A REBEL AND A WITCH: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND
IDEOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF MORGAN LE FAY IN
MALORY’S LE MORTE DARThUR

Dissertation

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Adviser
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To my father, William Saul, without whose support
I would not have been able to finish this.
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Introduction

Morgan le Fay is one of the most intriguing characters in *Le Morte Darthur* due to her attempts to seize more power than any other woman in the book, and even more than any other man except for Mordred. She most emphatically does not confine her actions to those expected of conventionally passive women in the Middle Ages. She kidnaps Lancelot many times, orders knights to pursue and destroy either Lancelot or Tristram (whichever they happen to meet first), and attempts to expose the adultery of Guenevere. She controls her own castle, which can be defended against everyone, including the King. She spares no mercy for her husband, whom she attempts to murder. Most rebelliously, and in her very first recorded action, she manipulates a battle between her lover Accolon and her brother King Arthur in a bid to rule the country herself. This action, in fact, establishes her role as enemy to Arthur and his court. Numerous characters fear her power, and yet she achieves none of the specific goals
she sets for herself. The characterization of Morgan le Fay is even more complex when one considers that Malory’s focus is on the men. Although Malory includes such traditional love stories as those of Lancelot and Guenevere and Tristram and Isolde, his attention is more often on the battles and tournaments of the males, and he tirelessly describes each in detail. Yet he also includes the troublesome Morgan le Fay. What is she doing in this very masculine book?

Previously published books and articles on Malory’s work have not given many answers to this question (when they have examined Morgan at all). In fact, critics writing on Malory have only very recently taken notice of the female characters in his narrative. The traditional focus of criticism on Le Morte Darthur is best represented in the two main collections of essays devoted to it, Aspects of Malory\textsuperscript{2} and Malory’s Originality.\textsuperscript{3} In the latter and older book, the essays correspond to tales, covering the tales of King Arthur, King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius, Lancelot, Gareth, Tristram, the Sankgreall, and Lancelot and Guenevere. Each critic attempts to locate a tale in the context of the whole narrative according to theme and technique, ultimately
arguing that Malory "wrote a single unified book rather than eight separate 'Tales'" (Lumiansky 4). Some discussion of Malory's use of sources is also included. The former collection, on the other hand, concentrates almost exclusively on Malory's use of sources, with the point being mainly that Malory knew what he was doing when he adapted his sources to fit his own purposes. However, none of these topics has much to do with Le Morte Darthur's female characters and how they fit into Malory's artistic or socio-political purposes. A check through the MLA Bibliography on Malory reveals that recent criticism maintains a heavy emphasis on male characters, especially Lancelot (but with a new interest in Merlin) and on issues such as narrative styles, the knights' fellowship and chivalry.

However, in recent years, some attention has been given to the female characters with articles such as Martin R. Shichtman's "Elaine and Guinevere: Gender and Historical Consciousness in the Middle Ages." He argues that Elaine of Astolat was the perfect masculine idea of a woman, beautiful and submissive, who self-destructs upon Lancelot's rejection because he refuses to allow her to attain the role she sought: that of a wife. Rather than
finding new roles, or even rather than go back to the old roles of sister and daughter, Elaine attempts to assert her autonomy by starving herself to death. Shichtman characterizes Guenevere, on the other hand, as always less than perfect, a character which evolves over time, and ends her life in the convent, rejecting all her previous authority and responsibility. There is also the recent book, *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Reviews*, which includes a few essays on female characters and a few on love.\(^5\) One of these studies, Peter Waldron’s "'Vertouse Love’ and Adulterous Lovers: Coming to Terms with Malory," focuses on the distinction between love for God and romantic love, arguing that Lancelot and Guenevere do not live up to the higher ideal of love of God. In another essay, Ginger Thornton and Krista May raise the issue of Malory’s possible feminism in "Malory as Feminist? The Role of Percival’s Sister." However, the article disappoints the feminist reader expecting a significant improvement in development of a female character’s role. In comparing Malory’s version to what is believed to be his source, they note that Malory has increased the involvement of Percival’s sister in the quest, yet they fail to show more than a few minor
differences, which I believe they have exaggerated in any case. Significantly, Malory still does not name the sister. Her new assertiveness in Malory's version mainly consists of Percival’s sister choosing to die by shedding the blood needed by a dying maiden instead of being forced into death, as in the previous version. This self-sacrificial act may give her a slightly higher reputation by allowing her the honor of being buried alongside Galahad and Percival and thus possibly implying that she has achieved as high a spirituality as these two knights. Nevertheless, a truly feminist revision on Malory’s part would surely not consist of him representing a woman choosing to die. In fact, in the end the authors admit, "To argue Malory’s ardent commitment to fifteenth-century feminism—if such a thing could even be said to have existed—would be ridiculous" (50). So the title question turns out to be a red herring.

In fact, many of the new studies of women in Malory disappoint by employing the very stereotypes that feminist critics caution against. The titles of these articles alone suggest the limitations of this approach: "Bitch or Goddess: Polarized Images of Women in Arthurian Literature and Films" and "The Good, the Bad, and the
Ugly: A Study of Malory’s Women.”7 Therefore, while there have been feminist studies of Malory, they have not always been as penetrating and as deep as they could be. As can already be seen from previous examples, studies of the female characters concentrate mainly on Guenevere and both Elaine of Corbenic Castle (Galahad’s mother) and Elaine of Astolat, all lovers of Lancelot. Some studies of the female characters also focus on the whole Arthurian tradition or on modern popular images of these characters. Therefore, such articles are not very illuminating about Malory’s specifically fifteenth-century versions of these characters.

It is particularly surprising that so few articles or studies have focused on Morgan le Fay in Malory, especially considering how many have been written on the same character in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.8 The interest in Morgan’s role in this poem is due to the fact that at the end of the poem the Green Knight (Bertilak) tells Gawain that Morgan actually arranged the beheading game as well as the attempted seduction at Bertilak’s castle. Although Morgan has not been mentioned until this point and is not mentioned afterwards, she apparently has been the most powerful character in the poem since she is
identified as having devised all of its action and as having giving instructions to Bertilak. Moreover, critics widely disagree on the significance of Bertilak’s revelation.

Douglas Moon characterizes the beheading game as a chastity test directed at Guenevere, and this equation of Morgan’s plot with a test is also employed by Mother Angela Carson, Hubert Morgan and J. Eadie. Carson bases her argument on Loomis’ works on Celtic mythology (including *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romances*) which she uses to equate Morgan with not only the old woman at the castle but also Bertilak’s wife. Since she argues that Morgan is Bertilak’s wife, she can then explain that Bertilak must really be Morgan’s husband Uriens and his castle the Other World, or the land of faery. This characterization would also correspond to Malory’s version of Morgan since she marries Uriens, and also takes Arthur to Avalon in the end, which may be a version of the Other World. Eadie, on the other hand, takes a less mythological approach, and argues that the tradition of Arthur’s court is a story of decline. He further states that this poem is set at a time when "everyone is poised between the possibilities of good and evil" (301); in
other words, before Arthur’s court has begun to disintegrate due to the flaws of its members. Morgan’s plan, he believes, functions to emphasize the battle between good and evil, with Morgan representing evil. This also seems to be the role she often plays in Le Morte Darthur, where she is continuously seeking the destruction of Arthur and his knights. Hubert Morgan, however, puts Morgan le Fay on the opposite side of this battle, saying,

This very sickness, however, subtly threatens to betray the court into a false pride in its members and institutions, a pride wanting Christian humility and forgetful of the perpetual need of grace, and the trial initiated by Morgan and furthered by Bertilak and his wife serves both to test and to teach Gawain, assuring him of his merit yet also of his limitations, bringing him to a more sober awareness of the service he owes and of the mercy invoked by the knight-servitor. (280)

Denver Baughan also shares this belief that the test has the aim of reforming a corrupt court.

Moore apparently disagrees with every other critic’s analysis of Morgan’s role, although he agrees there is a need to examine it. He faults Albert Friedman for believing that the poem’s ingenious interweaving of material from varied sources, a notable aspect of its tour de force achievement, simply breaks down at the end. The intrusion of Morgan is
nothing more than the poet’s last-ditch effort to pull everything together, and a most unsatisfactory effort at that (214-5).

He faults Carson’s logic in identifying Bertilak’s wife as Morgan for such reasons as "Bertilak does not explicitly deny the identity of the two women" and he comments, "Such arguments from silence generally carry little weight" (217). He also criticizes Moon, who agreed with Carson’s analysis. He points out that Eadie’s belief that Morgan’s presence in the poem serves to remind the audience that evil threatens Arthur’s court because "the supposed desire to foreshadow the fall of Arthur’s court" would not require "the poet to introduce Morgan in stanza 98" (219). As for his own explanation of Morgan, his theory rests on the idea of "a Gestalt switch" (221); therefore, "Bertilak’s revelation . . . rais[es] new questions at the last moment" (226). That the revelation of Morgan’s involvement raises questions about the preceding episodes is about as specific as he gets in assessing Morgan’s role in the poem.

The disagreement about the aim of the chastity test is a particularly interesting point. Geraldine Heng argues that Morgan’s "evil" (in Le Morte Darthur) actually serves a positive function:
In the final analysis, however, Morgan’s impact is not as destructive as it might superficially seem. The trials she provides Arthur’s knights serve to increase their abilities and reputations with successful endurance. . . .

While this may be true, I do not think readers of Malory should overlook Morgan’s ubiquitously threatening presence, and the fact that she frequently does intend to cause great destruction. I agree with Friedman, who argues that Morgan is not a fit agent of reform and that her testing is not usually positive. However, the chastity tests can still find the court lacking, even if the person pointing out these faults has many of her own. Morgan attempts to reveal the shortcomings of the court, such as Guenever’s infidelity, not with the intention of rehabilitating but with the intention of instigating the kind of disruption that Mordred achieves at the end. Nevertheless, I find it surprising that six articles have been published, within six years of each other, on the character of Morgan in a poem in which she is barely mentioned (no matter how much power is attributed to her), while only two articles have been published on her character in Le Morte Darthur, where she has considerably more importance and where she is quite fully developed as a speaking and an acting agent. This lack of examination
of Morgan’s character in Malory is a gap that this dissertation has begun to fill.

Some limited explanations have been offered by traditional formalist and historical critics. Henry Morgan discusses only one incident in which Morgan le Fay comes into the action, her rebellion against Arthur. He compares this rebellion to Mordred’s rebellion at the end, and classifies both as family betrayals (Arthur is betrayed by both sister and son). Nevertheless, he overlooks significant differences due to gender. Morgan and Mordred use different methods since Morgan’s plot involves magic and Mordred’s does not. While both, at different times, use the excuse of Guenevere’s betrayal of Arthur in order to stir up dissension, Morgan uses subtler hints such as the painting on Tristram’s shield while Mordred more successfully uses the evidence of Guenevere and Lancelot in bed together. Further, Henry Morgan does not discuss any of Morgan le Fay’s other actions, which are quite different in nature from this incident since she never again seeks to overthrow the king.

Myra Olstead’s essay covers more ground than Henry Morgan’s, and she primarily characterizes Morgan in terms of the fairy mythology in which she believes these stories
originated. Through this mythology, she classifies Morgan’s role as "fairy captor" in repeatedly kidnapping Lancelot and other knights. She also terms the Accolon episode a family betrayal, but in addition points out the necessity of the Lady of the Lake to counteract Morgan’s "sinister actions." She notes that Morgan never succeeds, because the Lady of the Lake always prevents her: "The interplay of magic between them constitutes an important narrative sequence that contributes to the total unity of the Morte Darthur" (137). While Olstead’s article provides a more complete picture of Morgan than Henry Morgan’s, she limits herself to Morgan’s identity as a fairy. She does not provide much of a comparison to other female figures, nor does she historicize Morgan as a fifteenth-century creation. Further, she cannot account for the confusing ending in which Morgan appears on the boat to take Arthur to Avalon where he will be healed, which is a surprising action following so many details of extreme animosity:

Undoubtedly much of Morgan’s immortality lies in her establishment of "the Breton hope," paradoxical as it seems to her nature elsewhere, for in that hope is symbolized the survival of nobility, the promise that courage and honor are enduring qualities in the hearts of men. (138)
Clearly, a further study of this episode and others involving Morgan is necessary, a study which takes into account Morgan’s gender, her social roles, and her subtextual "meaning" in Malory’s complex and specifically late medieval culture.

The assumption that this character’s gender is essential in defining her meaning in the text is at the base of this study. In following this assumption, I am grounding my study on the principles of feminist criticism. Traditional formalist and historical approaches to Malory, as discussed above, such as examinations of which sources Malory used, how he used them, his structural decisions, and his idea of chivalry, while certainly necessary, can only begin to account for the female characters in the text. This study, rather, will follow Sandra Gilbert’s belief that "if feminism and humanism are not to be mutually contradictory terms, we must return to the history of what is called Western culture and reinterpret its texts." 12 Indeed, she quotes a medievalist as saying, "'Everything has to be done again'" (36). In declaring that we must reinterpret texts, Gilbert explains that this means "to decode and demystify all the disguised questions and answers that
have always shadowed the connections between textuality and sexuality, genre and gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority" (36). In this study, I examine, in a reinterpretation, the assumptions about "gender, psychosexual identity and cultural authority" that are embedded in Le Morte Darthur. The feminist challenge, however, does not necessarily ask that we censor or jettison texts that offend our feminist sensibilities. As Lillian Robinson explains, "although [feminist criticism] posits new values, it never suggests that in the light of those values, we ought to reconsider whether the great monuments are really great, after all." 13 Certainly I do not argue that Le Morte Darthur is not worth reading if it portrays women in a biased manner. However, we do need to recognize why the female characters are portrayed in the way that they are, and to historicize them in an act of feminist historical investigation.

Besides the fear that this feminist reanalysis means doing away with canonical texts, there is another criticism of this approach, one from the feminist critics themselves. Elaine Showalter cautions that such analysis "comes dangerously close to a celebration of the opportunities of victimization, the seduction of
betrayal." Annette Kolodny further laments the "painfully personal distress at discovering whores, bitches, muses and heroines dead in childbirth." Toril Moi discusses the other limitations of earlier feminist criticism which searched for "an authentic expression of real experience" or "realist fiction." Previously, it is true, such analyses led merely to a discussion of female stereotypes or a desire for "role models," but feminist criticism has gone beyond such limited arenas. Rather than searching for role models and stereotypes, feminist examination of the canon has taken a new stance, as exemplified by Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader*, an analysis of male authors' cultural assumptions which lie behind their words. In much the same way, I study Malory in order to discern the cultural influences behind the words, as well as how these influences shape the depiction of the female characters.

Certainly, recent articles on Malory, including Geraldine Heng's previously mentioned essay on the feminine in *Le Morte Darthur*, avoid such stereotypical limitations. I do not believe a feminist criticism of Malory, whichever character is the focus, need stop at delineating stereotypes; much more is clearly going on.
Indeed, I do not intend to discuss any of those stereotypes that Kolodny mentions. After all, Morgan is the one doing the betraying here, though this does not make her simply a "bitch." Instead, this study will examine Morgan’s character as a rebel and a woman in relation to the themes of marriage and love, gender and power, and witchcraft and heresy.

In order to understand Morgan’s meaning in Malory, we must attend to "a growing emphasis in feminist literary study on the fact of literature as a social institution, embedded not only within its own literary traditions but also within the particular physical and mental artifacts of the society from which it comes" (Kolodny 147). In reference to Malory’s text, this means studying some of the contemporary artifacts relevant to Morgan’s roles in the narrative. In Chapter 1, I use historical and literary studies to illuminate Morgan’s character and her role in Arthurian (and, concomitantly, fifteenth-century) society. Morgan participates in two differing social systems of the Middle Ages, patriarchal marriage practice and courtly love. For example, in studying medieval marriages, Ann S. Haskell explores the ways in which arranged marriages affected women’s lives, noting, for
instance, such evidence as the fact that daughters who were disobedient to their parents’ marriage negotiations seem to have been treated more harshly than sons.\textsuperscript{18} Evidence from the fifteenth century, for example the various marriage negotiations recorded in the Paston family letters,\textsuperscript{19} confirms this. For example, when Elizabeth Paston in 1449 refused to marry the man her family had chosen, she was severely beaten by her mother (\textit{Paston Letters}, vol. II, no. 446, p. 31). Whether or not this was common, the incident does show the extent of the pressure that could be brought upon young women who did not passively agree to their parents’ marriage arrangements.

However, the history of women’s daily life in the Middle Ages is not always one of total submission to men. Judith M. Bennett, for example, notes that the widows in the village of Brigstock in England in the fourteenth century greatly expanded their participation in the community, bringing it to a level that was more on a par with the participation of men.\textsuperscript{20} They then began to trade and sell land, and became active in litigation. The description of marriage arrangements in these studies is quite similar to Morgan’s arranged marriage to Uriens.
They also provide a context for Morgan’s desire to kill this husband of an arranged marriage, since historical studies reveal the fact that, in the Middle Ages, upon widowhood Morgan would gain greatly increased power. She could then own land and property in her own name (in addition to the castle it is said Arthur gave her), and sell it or buy more, as she so chose. While her son Uwain would inherit the family title and the power that went with it, Morgan would still be in control of the estate while Uwain was away involved in all those battles and tournaments Malory loved to describe.

In contrast to this medieval reality, Malory includes in his story the courtly love tales of Guenevere and Lancelot and Tristram and Isolde. Courtly love allowed for greater freedom for women in that they had the option to accept or reject an offer of love, and had the option of a love affair outside of an arranged and possibly loveless marriage, at least in the fantasy of the chivalric romances. Nevertheless, as Georges Duby, Penny Schine Gold, and Howard Bloch have said, there were still restrictions on a woman’s behavior. The freedom to choose was limited by public opinion, as in the case of Ettard in Le Morte Darthur, who rejects Pelleas’
love. All the ladies interpret her refusal as a sign of excessive pride, and judge her harshly. Even when the woman does have the power of choice, the power does not extend beyond this one relationship. Morgan le Fay exposes the boundaries of courtly love by her refusal to confine her actions to these boundaries. Instead of passively waiting for the man to approach her, she pursues Lancelot. Rather than accepting rejection calmly, she sends her knights out to take revenge on him. Furthermore, she uses her lover, Accolon, and the relationship with him as a basis for a plot to kill Arthur and rule with her lover. Obviously, all this is not part of the courtly love ethic.

Morgan disrupts the Arthurian world even more by her attempts to reveal the infidelity of Guenevere. She apparently understands the contradiction in courtly love’s acceptance of adultery and patriarchal practice’s criminalization of it, and plans to use this tension to her own ends, which are not only to humiliate Guenevere, but also to cause dissension in the court, since in her first rebellious action she reveals herself as the enemy to Arthur’s court. On at least two separate occasions she attempts to expose Guenevere’s adultery, but is
unsuccessful in forcing Arthur to see the truth. The exposure of the two lovers is left to Mordred, who fulfills Morgan’s vision of rebellion and destruction of the court.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the power women in Le Morte Darthur do have. As Heng has argued, the male characters in Le Morte Darthur rely on the female characters in many ways. The most common influence of women may be that they often supply men with weapons, as when the Lady of the Lake gives Excalibur to Arthur, but they also influence men by interpreting signs, as when the anonymous maiden tells Percyval he should sit in the Siege Perilous at the Round Table. Besides affecting the action of the men in these ways, sorceresses also have power over others. While the second Lady of the Lake, Nyneve, uses this magical power for the good of the men, Morgan uses her magical power for her own benefit. Morgan uses her magic in order to arrange an opportunity to kill Arthur and rule herself, and later to attempt to kill Arthur in his own court, but Nyneve uses her power of prophesy and interpretation to inform Arthur of Morgan’s plots. The characterization of Morgan, therefore, is an expression of masculine fear of women’s power because she is not
controlled by any man, and thus uses her power to harm
men. Nyneve, on the other hand, represents the only
model of a powerful woman acceptable to the medieval male
mind: a woman who uses her power exclusively for the good
of men.

This idea of dangerous women also has been discussed
by other feminist critics. Gayle Green and Coppelia Kahn
have examined the story of "The Blank Page," and have
found that traditional patriarchal practice "holds female
sexuality to be dangerous and powerful, requiring men to
exercise strict control over it."24 Not only is female
sexuality seen as powerful, but so are the women
themselves. In studying history from a new perspective,
feminist historians have determined that, "an
understanding of the interdependence of the spheres
reveals that women have wielded more power than has been
apparent, and that aspects of women's lives which appear
to be restrictive may actually be enabling" (Green and
Kahn 17).

Besides noting these subtle forms of "informal,
invisible, collective" power, critics have found more
overt forms of feminine power. In examining Shakespearean
plays, Madeline Gohlke has found that in many cases, "it
is women who are regarded as powerful and men who strive to avoid an awareness of their vulnerability in relation to women, a vulnerability in which they regard themselves as "feminine." 25 She finds that Othello kills Desdemona in "a desperate attempt to control" her (155), and that Macbeth becomes "the plaything of powerful feminine forces, betrayed by the 'instruments of darkness,' the three witches" (159). Morgan le Fay also controls men, such as Alysaudir le Orphelin and even Lancelot. She has the power to control primarily due to her knowledge of medicine which allows her to keep these men unconscious until she can have them removed to her castle and locked up. These men do not escape by their own power, but only through the help of Morgan's maidens. Although Othello may have wished to control Desdemona, in Le Morte Darthur, Morgan can never be completely controlled.

One representation of this medieval masculine desire to control women, and of a woman's pain at hearing statements filled with the concomitant hatred, can be seen in the Wife of Bath's Tale. She explains that one of her husbands used to read from a "book of wikked wyves" and liked to quote proverbs such as "'Bet is,' quod he, 'thyn habitacioun/Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,/Than with a
womman usyng for to chyde." Of course this husband, Jankyn, also reminded her of Eve, proving "That womman was the los of al mankynde" (ll. 719-20). The portrayal of her character reveals medieval misogyny because Morgan attempts just such a destruction of the Arthurian world, and because she is the only serious threat to the kingdom after Arthur has established his authority until Mordred rebels.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the ideological meaning for a medieval audience of Morgan’s role as a witch. For instance, one of her roles is as a healer, which also gives her some of the power she uses, as just discussed in the cases of Alysaunder and Lancelot. This knowledge of healing can also be used to cause illness or death, and she uses it to harm men. Therefore, she has more power over men than medieval male readers could accept, and such power would identify her as a witch, as I will demonstrate with historical evidence. In order to understand how the culture of Malory’s time may have affected the portrayal of these roles, I have examined studies of women healers and medical treatises of the time, which reveal what restrictions there were on women healers, what masculine attitudes were at the time towards these women healers,
and how often these women healers were accused of witchcraft. On the other hand, modern studies of witchcraft and witchcraft treatises of the time also shed light on Morgan’s character. As most histories of witchcraft note, women were much more frequently accused of witchcraft than men, whether or not the women practiced medicine, and the greater number of accusations against women may be due to women’s need to rebel against the restrictiveness of their society. While Morgan does not show any of the satanic associations that had come into the understanding of witchcraft by Malory’s time, she does exhibit the rebellion against her own society thought to be characteristic of witches. For instance, Jeffrey Burton Russell characterizes the witch as a person who "takes pleasure in corrupting all that a peaceful and just society holds dear." Similarly, Morgan rejects medieval values such as feminine submissiveness to men, as when she attempts to murder her husband, and holds knights such as Lancelot captive. Russell also believes that "[t]he witch may be moved by the Promethean urge to acquire the means to bend both nature and other people to his [or her] own ends" (275-6), and Morgan uses her sorcery for just these purposes.
Another reason most accused witches were women may be due to masculine fear of women’s power. The fifteenth-century witchcraft treatise (perhaps the most influential of the genre), Malleus Maleficarum, first published in Nuremberg, reads like a diatribe against the dangers of an uncontrolled woman. The authors sum up this fear in saying, "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil." Moreover, the evil they think, according to the authors, is primarily directed towards men to the extent of even causing men to believe that they have lost their genitalia. However, this is only an illusion since no witch—woman—could have such power; only a male God could really do such a thing. The previously mentioned scene in which Morgan attempts to kill her husband proves how well she fits this gynophobic stereotype. What could be a more frightening thought to medieval men than that their own wives might be plotting to kill them in their sleep? In the Middle Ages husbands were expected to have control of their wives; perhaps the fear was that if they did not, they might in fact be in danger from their own wives.

That women do have power can be supported further by studying the lengths to male writers such as those of the Malleus are driven in their diatribes against the evils of
women, all the while denying that women have any power at all, insisting instead on their weakness. In constructing this argument, I am making assumptions about motives that are not stated; for instance, I have to ask why medieval male writers felt the need to argue so strenuously that women are weak and yet at the same time seem so fearful of what a woman might do if she turns to witchcraft. It does not seem logical to argue that women are powerless and yet simultaneously argue that they are so dangerous as to require such examination and execution if found to be a witch; however, the authors of the Malleus Maleficarum are apparently unaware of the basic contradiction in their logic. I believe such authors maintained this paradox because in fact they did believe women were powerful, but wished to restrict their power, and that they used the argument that women are weak in order to confuse women into believing they had no power. They needed to convince women not to use their power because if they did, they would use it to the detriment of men. The authors of the Malleus took this logic further and stated that any power women did have must come from the devil, and therefore must be a defiance of God.
In heretical movements as well, women found an outlet for protest against the restrictive roles their society dictated. Shulamith Shahar explains that the Waldensians and Cathars allowed women to preach and conduct religious services. This wider interpretation of women’s role in religion occurred in spite of the fact that both Waldensians and Cathars “questioned Mary’s role as mediator between the believer and God” (256). Shahar remarks:

It is therefore impossible to explain the greater rights of women in the Waldensian [or Cathar] community on the basis of a theological change concerning the function of the feminine element in the celestial hierarchy or the redemption of mankind. (256)

The increase in roles allowed to women was instead due to the laity and their hostility toward the Church hierarchy. Cathars also stressed the equality of all believers through their view that "the very existence of the sexes is a creation of Satan" and that all souls were equal in God’s eyes (262). Because of the greater freedom given to women in these movements, Shahar wonders,

Did they [women] seek, above all, a religious life in which they as laymen would have a greater share than they could in the Catholic Church at that time, following the eleventh-century Reform which had failed to
satisfy? Or was it primarily a kind of protest against the social order in general? (266)

Besides these sects, the fifteenth-century Lollards also allowed women to preside over the eucharist, and like the Cathars their reasons were not specifically to increase women’s involvement. They believed "that any Christian, including a woman, could perform the sacrament of the eucharist." This belief of the Lollards explains why a woman in the Middle Ages who dictated her own life story, Margery Kempe, was accused of being a Lollard when she was considered to be speaking excessively about scripture. However, it was not just women’s involvement in administering sacraments that enraged the Catholic Church at the time, but any substantial involvement at all by women in religious practices. In a handbook on recognizing heresy, written by a cleric in the thirteenth century, the writer explains that for Waldensians, "all men, and even women, are allowed to preach." The writer quotes scripture to show the error of this idea: "Corinthians (1 Cor 14:34): ‘Women should keep silence in Church, for it is not permitted for them to speak.’ The greater role of women in heretical sects was one of the main objections by the Catholic Church in classifying their ideas as heresy, as I will show in chapter 3.
The history of witchcraft and heresy provides a rich ground for investigating feminine rebellion in medieval society, and this history may supply a parallel for Morgan’s hostility to the court of Camelot. From the feminist point of view, Russell theorizes,

The fact that women made their presence felt in orthodox reform, heresy, and witchcraft—all three—to a greater extent than anywhere else in medieval society suggests that they felt deprived, not of wealth, but of the dignity and worth they deserved as human beings. (282)

In short, Russell sees witchcraft and heresy as "a form of rebellion against the male establishment" (281). Not only does Morgan’s open rebellion link this subject to Arthurian romance in general, but as Russell states, "The rise in status of ladies caused by courtly love . . . may actually have encouraged the development of the witch image as a reaction" (284). So not only are women driven to rebellion in a restrictive society, but men are likely to view any gains in women’s status as extremely dangerous.

In examining various medieval literatures for the theme of women’s rebellion, Joan Ferrante discusses women’s attempts to gain power even though they were forced into a passive role. She determines that
The point seems to be that not all women will accept the passive role imposed on them; if they are denied a direct and open role, they will find a way to assert their will, and the secret, hidden way can be dangerous.35

Malory’s contemporary audience, I believe, would have seen Morgan in this dangerously rebellious role since she does not accept a passive feminine one, and the methods she uses to break out of this role--plans for her lover to kill her brother, plans to kill her brother with a magic mantle, plans to kill her husband with his own sword--could potentially cause great harm to others and even the whole court. Through my examinations of the socio-political history of the fifteenth century in regards to women’s position in society, I demonstrate both Morgan’s hidden and overt roles as a threat to Arthur’s court.
Notes

1. I use the edition of Malory: Works, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 1971. For the sake of consistency, I will use one spelling of each name in the Arthurian story throughout my discussion, in spite of the numerous variations of each from source to source (or even within a source). The only time other spellings will be used is in direct quotation of a source (primary or secondary) or in a title of a source.


28 Except in one case where Uwain prevents her from murdering her husband Uriens. She repents and claims to have been led astray by the devil. However, her repentance, and therefore her explanation of how she was led astray, becomes suspect when her next action is to send to Arthur a mantle which should burn him to death. However, the Lady of the Lake warns him in time to prevent any harm.


CHAPTER I
The Conflict between Courtly Love and Medieval Marriage

The Arthurian tradition which Malory drew upon included numerous texts in various languages, from various centuries, and with various points of view. For example, in the English *Alliterative Morte Arthure* from the century preceding *Le Morte Darthur*, the writer portrays Arthur as a warlord and focuses on battles and the knights' loyalty to their overlord.1 By contrast, the earlier French romances, such as Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century *The Knight of the Cart*, for which the author says Marie de France gave him the source and meaning (or matiere and san),2 embody the ideals of courtly love.3 In drawing together such sundry texts, Malory brings into one work two competing ideals, that of patriarchal marriage practice and that of courtly love. While marriage practice sought to regulate female sexuality, courtly love may have offered an outlet to frustrated women (and men), even if only in fantasy.
Morgan le Fay participates in both systems, violating the codes of both, and finally uses the friction between the two in an attempt to disrupt the court through dissension.

The pressures of patriarchal marriage practice come to bear on Arthur early in *Le Morte Darthur*. Immediately after he is established as king and accepted by the barons, Malory tells us that the barons advise Arthur to get a wife. In Arthur's discussion of the issue with Merlin, negotiation and romance seem to be mixed. On the one hand, Merlin asks Arthur "is there ony . . . that ye love more than another?" (Malory 59), and Arthur instantly responds that he has long loved Guenevere. However, on the other hand, the emphasis then shifts from love to political negotiation as Merlin speaks on Arthur's behalf to King Leodegrance (Guenevere's father), who gives not only his daughter to the King but also the Round Table and a hundred good knights. For all his protests that he loves her and esteems her highly, Arthur's true loyalty is to his political rather than marital state; he reveals this loyalty near the end of the work when the knights of the Round Table have dispersed by saying, "much more am I soryar for my good knightes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a
felyship of good knightes shall never be togydirs in no company. And now I dare sey . . . there was never Chrystyn kynge that ever hylde such a felyshyp togydyrs" (Malory 685). In other words, he says, a wife is easily replaceable while "such a felyship of good knightes" is not. By giving Arthur such a speech, Malory emphasizes the importance of the marriage as a political arrangement and devalues the romance between Arthur and Guenevere, and values instead the knights. After all, Guenevere herself is never consulted as to her preference for the marriage, and does not speak at all until the court of knights and ladies has been established.

Similar to the arranged marriages in Malory's story, marriages in the Middle Ages were arranged among the upper classes, and such arrangements were rarely motivated by romance or affection. They were more often the result of negotiations made by the parents of the betrothed. Finding marriage partners for one's children frequently depended upon finding a suitable heiress to bring the family more power and land. Such heiresses were especially important to find for younger sons (who would not inherit the family estate), who otherwise would not normally marry. Because marriage was seen as an
advantageous arrangement for the family rather than the fulfillment of a romance, betrothals would be made as soon as children were of age, that is, when they were as young as seven years old (Ward 13), although the actual marriage would not take place until puberty or the age set by the Church—twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Jennifer Ward describes an example of such an arrangement in medieval England:

Edward I's nephew Thomas, earl of Lancaster, was betrothed to Alice de Lacy in 1292 when he was about fourteen years old and she was eleven. Alice was the daughter and heiress of Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln, and Edward I ensured in the marriage settlement that the whole Lacy inheritance would come to Thomas and Alice. (Ward 17)

Medieval marriages in Malory's time were still political arrangements, and the betrothed were still very young.

The Neville family provides an example from the late fifteenth century:

One daughter, Eleanor, married when she was probably no more than nine, Richard Despenser, de jure Lord Burghersh, then aged twelve. Within two years she was a widow and remarried to the twenty-one-year-old earl of Northumberland.6

The most extreme example of marriage contracts for the family's political or financial gain involving very young
participants comes from the same period as the previous example. In this case, one of the participants has not even been conceived at the time of the contract: "The agreement provided for the marriage of [Lady Grey's] son Thomas (or, in the event of this death, that of his younger brother, Richard) to the eldest daughter of Lord Hastings to be born within the next five or six years, with provision for a marriage to a daughter of his brother, Ralph, or his sister, Anne, if no daughter was born to him" (Lander 132, my emphasis). The fact that families are negotiating for influence and not the welfare of their children is supported not only by the fact that one of the participants to the marriage does not yet exist (and may never exist), but also by the fact that alternative provisions are made, substituting brothers and cousins in order to fulfill the specified arrangements (including mention of manors, possessions, rents and profits, as well as 500 marks).

Although these examples appear to suggest that men and women (boys and girls) were equally powerless in the arrangements made by their parents, Ann S. Haskell explains that, while technically the rights of refusal would belong to both participants, daughters were
subjected to considerably more pressure than sons.⁸

Letters from the Paston family can provide an example of such "pressure" in the case of Elizabeth Paston, who in her teens in 1449 refused to marry Stephen Scrope, a man of around fifty and "permanently disfigured" (Haskell 466-7). Elizabeth Clere writes to John Paston on his sister's suffering due to this refusal:

... for sche was never in so gret sorow as sche is now-a-dayes; for sche may not speke wyth no man, ho so euer come, ne not may se ne speke wyth my man, ... And sche hath son Esterne the most part be betyn onys in the weke or twyes, and som tyme twyes on o day, and hir hed broken in to or thre places.⁹

On the other hand, when a woman attempted to arrange a marriage on her own, the family resisted and actively worked to destroy the union. In 1466 Margery Paston clandestinely married the family bailiff, Richard Calle, much to the family's disapproval. The family prevented Margery from having any contact with the world, and especially with Richard Calle, causing them both deep distress, as Richard attests in this letter to Margery in 1469,

Myn owne lady and mastres, and be-for God very trewe wyff, I wyth herte ful sorowefull recomaunde me vnto you as he that can not be mery nor nought schalbe tyll it be otherwice
wyth vs theenne it is yet; for thys lyff that we lede nough is nowther plesur to Godde nor to the worlde, concederyng the gret bonde of matrymony that is made be twix vs, and also the greete love that hath be and as I truste yet is be-twix vs, and as on my parte neuer gretter . . .


When later that year the Bishop required Margery and Richard to be examined as to the legitimacy of the marriage, Margery asserted that, "sche thowthe in here conschens sche was bownd" (Paston Letters, vol. I, no. 203, p. 341). In response her mother Margaret declared, "I schargyd my seruantys that sche xuld not be reseyued in myn hows" and assured Sir John in her letter that, "we have lost of here but a brethele [worthless person]" because "fore and sche had be good, wat so euer sche had be yt xuld not aben os jt tys." She also advised against seeking a divorce, since this "xuld offend God and yowr conschens."

Negotiations like those of the Nevilles and Pastons are represented in Le Morte Darthur in the beginning of the story, at the time of Igraine's marriage to Uther. The arrangement of this marriage begins, as with Arthur's marriage, with the barons who recommend to the king that he marry Igraine for the sake of the country. As with the arrangements of the Nevilles, the arrangements are
suggested by people other than the man and woman to be married, and the reason is for something other than love. Naturally, since Uther had long been enamored of her, "lyke a lusty knighte, he assentid thereto with good wille" (Malory 5). The arrangements proceed without much mention of Igraine's preference, even though her preference should be much in doubt since she has previously acted as a loyal wife to the Duke of Cornwall, who has just died fighting Uther's knights.\(^1\) Merlin and Uther had previously arranged a plan to allow Uther to satisfy his desire for her on the night of the Duke's death, when Merlin through magic caused Uther to look like the Duke. They did not inform Igraine of these arrangements; consequently, Igraine believed the man to have visited her to have been her husband. Therefore, her interest in marrying Uther cannot be assumed.

At the time of Igraine's wedding, marriages are arranged for her daughters.\(^2\) This is the first mention of Morgan, who is sent to a nunnery to be educated and then marries Uriens. In the case of Igraine and those of her daughters, the women apparently have not been consulted in these arrangements, and Malory emphasizes the fact that men control them: first, by noting the
initiative of the barons, and second, by adding that the marriage of the daughters "was done at the request of kynge Uther" (Malory 5). This first mention of Morgan is ambiguous about her nature. While she takes part in typical feminine roles since she is educated at a nunnery and has an arranged marriage; nevertheless, Malory also hints of her troublesome future by saying that she learned necromancy at the nunnery.

Besides being primarily political and financial negotiations, marriage arrangements in the Middle Ages also ignored or contradicted the ideal of romantic fulfillment, such as depicted in the romances by Chrétien. Marriage served as a restraint on a medieval woman's access to power as well as on her sexuality. As is commonly known, a wife in the Middle Ages was considered to be inferior to the husband. As Duby puts it,

One of the functions of marriage was precisely to regulate this inequality. Just as the relationship between God and Adam was transposed at lower levels into the relations between superiors and inferiors, the hierarchies of heaven and earth, so it was supposed to be transposed at lower levels into the relations between husband and wife. (The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest, 25)

This inequality of status and thus power between husband and wife can be noticed in the way men controlled
property, as seen in charters transferring property rights. While women as well as men were commonly represented in the charters, their roles were not always identical. Penny Schine Gold has examined twelfth-century evidence from these charters, and sums up the differences in male and female participation:

Looking back over the male and female life cycles, we see that men and women participated in similar ways when acting as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and widows and widowers, but that as adult married persons their participation diverged, with the married woman continuing to participate in a role similar to a child's at a time when a man's participation changed to one of primary alienor.12

Although her study concentrates on the twelfth century, women's situation in regards to marriage property did not change much in later centuries, as studies such as Judith M. Bennet shows, and as I will further discuss.

The only time a woman had real power over property (even property that she brought to a marriage) was as a widow, or when she brought property to a marriage from a previous marriage. From studying court records in Brigstock in Northamptonshire in the early fourteenth century, Bennett states that widows "acquired public opportunities that surpassed those of all other women."13
In fact, she notes that new opportunities for widows included

individually trading, exchanging, and selling small parcels of property. . . They, like
daughters, owed suit to the Brigstock court and
answered complaints and pursued litigation
without the couverture of a male. In addition,
they, like husbands, could be legally liable for
the actions and problems of their dependents.
(Bennett 23)

Women, then, gained much greater power upon widowhood than
they were allowed at any other time of their lives. This
greater control of property upon widowhood may partly
explain Morgan's motive for attempting to kill her
husband. Although she does not seem to be restricted in
her activities while he is alive, her legal power would
have grown with her husband's death.

On the other hand, while married women may not have
had legal power over property, since many medieval
marriages were subjected to long periods of separation of
husband and wife (whether the husband was away to complete
education or to arrange business affairs), women of the
landed gentry were frequently left in charge of large
manors (Haskell 463). For example, daily operations of a
widow in 1413 (all of which would have been her
responsibility while her husband was alive as well),
involved baking, cooking of meals, brewing and purchasing supplies for the pantry. One notation in *The Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene of Acton Hall, Suffolk, September 1412-1213*, reads: "The baking: one qr. wheat, whence came 234 white, and 30 black, loaves. Meals: Breakfast 6, dinner 20, supper 20. Sum 46." Married women's power, as head of household while their husbands were away, was even greater than stocking the kitchens. Being in command of a large estate also entailed defense of the manor when necessary, as Margaret Paston found in the summer of 1465 (Haskell 463). Her husband, furthermore, encouraged her to show strength, "Wherfor I pray yow, make your word god if ye may, and at the lest, let myn adversarijs not haue it in pees if ye may" (*Paston Letters*, vol. I, no. 74, p. 134). Morgan le Fay likewise shows this strength in defending her own castle, which was given to her by Arthur. Deviating from accepted medieval property arrangements, however, she is not holding the castle in stewardship for her husband. Instead the castle is said to belong to her. She is very clearly in control of this property, and even Arthur cannot win it back (see further discussion in chapter 3).
The need to control women represented in these examples of marriage arrangements may have arisen from various motivations. First, marriage was seen as necessary to restrain man's tendency towards sensuality, embodied by woman in the eyes of medieval men. In order to achieve this control, in order for "marriage [to] restore the original hierarchy, the domination of flesh by spirit" (The Knight, the Lady and the Priest, 28), the husband must dominate the wife. More than that, however, woman's sexuality must be ruled over in order to ensure the production of heirs; therefore, a woman's adultery was considered much more of a crime than a man's. A nobleman had to be certain that his wife's son, his heir, was in fact his own offspring.

Gynophobia also motivated medieval men to control women. Men feared a woman's supposedly insatiable physical desires as well as her ability to harm a man; again in the words of Duby: "We can imagine a knight of the eleventh century lying trembling and suspicious in his bed every night, beside an Eve whose insatiable desire he may not be able to satisfy, who is certainly deceiving him, and who may be plotting to smother him under the bed covers while he sleeps" (The Knight, the Lady, and the
Priest, 106). While this scene may be an extreme interpretation of the tensions of medieval life, nevertheless such a fear is represented in Le Morte Darthur by Morgan, who seeks sexual satisfaction outside of her marriage with lovers such as Accolon and Hemison, and who also attempts to murder her sleeping husband.

The idea of married women taking lovers, as Morgan does, is at the center of the controversy surrounding courtly love, as I shall demonstrate. Modern medievalists have responded to the idea of courtly love in many different ways, including interpreting courtly love as a psychological fantasy, as a game, as a stylistic convention, and finally as a myth not to be seriously considered.15 I am not interested in resolving this controversy, but only in establishing at least a tentative definition of what Malory may have thought of the romance elements he incorporated from his French sources. In other words, for the purposes of the present study, if courtly love was ever practiced in reality, and if so, what particular meaning it may have had as an idea is not my concern; rather I must establish what significance love carries in the text of Le Morte Darthur.
Various critics have examined courtly love in Le Morte Darthur, and have (naturally) expressed various (if not contradictory) opinions. On the one hand, Charles Moorman believes that Malory "unequivocally condemns courtly love throughout the book."\(^{16}\) He can make such an "unequivocal" claim by neatly ignoring the passage in which Malory calls Guenevere a "trew lover" (Malory 649). R.T. Davies, however, does not ignore this passage and sees Malory as inconsistent on the subject of courtly love.\(^{17}\) While he says that Malory views the love of Lancelot and Guenevere as a sin, he believes that Malory tells us that Guenevere meets a good end because she finally repents and joins a nunnery; therefore, a "good end" means assuring that she will go to heaven (Davies 468-9). At the other extreme, Peter Waldron maintains that Malory makes a distinction between "trew love" (romance) and "vertuouse love" (for God) and sympathizes with and forgives Lancelot and Guenevere in the end even though they did not follow the higher road of "vertuouse love."\(^{18}\)

The distinction between romance and spirituality is not immediately relevant to my discussion of Morgan le Fay. However, Morgan does intersect the two spheres of
patriarchal marriage practice and courtly love; in fact, she exploits the inherent contradictions between the two in order to pursue her own personal goals (often revenge). These two ideals, patriarchal marriage and courtly love, ideologically contradict each other in their views on the status of women and in their positions on adultery.

If these stories were primarily masculine fantasies, as Penny Schine Gold believes, and a method of controlling male brutality, as Duby states, did they offer any appeal to women? Why was Marie de France interested in them if they did not appeal to women? And why does our evidence of female readership of romance literature grow in the later medieval period? The romances could in fact function partly as an imagined escape for women as well. While in medieval marriage women were unquestionably subservient to their husbands, in courtly love there was at least a possibility for women to find an equal role with men, if not take the lead. Howard Bloch discusses how the idea of courtly love served as a mental escape for women in unhappy marriages:

[T]he women's discontent can be seen to engender the illusion of escape from the reality of aristocratic marriage. The daydream of the rescuing knight implies the fantasy of evading the lot of the mal mariée.
Escape seemed necessary since medieval marriages, as has been said, were not primarily love matches. Thus, courtly love held a very real importance for women forced into marriages against their will. Nevertheless, as we have seen from the Paston correspondence, these romances did not change social practice, which might have allowed women and men to choose their own partners.

Morgan apparently seeks the outlet of adulterous love common in the romances since she has two specifically named lovers, Accolon and Hemison. Although Morgan has clearly used Accolon in her plot against Arthur, a plot which results in Accolon's death, his death is not the outcome Morgan expects. She is not, in other words, a merciless lover who considers her knight expendable as long as she realizes her own ambition. In fact, according to Accolon in his confession to Arthur, she plans for Accolon to rule alongside her, and to ensure this outcome she gives Accolon the magical Excalibur and the even more valuable scabbard, which prevents the bearer from losing blood, while providing Arthur with weak imitations. She demonstrates the strength of her affection for Accolon after his death as Malory says, "But whan quene Morgan wyste that Accolon was dede, she was so sorrowfull that nye
hir herte to-braste" (Malory 91), although he does not describe her reaction to the news that her plot failed except to add that "she kepte hir countenaunce and made no sembelaunte of dole. But welle sche wyste, and she abode tylle hir brother Arthure come thydir, there sholde no golde go for hir lyff."

While this hiding of her emotions might seem cold and calculating, implying that she is not truly remorseful for Accolon's death, Malory illustrates Morgan's grief by including an episode in which Morgan helps a knight in honor of Accolon's memory. When she meets a knight leading another bound hand and foot, she inquires as to the cause. Once the bound knight declares himself "cosyn unto Accolon of Gaule," her loyalty is clear. "'Ye say well, and for the love of hym ye shall be delyverde, and ye shal have youre adversay in the same case that ye were in,'" Morgan declares (Malory 92). This grief Morgan shows for Accolon does not make her a loving, beneficent sorceress, however, since in the middle of this episode she attempts to murder her sleeping husband Uriens. Therefore, although she can show love, she still continues to demonstrate a certain cold-blooded resolution to achieve her political ends.
Her next named favorite, Hemison, battles Tristram. When Morgan holds Tristram as prisoner, she

wolde sette sir Trystram on her one syde, and her paramour on hir other syde, and evermore the quene wolde beholde sir Trystram. And thereat thys othir knyght was jelsous, and was in wyll sudeynly to have ronne uppon hym with a swerde, but he forbare for shame. (Malory 340)

Subsequently, Morgan makes a bargain with Tristram and grants his freedom in exchange for his agreement to reveal his name, and further requires him to bear a shield to Camelot (with the intention of exposing Guenever and Lancelot). When he leaves, Hemison wishes to pursue and challenge him. Morgan counsels against this, "'Now fayre knight,' seyde Morgan, 'ryde ye nat aftir that knyght, for ye shall wynne no worshyp of hym'" (Malory 341). She provides good advice for apparently altruistic motives, protecting his honor rather than any personal goal of her own. Perhaps she is remembering Accolon and his fate, yet death is also Hemison's fate in spite of her warning. Again Morgan reveals her capacity to love another in her sorrow: "Whan Morgan le Fay saw hym dede she made grete sorow oute of reson." In these episodes she appears to show the affection of a courtly lover; however, even though such affection is a convention of courtly love,
Morgan seems to go beyond the conventional with such actions as the previously mentioned interference with the knight leading the captive. In other words, not only does she show sorrow, but she also acts on it.

In addition to fulfilling a feminine fantasy by offering a woman a choice in taking a partner, courtly love also provides the image of a man fulfilling a woman's every wish. Geraldine Heng describes Lancelot as the perfect submissive man: "the characterisation of Lancelot answers the requirements of masculine dedication to feminine will so satisfyingly that it has often been felt to contain the lineaments of an ideal woman's fantasy."23 In this view, the woman has the control of the relationship, and this is most obviously demonstrated in Chrétien's "Knight of the Cart" where Guenevere requires Lancelot to first do his worst then do his best in a battle (apparently in order to make sure the disguised knight is really Lancelot). The perfect courtly lover (who must be male since the stories are not aimed at the choices female lovers may or may not have) then must do whatever his lady requests, whether it would hurt his reputation or not.
Duby also discusses the woman's power in the courtly love relationship in which the woman may accept or reject a man's offer of love ("The Courtly Model," 251). However, it was not true that a woman was really free to exercise this power over the man in any manner she wished. As Duby also explains,

From the moment she joined the game she could no longer violate its laws, whether by withholding herself too stubbornly or surrendering too quickly, without incurring penalties: loss of 'courtly' status and exclusion from the court by the judgment of other women, her rivals. ("The Courtly Model," 262)

The woman's actions were therefore circumscribed by the game in which she participated. An examination of a few female characters and how their actions are judged by the theory of courtly love will first illustrate the boundaries of acceptable courtly behavior on the part of women; then we may examine the ways in which Morgan ignores or rejects these boundaries.

The belief that the woman should hold out neither too short nor too long a time is illustrated in the Pelleas-Ettard episode. In this case, the knight Pelleas is hopelessly in love with the Lady Ettard, who steadfastly rejects his love. Here there is the implication that Ettard is in the wrong since Pelleas is
such a worthy knight. Nyneve says, "for hit is no joy of suche a proude lady that woll nat have no mercy of suche a valyaunte knyght" (Malory 104). The issue of Ettard's pride is introduced from the beginning of the tale, when a knight explains the situation to Gawain:

"But she was so prowde that she had scorne of hym and seyde she wolde never love hym though he wolde dye for hir; wherfore all ladyes and jantellwomen had scorne of hir that she was prowde, for there were fayrer than she, and there was none that was there but and sir Pelleas wolde have profyrde hem love they wode have shewed hym the same for his noble prouesse." (Malory 100)

In addition to the judgment of Nyneve as well as "all ladyes and jantellwomen," Ettard herself appears to damn her own behavior by commenting to Gawain, who loves a lady who will not return his love, "Sche is to blame . . . and she woll nat love you, for ye that be so well-borne a man and suche a man of prouesse, there is no lady in this worlde to good for you" (Malory 102). Therefore, Ettard herself implies, the woman in romance has no legitimate reason to turn down a worthy man, unless she believes she deserves a better one. By violating the implicit rules of courtly love, the woman always bears the guilt for a troubled relationship: either she seeks love from a knight who will not return it and therefore she is
interpreted as forcing the relationship (as Morgan often does with Lancelot), or she refuses an admirable man out of her own pride.

Pelleas is rescued from Ettard’s supposed pride by receiving justice according to Nyneve. Nyneve declares, "He shall nat dye for love, and she that hath caused hym so to love she shall be in as evylle plyte as he is or hit be long to" (Malory 104). Again, Nyneve claims that the woman caused the situation and must bear the responsibility. Nyneve then rearranges affections, causing Ettard to be as hopelessly in love with Pelleas as he with her, then causing Pelleas to be in love with herself. Malory appears to consider this just desserts, yet one must question this judgment. First, the claim that Ettard was motivated by pride in refusing Pelleas is the interpretation of others and not Ettard’s own motivation as explained in a statement of her feelings. In discussing her situation, she tells Gawain, "that is grete pyte for he was a passynge good knyght of his body. But of all men on lyve I hated hym moste, for I could never be quytt of hym" (Malory 102). Here we should note the similarity to Nyneve’s predicament, since Nyneve also has a suitor, Merlin, whom she refuses. The difference in
the two romances, which leads to the portrayal of Nyneve as justified and Ettard as overly proud, is that Malory does not give Ettard the excuse of being afraid of a "devyls son," an excuse Nyneve has in refusing Merlin. In stories of courtly love, the woman who does not capitulate at the proper time receives a harsh judgment. Furthermore, women who agressively pursue men, as Morgan does, receive an even harsher judgment.

Indeed, the theory that courtly love meant an improvement for women, even in fantasy, has been severely undermined. Bloch believes that courtly love developed as another instrument to "keep women in their place." He further questions the idea that courtly love improved women's position in society when he challenges men's motives in such relations: "the gaze is not upon the woman so much as on the reflection of the man in her eyes" (Bloch 149). The benefit of women loving Lancelot, therefore, goes not to the women but to Lancelot, who receives their praise in the same way as Elaine of Astolat honors him in her dying statement. The example of Elaine of Astolat, while extreme, demonstrates the differing benefits and dangers for men and women in such a relationship. While Lancelot's status as a knight and
object of affection grows, Elaine dies of unrequited love (just as the sorceress Hellawes does when Lancelot refuses her as well). In fact, Bloch calls courtly love a disguised form of misogyny:

No less than the discourse of misogyny does that of courtly love reduce woman to the status of a category; and no less than the discourse of salvational virginity does it place the burden of redemption upon the woman who, as in the double bind of Christianity’s founding articulation of gender, finds herself in the polarized position of seducer and redeemer—always anxious, always guilty, never able to measure up, vulnerable. (Bloch 196)

Malory depicts the majority of the women in Le Morte Darthur in just such a role, confined to passivity, identifying their importance with male acceptance; one example is Elaine of Astolat, who loves Lancelot without having her affection returned.

In contrast to Bloch’s argument that courtly love is disguised misogyny, Penny Schine Gold takes a less extreme stance and defines courtly love as ambivalent towards women. As she states the case,

... romances would not exist without women, yet the female characters are attendants to the central drama of the stories rather than participants. In the romance, we do not see men and women working together toward a common goal but, rather, we see a goal pursued by men alone,
with woman as one object of that pursuit.
(Gold 28)

Courtly love did serve to improve one aspect of women’s relations with men. As Duby observes, "[Men] learned that it was also important to win a woman’s heart, that is, to ensure that she was willing . . ." ("The Courtly Model," 265). In any case, courtly love was a man’s game and "the hierarchical distance between the sexes was not noticeably diminished" ("The Courtly Model," 266).

In accordance with the continued submissive feminine role in courtly love, Elaine of Astolat confines herself to a primarily passive role. In defining passive women, Elaine Tuttle Hansen describes their typical behavior: "They put the love of a man above all other responsibilities, even life itself. As a direct consequence of this ‘love’ they endure great suffering . . . almost all die . . ."24 Elaine exhibits all three types of behavior. As is often true in romances, she apparently has no responsibilities to home or family but instead devotes all her attention to helping Lancelot prepare for battle or nursing him afterwards. Thus, Malory portrays such a neglect of a woman’s own concerns, while totally devoting herself to assisting with the man’s goals, as
normal. Curiously, this behavior is not only exhibited by a woman but also by a man: her brother Lavayne displays the same devotion to Lancelot to the exclusion of all other pursuits, although the male version of devotion takes the forms of accompanying him in battle and following him in every adventure. The crucial difference between the two is that no problem exists for Lavayne in leaving his responsibilities to his brother and father, and Lancelot can always welcome another companion. Lancelot, however, can only have one lady love, and that role has already been taken. This prevents Elaine from fulfilling her fantasy. Also conforming to Hansen’s description of passive women who endure great suffering, Malory portrays Elaine as a woman in desperate pain upon Lancelot’s rejection: "Than she shryked shirly and felle downe in a sowghe; and than women bare hir into her chambir, and there she made overmuche sorowe" (Malory 638). The use of "overmuche sorowe" contains the double meaning of unbearable sorrow and an inappropriate amount of sorrow as we see when she expires for love. Therefore, Elaine is subtly criticized for expecting too much from Lancelot.
Elaine finally dies of her unrequited love for Lancelot, yet she does not die quietly and invisibly, as do many of the other maidens who, Malory tells us, find a priest, confess and die meekly. Instead, Elaine of Astolat plans a grand funeral barge to greet her intended love (and his lover, the Queen) at Camelot. Her requirements for her death are quite detailed, including that a letter be written explaining how she died, that she be dressed in rich clothes, that she be put in a barge with one person with her, and that the barge be covered with black samite (Malory 640). She portrays the ultimate in passivity by dying for love. While the ideology of courtly love may portray such passivity as romantic, dying for love seems to be the position taken more often by the woman than the man.

However, Elaine transforms this passivity into an aggressive chastisement of Lancelot for what she considers his neglect. The passive role becomes the vehicle for her protest, which gains more force because of her passive, martyr-like behavior. An example from Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale can also illustrate passivity transformed into protest. Griselda, throughout the tale the most passive character imaginable, nevertheless manages to protest her
cruel husband's inhumane treatment:

Griselda seizes the opportunity to protest and celebrate, at the same time, her own treatment at Walter’s hands . . . she warns Walter not to torment the maiden [his supposed new wife] as he has tormented "mo" ("others"), as she tactfully puts it. The well-born creature could not endure, Griselda predicts, what the poor one could. (Hansen 235)

Similarly, Elaine states her case in front of the whole court in her letter:

'Most noble knyght, my lorde sir Launcelot, now hath dethe made us two at debate for youre love. And I was youre lover, that men called the Fayre Maydyn of Astolat. Therefore unto all ladyes I make my mone, yet for my soule ye pray and bury me at the lest, and offir ye my masse-peny: thys ys my laste requeste. And a clene maydyn I dyed, I take God to wytnesse. And pray for my soule, sir Launcelot, as thou arte pereles.' (Malory 641)

Both characters pretend to be passively accepting the fate decreed by the man since Griselda does not dispute Walter’s right to marry the younger woman and Elaine insists both on her virginity and Lancelot’s virtue. Yet at the same time both are actually criticizing the man’s actions because Griselda comments on Walter’s heartless torments and Elaine emphasizes Lancelot’s rejection.

In addition, Elaine’s dying statement reveals her as the lover of Lancelot, an idea he had encouraged by
wearing her favor at a battle when he had never previously worn any woman’s favor. She has shown Lancelot as a heartless man; yet she simultaneously maintains her pose of passivity by praising Lancelot above all others and by asserting her virginity. Nevertheless, this criticism is not lost on Guenevere, who had previously chastized him for favoring Elaine too much, and who now ironically does an aboutface and shames him for he "'myght have shewed hir som bownte and jantilnes whych myght have preserved hir lyff'" (Malory 641). However, the one action that Lancelot could have taken to "preserve hir lyff" would have been the action that Guenevere would have least tolerated: Elaine insisted on Lancelot’s acceptance and reciprocation of her love, refusing all alternatives, including the alternative of living without him. Elaine has in a sense confounded Lancelot by her very passivity, and made the ultimate sacrifice in order to accomplish this. So a woman, even measured by the standards of courtly love, must resort to a passive-aggressive move in spite of the theory that she will be in control of the relationship.

Lancelot defines his own idea of love, which cannot be forced but arises freely—"I love nat to be constrained to
love, for love muste only aryste of the harte self, and nat
by none constrainte" (Malory 641)--and Malory seems to
mean by this that women should not pursue men and "force"
them to love. That is, men are not criticized for
pursuing women who do not love them. Pelleas, for
example, was not criticized for his hopeless love for
Ettard; rather, Malory attributes the blame for this
standoff to Ettard's pride. Although she is viewed
sympathetically by the court, Elaine is somewhat
criticized for exceeding the limited role prescribed for
women in courtly love by asserting her love of Lancelot
despite his rejection.

However, Morgan exceeds the limits even more than
Elaine by pursuing love aggressively. As we have already
noted, Morgan imprisons Tristram and on condition allows
him to leave, but she also captures Lancelot. Morgan, in
company with three other sorceresses, discovers a sleeping
Lancelot. Morgan puts an enchantment on him and
transports him to her castle. There the sorceresses
demand that he "'choose one of us, whyche that thou wolte
have to thy peramour, other ellys to dye in this preson'"
(Malory 152). He, of course, refuses to take a lover and
escapes with the help of one of Morgan's disloyal maidens.
Morgan is judged harshly by the characters in the text not because she seeks Lancelot’s love; after all so did Elaine of Astolat who was much sympathized with even by her rival Guenevere. Rather, the others revile her for directing her anger and sorrow in the wrong direction: although Elaine chooses the traditional self-sacrificing role, Morgan, as Lancelot notes, has "'destroyed many a good knyght’" (Malory 152). Malory, therefore, has retained the misogynist elements that Bloch detects in the original material.

Not only does Morgan imprison Lancelot, but she also does not accept his rejection of her. She attempts revenge by two methods: first, she plans for her knights to kill Lancelot, and second, she plans to expose her rival, Guenevere, as an adulteress in front of the court. Through her second plan, she uses the contradictions between patriarchal marriage practice and courtly love in order to destroy her rival. Both attempts at revenge fail.

Besides showing unfeminine aggressiveness in pursuing love, Morgan violates the boundaries of courtly love in her relationship with Accolon. She has not stopped at merely taking a lover in order to experience the romantic
fulfillment which medieval marriage arrangements did not offer; she has gone beyond this role by projecting her adulterous relationship into a ruling partnership in hoping to wrest the crown from her brother. By transforming the personal love relationship into a political one, Morgan has aspired to a role well beyond the boundaries of courtly love, however much more freedom it may have seemed to promise to medieval women. Perhaps learning after the failure of this plan how unreachable such a goal truly is, Morgan never again plots with such ambition. The next time Malory tells us she has a lover, Hemison, she makes no political plans and tries to convince him not to challenge Tristram to a battle for his own safety. She seems here to have reined in her ambition and may be behaving in a more acceptable fashion, according to the romances. However, if she had fully accepted any of the expected roles of women in the Middle Ages, she would not attempt to destroy Lancelot and Guenevere. Thus, while she has renounced her most rebellious goal of seeking to rule the country, she has not totally confined herself to acceptable, non-aggressive behavior.
As we have seen, courtly love at least questions, if not changes, the submissive role of woman in medieval marriage; yet it also challenges the patriarchal order on the issue of adultery. Critics dispute how much emphasis should be placed on the adulterous aspect of courtly love. Theodore Silverstein says, "Courtly love was not everywhere opposed to marriage," which it would be if the theory insisted on consummation of the adulterous relationship. F.X. Newman describes the practice of courtly love as "frankly grounded in sexual passion" (The Meaning of Courtly Love, vii). Duby begins his article on courtly love by insisting it "was not . . . platonic. It was a game, and as in all games the player was motivated by the hope of winning. To win meant, as in hunting, to capture one's prey," presumably meaning to consummate the relationship with the object of affection, ("The Courtly Model," 251); yet later in the same article he maintains that "The crucial thing was to maintain one's self-restraint" (263). Whether the ideal of courtly love as represented in the romances or as practiced in the twelfth century depended on the sexual consummation of an adulterous relationship or not, in Le Morte Darthur that is exactly what we have with Guenevere and Lancelot and
with Tristram and Isolde. Furthermore, the adulterous aspect was in direct conflict with not only accepted codes of behavior but also laws of the Middle Ages.²⁶

Such critics differ on the question of how much of a conflict these two differing paradigms created. Duby finds the two systems in some sort of harmony, and says, "[Andreas Capellanus'] book proposed limiting extramarital sex . . . this was in perfect harmony with the evolution of matrimonial law" ("The Courtly Model," 264-5). This harmony comes from positing the relationship of the lover to his lady as similar to the faith and service expected of a vassal to his lord (who was usually the husband of the lady in question). Another way courtly love served to strengthen the existing system was to provide a structure for the desires of younger brothers who were not usually married. Thus, Duby says, "Courtly literature . . . inculcated a code of behavior whose function was to limit the damage that the irrepressible sexual exuberance of young knights might cause to the military aristocracy" ("The Courtly Model," 259).

However, I think it would be a mistake to ignore the inherent contradictions between the two competing systems. Because of the adulterous aspect of the courtly love
ideal, the theory not only violated secular marriage practice but also violated religious norms. Alexander J. Denomy explains the differences in reference to Andreas Capellanus. He believes Andreas demonstrated the two types of loves in the treatise, placing spiritual love above worldly love: "The god of love rules this world. He rewards those who serve him with the choicest gifts of his kingdom . . . But those virtues are not the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, not the supernatural moral virtues . . ."27 Perhaps because of this friction, the morally conservative English romances did not always insist on adultery as a prerequisite for love (as so many French sources did). An example of this difference may be found in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in which Gawain, in a test of his virtue, must resist the attempted seduction by the married lady of the castle. Gervase Mathew describes the ideal in England by the fourteenth century: "Within the milieu of the knightly class the conventional theory of marriage assumed not only that it was compatible with romantic love but that ideally it was the expression of it."28 Marriage in practice would still be a financial, political negotiation, but at
least in theory, and through rhetoric, marriage became linked with romance.

As Penny Schine Gold interprets the conflict between the two ideals, this relationship of the lover with the lady of his lord puts him in a difficult situation: "Lancelot's dilemma is similar to Yvain's, but unresolvable: his love for Guinevere is fundamentally incompatible with his loyalty to Arthur, her husband" (Gold 26). In addition, Guinevere cannot resolve her conflict in loyalties between her lover and husband, although her point of view is not usually of primary interest in the romances. This dilemma of conflicting loyalties becomes a key theme in Le Morte Darthur and, while not the sole cause, does provide the impetus for the sequence of events which leads to the breakdown of the entire society. Morgan attempts to reveal this conflict between the law of the Arthurian court and the behavior of two of its chief representatives. Possibly she hopes to begin the destruction of the court, that Mordred achieves at the end, with the horn test and Tristram's shield, but she is unsuccessful in forcing the court to acknowledge Guenevere's and Lancelot's adultery.
Although knights and ladies in *Le Morte Darthur* frequently call Lancelot and Guenevere the best lovers, and Malory calls Guenevere a "trew lover," he nevertheless demonstrates the faults in their relationship and the consequences of their behavior to the court. In the same section in which Malory calls Guenevere a "trew lover," he also discusses the truer love in olden days and the instability of love in his own days (a section almost every critic seeking to establish Malory’s view on love notes, and usually quotes; I will continue the pattern). He believes,

> For, lyke as wynter rasure dothe allway arace and deface grene summer, so faryth hit by unstable love in man and woman, for in many persones ther ys no stabylite: for we may se all day, for a lytyll blaste of wyntres rasure, anone we shall deface and lay aparte trew love, for lytyll or nowght, that cost muche thynge. Thys ys no wysdome mother no stabylite, but hit ys fyeblenes of nature and grete disworshyp, whosomever usyth thys. (Malory 649)

However, by his own definition, then, Guenevere is *not* a good lover at all. At this point in *Le Morte Darthur*, she has already argued with Elaine of Corbenic Castle (the mother of Lancelot’s son Galahad) and rejected Lancelot, leading to his madness, as well as rejected him for wearing Elaine of Astolat’s favor at a tournament.
That we are meant to interpret her behavior negatively the more often such actions are demonstrated is confirmed by various masculine pronouncements on her lack of faith in Lancelot. The first, if indirect, criticism of Guenevere comes from Lancelot’s relative Sir Bors, who encourages him to accept Elaine of Astolat’s offer of love:

‘Why sholde ye put her frome you?’ seyde sir Bors. ‘For she ys a passyng fayre damesell, and well besayne and well taught. And God wolde, fayre cousin,’ seyde sir Bors, ‘that ye cowde love her, but as to that I may nat nother dare nat coungeyle you. But I se well,’ seyde sir Bors, ‘by her dyligence aboute you that she lovith you intyrerly.’ (635)

He suggests to Lancelot that everyone would be better off if he could love such an admirable, unattached maiden rather than the Queen. When Guenevere needs a champion to defend her honor, Arthur, seemingly unsympathetic, asks her why "'that ye can nat kepe sir Launcelot uppon youre syde?'' (Malory 615). Bors as well shows her little sympathy in her search for a champion, admonishing, "Therefore, madame, I mervayle how ye dare for shame to requyre me to do onythynge for you, insomuche ye have enchaced oute of your courte by whom we were up borne and honoured’" (616). Thus, Malory implies that if Guenevere
has no one to defend her, she has no one to blame but herself. Furthermore, Bors' criticism also implies that not only has Guenevere lost a champion, but she has also deprived the court of its best knight; therefore everyone will suffer for Guenevere's instability in love.

Whether or not he condemns their love, and I do not believe he does, Malory does appear uncomfortable with the fact that this relationship is based on adultery. However, this theme of the love between Lancelot and Guenevere was too well established for him to ignore in writing his own version of the story. There is the implication that he would value more highly a relationship ending in marriage since he includes the "Tale of Sir Gareth," which is about a love affair ending in marriage. As Moorman says, Malory seems to use the "Tale of Sir Gareth," which has no known source, as a counterpoint to the adulterous romances so prominent in the Arthurian material. In this story, Gareth's lover, the Lady Lyones, has a sister who contrives to prevent the young lovers from acting on their passion too soon, and the story ends with the two happily married.

By contrast, Guenevere's situation grows more and more precarious because of her adultery. The three successive
trials also serve to accentuate the conflict between the ideal of courtly love and the established sociopolitical system. While the love between Lancelot and Guenevere appears enviable, this noble emotion provides ammunition for Mordred's rebellion. Moreover, in each trial the guilt in question is not Lancelot's for sleeping with his lord's wife, but Guenevere's. In the first case, the knights wrongfully accuse Guenevere of attempting to poison Gawain. Because she has sent Lancelot away, she has no one to defend her (her husband excuses himself since he must be the judge as he is also the king). At the last moment, Lancelot arrives to save her life as well as her reputation.

In the second trial, Guenevere is only technically innocent of the charge brought against her--Mellyagaunce accuses her of sleeping with one of her wounded knights. She has not done so, yet she has slept with Lancelot, who suffers from a cut hand and thus provides the bloody sheets that give evidence of Guenevere's misbehavior. Again after suitable suspense, Lancelot arrives to save the day and defeat Mellyaguance, forcing him to withdraw his accusation.
Finally, in the third trial, Mordred and his brothers (except for Gawain and Gareth) expose the lovers in bed together. Here there can be no doubt that the romance has been consummated. Guenevere attempts to follow the old pattern and assumes Lancelot will manage to rescue her from the flames yet again. However, Mordred has begun the war that will result in the dissolution of the Round Table.

Thus, the idealized love affair becomes the impetus (or excuse) for the insurrection that demolishes the entire society, and the woman receives the initial blame, as Guenevere recognizes when she says,

'Thorow thys saume man [Lancelot] and me hath all thys warre be wrought, and the deth of the moste noblest knyghtes of the worlde, for thorow oure love that we have loved togydir ys my moste noble lorde slayne. Therefore, sir Lancelot, wyte thou well I am sette in suche a plyght to gete my soule hels.' (Malory 720)

Although she stresses "oure love," Guenevere herself first takes the responsibility to atone for this sin. She rejects all contact with the world and further association with Lancelot in order to become a nun; only by giving up everything can she atone for her involvement in a subversive affair. That the woman must atone for the sins of the couple is also discussed by Duby, who discusses
this consequence of the rules of courtly love. Since the woman is at least theoretically in control of the relationship, she is at the heart of the system designed "to discipline male sexual activity, prevent excesses of masculine brutality, and pacify--civilize--the most violent segment of a society undergoing widespread and rapid change," ("The Courtly Model," 261). Therefore the woman is burdened with all the responsibility for the behavior of both partners.

Haskell discusses this idea of blaming the woman in relation to the marriage of Margery Paston to Richard Calle, an example previously mentioned. Margery "seems to have been excised from the family as if dead"; as we have seen, her own mother refused to receive her at her home. Nevertheless, Richard "remained in the Pastons' employment for several years after the wedding." Haskell draws the conclusion from this evidence that "the woman was considered to blame for binding herself to an inferior, while the man was blameless for attempting to marry up in society" (Haskell 468). Likewise, Guenevere, by being the first to repent and join a convent, appears to take all the blame for the adultery on herself. This portrayal of
Guenevere again demonstrates the misogyny retained by Malory in adapting his sources to his own purposes.

Before the disintegration of the Round Table in the end, however, Morgan attempts to exploit the inconsistencies between marriage practice and courtly love to her own purposes. For instance, Morgan wishes to expose Guenevere’s adultery before the court and sends a drinking horn, from which only faithful wives can drink without spilling a drop, to Arthur’s court. The "gift" is intercepted by Lamsarak, who, bearing a grudge against Tristram, redirects the horn to the court of King Mark. Isolde, in the company of a hundred other ladies, is proven unfaithful to her marriage vows. The proposed consequence of such an open revelation of adultery foreshadows the ending disintegration of the Round Table which is triggered by the revelation of Guenevere and Lancelot. King Mark wishes to burn Isolde and the other ladies immediately; however, the barons refuse to permit this since the horn was sent by Morgan, a witch (the significance of calling her a witch, and the barons’ desire to redirect blame will be discussed in Chapter 3).

From the viewpoint of secular marriage practice, such a transgression could not be tolerated. The Church looked
harshly on adultery by both men and women, but since secular practice was constructed primarily to produce an heir, who had to be of the man’s own blood, only the woman’s adultery really mattered, as mentioned previously. As Duby explains, "laymen deemed it necessary to exercise strict control over female sexuality. And, like the priests, they regarded marriage as a remedy against fornication—that is to say, fornication in the form they dreaded, fornication indulged in by women" (The Knight, the Lady and the Priest, 47). Such strict control was essential to ensure that family holdings would be passed from one generation to the next smoothly and that the new heir would truly be of the family blood.

In considering the importance of producing an acceptable heir, the behavior of the barons seems incomprehensible. Although the barons claim they will not act on the infidelity revealed through the horn because of Morgan’s reputation, other concerns affect the portrayal of their actions. On the one hand, they may refuse to act because they function as supporters of courtly love and support this practice over the medieval marriage system. Yet this seems unlikely, since throughout Le Morte Darthur the barons of any court always seem to encourage their
kings to conform to marriage practices, as we have seen when Uther is encouraged to marry Igraine and Arthur is encouraged to take a wife. On the other hand, the refusal of the barons may be due to a wish on the part of the author (whether Malory or one of the writers of his sources) to avoid depicting the destruction that would result from an overt confrontation between irreconcilable ideals. In this way, the revelation of Isolde’s adultery and its possible consequences foreshadows the fate of Guenevere and Lancelot at the end.

Since this plot to disrupt the love affair of Guenevere and Lancelot fails, Morgan tries again by providing a shield that she requires Tristram to carry in a tournament at Arthur’s court. Malory describes the shield as being painted in this way: "the fylde was gouldes with a kynge and a quene therin paynted, and a knyght stondynge aboven them with hys one foote standynge uppon the kynges hede and the othir uppon the quenys hede" (Malory 340). When Tristram asks her what it means, she replies, "'Hit signyfieth kynge Arthure and quen[ne] Gwenyver, and a knyght that holdith them bothe in bondage and in servage,'" and Malory then explains that she does this "to put sir Launcelot to rebuke, to that entente,
that kyng Arthure myght undirstonde the love betwene them." The symbolism of this shield neatly encapsulates the conflict in the irreconcilable codes of courtly love and that of marriage practice and political power. Morgan has implied through the shield not only that Guenevere is unfaithful, but also that Lancelot is betraying the trust of Arthur, that he is in fact "holding them both in bondage" by threatening to undermine the power represented by the traditional marriage. In other words, the love relationship of Guenevere and Lancelot interferes with the traditional transference of power from one generation of males to the next by calling into question the parentage of any children Guenevere may have.

Although Arthur does ask about the shield, Tristram answers that he does not know the meaning, and therefore nothing comes of this plan. Once again, disaster is foreshadowed, not only for Guenevere and Lancelot but also for the whole court. At another time, King Mark sends a letter to inform Arthur of the betrayal of Guenevere and Lancelot, causing Arthur to recall Morgan’s warning. However, because of Morgan’s previous enmity towards Arthur, and towards Guenevere and Lancelot, Arthur dismisses the warning as being without substance.
Morgan's attempts to force a confrontation between Arthur and Guenevere and Lancelot do not succeed because the court continues to ignore the contradictions between courtly love and marriage practice as long as possible. Apparently only a man, Mordred, possesses the power to bring the underlying conflict to the surface by presenting the undeniable evidence of the two lovers together in bed. Obviously, his incontrovertible evidence of the two of them in bed cannot be denied, while Morgan's implied evidence of the shield is more suggestive than definitive. Nevertheless, Morgan's plots do serve to maintain a sense of tension in the text, a reminder of the tragic consequences which have been barely averted time after time. Being a part of both systems, having an arranged marriage to Uriens as well as having lovers, she can be acutely aware of the friction between the two ideals. Being an unusually aggressive, unusually powerful woman, Morgan is the only female character who dares even to threaten to expose the inherent contradictions of the competing systems, contradictions that Mordred exposes more successfully. Morgan, in effect, laid the groundwork for Mordred by helping to make Guenevere's and Lancelot's relationship known. He then acts on the common knowledge
of this betrayal of Arthur and exposes them, and achieves the destruction of the court that Morgan had desired to cause.
Notes

1Vinaver discusses Malory's use of and changes in this version in the notes to the text, pp. 739-741.


3Vinaver also discusses Malory's use of the story the Knight of the Cart. He explains that Malory probably used, instead of Chrétien's original version, a later prose version which eliminated or minimized the examples of Lancelot's willingness to suffer for the love of his lady. See notes, pp. 767-8.


10Although Malory says at one point, "So by entrete at the last the kyng and she [Igraine] met togyder" (5), the next paragraph begins with Ulfin apparently addressing the
barons. No more is said of this meeting or if in fact the two made peace.

11 Or so I assume, since Morgan is later identified as Arthur's half-sister, and Morgause's son Gawain is regularly referred to as Arthur's nephew. Nevertheless, Malory does not clearly identify these women.


19 See Penny Schine Gold, 1985, chapter 1.


29 See Vinaver, notes, 746-7.
CHAPTER II
Gender and Power

Although in reality in the Middle Ages women were dependent on men, who legally owned property and made laws, in Le Morte Darthur men are often dependent on women who have magical power. However, rather than this dependence endowing a sorceress with an honored place among men, male gynophobia leads to a masculine suspicion and desire to control such powerful women. Because of medieval men’s desire to control women, women who are controlled by men are portrayed as benevolent, while those who are not controlled by men are portrayed as evil. Nyneve, for instance, conforms to the submissive role, restricting the use of her power to aiding the male characters, and therefore she is a positive character. However, other female characters, primarily Morgan le Fay, use their power to promote their own goals, and are therefore dangerous to the male characters.
Critics have generally ignored these differences in the kinds of power available to each gender. For example, Henry Morgan, in "The Role of Morgan le Fay in Malory's Morte Darthur," argues that the betrayal of Morgan in "The Tale of King Arthur" is ideologically linked to Mordred's rebellion in the "Day of Destiny" since both are betrayals of Arthur's immediate family, and Malory stresses Arthur's relationship to his sister or son in each case. Henry Morgan defines the issue as a lack of trust in Arthur's court, and argues that this failure is what leads to the destruction of that society. He further links this breakdown in trust to the code of chivalry: "A failure in loyalty by one member of the society to another becomes a failure in loyalty to the society itself, and this failure therefore is a violation against the code of chivalry on which the society is founded."¹ He then identifies the specific violations of the code made by Morgan le Fay and Mordred.

The flaw in this argument is that Morgan le Fay, as a woman, would not normally be held to the code of chivalry, which was an essentially masculine establishment. Morgan, in a sense, is violating the code merely by taking actions that fall within the jurisdiction of the code of chivalry.
If she had confined herself to traditionally feminine activities--for the aristocratic woman, overseeing the operation of the household and the care of the children--her actions would not have been relevant to the code in the least. Morgan is dangerous precisely because she attempts to usurp a masculine role by seeking political power, which she is able to do because of the power she gains from the traditionally feminine weapons of secret knowledge and enchantment.

Nevertheless, there are numerous examples in the text of women assisting men through magical means. For example, Excalibur and its scabbard were gifts from the first Lady of the Lake, who is killed in front of Arthur by Balyn. Geraldine Heng, in discussing the various items that enable men in their quests, argues that Arthur "symbolically acknowledges in the favour he agrees to give for their use"² that the sword is borrowed from a woman. Thus, Arthur gained significant advantage from the power of the magical sword and the scabbard, which prevents the wearer from losing blood; yet in accepting this advantage, Arthur owed a debt to the Lady of the Lake, a debt which he refused to repay. She requests Balyn’s head in retribution for a wrong he has done to her. However,
Balyn seizes the opportunity of Arthur’s hesitation in deciding on her request to reverse the situation, and instead of Arthur agreeing to kill Balyn on her request, Balyn kills her. Arthur has not only failed to repay his debt to her by granting her request, but he has also failed to protect her in his own hall. Because she relies on Arthur to settle the dispute rather than using her own magic to resolve the issue, she dies. This outcome reinforces the claim that women cannot rely on men to protect them or settle their disputes; they must rely on their own power. Furthermore, his failure results in not only the dire consequences to the Lady of the Lake for this failure by Arthur to fulfill his obligation, but also in his own suffering by the loss of the scabbard, which is more valuable than Excalibur, according to Merlin. Another woman, Morgan, deprives him of the scabbard, thus keeping the feminine magic in the control of feminine hands. Because he failed to repay his debt to a woman, a woman has the power to reclaim the feminine magic of the scabbard.

Although we never learn the truth of the Lady of the Lake’s dispute with Balyn (both claim that the other killed a relative of theirs), Balyn calls her "the
untrwyste lady lyvynge, and by inchauntement and sorcery
she hath bene the destroyer of many good knyghtes, and she
was causer that my modir was brente thorow falseholde and
trechory" (Malory 41), an accusation that greatly
resembles those brought against Morgan throughout the
tales. For example, Sir Palomydes says of Morgan, "And
ever as she myght she made warre on kynge Arthure, and all
daangerous knyghtes she wytholdyth with her for to dystroy
all thos knyghtes that kynge Arthure lovyth" (Malory 367);
therefore, that Morgan and the first Lady of the Lake
share enmity to true knights. The idea in the tale of
Belyn that the Lady of the Lake has used her sorcery to
destroy knights implies the potential danger to men of
women’s unrestricted magic. If he can be believed in this
accusation, then Belyn is not killing an innocent,
harmless woman, but rather one that has proved to be a
danger to men. Certainly ridding the kingdom of such a
treacherous woman benefits the kingdom; therefore,
according to this point of view, Belyn may actually have
done a service to Arthur’s court. This characterization
justifies Arthur’s inaction and Belyn’s action; her
beheading by Belyn is acceptable since she was a dangerous
woman.
The idea that men believe women are dangerous is openly asserted in many medieval texts, especially medical texts. Although some of the texts I will quote were written before Malory’s time, they were still used in university study and discussion of medical theory in the later Middle Ages. In examining such texts, we should remember that medieval medical theory was quite different from modern theory, employing, for example, the theory of the humors of the body, such as blood and bile, and the connection of such matters to temperament. Avicenna explains the interaction of temperaments and humors:

Occasionally a temperament may temporarily produce its own opposite e.g. a cold and dry temperament produces abnormal moisture by impairing digestion. Persons with such a temperament are generally thin and lean, have loose joints and are comparatively hairless. They are also cowardly. Their bodies are cold and oily and superficial vessels narrow.

It is crucial to note that medieval (and earlier) writers interpreted what little they did know about physiology with a strictly masculine bias. For instance, while Avicenna does not portray women as particularly dangerous in his Canon of Medicine, he does interpret women’s health and physique in terms of men’s. For example, in discussing parts of the body and their functions, Avicenna
equates the ovaries of the female with the testes of the male without much regard paid to what different functions these parts might have.

A popular text, *De Secretis Mulierum*, used in the later Middle Ages for discussions of medical matters was attributed to Albertus Magnus, though probably written by one of his students. The work was first written in the thirteenth century, but more than 50 printed manuscripts survive from the fifteenth century, demonstrating its continued popularity. This text was also influential in the fifteenth century because it was used as a source by Kramer and Sprenger in writing the misogynous *Malleus Maleficarum* (see introduction to Lemay’s edition). Kramer and Sprenger, in effect, took the misogyny of the authors and commentators on *De Secretis Mulierum* and gave it a social manifestation, classifying women as more prone to witchcraft than men, with the further purpose of explaining how to identify, prosecute, and ultimately execute women believed to be witches (I will return to this text in chapter 3). The very title of *De Secretis Mulierum* suggests the medieval attitude towards women: they have secrets which men must understand in order to control them. Women’s impure menses, for instance, can be
dangerous not only to a fetus but also to men, including
being "very harmful to the male member" (77).

Not only are women's natural excretions harmful, but
women may intentionally attempt to harm men through
unnatural means: "For when men have sexual intercourse
with these women it sometimes happens that they suffer a
large wound and a serious infection of the penis because
of iron that has been placed in the vagina, for some women
or harlots are instructed in this and other ill deeds"
(88). Yet the author goes further in the dangers of
associating with women, including the belief that,

[t]he more women have sexual intercourse, the
stronger they become, because they are made hot
by the motion that the man makes during coitus.
. . . On the other hand, men who have sex
frequently are weakened by this act because they
become exceedingly dried out. (127)

Because women can be dangerous to men, intentionally or
unintentionally, men need to control women for their own
protection. Specifically, men must find tests to
determine important information--if the woman is a virgin,
for example, or if the woman is pregnant. However, even
these tests are not foolproof since, "Some women, however,
are so clever and so aware of the trick that they refuse
to tell the truth, but rather say something else instead"
Certainly Morgan proves this idea of the deceitfulness of women when she sends the burning mantle to Arthur, sending the message that she wishes to make peace after her unsuccessful rebellion. She sends the mantle in the guise of a gift, as a gesture of peace, but plans for it to destroy him. Nyneve suspects her motives, and warns Arthur, who orders the maiden bringing the mantle to wear it first; she is burnt to death. This episode underscores the danger to men of such deceit since Morgan’s word cannot be trusted, and the result would have been Arthur’s death. The truth of a woman’s motives can be best understood by another woman, as only Nyneve can correctly interpret Morgan’s hidden motives.

That medieval male writers were concerned about the potential danger of women to men can also be supported by the degree of venom in their diatribes against women. Why protest so energetically against the obvious, if a woman’s inferiority and weakness are obvious? After all, no one today is arguing hotly for the fact that the sun will rise tomorrow; it is accepted and obvious. Therefore, if medieval male authors felt the need to argue strenuously that women are powerless, there must have been room for doubt. There must have been a fear that perhaps women are
in fact powerful, and if they are, that they are capable of much harm.

But all of this distrust of women in De Secretis Mulierum is only a warm-up to the real vitriolic statements made by this author about the nature of women. First, we should note that according to one of the contemporary commentators on the text, "Nature always intends to produce a male," (117), thus revealing Nature to be not only biased towards the male but apparently totally impractical since the species would die out if only males were produced. In regards to how a fetus is formed in the womb, the author also explains how a boy or girl is formed. It all depends on which side of the womb the fetus develops: "if the semen falls in the left side of the womb a female is generated, and if it falls in the right side the child will be a male" (117). Attributing the different development to these sides is not arbitrary; that is right and left are not equally good. The commentator’s argues for the relative worth of different sides by stating that "even though the heart is located more towards the left side, it has greater influence over the right side. Therefore, all members on the right side are nobler than those on the left side" (143). This whole
discussion of the value of each side of the body or womb is a blatant example of a male author bending the facts to fit his expectations: the commentator tries to fit facts such as the heart being on the left side into his preconceived notion that the right is more noble by asserting that the heart influences the opposite side.

An illustration of how "left" was considered inferior to "right" can be drawn from French where "gauche" not only means left but also awkward or graceless; by contrast the French word for right, "droit," also means honest. In English as well, the word "right" not only means the right side but also, according to Webster's, "in accordance with fact, reason some set standard, etc.; correct; true . . . fitting; appropriate; suitable" and "sound; normal."

Since the original text of De Secretis Mulierum was written in Latin, we can also add the Latin word "sinister" which means "left" as well as "wrong, perverse," a meaning that is still retained in the borrowed English word. If the medieval author and commentators identify female with "left" and "sinister," then women are also sinister and mysterious. It would seem natural to a medieval mindset, therefore, to link women with a power that was mysterious and had the
potential to be dangerous, which magic was considered to be in the Middle Ages.

Another reason this division of power for men to have physical strength and women to have magic seems logical is the traditional dichotomy of man/woman, strong/weak, reason/irrationality, and so on, that can be seen in many medieval texts (as I will show shortly). Since men are normally physically larger and have the capacity to develop more muscular strength (especially upper body strength) than women, one would expect writers to depict men as having more natural ability at sword-fighting than women. On the other hand, according to the traditional dichotomy, since women are considered to be irrational, their natural ability might be assumed to be a weapon that cannot be explained through reason, a weapon that by its very nature is more mysterious. As Luce Irigaray explains men's traditional attempts to understand women, "'She' [woman] is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious . . . not to mention her language, in which 'she' sets off in all directions leaving 'him' unable to discern the coherence of any meaning." Therefore, the medieval mind associates
female with the left or "sinister" side and male with the right or "normal" side.

This association of women with the mysterious and sinister has a logical connection to female characters' use of magic since women's traditionally understood ability to interpret hidden signs or cast a spell is as incomprehensible to the male characters as is the woman herself. For example, no one knows how the first Lady of the Lake had the skill to fashion a scabbard which would prevent the bearer from losing blood, nor could anyone understand how she acquired this power. And if she could make a scabbard with such positive characteristics, she must also have the ability to make one with harmful characteristics as well. After all, as we have seen, she is also called a destroyer of knights; therefore, her magical ability is both incomprehensible and sinister.

Morgan le Fay also has many powers that no man understands, or apparently can combat without the help of a woman. No one comprehends how she could fashion a mantle which would burn the wearer to death, and this mysterious danger inherent in the mantle would not have been discovered until Arthur was dead if Nyneve had not warned him. Therefore, only another woman, in this case
Nyneve, could know the plot of a woman and warn the unsuspecting man. Not only are woman’s methods mysterious, but so are her motives, and a man’s inability to find coherence in her speech or actions causes him to see her as capricious. Such a mysteriously powerful, capricious figure, if not strictly controlled, must be interpreted as extremely dangerous. Morgan le Fay is exactly such a figure throughout the text, since she is continuously plotting to kill the male characters and is only defeated by the interventions of other women.

More specifically, an example of men’s suffering through women is provided by Morgan’s first action early in Le Morte Darthur. Knowing she cannot fight Arthur herself (fighting being a masculine power), Morgan le Fay arranges for her lover Accolon to fight him, with the goal of ruling in Arthur’s place. When Accolon loses the fight, she takes the scabbard away from Arthur, who, along with his men, pursues her. When they finally corner her in a valley, she turns herself and her horse into marble stones to match the stones in the valley. Although Arthur mistakenly believes this to be "the vengeaunce of God" (Malory 92), Morgan later sends him a message to assure him of her invincibility: "tell hym I feare hym nat whyle
I can make me and myne in lyknesse of stonyse, and lette hym wete I can do much more whan I se my tyme" (Malory 93). In this moment she establishes her position as the premier menace to Arthur, while at the same time she proves the invulnerability of enchantment to physical force. Morgan is dangerous and invulnerable precisely because she possesses the strength of her feminine magic and the willingness to use it to her own benefit.

Furthermore, Morgan arranges the conditions of the battle between Accolon and Arthur so that both participants believe they are the champions for two brothers who have been feuding. Once again we see Henry Morgan’s theme of the breakdown of loyalty, since one brother is attempting to intimidate the other out of his rightful inheritance.7 Significantly, however, the parallel is not what might be expected, i.e. Arthur is not defending the brother who appears to be in the right. Morgan puts Arthur in the position of defending the elder brother, Sir Damas, called "withoute mercy, and he is a cowarde" (Malory 83), while she puts Accolon in the position of defending the younger brother, Sir Outlake, called "a good knight of prouesse." One of Arthurs’s fellow prisoner knights tells him that "this traytoure
Damas, the elder brother, woll geff hym [sir Outlake] no parte of his londis but as sir Outlake kepyth thorow prouesse of his hondis" (Malory 83). Morgan’s method of arrangement implies that she sees her own situation similarly: her brother legally inherited the family holdings since he is the first male heir, just as the elder brother, Sir Damas, inherits before his younger brother. Morgan desires to possess what Arthur has inherited--the kingship--and believes Arthur is being as ruthless as Sir Damas in denying her more power. Accolon is then in a position to vindicate Sir Outlake’s claim as well as Morgan’s own claim, "thorow prouesse of his hondis."

This episode portrays a common medieval fear about disputes over inheritance, especially in the case of the monarch. Malory, in fact, lived and wrote during the time of the War of the Roses between Lancaster and York, when who should legally inherit and rule was in violent dispute. Having roots in the question of the inheritance of the duchy of Lancaster after John of Gaunt’s death in 1399,8 the war was not settled until Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the battle of Bosworth field.9 Such wars involved people in addition to those who hoped to inherit,
as is clearly illustrated in the Paston letters of the fifteenth century. Two brothers, both named John Paston, fought in the Battle of Barnet in 1471 on the Lancastrian (losing) side, which left the younger brother injured. Both brothers then had to hide their Lancastrian involvement to avoid being arrested as traitors by the York side. In similar fashion, Morgan, while at court during the battle between Accolon and Arthur, must hide her involvement in the plot, then retreat to her own castle to escape Arthur’s wrath. Besides being involved in the war over the inheritance of the kingship, the Pastons also fought in the courts for the inheritance of the estate of Sir John Fastolf. The opposition over the estate began shortly after Fastolf’s death in 1459 when the will was contested by William Yelverton, and was not entirely settled until 1476 when John II’s claim to the last piece of the estate, Caister Castle, was finally recognized (see, for example, Paston Letters vol. II, no. 88, p. 160). Malory also describes disputes over control of castles, as when it is mentioned that Morgan owns a castle that Arthur cannot command (Malory 367). Morgan most clearly represents this specifically fifteenth-century fear of upheaval over inheritance
disputes, so vigorous and common at the time, by plotting to rule in place of Arthur. The anxiety of a medieval audience over inheritance would be intensified by imagining a woman attempting to acquire a man’s rightful inheritance.

While Henry Morgan interprets both Morgan’s and Mordred’s rebellions as violations of family trust, I wish to provide a different emphasis by showing how their rebellions differ due to their genders. Disruptions previous to Morgan’s plot were attacks on the government or society; however, as Henry Morgan notes, Morgan le Fay’s plan constitutes the first attack on Arthur personally, as a dying Accolon informs Arthur: "for ye shall undirstonde that kynge Arthur ys the man in the worlde that she hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and of prouesse of ony of hir blood" (Malory 88). Although Mordred rebels with the intent of replacing Arthur, there seems to be nothing personal in his actions; at least Malory never attributes to him the same hatred that Morgan displays. Hers is the first personal attack, and it is not again matched until the last tale (while another sorceress does kidnap Arthur later, she dies in the attempt). Morgan then becomes the most treacherous
person in the kingdom, as she provides a constant and unpredictable threat throughout all the tales. It is important to notice that not even another man matches Morgan’s attempt until the very end of the work. Therefore, Morgan le Fay remains the single most formidable enemy of King Arthur from the first tale to the last; she represents a main source of conflict in the tales with a continuously threatening feminine power.

Another difference between the two betrayals that is crucial to this study is the method of operation that Morgan and Mordred use in their plots. Because Morgan is a woman, she must make up for her lack of the physical and political force that Mordred uses; she must use magic and a surrogate knight to do the fighting for her. Morgan’s plot is more secret and calculated; therefore Arthur cannot develop a battle plan (using masculine weapons) to defeat her since he never knows when, where, or what her next attempt will be, further illustrating Irigaray’s explanation that men characterize woman as "incomprehensible, capricious."

In addition, Morgan has had to arrange an opportunity, while Mordred merely seizes what opportunities fate has given him, which implies that the opportunity to rebel
always exists for a man but must be created by a woman. After all, Mordred has an army at the ready to challenge Arthur, which implies he has many supporters. By contrast, Morgan has neither army nor supporters. Also, Mordred has been given responsibility for ruling the kingdom in Arthur’s absence, as Malory says, "And there kynge Arthur made sir Mordred chyef ruler of all Ingelonde, and also he put the quene undir hys governaunce: bycausse sir Mordred was kynge Arthurs son, he gaff hym the rule off hys londe and off hys wyff" (700). The fact that Arthur makes Mordred ruler in his absence and not the queen implies that Arthur would only give another man this much responsibility. Even if Guenevere had been pure and loyal, it does not seem likely that Arthur would have assigned the Queen as the ruler in his absence, since a man would be preferred in order to keep order, leading battles when necessary. Morgan as a woman, therefore, even in her apparently loyal days, would never have been given this responsibility. Mordred as Arthur’s apparent successor and substitute king, already is wielding the power of the kingship and now must maintain this power, while Morgan was never and would never have been in such a position of power. Mordred’s
success in rebelling, in contrast to Morgan’s failure, may be due to his having been given so much more power from which to launch a revolt.

Moreover, Mordred’s rebellion is a man’s rebellion: although he uses deceit initially in spreading the word that Arthur is dead, he meets Arthur face-to-face on equal footing in the final confrontation. However, in Morgan’s plot Arthur and Accolon fight without knowing each other’s identity, circumstances which were arranged through Morgan’s enchantments. Mordred trusts his superior masculine physical force to defeat Arthur, whereas Morgan must increase Accolon’s chances of defeating Arthur by replacing Excalibur and the scabbard with poor imitations. Thus, she does not trust Accolon’s physical strength and agility, but rather depends on the feminine magic of these weapons. It is this feminine magic that makes Morgan le Fay such a dangerous presence throughout the tales, even though disaster for the men is always averted, primarily with the help of Nyneve.

Indeed, women can only gain power from sorcery; they cannot reverse roles and gain power by using typically masculine force. Such an attempt to gain masculine force, furthermore, can cause women to be more vulnerable to men.
For example, in "The Tale of Sir Tristram," Aunowre is a sorceress who curiously forgoes her feminine or magical powers and challenges Arthur on a man's terms. She initially acts out of great love for Arthur but, when rejected, seeks revenge. When she "saw that she myght nat have hym at her wylle" (301, implying she wishes to control as well as love him), she attempts to slay him herself, and with his own sword, thus resorting to using masculine weapons. Even with the magic of Excalibur in her hand, however, a woman cannot effectively use physical strength, and Arthur cuts off her head. Although the source of Excalibur's power may be a woman, since it was previously owned by the first Lady of the Lake, it is still a man's weapon to use.

Although she usually makes great use of her magic, Morgan le Fay also at times uses physical force in her feud with Lancelot. However, unlike Aunowre, she arranges for men to use the masculine power for her, as when she sends 30 knights to ambush Lancelot; however, she is betrayed by one of her damsels who warns Tristram and Dynadan, allowing them the opportunity to defeat the knights. Perhaps because she does not attempt to fight a man herself but instead sends the knights to carry out her
plan, she remains safe, while Aunowre dies. Morgan recognizes she cannot physically match knights in a one-on-one fight, so she orders her own knights to fight Lancelot. She makes similar arrangements in planning for Accolon to fight Arthur. Since she does not participate in the battle herself, as Aunowre did when she picked up the sword and tried to kill Arthur, she remains safe and protected in her castle. Morgan’s attempts to use masculine power even by proxy fail, and she must instead rely on her magic.

However, Morgan remains so dangerous through her magic that Arthur cannot defeat her with his masculine weapons; he must, in fact, rely on another sorceress to equalize this feminine threat, and this is the second Lady of the Lake’s role. Immediately preceding the Arthur and Accolon section, this Lady of the Lake, Nyneve, has just entrapped Merlin and has taken on his role as protector of Arthur. Previous to Morgan’s threat, all threats to the kingdom were male-initiated. For instance, Merlin advises Arthur’s forces in his battles with Lot and the King of the Hundred Knights. A male guardian seems appropriate when the threats are masculine, even if Merlin never uses masculine weapons. However, the gender of the magical
guardian of Arthur changes just before the gender of the people threatening Arthur changes, thus emphasizing the need for a woman to neutralize another woman’s weapons.

It is significant to note that after her initial actions of imprisoning Merlin and acquiring Pelleas’ love, Nyneve rarely uses active magic. While Morgan uses such spells as the burning mantle meant to destroy Arthur, Nyneve prevents the intended harm merely by a warning to Arthur. Whether she operates with a kind of stereotypical "woman’s intuition" in not trusting such conciliatory gestures or whether she uses the power of prophesy, Nyneve relies on the ability to interpret hidden signs, more often associated with women in Le Morte Darthur. As Heng notes in her study of the feminine, "We notice that women never lose sight of these veiled significances" (284, emphasis in original).

Even women who have no apparent skill in magic can read hidden signs and identify the fates of the knights. When Percyval comes to court, Arthur puts him "to be sette amonge meane knyghtes" (Malory 377) until "a mayden in the quenes court that was come of hyhe blood, and she was domme and never spak word" comes to put him in his rightful place "to the ryght syde of the Sege Perillous."
Apparently none of the men in the court knew Percyval's rightful place; only a woman can interpret the hidden signs of greatness in him or predict the future of the untested knight. Unlike Nyneve, who can reveal crucial information and then retreat back into her own affairs, this maiden pays the ultimate price for this power: "Ryght soo she departed and asked a preste, and as she was confessid and houseld then she dyed." This is the one and only time this unnamed maiden is ever mentioned, and according to Malory the only time she ever spoke in her life; her only purpose in the story is simply to show Percyval his future and then disappear. She suffers a harsh penalty for her interference (even if it is a positive one) in men's affairs since she does not return to whatever life she had before this episode, but instead immediately dies.

In fact, not many of the women who have the ability to use magic survive long after interfering with men, as we have seen with Aunowre and will see with Hallewes, who both die immediately after attempting to gain the love of Arthur and Lancelot respectively. This provides a warning to women on the hazards of using power. The only protection against this hazard apparently is using the
feminine power of active magic as Morgan does. While she may not accomplish her goals, she does survive unlike the other women who interpret signs yet do not use magic actively.

Like Nyneve and the unnamed maiden, the sorceress Hallewes also reads hidden signs. She has fixed her love on Lancelot, but knows he will love no one but Gueneverre. Varying from the precedent set by Nyneve and the maiden, however, Hallewes does not use interpretation of hidden signs to help a man but rather attempts to manipulate Lancelot into a compromising position. First, she tells him to leave his sword or he "shalt dye!" (Malory 168). Lancelot, a reasonable knight, refuses to leave his sword, and Hallewes reveals the true significance: "and thou dyddyste leve that swerde quene Gwenyvere sholde thou never se." Having passed the first test, he must pass still another when Hallewes appears to ask for an innocent kiss. Lancelot, Gueneverre's loyal lover, refuses, and again Hallewes reveals the hidden meaning: "and thou haddyst kyssed me thy lyff dayes had be done." Having failed to trick him by such manipulations, "she toke suche sorow that she deyde within a fourtenyte," thus paying the same penalty for such interference as the unnamed damsels
that took Percyval to his seat at the Round Table. The feminine power of interpretation apparently does not allow for its use to further a woman’s personal goals. An alternative explanation is that she cannot confuse a knight who is so submissive to a woman as Lancelot is to Guenevere. Since he is already submissive to one woman, this seems to protect him against the manipulations of others.

The fear of a woman, such as Hellawes or Morgan, who cannot be controlled by a man, but rather pleases herself, may derive from a masculine belief that she possesses unlimited desire. Irigaray states it this way:

Thus what they [women] desire is precisely nothing, and at the same time everything. Always something more and something else besides that one--sexual organ, for example--that you [men] give them, attribute to them. Their desire is often interpreted, and feared, as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will swallow you whole. (29)

Fulfilling this fear, Morgan’s desire for power will stop at nothing. If Morgan had been merely a troublesome woman who interferes with Lancelot and Tristram and generally causes disruption wherever possible, she would not have represented this male fear of a woman’s insatiable desire so well. It is because she seeks the ultimate power in
her society, the power of the monarchy, that she so clearly exhibits "a voracity that will swallow [Arthur] whole."

The author of *De Secretis Mulierum* also has a lot to say about woman’s insatiable desire and what it means. For example, in an expanded manuscript of the text, the author insists that woman has a greater desire for sex than a man because "something foul is drawn to the good." He means that the "foul" or the woman is drawn to the "good" or the man, so therefore the woman’s desire is greater than the man’s. Not only do women desire intercourse often, but it is also beneficial to their health since, "through it they lose their superfluous cold and receive heat, and this tempers their frigid natures" (70). So women depend on intercourse with men to improve their health, but the same act weakens the man. Therefore, the author creates a theory whereby women need intercourse with men, but men are harmed by it. Women benefit from men, but men suffer through women.

According to Irigaray, this inability of men to understand feminine desire not only leads to gynophobia, but also to a tendency for men to define women and their desires in terms of masculine desire. For instance, she
points out that Freud, in explaining both "normal" female development and female homosexuality, makes the woman a man (or the girl a boy). Thus, she explains that in the Freudian theory girls not only have "penis envy" but also may have a "masculinity complex," so that "it is only as a man that the female homosexual can desire a woman who reminds her of a man" (194, emphasis in original). If women's desires are interpreted only in terms of the masculine, then Morgan logically would not desire her own specifically feminine goals (whatever those might be, since they cannot be imagined in a purely masculine view of the world); instead she pursues a masculine goal--worldly power.

A good contrast to Malory's version of Morgan, who pursues the masculine power of the kingship, is Marion Zimmer Bradley's characterization of Morgan in The Mists of Avalon. Bradley's Morgan possesses a completely different view of the world from Bradley's version of Arthur (and Arthur's court); she worships the Goddess while the court worships the Christian (male) God. Her goals have nothing to do with replacing Arthur as ruler, but instead she wishes to bring the people more under the influence of her religion where women are the main
representatives of power in their roles as priestesses and as the chief authority, the Lady of the Lake. Morgan eventually achieves the highest position in her society as Lady of the Lake. On the other hand, Malory's Morgan has no alternative worldview, but aspires to the same sort of power that Arthur has. The male writer has not imagined any other goal, any female-identified goal, for Morgan, whereas the female writer has. The point is that historically, for male writers, women's desires have only been interpreted in terms of masculine desires.

Another example of interpreting a woman's desires in terms of a man's can be provided by Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. The Wife of Bath laments that her fifth husband used to read to her out of a "book of wikked wives" (p. 114, l. 685). This husband, she says, would read such "wisdom" as "That womman was the los of al mankynde" (p. 114, l. 720), and "'Bet is . . . hye in the roof abyde,/Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;/ They been so wikked and contrarious,/ They haten that hir housbondes loven ay" (p. 115, ll. 778-781). Previously, she had suffered under domineering husbands, and wished to change this painful situation. Therefore, the moral in her tale is that women really want the traditional balance of power
in marriage reversed from masculine control to feminine control. Instead of completely redefining marriage in terms of an equal partnership, she merely wants to switch roles and play the masculine role.

That Morgan is using magic to "act like a man" is supported by the fact that the only other character who continuously seeks power and the destruction of those characters who refuse him is male, King Mark of Cornwall. No other woman dares to use any of her weapons for such unfeminine goals. King Mark, on the other hand, maintains a consistently negative and persistently threatening presence, as does Morgan. The differences in their mode of operation, as with the comparison of Mordred and Morgan, are due to gender: King Mark uses none of the feminine magic for which Morgan is famous, relying instead on physical force. Still, King Mark and Morgan le Fay share similar motives for their destructive behavior, including jealousy in a love affair. While King Mark is jealous of Isold's love of Tristram, Morgan is jealous of Lancelot's love of Guenevere. While King Mark attempts to destroy the competition, Morgan seeks revenge on the one who rejected her.
Another difference is that King Mark fails to demonstrate competency in the expected masculine powers, while Morgan excels in employing the expected feminine powers, so that he must rely on her magic to accomplish his goals. For example, in a feud with Alysandir le Orphelyne, he appeals to Morgan and the Queen of Northgales:

Than was kynge Marke wood wrothe oute of mesure. Than he sente unto quene Morgan le Fay and to the quene of Northe Galys, prayynge them in his lettyrs that they two sorserers wolde sette all the contrey envyrone with ladyes that were enchauntours, and by suche that were daunygeous knyghtes, as sir Malaugryne and sir Brewyns Saunze Pyte, that by no meane Alysandir le Orphelyne shulde never ascape, but other he sholde be takyn or slayne. (Malory 392)

Once again, a man must rely on feminine power.

When King Mark asks Morgan to make sure Alysandir does not escape, she does step in to use her spells. However, she does not appear to be motivated by King Mark’s request, but rather takes an interest of her own in this knight, who, according to her maiden, is the best that she ever saw. Coming to Alysandir’s rescue after he is wounded in battle, Morgan has him carried on a litter to the castle, much as she does in kidnapping Lancelot. Her knowledge of ointments gives her power over his life
and death, although he is already in a weakened condition at the time. Yet she makes this control even more complete: after administering still another potion that causes him to sleep for three days, she has him moved to her own castle. Next she gives him an ultimatum, "Than shall ye promyse me by youre knyghthode that this twelve-monthe and a day ye shall nat passe the compace of this castell, and ye shall lyghtly be hole" (395). Unlike Lancelot, who refuses to agree to any of Morgan's ultimatums, Alysaunder agrees. In fact, he has few other choices.

However, the balance of power changes when a damosel comes to enlighten him, again demonstrating women's ability to read signs hidden from men. When the woman tells him, "my cousyn, quene Morgan, kephyt you here for none other entente but for to do hir plesure whan hit lykyth hir," Alysaunder switches allegiance. The damsel also issues an ultimatum of her own, "and ye wolde love me and be ruled by me, I shall make your delyveraunce with your worship" (Malory 395). Alysaunder agrees wholeheartedly, and submits himself completely to a woman's desires, unlike Lancelot who only agreed to one particular action in exchange for a maiden's help in
escaping. Although Alysaundir adamantly states, "A, Jesu defende me . . . from suche pleasure!" in reference to being under Morgan's control, he willingly submits to a similar condition with the damsel, and Malory further explains, "he kyssed hir and ded to her plesaunce as hit pleased them bothe at tymes and leysers" (my emphasis). Nevertheless, first Alysaundir must have the situation interpreted for him by a woman, then he must submit to another woman in order to be released, reinforcing the idea that a man must have the help of a woman to escape another woman. Although he may have escaped the evil Morgan's control, he is still dependent on the other damsel.

By thus seeking to control men, Morgan refuses to restrict her actions to acceptable feminine roles, and this desire for control may explain the confusion writers have about her name (and gender). Malory himself calls her Morgan le Fay (cf. 84) using the French masculine article even though his French sources such as Mort Artu refer to her as la fée\(^{14}\) with the feminine article. Although the same writer also calls her "Morghe li Fée," he identifies her as "la suer le roi" (sister of the king) with the feminine article (98). In the French Prose
Lancelot, the writer also calls her "Morgain la Fée"\(^{15}\) and later refers to her as Arthur's sister (320). As another example of the confusion over her gender, the English writer of the metrical romance *Ywain and Gawain* even calls Morgan "he"\(^{16}\) while his source, Chrétien's *Yvain ou Le Chevalier au Lion*, calls her "Morgue la sage."\(^{17}\)

The source of Morgan's name is in fact something of a mystery. Lucy Allen Paton theorizes that the character may have originated in Irish stories of the goddess Morrigan.\(^{18}\) This would explain many of her characteristics, including her hatred of and yet occasional desire to help Arthur (such as accompanying him to Avalon presumably to heal him), and her ability to transform her shape. Roger Sherman Loomis, on the other hand, identifies Morgan with the Celtic goddess Modron, as the "daughter of Avallach, wife of Urien, and mother of Owein."\(^{19}\) Whether or not it is true that the character originated as a Celtic goddess, she has always been a very powerful figure. In later versions, when she is no longer considered a goddess, another explanation for her power must be offered. As discussed above, for instance, many versions call her "la fee," meaning a fairy, a magical being. Paton supposes that the frequent use of the phrase "la fee" may be to
mark her definitively as female "because of the masculine form of her proper name" (Paton 164). The name "Morgan" in fact is a fairly common masculine name among Bretons and Welsh (Paton 267). By giving such a powerful character a male name, the authors imply a preference for men in such positions of power.

On the other hand, Morgan le Fay may even seem to such authors a mixture of male and female--male by having so much power and female by using the power of magic. This strange mixture of female and male might even characterize her as a monster. As the commentator to De Secretis Mulierum, explains, monsters are "errors in nature" which "are those individuals of a certain species which in a certain part of their body are outside the bounds of the common course of the nature of the species, just as can be seen in men having only one foot or only one hand, etc" (112). However, these comments are difficult to reconcile with an earlier comment that defines a woman's nature: "woman is a failed male, . . . and thus it has been said that woman is not human, but a monster in nature" (106). One would hardly think that being a woman instead of a man was really "outside the bound of the common course of the nature of the species" or that not having male genital
organs (but instead having female ones) would be equivalent to missing a foot or hand. Nevertheless, this is the attitude expressed by the author and his commentators. Morgan’s behavior, from the medieval viewpoint, is "outside the bounds of common course of the nature" of women, and therefore she could be considered a monster.

Another reason for the discomfort of male writers with Morgan’s gender stems from the unwillingness of men to depend on help from, and thus be vulnerable to, powerful magical women. An example of Morgan’s actions illustrates how well she fits this gynophobia. Not only is she a destroyer of good knights, but she also kidnaps knights, including Lancelot. Although she demands that he choose a lover among her and the other sorceresses, Lancelot refuses to submit unconditionally to any woman (except Guenevere). Nevertheless, he must have the help of another woman to release him from Morgan’s grasp. In order to escape, Lancelot agrees to a specific request consistent with the conduct of chivalry from one of Morgan’s damsels, who releases him in exchange for the agreement that he will fight for her father in a tournament. If Morgan’s disloyal maiden had not helped
Lancelot, he may have eventually had to submit to her demands in order to regain his freedom. His masculine weapons—sword and spear—have been taken away, and he has no magic to fight her on her own terms. Because he cannot fight her on his own, Lancelot reflects the masculine fear of vulnerability to women, the fear that even the most powerful knight is defenseless against the designs of a powerful woman.

Arthur resists classifying himself as vulnerable to a woman, and so he refuses to grant the first Lady of the Lake her only request, which would have repaid the debt he owed for her gift of Excalibur. Arthur’s reluctance to trust a woman may seem justified when one considers that dangerous women like Morgan use their power over men for evil purposes, such as when she sends him the burning mantle. Because of this reluctance to depend on women, male writers of the Arthurian stories prefer that powerful characters be male, and prefer the helper of Arthur to be male. Although Nyneve appears beneficent towards Arthur, the thought of the king being vulnerable to and dependent on a powerful woman may have been too difficult for the medieval writers of the Arthurian stories to accept. This, after all, might make the woman more powerful than
the king if he must depend on her to maintain his authority. However, if a woman who helps a man can be frightening in her power, how much more frightening a powerful woman who opposes a man must be. This fear of powerful women leads to a portrayal of an evil Morgan and a beneficent Merlin, which can be found in Malory’s sources (presumably written by male writers) such as the French Prose Lancelot.

The preference of Merlin to Morgan (or even to Nyneve) is based on the idea that men have inherently more value than women, an idea that has been expressed since ancient times. For example, Aristotle used the differences between male and female to make value judgments: although female parts are roughly equivalent to male parts, women’s parts are a poor imitation of the male’s. One of the major questions for Aristotle, and the medieval scholars who read him, was whether or not females contributed "semen" or "seed" to the conception of the fetus. In this argument, menstrual blood is equated to male semen. Aristotle, after much logical argumentation, concludes that women do contribute something to generation: "By now it is plain that the contribution which the female makes to generation is the matter used therein, that this is to
be found in the substance constituting the menstrual fluid...

This contribution substantially differs from what men provide in conception, as Aristotle explains, "The male provides the 'form' and the 'principle of the movement,' the female provides the body, in other words, the material" (109). In case the reader was in doubt that this pronouncement puts the male in the superior position, Aristotle makes this point clear also; he says, "the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort, viz., it [the female] lacks the power to concoct semen out of the final state of nourishment... because of the coldness of its [the female's] nature" (103). Yet again Aristotle moves the argument a step further by insisting that not only does the male provide "form" but also the Soul" (145). This conclusion then leads Aristotle to state another decree of female inferiority, where he writes "... the female is as it were a deformed male; and the menstrual discharge is semen, though in an impure condition; i.e., it lacks one constituent, and one only, the principle of Soul" (175).

The entire discussion in fact seems to be an attempt to answer a masculine fear: why does a female need a male? After all, wouldn't it be more obvious to argue
that the female creates (forms) the fetus since it grows and develops in her body? Aristotle logically argues that this is not so, but rather, "Thus, if the male is the factor which produces the sentient soul in cases where male and female are separate, it is impossible for the female all by itself and from itself to generate an animal; because the faculty just mentioned is the essence of what is meant by 'male'" (203). Therefore, Aristotle characterizes the meaning of male and female as active formation and passive material respectively, with the act of creating a fetus analogous to a male artist shaping a form out of female clay.

This theory of conception supports the distribution of power in the medieval society where the men use their physical power (and reason) to rule and women use some unformed, irrational potential to either help or hinder the men's plans. For example, Arthur make decisions as king on forming the Round Table, choosing the knights to sit at the table, and what wars to pursue. By contrast, once Arthur and the knights have decided to make Percival a knight of the Round Table, the unnamed maiden comes to lead him to the proper seat. She did not make this decision, since this is his destiny as decreed by God; she
is merely the instrument the Lord chooses to reveal 
Percyval’s destiny. Women aid the kingdom in other ways 
as well; for instance, they are mothers and bear the sons 
that will become the knights of the Round Table. However, 
it takes a man to make these sons knights and to decide if 
they are worthy of the Round Table. The masculine role 
in these examples is active while the feminine role is 
passive and auxiliatory.

While the male writers have, because of this belief in 
female inferiority, given Merlin the role as protector of 
the king, they have given him traditionally feminine 
power. This combination of a male character with feminine 
power may cause confusion as to his gender. Although 
Merlin is never referred to as other than male, he 
exthevertheless uses feminine weapons and behaves in part in 
traditionally feminine ways. While Malory includes many 
examples of sorceresses in the text, Merlin is the only 
man described as using magic, which I have defined as a 
characteristically feminine weapon. He shares with Morgan 
the ability to transform himself and others, as when he 
makes Uther "be lyke the duke [Igraine’s] husband, Ulfyus 
shal be lyke syre Brastias, a knyghte of the dukes, and 
[Merlin] will be lyke a knyghte that hyghte syr Jordanus,
a knyghte of the dukes" (Malory 4) in order to enter the Duke’s castle to assist Uther in consummating his desire for Igraine.

In addition to operating with feminine weapons, Merlin maintains a traditionally feminine--that is submissive--position in relation to the other men in Le Morte Darthur. Just as his successor, Nyneve, for the most part, assists Arthur in his goals rather than any of her own, so does Merlin. With the exception of his ill-fated pursuit of Nyneve herself, Merlin never seems to have any personal goals, but only behaves as a benevolent wizard to his king, whether Uther or Arthur. Unlike so many of Arthur’s knights, such as Lancelot, Gawain, Uwain, and Gareth, to name a few, he never goes out on his own seeking adventure to increase his honor. Instead he reserves all his energy for increasing Arthur’s authority and honor. He thus takes the preferred feminine position of submission to a man by devoting all his magical power to the benefit of the king. Furthermore, his pursuit of Nyneve leads to his coming under her power, putting the male in submission to the female, a most unnatural position to medieval thought.
Another characteristic of Merlin that even more convincingly marks him as "feminine" is his lack of masculine power. Although the threats to Uther's and Arthur's political power during Merlin's time are masculine, i.e., wars and battles, he never once even touches a sword let alone raises a sword in battle. For Merlin the question of his being expected to fight never arises. This feminine submissiveness to other men and lack of masculine power may explain why he is able to use feminine magical power. Therefore, Morgan and Merlin comprise an interesting pair of opposites even though they depend on the same source of power. On the one hand, Morgan represents the danger of a powerful woman, or to put it another way, a woman seeking masculine goals. On the other hand, Merlin represents a man behaving in a characteristically feminine role. The ambiguity of the gender of these characters may stem from the conjunction of (to the medieval mind) apparently contradictory ideas: femininity and power. Femininity by definition must be weak and submissive while power by definition is strong and aggressive. Therefore, the woman who has power seems, as I have said Morgan appears, like a monster, a masculine woman. On the other hand, the man who uses a power that
has been associated with women also seems monstrous, a feminine man. Only Nyneve harmonizes the opposites by using her power solely in submission to a man (Arthur). Only a woman that submits to a man can use power positively. By contrast, Morgan shows how dangerous an unrestricted powerful woman can be by attempting to murder men and disrupting the order of her society through attempting to expose its weaknesses (such as Lancelot’s and Guenevere’s affair).

Although society in the Middle Ages preferred women to be passive and denied them any real power, in the Arthurian material that Malory drew upon to write his Le Morte Darthur, women do have power, the powers of magic and prophesy. In using these powers, some women aid men in the traditionally submissive way women were expected to behave, repressing any personal goals they might have in favor of facilitating the men’s goals. By accepting this help, however, men have made themselves dependent on these powerful women, reversing the balance of power. Perhaps the confusion over Morgan’s gender in texts such as Ywain and Gawain does not result from the similarity of her name to a masculine Welsh name, but rather from the male writers’ suspicion of a powerful woman. These writers may
have preferred men such as Merlin to adopt the role of the
king's helper. Because men are uncomfortable in a
position of vulnerability, women's power is portrayed as
dangerous. Morgan le Fay embodies this gynophobia.
Notes

1 Henry Grady Morgan, "The Role of Morgan le Fay in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*," *Southern Quarterly* 2 (1963-4): 151.


3 For more information on the use of these texts in the later Middle Ages, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993, 110-1.


7 This theme of a conflict in loyalty has been commonly discussed. See also Wilfred L. Guerin’s discussion of other conflicts in loyalty, *Malory’s Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1964, 251-2. He finds other examples of this conflict including the differences between Gawain and his less honorable brothers, and Gawain’s conflict between his loyalty to Lancelot and his desire to take revenge on Lancelot for killing his brother Gareth. See also Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth-Century France*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985, chapter one. She discusses the conflicts for Lancelot and Guenevere who wish to be loyal to Arthur but cannot because of their love.

9 See further discussion in Jacob, chapter 13.


11 See introduction to Women's Secrets, 51.


20 Aristotle, Generation of Animals, trans. A.L. Peck, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1953, 101, emphasis in original. Also note that a translation of this work was made in 1450, in Malory's time; see introduction, xxi.
CHAPTER III

Morgan as Witch and Heretic

Did the people accused of witchcraft in the Middle Ages (and in Salem in the seventeenth century) really believe they were casting spells and making pacts with the devil? Why were so many of the accused women? The first question we will never be able to answer satisfactorily. The second question has been studied by many historians, including Christina Larner and Carol Karlsen, who often assume the answer to the first question is no. Karlsen suggests that the real crime these women had committed was "against femininity."¹ Women accused of witchcraft were very often, according to such historical studies as those by Larner and Karlsen, aggressive and often violated the norms of their society. Whether challenging established church authority or becoming too powerful for a "mere" woman, their community could not tolerate them. Closely related to the subject of witchcraft is the history of heretical sects, whose members the officials of the
dominant religion accused of witchcraft, among other things. These new sects were often suspect partly because of their acceptance of greater involvement by women in religious ceremony that the established Church did not allow. The women in these groups therefore transgressed expectations of feminine behavior because they took on roles in the new sects that were specifically forbidden by the Church. In light of such an interpretation of witchcraft and heresy trials as a form of pressure on women to conform to society’s standards, Morgan le Fay is more than simply a sorceress, a neutral performer of magical spells; she is in fact a nonconformist intent on challenging and defying the rules of the Arthurian world.

The medieval theory of witchcraft generally distinguished between two major types of witches: 1) the white witch or village wise woman and 2) the witch accused of maleficium, or the intent to harm, usually believed to be in league with the devil. However, Ronald Holmes argues that the simple dichotomy is actually inadequate and that there were three types of witches: besides the white-witch who functioned as a village wise woman or herbal healer, he also identifies the political-witch, who may prophesy or actively seek the death of the monarch by
witchcraft, and the heretic-witch, who rejects all Christian values. Examples of accusations against women in all these forms can be drawn from medieval history, and Morgan le Fay at different times fulfills each of these functions.

To examine the wise woman first, female healers usually worked with women during childbirth and for gynecological concerns. Male doctors generally considered such matters "beneath their dignity," and treatments for female ailments often employed sorcery. As one surgeon stated, "because the matter requires the attention of women, there is no point in giving much consideration to it." Although there is some evidence that male doctors did not ignore women's medical conditions entirely, their interest seems to stem more from the desire to control women's reproduction rather than from concern for women's health. This orientation is expressed in the title of one such medical text, "Treatise on the Womb," whose very title focuses on the female organ representing woman's reproductive ability and not on the women themselves (Green 458). Additionally, the idea that women were reluctant to discuss such intimate conditions with men led to their preference for consulting women in these matters
(Green 468). In fact, as Margaret Labarge explains, "Magical practices to ease delivery, such as the use of precious stones with magical properties or wonder-working girdles, were grafted to scanty theory, some practical knowledge, and the pragmatic solutions gradually worked out for recurrent problems."4

Leland Estes also relates changes in medical practice to the witch-hunt.5 Doctors originally relied on the theory of "humors" and other astrological or supernatural ideas to explain illnesses, as demonstrated in a fourteenth-century treatise which describes the influence of the moon on the outcome of surgery.6 Cures were also of questionable validity, as shown by these medical recipes: "For loss of speech/ Take the juice of southern wood or of primrose, and he shall speak at once . . . To make a man or woman sleep three days/ Take the gall of a hare, and give it in his food, and he shall not awake until his face is washed with vinegar" (EHD 1191). However, after about 1500 these old beliefs lost their authority and a new investigation into natural causes for illness began; any condition that could not be explained naturally (according to the very limited knowledge of natural causes of the time) would be suspected to be
caused by witchcraft (Estes 272-3). As a result of this change, Estes believes that the village wise woman who used herbal cures would be less likely to be accused of witchcraft than healers assuming supernatural causes and relying on magical charms or spells. Still, there was competition between these female empirics, who had been using natural cures when the male doctors were applying leeches, and the male doctors, who sought to dominate the field.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English believe that university-educated male doctors increasingly restricted and finally eliminated their competition, the village wise woman. They claim that witchcraft accusations against midwives were the first strategy in removing women from the role of doctor and relegating them to the subservient role of the nurse. Monica Green agrees that women were increasingly limited in their right to practice medicine. Although women were originally active in many areas of medicine, treating a variety of conditions in both men and women, and not restricted to the role of midwife, laws were enacted preventing any actual practice of medicine by women. A law was passed in England in 1421 stating that, "'no Woman [may] use the practyse of Fisyk [medicine]"
undre the same payne’ of ‘long emprisonement’ and a fine of forty pounds” (Green 449). Despite this law, women remained active in medical practice, and Green cites as evidence treatises that may have been written for women and cases where the male writer of a treatise may have consulted midwives for obstetrical information. The fact that Malory writes of Morgan practicing medicine after this date already puts into question the appropriateness of her behavior for fifteenth-century readers, whether she uses it for good or ill.\(^8\) Actually, she does both in administering "ointments" to Alysaundir le Orphelin, as discussed below.

In addition, Green believes changes in medical theory may have led to more witchcraft accusations. For instance, in a list of medical practitioners in France from the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, 121 are women and three of them are identified as "sorcières" (Green 440). Although only a few women are named as sorceresses, still a connection is made between sorcery and medicine. Although midwives seem to be a minority of the women accused of witchcraft, suspicion of medieval people towards women healers was widespread, and is expressed by Nicolas Remy in his treatise from 1595.
First, he says, they (witches specifically) "desire to cause sickness or death" and can always achieve this. However, he claims, when it is a matter of curing someone, they seem to always offer some excuse, and he provides examples of several such excuses, including "the sickness was not caused by the witch in question, but by another." More central to his distaste for consulting a woman as healer seems to be a woman's "questionable" motives; for instance, they want to "be asked to perform cures so that they may reap some profit, or at least gratitude" for this service (Remy 159). Although Remy here accuses witches, such motives could be applied to anyone, man or woman, working as a physician. One might ask exactly what is so objectionable about seeking financial compensation, since, as he admits, most of these women are poor, and further what is so objectionable about asking for mere gratitude in appreciation of the cure?

In any case, Remy has more damning motives to attribute to these women who, he says, wish "poweres of life and death over mankind" (Remy 159). For a witch to have such power must have been a frightening thought for anyone in the Middle Ages, but much the same thing could be said of any healer, male or female. Even the male
doctors of the time would have had much the same ability to cure or harm as any woman practicing medicine. Another reason for suspicion toward women healers, as Holmes notes, is that "the same craft [as the herbalist’s art] could be used to produce abortion, illness, illusions, and death" (Holmes 15). Again, this accusation could be made of any healer, male or female, but only seems to have been used against women healers.

Witchcraft could be blamed for any mysterious condition, and often was suspected in unsatisfactory outcomes of pregnancies, as expressed by Henry VIII during his quest for an heir to the throne. After having put aside Catherine of Aragon, he married Anne Boleyn, who disappointed him (in his view) by failing to provide the all-important son. When a daughter (Elizabeth) was born, he "declared the incident to be held ‘to the great reproach of the astrologers, sorcerers and sorceresses,’" who had assured him the child would be male (and who were most likely afraid to tell him anything else) (Holmes 62). After Anne later miscarried a boy, the king’s courtiers brought witchcraft charges against her, which ended in her beheading. Henry himself asserted that "when he married Anne he had been ‘seduced by witchcraft’ and that this was
evident since ‘God did not permit them to have any issue’" (Holmes 62). Although these incidents occurred later than Malory’s time, they date to less than fifty years after the first publication of Le Morte Darthur; thus not more than a generation or two separates Malory from Henry VIII. Clearly, many ideas would be shared by times within a couple generations of each other, including the ideas about what witches were capable of (or could be blamed for).

Although Morgan does not appear in the capacity of a midwife, she does exhibit the power to heal and the power to harm. These opposing possibilities are best demonstrated by the Alysauendir le Orphelyne episode in Le Morte Darthur. In fact, Morgan uses both forms of magic on Alysauendir in quick succession: "Than quene Morgan le Fay serched his woundis and gaff hym suche an oynement that he sholde have dyed. And so on the morne whan she cam to hym agayne, he complayned hym sore. And than she put another oynemente uppon hym, and than he was oute of his payne."¹⁰ Ironically, when he is wounded, he cries out, "'A, Jesu, succoure me!'" and immediately Malory tells us Morgan comes to him; thus, he has requested help from heaven but apparently receives help from hell. Once
Alysaundir is totally dependent on her, Morgan then transports him to her castle and requires him to promise that he will stay inside her castle for a year in exchange for her curing him. Thus, Morgan demonstrates the danger of a witch having power by using her (magical) medicinal skills in order to confine and control a man. As we have seen in discussion of this episode in chapter two, Alysaundir must agree to submit to another woman in order to escape from Morgan’s control. The man needs a woman to escape a witch.

The issue of woman’s power plays a significant role in witchcraft accusations. Karlsen suggests that the real motivation behind accusing a woman of witchcraft is the desire to neutralize a perceived threat to traditional male authority. Morgan represents this threat to male authority through plotting to kill her brother King Arthur and through kidnapping knights such as Lancelot. Although Karlsen’s book largely concerns the Salem witch trials, theories similar to hers can be used to illuminate medieval witchcraft treatises and trials, as I will show below. For example, Karlsen believes that the famous case of Ann Hibbens in New England did not concern any sorcery that the woman performed to harm her neighbors (a frequent
motivation for witchcraft accusations), but rather her "obstinate challenge to religious, secular, and familial authority, and for her evil influence over other church members" (Karlsen 5). The woman was, then, "an enemy of both New England society and the Puritan faith." Not only was Ann Hibbens perceived as a threat to civilized society, but later Anne Hutchinson, another Puritan woman charged with witchcraft, became too powerful for church leaders to ignore. Her main crime seemed to be her "outspoken theological views and her personal assumption of religious leadership" (Karlsen 15). In fact, authorities such as Governor Winthrop "made explicit the link between Hutchinson’s witchcraft and her assumption of spiritual leadership" (Karlsen 18), thus confirming the use of an accusation of witchcraft as a tool to dispose of an overly powerful woman.

An example of an actual woman challenging authority and consequently being accused of witchcraft in the Middle Ages can be drawn from The Book of Margery Kempe, printed about 1501 by Wynkyn de Worde, and probably dictated by Margery in the 1430’s. Margery, a middle-class woman living from c.1373-c.1440, was not literate but dictated her life story. In her book, she emphasizes her spiritual
experiences, including a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and her struggle for acceptance in her community, which disapproved of her intensely emotional religious actions (for example, weeping loudly in church). Margery also sparred with church authorities in defending her faith. Strong-willed and outspoken, she did not hesitate to confront church officials, even arguing her case against the Archbishop of York. When she quotes scripture to support her point, the clerics associate her with witchcraft: "'Ah, sir,' said the clerics, 'here we know that she has a devil in her, for she speaks of the Gospel.'" Later suspected of being a Lollard, Margery is advised to comport herself more properly as a woman: "'Woman, give up this life that you lead, and go and spin, and card wool, as other women do, and do not suffer so much shame and so much unhappiness'" (Kempe 168). Thus the cleric implies that many of Margery's troubles stem directly from her unfeminine independence.

The emphasis on a witch as a woman with a desire for power is also evident in John Lydgate's early fifteenth-century *Troy Book*, when he discusses sorcery. Again and again, four times in only fifty-seven lines, he emphasizes that the sorceress acts by her own will:
"like to her desire," "For when she wished," "she wished to make," "And when she wished" (EHD, 858-9). In case his readers had any doubt, Lydgate also points out repeatedly with words such as "unnaturally . . . against kind," what an objectionable quality acting on her own desires is in a woman.

That a powerful woman is vulnerable to a charge of witchcraft seems to conform to Holmes' category of political-witch, a role Morgan establishes for herself with her first action, plotting for her lover Accolon to kill Arthur. As noted in the previous chapter, this action puts Morgan in the position of the most dangerous threat to Arthur all through Le Morte Darthur. In spite of this powerful threat, Morgan does not achieve her evil intentions through enchantment (or any other means). This failure on Morgan's part also conforms to medieval ideas about witchcraft which maintained that witches did not attain great success through magic. As I will show, medieval authors reasoned that "Satan, wishing to offend God, sought to obtain their services for the lowest price."¹²

Nicolas Remy, for one, discusses the temptations of the Devil that lure people into practicing witchcraft. In
the title description of Chapter IV, he maintains: "That when Demons first approach their Followers, they bring them Money; but afterwards, when the Glamour has vanished, it is found to be nothing but Dung, Bricks, Leaves or some such Matter" (Remy 7, emphasis in original). He further gives an example of "a man of Nuremburg in the year 1530" who thought he would acquire great riches from the Devil only to find that "the vault collapsed and crushed him to death in a moment" (Remy 7). Remy finally concludes on this point: "if Demons were to reward men with true wealth, no man's integrity should be secure from so great temptation" (Remy 8). Thus, such promises of the Devil are only tricks, and the witch-hunter can safely assure his readers that there is no profit to be gained from witchcraft.

That the witches' accusers feared such powerful women and wished to deny them power can be proved by quoting their own words. Although the Malleus Malificarum by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, first published in 1486 in Nuremburg, is a little late to have influenced Malory's own writing, the work did not create new ideas about witchcraft but rather, as Brian Levack states, it did "help to strengthen the fusion that had already taken
place between many different witch beliefs by discussing them in a single work and in an ordered, systematic way." This "encyclopedia of witchcraft" constructed theological authority for ideas that had been "formed fifty years before." Achieving immediate popularity with the Church, the ideas contained in the *Malleus* could have influenced Malory, and the *Malleus* itself could well have influenced those of his readers who were part of Caxton’s circle.

Although misogyny is evident throughout the treatise, it is most explicit in the section explaining "Why Superstition is chiefly found in Women." The double standard and interest in keeping women in their place dominates the reasons given in answer to this question. Primarily, women transgress medieval limitations on feminine behavior when they act on ambition or desire, in women called "avarice" and "lust." The authors of the treatise say "the root of all woman’s vices is avarice" (Kramer 43), and later, perhaps forgetting they had already identified the root of all vices, "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust" (Kramer 47). The suggestion of male fear of feminine power becomes even more obvious when other reasons are added: "she takes it upon herself everywhere to look down on everybody, and is inflamed to
all boldness by the spirit of pride... a woman will not be governed, but will follow her own impulse even to her destruction" (Kramer 46).

Yet the authors are not really interested in woman's own destruction; they are interested in the potential harm to men. After a list of all the dangers of witchcraft to children, women, and men, the writers remark, "And all these will be considered later; but for the present let us give our minds to the injuries towards men" (Kramer 47). Not only are the injuries to men first to be considered, but they are probably more significant as well: "And if women behave thus to each other, how much more will they do so to men" (Kramer 45).

As witches pursue revenge against men who rejected them, they could specifically cause men to be impotent "by removing the members accommodated to [their generative] act" (Kramer 4 and 47). In the face of so ominous a possibility as this, a strong defense would be needed. First, the authors deny that such potential acts occur due to the power of women; indeed God alone retains power over the world:

... the power of God is stronger than the power of the devil, so divine works are more true than demoniac operations... so it is
unlawful to believe that the noblest works of creation, that is to say, man and beast, can be harmed and spoiled by the power of the devil. (Kramer 2)

Furthermore, if witches seem to have harmed others it is only because God allows this for His own reasons:

... it is always to be understood that this can only be done by the permission and indeed by the power of God, and that this is only done in order to correct or to punish, but that God very often allows devils to act as His ministers and His servants, but throughout all it is God alone who can afflict and it is He alone who can heal. (Kramer 8)

This statement also serves to maintain the power in male (God’s) hands while denying power to women.

While only God can cause the removal of the male organ as a punishment for sin, witches can, with the devil’s help, cause men to believe they have lost the male organ. Therefore, while the true effects on men can only be accomplished by God’s power, witches can create an illusion causing men to believe they have suffered a real loss. In this way, the authors have kept the real power for men and God while allowing women only an illusory power over men.

Yet such an answer to the writers’ gynophobia must not have seemed defense enough in light of the authors’ venomous insistence on women’s inferiority. They bring to
bear every rhetorical weapon they know, including references to Adam and Eve, and thus reveal the inconsistencies in the theory itself. They blame Helen for the fall of Troy, implying she was apparently to blame for her own kidnapping and the ensuing battle to reclaim her. Therefore, a woman, no matter how passive, can be held guilty for the destructive behavior of men, which exposes another inconsistency: at the same time that the authors declare that women have no real power over males, they nevertheless blame women for many disasters to men. Shulamith Shahar discusses this tendency to use the accusation of witchcraft as a search for a scapegoat:

"The person accused was often the object of the projected feelings of fear, rage, greed and cruelty which animated the accuser and made him feel guilty" (Shahar 276).

This scapegoat effect can be demonstrated by Morgan le Fay in her assumption of the role as tester of the virtue of others. For instance, when she sends the drinking horn to Arthur’s court to humiliate Guenevere, Lamorak diverts the horn to King Mark’s court "in the dyspyte of sir Trystrames" (Malory 270). As presented in chapter one, Isolde is found guilty, but the barons refuse King Mark’s wish to burn her for her crime. While the barons blame
Morgan for sending the horn, surely the wives who betrayed their marriage vows are the guilty ones rather than Morgan, who merely exposed their duplicity. However, in order to keep the present political system intact, the barons must blame the person who reveals the women’s secret and ignore the guilt of the women themselves. Morgan, then, becomes a scapegoat for others’ guilt, although they are never able to punish her for her interference as they would like. In contrast to the world portrayed in the treatises where witches are discovered and executed, Morgan is invincible. Since she cannot be defeated, she may be an even more frightening character to readers in the Middle Ages than the image of the witch of who could be brought to justice, thus eliminating the threat she represented.

That the accusers have their own guilt is often true of witchcraft accusations. Richard Kieckhefer argues that

in many cases the suspected witch stands in a position of moral superiority in this [prior] quarrel, so that the accuser feels guilty, and reverses his guilt by projecting it on to the accused. If he has denied her the hospitality or kindness that he owes her, for example, he relieves his own feeling of guilt by asserting that she is somehow morally culpable. 15

This interaction then leads to an accusation of witchcraft
to confirm the accuser's assertion of the guilt of the woman. Nicolas Remy further exhibits this attitude in his explanation of the manner in which witches poison men:

Witches have another most treacherous manner of applying their poison; for, having their hands smeared with it, they take hold of the very ends of a man's garment as if they were to entreat and propitiate him. Thus it is hardly possible for you to be on your guard and avoid them, since the action has an appearance of kindness rather than of injury. Nevertheless, it is a most instant poison to the body . . . (Remy 6)

Remy thus demonstrates the process whereby a man ignores a (perhaps) old and poor woman asking for charity, and then transfers his guilt onto the woman herself, accusing her of malice. In this way, the roles are reversed and the accuser can regain a sense of moral superiority over the other.

Another example can be drawn from the Malleus where the authors interpret a Biblical story in order to illustrate their own point of view:

Again, when Shechem saw Dinah going out to see the daughter of the land, he loved her, and seized her, and lay with her, and his soul clave unto her (Genesis xxxiv). And according to the gloss: When the infirm mind forsakes its own business, and takes heed like Dinah, of that of other people, it is led astray by habit and becomes one with the sinners. (Kramer 52, my emphasis)
Kramer and Sprenger gloss the story in terms of female responsibility for male error, even though the man is the one described as tempted and acting on temptation. The authors do not describe (or care?) what Dinah’s motivation or will is in the story, and yet without any justification they assign the guilt for the man’s action onto her.

Although writers on witchcraft wished to deny any power to women to harm men, they nevertheless reveal a substantial gynophobia. Their inability to control these unruly women causes them to fear and to deny women’s power. The Malleus not only states that women deceive men, "And the tears of a woman are a deception, for they may spring from true grief, or they may be a snare," but also immediately follows this with woman’s feared independence: "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil" (Kramer 43). For a woman’s independence must seem evil to the man who seeks to control her. Morgan le Fay embodies this fear of woman by her refusal to be governed, either by her husband or her brother the king, leading to her ambitiousness and her vendetta against men.

Remy discusses the medieval belief that women used witchcraft to take revenge on men and gives the example of a wife who "was indignant at the presence of [her
husband’s] adulteress" and seeks help from her neighbor. Acting on this woman’s advice, she uses an herb intending to cause her husband to forget the other love; yet because of her action the husband feels "that his whole masculinity had been taken from him" (Remy 112). Morgan embodies this same fear that a woman may attempt to use magic to take revenge for male rejection. After she has already challenged Arthur’s political power in a failed plot against his life, she next enters Malory’s story when she and three other sorceresses kidnap Lancelot. In addition to magic, Morgan also uses the force of her knights to try to destroy Lancelot and Tristram, but does not succeed due to the warnings of Nyneve. As in the Malleus, where the authors feel the need to argue so extensively in denying that women have any power (though women nevertheless receive all the blame for men’s midsdeeds), similarly in Le Morte Darthur, the potential for women’s power to destroy men is expressed in the lengths needed to control it. Morgan may, by means of her knights, defeat Lancelot, and only through the teaming of the Lady of the Lake and Tristram can Lancelot defeat Morgan’s power.
After Morgan has protected herself from Arthur’s wrath by transforming herself temporarily into stone (transformation being a typical ability attributed to witches, though the transformation is usually into an animal rather than stone), she issues him a warning to prepare for her wrath. Thus Morgan declares herself unstoppable by ordinary means and reveals her hostile aims. Proving the untrustworthiness of witches, Morgan next sends Arthur the burning mantle. Although Nyneve warns him in time to prevent his death, magic makes Morgan very dangerous, for Arthur cannot defeat her without the help of another woman.

Nyneve consistently blocks Morgan’s plots. As we have seen, after her initial acts of imprisoning Merlin and acquiring Pelleas’ love, she rarely uses magic. While Morgan uses such spells as the burning mantle meant to destroy Arthur, Nyneve exposes the plot without any spells of her own. She simply informs Arthur of the danger, and he acts on the information. Her restraint in using magic is consistent with interpreting magic and sorcery as witchcraft. Since Nyneve is meant to be a positive influence in foiling Morgan’s malevolence, she should not
use magic for evil motives, and preferably would use very little magic at all.

Indeed, in attempting to portray Nyneve as a positive character, Malory reinterprets his sources to excuse her so that instead of deceiving Merlin she is protecting her virginity. While the Huth Merlin and Les Prophecies de Merlin stress Nyneve’s deceitfulness with regard to Merlin’s courtship of her, Malory follows the Christian interpretation of magic as the devil’s power. In describing her motives, Malory tells us: “And allwayes he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode, and she was ever passynge wery of hym and wolde have bene delyverde of hym, for she was aferde of hym for cause he was a devyls son, and she cowde not be skyfte of hym by no meane” (Malory 77). Thus, not only is Nyneve’s role transformed from a scheming woman taking advantage of an old man to an innocent virgin protecting her honor, but Merlin is also briefly transformed from a benevolent wizard to an accomplice of the devil. By identifying Merlin with the devil, Malory can portray Nyneve as justified in imprisoning such an evil man. However, this idea of Merlin as a devil’s son is not reconciled with his previously helpful behavior towards Arthur.
In the Middle Ages magic gradually began to be understood as witchcraft; therefore, Nyneve, if she is going to work as a positive force in Malory's narrative, must be excused from using magic. Edward Peters records the "systematic condemnation of magic in the thirteenth century" through the writings of Aquinas, Pope Gregory IX, and Pope Boniface VIII. In Malory's time as well, magic could be used to help or to harm others, yet increasingly all magic came to be suspect for its possible connection with the devil. Magic therefore was interpreted as a crime against the Church, and, eventually, against the state. In his Daemonologie, of the late sixteenth century, King James VI of Scotland (before he became James I of England) discusses the use of magic without an official pact with the Devil and explains why this also was questionable:

Yet to speake truely for my owne part (I speake but for my selfe) I desire not to make so neere riding: For in my opinion our enemie is over craftie, and we ouer weake (except the greater grace of God) to assay such hazards, wherein he pleases to trap vs. (King James 15)

Through this argument, King James makes all such "craft" perilous to one's soul because of the possibility of falling under control of the devil.
To the established monarchies in the Middle Ages, including the kings of England, witchcraft furthermore represented a threat of rebellion, a perversion of accepted values, as when Morgan violates the ideal that a proper woman should submit to male authority. Levack defines the person typically accused of witchcraft as "an eccentric or a nonconformist" who attempted "to survive in a hostile environment, [and] registered a protest against her social superiors" (Levack 138-9). Specifically, women who were accused of witchcraft exhibited "an aggressiveness that was regarded as inappropriate for their sex" or "were known for their 'effrontery'" (Levack 139). Perhaps these women were driven to unacceptable forms of protest since they were frequently among the least powerful in medieval society, as Levack states, more often older and poorer than the average person and frequently unmarried (often widowed), thus having no male to act on their behalf.

Christina Larner also defines the typical accused person as poor and as a social deviant. She maintains that of the accused in England "it is clear that the witches were ninety-three per cent women, and that they were absolutely at the bottom of the social heap."18
This assumption of the poverty of the accused can also be supported from the treatises. Remy, for example, argues that the devil more easily tempts the poor:

But this he does the more easily when he finds a man weakened by the hardships and cares of life; for then he suggests to the man that he is grieved at his misfortunes and is willing to come to help him. (Remy 1)

Remy contends that the poor man (or woman) is more vulnerable to temptation.

Larner also gives examples of women who were apparently singled out as witches because of their nonconformity, including Janet Man who had in fact been a natural target for witch-labelling, though her list of sins contains nothing that would have otherwise got her into trouble with the criminal law. She was a social deviant. She had rejected patriarchal religion and had lived for nine years with one man to whom she had borne children. (Enemies of God 173)

As in this example, the average woman believed to be a witch was usually poor and/or socially rebellious.

Jeffrey Burton Russell sees in the practice of witchcraft woman’s desire for improvement in the quality of their lives:

The fact that women made their presence felt in orthodox reform, heresy, and witchcraft--all
three--to a greater extent than anywhere else in medieval society suggests that they felt deprived, not of wealth, but of dignity and the worth they deserved as human beings. In turn, the activity of women disturbed, even frightened, the male establishment. . . .19

In fact, Russell sees this gynophobia as a direct result of improvements for women: "The rise in the status of ladies caused by courtly love and the cult of the Virgin may actually have encouraged the development of the witch image as a reaction" (Russell 284). The attitude towards women had changed from viewing them as chattel to seeing them as potentially displaying admirable spiritual characteristics. This attitude was more often expressed in theory, unfortunately, than in actual treatment of women (Russell 280). Thus, at the same time that woman as an idea began to symbolize a higher good, the old, contrary and opposing idea of woman as a corruptor of everything good, as represented by Eve, took on new force in the figure of the witch.

Morgan demonstrates this role of uncontrollable subverter of traditional values, and she further transgresses medieval norms by seeking to control, or else destroy, men. Thus, for example, she imprisons Lancelot and threatens his life, and makes war on her brother the king and all his knights. Uriens himself is in mortal
danger from her. Surely the following scene from Le Morte Darthur expresses the ultimate horror of which a woman is capable in the view of the authors of Malleus Maleficarum:

Anone the damesell brought the quene the swerde with quakyng hondis. And lyghtly she toke the swerde and pullyd hit oute, and wente boldely unto the beddis syde and awayted how and where she myght sle hym beste. And as she hevyd up the swerde to smyte, sir Uwayne lepte unto his modir and caught hir by the honde . . . (Malory 90)

To excuse her actions, Morgan further identifies herself as a possible witch: "‘A, fayre son Uwayne, have mercy upon me! I was tempted with a fende, wherefore I cry the mercy. I woll nevermore do so. And save my worship and discover me nat!’" (Malory 90). Since she not only was tempted by the devil but also began to act on this temptation (and would have completed the action if Uwain had not arrived just in time to stop her), she has put herself on the side of the devil. However, she claims that Uwain’s action has brought her to her senses, and it will never happen again. Uwain accepts this explanation, but the reader must wonder at Morgan’s intention in this speech since her very next action is to send the burning mantle to destroy Arthur. Uwain treats her story of the fiend’s temptation as a satisfactory explanation of her
actions, believing her promise never to act in such a
devilish manner again. Perhaps a fifteenth-century reader
with knowledge of witchcraft trials may have wondered why
he believes her so readily, and they would not be at all
surprised by her next murderous plot following so soon
upon the attempt on her husband's life.

As an instructive parallel to this scene, the Malleus
provides a discussion of procedure in the case of "one who
hath Confessed to Heresy but is Relapsed, Albeit now
Penitent" (Kramer 254, emphasis in original) but it
provides for little mercy, decreeing that,

[s]uch a one is not, if she humbly ask for them,
to be denied the sacraments of Penance and the
Eucharist; but however much she may repent, she
is nevertheless to be delivered up as a
backslider to the secular Court to suffer the
extreme penalty. (Kramer 254)

This discussion is to be applied specifically to cases of
heresy, and an impulse to grant mercy can be seen in the
trial of a man, John Badby, in 1410. Accused of heresy
and threatened with burning, Badby refused to repent even
though he was promised his life and "a grant of threepence
a day from the royal treasury" if he would. Because of
his obstinate refusal the chronicle writer can only
conclude that he was "undoubtedly possessed by an evil spirit" (EHD 857).

However, in the sections of the Malleus on procedure in trials of witchcraft no provision is made for a person repenting. Confession (usually upon torture, as the Malleus acknowledges) is actually used as evidence against the accused and thus becomes a prelude to execution in most cases. Therefore, the fifteenth-century view would not classify Uwain's mistake as the belief that Morgan was led astray by the devil, but rather the belief that it could be an isolated incident.

Such confessions as the Malleus discusses were important because part of the fear of witchcraft comes from its mystery: as Christina Hole says, "One of the most terrifying features of the general witchcraft belief was the fact that no one knew for certain who was or was not, a witch" (Hole 75). Consequently, proofs such as the devil's mark and, even more so, the confession of the accused became crucial to conviction in the trials. Conversely, this difficulty of identifying witches conclusively made the case of proving oneself innocent of witchcraft difficult. The accused might try various approaches to obtain an acquittal, such as arguing that
"insufficient witnesses [were called] . . . that an [accusation of malefice] had a natural rather than a supernatural cause . . . [that] the woman was simple, wandering or of unsound mind" (Enemies of God 178).

Because so little proof was needed, the way was nearly clear for any powerful person to accuse a less powerful one of witchcraft in order to seek revenge or merely eliminate them as competition for money or position.

Beyond the personal threat a witch posed, she could also pose a political threat. For example, Morgan owns a castle given to her by Arthur, who cannot retrieve it, and from which she launches assaults on him. As Sir Palomydes explains,

'Here is a castell that I knowe well, and therin dwellyth quene Morgan le Fay, Kinge Arthurs systyr. And kynge Arthur gaff hir this castell by the whyche he hath repented hym sytthyn a thousand tymes, for sytthen kynge Arthur and she hath bene at debate and stryff; but this castell coude he never gete nother wynne of hir by no maner of engyne. And ever as she myght she made warre on kynge Arthure, and all daungorous knyghtes she wytholdyth with her for to dystroy all thos knyghtes that kynge Arthure lovyth.
(Malory 367)

Morgan's castle and knights may represent a threat which was prominently featured in heresy trials of the Middle Ages. In the trials of Sir John Oldcastle in 1414 and
1417, for example, Oldcastle was accused as leader of a plot to seize the king, at one point taking the field with 25,000 men "to destroy the king and all his lords" (EHD 863).

Levack also describes a fear that witches might grow sufficiently numerous and strong enough to actually wage a war against a monarch (Levack 59). Medieval people thus not only feared individual witches, but also feared them in groups which might form an organized rebellion, as Levack further explains,

As a heretic and apostate the witch was considered guilty of lese majeste or treason against God; as a devil-worshipper she was part of an enormous political conspiracy; as a lower-class peasant she was part of a movement that was striving to turn the world upside down, reversing the divinely established hierarchical order of society and rejecting all of its moral norms. (Levack 58-9)

The fifteenth century provided many examples of politically motivated accusations of witchcraft, and charges were occasionally directed at the accuser's own family. In 1419 Joan of Navarre was accused by her son, Henry V, of plotting to murder him through magic. The accusations extended to her chaplain John Randolf, who confessed to using sorcery and necromancy. Joan was never brought to trial, though she was denied her dower and she
was kept in "exceedingly polite custody" (Labarge 217). Not long before Henry's death he reinstated her dower (Hole 150-1), implying that the charge was motivated less by a real belief in her guilt as a witch and more by a need for her money, since Henry suffered monetary pressures, including the pressure of financing a war with France. Thus, the charge of witchcraft served as the perfect tool to remove a woman's power, both political and financial. The strength of such an accusation derived first from the fact that it required relatively little proof (the confession of Joan's chaplain was all that was needed), and second from the repulsion it would inspire people to feel for the accused. Henry V seemed to know just what charge would be the most effective to employ against a woman, even a powerful one.

Morgan's attempt to use witchcraft to gain political power by arranging for her lover Accolon to kill Arthur and for her to rule the country herself serves partially to exculpate Accolon from her plot. Although he admits to Arthur that he loves Morgan and knew of her plot, he has not participated in the actual planning and is not aware that he is fighting his king. Indeed, Accolon seems to be shocked and repentant immediately upon hearing that he has
in fact done battle with his lord and he pleads for mercy "for I knew you nat" (Malory 88), an excuse which can be heard again and again throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, including in battles between relatives. Balan and Belyn, brothers, in fact battle until mortally wounded before they discover each other’s identity. Arthur acknowledges that this excuse does call for mercy, although Accolon did in fact mean to help Morgan kill him. However, Morgan’s reputation as a sorceress, as a witch, tips the scales in Accolon’s favor, since Arthur believes "but I wyte the the lesse for my sister Morgan le Fay by hir false crauftis made the to agre to hir fals lustes," even though Accolon has said nothing to encourage this interpretation. Thus, Arthur (and Malory would expect the reader to follow suit) holds Morgan primarily responsible for the plot against his life.

Medieval witchcraft theory stated that although a witch may be tricked by the devil into doing his bidding, she cannot be totally excused since she has consented to a pact with the devil of her own will. Consequently, Remy argues that the devil tricks witches by offering false riches, and the *Malieus* argues that "The devil provides the inner suggestion . . . [and that] the cause of man’s
depravity lies in man’s will" (Kramer 39). Similarly, Accolon is only partially excused in the plot against Arthur since, even though Morgan may have tricked him, he nevertheless agreed to do what she requested. While Accolon does not totally escape blame for his actions, the majority of the guilt falls on the female rather than the male conspirator.

Ironically, Arthur does not show as much mercy for Morgan’s innocent son Uwain and banishes him from the court, assuming that he schemed with her. Perhaps Arthur’s different treatment is due to the relative difference in the threat to his status posed by Accolon and Uwain: Accolon is a dying man when Arthur pardons him while Uwain is a young knight in a position to inherit Morgan’s holdings and perhaps her traitorous goals as well. Furthermore, Uwain also may be suspected of inheriting his mother’s witchcraft. As Larner contends, witchcraft was assumed to be passed on from one generation to the next, "’that children of witches might be justly regarded as being under a real compact with Satan’" (Enemies of God 165). If a child can "inherit" his parent’s witchcraft, Arthur cannot afford to absolve Uwain of suspicion.
Necromancy defines another politically charged aspect of witchcraft in which Morgan participates. The first connection of Morgan to witchcraft comes before she takes any active role in the plot, in fact in Malory’s first mention of the character. At the time of Uther’s marriage to Igraine, Malory describes the fates of the various daughters, including Morgan, who “was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye” (Malory 5). That a nunnery provided the setting for Morgan to learn necromancy may seem surprising, but nevertheless this establishes Morgan as practicing a skill whose motives were questionable for a fifteenth-century audience.

Actually, nunneries in the Middle Ages could be involved in witchcraft or heresy trials, or serve as havens and/or prisons for traitors. Eileen Power discusses the case of Jacquetta, Duchess of Bedford, who in 1470 was accused by Thomas Wake “of making an image of lead to be used in witchcraft against the King and Queen, which image he said had been shown to various persons and exhibited in the nunnery of Sowardsley.”20 Approximately fifty years later Elizabeth Barton took refuge in the nunnery of St. Sepulchre’s in Canterbury where she lived
as a nun for seven years when "the fame of her outspoken condemnations of the royal divorce finally brought about her execution" (Power 419) as a heretic and traitor.

On the other hand, women were sometimes sent to nunneries as to a prison or as a method of preventing further insurrection. Edward II sent his niece Margaret to a nunnery because of her husband's rebellion, later sending Elizabeth de Burgo to the Abbess of Barking, and also sending the daughters of Roger Mortimer to separate nunneries (Power 419). While in the case of Elizabeth Barton a nunnery served as a haven for a traitorous individual, Edward II evidently thought of nunneries as places capable of immobilizing potential enemies. Still, nunneries may be suspect for the very presence of such possibly traitorous women, who may have some negative influence on the other women in the nunnery. Perhaps the distrust men demonstrated towards nunneries came from their lack of control over the nuns' behavior since even "the bishop was obliged . . . to trust the prioress and to the nuns themselves to enforce his decrees" (Power 492).

Certainly, the authority of the church could exert considerable pressure on women who took holy vows, even when they subsequently attempted to renounce those vows.
Apostate nuns were forcibly returned to their nunneries and kept in cells, sometimes on bread and water, until they recanted. A woman who could resist such pressure and remain in a state of apostasy and rejection of the church, as Power puts it, "must have been of a most unmedieval scepticism, a most unfeminine indifference to the scorn of their fellows" since most could not fight "two great institutions, the Church and the State" (Power 441).

Whether women were seeking refuge in the nunnery, as Elizabeth Barton did, or whether they were sent there as Elizabeth de Burgo was, or even whether they were there against their will, preferring to renounce their vows, it is clear that many of the women living in nunneries were not committed to the religious ideal. There were also young girls living at the nunnery for education. Malory tells us Morgan was sent to a nunnery for schooling presumably as a young girl, as were many children of nobles. One of the subjects that was probably taught in the nunneries was herbal medicine (Power 277), which as practiced by the village wise woman came to be suspected of witchcraft, as we have already seen.

Although one may expect nunneries to be viewed positively in Malory's time, the meeting of groups of
women could be suspect. This distrust may explain the development of the belief in the witches' meetings (sometimes called a Sabbat). For instance, Christina Larner explains that in seventeenth-century Scotland all "communal occasions were feared and frowned upon," but bonding between women was especially discouraged. As Larner says:

The stereotype of witch is set by males as a negative standard for women. Female security lies in conforming to the positive standard and therefore women, who for this very reason rarely engage in bonding . . . , reinforce their own individual positions by joining in attacks on deviant women. ([Witchcraft and Religion] 62)

While Malory describes no actual Sabbats with the devil appearing or any of the other various perversions of Christian values, he does depict Morgan associating with other women, usually in order to plot against men. Morgan employs many (usually disloyal) damsels to work for her, be it to serve a knight held captive or to lead a knight to her castle in order to imprison him. She also connives with other sorceresses such as the Queen of North Gales, always with the intent of harming a man (usually Lancelot). For instance, she puts a spell on Lancelot in order to carry him off to her castle, and is helped by the Queen of Northgales, the Queen of Eastland, and the Queen
of the Out Isles, all sorceresses. These women threaten Lancelot with death. She also conspires with other sorceresses to the detriment of other women. Morgan and the Queen of Northgales put a maiden in boiling water out of jealousy; Lancelot rescues her, one of the few instances of a man being able to rescue anyone from a sorceress’ magic. Such incidents would reinforce the interpretation by medieval men that groups of women were plotting against them.

Since the first mention of Morgan includes the prediction of her involvement in necromancy, readers would already be alerted to the possibility that Morgan will be a politically dangerous witch. Levack defines necromancy as "the use of the spirits of the dead . . . to acquire secret or otherwise unknown knowledge" (Levack 7). King James defines the difference between necromancy and witchcraft as a question of who has power over whom, and says "that Witches ar servantes onelie, and slaues to the Devil; but the Necromanciers are his maisters and commanders" (King James 9). Fray Martin de Castenega, in his Tratado de las Supersticiones y Hechicerias, a sixteenth-century Spanish treatise, also expresses this idea and relates necromancy to art or science, with the
additional insistence that women are never called necromancers but rather witches, sorceresses or sirens.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, de Castanega claims women are more often witches because they are loquacious and cannot keep secrets (such as necromancers might acquire) (de Castenega 37-8). He believes that women who desire secret knowledge violate their nature (de Castanega 37). Therefore, Morgan would be succumbing to a natural feminine weakness by becoming a witch, but she would be taking a more frequently masculine role by becoming a necromancer. By using necromancy, she would have access to more power than a woman should possess.

In defining the threat represented by the political-witch, Holmes explains necromancy as "attempts at foretelling or bringing about the death of the monarch and others," a skill which also "had been condemned since before the birth of Christ and continued to be legislated against during the centuries which followed . . ." (Holmes 15). The danger of prophesying the king’s death can be illustrated by Elizabeth Barton, who, as just mentioned, in 1527 "prophesied that Henry [VIII] would not be King in the eyes of God one hour after his marriage to Anne Boleyn, that he would not be King in fact within one month
of the marriage, and that he would die a villain’s death.” Such prophecies became so threatening that Henry eventually had her arrested and taken to the Tower of London for examination. She was finally hanged with some of her followers on Tyburn Tree (Holmes 61-2).

In *Le Morte Darthur*, women frequently seem to have hidden knowledge, as necromancers were believed to have. Often women announce the destiny of a particular knight, as already mentioned when Percyval comes to court and is shown his destiny by a maiden. Morgan le Fay also acquires covert information. She not only knows about the relationship between Guenevere and Lancelot, she contrives to inform Arthur of the situation, again with a malevolent motive, in this case to seek revenge on Lancelot for his rejection of her. In a scene discussed in chapter one, she devises a shield for Tristram to carry in a tournament where the King and Queen might see it. She hopes the King will understand the picture on the shield to mean that Lancelot and the Queen are betraying him, and by making this betrayal known, she further hopes to force Arthur’s hand into destroying Lancelot and Guenevere. Although the shield is noticed, it is not understood, and therefore does not cause the disruption
she desired. It may be that once again, as in the case of the drinking horn, the people of Arthur’s court (including Arthur himself) do not want to know the truth about Lancelot and Guenevere. However, it may be simply that Morgan once again cannot succeed in one of her plots, since that would be giving too much power to a witch, a woman.

The implication that necromancy can be used to predict the death of the king perhaps lends a chilling effect to the traditional ending that Malory includes in *Le Morte Darthur* where Morgan accompanies Arthur to Avalon. Although this journey to Avalon in earlier versions of the tale is presented by the authors as a positive action by Morgan, with the hope that she might use her healing powers to save Arthur so he could return to the Britons in the future, it has always presented a problem to critics of *Le Morte Darthur* since Morgan does nothing else to benefit Arthur. Since a medieval audience would believe that a necromancer might predict (and thereby affect) the time of the king’s death, Morgan thus could be seen as intending to insure his death by taking Arthur to Avalon where he is believed to have died. In fact, Morgan is not the only sorceress in the boat, since she is accompanied
by the Queen of Northgales and the Queen of the Waste Lands, both of whom assisted her in some of her sinister plots such as kidnapping Lancelot and putting a maiden in boiling water. The saving grace in this scene is that Nyneve is also in the boat to counteract any evil of Morgan's. In any case, it is significant that all of Arthur's companions in the boat to Avalon are sorceresses, only one of whom has ever previously done anything positive.

When Morgan sends as a supposed gift to Arthur a mantle which will burn the wearer, intending to kill him, she becomes the kind of witch who practices maleficium, or sorcery with the intent to harm others. Christina Larner describes the acts attributed to maleficium as popularly understood:

The kinds of misfortune for which witchcraft was held to be responsible were . . . sudden illness, certain accidents, lingering illnesses for which no cause was clear, strokes, unexpected deaths, the failure of crops, especially if other people's were doing well, the drying up of milk, human or animal, strange behaviour in animals, and in fishing villages, disasters at sea. (Witchcraft and Religion 74)

While the "learned" version of witchcraft was theorized as a compact with the devil, as found in the Malleus, the popular belief in witches focused on practical problems
and personal misfortunes. Kieckhefer also makes this distinction. In all the centuries of the English witch trials, the townspeople (as opposed to judges or other government officials) "felt that these individuals [witches] were noxious creatures, who were undermining their health and welfare" (European Witch Trials 36).

Besides attacking her brother, Morgan "undermines the health and welfare" of others as well. One of Lancelot’s many achievements is the rescue of the damsel put in "scaldyngge watir" (Malory 478) by Morgan and the Queen of North Gales. Malory explains their motive as jealousy over the maiden being called the "fayryst lady of that contrey." This episode increases Lancelot’s reputation since he can undo the harm of evil women, and therefore secure male authority in the face of feminine threats. It also reflects the dynamics of witchcraft accusations springing from quarrels among neighbors since the motivation for Morgan harming the maid was jealousy. It was not a charge brought by a court due to Morgan’s unacceptable behavior, but rather a dispute between women over who is more appealing. Kieckhefer contends that "the importance of the quarrels is obvious" (European Witch Trials 98), and gives as an example of this
importance the action of a fifteenth-century witch from Lucerne:

Another [person] had recently arrived in the community, and planted a garden that was better than hers; out of spite, she went through his garden one day cursing the plants in it, and from then on his onion crop was blighted. (Kieckhefer 99)

This witch, motivated by jealousy, wishes to destroy the better garden, while in similar fashion Morgan and the Queen of North Gales, motivated by jealousy of the other woman's beauty, wish to destroy the more beautiful woman. Larner also maintains that the type of woman accused of witchcraft "was likely to be quarrelsome" (Witchcraft and Religion 73). As demonstrated in many cases in the Middle Ages, witchcraft operated as a woman's method of retribution in personal relations that had soured.

Nevertheless, the importance of witchcraft to the people of the Middle Ages goes beyond personal grievances; witchcraft represented an inversion of values, including Christian values, and thus definitions of witchcraft were intertwined with definitions of heresy. The Malleus states the case in this way: witches "whose art involves some worship of or subjection to devils, and who assay by divination to predict the future or something of that
nature, which manifestly savours of heresy; and such are, like other heretics, liable to the Inquisitorial Court" (Kramer 297). Some of the medieval beliefs/sects considered heretical were specifically linked to witchcraft. For instance, the Waldensians and Catharists were accused of such behavior as that they "meet secretly at night and freely perform their evil rites" (Russell 126-7) or even sexual promiscuity. As Kieckhefer notes, "The notion of a nocturnal orgy in the presence of a demon was a standard charge against heretics in the High Middle Ages." The heretical movements, as well as witchcraft, violated medieval rules of female behavior. Waldensians, for instance, allowed female Perfects who could "preach and conduct the religious services," and the Cathars, in addition to permitting women perfects who could "preach, bless and administer the consolamentum," also included female deacons or bishops (Shahar 259). These additions to the possible religious roles for women did not constitute a revolution in woman’s status in these communities; instead this greater freedom stems from the different emphases in these religions. The Cathars, for example, believed in a "certain neutralization of the sexes" in the souls. Although the bodies may have
different sexes and the woman was thus still inferior to
the man in their system, nevertheless, "'the souls of men
and of women were identical,'" as one defendant in an
Inquisition explained (Shahar 262).

The case of Eleanor Cobham combines the accusations of
witchcraft and heresy. In 1441 she was formally charged
with "necromancy, witchcraft, heresy, and treason" (EHDP
870). Not only did she employ necromancy to discover
"what should befall her and to what estate she should
come" but she also used magic more aggressively when she
"compelled the . . . Duke of Gloucester to love her and to
wed her." Such seeking of a man's affection is overly
aggressive behavior in a woman whether or not magic is
involved. Finally, the officials' desire to force her
into more submissive, and therefore feminine, behavior, is
reflected in the sentence she received, which stated "that
she should go the same day from Temple Bar with a meek and
demure countenance to St Paul's bearing in her hand a
taper of one pound, and offer it there at the high altar .
. ." (870, my emphasis). This case shows some similarity
to Morgan's actions since she also is said to practice
necromancy. Certainly Arthur, Lancelot and others would
like to see Morgan acting "meek and demure," but Morgan's
ability to escape capture (by turning herself to stone and fortifying a castle) allows her to continue her aggressive behavior.

The heretical movements were challenging the received authorities in many ways, as a letter by Archbishop Courtenay in 1382 analyzing Wyclif’s teaching shows. Under his discussion of "Erroneous conclusions," the Archbishop details many of Wyclif’s propositions, including

15. The assertion that it is lawful for anyone, even a deacon or a priest, to preach the word of God without the authority of the apostolic see, or of a catholic bishop, or any other authority from which there is sufficient assurance.

and,

18. That tithes are pure alms, and that parishioners may withhold them on account of the sins of their curates, and at their will give the tithes to others.

and further,

19. That special prayers applied to one person by prelates, or religious, are not more advantageous to the same person than general prayers would be, all other things being equal.

(EHD 845)

Another example is presented by the case of John Skilly of Flixton, a miller, who in 1429 abjured his former heresies
and errors under pressure of the Bishop of Norwich, which heresies included such ideas as that

the pope has no power to bind nor loose . . . it is lawful for priests to take wives, and nuns to take husbands . . . that censures and cursing of bishops and prelates are not to be dreaded nor regarded as weighty . . . that holy water hallowed by a priest is of no more effect than the water of the river or of a well is . . .

(EPH 865)

and many others. From the point of view of established church authorities, such ideas and doctrines would only serve to diminish their power and special position while granting more power to the general populace, women included.

The Lollards, for their part, reversed the accusations of heresy and witchcraft and turned them back against the other side. Besides denying special authority to priests and the Pope in favor of any Christian, in fact identifying the Pope as Antichrist (Leff 589), they viewed traditional Catholic practices as not only providing no spiritual benefit, but equivalent to superstitious charms. For example, one of the twelve conclusions of the Lollards of 1395 is

that exorcisms and hallowings, done in the church, of wine, bread, and wax, water, salt, and oil and incense, the stone of the altar,
upon vestments, mitres, croziers, and pilgrims’ staves, are the very practice of necromancy rather than of holy theology . . . (EHD 849)

Witchcraft, then, appears to be a convenient label to discredit one’s enemies, no matter which position one takes.

In addition to questioning established spiritual authority, Lollardy also deviated from traditional religious practice by providing a larger role for women than the Catholic church did. In their efforts to erase differences between laity and clergy, they granted new powers to all people, including women. Women were even encouraged to read Scripture and interpret it for themselves (Shahar 267). Perhaps more shocking to the Catholic church, Lollardy additionally allowed for women to preside over the sacrament of the Eucharist, since they believed any Christian could perform such a function (Leff 589).

Such perceived deviance from society’s norms may have encouraged the equation of the Lollards and Cathars with witchcraft, while Satanic witchcraft, making an explicit pact with the Devil, represented the ultimate form of heresy. Larner states that "Witch beliefs represent the inverse of the positive values of any given society"
(Witchcraft and Religion 62), and thus witches transgressed religious dictates by rejecting God in favor of the Devil, and rejecting social values through sexual promiscuity and inflicting harm on men. Morgan le Fay represents this inversion of values, such as requiring submission from men to her magical powers, as well as taking lovers in spite of her marriage vows.

Women have not always been content with the limited roles allowed by their societies, and in the Middle Ages they attempted to broaden their sphere of activity through religious reform and magic. Yet they were not always successful. Although she does not mention witchcraft specifically, Joan Ferrante illustrates the dynamics of a woman denied legitimate power who destructively attempts to gain power in other ways. She contends "that not all women will accept the passive role imposed on them; if they are denied a direct and open role, they will find a way to assert their will, and the secret, hidden way can be dangerous."24 This statement can apply perfectly to the witch, as Levack and Larner have described her: she has, perhaps, even less access to power than the average woman, and must resort to curses or attempts at sorcery to equalize the imbalance. Yet Ferrante's statement also
applies directly to Morgan, who desires power so much that she attempts to murder her brother and her husband. So by the time King Mark’s barons call Morgan le Fay "'the false sorseres and wycche moste that is now lyvyng’ . . . [who] in her dayes she was an enemy to all trew lovers" (Malory 270), her status as a witch and enemy of Camelot has already been established for most readers. Her actions define her as a witch, as Malory’s fifteenth century audience would have understood the term.
Notes


6See English Historical Documents IV, ed. by A. R. Myers, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969, 1186, hereafter referred to as EHD.


8Obviously, Malory is writing of events that were thought to have taken place centuries before; however, he interprets much of the action as if it were taking place in his own time. One example of this is his description
of Guenevere locking herself in the Tower of London to
defend herself against the rebelling Mordred.

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10Sir Thomas Malory, Malory: Works, Eugene Vinaver, ed.,

11Margery Kempe, The Book of Margery Kempe, trans. by B.

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1934, 419. For more information on women and religion see
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CONCLUSION

Throughout Le Morte Darthur there is one consistent threat to the Arthurian society, while other threats come and go. This continuous threat is Morgan le Fay. Although she is mentioned in the first tale as well as the last, most of her activity comes in the Tale of Sir Tristram, where she is frequently menacing other characters. Compared to other characters, whether male or female, she stands out as uniquely fascinating. For example, King Mark of Cornwall is as consistently negative as Morgan is, yet he confines his plots for the most part to interference with Tristram. Morgan, on the other hand, takes on Lancelot, Tristram, Alysaudir, Arthur, and others. While both Morgan and Mordred have at different times the same aim of ruling in Arthur’s place, here again Morgan plays a significant role in more of the tales (mainly "The Tale of King Arthur" and "The Tale of Sir Tristram") than Mordred, who really only stands out in the last tale. Although Mordred does succeed in destroying
the Round Table in the end, this is the first time he has threatened Arthur or any other good knight. Morgan, on the other hand, pops up again and again, even in casual mentions such as Bors remark, "'for this halff yere [Lancelot] hath bene in preson with quene Morgan le Fay,'" (Malory 482).

There are more similarities between her and the other female characters than between her and the male characters, since she takes part in every type of activity the other female characters do. She has an arranged marriage like Guenevere’s and Igraine’s, and is a queen just as they are. She participates in courtly love just as Guenevere and Isolde do. She practices sorcery just as the Queen of North Gales and Aunowre do. Finally, the broad range of behavior she shows makes her a uniquely interesting character to study since in this one character we can examine gender constructions of many types, including those implicated in marriage, love, power, witchcraft, and rebellion. The character of Morgan le Fay can be an intersection for all these issues as they relate to women in the Middle Ages, and in the process the character challenges these accepted female roles.
Because she not only participates in so many roles but also challenges their limitations, she can also be interpreted as an expression of medieval gynophobia. This medieval attitude is best summed up by Kramer and Sprenger in their extremely misogynist *Malleus Maleficarum*, when they say, "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil" (Kramer 43). Contained in this very concise statement are a few assumptions: that women's natural inclination would be to harm others (i.e. men), that women have the power to harm others, and that therefore women must be controlled by men for the safety of everyone (i.e. men). Because of these assumptions, the authors take great pains to insist that in fact women are not powerful, but rather that the Devil tricks them into thinking they are. The fact that all this hatred is poured out into a treatise on witchcraft implies that the authors see women who seek power as deviants, and interpreted in light of their religion, such deviance means an association with the Devil. Thus, they have defined powerful women not only as harmful to men, but also as the very enemies of God.

Kramer and Sprenger state that all this deviance springs from one violation of God's law, although which law seems to be in question since they first attribute the
fault to avarice (Kramer 43) and then to carnal lust (Kramer 47). Whether the path to destruction begins with avarice or lust, they believe that a woman, having first violated one law, will not stop until she has violated them all, in the end becoming an enemy of society and God. This theory can be used to explain why Morgan involves her lover in her plot to kill Arthur and become queen. Having violated religious codes by taking a lover, she shows unfeminine ambition and challenges the divine right of the first-born son of Uther to rule as king. So her first violation of adultery leads her on a path which does not stop until she desires to overturn the rightful order of the whole society. It is true that other female characters also commit sins such as lust, most prominently Guenevere, but also Isolde and Morgawse. Nevertheless, only Morgan represents the ultimate end of the path of sin by not only rebelling in small ways such as taking a lover in spite of being married, but also by attempting to seize power of the country. No other woman even considers such an outrageous action. While is it commonplace to believe that women had no power in the Middle Ages, it is intriguing to ask why men seemed to fear women to such an extent.
Because so many other characters are engaged in sin, according to religious doctrine of the time, Morgan has yet another role as tester. She tests the virtue of the others by sending the drinking horn from which only a faithful wife can drink. The others think that in doing this she is a meddlesome witch and an enemy of lovers, yet she only exposes their own hypocrisy. I believe she does not test others in order to reform them but rather to disrupt society; however, she never succeeds in causing disruption. Here is an area that leaves room for further study, since the tests may yet have other meanings and effects that should be examined. Do the tests (in any version that they appear in) simply show Morgan as an enemy to society, or does the writer wish to comment on the corrupted morality of the society Morgan wishes to discredit? Why is Morgan chosen as the character to administer these tests?

Although Morgan may represent medieval gynophobia and attempt to expose the sins of others, her actions are not entirely negative. She does show great affection for her lovers, and great grief at their deaths. While this may fit the conventional pattern of courtly lovers, it is nevertheless surprising for Morgan to show such tender
feelings when she is portrayed as so cold and cruel at other times, as when she attempts to murder her sleeping husband. This contradiction in her character also needs further study, as does the scene of her (along with all the surviving sorceresses) escorting Arthur to Avalon. In exploring this contradiction, we need to examine further how Malory has changed details from his sources. Although some examination of his sources has already been done (namely in Aspects of Malory and Malory’s Originality) the previous emphasis has usually been on proving that Malory was original and thoughtful in his use of sources (i.e., in formalist terms, Malory knew what he was doing). We need to go beyond this focus and examine how his changes alter the meaning of the specific stories and characters. While Ginger Thornton and Krista May engage in such an examination of Malory’s altering of the character of Percyval’s sister, I think other characters and stories might reveal more significant changes.

In the character of Morgan le Fay, for instance, Malory has definitely made some alterations. Although it seems to be frequently assumed that Malory has blackened Morgan’s character to suit his purposes, the blackening of Morgan’s character was already complete in his sources.
In fact, in a few instances, Malory has exculpated Morgan from certain offenses and assigned guilt elsewhere. For example, in the French Prose Lancelot, Morgan conspires to make Lancelot believe Guenevere has rejected his love when she has not, and this perceived rejection drives him mad. However, Malory puts the blame for Lancelot’s madness squarely on Guenevere, and not on Morgan. Therefore, while he has removed guilt from Morgan, he has placed it on another woman; it is still a woman’s fault. In Malory’s story, Lancelot overhears Guenevere and Elaine of Corbenic Castle arguing, and, fearing Guenevere’s wrath for his association with Elaine, he runs into the forest, mad. More examination of such changes, and what Malory intended by these changes, needs to be done.

This study has revealed that Morgan is more than just a minor irritation that reappears from time to time in the text. In fact, she represents much more; she systematically represents medieval gynophobia. Through examining her use of magic, she is revealed to be a powerful and mysterious woman, a very frightening thought to a medieval audience. Through examining women’s roles in marriage and courtly love, I have shown that she is rebelling against both the restrictions of patriarchal
marriage as well as against the supposedly freer role in courtly love. Moreover, she uses the tension between the two ideals to attempt to disrupt the peace of Arthur’s court. Finally, through a study of witchcraft treatises, Morgan le Fay is revealed to be not only an enemy to men like Lancelot, but also, as a fifteenth-century audience would have classified her as a witch, an enemy to God. Therefore, up until Mordred rebels at the end, Morgan le Fay in Le Morte D’Arthur represents the most terrifying potential menace to the golden dream of Arthur’s court.
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