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THE CHIVALROUS AND FEMINIST KING: HOW THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS  
CHRONICLED THE FORMATION OF TWO GENDER IDENTITIES

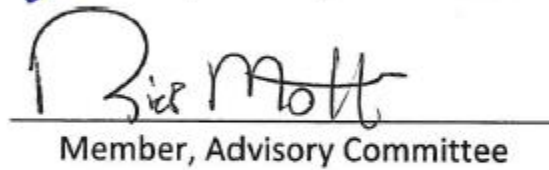
BY

GARY ANDREW BAILEY PICKLE

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THE CHIVALROUS AND FEMINIST KING: HOW THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS  
CHRONICLED THE FORMATION OF TWO GENDER IDENTITIES

BY

GARY ANDREW BAILEY PICKLE

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
Eastern Kentucky University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

2019

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## DEDICATION

Kaylee,

My daughter, my best friend, and my constant inspiration. I hope you are as proud as your dad as he is of you every day. Thank you for always being my biggest fan and always pushing me to be the best role model I can be for you. I love you so much, dream big, push yourself and make a space for yourself even if the world tries to tell you that you don't deserve it.

Mom,

I would have never even embarked upon this great journey had you not shown me the light and love of Avalon when I was just a boy. Instilling my youth with lessons focused on respect for women, equality for all, and love was one of the best things you have ever done for me and I will always be eternally grateful. Thank you for always knowing just what to say and for pushing me to be the best father and man that I can be.

Laritza,

My wife, you opened my eyes to much of the invisible suffering in the world to which I was previously unaware. Loving you and learning so much more about the world through our love has been one of the driving factors that pushed me to be a better man, seek further education, and push for a more equal future through all that I do. Here's to hoping that I can keep making you proud of me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Nachtwey for his unending knowledge, guidance, and constructive input as this thesis was constructed. I'm sure he is probably sick of me by now, but I shall continue to sing his praise wherever I go from here. Second, I would like to thank all of the faculty within the English Department of ECU, the professors of this department have been immensely helpful, understanding, and gracious throughout my education here. The English Department at ECU houses a plethora of amazingly intelligent and caring people that are supremely undervalued. Lastly, I would like to thank all of my fellow students within the program who have "suffered" with me and have been there to support my work as I always tried to do the same for them.

## ABSTRACT

Literature is often a product of its time, though some works can be said to be more indicative of the time period they came from than others. This thesis inspects Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, not only as products of their time, but also as works that illuminate the formation of gender identity within their respective time periods. Malory's unique experience as an acting knight throughout the fifteenth century influenced his version of the existing legends of Arthur and his court injecting then-current chivalric ideals into the text. Bradley worked to write a text focusing on these very same masculine legends that responded to them with a femine retelling which was influenced by the second-wave of the feminist movement that Bradley lived through. Pulling from various medieval and feminist scholars, this thesis argues the validity and representation of both author's works while explaining why Bradley's revision was needed and how it unifies the past legends centered around Arthur with a more unified and equal future.



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## INTRODUCTION

Chivalry was a set of constantly shifting ideals and practices, never fully documented, that instructed medieval warriors how to navigate the sphere of knighthood. Specifically, these practices and ideals dictated how a knight interacted with his fellow knights as well as how they navigated the power structure between their king and their paramour. Not limited to interactions within the social sphere, chivalry worked as much as a code of combat as it did as a guide to social interactions throughout the Middle Ages, but more specifically the fifteenth century. These guidelines also influenced how the knights interacted with the rest of the world. Chivalry did not end at the dividing lines of a king's lands. Knights were expected to act respectably and honorably when dealing with individuals from other nations, and most importantly, when encountering knights who pledge themselves to different kings or lords.

The knights that these ideals and practices of chivalry influenced were obviously, men, more specifically though, noblemen who were eligible to become a knight and had the wealth to do so. So what chivalry, and its constantly shifting nature, seemed to be was the process of a class-based gender formation in the medieval, male aristocratic-warrior society. Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* was highly influenced by the budding structure of the "chivalric" identity. This work, in turn, influenced how many of the Knights of the Round table would act and the choices that they would make. On the other hand, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* focused on reframing the legend from a feminine point of view. In *The Mists of Avalon* the marginalized and ignored women of the original masculine narrative provided by *Le Morte D'Arthur* is

challenged. Bradley's retelling of Malory's work was heavily influenced by the Second-wave of the feminist movement which impacted how Bradley chose to have most of the women within her novel interact with the very masculine world around them.

The question must be posed though, why would Marion Zimmer Bradley choose to write a feminist re-envisioning of specifically *Le Morte D'Arthur*? The Arthurian legend has become a staple of medieval literature which has been rewritten and modernized on many occasions: Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, White's *The Once and Future King* and even Tolkien's "*The Fall of Arthur*." Although the legend had been retold numerous times, none had chosen to create a version of the tale that was so intensely women-centered before *The Mists of Avalon*. The Arthurian legends have long been seen as romances for boys, and *Le Morte D'Arthur* especially is a very masculine text and emphasizes the significance of violence and combat to creating masculine identity. Conversely, *The Mists of Avalon* which was not published until 1983 is more modern with the text finding its beginnings within Bradley's own experiences and interests. *The Mists of Avalon* is a reworking of the hypermasculine tale of the Arthurian legend into a story focused upon female agency and power. Bradley's vision usurps the normative function of the legend which allows for female readers to find as much inspiration within its pages as male readers have for generations. Bradley offers a bit more of an explanation of why she wrote *The Mists of Avalon* within an article she wrote explicitly to deal with the origins of her version entitled "Thoughts on Avalon":

I wondered: if Malory disapproved so much of these women, why did he not simply expunge them from the mythos, as he did with so many other elements of the ancient Celtic folk-tales that he grafted on to the doings of his 5th-century historical hero chieftain. My theory is that he *could not*, because in the originals, now lost, Morgan and the Lady of the Lake were absolutely integral to the whole story and it was unthinkable to tell tales of Arthur without also telling tales of the women involved (Bradley, “Thoughts”).

Bradley’s choice to focus heavily on the women of Arthurian Legend brought new life to the story and reworked the historically masculine text with the staple of feminism, injecting more power into the system of Camelot through mysticality and the island of Avalon.

### **Literature Review**

Both *Le Morte D’Arthur* and *The Mists of Avalon* work around the intricacies of the power dynamics between the men and women of the Arthurian legend. However, Malory and Bradley's works detail the construction of further stratified class systems regardless of whether it is acknowledged or intentional. Chivalry only dictated a standard for upper-class males who had choice and freedom at the time, which were mainly Knights and almost entirely white males. This stratification not only informed how but also in what way a knight was able to act within the court and most importantly how a knight should act upon the field of battle.

Second-wave feminism was an excellent step for the movement, but it did have one significant drawback: it was the most beneficial for upper-class white women due to the political and social upheavals that were ongoing throughout this wave. While this may seem a bit of an overstatement, Joanna Williams explains within chapter eight of her

book *Women vs. Feminism: Why We All Need Liberating From the Gender Wars* that, “In America in the 1960s, it was the civil rights movement that represented the most significant demand for social change and many of the legal developments that women benefited from developed out of a broader expansion of civil rights” (188). Williams was expanding upon the idea that second-wave feminism was a reaction and a rebuttal to the “domestication” of well off women who had been coerced into accepting the suburban lifestyle of mother and wife as the heart of the household as their primary role, yet the benefits that these women sought: equal pay to men and the same opportunities as men, etc. were not won by all women, these allowances only came in connection to the broader quest for civil rights, which still placed minority men and women in a lower spectrum within the social sphere. This phenomenon is also evident within *The Mists of Avalon* through the actions and the limitations placed upon the marginalized less powerful women within Bradley’s text that were not of the high priesthood of Avalon. Minority women were not as visible within the second-wave of the feminist movement or focused on as much because they were fighting for everything white women already had as well as, most importantly, a voice and sense of agency.

Malory's work, as mentioned previously, sits in a unique and specific place wherein the formation of the chivalric identity was still in flux, and beginning to become obsolete, as he was writing his text which is why he dealt with it so rigidly and conservatively. Because of this, the text is a veritable treasure trove for scholars who wish to pick it apart to identify various aspects of chivalry and how Malory portrayed them within his text. Many other scholars have addressed the importance of chivalry,

especially in regards to how it contributed to broader constructions of heroic, masculine gender identity in fifteenth-century culture. Richard Kaeuper, a scholar of medieval literature, authored one of the most essential sources discussing the form and function of the chivalric knight which served to form, along with Geoffroi De Charny, much of the understanding of chivalry as it was before applying it to the Arthurian Legends. Within the early pages of his novel on the topic, Kaeuper states that:

Chivalry was not simply a code integrating generic individual and society, not simply an ideal for relations between the sexes or a means for knocking off the rough warrior edges in preparation for the European gentleman to come. The bloody-minded side of the code -- even if it seems to moderns, as Twain might say, a shuddering matter -- was of the essence of chivalry. The knight was a warrior and not Everyman. (8)

Kaeuper's *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* opens with a discussion surrounding the actual premise of what Chivalry was and illuminating for the reader just how essential violence and the art of combat was to being a knight. Additionally, this is one of the earliest points within his own text that highlights the importance of these knights not being an "Everyman".

To engage in the art of chivalry, one needed to be able to participate in battle and fight for a lord, but a knight also had to be able to adhere to all the societal aspects of the ideals as well. This is why an "Everyman" was unable to participate. These societal aspects were something that often required a great deal of time that was not afforded, or allowed to the peasant or worker class, and the act/process of courtly love was not something that was available or thought to be possible for those of the lower class. Chivalry and the various courtly aspects of it were serious practices that ran much of the

nation and the common man had no real place in the doings of nobles and kings. Within his introduction to Charny's *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, Kaeuper continues this discussion clarifying that chivalry:

Was in no sense frivolous or ephemeral, concerned only with a few outward forms of social life as the popular notion would have it. This popular notion is largely formed from post-medieval revisions and revivals. To see genuine medieval chivalry clearly we must demolish the structures, many of them venerably Victorian, which stand in the way. Observing the increasingly rare phenomenon of a male opening a door for a woman or standing in respect when another person enters a room, modern observers may still be heard to mumble-either in praise or with irony-that chivalry is not dead. This longevity of chivalry is highly significant, but it creates distinct problems of interpretation. We may easily think that such pale modern survivals from the medieval code show us how chivalry actually worked in the medieval period. They do not. (2)

All jokes aside about the life and death of chivalry, it can be clearly seen here that Kaeuper's largest issue with the common understanding of what chivalry was is that the Victorian ideologies of what a chivalrous man did or did not do have been the only real facet that has stuck around in the social understanding of chivalry. The rules of combat and the intense focus on actually bleeding and sweating in a somewhat religious vigor for your lord and your cause have been lost to the ages and drowned out in favor of a focus on fair play and sportsmanship, essentially the idea of being an upright gentleman.

The elevated romance inherent within courtly love is now absent from common understandings surrounding chivalry and have been downgraded to mere acts of holding the door open for others or being kind. In her book *Chivalric Stories as Children's Literature*, Velma Bourgeois Richmond focuses on how the interpretations of the legend have been used to set up Arthur, and his various knights, in their respective forms and

translations as role models, while looking at each text's use in a deeper manner. At one point Richmond focuses on how many stories have a section devoted to the Grail quest focusing on, "Heroes included Arthur, Percival, Gawain, Sir Bors, Galahad, and Lancelot with ample attention to the marvelous..." but highlighting how "the moral significance, if there is one, is 'the neglect of ordinary duties in the search for what could never be gained by mortal men'(65)." (156) While it is important to focus on the heroes of the Arthurian legends as moral figures to tell moral stories with, the notable absence of a discussion surrounding the violence of the quests and the purposeful delegation of violence to the backstage of each tale while the moral took the foreground is interesting, since Malory is so often brought up within her discussion and Malory's text is so heavily saturated with violence. As part of that discussion, Richmond brings in narratives about Arthur and his role as the central figure within the chivalric hierarchy as both a religious and pagan bridge to Camelot as its king. While Richmond does not precisely discuss Arthur's role within the chivalric ladder in this work or within her work *The Popularity of Middle English Romance*, his role as the religious leader of his knights and bridge to the mysticity of Avalon enhances his station of power as the high king within Malory's text. Even though Arthur's role as king, quest giver, and as quest taker is part of her discussion, the importance of the king taking part in the act of chivalric violence and often being the catalyst for such a thing is one aspect of chivalry that was supremely important within Malory's text, yet not focused on as much as it should have been within her discussion of the legends.



Within Marco Nievergelt's article, we see a discussion of Malory himself and how gender plays a part in the actual knighthood practice/identity. Nievergelt addresses the fact that other scholars have not sufficiently highlighted that Malory was a knight and that this influenced and made his tale biased, especially concerning specific classes and, of course, women. Dorsey Armstrong's *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte D'Arthur* and Kenneth Hodges' "Wounded Masculinity: Injury and Gender in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*" introduced a more in-depth look at the gender identity of the knights within their separate articles. Armstrong focused on Gareth explaining that:

Gareth is the nephew of a king, and he comes to court in disguise to prove himself through the "prowess of hands" rather than relying on his blood relationship with the monarch as an avenue to knighthood... ..Gareth's calculated deception of the court creates the circumstances that will allow him to establish a knightly reputation free from any hint of preference or partiality due to his kinship with the king. By obscuring his bloodline, a hero in disguise may better prove his inherent aristocracy, affirming his rightful place within the chivalric society through completion of challenges or tasks that only the most noble of men could possibly accomplish. (115)

Gareth's integrity and deep belief in personally attaining his own valor is not the rule for all knights, but he serves as a beacon that is representative of all of Arthur's knights, exemplifying the role of the knight which was supposed to serve in many ways as a religious and societal role model for his country. Additionally a "hero in disguise" as a peasant enables the general populace to see a representative of their own elevated to the level of knighthood and immense valor, even though his status was what made all of this

possible and according to Charny, is what even him able to experience all of the levels of courtly knighthood.

Conversely, within Hodges's article we see an inspection of injuries and their function within the text, elevating the knights while leaving wounds unhealed or untended in most cases when inflicted by women as if to show that they are not to be taken seriously or that they are not worthy of notice as in the instance of the verbal wounds thrown at Gareth during the early parts of his adventure. Hodges explicitly discusses injuries between knights explaining that:

Wounds do not mark failures in the effort to be knightly. Although each wound might be said to result from a failure to ward a blow properly, the inevitability of this happening sometimes even to the best knights means knights had to deal with the fact that they would be hurt. Medieval sources testify to the thorough understanding that being injured was an essential part of knighthood, even for the best knights. Geoffroi de Charny, when he compares knighthood to religious orders, emphasizes the injuries that knights regularly suffer. (15)

Hodges discussion can be seen to have been informed by Charny's text giving validity to his statements. Hodges highlights the very real aspect of chivalric life and knighthood that almost worshipped the ability for knights to be able to survive great injury and combat and display great manliness through their vigor and suffering. It is in a knight's ability to continue on with his adventures and his role as a servant and warrior for the king regardless of injury that elevate him and exemplify his worthiness as an aristocrat and knight. It was not expected or thought possible that any "everyman" would be able to survive or be successful as a knight and reach the pious level of service that a knight

was supposed to be able to reach, nor would it have been possible for them to interact with or work through the other aspect of chivalry.

One such side facet of chivalry talked about by Maria Alvarenga and C. G Jung is that of Courtly Love, which is the interaction between the knight and his paramour, a lady who bids the knights do her favors in return for her love, be it symbolic or actual. Alvarenga and Jung go into depth of what this "courtly love" was and explain how it was almost always inherently adulterous as marriage was usually a formal situation meant to secure alliances and lands between neighboring kingdoms. Alvarenga and Jung's article, *The Grail, Arthur and His Knights : A Jungian Symbolic Reading*, fits into the discussion of gender here because courtly love was an institution that granted women a form of power within medieval society wherein they were largely considered to be powerless.

Jung and Alvarenga discuss that:

When a lady accepted the affections of a lover, she was responsible for giving this knight a task. For example, he may be required to guard a bridge, since these were strategic locations and this task was considered to be of great importance. Consequently, there seemed to be a certain excess of gentlemen responsible for guarding bridges. (18)

Although these knights were setting themselves to a task suggested by a lady, it is not inherently her fault within this patriarchal system if anything good or bad happens to the knight or if he botches the assignment or dishonors himself or others. To give a lady that kind of power within chivalric society would have been unheard of, but it is possible they could be used as potential scapegoats to deal with the fallout of a dishonorable situation. Ridiculously enough, ladies, married and unmarried were almost unable to refuse the

advances of courtly relations, to do so would make her seem to be “‘savage’ and the troubadours should address her as such” (18). Adulterous, yet productive, love affair on one hand, or public scrutiny and slander (which would further dishonor her husband) on the other? Truly the chivalric society was not a woman’s world in the slightest.

MaryLynn Saul’s article "Malory's Morgan le Fay: The Danger of Unrestrained Feminine Power" discusses the reaction to feminine power that Malory's work exemplifies and the potential abuse of the power of courtly love enacted by Morgan Le Fay among other facets of her use of agency. Specifically, Saul highlights how Malory’s work suggests that feminine power is something that must be feared and pushed into the background of political and social strata. Her discussion of this focuses on Morgane Le Fay as the central figure and symbol of feminine resistance and agency that must be dealt with in Malory's eyes and discussed extensively by readers; for regardless of her consistent failure to bring down many of the knights and King Arthur, Morgane is still a prominent character within the text and has remained so throughout the various iterations of the legend.

Finke and Schichtman use their article, "No Pain, No Gain: Violence as Symbolic Capital in Malory's Morte D'Arthur" to posit that women function within Malory’s work as capital or rewards gained for the quests they are assigned, yet they fail to fully conceptualize the correct iteration of chivalry as written in their discussion. Ironically though, later within the article, they refer to *Le Morte D'Arthur's* intense and numerous scenes of violence and highlight how violence and masculinity go hand in hand, which

was the actual point of chivalry put forth within Malory's romance and within Geoffroi De Charny's book on chivalry. Finke and Schichtman state, "Critics have argued that such a presentation of arbitrary violence in the *Morte* reflects cultural and political upheavals in England during the War of the Roses" (119), while they are summarising the works of others, they are using it as an argument themselves and misrepresent what the Knights of the Round Table were doing entirely. Yes, violence was being used as a way to foster control within the novel and was used as symbolic capital exchanged for honor and wealth but the knights were hardly ever rebellious to their king, so Finke and Schichtman's claim that chivalry caused discord within its society just as much as it leads to control seems to be a bit lacking. Launcelot and Mordred were the only actual examples of knights acting in discord to their king and trying to put an end to his reign, Launcelot's threat was curbed quickly and was mainly born from his love of the Queen. Mordred's discordant actions were born from his very birthright and the home in which he was raised that lead him and Arthur to their final moments. Otherwise, most of Arthur's court chose to stay by his side and honor him throughout most of the romance.

Political readings of old texts are nothing new, and with *The Mists of Avalon* being as political as it is, it makes sense that Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint would have a bit to say about this work within their article entitled "Political Readings" contained in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. While they do not specifically mention Arthurian literature until almost the end of their document, they examine the different iterations of the legend and what those had to say respectively, mentioning *The Mists of Avalon* explicitly. This fits into a discussion of further politically-related topics

surrounding *The Mists of Avalon*, which sits in just as unique of a place within the academic fields it inhabits. Bradley's novel has drawn a great deal of scholarly attention in regards to its ability to take back the feminine narrative from the intensely masculine legend that we often see, but the articles used in this discussion focused more upon second-wave feminism itself in an effort to deal with how Marion Zimmer Bradley incorporated the prominent feminist movement that she had lived through, why she wrote the text in the first place, as well as why she made the choices she did when discussing specific characters. Sari Biklen, Catherine Marshall and Diane Pollard talk explicitly about how women within our nation experienced Second-wave feminism, both the marginalized and the mainstream. Biklen, Marshall, and Pollard's article, "Experiencing Second-Wave Feminism in the USA" was an excellent place to start in understanding the dynamics at work within this movement of feminism and in how Bradley represented them within *The Mists of Avalon*. Their article illuminated how the marginalized characters within Bradley's tale were represented and informs the reader of a point of view on which her character motivations may have been based.

Continuing this conversation in her "Making Better Use of U.S. Women's Psychology, Sex Roles, and Womanpower in Post-WWII America," Alexandra Rutherford focused upon the societal and cultural aspects of the budding years of the second-wave of the feminist movement. Rutherford explains the intersection of culture and the economic expectations placed upon white women as well as minority women and how this intersection served to shape the movement as it continued. Rutherford expands on some of these issues connected to the more overtly American cultural issues instead of

focusing heavily on the minority and majority aspect: “as the aforementioned article on Phyllis Weber, housewife and satellite engineer, indicated, cultural conflicts over women’s changing roles persisted. More highly trained, professional women were clearly needed to keep pace with the Soviets, but many Americans were still not ready for the radical reconfiguration of sex roles that filling this need would entail” (240). The rapidly changing role women throughout this period was hard enough to navigate as a man in a world where Soviet competition was pushing the expansion of sciences and business in America, but doing so as a woman, or even a woman of color was an entirely different beast altogether. Rutherford’s article tracks much of the transformation of the fifties’ house-wife into one of the most important forces within the American workforce, and yet she seemed to misrepresent minority women or ignore them entirely, as seen in the above quote at times. Rutherford’s article served as a good discussion point later on when addressing certain characters within Bradley's text, especially Morgause and Igraine who fit into the marginalized groups of the text due to their lack of strength in the mystical “Sight”.

### **Gender Identity: Chivalric Construction and the Ripples of the Second-Wave**

Masculinity plays an ever-increasing role throughout the tale of *Le Morte D’Arthur*, yet the formation of the masculine identity that these knights embodied is entirely influenced by the role that chivalry placed upon them from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries. Lineage, honor, power, wealth was what defined a man: both in traditional and historical masculinity. So it is safe to claim that this is why chivalry only pertained to the upper-classes, namely and most significantly to the knighthood. If a man had these

things, he was a paragon of manhood in the eyes of his community and his fellow Knights.

However, contrary to modern ideas, maintaining respect between knights also required frequent competition between them. Many knights sought chivalrous combat between one another to further their honor, wealth and legacy according to Geoffroi De Charny, a “practicing” knight and a veteran of the practice of chivalry, who wrote *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, seventy-five years before Malory had written *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Charny's critique of knighthood and choice to author a veritable guide to its practice was mirrored by Malory in how they both chose to write a text that served to be an example for knights to follow in a period wherein they felt that the art of knighthood was in decline. Although Charny's text deals with the real world and Malory's world of fantasy, both authors were able to use their experience as knights to retrospectively design an ideal form of knighthood to portray and instruct upon future knights. Arthur's knights of legend were no different from the real knights, except for the fact that they were a work of fiction. The genuine then-current notions of chivalry were influencing the formation of Malory's text allowing him to tell a very "real" story that focused less on the fantastic and more so on the relationships and actions between the knights. It would make sense for Malory to be exploring the intricacies of this change in gender identity as he was a knight to whom these rules applied, which is precisely why Nievergelt states within his article that "Malory's own textual 'I' surfaces at key moments as if to claim participation in the narrative through juxtaposition" (462). Nievergelt recognizes that due to Malory's experience and understanding of the vocation of knighthood, he was able to



show that knights were not always at peace with one another, and this generally dealt with the competition for honor and glory that came with the profession.

Arthur's knights were sworn to the same master but they fought individual battles amongst one another, pushing themselves and challenging their comrades to become more than they already were, and this competition is evident within Charny's work where he explained that in regards to real knights, "it is right to do so for all such matters are honorable, although some are honorable enough, others are more honorable on an ascending scale up to the most honorable of all"(47). The point Charny is trying to make is that those who sacrifice more and give more of themselves through the vigorous act of chivalric deeds will earn a higher station and more honor because of this. Charny is speaking toward the ability of knights but also an existing hierarchy within the chivalric ladder, as those with more wealth are also able "to do more" as they have the existing resources to contribute to their chivalric deeds. This can be referring to donations for the common good or giving more money to their king but more often refers to the quality of armor and weaponry that the knights were able to afford, as that directly influences the chances of success that the knight has. But wealth is, of course, not the only resource that Charny is referring too, there was an ephemeral hierarchy existing within the community that was made up of those who had the most drive and the will to commit to deeds "to do more" and to push themselves and other knights to commit to the sacrifice and physical deeds inherent within the chivalric process. The constantly shifting "code" of chivalry allowed for a fluid form of dedication to exist for knights that changed over time, but

dedicating oneself wholly to knightly acts was a constant tenant of chivalry, it was just that what constituted “knightly acts” changed over time.

Charny's main focus early within his text is to establish how integral the art of combat is to the foundations of chivalry and how the levels of combat and honor that follow the prowess shown, ascend in levels from tourneys eventually leading to war for the king and the honor gained raised from level to level. Charny builds his framework of what a knight can and must do to gain more honor with the hierarchy or as he puts it, the ladder, of being a knight where one may climb the rungs of trials and combat to gain a more favorable/higher position. We see this hierarchy of honor, glory, and the distinction between how some actions are "good" and some are better made clearly in *Le Morte D'Arthur* through various quests the knights embark upon for their own reasons or for their king and the rewards each reaps through completion of their mission. We can look much further into the text and see this ladder represented within the Grail quest and the greater and lesser degrees to which each knight achieves the quest for the holiest of items, but that will be dealt with much later.

Many scholars have misconceptions regarding chivalry based around the more Victorian ideals which seemed to place chivalry's primary practice within the aristocratic court rather than where the rules of chivalry were most practiced, battle. Richard Kaeuper expounds upon this within the introduction to Charny's *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*,

Some would prefer chivalry to be a set of ideals all could still like without qualification. They may be surprised to find how tough a warrior code the chivalry of medieval times was and how much it valued sheer prowess. An idea of chivalry based on Victorian values will distort our sense of the broad place of chivalry in medieval society. Chivalric ideals, it is again easy to think, surely went far toward solving the historical problems represented by vigorous masculinity in the Middle Ages(2).

Vigorous masculinity is precisely much of what chivalry included, but one must understand that it was with the best intentions rather than being a form of masculinity that was intentionally toxic in any way. In an effort to explain particularly what “vigorous masculinity” is, we can look at another work by Kaeuper, *Medieval Chivalry*, where he states: “As an active model knight, Geoffroi de Charny provides the ideal exemplar. Charny clearly found physical suffering inherent in the vigorous practice of knighthood to be spiritually meritorious” (292). The stress and focus being on the act of suffering and struggle of combat and fighting for what one believes in, Kaeuper continues on the next page: “He (Charny) is sure that as Lord of Hosts, God has ordained a knighthood in which ‘practice is hard, stressful and perilous to endure.’ But Charny knows that such suffering is essentially beneficial because it is the price to be paid for the glorious enterprise of prowess securing honor in this life” (293). Through Kaeuper’s description it can be understood that manliness, in its correct form shown through chivalry (combat, struggle, and sacrifice), was meant to be the ideal form of being a man/knight. What Kaeuper points out within Charny’s introduction is that: “The idealistic Victorian view is that they(knights) achieved their goal through chivalry, by advancing standards of fair play, and respect for women as the desirable but ‘weaker’ sex”(2). Through Kaeuper’s discussion of the facts surrounding the fifteenth century ideals of chivalry it becomes

clear that the Victorians were wrong about chivalry. While the tenets of chivalry do indicate a correct presence of mind and treatment of others based on honor and prestige, the main focus of chivalry was on the very masculine art of combat and in how one can gain more honor by engaging not only in tournaments and jousts, but in war at home and abroad and by endeavoring to go out and quest for themselves, a sponsor, paramour, or most importantly, their king.

Victorian views of chivalry wanted to create disciplined soldiers (not warriors) that could enact violence on an industrial scale. The wish for Victorians was to create a mechanical unit which could enact the will of one nation on another in a uniform and mechanical way, which was quite different when compared to the historical knightly warrior form of combat which ruled throughout the middle ages and embodied the very masculine form of the chivalric knight. Removing the “identity” of a warrior and creating a uniform method of “soldiering” removes a bit of the agency and manliness aristocratic knights were able to exemplify in the past. Taking away the unique identity a man portrays to the world, in a way, emasculates and creates a vessel to be filled as if the once proud warriors were nothing but machines to be programmed and oiled during routine maintenance. By removing the focus on the vigorous and unique variations of violence expressed portraying the devotion and rigor of knights to their king and focusing almost entirely on the courtly and refined aspects of chivalry creates an entirely different entity.

The Victorian focus on fair-play worked to instill mental intelligence and virtues alongside the focus on producing a unified general male populace once fully grown worked to create a unified nation through the practice of “Muscular Christianity”, but the core values taught alongside Medieval chivalry and the rigorous devotion it took were lost, as self sacrifice and suffering as a form of devotion were not necessarily required or thought to be a representation of honor as much as it once had been. Within *Masculinities and Culture* by John Beynon, we see a discussion of said Victorian ideals, wherein “Muscular Christianity” is highlighted and explained, “the value system into which large numbers of upper and upper middle class young men were acculturated, one characterized by ‘self-reliance, independence, emotional control and the deep suspicion of intimacy’ (Clare 200: 88)” (41) was also intended to potentially be “aimed at ‘rescuing’ lower middle class boys” (41). These ideals seem to nearly counter entirely some of the largest aspects of the chivalric identity, yet also seemed to be an attempt to “retcon” the easiest and most attainable (for all classes) aspects of the chivalric identity in an effort to elevate boys of all ages to an “honorable” attitude/presence. While this form of pseudo-chivalric ethics has served to birth a continuing set of ideals surrounding the ideas of gentlemanly conduct and fair play, it failed to understand how knights were meant to act as role models as well as agents of the king and enforcers of the law, and therefore served as a ruling class all should have aspired to emulate.

Returning to Kaeuper, he puts the idea of the true chivalric attitude into a better perspective in the first chapter of his book on the subject, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*: “Knowing how to talk and act in refined company and especially with

ladies was added to knowing how best to drive a sword-edge through a mail coif into a man's brain" (7). Putting blade to blade indeed showed who had the most skill and in many instances was the deciding factor on who was "right" in any disagreement. While this may seem barbaric, it was meant to be a form of control which limited the amount of violence that took place outside of the battlefields — making these confrontations public forced the outcome to be upheld, insofar as making it a well-known fact for all to see that a decision had been reached and the outcome must be adhered to by all parties. Thus many of these knights put their very lives on the line to settle issues between them, which Richmond illuminates within her work, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance* by discussing how the knight's "acceptance of his death is reflected in his attempt to use his temporal existence in the most meaningful and worthy manner"(48). This public confrontation where the knight was using his life and combat ability to fight for what he felt was right limited the ability for knights on the losing side to try and enact any form of vengeance or recompense for anything lost. Whichever knight died or lost the fight was obviously the one who was wrong in their eyes. So seeking any form of vengeance would besmirch the loser's honor further and prove them to rightfully be beneath the other party in the order of the chivalric "ladder." In accord with Chivalry, the varying levels of honor had to be respected at all times by Arthur's knights just as Malory's contemporaries were expected to do the same, for to ignore the chivalric ladder and the rules which governed the interactions between the varying levels would be to forsake honor entirely.

As Arthur is the namesake of the legend, the reader would rightly assume that Arthur would be the paragon of manhood within *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Malory makes this evident when he sets up Arthur's parentage, his pulling the sword from the stone, and then reinforces his "manliness" with his victory over all the other kings who doubted his right to rule when proclaimed by Merlin. Although his parentage was uncertain for all initially, his royal blood and his ability and overall "goodness" inspired men even before Merlin's proclamation of the truth. It cannot be stressed enough that it was this immensely magical and powerful sword (and phallic symbol) that no knight was able to take from the stone was drawn out by a boy, highlighting his worthiness even before the dawning of his manhood, which proved his prowess and right to rule over the realms of men. Additionally, it is interesting how such a phallic and violent symbol is used to prove the legitimacy of his birth and becomes the symbol that his nation comes to rally behind, how masculine and chivalric it seems that an instrument of violence, however mystical/magical, is the key that gave Arthur the throne.

Following his victory over the kings that opposed his rule with said mystical sword in hand, the knights all looked to Arthur as their lord pledging fealty to no other lords and, as stated before, this caused the knights to seek to gain honor in his name. While there were a few exceptions and treacheries from time to time, in most instances the Knights of the Round Table fought for the safety of their king as well as for honor. The majority of the knights of the round table exhibited the will to perform the highest standard in deeds of arms for their king without hesitation. Some may have faltered at times, but in direct opposition to that, a select few knights went further than most striving

always to gain more glory and the possibility of praise and reward from their paramour or their king. Chivalric masculinity then, in this context, can only be embodied by the collective of the knight's of the Round Table as they serve to represent all aspects of the masculine ideals of chivalry in their purest forms. Another aspect that is represented is that of class, which, as discussed earlier, played a large part in the formation and acceptance of chivalry and the creation of the masculine persona during the middle ages. Fealty and loyalty to a throne came to be the standard set for knights, and this directly influenced the formation of chivalry: honor was gained through conquest and deeds completed for king and country to prove themselves to their king. Not to say that knights would not do a good deed out of the kindness of their hearts, but medieval Europe was not a world of happiness and rainbows. Honor was the currency of Knights, and they used the code and conduct of chivalry to acquire more wealth and a better position within their kingdom.

Published in 1983, *The Mists of Avalon* was interacting with a readership that had survived a very intensely active time within the United States and its continuously shifting culture. While Marion Zimmer Bradley hadn't lived through a world of constant warring or fought through various levels of honor to gain recognition, she had lived through a very turbulent time within our nation's history and the further blooming feminist movement that profoundly shaped how she was portraying women within *The Mists of Avalon*. Thus the women in Bradley's work behaved and acted quite differently than their counterparts within *Le Morte D'Arthur* and the focus was no longer upon the male hierarchy and the interaction governed by chivalry: instead Bradley focused on the



interactions between the women of her narrative and changed the focus to how it was their power structure that drove change all of the other events within the Arthurian legend.

Bradley places the marginalized female characters of the Arthurian legends explicitly in the center of her texts, placing the most importance on not necessarily the characters themselves but on the very role of the female within a predominantly male-focused legend. Choosing to do so places her story within the purview of second-wave feminism. *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan was likely a text with which Bradley was very familiar as the book spoke to the experiences of women who had lived through the period in which she did, and the text heavily discusses second-wave feminism without explicitly labeling it as such. Within its budding years, women had to take a more prominent role within the workforce and home while their husbands were out fighting "the good fight." Therefore, it could have come as quite a shock for her when "a valorization of women's role in the private sphere of the home was a prominent feature of postwar discourse" (Rutherford 229). Following the lifestyle championed for women fashioned as the norm of the 1950s which valorized single-income families with blonde skinny, happy homemakers willing to do anything and everything for their families, a new problem surfaced. Due to repressing their abilities and interests for the role that was expected of them, many women found that they were no longer happy with their lives. Many women had cut off their education early in order to seem as though they were not too educated to find a husband. Many women never even took a step toward education due to the fear of missing their chance to marry and instead married early and began

families before they ever found out for themselves "who" they were or "who" they wanted to be (Friedan 2).

In reality, this time period created and endorsed a very submissive image of a woman who was nothing more than a pawn in a man's world who was there to create offspring and tend to his life while the man was out doing all of the "important things" and could not be bothered by familial matters or responsibilities. This strange phenomenon was appearing everywhere according to Friedan: "Women who had once wanted careers were now making careers out of having babies. So rejoiced *Life* magazine in a 1956 paean to the movement of American women back to the home" (3). The key words in this whole passage are "back" and "home." Women had social agency and power after the war, and were unsure collectively what to do with it. But the "home" itself was a powerful symbol of social stability in the uncertain post-war period, one which brings in both masculinity and medievalism, as far-right conservatives, led by George Wallace, insisted on a "return" to the idea that "a man's home is his castle" (Wallace, Speech At Madison Square Garden). Women, during this period, after being somewhat liberated during the war, were being forced back into a situation in which they had no real agency or control of their power. What they had gained during the time of the war was seemingly slipping from their grasp, enforcing and emphasizing the sacrificial nature of a woman and instilling the idea that they must give up their dreams in deference to their husbands and families. This sacrifice enforced the idea of an inherent biological destiny for women regardless of the dreams they may have had.

In an effort to frame the full discussion of Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, a short summary of the novel would prove to be prudent. As previously stated, *The Mists of Avalon* rewrites the narrative and events of *Le Morte D'Arthur* to place the female characters who were previously marginalized or villainized into the foreground of the text. Within Bradley's tale, the Lady of the Lake and High priestess of Avalon is the one who places Uther Pendragon upon the throne of Camelot and works to birth a high king that would unify the futures of both lands, Avalon and Camelot. Through grand schemes and great pains the chosen son, Arthur, is born from Igraine the sister of the high priestess of Avalon and Uther the current high king of Camelot. Throughout the rest of the novel that complicates and changes the tale which readers are accustomed to, the focus is placed mainly upon Morgaine, Arthur's sister. The novel also focuses on and gives more of a voice to some of the other more significant women who were silenced and generally blamed for the fall of Camelot before, such as Gwenhwyfar. After Arthur's ascent to the throne through elevation and influence by the magical forces of Avalon (which included a marriage to the earth that produced a child with his sister Morgaine that he was unaware of), Arthur pledged himself to protecting and unifying the nations and keeping the faith of Avalon alive. This exact facet of his reign is what proves him worthy of Excalibur and the garb of Avalon that was to protect him throughout his life. It is not until much further into the novel that a discord forms between the nations due to Arthur's inability to produce and name an heir with Gwenhwyfar and because of his choice to fully accept the Christian faith that Gwenhwyfar and her family represented. It is then through the rest of the novel that we see Avalon fight to take Excalibur back and Arthur's son choose to vie

for the throne instead of allowing another to take his rightful place. Within *The Mists of Avalon* much, if not all, of these events are orchestrated or at least influenced by the women of power throughout the novel, going so far as to even reconcile the differences between Avalon and Arthur in his death as he is placed upon the boat and sailed across the mists to his final resting place.

The previous discussion on the foundation of second-wave feminism is essential to the discussion of Bradley's work as the very first character we happen upon within *The Mists of Avalon* is Igraine, a "housewife" once set to be a priestess of Avalon who has accepted her role as a pawn in the hands of her husband and sister. Interestingly enough, the entire tale sees its beginnings in the communication between two prominent sisters, Igraine and Viviane, who technically aren't even in the same room until a chapter or so later (only made possible, of course, by the magic and sort of telepathic communication granted by the sight). Igraine fretted about her role as housewife within the first few pages but does so in a way that shows she has long since accepted it and was working to enjoy life as much as she can since she had come to terms with her powerlessness. Producing a viable male heir was the primary purpose of a lord's wife, and Igraine had yet to give Gorlois such an heir. This upset her, and during her period of lamentation, she was visited by "the sight," a power that allows telepathic communication, premonitions, and other various mystic powers throughout the text that serves as a contributing factor to whether a woman has agency or not within her position in the novel. The sight offered a glimpse of her sister, Viviane (the high priestess of Avalon), stirring once more the feelings of unrest within Igraine and the possibilities that could come with that. This

resistance to the mundane and domestic life within Igraine mirrored that of the unrest within women of the 1950s and 1960s that became the main focus of Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, "The problem that has no name." The problem was that of purpose upon numerous levels, social purpose, political purpose, power, agency, individual happiness and community, all of these things were absent within the life of the suburban housewife and are seen within the experience and life of Igraine.

In Bradley's tale, the problem represented itself in the question of what was Igraine's purpose and how she was to be used. At this point, she was not a priestess of Avalon anymore but a wife in a mundane world. Igraine was not as gifted in the sight as she once had been, so her role was unclear. She was granted the illusion of power by her sister, Viviane, once she informs Igraine that she will not bear her husband, Gorlois, an heir but that she will for the high king of Camelot Uther:

"The worlds shall once again come together, a world with room for the Goddess and for the Christ, the cauldron and the cross. And this leader shall make us one." "But where shall we find such a king?" Igraine asked. "Who shall give us such a leader?" And then, suddenly, she was afraid, felt ice pouring down her back, as the Merlin and the priestess turned to look at her, their eyes seeming to hold her motionless as a small bird under the shadow of a great hawk, and she understood why the messenger-prophet of the Druids was called Merlin. But when Viviane spoke her voice was very soft. She said, "You, Igraine. You shall bear this great King"(15).

This conversation reinforces the fact that the choice and her life were not her own; she was to be a housewife to one lord or another. Viviane had married her off before and now sought to use her again as the vessel for another plaything in her grand schemes. The purpose for her little sister Morgause and her child Morgaine are hinted at as well

throughout this section, even though their lives are yet new, the roles they must serve are preordained, and beyond the control of those without the sight, The goddess and Viviane would have her way and the will of Igraine was not a factor.

Discussion of Bradley's tale here creates an interesting point regarding class or station. Those without and with "the sight" represent different groups of class and station. Viviane places the significance of those of Avalon and its Sight above the law of Camelot, which is evident within her discussion with Morgaine in chapter ten of book one where she states that, "Uther is not my master" (121) when she and Morgaine are going to attempt to use the sight to discover the person putting Uther's heir in danger. To Viviane, whether the orders are coming from the high king or from a mere Lord, their words are nothing in relation to the will of the goddess and in the presence of the abilities of the goddess, and this section embodies this constant within the novel and explains as well the way in which Viviane uses so many in the will of the Goddess. This distinction creates a stratified society wherein we can see the haves and have nots even in the hierarchy of Avalon, which pretends to be an equal society which further places itself on a pedestal above the likes of those of Camelot. The currency and power within *The Mists of Avalon* seem to be the act of fertility and the role in which it dictates the fate of the realm. The control of this is placed in the hands of those most influential with the power of sight or those still in the highest position within a hierarchy, creating an interesting parallel between Bradley and Malory's texts that shows us that regardless of whether it is a male or female-focused society, power is what rules.

Second-wave feminism and the power of Avalon only truly helped those of the ruling class within the society it affected most. Minority women, who were represented as those without the Sight, served merely as backs to step upon to get the movement elevated to the level wherein it could genuinely be put forth as a real force for societal change. The marginalized women within Malory and Bradley's texts were mostly ignored. Just as chivalry entirely focused upon the upper-class knights of the realm, second-wave feminism entirely focused on benefitting white upper-class women. Within Bradley's text, Second-Wave Feminist goals of gender equality and female empowerment are embodied in the priesthood of women who had the sight, those with the sight were granted agency and control over most of their actions and a place within the isles of Avalon, women without the sight were almost entirely ignored or used as pawns which created a lower class of women merely because they were not blessed with this mystical power.

Lower-class women's agency and existence within both texts were of no real importance to the authors as mentioned in the previous paragraph, which genuinely mirrored the experience of minority and poor women of the 1950s and 1960s who were largely ignored by the powers that be. Rutherford points this out explicitly: "women's retreat to domestic roles was highly selective and partial, and differentially determined by race and class. Some women, such as many women of color, had always been workers" (229). The only problem with Rutherford's discussion of this topic is that she ignores the fact that these women had always been workers because they were not allowed a

luxurious or comfortable life due mostly to the color of their skin. These individuals had to work and did not have access to lives that white upper-class women did.

The influence that women have in Malory's romance speaks volumes about the positions of the various knights and what they must do, and what they cannot do to be in full accord with societal expectations of chivalry as it was morphing into more of a social etiquette style in many ways, while losing a bit of the focus on the main idea of chivalry which was the "art and rules of combat." Bradley was connecting not only the legends and their women to the fear of women's power in a patriarchal controlled male-dominated Christianity but also to the power they held within old Celtic traditions. The Celtic societies initially held a matriarchal power structure and valued women far more than Christianity did, which is what Bradley was focusing on within her work. One specific reference to the tribal reverence of women is even mentioned explicitly by Merlin within chapter two of book one that shows the great focus and importance of feminine power that will be evident throughout the text:

"Listen to me, Igraine," said the Merlin. "I fathered you, though that gives me no rights; it is the blood of the lady which confers royalty, and you are of the oldest royal blood, descended from daughter to daughter of the Holy Isle. It is written in the stars, child that only a king who comes of two royalties, one royalty of the Tribes who follow the Goddess, and one royalty of those who look to Rome, will heal our land of all this trife."(16)

As we can see within Merlin's discussion of things to come, Bradley saw the thread of fear of women's power within Malory's tale and saw its mirror within most patriarchal Christian religions/societies within Malory's time and created her vision of Avalon as complete opposition to that. In Bradley's version of the legend, if women were not



controlling and influencing much of what happened in Camelot, it would never survive. While the women and the Isle of Avalon within her novel are not tribal, their worship of the Mother and her plentiful faces is a more tribalistic way of dealing with religion and they work as direct descendants of the more mystical tribes of the Celtic regions within Bradley's novel. Additionally, the matriarchal rule within Avalon and its priesthood harken back to the early Pictish painted peoples of the isles and the Celtic mixture of tribes that followed before Roman expansion did away with that. As we know, the conquering of their lands and the expansion of christianity to the tribal and not so tribal folk of the Celtic Region started the shift in their society that swapped the ruling power and descent of lineage from the women to the men due to the Roman Catholic expansion and control.

Talking explicitly about how the two authors portray their respective gender identities within their texts is all well and good, but to show more effectively what Malory and Bradley were doing, we will focus specifically on certain key characters that represent the movements/formations most effectively. First, starting with the knight Gareth within *Le Morte D'Arthur* and his subversion of the hierarchical system in place in an effort to embody a more pure vision of what the chivalric knight should be. Second, explaining the representation of female agency through the use of second-wave feminism focusing intently on two main female characters within *The Mists of Avalon* and how integral women are to the legend when they were once ignored. Third, the idea of courtly love will be further flushed out and examined in connection with the chivalric identity of men within Malory's novel which was indicative of the very systems in place

when he was a knight. Lastly, both works will be first examined independently through character discussion and then unified by an explanation of the use of Arthur and Morgan/Morgaine which exemplifies the gender identities interacted with and constructed throughout both works.

*Quiet Masculinity in the Story of Gareth contained within Le Morte D'Arthur*

There is one knight in particular who straddles the line of class initially in quite an unusual way as he presented himself as a peasant or knave, a mere kitchen worker before he went on his first quest. This knight was Gareth, who was the brother of an honorable and prestigious knight named Gawain. Gareth chose to hide his identity taking on the fake name Beaumains as to not gain special treatment and to be able to form his own identity apart from his connection to Gawain, as he wanted to stand on his merit and Gawain was not always the most trustworthy or honorable knight.

Gareth's quest was one of personal valor and one focused on his belief that true chivalric merit is born through action which mirrored the belief of Charny's own idea around chivalric deeds and the way in which one was able to climb the (purely aristocratic) ladder through devotion and vigorous commitment. The entire seventh book of *Le Morte D'Arthur* is focused upon the budding strength and legacy of Gareth and how he comes to the full extent of his greatness through his own choices, not just by birth. Gareth began his quest by approaching Arthur during the Feast of Pentecost as if he were a commoner and asking three favors of him, but wishing to only have one of them granted at the time. The first favor Gareth chose was to be able to serve at Arthur's castle in any capacity for a year. During this time, a request was made by a woman for a

knight to go forth and rescue her sister from the Red Knight, and it is this moment that Gareth chooses to step forward under his fake identity and ask for his other two favors: to take this quest and to be knighted by Launcelot at a later date. Needless to say, Gareth excels at the quests placed before him, defeating knight after knight of differing colors and sending them to pledge themselves to King Arthur as recompense for their actions, all while suffering scornful criticism from the damsel whom he had wished to represent and quest for from the start. Eventually, his identity is discovered through his mother, Morgause, wishing to know what has happened to her youngest son, but also due to the circumstances and events that took place when he wished to marry the lady Lyonesse. While all of these things, all of his prowess, training and his choice to lower himself were only possible because he was an aristocrat to begin with, he never leaned on that as a way to make his way in life. Due to his greatness and unique attitude toward attaining his position he was even singled out for retelling by Tennyson within his *Idylls of the King*.

Gareth's actions and choices may seem mad, as his status would have aided him many times throughout his quests, but it was a stance of preparing for greatness and facing the tasks before him that he strove to embrace and be ready for that partially grants him the merit that Malory and other authors have continued to place upon him.

Armstrong gives us a succinct insight into Gareth's motivations within her article *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte D'Arthur*,

Gareth's calculated deception of the court creates the circumstances that will allow him to establish a knightly reputation free from any hint of preference or partiality due to his kinship with the king. By obscuring his bloodline, a hero in disguise may better prove his natural aristocracy,

affirming his rightful place within the chivalric society through completion of challenges or tasks that only the noblest of men could accomplish. By deliberately choosing a position on the margin of the courtly community, Gareth elects to prove his worth by working his way up the chivalric social ladder from an "entry-level" position. His success is all the more notable in that his knightly career at Arthur's court begins from a position of prejudice rather than preference (115).

Gareth's knowledge of his status and his confidence in his abilities was enough to allow him to suffer any indignity thrown at him, as he knew he would succeed with his quest regardless of the reluctance of the maiden he accompanied as Beaumains and the insults toward his "status" hurled by her. Additionally, although Gareth forsook his possessions and rank by playing role of one from a lower class rising above his rank, he never stopped being a "natural aristocrat" which as Charny would argue is why he was so completely able to be so truly "chivalric". Though he suffered the insults of Sir Kay and lived as a wretch for a year this did not bother him or distract him from his overall goal, Gareth's interest in honor and his devotion to gaining it his way and through sincere knightly devotion proves his merit above even having his initial class.

The maiden so often rebuked Gareth that if he were any other knight his patience would have worn down and he would likely have given up the quest or caused the maiden physical harm for her slanderous language. Instead, he explained to his paramour how he dealt with these insults as they headed toward Sir Persant,

A knight may little do that may not suffer a damosel, for whatsomever ye said unto me I took none heed to your words, for the more ye said the more ye angered me, and my wrath I wreaked upon them that I had ado withal. And therefore all the missaying that ye missaid me furthered me in my battle, and caused me to think to show and prove myself at the end what I was; for peradventure, though I had meat in King Arthur's kitchen,

yet I might have had meat enough in other places... I let you wit, fair damosel, I have done you gentleman's service, and peradventure better service yet will I do or I depart from you (191).

Gareth's comment that "a knight may do little that may not suffer a damosel" has at least two potential meanings. In one reading of the passage, knights should be able to take criticism, as to be unable to would prove them weak and meant to do little or nothing of worth. A knight may suffer many reproves through his adventures, most of which will likely come from his paramour but potentially his king for if the knight is infirm in his confidence and ability, it could lead him to treachery and a loss of honor. According to Charny, a knight should be able to take this criticism and grow from it or aspire to climb the ladder of honor once more with this criticism in mind. Because his deeds were not above reproving and the only way to avoid any further reprove would be to climb that ladder further and excel at his next task in a broader scope. A knight who would cast aside any reproofs and not seriously question the motive or the message given within it would be a subpar knight, indeed.

Another reading of Gareth's speech might be that that the words of a woman should not matter to a knight. Women were not knights, and, therefore, their input may be parallel with the hierarchy of honor that a knight wishes to climb, but it is not a part of it however parallel these lines may be. The insignificance of their words is based purely on the stratification of the social structure of the medieval kingdom of Camelot, but it is worth noting this indifference toward the opinions of women is one of the other aspects of chivalry that was shaping its formation. She could continue "missaying" Gareth, but it would not affect his prowess except to spur him on, mainly because his quest was to

defeat these knights and he, being Gawaine's brother, was well versed in the art of combat. Slandering his honor and speaking evil of him proved to be nothing of worth as his prowess on the fields of battle is what brought his quest to an end, not her negativity. Through this speech to the damosel we see that Gareth saw no real merit or honor in being just "born" into glory and honor, nor in the idea of really just being in the right place at the right time. Gareth wanted to prove himself quite early on in his knighthood as a knight of honor by choice and ethics, not by word or birth, hence the entire decision to masquerade as a peasant turned knight. That is why he could suffer the arrows of spite that the damosel shot at him, Gareth sought honor in a progressive form of knighthood, honor that represented chivalry in the most realistic description, honor from combat and deed instead of inheritance. Gareth's self-worth came from his prowess in battle, and through violence/the clash of arms, he became the man he was meant to be, not merely by birth.

It is important to note, that though Gareth gained his honor and self-worth through battle, the freedom granted to him by birth into status allowed him to act in this manner. His upper-class sibling and family status allowed him the ability to choose to make himself seem a pauper to gain personal glory and honor. While this act of pushing for his nobility and place in Arthur's court was honorable and coinciding with the ideals/aspects of chivalry, this plan of action would not necessarily have been available to any beneath his already comfortable status. Class plays an almost almighty role in these situations though. In the very literal sense, a higher station in society gave the knight an even higher chance of living and surviving combat in general. More wealth equaled the ability

to get the best armor, the best armaments, the best horses, and even the training needed to be the best of the best on the battlefield. Class became central to what it meant to be a knight but also what it meant to be a "good" and "successful" knight of the round table. Whether it was won throughout conquest or deed, given in praise by other knights or symbolically given through endorsement from a knight in a station above them or just simply inherited by the knight through lineage, wealth became the means to an end of surviving the various trials presented to them by lady or by their very king. It is worth noting in Gareth's case that the armaments he set off on his journey with were all gifts of others who also wished to see him prove his merit after coming forth supposedly as an unknown and brazen knave. He was not using the benefits granted to him through his birth to gain his state within Arthur's court, nor was he making use of the various troubadours or minstrels to further the fame of his deeds at this time as other knights may have done. Gareth based his fame and honor off of deeds, prowess, and his ability to fulfill a quest to its completion regardless of difficulty, not rumor or familial affiliation.

*Viviane and Morgause: A feminism with Two Faces presented within The Mists Of Avalon*

The hierarchy within *The Mists of Avalon* is primarily based around the goddess and her power, as her will within Bradley's tale is what lead Arthur to his seat of power. One would expect that the female characters of the text are the driving figures and the ones with the most "power" within their world and in most instances within *The Mists of Avalon* this rings true. It can be argued that "the sight" could represent female agency, or class, both of which heavily determine the fates of those who do or do not have them. In

the 20th century, this would relate to, bluntly put, the whiteness of skin and economic standing. Having both of these things has placed many undeserving members of society well ahead of those who do not have it regardless of ability, a facet of society which we would refer to as privilege now and this privilege was evident throughout the text. Those who are very powerful in "the sight" are also given a higher place within Avalon. This is where we find the character Viviane, whose two sisters did not have the sight at the same strength that she did.

Viviane, aunt of Morgaine and one of the High priestesses of Avalon, sees herself acting as a conduit of the mother/goddess throughout most of the novel to secure a future and a place in the world for Avalon and its magic and the overall future of Camelot. Viviane uses many other characters as pawns throughout the text, in one instance Viviane even tells Morgaine when she is young that she may one day hate her even though she is Morgaine's more loving mother figure throughout her time in Avalon. This warning proves to be accurate due to Viviane's willing abuse of her power and status to manipulate those around her, going so far as to orchestrate the circumstances that lead to Gwydion/Mordred's birth. There was nothing that Viviane would not do to protect and ensure the future of Avalon and its safety even in the face of her own death later on within the novel. Viviane stands in contrast to her sisters, Igraine and Morgause, as Viviane is this pinnacle of power and manipulation within Avalon's and Camelot's power structure which was only possible because of her privilege.

*The Mists of Avalon* imagines that the best way for the common good of women (or "the feminine") to be served is through the enlightened leadership of a powerful elite,



represented by the priestesshood and Viviane. That corresponds to (but does not necessarily "symbolize") a central strain in second-wave feminism that emphasized the need for women to step into executive leadership roles. But the sad fact is that the only women that genuinely benefited without any reservation within the second-wave of the feminist movement were white women, and it becomes evident that Viviane and the upper-class priestesses of Avalon were representative of this sect of women exclusively. Viviane indeed moved people around and played people as if they were nothing but pawns in her very large game. In relation to how this type of feminism manifested itself within reality, the authors of "Experiencing Second-Wave Feminism in the USA," Biklen, Marshall and Pollard state that:

Second-wave feminism forced many women to choose between their racial and gendered identities, creating the idea that the world would change if women were elected to public office because they were more peaceful and nurturing, and ignoring the fact that some women had benefited from slavery, colonialism, had waged wars, and were not necessarily or naturally oriented toward change that would support women from all class, ethnic, racial locations, and sexual orientations (451).

What this suggests is that the future for the power of women was built upon the backs of minority and marginalized communities of women, which mirrors in many ways the sacrifices that Igraine, Morgaine, and Morgause were forced to make to keep Avalon alive and fully connected to the seat of power within Camelot. Interestingly, the hierarchy fits into place because although Morgause and Igraine were sisters of Viviane, the power of sight was most potent in her and that placed Morgause and Igraine in a level beneath her. Being blessed with the immense power of sight that she had allowed Viviane to be able to take the place of power within Avalon, which set the stage for her to

plan out the lives of those closest to her. In this way Viviane's power mirrors the ability that middle-class white women had during and after the effects of second-wave feminism, they could plot the course for the ascension of power for all other women, or they could find a way in which to keep them still shoved off into the margins.

Morgause, to reiterate a fact from an earlier discussion, was Gareth's mother within both Bradley's and Malory's texts and she was not strong in the gift of sight and so she did not reside in Avalon for most of her life. Instead she lived with Igraine before Igraine had to leave her husband for Uther. Morgause's role in Bradley's tale is of one of the marginalized women that the structure of Avalon and Camelot was built upon the back of, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. She was a pawn just as Morgane was in Vivianne's schemes. She married King Lot through an arranged marriage at a young age due to Viviane's feelings about her and what she saw through "the sight" about her. Viviane sees Morgause as a figure to be used in a way which denies her of power or actual agency because she does not view her as a viable conduit of the goddess' power because she represents the "fourth face, which is secret"(23) of the goddess which is alluded to being a negative one. Even that early within the novel (and Morgause's life) Viviane denies Morgause a position of power due to her lack of "true sight" and ill-motivated intentions. Because of this Morgause never became a part of the higher class of the ethereal world that was controlling everything in the world of men, at least not until many years later when she had raised Morgaine's child, Mordred, the son of Arthur and Morgaine. In this way, Morgause stands in for the underrepresented women within Second-wave feminism, as she had been used, abused, and forgotten by Vivianne in her

constant struggle to control and reinforce the power of women within Camelot's society. Avalon did not do anything for her, just as second-wave feminism did not directly enhance the lives of minority women or underprivileged women. Unlike her son who sought power through deeds and noble acts, Morgause worked to subvert the power structure of Avalon and Camelot through the use of dark magic and her sight instead of allowing for the plot of Avalon to run its course.

Having lived as a pawn for most of her life, Morgause acted with the only available means she was able to secure an ounce of an agency that had been denied her almost her entire life. Morgause did not have the privilege of being able to put on a new name and go on quests to secure a better place in her life. She was a queen, but to a lesser lord and she felt as if her sister had put her aside just as quickly as someone puts away a once loved plaything. Morgause found out the identity of Mordred's parents with her sight within the second book of the novel, "Morgause should have known; they had made the Great Marriage for Arthur, then, before his crowning. Had Viviane planned this too, a child that should be born of the two royal lines?"(250). This quote explicitly highlights the understanding that Morgause has of her situation and her station within the entire spectrum of power within Avalon and Camelot. As a pawn of Viviane who had been cast aside eventually as her use had run its course, she was able to recognize the workings of Viviane's machinations from the outsider perspective and wished to find a way to subvert it. She used this, later on, to try and make a play for power through Mordred's claim to Arthur's throne. What is interesting is how this representation of Morgause's recognition of Viviane's plan mirrors in some ways the realization that many

marginalized women had to face within second-wave feminism, with one addendum, Morgause had become marginalized, yet she was still married to a king even if he was a lesser one. A universal quality emerges with this instance in mind between the sexes and with the tale of Morgause's son in mind; What both texts imply to "universal" qualities of gender identity--chivalric masculinity and natural, mystical femininity--turn out to be thoroughly determined by social conditions of birth. Unlike many of the underrepresented women within Second-wave feminism, Morgause was able to subvert the power structure and take her place by utilizing the power of her husband, just as her son was able to subvert the standing chivalric system in place in order to gain his own place within the power spectrum outside of relation to his brother and Arthur.

This convenient overlap of privilege of her status as a woman of Avalonian descent and a woman of royal status granted her a certain amount of power unintentionally and provided her the power necessary to make her life her own in a different way. In this way, we can again see a reflection of Second-wave feminism within the text. Viviane was pushing forward her wishes regardless of whom she had to use as a pawn, and Morgause was tired of sitting back and doing only what she was forced to do. Like many women of color within the early feminist movements, she made a space of her own, even if it was a small one and claimed what power she could. While readers may not agree with the actions taken by Morgause throughout the rest of the text, we can understand why she sought to take what she thought was owed her with her own hands since she had been ignored and forgotten after being married off. As early as page twenty-three within *The Mists of Avalon* we see an instance wherein Viviane refuses

Morgause a path to power in conversation with Igraine, "The Goddess has a fourth face, which is secret, and you should pray to her, as I do -- as I do, Igraine -- that Morgause will never wear that face." Viviane, regardless of being justified through sight or understanding, selectively marginalized a woman while actively pushing others down paths that would bring her plans to fruition. While Morgause was not knowledgeable of this conversation, it influenced her fate and set her along the path she takes throughout the rest of the tale. Morgause was not of power within Avalon's priestesshood and never would be, but she was well seated within the structure of Camelot, enough so to have the means to raise a would-be king and train him for ruling a kingdom while also teaching him battle tactics and the art of war.

Even before they found out the parentage of Morgaine's child, Morgause and King Lot sought a way in which Gawaine would be placed closer to the throne, and Morgause had thought (speaking of Morgaine) "Her son stands nearer the throne than my own Gawaine. I am full sister to Igraine, and Viviane, but he be Arthur's nephew. I wonder if Morgaine has thought of this?"(242). This manner of thought is a sad one, as it articulates the thought process of some of those who have been marginalized and seek to claim any source of agency or power they can whenever they can. Morgause is viewing Morgaine as a potential future threat even though she too has been a pawn in Viviane's game, but she just doesn't yet understand the length at which Morgaine has been used; in this passage we see her thinking of Morgaine's unborn child as Arthur's nephew and in how he would be an obstacle to the throne if Gawaine were ever to have the ability to ascend to power. A negative aspect of the novel that was informed by the darker side

effects of second-wave feminism can be seen in this instance, competition for a piece of the pie. Those more closely connected in identity or even passing as white or being straight were much more able to gain more autonomy within their society and able to navigate through a man's world in more ease than women of any marginalized community or color. That being said, the "zero-sum" approach we could see within Second-wave feminism and *The Mists of Avalon* was very oddly competitive and seemed much more patriarchal and phallogocentric: the very kind of thinking that feminist theory was supposed to be trying to undo.

*Le Morte D'Arthur: Courty Love and Malory's use of Feminine Power*

Marion Zimmer Bradley was responding to latent feminine power that she saw present in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The plots and conspiracies within *The Mists of Avalon* were making explicit an element that already existed but was mostly concealed within *Le Morte D'Arthur*. Bradley wanted to illuminate the position of women within Camelot and bring about a higher station of influence and power for them that resided in much more of the foreground of the text. The women within Malory's narrative had limited power due to the structure of their society but were still able to influence events throughout the text quite heavily and in some instances were the leading reason for a few character's deaths. Bradley wanted to prove that the female characters within the Arthurian legends were of some of the highest importance and that Malory must have downsized their parts within the legend to instill patriarchal values within the romance of *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Easily the most significant example of feminine agency and power within Malory's text, aside from Morgan Le Fay, is that of Guenevere. In book 19, the knight Meliagraunce kidnaps Guenevere because he harbours a secret love for her, wounding the knights who guarded her in the process. Incensed, Launcelot goes to rescue her, because of course he does, he is Launcelot and loves her endlessly. Upon arriving at Meliagraunce's castle Launcelot finds that Meliagraunce has changed his mind about the kidnapping and Launcelot's fury is sated by Guenevere's words. Instead Launcelot stays the night at the castle and injures his own hand getting into Guenevere's room through the window. This leads to Meliagraunce accusing Guenevere of the treason of sleeping with one of her wounded knights, and Launcelot comes to her aid swearing that she did not sleep with "any of her wounded knights". Eventually this encounter leads to a duel between Launcelot and Meliagraunce, and in this instance Guenevere breaks the boundary of the expectation of Violence being a male-only thing within Malory's work, as she is what influences, non-verbally, Lancelot to slay Meliagraunce. Malory shows us this the outcome of this episode through narration,

Then Sir Launcelot wist not what to do, for he had had liefer than all the good of the world he might have been revenged upon sir Meliagraunce; and Sir Launcelot looked up to Queen Guenevere, if he might espy by any sign or countenance what she would have done. And then the queen wagged her head upon Sir Launcelot, as though she would say: slay him!  
(683)

Malory gives Guenevere an ambiguous air in this instance, "as though she would say" is uncertain and noncommittal, even slightly hesitant, yet the following two words, "slay him!" are definitive and imperative. It seems as though Malory is hesitant to place exact blame here on the death of Meliagraunce, as doing so would place more power in

Guenevere's hands within the text, but in showing her as slightly apprehensive and scheming he is undercutting her authority and placing the final decision between life and death in the manly Sir Launcelot's hands. This among others to follow, shows us that women's role and power within *Le Morte D'Arthur* gets conflated with the power and influence they have over Knights and even the influence they have over their very quests as the Knights are charged to do as they say and do the deeds asked of them to grant them honor, yet the knights much choose to finish the quests themselves. In this way, do the women of Malory's novel not hold influence in forging these knights into a better version of themselves? Do they not also have the power to destroy said knight? The power they do have here though is still only reflected in the actions of the knights. Gareth gained conviction and drive in his early quests through the taunting and insulting of the damosel, and that set the stage for the very knight he would one day become, one to stand tall in the face of adversity. Launcelot could have been the knight to grow to such holiness and prowess, and he could have been better than even Galahad and been able to take the sword from the stone, yet he was sinful and treasonous in how he coveted his Queen, even though Guenevere is what made him the knight he was and is the reason for why he is such a devoted, and strong knight. Though Launcelot was a strong man with agency of his own that he showed repeatedly throughout his consistent refusals toward other women's love, it was his love for her and Guenevere's status that made him not the holiest knight or the most chivalrous, because his devotion was to only one huge part of chivalry, courtly love. Launcelot's devotion for his queen outmatched his devotion for his king, rendering him a lesser knight. Interesting to note though how once again the



representation of feminine power within Malory's work is used to reflect feminine agency negatively. Bradley directly contrasts this by allowing her women to woo and in some ways court the men of the Arthurian legend, especially in Launcelot's case who seemed at first to be so enthralled in young Morgaine, but the instant he saw Guenevere wander upon the shores of Avalon, Morgaine was nothing to him. Guenevere took hold of him even then and even continued and allowed for the covetous and adulterous extra-marital affair to develop throughout both works, but the fault was not so heavily placed upon her within Bradley's work.

In many ways, Malory's knights fear women and the control they have over other men and Knights through their affections and their favors, but they also desire these very affections of the women of the Lake and Camelot. This fear becomes represented in the picture that Malory gives us of Morgaine and in how she is treated within Malory's text, most notably in the encounter early on within *Le Morte D'Arthur* when Morgaine had stolen Excalibur and orchestrated a series of events where Arthur ended up imprisoned and used as a champion in a duel over land and support between brothers that lead to her using Accolon in an attempt to kill Arthur, by also having him awake near the brother's land who then uses him as a champion after Morgan got a messenger to give Accolon Excalibur with orders to use it upon the knight he would soo duel. Accolon confessed after his battle with Arthur upon realizing who he was that,

This sword hath been in my keeping the most part of this twelvemonth; and Morgan le Fay, King Uriens' wife, sent it me yesterday by a dwarf, to this intent, that I should slay King Arthur, her brother. For ye shall understand King Arthur is the man in the world that she most hateth, because he is most of the worship and of prowess of any of her blood; also she loveth me out of measure as paramour, and I her again; and if she

might bring about to slay Arthur by her crafts, she would slay her husband King Uriens lightly, and then had she me devised to be king in this land, and so to reign, and she to be my queen (99).

Accolon desired Morgan, as she was his paramour and he wanted nothing more than to do as she wished, for he too would gain in power then. Morgan loved him "out of measure," which is an interesting word choice for Malory to use. For a knight's usual wish is to gain the love of his paramour and Morgane promised this and more, through giving him the most phallic symbol of such symbols, Excalibur, the sword of swords, she was granting Accolon everything that he could have wished for if only he would slay her brother. Feminine desire is a fearful topic within Malory's world and the expression of this and the promise of such drives men at the time to do great but often fearful deeds; this is made explicitly evident in the discussion of Accolon and Morgan's plans. The promise of a woman's love, according to Malory, can lead to a possible conflict that could overthrow a kingdom. However, in hindsight (upon his deathbed), Accolon feared the power she held over him and the treachery that she had hatched that lead to his eventual death.

Arthur, of course, feared Morgan's power and ambition as well, as he is the "man in the world that she most hateth". Part of Morgana's hate had to do with the fact that she could not sway him in the ways that she was able to with other men, and at least in Malory's text she is envious of the power with which Arthur has been endowed. Arthur goes so far as to send Accolon's corpse to Morgan as a warning/promise that he will not be overthrown, "Bear him to my sister Morgan le Fay, and say that I send her him to a present, and tell her I have my sword Excalibur and the scabbard" (101). One must ask in

this instance, are there phallic references here? One could argue that Morgan was usurping his manhood by trying to take his throne away, and his use of the phrasing of “I have my sword Excalibur” is very much saying, I still have my manhood and mentioning the scabbard is interesting as well because of the other sexual connotations of having a place to put a “sword”, his marriage/union of Camelot [masculine world] and Avalon [mystical and feminine] give him the power of the king. One can even go as far back as chapter XXV in Book One when Arthur first gets Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake to see the phallic representation of the sword and the hand that feminine power has in setting this legend in motion. All the Lady of the Lake asks from him is a gift in return of her choosing upon a time of her choice, yet as a mother births a son and grants him “manhood” the Lady of the lake bequeaths his instrument of manhood and his instrument of power over others to him along with the scabbard. The scabbard that should and would keep him invulnerable and whole as long as he kept it by his side and was true to his promise to Avalon. Feminine power in this form is quite creative but is giving Arthur the power to commit acts of destruction upon others.

As can be seen in the previous discussion, knights' fear of the feminine power within love relationships was not unfounded. Alvarenga and Jung's definition within *The Grail, Arthur and His Knights : A Jungian Symbolic Reading*, is among one of the earlier understandings,

Courtly love in poems and love songs was meaningful love, painful love, the love of a man for a woman. This type of love occurred when the person in love was not married to his love object, and almost always referred to adulterous love. In the majority of cases, marriage was a contract without love and the relationship that was established was more of an economic agreement, the joining together of land, assets, and

possessions, established through family agreements. Marriage was and had to be a good business agreement. (17)

The contract of marriage that was very business-like within both versions of the legend is Arthur's marriage, yet within Malory's work this also constitutes the notion of what is or isn't adulterous, the Arthur, Launcelot, and Guenevere love triangle is an exemplary moment of courtly love, but also fully unique (and therefore useless as an example for the discussion of arranged or business like as a rule) for the same reasons: Arthur's status as king, Launcelot's status atop the chivalric hierarchy, and Guenevere's status as the desideratum for so many knights allowed the three of them to serve as an exemplary member of their respective group within this love affair, but not as a rule of thumb in any or all instances of courtly love.

Within Bradley's work, the line of adultery seems to be a bit fuzzier, because marriage was most often just a social and political contract especially in her world of Camelot, ownership to sexual rights of the one married to you was not always explicit nor was it necessarily tied to marriage. However, that mix of the political, spiritual and personal is echoed in Bradley's work by the distinction between the legal contract of marriage, the Christian sacrament of marriage, and the "Great Marriage" (which was polyamorous) of the pagan, matriarchal tradition. Bradley makes sure to let us know many times that quite a few other marriages were also just a business transaction, often being orchestrated by Vivianne, as noted earlier. The institution of Courtly love was well known and has been parodied in stories as a comical construction, yet that does not take away from what it was and why it was. To pull from Alvarenga and Jung once more, "These are the stories about courtly love. To live it and understand it, one had to have

very intense feelings, which caused a great deal of suffering, since it was only through suffering that the soul could be transformed and the meaning of life could be found”(19). As Alvarenga and Jung summarize a paragraph or two later, the suffering and transformation were indicative of the society that these stories centered around. Especially around the central religion of Christianity, one must often suffer and go through many trials to become a holier and healthier person, as a life of excess, ease, and idle hands lead to corruption. These trials and the quests the knights undertook under severe emotional distress and pining for a love they can never have, in this mindset, transform them into more moral, upstanding, holier knights fighting for the good of all as well as themselves. Though transgressions inevitably did happen within this system of Courtly Love and often lead to disastrous ends; the system was in place and not necessarily looked at with disdain because, well, jobs were getting done around the kingdom, bridges were getting fixed, and guards were being posted. While unorthodox, chivalrous interactions of courtly love worked as a stimulant for what needed to get done around the kingdom, regardless of the motivation.

With that in mind, in the article “No Pain No Gain: Violence as Symbolic Capital in Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*” Finke and Schichtman posit that women function within Malory’s work as capital/rewards gained for the quests they go through and the trials that are placed before them. While it may seem true to a certain extent, as we just covered, that does not necessarily align with the original coding of chivalry or courtly love which is of course why they do quests for the many ladies that are within the text. The ladies are often meant to serve as an unrequited love that cannot be fully acted upon or grasped,

the lady must remain out of their bounds, yet they must constantly vie for her affection through the numerous quests they do embark upon. Hence the dishonor that Gawaine brings upon himself within Book IV chapter XX when Gawaine had left Arthur's court to accompany his banished cousin Uwayne on his journey. Gawaine brings additional dishonor to himself when the lady that he chose to travel with, of the three ladies that he Uwayne and Marhaus choose between, abandons him after he refuses to save another knight who was bound after defeating men on horseback and refusing to do battle on foot when she asks Gawaine explicitly to save him. His choice to ignore her request expresses his disregard for her and any quest she could give him. Additionally, we see Gawaine dishonor himself when he is tasked with a quest by Sir Pelleas to don himself with his armor and win the heart of a woman for him, but instead Gawaine reveals himself and sleeps with the woman, only to wake and find his blade across their throats:

When Sir Gawaine and Ettard awoke of their sleep, and found the naked sword overthwart their throats, then she knew well it was Sir Pelleas' sword. Alas! Said she to Gawaine, ye have betrayed me and Sir Pelleas both, for ye told me ye had slain him, and now I know well it is not so, he is alive. And if Sir Pelleas had been as uncourteous to you as ye have been to him ye had been a dead knight; but ye have deceived me and betrayed me falsely, that all ladies and damosels may beware by you and me (115).

While Gawaine redeems himself later within Malory's work, this infringement casts him in a poor light throughout the beginning of the text and gives us an early representation of how not to behave when one is supposed to act with chivalry and honor. While Gawaine is often able to gain honor through combat, his selfish desires get in his way when he is tasked with this quest and brings him more dishonor than anything else.

Although Gawaine messed up, we can again bring the discussion back to the worst infringement of the system in place, a knight taking a woman as his own when she was supposed to be out of reach and then conspiring with her against her lord, Lancelot and Guinevere. While one could use Finke and Schichtman's article to argue that this is a prime example as violence working as the capital to pay for the reward of a woman, they would find themselves wrong if they were to inspect chivalry in its original form and how that informed manliness at the time and what it meant to be a man/knight. This very covetous relationship that Lancelot had with his queen and the infringement upon the boundaries that occurred offscreen was what indeed kept him from being worthy of The Holy Grail. It was no lie that Lancelot was the 'best' knight, in combat and honor, but he was not the most moral and upright knight because of the treasonous transgressions with his king's queen. His prowess in battle was immense, which explains, beyond just the physical beauty of him, the infatuation that Guinevere had with Lancelot and how easily he was able to woo her through his many quests. Throughout all his instances of valor and conquest, with which he performed admirably and with utmost honor and skill adhering to all the chivalrous rules of combat and the rules which governed the interactions between knights, his one real focus was never on God or his king; every deed was for his queen. Lancelot confesses to "the good man" within Book XIII, his situation and this encroachment of the boundaries within the roles of chivalry within the medieval sexual economy,

He told there that good man all his life. And how he had loved a queen unmeasurably and out of measure long. And all my great deeds of arms that I have done, I did for the most part for the queen's sake, and for her sake would I do battle were it right or wrong, and never did I battle all

only for God's sake, but for to win worship and to cause me to be the better beloved and little or naught I thanked God for it (544).

This instance itself seems to throw an eye of doubt at Finke and Schichtman's article, at least in that point of their argument, there was no spiritual or honorable reward for Launcelot regarding his affection for his Queen, sure their romance was at one time consummated in the margins, but at what cost?

Finke and Schichtman were not entirely wrong though, in their discussion on violence within *Le Morte D'Arthur* especially, "It is not quantitatively more violent than other medieval versions of the legend, but it is often more gratuitously violent. As such, it makes a good test case for our claims about masculinity, and particularly about the relationship between masculinity and violence in the medieval sexual economy." (118) As stated earlier within the paper, violence is one of the most significant defining points of chivalry and in-turn, what it means to be a man within Malory's society and his tale was working to embody that as best he could make it. Which brings us back to Charny and his *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* where violence and the act of committed vigorous masculinity take center stage. Charny explicitly focuses on this aspect of knighthood being the most important. In regards to violence and combat Charny believes that, "they themselves, through their great zeal and determination, learn the true way to practice the military arts until they, on every occasion, know how to strive toward the most honorable course of action, whether in relation to deeds of arms or in relation to other forms of behavior appropriate to their rank"(56). This idea is mirrored within Hodges work as well, wherein Hodges focuses on the aspect of injuries as a right of passage, and in some ways a religious experience for knights which portrays combat as a



vital part of chivalry: "In Malory's *Morte Darthur*, good knights transform injuries into evidence of courage and commitment, opportunities to learn, and occasions for fellowship"(31). A knight must know how to be a warrior above all else and to know the rules of combat and its intricacies to even think of being known as an honored warrior as well as being able to navigate when to act as a knight fit for combat or to act with social decorum.

The more instances of conquest a knight engaged in and whether or not the knight gains victory within these altercations directly added to the masculinity and the desirability of the knight within this culture, prowess and the very scene of violence they are able to create instills fear in their foes and awe in their comrades and the court. Within the eyes of Charny, (because he was focused on the militaristic, masculine, properly “\_cheval\_ -ric” side of chivalry) Launcelot alongside Gareth and many other knights would be quite the manly men within this model of the medieval sexual economy as they were often very skillful in battle and would create scenes of gratuitous violence. Cleaving men from helm to waist or sundering a man's arm entirely would be viewed as the pinnacle of manliness, but the way in which Launcelot conducted himself with the queen would make all of that null and void, putting other knights above him with their piety and honor, which within *Le Morte D'Arthur* is the exact reason why Launcelot is unable to find or claim the grail for Arthur because his focus is impious and impure. Launcelot's explicit focus on his relationship with the queen and obsession with his relationship with her conflicts with Charny's explanation and understanding of chivalry as, for him, relations with women are not wrong, per se, but beside the point, they are

augmentments of the life of the knight and a reason to do what they do, but should not be the whole center of a knight's existence.

### *Arthur and Morgan/Morgaine*

Arthur's place within the kingdom is central, not only because he was the king or because of his ownership of Excalibur, but because his rule was eventually accepted unanimously. Arthur was recognized within Avalon and within Camelot as the one true king who could unite the lands within both texts. While Merlin had a vital role in this within *Le Morte D'Arthur*, he was trapped underneath a rock by a damosel who he wished to have for his own in Book IV chapter I, and there he perished. It seemed as though Merlin abandoned Arthur's side after Arthur had come to power and gained his weapon which was symbolic of his strength, so Arthur was left to lead the knights of the round table with his faculties alone. Regardless, even after the absence of Merlin had set in, Arthur had proven he was capable, and the role of the king seemed to be outside this struggle for power and honor that raged between the knights. Arthur may not have fought in all of his knights' battles, but they still revered him as their king because of the station he held and the power he inherited through Uther, as well as the power he proved on the battlefield in his early years when uniting the kingdom. Nor did they discount his mastery of Excalibur and the quest that Arthur had to go through in order to get it back when Morgan had stolen it from him. Most knights, after combat had taken place, adhered to the codes of honor that followed a joust or a challenge and went their separate ways or aided one another.

While the majority of the *Le Morte D'Arthur* centers around many of Arthur's knights and not his exploits, he still seems to be present within the tales that are told within each chapter. Maybe not explicitly, but the archetype of the honorable knight of the round table was first exemplified by Arthur when he was working to unify the kingdom. If we look back at the beginning of the romance, the lords and kings were all trying to seize power after Uther's death, and were just as unwilling to listen to Merlin when he brought Arthur forth. Arthur had to fight for the authority given to him, starting as a supposed "orphan" and working his way up the chivalric ladder and proving himself in combat and leadership. Gareth's tale, one can assume, was in some ways meant to emulate the very humble beginnings of Arthur and it may have been possible that Gareth chose to travel as Beaumains for this very reason. For who else within their nation of Camelot would be worth emulating in life, if not for their king, the one who united the lands and united Camelot with Avalon once more.

Morgan Le Fay, or Morgaine within *The Mists of Avalon*, had been an almost constant target of criticism as a literary figure and just deemed as a constant source of villainy within the Arthurian legends even though she is almost just as absent within the majority of the text as Arthur was himself. While she does not seem to be a complete threat within the first few pages of *Le Morte D'Arthur*, she quickly places herself as an antagonist to King Arthur's rule. Her status as a "witch" or "sorceress" created a space wherein Malory could give a female character power and her own agency, but used her often as a way to prove how these things lead to ruin or folly. Saul discusses this very thing within her work:

As a witch, Morgan le Fay gains access to power in several ways. Through necromancy, she gains knowledge of demons and how to control them. Through her ability to perform maleficium, which “came to mean malevolent sorcery in particular,” she can take vengeance on those she deems have wronged her. In conspiracy with others, she can plot to overthrow the government or imprison opponents. Curiously, in spite of all her powers, Morgan is rarely successful in any of her plots. Nevertheless, she remains a medieval symbol of the potential danger of uncontrolled female power” (85).

Labeling a woman a witch merely for expressing any form of agency was one of the primary methods by which women have so often been kept down within the usually patriarchal masculine society that women are more often than not, forced to inhabit. Of course, Morgan Le Fey would be considered a witch for wanting to seek vengeance on any who wronged her, of course, Morgan would be labeled an evil woman for wanting to overthrow the established order of King Arthur the great, where any female expression of choice or rebellion is labeled as a threat. This labeling and the forced negative depiction of her character, and subsequently her consistent failure to overthrow King Arthur within *Le Morte D'Arthur* are some of the very things which allowed for and established the grounds for the possibility for someone to come along and write a story such as *The Mists of Avalon*. This representation is practically begging for a rewrite, and Marion Zimmer Bradley stepped up as one of the various women who have tried to fill that role.

*The Mists of Avalon* grants the women of the novel the ability to become entities of agency through their means and their sexuality without the judgment of the masculine bias. Bradley creates a tale wherein Morgaine is the one who raises her brother and teaches him about the world before he is taken to be groomed into the role of high king. Completely turning Morgaine into a loving and maternal/sisterly figure within the novel

and revising her role within the whole legend itself which can be seen as early as the eighth chapter of book one:

He was heavy on my lap, and his hair felt soft and damp; he was damp elsewhere, too, but I found that I did not mind much, and in the way he clung to me I realized that in his sleep he had forgotten he was not in his mother's arms. I thought, Igraine has forgotten both of us, abandoned him as she has abandoned me. Now I must be his mother, I suppose. (110)

While this section is prefaced with an annoyance at the existence of her brother and fraught with the jealousy of a child watching her mother shift her affections away from her, it must be noted that Morgaine states that she was only seven at the time and the love for her brother was only beginning, but this quote shows just how important she felt to him even in such a small moment early on. As the novel continues, Morgaine moves on to becoming a priestess of Avalon, yet her affections for her brother are never forgotten and are even manipulated by Viviane in an effort to unite and save Avalon once more when she worked to prepare Morgaine for her life as a priestess and employ her sexuality within the ritual of the hunt much later on within her training, changing the course of the future of Camelot and Avalon by creating a child of both worlds, but also by pairing Morgaine and her brother into this ritual, embedding Morgaine into the very fabric of the future of both worlds.

Despite Bradley's revision of the legend, Arthur and Morgan have almost always been set up as opposites within the narrative of the Arthurian Legends, even still today within the recent *The Kid Who Would Be King* film. While this is likely because Malory made Morgan such an easy target as an antagonist/villain through his representation,

many of these revisions seem to ignore her role in Arthur's final moments and the close of the novel in *Le Morte D'Arthur* which resurfaces in *The Mists of Avalon*. Within Malory, we see Bedivere take Arthur to the lake and place him upon the barge with the three queens of Avalon, it is in what one of the queens say to Arthur that the reader should pay close attention: "ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me?"(738). Malory does not come right out and say that this is Morgan, which is an interesting thing, but in saying that is her brother, that proves it and circumvents the image Malory initially presented us with of Morgan throughout the beginning of the tale, her power, and regality, as he describes the women as queens, places power upon her still, and seems to redeem her in his tale as she is resurfacing in an instance in which Arthur needs magic most.

Regardless of his final fate, Morgan was there with him in his final moments as a nurturing hand, no longer one trying to kill him. Bradley seemed to have picked up on this thread and embellished upon it within her text, of course, because Morgaine is the central character within her novel, but also because she wanted to illuminate their relationship as well as she can and draw our attention to the actual feelings she felt resided within their connection. Her version has Arthur speaking instead when he is first placed in the boat where he instantly recognizes his sister and pleads for her to rescue him: "Morgaine," Arthur whispered, "is it really you? I cannot see you, Morgaine, it is so dark here -- is the sun setting? Morgaine, take me to Avalon, where you can heal me of this wound -- take me home, Morgaine --"(868). In this version, Arthur is acknowledging not only his helplessness to his fate but also recognizing the power that Morgaine and the

Isles of Avalon hold. While the tale ends tragically just as Malory's did, it was in the arms of his sister (a feminine force of power that had been so often presented as a force of destruction) that the king of all kings searched for rescue and found peace in death as he was sailing toward the distant shores of Avalon.

## CONCLUSION

The image we are left with at the end of both tales spins an interesting thread for us to follow. Within *Le Morte D'Arthur* and *The Mists of Avalon*, we see a unification of the very masculine and feminine powers at play. While Bradley intends this, it was likely not so with Malory who feared the authority of women so deeply. Yet the image is still there. Within Malory's text, it creates a compelling contradictory optimism that seems to undercut the genuine fear of feminine strength that Malory felt and has tried to impose throughout his telling of the legend. Yet the fact remains that life springs forth from feminine reproductive power and in seeking "life," in Malory's text, it seems as if Arthur is wishing to bargain with the very powers he sought to demonize to keep himself from death regardless of the honor he would attain after his death within the chivalric ladder. Bradley's text instead creates a final space wherein Morgaine and Arthur are equals, both named and recognized in state at this point where Arthur refers to her as a child would a caregiver saying "take me home, Morgaine," fearful of the fate coming for him he seeks the comfort he grew with and symbolically unified the two worlds they represented once more.

While one could take a pessimistic stance on this ending for both texts, it creates a space wherein it is possible to open up a discussion and space of acceptance for these two very prominent gender identities. Marion Zimmer Bradley brought the feminine experience to the foreground within Thomas Malory's tale and in doing so brought new life into it. It would seem that the fear Malory and many of his contemporaries had of women blinded them to the very real power these women already controlled, Bradley



effectively brought this power to light and changed the role of the legend's marginalized characters into a more well rounded and realistic one reconciling the future with the past and moving us all beyond the mists as one.

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