true love when they consummate their love. Though they experience several separations, it is the final reunion in both books when the true lovers, Guenevere and Lancelot, once again resume their adulterous activities that lead to dire consequences. The sexual activities of the true lovers not only endanger themselves but also the realm by providing those vying for power within the kingdom a means to attempt an overthrow of Arthur's court.

Chapter Five: Discovery

Throughout the years of Guenevere and Arthur's marriage, the Christian religion and its priests gained increasing power within the kingdom. In both Bradley and Miles, Arthur is raised as a Christian who anticipates an entirely Christianized England. Nevertheless, he is clearly sympathetic to those who continue worshipping the Goddess. In The Mists of Avalon, he even participates in the pagan king-making rites and swears to the Lady of the Lake that he will continue to carry the banner of Avalon. In Miles's Guenevere: Queen of the Summer Country, the Christian Arthur accompanies Guenevere to receive blessing from the Lady of the Lake where once again Arthur swears to uphold the sanctity of the Goddess. Though Arthur in both versions intends to honor his promise to the Goddess, he fails to do so as he succumbs to the overwhelming Christian influence within his inner circle. By betraying the Goddess, Arthur weakens the foundation of his government, enabling his son Mordred to attempt an overthrow. In a land that once honored a woman's right to choose her own lover, Mordred uses Guenevere's well-known adulterous relationship with Lancelot as the catalyst that permits him to garner the Christian power for his own purposes.

In The Mists of Avalon, the Christian Guenevere devotes her life to ridding Arthur's court of all pagan influences. This becomes an obsession as month after month her barrenness appears to be a permanent condition. Eventually, she views this affliction as punishment from God for Arthur's continued loyalty to the Lady of the Lake. In the aftermath of a miscarriage, a mournful Guenevere finally convinces Arthur that he must give up the banner of Avalon:

Arthur, listen to me—do you think, could it not be, God has punished us because he feels we are not fit to give this kingdom another king, you and I, unless we will vow ourselves to serve him faithfully, not in pagan ways but in the new way under Christ? All forces of pagan evil are allied against us, and we must fight it with the cross. . . . God will not let you ride forth into battle believing that any son of yours shall rule this land, because you have not yet resolved to make this a Christian Land. . . .
(Bradley 392-93)

Arthur tells Guenevere that he does not believe God would punish them because of a banner, yet unnerved by her acute distress, he agrees to put away the banner of Avalon and henceforth carry only the banner of Christ. Guenevere, “her heart lifting with a wild joy” (Bradley 393) at her husband’s gesture of love, nevertheless observes that “he looked very sad” (Bradley 393) as he prepares to put away the banner of Avalon.

Thus, in her efforts to Christianize Arthur’s kingdom, Guenevere disrupts the balance of the two religions that so far have managed to coexist, therefore weakening the foundation of the court. Trouble arises within hours of the Pendragon banner’s retirement. The non-Christian tribes balk at following a king who no longer visually supports their beliefs. King Lot tells Arthur:

The Pendragon banner we pledged ourselves to follow, it flies no more over the camp, and there is great unrest among the Tribes. . . . The archers of Avalon are talking of leaving you, Arthur . . . raise the Pendragon banner at its [the banner of Christ’s] side with the serpents of wisdom, or

you will see your men scattered and not all of one heart . . . don't take
away their banner and their allegiance like this! (Bradley 395)

Lancelot, as Viviane's son, is loyal to Avalon and offers to carry its banner, enabling Arthur to honor both his promise to Guenevere and his promise to the Lady of the Lake. However, King Lot points out that these two banners will create conflict between the Christians who will follow the banner of Christ and the others who will follow Lancelot's banner of Avalon. Arthur agrees with Lot and tells Lancelot: "We must fight under *one* standard, and that standard is the cross" (Bradley 396). Lancelot angrily accepts Arthur's decision, but, during their dinner, Guenevere notices that Lancelot's eyes, as she had observed earlier of her sad husband, were "filled with sorrow and dread" (Bradley 397).

While once the Saxons posed the greatest threat to Arthur, now conflict abounds within his own country as those loyal to Avalon and the old ways seek to regain recognition. Viviane, the Lady of the Lake, makes the long journey to remind Arthur of his pledge to Avalon and to request the return of the sword, Excalibur. Before she can speak, she is slain by a revengeful Christian. Arthur's own sister, Morgaine, plots to overthrow her brother and place her lover, Accolon, upon the throne. Her plan is thwarted when Arthur kills Accolon.

Trained in Avalon to become a priest, Arthur's son, Mordred, believes it is paramount that the High King openly acknowledges the power of the Goddess. As each plan fails to topple Arthur from the throne, Mordred takes measures into his own hands. When Arthur breaks his pledge of support, Avalon becomes a target for ransacking Saxons. Mordred observes the invaders "think little of any king who is a cuckold, who

cannot rule his women” (Bradley 850), though he admits, ““By Avalon’s laws, Gwenhwyfar has done no more than is right—the lady shall choose who she will for her consort, and Arthur should be overthrown by Lancelot!”” However, he further states, ““that day is done . . . now the movement of men and armies settles things. . . .The world now . . . is not one of Goddesses, but of Gods, perhaps of one God”” (Bradley 851).

In this new, increasingly-Christian world, it is the son who inherits the throne. Mordred, the young man trained to be a priest of Avalon, uses the new Christian way of doing things to his own advantage. He says: ““I mean to be High King after Arthur—and to do that, I must keep the glory of Arthur’s court at full height. So Lancelet must go, which means that Arthur must be forced to banish him, and probably Gwenhwyfar as well”” (Bradley 851). Accordingly, Mordred devises a plan which he hopes will result in the removal of Lancelot and Guenevere, clearing the way for him to inherit Arthur’s throne.

Christians are also gaining strength in Miles’s trilogy where the Christian clerics are active participants in the story line. Their presence is negatively depicted as a variety of devious plots are revealed, one of which results in building churches on the holy island of Avalon with an eye toward Christianizing Guenevere’s Summer Country while undermining her rule. Even the Christian convent is tainted; it is the masochistic Abbess’s brutality that transforms Morgan, who was thought to be destined to become a high priestess of Avalon, into a medium of hatred and evil.

Miles’s Arthur becomes little more than a pawn used by the priests to infiltrate the land. Guenevere is horrified when Arthur gives permission for a Christian church to be built on Avalon:

Avalon is mine, Arthur. . . . It is the heart of my kingdom, and was never yours to give away. You have broken the vow you made when you swore to be mine. You promised then to defend the Mother and Her worship, and now you join with the Christians to root it out. You have betrayed me, you have condemned the Lady and her Maidens to the hands of men who hate. . . . (Miles Child 256)

Guenevere storms away from Arthur vowing to leave for Avalon, never to return to him. Her anger and ranting is observed by King Lot's son, Agravain, who muses that such behavior is not good for a queen: "let alone the consort to a King like Arthur, so much in need of advice and guidance" (Miles Child 258). Arthur's decline in leadership ability causes even a veteran knight to remember the old days and muse: "Now the King was hag-ridden by his priests, and Christians were everywhere around the throne. . . . if only they could have a real king again—" (Miles Child 275-76).

As in The Mists of Avalon, Miles's Mordred is the son of Morgan and Arthur. However, unlike Bradley's Mordred, who was fostered by a loving though ambitious Morgause, Miles's Mordred's childhood is one of seclusion and loneliness. However, once he finally arrives at Arthur's court, he is readily received and acknowledged as Arthur's son, Prince Mordred. When, after ten years, Arthur has not recognized Mordred as the next heir to the throne, the prince becomes increasingly bitter. This bitterness becomes a simmering rage when Arthur's nephew, Agravain, instigates further doubt: "In the old world, lords, a sister's son was held to be a man's closest kin, closer indeed than the child of his own loins. . . . Our mother was Arthur's elder sister . . . To many here, Gawain is the King's rightful heir" (Miles Child 230). Mordred is also Arthur's

sister's son, but to claim the throne based on Mother-right, he would have to disclose his parents' incestuous relationship, a sinful union that would never be accepted by the Christians. To become king, Mordred realizes he must have the support of the priests; therefore, "He had no choice but to stand as Arthur's son" (Miles Child 230).

Agravain brings news of Guenevere and Lancelot's affair to Mordred who, though initially startled at the revelation, responds with indifference: "The king's caught up with his monks. . . . The queen wants company'" (Miles Child 301). Later, Mordred's impatience to be publicly acknowledged as Arthur's heir overrides his apathy, and he agrees with Agravain to catch the trysting lovers: "With Lancelot disgraced and Guenevere destroyed, Arthur would be his and his alone. Once Arthur was his, then the kingdom would be his, King Mordred would become a clear reality, not a distant hope" (Miles Child 301).

Thus, in Bradley's Mists of Avalon and Miles's Child of the Holy Grail, Guenevere is disgraced at the hands of Mordred, who uses the power of Christianity to bring him closer to achieving his royal ambition – a goal that might have been realized without exposing a scandal. Ironically, though their affair has been public knowledge for decades, it is as it is about to end that Guenevere and Lancelot are discovered in her bedchamber. By the time of their discovery in The Mists of Avalon, Guenevere and Lancelot rarely engage in sexual relations; they behave more like comforting old friends: "It was not his body she desired. . . . Seldom, indeed, had he ever taken her in that way which was sin and dishonor" (Bradley 854). In fact, after hearing the priest's sermon on adultery, Guenevere decides before Lancelot arrives and they are ensnared in Mordred's

trap that she must no longer see Lancelot: “Christ had said to the woman, *Go and sin no more*. And that was what she must do . . .” (Bradley 854).

On the night of their discovery, Miles’s Guenevere and Lancelot also plan to enjoy one last night of passion before permanently ending their affair. Lancelot receives a warning not to visit the queen, and, realizing that they are indeed on the brink of exposure, tells Guenevere that he must return to his own kingdom: ““But lady, this love of ours is endangering you. We have been too happy”” (Miles Child 307). Though Guenevere is devastated, she understands that this will be their last night together: “Tomorrow he would leave. So this night was to be their last for a lifetime apart” (Miles Child 309).

Both Bradley’s and Miles’s discovery scenarios loosely resemble Malory’s Morte D’Arthur where Agravaing and Mordred set the trap which leads to the discovery of Guenevere and Lancelot by a bevy of knights. It is the public announcement of the discovery that ultimately causes the damage to the throne, and it occurs in all three versions. In Malory, Mordred and Agravaing arrive with twelve knights and Mordred shouts loudly for all the court to hear: ““Thou traytoure, sir Launcelot, now are thou takyn!’ And thus they cryed with a lowed voice, that all the courte might hyre hit” (Malory 676). Miles’s spies also arrive in a raucous manner: “The room was bursting with the thunderous pounding on the door. *Bang, bang, bang!* Traitor knight, Sir Lancelot, give yourself up!” (Miles Child 310). Bradley chooses a quieter approach as Mordred surprises Guenevere in her bedchamber before the arrival of Lancelot; however, he brings several knights with him to witness the inevitable rendezvous with Lancelot: “Gwenhwyfar felt the pricking of the knife at her throat. . . . She could hear small

noises—the rustle of garments, the clink of weapons hurriedly muffled; how many men had he brought to this ambush?” (Bradley 855).

This very public discovery is ultimately Arthur’s and the lovers’ dilemma, as Angela Gibson points out in her essay, “Malory’s Reformulation of Shame.” Gibson believes that the society in Malory’s Morte D’Arthur, and this idea can also be argued for both Bradley and Miles, “values the public display of loyalties and only minimally acknowledges guilt and inner life” (64). Gibson further writes that the characters’ concern is “more on the problem of exposure, less on the fact of adultery or faithlessness” (64).

The complications created by exposure, rather than merely by the adultery, is illustrated in both twentieth century versions as well as in Malory. In her “Introduction” to Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook, Lori J. Walters suggests that in Malory, Arthur is less concerned with the adultery than with the inevitable breakup of the Round Table knights (xxx). In Morte D’Arthur, when the plot to reveal Guenevere and Lancelot is presented to the king, Malory describes Arthur’s thoughts, “. . . for sir Launcelot had done so much for hym and for the queen so many tymes that wyte you well thekngge loved hym passyngly well” (Malory 674). When he is told of Guenevere’s capture and Lancelot’s escape, Arthur responds, “. . . me sore repentith that ever sir Launcelot sholde be ayenste me, for now I am sure the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table ys brokyn for ever, for with hym woll many a noble knight holde” (Malory 683).

Bradley’s Arthur is also less concerned with the adultery. It is, after all, Arthur who arranges the first sexual encounter between his wife and his best friend. The king is most concerned with the future of England, and he is clearly in love with Guenevere; a

liaison with Lancelot could possibly result in an heir and also bring the Queen some happiness: “. . . it seemed to me that you loved Lancelet well . . . I thought to give you pleasure” (Bradley 546). The court is well aware of the affair as well. When Mordred begins planning to reveal the scandal, Gareth hesitates to be involved: ““But while Arthur does not speak, I will hold my tongue. . . . All men have known for years that he [Lancelot] has been her champion—”” (Bradley 847). When Mordred asks if Gawain had ever discussed the affair with Arthur, the faithful knight’s response indicates the king’s awareness of Guenevere and Lancelot’s intimate relationship: ““He said that the Queen was above my criticism, and whatever she chose to do was well done. He was courteous, but I could tell that he knew what I was saying and was warning me not to interfere”” (Bradley 847). Nevertheless, both Gareth and Gawain accompany Mordred in his mission to catch Lancelot and Guenevere together.

In Miles’s trilogy, Arthur gradually succumbs to madness as the guilt over the incest with his half sister and his role in the death of his son render him vulnerable to the influence of the priests. Throughout their marriage, Arthur intermittently offers Guenevere the option of leaving their marriage; however, for the welfare of the kingdom, she routinely refuses his offer. Arthur is apparently oblivious to Guenevere and Lancelot’s many clandestine meetings, though the affair is well-known throughout the realm. When it is first brought to Mordred’s attention, the prince is unconcerned: ““She’s the Queen, he’s her knight, it’s the way of the court”” (Miles Child 301). However, once he realizes that a public discovery would work to his advantage, Mordred quickly arranges the trap that will bring the affair out in the open; therefore, the nearly demented Christian Arthur has no choice but to declare the lovers as traitors and agree to burn

Guevere as an adulteress and a witch. As in Malory, Miles's Arthur appears more devastated about the dissolution of the Round Table than the loss of his wife's love: "“Oh, woman,’ he howled, ‘what have you done? You have scattered the knights of the Table far and wide! You have destroyed the work of my entire life’” (Miles Child 333).

As in Malory, Guevere in both Bradley and Miles, with the assistance of Lancelot, escapes imminent death. In The Mists of Avalon, Lancelot grabs Guevere as he fights their way through the bevy of knights waiting outside the bedchamber door. In Miles's The Child of the Holy Grail, Guevere, in order to save Lancelot's life, orders him to escape if he can and let her face her fate. Arthur, through the advice of the priests, orders Guevere to be burned at the stake. Just as she is succumbing to the smoke, Lancelot, as in Malory, rescues her, and they ride away.

In both Bradley and Miles, Guevere decides that she and Lancelot must not remain together. Bradley's Guevere realizes that the bloodshed spent during their escape would forever taint their union: "He [Lancelot] would love her still, but he would never forget by whose blood he had come to possess her. . . . She knew, for the first time, that she was stronger than he, and it cut at her heart with a deathly sword" (Bradley 862). Guevere returns to the convent where she once fostered as a child. Though she now feels trapped by the surrounding walls that once made her feel so safe, she finds comfort in the act of sacrificing her love:

When I had freedom, she thought, I desired it not, and feared it. And now, when I have learned to love it and long for it, I am renouncing it in the name of my love. Dimly she felt this was right—the acceptable gift and a sacrifice to bring before God. . . . For my love. And for the love of God,

she thought, and felt a small seed of comfort stealing through her.

(Bradley 864)

Miles's Guenevere also decides to live separately from her true love, Lancelot. Even though Arthur has returned to Avalon, she remains as High Queen, and it is her responsibility to lead the country:

I cannot go with you. . . . Arthur may sleep in Avalon in eternal peace.

But he has left two shattered kingdoms crying to be restored. . . . All the world knows that Arthur is in Avalon—that he is not dead but sleeping till he comes again. How will it be if I am living here in open adultery with his knight—his friend? (Miles Child 457)

After Lancelot's departure, Guenevere, in a startling break from tradition, discovers that she is pregnant and gives birth to Lancelot's daughter whom she names "*Maire Macha, Battle Raven, after her mother's mother in the line of Queens*" (Miles Child 463).

Thereafter, every year during Beltane, Guenevere visits Lancelot's kingdom where they renew their love.

Though both Gueneveres decide to live separately from Lancelot, they choose to do so for different reasons. Bradley's Christian Guenevere bases her decision on guilt and sacrifice. She feels she must make amends for the years of adultery with Lancelot and the bloodshed resulting from their escape. Miles's pagan Guenevere turns away from Lancelot, because she believes her first responsibility is to her land and kingdom. The Queen convinces her people that Arthur is merely sleeping in Avalon, and living openly with Lancelot would contradict the notion that she believes her husband will return.

By choosing not to live with the man they have loved for so many years, both Gueneveres demonstrate an incredible strength that supercedes their own desires. The Christian Guenevere, who once had little control over life, now has the confidence to choose the path of her remaining years. The pagan Guenevere, born to be queen, is now able to put aside her own desires in order to best rule her kingdom.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In their versions of the Arthurian legend, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Rosalind Miles present a pagan medieval society evolving into a predominantly Christian culture. Societal changes of such enormity were bound to affect the general population: this is depicted in the chaos created once Arthur yields to priestly influence. However, both authors choose to develop the religious conflict through the perspective of the female characters who, regardless of their religious stance, manage to prevail in the wake of the upheaval following the adulterous discovery.

Ironically, in a land that is increasingly Christianized and full of priests who celebrate the superiority of men and abhor women as the bearers of Eve's original sin, it is the women who survive the religious transition. As the Goddess belief system gradually fades into the mists, some men seek the new Christianity as a way to advance greedy agendas. Though Bradley and Miles portray Arthur and Lancelot as men seeking to maintain a peaceful status quo within the evolving kingdom, both authors present Mordred as a scoundrel intent on manipulating the burgeoning theology in a way that he hopes will guarantee him Arthur's crown. His plan not only fails to achieve his goals, it brings about the collapse of the Round Table as well as his and Arthur's deaths. However, Queen Guenevere, both pagan and Christian, adapts to the aftermath of war and continues to live her life.

As Ann Howey points out, both of the main female characters in The Mists of Avalon find refuge by returning to the community of women where they spent their youth (74). The pagan Morgaine returns to Avalon to live out her remaining years in the company of a dwindling number of priestesses. Having experienced love and other

worldly pleasures, the Christian Guenevere does not return enthusiastically to the cloister but nevertheless embraces the peace she finds by sacrificing her love for Lancelot to atone for what she perceives as their sinful relationship.

Miles's pagan Guenevere also survives the aftermath of the scandal and Arthur's death. However, unlike Bradley and Malory's Guenevere, she does not live out her life in a convent. Instead, she remains High Queen, defending the right of Goddess worship while recognizing the Christian presence as well. Though highly aware of the inevitable force of the Church's power, she will not yield to priestly pressure. When told by the Archbishop that the Church will act as her husband and help her rule the land, she bristles: "In my country, priest, women do not turn to husbands and fathers to run their lives. Whatever seems good to me in my soul, I will do" (Miles Child 453). Sensing his concern about the fate of the church buildings and the Christian faith, she assures him:

Never fear, priest. You are safe from us. . . . Your God destroys others; we have faith in love. Do not judge us by your miserable selves. . . . Go about your business. Your churches and your lives will be spared. But for your part, do not think to destroy the Mother-right. Learn to honor women, and you will be welcome back when you do. Till then, leave my court, and do not think to return. (Miles Child 453)

Guenevere then journeys throughout the islands, enlisting worthy knights to create a new fellowship of the Round Table and spreading the word that Arthur is merely sleeping and will one day return. She continues the dream of Camelot among all her people who heartily accept her as their sole ruler.

Bradley's Guenevere, though initially weak and submissive as determined by a Christian society, prevails in spite of a land rife with misogyny. She chooses to live her remaining days without the support of a man in a manner she believes is best for herself. Miles's pagan Guenevere struggles throughout a lifetime to find a balance between being the wife of a Christian king while maintaining her own identity as a woman born to be queen in her own right. She, too, succeeds as a powerful ruling High Queen during the dawn of Christianity in Britain.

Marion Zimmer Bradley and Rosalind Miles have shown in their novels that the centuries-old Arthurian legend continues to be relevant and exciting in modern times. Bradley's The Mists of Avalon and Miles's Guenevere trilogy reflect the women's movement of the latter portion of the twentieth century. Written during an era when women were experiencing sexual freedom and demanding equal rights within the workplace, the authors empower female characters, who prevail in spite of masculine ministrations to keep them in check and provide readers with a readily-identifiable conflict. By presenting a character who exhibits doubt and weakness as well as strength, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Rosalind Miles enable contemporary readers to accept a human and sympathetic view of Guenevere, whose voice at long last is heard above those of her male counterparts in the ever-evolving Arthurian legend.

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