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CREATING HER OWN POWER: *MORTE DARTHUR*'S MORGAN LE FAY

A Thesis

by

CYNTHIA A. SCOTT

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2014

Major Subject: English

CREATING HER OWN POWER: *MORTE DARTHUR*'S MORGAN LE FAY

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by
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May 2014

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ABSTRACT

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Morgan le Fay is one of the most recognizable female characters in Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* as she persistently creates conflict for King Arthur and his knights. While many scholars have focused on the idea of a subjugated female presence in Malory's text, this paper addresses the power that Morgan displays and how it suggests underlying masculine anxieties existing in a patriarchy. Three specific components of Morgan's power are discussed: her ability to reject and manipulate prescribed gender codes, her power of enchantment, and her disruption of homosocial bonds. The strategic combination of these three components allows Morgan to exhibit a unique and independent power that persistently threatens the stability of a highly structured society and interferes with the construction of the male chivalric identity. The multi-dimensionality of her power is addressed as it signals the potential strength held by women in a society that seeks to minimize their worth.

DEDICATION

The completion of my graduate studies would not have been possible without the love, understanding, and support of my family. My husband, William Scott, my children—Cayce, Matthew, and Janae—and my parents, Antonio and Rosario Guerra, were a constant source of love and patience as I worked on this process. They each motivated me to complete my graduate work and were largely instrumental in helping me to accomplish this degree.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* (1469) is regarded by many as the most unified work about the Arthurian legend that has long fascinated readers. Malory begins by including Arthurian prehistory before presenting the story of Arthur's initial establishment of his kingdom. He then focuses on numerous tales of the Round Table knights and their defining quest for the Holy Grail before concluding with the tragic fall of Arthur's realm. Such a comprehensive text is extensive in its presentation of characters with no shortage of those who create conflict for King Arthur and his fellowship of knights. Despite the abundance of external and internal threats to the kingdom, it is Arthur's own half-sister who is one of the most devious figures in Malory's work. While the canon of Arthurian literature is extensive, *Morte Darthur* has arguably had the greatest impact in developing the popular perception of King Arthur's half-sister as a malevolent female figure associated with the dark arts who is determined to destroy her own half-brother. She wields an impressive amount of power in Malory's work as she consistently presents a threat to Arthur and his knights. Her characterization, however, presents an interesting paradox. While she is a member of what is perceived as the more passive and vulnerable sex during Malory's time, demonstrated by the nameless women in need of rescuing that litter the text, Morgan instead exhibits an active presence that rivals even the most masculine of characters in *Morte Darthur*. She goes against the feminine norm in a genre in which "womanly timidity, passivity

and pity confirm the masculinity of bravery, initiative, and severity" (Crane 19). Malory is hardly a feminist; however, his negative portrayal of this powerful female character in a medieval romance suggests underlying masculine anxieties existing within a patriarchal society.

It may be argued that Morgan's power is due to her embodiment of typically masculine traits such as ambition, sexual voracity, combativeness, and cruelty—traits that are noticeably absent from the passive female characters typically associated with knights in the work, such as the Fair Maid of Astolat. And while some female characters in the text, such as Nyneve and Guinevere, certainly exhibit dominant personality traits, none directly threatens the patriarchal system so firmly entrenched in *Morte Darthur* as markedly as Morgan. However, it is her undefinable, rather than a definitive masculine, nature that truly provides her with an unmatched level of power as it threatens the existing order of stability due to its unrecognizable, and therefore seemingly undefeatable, nature. Her level of unpredictability is unmatched in the work as she successfully shifts gender roles in order to conceal true intentions and gain control over others. Morgan effectively transcends categorization as it applies to both masculine versus feminine and earthly versus supernatural, thus positioning herself as something that is truly outside the norm, an individual who is difficult for those situated in what is typically a highly structured and defined hetero-normative chivalric society to understand. Malory therefore portrays a character who symbolizes the greatest possible threat to what is supposed to be an ideal society that relies on the passive female in its own construction of the male chivalric identity. As Dorsey Armstrong has noted, "Knights in Malory always read women as vulnerable, helpless, and ever in need of the services of a knight—in short, the object through and against which a knight affirms his masculine identity" (36). Thus, a major distinction between masculine and feminine is that of being active versus passive. Morgan, however,

refutes the perception of the passive female as she often succeeds in rendering knights themselves helpless as a result of her active plots and supernatural abilities. Knights are therefore unable to read her as a woman given that she does not predictably adhere to the traits they expect to encounter in the women that cross their paths. They are unable to see her as a passive feminine object that may be used to bolster their own chivalric masculinity. Malory therefore presents a character who effectively symbolizes what men in his own society feared, one who threatens masculine identity and creates her own power independent of man. In Morgan's case, her power is due to the strategic combination of three occurrences: her rejection and manipulation of prescribed gender roles, her use of supernatural power, and her skill of disrupting homosocial bonds within the chivalric community.

Morgan's evolution in the Arthurian legend is clearly evident, but Malory's take on her signals a change in cultural norms that taps into male anxiety. The female contribution to the male-centered society was one that could not be ignored as much as its male adherents tried to marginalize its presence. Indeed, much of what has been written about women's roles in Arthurian literature has focused on the idea that chivalry proves to be impossible without the presence of a passive, subjugated female (Armstrong 36). However, chivalry is also established when acknowledging the active, powerful presence of a woman such as Morgan. As malignant as her actions are, they at times indirectly serve to strengthen the chivalric identity of the individual male and his community. In doing so, a patriarchal society is forced to acknowledge the emerging power of women in its presence. Morgan's perceived threat and powerful existence therefore serves a distinct function in this masculine culture, one that may not initially be evident or expected but one that nonetheless becomes concrete throughout the course of the text as it serves to highlight the necessity of a powerful female presence in Malory's male-

centered work. Morgan's characterization in *Morte Darthur* calls for the reader to reassess gender roles and the power that is held in the seemingly traditional society of medieval romance. This recognition of feminine power in the text exposes the weakness not only of the chivalric project but of masculinity itself.

Malory's cultural norms seem to lead to a characterization of Morgan that differs from what had previously been established in Arthurian lore. This is particularly evident when noting the presence of Morgan le Fay in three earlier sources: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (1150), Chretien de Troyes's *Erec and Enide* (1170), and the Vulgate Cycle's *Lancelot* (1215). In Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, Morgan resides in a land of fertility named "The Fortunate Isle" which "of its own accord…produces grain and grapes, and apple trees grow in its woods from the close-clipped grass." Morgan functions as the leader of her nine sisters as she is "more skilled in the healing art," changes her shape at will, and takes the lead role in educating her sisters and teaching them mathematics. Morgan also serves as a healer when the men entrust her with a wounded Arthur after an early battle at Camlan. The brief mention of Morgan in Chretien de Troyes's work similarly highlights her healing abilities as King Arthur addresses a wound that Erec has suffered by giving the knight an ointment made by Morgan that is said to be "so wonderfully effective that the wound to which it was applied, whether on nerve or joint, could not fail to be completely cured and healed within a week" (89). Brief though they are, these incidents highlight both Morgan's role as healer of knights and the court's complete trust in her.

While the earlier references to Morgan are positive in nature and associated with healing abilities, the reader encounters a far more ominous character in the Vulgate Cycle. She is notably described in the work as being "so lustful and wanton that a looser woman could not have been found" (173), and her penchant for imprisoning knights is well established as Lancelot

himself becomes one of her victims. However, this negative depiction of Morgan differs from that presented later by Malory, particularly regarding her motivation to destroy characters such as Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot. The source of Morgan's hatred in the Vulgate Cycle is geared much more towards Guinevere rather than her own brother as it is made clear that Morgan seeks to "deprive her of happiness forevermore, for she hated the queen more than any other woman" (173). Such hatred is due to Guinevere's role in convincing Morgan's lover, a young knight named Guyamor who is nephew to the queen, to give up his affair with Morgan le Fay. Morgan's motivation in this earlier source therefore seems to be based on jealousy and resentment over a lover who spurned her rather than on ambitions to inherit a throne or deny her brother honor as is later more clearly established in *Morte Darthur*. Morgan's goal in this earlier work seems to be to create conflict for another female rather than to create conflict directly for the king.

Scholars have seen Morgan's independence from men both positively and negatively. Maureen Fries has rightly established Morgan as "the oldest and most persistent Arthurian example of the female counter-hero," one who "violates the norms of the Arthurian patriarchy in some way" (3). The female counter-hero is particularly noted for her dependence on "the greater or lesser magics and / or sexual seduction, sometimes leading to destruction" (3). In her discussion, Fries notes how "the decline in [Morgan's] moral nature, her magic powers and even her beauty coincides with the virulent growth of woman-hatred in both religious and lay society and in all kinds of literature documented by historians as a feature of the later Middle Ages" (4). Malory's characterization of Morgan as a scheming, promiscuous woman would seem to support the misogynistic thought prevalent in the medieval world as presented by St. Jerome, who described women as "the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sting of the serpent, in a

word a perilous object" (Heer 265). Fries contends that while Malory's reworking of original French sources serves to emphasize the wicked nature of Morgan, it also highlights the ineffectiveness of her magical powers. And while the Lady of the Lake serves as a foil to Morgan by assisting Arthur, Guinevere, and other members of the king's court, Fries pointedly remarks that neither female entity proves to occupy a crucial role in the work as they instead "appear literally near the narrative margins of the book" (15). However, Geraldine Heng effectively highlights how both Morgan and the Lady of the Lake "are women possessed of such powers as confer an extraordinary autonomy upon them, an untrammeled freedom to act that is denied others" (104). Indeed, it is their independence that empowers them above any royal title, and despite arguing as to whether or not they truly occupy a crucial role in the Malory's work, it is that ultimate freedom from men's rule that sets them apart from other female characters in the work. In Morgan's case, it is particularly noteworthy as she remains defiant of values within King Arthur's society. Her independence seems to contribute further to her malevolent actions as they in no way function in favor of a traditional patriarchal society.

Perhaps even more notable is the idea that Morgan effectively rejects and manipulates prescribed gender codes in her society. Armstrong asserts that "Morgan's position transcends categorization as feminine, as that against which the knights may define their masculinity" (58). Such a claim would allow one to understand the conflict that Morgan would then pose in such a rigidly patriarchal society portrayed in Malory's work. Morgan le Fay is far removed from the idea of a marginalized, passive female as she instead rejects a "single position in favor of a diffuse, heterogeneous identity" (59). Armstrong additionally notes Morgan's unique position given that she simultaneously occupies two positions of power as a noble-born sister of a king and as a wife of an ally to the king. Her status would seem to situate her even more so in a

traditional society. On the contrary, we witness her absolute rejection of a stable, singular position as she instead chooses to be a threat to her own brother. It is a threat that remains viable as long as she continues to embody both masculine and feminine traits, empower herself with supernatural abilities, and consistently disrupt the homosocial bonds that are essential in a chivalric society. I propose to reveal how a strategic combination of these three components allows her to wield an independent form of power that is not found in any other figure in Malory's text or in any other portrayal of Morgan in Arthurian literature. And while these three components may be addressed as separate entities, they ultimately function together to produce one of the most consistent threats in *Morte Darthur*.

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF NON-CONFORMITY: MORGAN LE FAY'S SHIFTING GENDER ROLES

A great deal of Morgan le Fay's power in *Le Morte Darthur* is achieved in how she efficiently embodies both masculine and feminine concepts of gender and how she in turn disempowers the men she pursues for various reasons. Her ability to do so is a result of her willingness to both reject and manipulate prescribed gender roles that are an integral part of a traditional patriarchal society. As Armstrong notes, "She is both simultaneously and never potentially masculine *and* feminine in her actions, and thus, she radically disrupts the model of gender so crucial to the construction of knightly social identity and indeed, to the very foundation of the larger Arthurian community" (99). Perhaps her true power, however, relies on the unpredictability of her nature. It is this unpredictability that poses a distinct threat in a society that is highly structured, one that relies on the idea of socially established norms and ritualization. Judith Butler notes that "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (140). Morgan's ability to shift from masculine to feminine specifically violates this expectation. It certainly stands in stark contrast to the Round Table Knights who consistently strive to follow a set of norms set forth by King Arthur's Pentecostal Oath that serve to solidify their chivalric identity in society. Morgan's fluidity that results from both a manipulation and rejection of established gender roles therefore

proves to be strategic as it provides her with a unique source of power in her plots to gain power over others.

Morgan undoubtedly represents traits men would fear in women: sexual promiscuity, infidelity, disloyalty to kin, and unyielding ambition. However, she succeeds in using the belief underlying the Pentecostal Oath stating that knights are "allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [sucour:] strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them, upon payne of dethe" (75.41-43) to her advantage at crucial points in the text. The oath represents the very core of what Arthur and his knights seek to establish in society. Indeed, Richard Barber notes the significance of such oath-taking as parallels can be found in historical accounts of knights of the Order of the Bath and in oaths recited by members of tournament societies in Germany at around the same time that Malory would have penned the Pentecostal Oath (32). Such accounts are in line with the expectation that men make an oath upon taking up the order of knighthood, one that holds them to the idea that "those who are in the order must live by its rule" (Keen 71). In *Morte Darthur*, commitment to the oath is itself ritualistic as "all knyghtis [were] sworne of the Table Round, both olde and young…every yere…at the hyghe feste of Pentecoste" (76.1-2). The repetition of the oath is a public act that therefore serves to establish masculine roles and guide the actions of Arthur's knights. It sets forth an expected response to females, regardless of their age or station, as they are viewed as "helpless and passive victims totally dependent upon their male kinsfolk and the random good will of the men they encounter" (Wynne-Davies 62). Morgan, however, displays an ability to exploit the oath and its ingrained gender expectations, ultimately allowing her to gain power in a situation where one would initially see her as helpless.

Morgan's manipulation of codified gender roles is particularly evident in the episode concerning Arthur and Accolon. Arthur's initial trust in his sister is evident as he places Excalibur and its scabbard in her safekeeping following Merlin's early advice that he "kepe well the scawberd of Excalibur, for ye shall lose no bloode whyle ye have the scawberde uppon you, thoughe ye have as many woundis upon you as ye may have" (49. 30-31). Indeed, Malory adds in his text that "aftir for grete truste Arthure betoke the scawberde unto Morgan le Fay, his sister" (49. 32-33). The sibling relationship is crucial as it establishes how Arthur views Morgan as one to be trusted, particularly as she represents a gender that would not be interested in using a sword and scabbard for an advantage in the realm of battle. Arthur indeed views Morgan as a sister, one who would be faithful to her own brother and king, thus allowing his sword to function as a symbol of trust between the two. Morgan, however, manipulates this sense of trust as she instead uses the possession of Excalibur to gain power in her bid to remove Arthur from his throne. Morgan's disloyalty to her own kin is displayed as she sends Excalibur and its magical scabbard to her lover Accolon after convincing him to kill Arthur by doing "batayle to the uttirmoste withoute ony mercy" (84. 22-23). Despite Accolon's seemingly loyal tendencies to the king as a member of his royal court, Morgan's seduction leads him to agree to the deed. Accolon's sense of obligation to Morgan takes priority over his loyalty to King Arthur as is evident when he orders her messenger, "Recommaunde me unto my lady the queen and telle hir all shall be done that I promised hir, and ellis I woll dye for hit" (84. 31-33). Such a response highlights the flaw that is inherent in the chivalric project. Morgan capitalizes on her position as a woman to get Accolon to assist in her destruction of the king since she is unable to engage in physical combat herself. In such a case, the codified gender roles established in the Pentecostal Oath assist Morgan in her plot to kill Arthur, but it is also her own relationship to the king that

places her in such a unique position of power. Morgan strategically uses her situation as a woman to empower herself in a chivalric society that has pinned a huge part of its identity on assisting "ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen." Accolon ultimately feels obligated to fulfill his masculine duty as a loyal knight despite the fact that she is a married noblewoman. Morgan capitalizes on her role as a woman in need of assistance to wield power over Accolon, leading him to help accomplish her goal of killing her own brother. Her ability to seduce and control Accolon in her play for power illustrates how men's loyalties may be defined by women who possess the knowledge to manipulate them in order to achieve their own purposes, thus leading to a disloyalty that threatens a structured patriarchal society.

Morgan's plot leads to a fight between Arthur and Accolon in which they agree to fight on behalf of dueling brothers without realizing each other's true identity. Morgan's betrayal of kin is highlighted as she orders one of her damsels to present Arthur with a counterfeit Excalibur and scabbard along with a message that she "Sendis here youre swerde for grete love" (85.25-26). Arthur is only able to overcome Morgan's plot and reclaim the legitimate sword and scabbard with the assistance of Nyneve, the Lady of the Lake. However, Morgan's motive is made abundantly clear as Accolon receives what he believes is a final blow that will lead to his death and unknowingly confesses to the king that "Arthur ys the man in the worlde that [Morgan] hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and of prouesse of ony of hir bloode" (88. 10-11) and proceeds to reveal her ultimate plan to kill both Arthur and her own husband King Uryence in order to "have me kynge in this londe and so to reigne, and she to be my queen" (88.15). Her motivation and actions take on a different level of malevolence as Elizabeth Archibald describes her as "doubly perverse: she despises the values dearest to the Round Table, and she particularly dislikes them in her own brother" (140). The fact that Accolon particularly

notes her hatred of Arthur's honor and power, two essential components of patriarchal authority, is significant as it requires that the reader infer what it is about her own brother that drives her to plot his death. While some may see Morgan as despising the idea of honor, I would argue that Accolon's claim instead suggests that Morgan desires the very honor that her brother has so easily secured as king. As D.S. Brewer notes, "Honour, which Malory calls by its Old English name, 'worship,' still the usual word in his time, may be said to be the strongest single motivating force in the society which Malory creates" (25). Morgan's position as a woman in a "fierce, masculine, aristocratic society," however, severely limits her ability to acquire honor as it is primarily obtained "by fighting bravely in battle or tournament; specifically, by defeating the enemy, or by helping friends who are in difficulty, and by fighting fairly" (Brewer 25). Morgan is unwilling to resort to the traditional means of gaining honor as a woman: chastity and marital faithfulness. Indeed, her desire to possess the type of honor reserved for men leads her act dishonorably as a woman, yet that seems to bear no importance to Morgan.

Morgan's strategy to obtain the same kind of honor enjoyed by men, most notably her brother, is dependent on her resorting to her feminine self—the one that takes Accolon as a paramour and leads him to promise to assist in her plan to remove Arthur from power. Morgan's plot allows for her lover to take her place in the physical showdown against her brother while it places her safely at a distance as she devises the means to gain power, and ultimately honor, away from the king. Such a strategy supports Joan Riviere's argument that "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (303). While Morgan undoubtedly establishes an evil persona throughout the course of Malory's text, at this point she is regarded as a trusted sibling of the king. Her "mask" is a strategic way to avoid retribution from others while plotting her brother's demise. Her desire to

obtain masculine honor and power therefore displays her inconsistency in regards to gender roles. Consequently, while Morgan may not be able to overtake Arthur's title as king, her plan unveils a strategic measure on her part, one in which she enlists a member of Arthur's own circle of male confidantes to take over the throne in order to wield her the greatest power possible given her circumstances as a woman. This event is particularly significant when considering that public law in the Middle Ages law dictated that "a woman had no share whatsoever in the government of the kingdom and of the society…the law barred her from filling any public office and from participating in any institutions of government" including royal councils (Shahar 11). Malory's depiction of Morgan, however, illustrates how a woman may be able to circumvent such a law. If successful, her ability to seduce and control Accolon in order to defeat her brother would undoubtedly have translated into her ability as queen to control Accolon himself in his role as king, thus providing her with the means to achieve unlimited power in her royal position. Furthermore, Judith Butler builds on Riviere's argument by offering an additional interpretation stating that "the woman in masquerade wishes for masculinity in order to engage in public discourse with men" (52). Morgan's ability to shift between masculine and feminine roles certainly speaks to her desire to obtain power that would place her in a more visible role as a ruler, not simply as the sister of the king. While Accolon would have held the masculine title of king, Morgan would have likely held the greatest amount of power as her ability to seduce Accolon demonstrated. Despite the ultimate failure of the plot to eliminate the king, Malory's portrayal of Morgan taps into male anxiety as it emphasizes the very possible threat of a powerful woman who violates societal expectations in order to fulfill her own desires. By enlisting the aid of a man to inherit a throne intended for a male monarch, Morgan seeks to seize what seems to belong rightfully to man whether that entails land, title, or prestige.

Morgan le Fay again shifts between the masculine and feminine in her attempt to kill her own husband, King Uryence, while falsely believing that Accolon has successfully killed Arthur. Any sense of pity or marital faithfulness is absent in Morgan as she instead effortlessly takes an active role in attempting to kill Uryence. Malory's diction particularly serves to present Morgan in a masculine role. Her decision to kill him follows Malory's mention that "she aspyed kynge Uryence lay on slepe on his bedde" (90.14). The use of the word "aspyed" takes great significance in this key instance when one considers its connotation. *The Middle English Dictionary* provides a key definition for such a verb: "To lie in ambush for or attack from ambush (a person), to waylay; to set a snare for (a person); to plot against (a person); also, to plot (a person's fall)." While it is a verb that is typically associated with aggressive acts of men, Malory's use of the word portrays Morgan as hostile and strategic in her plan to dispose of her husband while he is the passive victim lying vulnerably under her calculating gaze. She is far removed from the role of a loving, faithful wife as she instead plots her husband's violent death much like a fighter who has spotted his greatest enemy in a vulnerable position on the battle field. In a perverse reversal of the male gaze, Morgan is in control of the situation, coldly instructing her maiden to "Go fecche me my lordes swerde, for I sawe never bettir tyme to sle hym than now" (90.21-22). The objectifying power of the gaze is held by Morgan, not to view Uryence as an erotic object but as an object that must be removed in order to fulfill her move for power. While medieval romance is regarded as "a foundational site for elaborating and refining the connection between femininity and the observed body" (Crane 74), Morgan instead takes on the masculine role of the viewer, observing a male body in order to dispose of it. Malory further notes how Morgan "toke the swerde and pullyd hit oute, and wente boldely unto the beddis syde and awayted how and where she might sle hym beste" (90.34-36). Malory's use of detail and

diction once again solidifies Morgan's masculine presence in the scene as she "boldely" wields a sword, the most masculine and phallic of weapons, and strategically continues to watch over her sleeping husband before following through with his murder. As Ad Putter argues, "The sword in medieval culture effectively guarantees the masculinity of the bearer…the naked sword is (or should be) the exclusive property of men" (290). Morgan rejects that belief by planning to use her husband's own naked sword to do the deed. It speaks to her desire to wield a masculine form of power in her own hands as she no longer needs a male intermediary such as Accolon to complete the murder. Despite her supernatural abilities, Morgan's instead decides to kill Uryence with a weapon traditionally found on the battlefield, a place reserved for men seeking to achieve honor through combat.

As easily as she employs masculine characteristics when plotting her husband's death, she adapts feminine characteristics in order to avoid conflict when facing retribution. Uryence's murder is prevented only because one of Morgan's maidens informs her son Uwayne of her plot, leading him to catch "hir by the honde" and declare, "A, fende, what wolt thou do? And thou were nat my modir, with this swerde I sholde smyte of thyne hede!" (90.38-39). His reference to his mother as a fiend highlights the very abnormal role she has created for herself, one that suggests demonic possession. However, it is her role as a mother that allows her to survive his wrath as it seems to be the only reason he prevents himself from killing her. Morgan's own response demonstrates her recognition of the powerful hold of a mother over her son; it also highlights her ability to shift from actively aggressive to helplessly vulnerable as she begs, "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!" (90. 42-22). Morgan effectively transforms herself from a masculine presence attempting to take an active, violent

role in the killing of her spouse to a powerless, remorseful woman who has fallen victim to forces beyond her control. Much like the widows of the siege of Thebes in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, Morgan fulfills a "conventional role for women as inspirers of masculine pity or mercy" (Crane 20). More importantly, she begs her son to help her retain her honor by not telling others of her attempt on her husband's life. It is important to note how her mention of "worship" in this instance varies greatly from the honor she seeks to gain from Accolon displacing Arthur as king. As Brewer notes, women acquired honor by being associated with honorable men and by exhibiting chastity and marital faithfulness (25). Therefore, while men gained honor mainly through physical exploits, women's honor was highly dependent on their passivity in relation to men. Morgan's honor is therefore in large part dependent on her marriage to her husband, King Uryence, an ally of King Arthur. To expose her attempt on her husband's life would effectively strip her of her honor as a woman. However, it is an honor that is preserved only if she is seen as a passive, loyal wife. While it could be argued that the honor she seeks to gain from Accolon becoming king still requires that she be dependent on a man, it is her own active role in plotting to kill her own kingly brother that allows her to obtain such power. Furthermore, her pleas for mercy again play on her son's adherence to the belief behind the previously mentioned Pentecostal Oath that knights always provide mercy and assistance to ladies. Morgan's ability to shift between the two gender roles empowers her in such a case. Her ability to maneuver behavior and adapt gender characteristics as required in certain situations allows her to survive and continue with her threatening ways shortly thereafter. In such a case, her femininity serves as a sort of disguise, one which can be donned when convenient in order to conceal her devious intentions and survive possible retribution from others for her plots against powerful male family members.

Thus, Morgan le Fay strategically uses the perception of the lady in need of assistance to her advantage all the while representing traits that are not typical of the standard female character, particularly one of noble status. As Elizabeth Edwards has pointed out, "The queens, and landed women, are immobile, castle-bound…When queens leave their castles, it seems they become damsels, subject to the perils of quests, to the wagers of strange knights, to abduction and danger" (38). While situated as a woman of nobility, Morgan certainly does not conform to such expectations. Her power lies in how she is able to draw others into danger. Regardless of where she is physically located, she functions as the active agent rather than the passive object that is at the mercy of outside forces. Accolon himself is portrayed as one who is deeply conflicted in his loyalty to Morgan as it violates the idea of fellowship that has been firmly established amongst the knights in Arthur's court. In one such instance, Morgan therefore truly positions herself outside of any norms indicating a traditional chivalric community as is evident in Arthur's own response as he seems to forgive Accolon for falling prey to Morgan's "fals lustes" before declaring, "I [shall] be sore avenged upon hir, that all Crystendom shall speke of hit" (88.30-32). Arthur therefore seemingly views Accolon as a mere victim and instead delivers a threat to Morgan that would seem to be reserved for a male combatant rather than his sister, thus illustrating her opportunistic use of gender roles and expectations as she "has slipped outside the bounds of the chivalric feminine" (Armstrong 63). Arthur no longer reads Morgan as his sister; rather he sees her as an enemy that threatens not only his kingdom but any force aligned with "Crystendom." More importantly, he seeks to reassert his own chivalric identity in a very public sphere, given that Morgan le Fay has threatened his position as king. His words speak of the anxieties produced in men by women who are overly ambitious to achieve their own power all the while knowing how to manipulate those who hold the means to achieving it in a

patriarchal society. It also speaks to the power of a woman who is willing to overstep such traditional boundaries despite the possible negative implications.

Morgan delivers a devastating blow to Arthur in this episode by taking the scabbard from him while he sleeps and disposing of it by throwing it "in the deppyst of the water" (92.9) where it sinks, never to be found again. This act allows Morgan to reclaim a sense of power. More importantly, while Arthur sleeps with "Excalyber in his ryght honde naked" he leaves the scabbard unguarded, allowing for Morgan to reclaim it and dispose of it as she pleases. As Heng reminds us, "the secret powers of [Excalibur are] contained not in blade but in scabbard or sheath (Lat. *vagina*)" (98). Arthur seems to disregard the importance of this fact; however, Morgan does not, and her ability to take the scabbard from Arthur removes power that is in some way representative of the feminine both in form and its origins from the Lady of the Lake. It may also represent Morgan's move to assert her own feminine power as a means of battling her own brother. While Putter notes that "Ladies, after all, do not hold swords; or rather (since they can, of course, help to arm the knight) they do not hold *naked* swords" (290), Morgan instead wields the sheath that would house the sword and ultimately keep Arthur safe, a move that renders her powerful as she eliminates a safeguard meant to protect the king. Even more telling is the threat Morgan later delivers to Arthur as she states, "tell hym I feare hymn nat whyle I can make me and myne in lyknese of stonys, and lette hym wete I can do much more whan I se my tyme" (93.7-9). In doing so, she boasts of her own power that lies far outside the traditional means of combat and masculine ideologies, that of supernatural ability. Her threat also highlights her ability to strategize much like a typical male combatant would as she sets her own terms for fighting when it is to her greatest advantage. Armstrong notes that Morgan "employs the masculine discourse of the knightly challenge, speaking to Arthur not as a woman or relative, but

as a rival knight" (65). Gone is any sense of loyalty to either king or brother as she instead seeks to display her own power as an active combatant, one who does not fear the challenge of the king and instead hints of the damage that is to come.

Her behavior is one that Arthur has not encountered before in the acts of a woman, therefore placing her outside the feminine norm. Arthur's acknowledgment that "God knowyth I have honoured hir and worshipped hir more than all my kyn" (88.32-33) further supports the idea that Morgan is not satisfied with the traditional means of how a female obtains honor in a chivalric society. A loyalty to brother and king provides a means for acquiring honor as does remaining faithful to her husband, but both are means that require a passivity that does not satisfy Morgan. As Judith Butler has noted, "the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (140). Certainly, Arthur and his knights adhere to the repetitive actions of assisting others as is set forth in the Pentecostal Oath established early in the work. Morgan, however, clearly goes against what has previously been established in her society; hence, her refusal to repeat actions that have come to be expected of women, particularly women of nobility, is what leads others to classify her as a malevolent force. Rather, Morgan seeks to manipulate the knightly code to meet her own needs while feeling no sense of obligation to the established norms of chivalric society. Her unpredictability is what allows her to be an active threat as she is able to play different roles that allow her to embody both masculine and feminine traits. Morgan's refusal to adhere to socially established norms is a form of power that must be recognized if it is to be combatted.

Morgan's plot to kill her brother highlights her disloyalty to kin in order to gain honor through dishonorable means. No other female character in Malory's text is guilty of the same

deed; rather, Morgan exhibits the same kind of motivation as seen in two of the most evil male characters: King Mark and Arthur's own son Mordred. This similarity places her in a distinct category as she is portrayed in a manner that highlights the most serious of betrayals, that of family. Accolon's confirmation to Arthur that Morgan's plot to kill him is because he "ys the man in the worlde that she hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and of prouesse of ony of hir bloode" (88.10-11) is strikingly similar to King Mark's jealously of his own brother Prince Bodwyne. After Bodwyne's success defeating a great army of Saracens, Mark becomes "wondirly wrothe that his brother sholde wynne such worship and honour. And bycause this prynce was bettir beloved than he in all that contrey…he thought to sle hym" (388.33-35). Mark and Morgan seemingly share similar motivation for killing their own blood relatives as they each despise the glory achieved by a sibling who has done good deeds for their own people. Both Arthur and Bodwyne's valor provides a stark contrast to the evil intent displayed by both Mark and Morgan. While Morgan tricks Accolon into killing Arthur and leaves her own brother defenseless with a false Excalibur, Mark tricks Bodwyne into attending a family dinner that presents Mark with an opportunity to kill his unarmed and defenseless brother in front of his own wife and child. Both Morgan and Mark take active roles in their attempts to kill an honorable sibling, and both employ deceitful methods to leave their siblings vulnerable. Morgan ultimately fails in her plot to have Arthur killed, but her intent remains one of the most evil presented in the text alongside King Mark's. It is a similarity that prepares the reader for Mark's later move to involve Morgan in his plot to destroy Sir Tristram.

Morgan's parallel to Mordred is notable as well when establishing motives. The actions of both Morgan le Fay and Mordred seem to be strongly motivated by the idea of personal gain (Morgan 161). Once again, Morgan is aligned with the desires of a male character as she seeks

to gain from Arthur's demise. In doing so, both she and Mordred explicitly violate an important premise outlined in the Pentecostal Oath stating that "no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarrel for no love ne for no worldis goodis" (75.43-44). And while Morgan as a woman would not take the oath, it was established by Arthur to guide men from doing wrong. The fact that Morgan goes against such a code speaks to her desire to resort to wrongdoings typically expected of men who seek to pursue personal gain over protecting others. She instead resorts to masculine activity to gain what she desires, in this case making her lover Accolon and herself rulers of Arthur's kingdom, much like Mordred resorts to disposing of his father in order to be declared king. Furthermore, both Mordred and Morgan use their kinship to Arthur to their advantage in their play for power. It is a key way that Morgan manipulates her position as a female relative in order to gain power in a situation that could ultimately leave the king helpless. Indeed, Malory stresses the relationship between Morgan and Arthur in "The Arthur and Accolon" episode just as he does the relationship between father and son in "The Day of Destiny," particularly as it leads Arthur to trust both with objects of great value: the scabbard in Morgan's case and Arthur's realm, including his own queen, in Mordred's situation. Each of their betrayals signals a failure in loyalty that threatens not only Arthur, but the entire kingdom. As Henry Morgan observes, "Malory has…emphasized this theme [of disloyalty] by presenting the "Arthur and Accolon" story as a foreshadowing and parallel of "The Day of Destiny" (155). Morgan and Mordred are tied closely to the darker episodes of Malory's text, particularly when one considers how Morgan's disposal of Excalibur's scabbard is what leaves Arthur vulnerable to Mordred's final attack on his life. While Morgan's plot to kill Arthur does not succeed, it is directly linked to Mordred's own attack that ultimately leaves Arthur wounded to the death. The similarities

between both episodes highlight the masculine desires and motivations of Morgan as no other female character could be compared to Mordred in the same manner.

Morgan is also the only female character to be associated with the action of imprisoning knights. In doing so, Morgan is once again associated with men such as Tarquin and Meleagant who are responsible for imprisoning Knights of the Round Table for evil purposes. However, it is a far different scenario when the knights are faced with imprisonment at the hands of a woman. While the act of imprisoning knights may be associated with men, Morgan still embodies feminine traits and uses them to her advantage. Therein lies her unique power: her ability to embody both masculine and feminine traits during the imprisonment process leaves her victims at a rather notable disadvantage as they are unable to react to her as they would a male captor. Such a situation is one that would be foreign to the knights as they are generally accustomed to rescuing women from danger, rather than needing to be rescued from women themselves. This therefore places the knight in a particularly vulnerable position as far as his masculine identity is concerned. As Armstrong argues, "in affirming his knightly identity and his right to belong to the heteronormative masculine community of the Arthurian court, a knight not only *needs* a vulnerable, helpless woman, but more specifically he needs 'woman' to *signify* as vulnerable and helpless" (36). Morgan's actions completely contradict such a possibility as she holds the masculine position of powerful captor while the knight fulfills the role of helpless victim in need of assistance. Even more troublesome and contradictory is Morgan's ability to display feminine traits at key moments during her role as captor, something that further serves to leave knights ill-equipped to deal with their captive situation as it oftentimes plays on their adherence to their Pentecostal Oath and leaves them powerless to resort to active resistance as might have been the case with a male captor. Morgan's manipulation of established gender

norms therefore causes the biggest disruption in the chivalric community as she "defies gender categorization in that her identity performance lacks consistent, repetitive citation of the norm of femininity. Knights, on the other hand, continuously and eagerly 'cite' the dominant model of masculinity" (Armstrong 69). Morgan undoubtedly disrupts the repetitive process that is so integral to a knight's masculine identity.

It becomes apparent that the physical prowess so crucial to the knight's success on the battlefield carries little to no worth when dealing with Morgan's unpredictable, inconsistent ways. One notable example of this effect is evident when the most chivalric of knights, Lancelot, proves to be helpless against Morgan. His vulnerability is highlighted even prior to being imprisoned when "the four queenys of a grete astate" initially come across the celebrated knight as he sleeps soundly underneath an apple tree (151.16). The group of women seem to form a sort of fellowship as the only men who accompany them are not their own husbands but men who serve them, "four knyghtes…[who] bare a cloth of grene sylke on four sperys betwyxte hem and the sonne" (151.17-18). The queens' recognition of Lancelot is almost immediate "as they loked on his face they knew well hit was [him], and began to stryve for the knight, and every of hem seyde they wold have hym to hir love" (151.22-24). Almost immediately, the four women gaze upon Lancelot as an object to be claimed, all while he still sleeps. This reversal of roles certainly places Lancelot in a vulnerable position as he is one who is objectified and actively desired by four women of title. As Crane notes, in medieval romance "the masculine gaze…both establishes feminine beauty as its object of desire and sees masculinity reflected back to itself in the difference between the ideal feminine and masculine identity" (74). Morgan and the three queens effectively disrupt this process and in doing so position themselves as the active masculine agents and Lancelot as the passive feminized object. This would further be

supported by E. Ann Kaplan's observation that "to own and activate the gaze…is to be in the masculine position" (319). Even more importantly, Morgan and the queens are not content with simply gazing the object of desire; instead, they actively seek to possess the object, leading them to fight over possession of Lancelot. Morgan's solution is not to employ the four knights she has at her disposal but instead to resort to her powers of enchantment to leave Lancelot in a deep sleep that will allow her to transport him to her castle and imprison him, later forcing him to choose one of the four queens as his paramour. Therefore, while she may be occupying a masculine position in this situation, she certainly does not react as a man would. No physical struggle is involved in Lancelot's imprisonment as is the case, for example, of fellow knights imprisoned in the same episode by Sir Tarquin. Instead, Morgan relies on her own power that lies outside that of traditional masculine ideologies, that of enchantment. She also takes on the role of leader of the fellowship of queens as she dictates what plan will be enacted to address their desire for Lancelot. Again, this poses a greater threat in that it is not what a knight is generally accustomed to fighting on the battlefield. Her ability to embody both masculine and feminine traits once again provides her with a far more complex form of power than a knight would be prepared to overcome.

Lancelot's reaction upon awakening from Morgan's enchantment is also notable in that he is limited in how he can assert his own chivalric identity. After informing Lancelot that as her prisoner, he "shalt [Guinevere's] love lose for ever, and she thyne" (152. 8), Morgan presents Lancelot with two options: he can either choose one of the four queens as a lover or choose to die in prison. Unlike a male captor who imprisons knights to exert physical power over them, Morgan seeks to use a knight for her own sexual fulfillment. Lancelot's response is clear in its refusal as he states, "I lever dye in this preson with worshyp than to have one of you to my

peramoure" (152.15-16). His masculine identity has been compromised as he is left vulnerable and at the mercy of four powerful women who see him as little else than a sexual object, but he is able to assert his commitment to honor and his loyalty to Guinevere as he asserts, "were I at lyberte as I was, I wolde prove hit on yours that she is the treweste lady unto hir lorde lyvynge" (152.18-20). Despite Lancelot's physical prowess on the battlefield, he must resort to passive resistance in this situation. And while Lancelot's refusal of the four queens may seem honorable, it nonetheless leaves him feeling disempowered. Lancelot's own speech signals his own defeated stance as he later responds to a damsel's question regarding his status by saying that he was "never so ylle" (152.27). The damsel quickly recognizes Lancelot's vulnerable state and capitalizes on it by declaring, "but and ye woll be ruled by me I shall helpe you oute of this dystresse" (152. 28-29). Regardless of the physical and mental prowess that defines him on the field, Lancelot is at the mercy of a woman who is able to counter Morgan's power when he has no ability to do so. Consequently, the knight is dependent on a woman not only to rescue him from Morgan but also to reestablish his masculine identity in the chivalric community as the damsel's request entails that he do battle for her own father. Such an occurrence demonstrates the importance of women in sustaining the chivalric identity of the most masculine of characters, particularly when they are threatened by someone as unpredictable and unreadable as Morgan. While "the masculine agents of the community never adequately deal with Morgan's threat," the feminine agents seem to hold the key to containing her power (Armstrong 99). Morgan's shifting nature once again speaks to the anxieties of men as they lack the foresight and knowledge to understand and contain a woman who strategically embodies both masculine and feminine traits. However, Morgan also highlights the power women yield in their ability to assist men who are dependent on them to maintain stability and control. Such women seem to

hold undeniable leverage not only in men's pursuit to protect the patriarchy but also in the knight's pursuit to define his own masculine identity within the chivalric society. As Armstrong notes:

> "The stability of identity supposedly produced by the [Pentecostal] Oath—the masculine as a free, predatory subject and the feminine as a passive, powerless object—is revealed to be a fiction, in that the masculine subcommunity is utterly and deeply dependent upon the feminine for definition." (37)

While this generally entails that a passive female is required in order for a knight to affirm his masculine identity, the women who assist the knights against Morgan fail to fit the passive mold as they instead actively function as the rescuer rather than the rescued. Their power emanates from their strategic planning and understanding of someone as complex as Morgan, and while it does not include physical combat on their part, it does serve to assist the vulnerable knight who is at the mercy of Morgan. The knight's dependence upon a female rescuer highlights a man's inability to deal with the unpredictable elements of a woman such as Morgan, one who occupies a masculine position of power yet continues to exhibit feminine traits as well.

Morgan's interactions with Sir Tristram similarly showcase the power she holds while embodying both the masculine and feminine. Prior to imprisoning Tristram, Morgan orders "thirty ladyes to seke and aspye aftir sir Launceolot or aftir sir Trystram" in order to capture them and bring them back to her castle under the false premise that "they sholde do dedys of worship" (315. 17-21). Morgan essentially creates a small army of women and positions herself as their leader in her plot to capture two of the most revered knights, a strategic and commanding move on her part. However, a key part of her strategy is to instruct these women to use their prescribed gender role to exploit the knights' adherence to the Pentecostal Oath. Morgan

therefore no longer works on her own as a woman against a fellowship of men; her threat is elevated as she involves a group of women to do the same, guiding them to manipulate established gender codes as well. This is certainly evident when one of Morgan's ladies encounters Tristram and informs him that "he sholde wynne grete worshyp of a knight aventures that ded much harme in all that contrey" (314.42-43). Not only does the lady refer to the ever important goal of achieving honor but more importantly she plays on the notion that she is a woman in need of assistance from someone who threatens her as well as others. Failing to assist would be akin to refusing to adhere to the section of the oath that mandates that knights "allwayes…do ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [socour:]" (75.41-42). This clause is perhaps the one section of the oath that is most definitive of the knight's obligations, and it becomes increasingly clear that Morgan understands the power of using this belief to her advantage. This would seem to support Armstrong's argument that "feminine figures, whether or not their conduct is subsumed within a desire for the common good, are able to use the Pentecostal Oath and its understanding of the feminine as either a defense or a weapon against their socially constructed identities" (44). It is this understanding that allows someone such as Morgan, who is in no way interested in the "common good," to wield notable power in her bid to accomplish her own personal desires. It is something that Malory emphasizes as contradicting traditional expectations for a woman, particularly one who is closely related to the king. This becomes evident following Gawain's intervention in the plot as he proclaims, "Fy for shame…that evir such false treson sholde be wrought or used in a queen and a kyngys systir, and a kynge and a quenys doughtir" (315.24-26). Malory incorporates three feminine labels in Gawain's statement to emphasize the inappropriate nature of her actions as not only a queen herself but also as a sister and daughter. The expectation that every female would adhere to the

common good is pronounced as Gawain instead describes her active plotting as shameful treason, thus reinforcing the abnormality of her intentions. Once again, Morgan succeeds in being an unpredictable agent in a structured society. The power of such an act is particularly notable when one recalls Butler's theory that "the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (140). Morgan's refusal to perform the repetitive acts that are indicative of her gender is what empowers her as it poses a true threat to the chivalric society that knights such as Gawain aim to protect.

That unpredictability and manipulation of traditionally held beliefs is once again present in her later imprisonment of Alysaundir the Orphan. Prior to his imprisonment, Morgan watches Alysaundir as he battles a man named Sir Malagryne who a maiden claims has been "an evyll neyghboure…[who] will nat suffir [her] to be maryde in no maner" (393.17-19). Alexander ultimately prevails in the battle but not before receiving grievous wounds that leave him in a vulnerable state. It is in this state that Morgan conveniently intervenes and takes on the feminine role of healer as she "serched his woundis and gaff hym suche an oynement that he sholde have dyed…and than she put another oynemente upon hym, and than he was oute of his payne" (392.27-30). While the healing tradition that is so commonly associated with Morgan in early Arthurian material is notably suppressed in Malory's text, this one instance seems to present Morgan in a nurturing role as she saves Alysaundir from almost certain death. However, her ominous intent becomes clear as she later gives him a drink that keeps him asleep for three days and nights in order to move him to her own castle. When Alysaudir wakes, Morgan asks him "yf he wolde fayne be hole" to which Alysaundir responds "Madame, who wolde by syke and he

might be hole?" (395.9-10). Morgan then uses Alysaundir's desire to be whole again as she proposes "than shall ye promise me by youre knyghthode that this twelve-monthe and a day ye shall nat passe the compace of this castell, and ye shall lightly be hole" (395. 11-13). Morgan's offer capitalizes on two attributes that are essential to knights--the ability to be whole enough to fight and the knight's sense of obligation to be of service to ladies. However, her manipulation of these attributes is what ultimately compromises his knightly identity. Morgan recognizes the power she holds by exhibiting feminine qualities and uses it to her advantage to once again wield the masculine position of captor. Morgan is therefore able to embody both genders simultaneously in this act in a seamless manner, one that guarantees that Alysaundir will take on the role of passive prisoner. It is the combination of both masculine and feminine qualities that renders Alysaundir powerless as she effectively strips him of his masculine identity. As Amy S. Kaufman notes, "Like a damsel 'won' by a knight because she requires his protection, Alysaundir must resign himself to becoming Morgan's property" (146). In a relatively short span of time, Alysaundir transitions from victorious knight to emasculated, objectified prisoner at the hands of a captor with an unpredictable nature that cannot be understood or defeated. Nowhere is this more apparent than when Alysaundir learns that Morgan's true intention in keeping him as prisoner is "to do hir pleasure whan hit lykth hir" to which he responds "I had levir kut away my hangers than I wolde do her ony such pleasure!" (395.30-33). Alysaundir's violent reaction is indicative of the threat that Morgan's desire carries, one that is seen as abnormal in a traditional society. Armstrong suggests:

> Morgan has crossed a boundary and is no longer a 'real' woman in the terms of the knightly understanding of such: sex with her would not be heterosexual or heteronormative, due to her emphatic denial of her gendered position, and thus,

> Alexander is willing to emasculate himself physically to avoid the symbolic emasculation and heteronormative transgression that sex with Morgan would create. (126)

Morgan's ability to defy categorization therefore creates a unique space for her in the chivalric society, arguably providing her with a greater level of power than any male adversary faced by knights. While male captors such as Tarquin and Meleagant pose notable threats to knights, they are eventually defeated and eliminated through physical combat. Such traditional means of overcoming captors do not apply to Morgan as she does not fit into any prescribed gender categories recognized by the knights. Much like Lancelot's case, Alysaundir is only able to escape Morgan's imprisonment by relying on a woman who is able to strategize a way to deliver him from the castle. His inability to read Morgan as a traditional adversary leads him to another reversal of sorts in which he must be rescued by a damsel. It is yet another way that Morgan's plots lead to his masculine identity being compromised.

Morgan's refusal to conform to prescribed gender categories threatens the knight's own masculine identity as he is unable to assert it against one whom he does not recognize. It leaves Morgan with a sort of invincibility not found in other characters in Malory's work. More importantly, it is a power that Morgan holds on her own, one that she is able to maintain independent of men. Morgan is indeed the most enigmatic character in Malory's text. It is difficult to define her presence, yet it is a presence that moves the action at key points in the work. Her individual threat to the chivalric community is undeniably strong, perhaps stronger than any other until Mordred's usurpation. And while some may view her as a character who resides on the fringes of Malory's narrative, her presence challenges traditional conceptions of

gender in medieval romance and ultimately highlights the power of those who refuse to conform to society's established norms.

CHAPTER III

THE POWER OF ENCHANTMENT: THE HIDDEN AND OVERT THREAT OF MORGAN LE FAY

There is little doubt that Morgan le Fay's most recognizable role to any reader of Malory's definitive text is that of an enchantress. Referred to by knights as "the false sorseres and wychhe moste that is now lyving" (270.31), Morgan certainly is not the only enchantress in the text. However, she poses a greater threat than the others, who range from nameless sorceresses who test the virtue of some of King Arthur's most notable knights to those who are viewed as powerful allies of royalty, such as the Lady of the Lake and Dame Brusen. It is therefore necessary to understand what Malory's characterization of Morgan signaled to readers in the late medieval period who would have been increasingly familiar with the idea of witchcraft. Magic and witchcraft had become largely associated with women who were thought to be powerless and generally uneducated individuals submitting to dark forces; however, Malory's Morgan refutes this traditional pattern as she instead exhibits an active and aggressive presence. Morgan's magical abilities therefore pose an even greater threat as they allow her to work outside masculine ideologies of power and provide her with an aggressive way to battle men given her inability to fight using traditional means in the realm of battle. As Geraldine Heng states:

> Magic…is an independent force, and requires little concession from the human counters with which it transacts. Its dispositions therefore lodge formidable sources of power in the text, to far exceed the mechanism of arms. And, because its operations are secret or indecipherable, and may press even the unwilling into service, it is a thing to be feared, particularly by a warrior ethic, for its mysterious compulsion. (103)

Indeed, magic is a large part of what allows Morgan to function as a counter-hero of sorts, one who violates the norms of a patriarchal society and poses a threat without fighting like a man (Fries 61). Her magical powers therefore present a very obvious and viable threat to those in power. Nevertheless, some have argued that the use of magical power by women is largely ineffective in Malory's text. As Andrew Lynch has stated, "Women's heavy involvement with the allurements of magic and sex can be seen mainly as a consequence of their debarment from the 'fair field' of knightly action and from 'knightly means', necessitating ways of influencing events which are represented as much inferior" (148). However, Morgan's magical plots signal hidden threats as well, not just to Arthur's court, but to traditional views held in the patriarchal society that defined Malory's time period. Therein, perhaps, lies her greater power as she ultimately seems to represent the idea of rebellion and unchecked desire in her role as an enchantress. Her magical ability in many ways therefore functions as a concrete representation of the hidden threat of female power in a medieval society.

The idea of witchcraft would certainly be familiar to a medieval audience. Trials and executions of accused witches, primarily women, began as early as 1450, with some trials taking place in the ecclesiastical courts of Europe, institutions that were known to regulate moral and religious life during the Middle Ages (Levack 1). Indeed, the stereotype of the witch as being

female was one which seemed to solidify late in this particular time period. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were twice as many women defendants than men in the witch trials, a fact that was even more notable during the later fifteenth century (Kieckhefer 198). Malory would have therefore written *Morte Darthur* in a time in which there was an increased fear and targeting of witches. Ironically, while witchcraft was associated with the idea of supernatural power, it was the belief that women's involvement in it was a result of their powerlessness that led to the emergence of the female witch stereotype. This belief was certainly conveyed in important texts about witches that appeared around this time. Perhaps the most influential in establishing the connection between witchcraft and women was that of Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*. Walter Stephens notes, "The *Malleus* has been justly condemned for its remorseless misogyny…[as it] consolidated the misogynistic impulses scattered in previous witchcraft treatises and hardly ever quoted their evidence of male witches" (33). Therefore, while this particular work was written in 1486 after Malory's completion of *Morte Darthur*, the ideas presented in the misogynistic text would not have been new to medieval readers. As Michael D. Bailey notes, "Throughout the fifteenth century, the number of women tried for sorcery and witchcraft was significantly higher than the number of men, and the special association of witchcraft with women appeared in authoritative literature fully fifty years before the publication of the *Malleus*" (120). Indeed, while *Malleus* may be regarded as the definitive witch-hunting text, its author was undoubtedly influenced by a work entitled *Formicarius* that was written around 1437 by a Dominican theologian named Johannes Nider. In fact, Nider would be the first to lay claim to the idea that women were more inclined than men to become witches (Bailey 120). Such claims would have therefore been well-established during the time in which Malory crafted his own definitive text.

Writers such as Kramer inevitably linked witchcraft to the spiritual weakness of women. This is perhaps most strongly demonstrated in part I, question 6 of *Malleus*, "an infamous and very complete collection of everything evil or unflattering that its author could find about women in the Bible, classical literature, and Christian theology" (Stephens 33). It is in this chapter that Kramer asks, "Why is this type of betrayal of God found more in women than in men and what kind of women does one find are more given to superstition and more likely to be witches?" (Maxwell-Stuart 74). One of the reasons provided by Kramer proposes that "by nature …[a woman] is more given to fleshly lusts than a man, as is clear from her many acts of carnal filthiness," further noting how her formation from a "chest-rib" leads one to conclude that she is an "unfinished animal [that] is always being deceptive" (75). Kramer further claims that a woman "wavers the more quickly in her faith because of her basic character, and also denies her faith more quickly," thus leaving her more susceptible to the idea of becoming a witch (76). He therefore presents the idea that a powerless, spiritually weak woman would seek to gain power through witchcraft. He further marks such "wicked women" as those who exhibit the vices of "lack of faith, self-interest, and licentiousness…[with the last vice being] by far the most predominant among those three vices, therefore (since it cannot be satisfied)" (77). Thus, he clearly marks women as weak-willed creatures who are never able to be satisfied, something that in his view inevitably links them to being susceptible to the evil forces that allow them to become witches. He proceeds to definitively link witchcraft more directly to women than men as he proclaims, "Consequently, it should be not be called the heresy of men who do works of harmful magic [*maleficorum*], but of women who do works of harmful magic [*maleficarum*], so that the derivation is taken from the party with the better claim to it" (Maxwell-Stuart 77). Kramer finally closes this chapter by emphasizing men's vulnerability as they are seen as victims

in the wicked woman's claim to power. He accuses such women of leaving "their finger-marks all over innumerable acts of harmful magic by so changing [the men's] minds towards wanton passion or infatuation that no embarrassment or persuasion can make them leave off their company" (78). Kramer's accusation seems to signal the very real threat perceived by men in a typically patriarchal society. The powerlessness of women, in this case specifically marked by a weakness of spiritual faith, allows them to gain power through witchcraft. And it is this very power that in turn can leave men powerless. As Robin Briggs states, "Ultimately witchcraft was a theory of power; it attributed secret and unnatural power to those who were formerly powerless" (285). The threat of such a shift of power is one which seemed all too real to a medieval audience.

It is also useful to understand the sort of activity that was associated with witchcraft during the late medieval period. Levack notes that the use of the word "witchcraft" or *maleficia* during this era would have referred to "the practice of harmful, black or maleficent magic, the performance of harmful deeds by means of some sort of extraordinary, mysterious, occult, preternatural or supernatural power" (4). Indeed, such deeds are characterized as being magical and harmful rather than religious and helpful. This would stand in contrast to the idea of white magic, the purpose of which is to provide some sort of benefit, whether it is productive, protective, or preventative. Further distinctions are made between high magic and low magic with high magic requiring a certain amount of education versus low magic which requires little if any education as it was thought to be acquired through oral transmission or experimentation. While alchemy and divination were associated with high magic, simple spells were the hallmark of low magic (Levack 7). Interestingly, necromancy, one of the most commonly known forms of divination that involved the use of spirits of the dead for obtaining knowledge, was perceived as

being decidedly masculine as it required a great deal of skill, preparation, and ultimately education (Bailey 126). Aside from the practice of *maleficia,* another activity linked to witchcraft would be that of diabolism, the worship of the Devil. The two activities of harmful magic and diabolism would be closely linked as many believed that a witch's powers were gained from the pact made with the Devil. It would be this idea of witches as Devil-worshipers that would drastically alter the perception of witchcraft as it led witches to be labeled as "intrinsically evil individuals who had rejected their Christian faith and had decided to serve God's enemy, the Devil" (Levack 8).

It is also important to note that in many respects witches were viewed as rebels by the very people who wrote witchcraft treatises and functioned as authority figures in medieval society. Whether accused witches actually were or were not rebellious may not have ever been established, but that did not stop others from regarding them as women who gained pleasure from corrupting peaceful societies (Russell 276). This would certainly seem to make sense in an era in which the ruling classes in Europe would have witnessed social rebellions and religious civil wars that threatened their very power. Even more importantly, in their perceived roles as rebels, witches would have been further associated with the Devil, whose own rise to power first began by openly rebelling against God. Once again, it would seem to be quite simple for those in power to associate the female witch with the Devil as she would have been regarded not only as "the quintessential rebel" in her role against traditional society but also as one who would have also been viewed as "guilty of *lese majeste* or treason against God" (Levack 58).

Into this era of thought arrived Malory's version of the Arthurian legend and with it his portrayal of the king's half-sister, Morgan le Fay. Malory's first mention of Morgan comes three pages into Book I as the reader is told of King Uther's plans for the Lady Igrayne's three

daughters by Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall. While Igrayne's two older daughters, Margawse and Elayne, are married off to kings almost immediately, Morgan "was put to scole in a nunnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye" (5.28-29). Such a detail carries great significance when one considers the gender implications associated with both the ideas of education and necromancy in the Middle Ages. Provided that Morgan would have been the daughter of a king, the idea of her being educated would certainly not be unheard of by a medieval reader. However, what was expected was that a young lady's education would be delivered by the hands of the child's mother in order to ensure that a proper upbringing was realized. As Susan Groag Bell notes, "Beginning with Jerome in the fourth century, Christian moralists repeatedly declared that it was a woman's duty to concern themselves with the literary and moral upbringing of their children, and particularly of their daughters" (162). This thought continued well into the Middle Ages with Vincent of Beauvais' treatise entitled *De eruditione filiorum nobilium* ("On the Education and Instruction of Noble Children"), written between 1247 and 1249 at the request of Queen Margaret of Provence, and Italian Francesco di Barberino's *Reggimento e Costumi di Donna* ("Rules and Customs for Ladies") written some seventy years later, which both continued to advocate the idea that a mother would be responsible for her children's education. A young Morgan, however, is far removed from her mother at the request of King Uther as she is instead placed in a nunnery, something that may not have been unusual given that children of noblewomen were known to be placed in nunneries as young children (Shahar 140). However, it is without her mother's guidance and close watch that she obtains an education that ultimately involves the learning of necromancy—a form of black magic that involved the use of spirits of the dead for obtaining knowledge. The learning of necromancy would certainly not be associated with the traditional education received at a nunnery. It

anything, the learning of necromancy was typically associated with clerics who, having too much time on their hands after fulfilling their religious obligations, gravitated towards "less holy pastimes" (Kieckhefer 155). As Maureen Fries notes, "Perhaps—as male authors for centuries before and after, as well as during Malory's own, maintained—this schooling illustrates the danger of educating women beyond their appropriate sphere (which is to further male interests rather than their own)" (10). Not only does this "sphere" include an education that ultimately involves the dark arts as a means of achieving her own interests, but it is also a physical "sphere" far removed from that which was advocated by moral authorities of the time, that of one's own mother in order to ensure a proper, virtuous upbringing. It is an education that allows her to reject the pattern of passivity and helplessness that would have been expected of 'good' women.

Of particular significance is Malory's mention of Morgan as being "a grete clerke of nygromancye" (5.28). First and foremost, the term "clerke" would have been most commonly applied to educated males in medieval society. Kieckhefer notes that "Most broadly the term could refer to anyone, even a boy still in adolescence, who had been tonsured as a mark of pious intent to be ordained" (153). However, it is the detail concerning the fact that she became well-educated in the art of necromancy that would have likely proven troubling to a reader of the Middle Ages. Necromancy was regarded by theologians as a decidedly masculine activity "involving pacts with demons and worship exchanged for supernatural services" with necromancers regarding themselves as "masters of demons, controlling these evil spirits through the power of their complex and often quasi-religious formulations and ceremonies" (Bailey 127). Necromancers were therefore viewed as being in control, in large part due to their skill and education. Witches, in contrast, were regarded as those who completely submitted themselves to demons. This was largely the reason for the feminization of witchcraft in the Middle Ages as

their success was viewed as resulting from their entire submission to evil rather than relying on any sort of training or preparation (Bailey 127). Morgan, however, comes across as an anomaly—an educated woman who is fully in control of the demons she uses to sustain her power. Given that the audience would have been familiar with the ability of a necromancer to control demons in order to obtain power, this detail concerning Morgan's particular type of magical skill presented so early in Malory's text serves as an early warning of her potential to control others, namely the men that she will encounter.

Morgan's ability to control men is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the chapter entitled "Arthur and Accolon" found in Book One of Malory's text. It is in this early chapter that Morgan effectively uses Accolon in her attempt to kill Arthur and remove him from his position as king so that she may instead take on a greater role of power herself. This involves strategy and manipulation on the part of Morgan, specifically as it involves Accolon's desire to please her in his role as paramour. Perhaps the most threatening aspect of this chapter to a medieval reader, however, would have been Accolon's pronounced unawareness and loss of control in this situation. Indeed, Accolon seems unaware of Morgan's true role as an enchantress. After a tiresome night of hunting, Accolon, along with King Arthur and Morgan's husband King Uriens, are led to "a lytll shippe all apparayled with sylke downe to the water" that accommodates them for the night. Upon awakening in the morning, each man finds himself to have been transported to a different setting with Uriens next to his wife Morgan in bed, Arthur in a prison, and Accolon waking up "by a depe welles syde within half a foote, in grete perell of deth" (84.8-9). Despite Morgan's role in the plot, Accolon seems completely unaware of her involvement as he exclaims:

> Jesu, save my lorde kynge Arthure and kynge Uryence, for thes damysels in this shippe hath betrayed us. They were fendis and no women. And if I may ascape this misadventure I shall distroye them, all that I may fynde of thes false damysels that faryth thus with theire inchauntementes. (84.11-15).

His declaration leads one to believe that he views enchantresses as demonic creatures who deserve to be punished by death. However, his marked inability to recognize Morgan's own fiendish qualities is highlighted in his response to one of her messengers who advises Accolon to "be of stronge herte [as] she hath sent the Excalebir, Arthurs swerde, and the scawberde, and she byddyth you as ye love her that ye do that batayle to the uttirmoste withoute ony mercy, lyke as ye promised hir whan ye spoke laste togedir in prevyte" (84.19-24). Rather than uphold his previously stated belief that enchantresses should be destroyed, he proclaims, "Recommaunde me unto my lady the queen and telle hir all shall be done that I promised hir, and ellis I woll dye for hit. Now I suppose…she hath made all this crauftis and enchauntemente for this batayle" (84.31-34). Such a response creates a stark contradiction in Accolon, one that seems to be the result of Morgan's strong control over him as she attempts to eliminate Arthur as a means of achieving greater power. Such a detail would seem to support to Kramer's own argument in *The Malleus Maleficarum* that "[witches] know how to change the minds of [these powerful men] so that they do not allow any harm to happen to [these women], either at their own hands or at the hands of other people" (78). Morgan's power was a result not of her own physical strength but of her ability to manipulate and control a seemingly powerful knight, so much so that she would ultimately be protected by the manipulated man at all costs.

Morgan therefore effectively presents herself as a threat on more than one level. First, she is identified as an adulterous woman who holds her lover to a promise likely made in a

private moment of intimacy. However, on a different level, her persuasion is additionally tied to the idea of enchantment, a power that allows her to pull seemingly unsuspecting men—her brother, her lover, and her husband—into her plot that began with an enchanted ship. It ultimately results with the promise of a man who is willing to fight to the death for her in order for her to achieve her desire for power. His complete adherence to her request leaves him powerless of better judgment given that he had previously voiced his strong disapproval of "false damysels" and "theire inchauntementes" (84.14-15). Instead, he willingly agrees to challenge the very king he has otherwise served. Morgan's ability to use Accolon in her plot recalls her earlier label as a necromancer. Necromancers were said to "[exploit] their highly specialized knowledge…in order to contact and dominate demons" (Stephens 53). Morgan, however, seems to use her own knowledge to control a man to do her bidding. The sense of control over a seemingly powerful subject remains, and Morgan's role as a necromancer serves her well in such an endeavor.

Such an episode certainly highlights how her manipulation of a man was the result of her own skill and unrestrained desire for power—two considerations that make her negative reception understandable. This becomes even clearer in King Arthur's own reaction to Accolon's part in the plot to have him killed. Despite Accolon's confession, Arthur voices sympathy for him as he instead lays the blame on Morgan's "false crauftis" (88.30). Morgan's role as an enchantress allows Accolon to be portrayed as a defenseless victim, bringing to mind Kramer's own claim in *Malleus Maleficarum* that "[these women] leave their finger-marks all over innumerable acts of harmful magic by so changing [the men's] minds towards wanton passion or infatuation that no embarrassment or persuasion can make them leave off their company" (78). It would have been quite possible for a reader from the Middle Ages to support

the idea that a woman alone would be responsible for the downfall of a respectable man when she sought to pursue her own power. Her threat would have been magnified due to the fact that not only was she manipulating a man to gain power for herself, but she also sought to take away power from an established male authority figure. Medieval male writers such as Kramer were certainly concerned with the danger that powerful witches presented to men. Kramer's own warnings regarding women's ability to control men were well established in his text as he referred to Cicero, Seneca, and St Jerome and further references the fall of Troy and the suffering of Judaea and Rome in his attempt to show the dangers of women (76). Morgan's ambition and ability to control a male lover would therefore have been symbolic of existing fears regarding women who desired power for themselves, something that truly represented a threat to men who would have expected women not to transgress the limitations of acceptable feminine behavior in the Middle Ages.

Morgan's ability to manipulate and persuade others is not limited to lovers but is applied to her own son Uwayne as well. This is aptly demonstrated after Uwayne stops his mother as she is about to kill his father, King Uryence, in his sleep. Morgan immediately begs for forgiveness as she cries, "A, fayre son Uwayne, have mercy upon me! I was tempted with a fende, wherefore I cry the mercy. I woll nevermore do so" (90.42-43). Interestingly, Morgan seemingly confesses her involvement with a devil in order to portray herself as a powerless victim. In doing so, she uses the idea of demonic possession, something she can evidently throw off or exploit at will, to pardon herself from looking like an active participant in the planning of her husband's murder, instead painting herself as a passive victim who is controlled by a "fende." Such a claim from Morgan would support the ideas presented by medieval writers such as Nider that were "ultimately based on longstanding Christian conceptions of the physical,

mental, and spiritual weaknesses of women, and their greater susceptibility to the temptations of the devil" (Bailey 122). In this case, Morgan's claim of powerlessness provides her with the means to escape condemnation and execution at the hands of her own son. Doing so successfully allows her to disguise her association with magic as a weakness. Morgan certainly takes on the role of a repentant victim, but such a role is seen as false provided that she almost immediately follows the sparing of her life by stealing the magical scabbard from Arthur in order to dispose of it. Her evil ways continue and therefore illustrate another belief commonly held by male medieval writers regarding the duplicity of women. As Michael David Bailey notes, readers of Nider's *Formicarius* would have been also familiar with the author's references to Seneca and Cicero that stated, "The weeping of a woman is a lie. Two sorts of tears there are in the eyes of women—one is of true sadness, the other is of treachery" (123). Much like Kramer would later assert in *Malleus*, writers were quick to establish the dangers that were inherent in powerful witches who could effectively persuade men not to harm them (Maxwell-Stuart 78). In this case, Morgan not only succeeds in convincing her own son to spare her life, but persuades him not to expose her evil doings to others. In doing so, she is able to continue her own devious plot to remove Arthur from power. The ability to persuade a man so effectively presented itself as dangerous to a medieval audience given that witches who confessed were typically not spared from execution. Instead, authorities in the fifteenth century generally believed that a witch's "only hope of salvation was to be arrested and to recant before her execution. By such reasoning the torment and killing of witches was for their own good as well as that of God and society" (Russell and Alexander 78). Uwayne, however, does not follow that line of reasoning after his mother's tearful confession and instead spares his mother's life. Her persuasion allows her to remain safe for the time being even though it eventually results in Arthur dismissing Uwayne

from his court after charging him with treason. Once again, Morgan's ability to control and persuade others gives her a power that allows her to continue destructive behavior that ultimately seeks to destroy the male authority figure that is her half-brother. In doing so, she represents a true threat to men who saw witches as possessing the power to control men for their own destructive purposes.

Morgan also displays another unique ability that sets her apart from other enchantresses in Malory's text—that of shape shifting. After Morgan steals the magical scabbard from Arthur that is meant to protect him from losing too much blood in battle, she disposes of it in the lake, leading him to seek her capture. Once Morgan finds herself about to be overtaken by Arthur's men, "she shope hirself, horse and man, by enchauntemente unto grete marbyll stonys" (92.12-13). Morgan's shape-shifting abilities provide her and her men with the means to escape capture and possibly death at the hands of Arthur and his men. Shape shifting was generally believed to involve a witch turning into a cat or wolf; however, the basic purpose of associating this particular magical ability with witches was generally to emphasize their otherness as they were viewed as "[carriers] of malevolent power who operated outside the normal realm of physical causation" (Briggs 110). In Morgan's case, her ability to shape-shift into stone signals a unique power, one that makes her impenetrable and invulnerable to Arthur's physical power as no sword or arrow can cause her harm. The weapons typically used by knights have no strength in the situation that Morgan has created as a result of her magical abilities. Even more importantly, it once again allows her to exhibit her rebellious nature as it serves as a way for her to threaten Arthur's authority. This is best illustrated in the message she sends with Manessen, one of Arthur's knights and a cousin of her lover Accolon. Upon rescuing Manessen from certain death at the hands of another knight, she instructs him to tell Arthur "I feare hymn nat whyle I can

make me and myne in lyknesse of stonys, and lette hym wete I can do much more when I se my tyme" (93.7-9). In issuing such a threat, Morgan specifically marks the power of her magical abilities since they allow her not only to be fearless but strategic as well. Her warning demonstrates her refusal to be restrained by authority as she instead chooses to threaten its very existence directly. More importantly, it signals how her magical abilities also provide her with a sense of control, one that allows her to dictate when her next plot to threaten authority will occur. In doing so, shape shifting allows her to issue threats in much the same way that a male adversary would. Her magical ability also allows her to retain her power as the queen of Gore as the chapter ends with her being "rychely receyved" upon her return as she further makes "hir castels and townys stronge" (93.11-12). Despite her being unable to kill Arthur, she is welcomed back by her subjects much like a celebrated king would be welcomed back to his own kingdom after securing a victory.

Morgan additionally resorts to what many would call *maleficium*—the practice of "doing harm to others or to their possessions by preternatural means" (Maxwell-Stuart 10). This is best illustrated shortly after the Accolon episode when Morgan sends what appears to send a gesture of peace in the form of "the rycheste mantel that ever was sene in the courte" (93.23-24). The mantel is sent along with a damsel who relays the message that "what thynge she hath offended she woll amende hit at your owne pleasure" (93.28-29). However, the Lady of the Lake is quick to recognize that the gift has the ability to burn the wearer to death, and she is able to prevent the king from donning it. Once again, Morgan's attempt to kill the king is unsuccessful. However, it presents an ongoing threat of a woman who refuses to adhere to authority and instead continues to disrupt any semblance of peace or stability. In this particular attempt, Morgan's goal is to kill the king by burning, ironically the same death wished upon her by his own knights earlier in the

passage as they "wysshed hir brente" after hearing Arthur tell them of her earlier plot to kill him. Even more significant is the fact that Morgan chooses to kill the king by burning him to death, the very same method that would have been the most common form of punishment that secular courts adopted for accused witches in the Middle Ages (Levack 82). While her plot ultimately fails, it functions as a very distinct and pronounced rebellion against male authority and power. Not only does she refuse to accept traditional means of punishment for her acts of treason and witchcraft, but she instead seeks to punish those who hold power in a traditional society. As Levack notes, witches were seen as "part of a movement that was striving to turn the world upside down, reversing the divinely established hierarchical order to society and rejecting all of its moral norms" (59). Morgan's attempts to deliver a punishment on her brother that would have generally been meted out to an accused witch certainly supports the idea that Morgan seeks to rebel against the order of traditional medieval society. Morgan's willingness to announce that she is responsible for the "gift" further reflects her desire to be acknowledged in her defiant role against the king, an action that would be perceived as a form of rebellion against the male establishment. As Russell states:

> 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)

Morgan's position as royalty would certainly not have deprived her of wealth, but her plots speak of her desire to achieve more than simply material wealth. Her open threat to Arthur serves as a rebellious move on her part, one that is achieved only through her use of black magic in this case. Magic therefore allows her to function as a visibly persistent threat to male authority. This

would certainly be a fear surrounding those who sought to identify and persecute witches—women who were seen as gaining some sort of power through their pacts with the Devil that could ultimately threaten men and leave them powerless.

While witches in medieval society were considered dangerous due to their perceived rebellious and conspiratorial nature, their sexuality also remained a source of great anxiety. Writers such as Nider and Kramer specifically addressed the idea of female sexuality and its relation to witchcraft with Kramer stating in *Malleus* that "Everything [I have been talking about happens] because of fleshly lust, which in [women] is never satisfied" (Maxwell-Stuart 76). Such a belief led Kramer to the conclusion that it was a woman's insatiable lust that led them to "rouse themselves to vigorous action with evil spirits in order to assuage their sexual appetite" (76). The threat of a sexually voracious woman was one that would have therefore been quite viable to men during the Middle Ages, who would have been familiar with such claims. As Anne Lleweyllyn Barstow notes, "Of all the maleficent powers which a man is led to fear in his wife, the most redoubtable are her sexual appetites, which threaten to subjugate him to her power" (137). Morgan certainly fulfills the role of the sexually unfulfilled wife as she resorts to adulterous affairs with seemingly willing partners such as Accolon and another knight named Hemyson. However, the power of enchantment specifically allows her to exert power over those who are not willing sexual partners in her pursuit to fulfill her sexual appetite. Only through enchantment is Morgan able to overtake Lancelot as she casts a spell on him that allows her to imprison him in her castle. As Marion Wynne Davies explains, female characters in Malory's text can be roughly divided into two categories: 'good ladyes' and dangerous 'sorsseres'. She clarifies that the actions of the evil woman have a specific goal in mind: "they destroy a man's bodily strength and detract from his honor" (66). That certainly seems to be the case with the

enchantment and imprisonment of Lancelot as it quickly becomes apparent that Morgan's intentions are of a sexual nature. Her magical ability provides her with a source of power that cannot be matched by any knight's individual physical strength as it operates outside traditional masculine ideologies of power. However, her power also comes from posing a threat to his honor. After acknowledging Launcelot's "worthynesse" and addressing him as "the noblest knight lyvyng" her demand that he choose either her or one of the three other queens as an illicit lover requires that he no longer be loyal to Guenevere—something that he ultimately refuses to do. While Launcelot is eventually able to escape from Morgan's imprisonment with the help of a lady, Morgan is able to demonstrate the potential power of a sexually charged woman, one who refuses to abide by the traditional expectations of the passive female and instead seeks to exert her own power in achieving her desire. Interestingly, Walter Stephens notes that medieval thought held to the idea that "since women's sexuality was defined as passive, women were imagined as being dominated by demons rather than controlling them" (53). Morgan, however, refutes this medieval notion as she actively pursues sexual fulfillment by seeking to control and dominate men in much the same way a demon was thought to do so with a woman. Her sexual desire and powers of enchantment therefore allow her to subjugate the man to a passive position, no doubt a fearful thought for a male medieval reader, and although she is not successful, she is able to exert a power over them that they are unable to fight without assistance from others.

Morgan is also able to use her healing powers, typically regarded as a beneficial form of magic, to pursue her own sexual desires. As Carolyne Larrington states, "Nowhere is the debasement of Morgan's magical powers in the later thirteenth century and beyond more clearly illustrated than in her employment of poison instead of healing in the story of Alexander the Orphan" (19). While this story is one of the lesser known episodes involving Morgan, it presents

her as a healer, an ability that was often positively associated with her in early Arthurian texts. However, rather than seeking to help Alexander, Morgan instead uses her healing powers to leave him completely dependent on her as she administers ointments and drugs that lead him to agree to remain as her prisoner until he is completely healed (395.12-13). Morgan's plot serves to pervert the idea of the nurturing healer in order to exert power over a knight she seeks to take as a lover. Once again, Morgan's sexual desire combined with her magical abilities leaves a man completely subjugated to her, so much so that Alexander famously quips that he would rather be castrated than be forced to give her sexual pleasure (395.31.32). His metaphorical preference for castration represents the powerlessness of his situation, but it may also represent how Morgan is viewed by a man—as being so deviant in her role as a enchantress that he would prefer to mutilate himself rather than give in to her sexual desire. His willingness to part with such a symbolic representation of his masculinity speaks to the power that Morgan has managed to yield over him. Once again, another knight is left completely powerless and dependent on another woman to help him eventually escape Morgan's imprisonment.

Morgan's magical abilities—ranging from *maleficia* to shape-shifting to spells and healing ointments—allow her to be a powerful presence, one that consistently presents a threat not only to Arthur but also to the traditional society that he seeks to maintain in his role as king. Her negative portrayal in Malory's text is vastly different from her initial role in the legend, one that portrayed her as a trusted healer and teacher. Maureen Fries states:

> Her gradual change (one can hardly call it growth) from a connector of life with healing, as mistress of Avalon, into a connector of death with illicit sex and wrongful imprisonment as she appears in most subsequent romance, indicates the

> increasing inability of male Arthurian authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms. (2)

While Fries certainly presents a valid point regarding Morgan's transformation, it does not necessarily take into account the positive portrayals of other enchantresses who also exhibit notable power in Malory's text. This is perhaps best illustrated in Nyneve, also referred to as the Lady of the Lake, who replaces Merlin as advisor to the king early in the text. While Nyneve and Morgan are generally regarded as moral opposites, they both possess a level of power that provides them with a freedom that is not experienced by others (Heng 104). Interestingly, Nyneve is able to take on such a powerful position by using the same enchantment she has learned from Merlin to trap him underneath a stone. Her actions could be perceived as being manipulative and strategic as her use of enchantment effectively destroys Merlin's power, thus allowing her to take over his position as chief advisor to the king. As Amy Kaufman argues, "After all, her entombment of Merlin not only textually subjugates male desire to female sovereignty, but it also replaces a male voice of power and influence in Arthur's realm with a female voice" (62). Indeed, prior to Merlin's entombment, it would seem that Nyneve had ulterior motives as it is noted early on that "ever she made Merlion good chere tylle sche had lerned of hym all maner of thynges that sche desyred" (76.9-12). However, she is ultimately portrayed "as a sympathetic figure, memorable more as Pelleas's beloved wife than as Merlin's fatal lover" (Holbrook 765). The fact that Nyneve successfully removes a male figure from a position of authority seems to be forgiven as she turns out to be a benevolent figure, particularly when contrasted with Morgan, someone who consistently fails in her plots to remove her own brother from his position of power. Nyneve certainly establishes her own record of helping Arthur his knights in key instances as is illustrated by her direct intervention in both the Accolon

and burning mantle plots; however, her favorable status is established prior to such events. This has much to do with her interaction with Merlin prior to his entombment. It is here that Nyneve establishes a key aspect that is central to her positive perception—that of chastity. While Merlin is portrayed as an obsessive would-be lover who "wolde nat lette her have no reste, but allwayes he wolde be wyth her" (76.8-9), Nyneve is portrayed as a woman who guards her virginity and holds Merlin to promise "that he sholde never do none inchauntemente upon hir if he wolde have his wil" (76.27-28). Merlin is therefore portrayed as both foolish and lustful as he "shewed hir many wondyrs…And always he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode" (77.7-8). As Kenneth Hodges notes, "Unlike his sources, Malory never claims Merlin is genuinely in love…He persistently tries to seduce her against her will, clearly violating the code of chivalry Arthur has just announced" (83). Such characterization certainly allows an audience to side with the enchantress as Malory's sympathetic portrayal of Nyneve would seem to reflect the medieval belief that held chastity as a virtue in women. Malory also notes how Nyneve fears Merlin because he "was a devyls son" (77.10), further aligning the lady against the dark force that is associated with Merlin. Such a label brings to mind Morgan's son's own reference to his mother as an "erthely fiend" (90.40-41). As powerful a figure as Merlin may be in initially establishing Arthur as king, the negative implications of his origins further elevates Nyneve as a sympathetic figure. Her use of enchantment to overcome a male figure is seen as a means to protect her own chastity rather than as a play for power, securing an initial positive perception for a female character that could have easily been viewed as manipulative and power hungry, two traits easily attributed to Morgan in her role as an enchantress.

While Morgan's magical powers are instrumental in her plots to seek sexual pleasure as demonstrated by her imprisonment of Lancelot and Alexander, Nyneve instead uses her own

power of enchantment as a way to secure a husband in Sir Pelleas. As S.E. Holbrook states, "For the story of Gawain, Ettarde, and Pelleas, Malory creates a role for [Nyneve] that she has nowhere else in literature—the savior and beloved wife" (771). After Pelleas discovers Ettarde—the proud, haughty woman who continuously rejects him—and Gawain making love, "his hert well-nyghe braste for sorow" (103.4-5). He later returns to the scene with the intent to kill the two lovers, but he ultimately refuses to do so and instead declares, "Though this knight be never so false, I woll never sle hym slepynge for I woll never dystroy the hyghe Ordir of Knyghthode" (103.11-13). He instead chooses to place his naked sword over both of their throats as they sleep, thus signaling that he has witnessed their betrayal. Upon returning to his pavilion, he declares to his fellow knights, "I woll go unto my bedde and never aryse tyll I ge dede" (103.22-24). Into this doleful scene arrives Nyneve as she comes across one of Pelleas' knights lamenting his sad state. Upon hearing of Pelleas' resignation, she decides to intervene, announcing, "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 longe to, for hit is no joy of suche a proude lady that woll nat have no mercy of suche a valyaunte knght" (104.1-4). Upon encountering a sleeping Pelleas, Nyneve's own desire seems to awaken as "she thought she sawe never so lykly a knyght" (104.6). Nyneve then proceeds to use her magical ability to cast a spell on him, creating a direct contradiction to her own request that Merlin not take advantage of her with his own means of enchantment. While no specific mention is initially made regarding the intent of the spell she casts on Pelleas, the purpose of her spell on Ettarde is quite clear—to make her fall so deeply in love with Pelleas that she goes "oute of hir mynde" (104.15). Upon waking from his sleep, Pelleas's desperate love for Ettarde is replaced with deep hatred as he declares, "Away, traytoures, and com never in my sight!" (104.22). Nyneve further ensures that she receives

proper credit for her role in the plot to right Pelleas' wrongs as she states, "Thank me therefore" after hearing Pelleas thank God for gracing him with the ability to hate Ettarde as much as he once loved her. The scene not only ends with Ettarde dying of sorrow, but also heralds how "Damesel of the Lake rejoysed sir Pelleas, and loved togedyrs duryng their lyfe" (104.37-38).

What began as a plot to punish a proud woman results in a lifelong relationship between Pelleas and Nyneve, another testament to her chaste nature as she remains devoted to loving and protecting him for the remainder of the text. Even though Nyneve resorts to casting a man under her spell and leaving him under her control, a medieval audience would be inclined to view her enchantment as a truly positive force as it allows her to save a worthy knight, uphold her own virtue, and punish a sexually active woman. Her own source of magic allows her to fulfill her role as Pelleas' savior and faithful wife, thus creating a stark contrast to Morgan in her role as an adulteress and as a woman who notably leads her own lover Accolon to his death. Two key instances that serve to showcase Nyneve's powers of enchantment, those of Merlin's entombment and Pelleas' rescue, therefore secure her image as one who uses magic to uphold the virtue of chastity both as a maiden and a wife. Despite her willingness to remove a man from a position of authority and cast another under her magical spell, a medieval audience may view her in positive terms given the importance that is placed on her remaining virtue. Heng states, "Nyneve is identified as beneficent and Morgan as malign—estimated, that is, only by the relative usefulness or threat of their presence for knightly society" (104). While their importance in the legend is linked to their ability to help or hurt men, I would argue that their portrayal is not solely based on such a descriptor; rather, their adherence or refusal to adhere to the idea of chastity plays as great a role in establishing how they are perceived by the reader.

Despite the failings of Morgan's plots, she continuously remains a threat to Arthur and his chivalric society. Her persistence is a sure sign of her unwillingness to adhere to the passive role that was traditionally expected of women in her position. As Joan Ferrante states, "if [women] are denied a direct and open role, they will find a way to assert their will, and the secret, hidden way can be dangerous" (227). Such a sentiment can certainly be applied to Malory's Morgan. She is a woman who consistently desires far more than is given to her in a traditional society, and it is the power of enchantment that provides her with the most direct means to achieve it. Even more importantly, it provides her with a sense of freedom and control as she functions on her own terms, something that is absent altogether for so many of the women in Malory's text.

CHAPTER IV

THE POWER OF DISRUPTION: MORGAN LE FAY'S THREAT TO HOMOSOCIAL BONDS

Throughout Malory's work, knights seem to be in a constant search of adventure in their quest for glory, whether they are participants in jousts, tournaments, or battles. At the heart of this work, however, is the idea of a fellowship of the Round Table—a group of knights that display a fierce loyalty to King Arthur and each other and who are expected to use their own military prowess and strength to help those needing protection. Indeed, Round Table knights' participation in an annual swearing of the Pentecostal Oath functions as a form of male bonding that essentially places the importance of loyalty above all else, including heterosexual love, in order to avoid "forfeiture [of their] worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evirmore" (75.40-41). Such a context leads to the development of a homosocial community that is highly dependent on relationships between men to sustain a cohesion that allows them to maintain power. However, it is also a community that can be threatened by those who recognize the importance of such homosocial bonds and seek to destroy them in order to serve individual needs. While recent work by Dorsey Armstrong and Elizabeth Edwards has focused a great deal on gender relations in Malory, little has been done to establish how female characters such as Morgan le Fay are able to create their own unique power by disrupting the very same

homosocial bonds that are critical in establishing knightly masculinity. More importantly, Morgan le Fay's discreet and overt attempts to disrupt homosocial relations between men suggest an anxiety regarding women's ability to threaten the homosociality that was a key component of a patriarchal society in the medieval era. This becomes apparent when analyzing how key components of homosociality are targeted by Morgan in her attempts to create her own power in a male-centered society. It is yet another strategic manner in which Morgan threatens the structured society Arthur and his knights represent.

The concept of male homosocial bonding has long been present in literary and historical contexts. As Eve Sedgwick writes, "Homosocial is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex," additionally noting that "it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may…be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (1). Jean Lipman-Blumen further defines homosocial as "the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex" (16). She adds that males are systematically placed in more highly valued roles than females as a result of a stratification system, thus leading to a dominant order among men that is based on their control of resources that range from land to money to political ties. This in turn creates a situation in which men identify with and seek help from other men. According to Lipman-Blumen, women who are then forced to seek resources from men inevitably become resources themselves, which men can then use to elevate their own standing in the male homosocial realm (16). Michael Kimmel has additionally noted the importance of performance in constructing masculinity as he states, "Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance…What men need is men's approval" (120). Men therefore not only identify with but also seek to compete against each other in their attempt to secure a

masculine identity. Furthermore, Michael Flood emphasizes the importance of male homosocial relations over male-female relationships as "homosocial social obligations are positioned as primary" (344). The concept of homosociality therefore creates a contradiction as it supports the idea of viewing women as a means to enhance a man's reputation yet demands that men give priority to homosocial over heterosexual bonds. Dorsey Armstrong's own argument concerning the "necessity of a subjugated feminine presence in the construction of individual and communal chivalric identities" further supports the concept of homosociality in Malory's text as it presents the idea that knights are dependent on a passive female to bolster their own masculine identity in the strongly homosocial world of Arthur and his knights. Indeed, the Pentecostal Oath included by Malory so early in the text is perhaps best known for its specific clause demanding that knights always provide "ladyes, damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes [socour]" (75.41.42). Therein lies a notable vulnerability in a homosocial realm as there is room for women to exploit its very presence. While knights' loyalty to each other is of utmost importance, there is no doubt that their chivalric identities are at times dependent on women who are in need of rescue. Furthermore, a knight's loyalty to his lady—an important characteristic of chivalry and courtly love—could undoubtedly come into conflict with loyalty to a male fellowship. Such factors highlight an inherent weakness that seems to be built into Arthur's homosocial setting; it is a weakness that could be easily targeted by someone such as Morgan who seeks to gain power for herself. The relevance of homosociality in *Morte Darthur* is therefore important to note given that it may be viewed as a fairly modern concept stemming from Sedgwick's defining work. Kathleen Coyne Kelley has noted, "medievalists have found the concepts of the homosocial and homosocial desire extremely useful in describing medieval social systems in which power circulates chiefly among men of the land-holding class" (86-87). It certainly would have applied

to the society of which Malory was a part. As Carolyn Dinshaw notes, "a society that retains the structure and forms of feudal relations, even as feudal relations were diminishing in significance, can be described as bonded by homosocial desire" (222). Hence, despite its contemporary relevance in the social sciences, homosociality is certainly an idea that is highly applicable to a medieval setting.

Male homosocial bonds therefore effectively create power for men while creating a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness among women, thus playing an important role in allowing men to sustain control over women. Sharon Bird argues, "Through male homosocial heterosexual interactions, hegemonic masculinity is maintained as the norm to which men are held accountable...[men's]daily interactions help perpetuate a system that subordinates femininity" (120). Bird specifically refers to particular male homosocial interactions that are critical to both the formation of masculinity identity and the maintenance of gender norms: emotional detachment, competitiveness, and sexual objectification of women (122). These are certainly concepts that are evident in Malory's text; however, their presence is also one that at specific instances is threatened by a female character who seemingly lies on the fringes of the narrative—Morgan le Fay. Her ability to disrupt elements that are crucial to maintaining homosocial bonds is demonstrated at various points in *Morte Darthur*. Her presence signals an uneasiness regarding a woman's capability to threaten homosocial bonds in medieval society.

The fellowship of the Round Table certainly serves as a concrete representation of homosociality in Malory's *Morte Darthur*. King Arthur's knights are united by a sense of loyalty that results in mutual support and friendship among members of the fellowship as they seek to embody the ideas of justice and virtue. It is a loyalty that runs both ways as King Arthur displays an intense loyalty to his knights just as they do to him and each other (Macbain 23).

Arthur is so closely attached to his knights that he expresses sincere grief as they leave on their quest for the Holy Grail, exclaiming:

> For whan they departe frome hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste. And so hit forthynkith nat me a litill, for I have loved them as well as my lyff. Wherefore hit shall greve me right sore, the departicion of thys felyship. (522.26-30)

The value he places on his knights is significant as he equates their importance to his own and mourns the possibility that the fellowship will no longer be complete following their departure. Such sentiment allows Malory's reader to understand how "the love which binds knights together in fellowship may be as powerful in its effects as the love of a knight for his lady" (Archibald 320-21). Indeed, this has led scholars to observe that Malory was not solely interested in heterosexual love such as that between Lancelot and Guinevere; Malory also sought to address the nature of love that existed between knights, one that he portrayed to be not much different from that of a heterosexual nature (Grimm 80). Arthur seems to be an exemplar of this idea as he laments the imminent loss of fellowship on more than one occasion, more so than he seems to lament the loss of his own wife later in the text. Such instances emphasize the priority that homosocial bonds are given over heterosexual bonds.

While there were many manifestations of the Arthurian legend prior to *Morte Darthur*, it is important to note that Malory assigned much more importance to the idea of fellowship than previous authors. Hyonjin Kim notes:

> Though the members of the Round Table, like their French prototypes, have their own individual agenda, they prove that they can fight as a body in Arthur's

> Roman campaign and learn the value of camaraderie in the face of the tragic events that overshadow the last two tales of *Morte Darthur*. (61-62)

This is particularly evident after Lancelot kills Gareth and Gaheris along with other Knights of the Round Table while rescuing Guinevere from burning at the stake. King Arthur later acknowledges that Lancelot's actions will "cause the grettist mortall warre that ever was" (685.24) before lamenting "my harte was never so hevy as hit ys now. And much more I am soryar for my good knyhtes losse than for the losse of my fayre queen; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company" (685.29-32). In no uncertain terms, the king's response directly emphasizes the importance of fellowship over his queen. Despite the fact that she has been taken by Lancelot, the king expresses far more concern for the well-being and likely demise of his fellowship of knights than for the loss of his wife. It is something that no one, particularly a woman, can replace and therefore causes a sense of bereavement for a king who acknowledges the end of the homosocial realm that was so firmly centered in the Round Table fellowship. Arthur's response indicates Malory's own view regarding the importance of fellowship. As Kim notes:

> The lamentations over the loss of the 'fayryst felyshyp' represent, in all likelihood, Malory's own reading of the Arthurian romances, in which the Round Table as a fraternity and institution is as important as the Round Table as the medley of distinguished individuals like Lancelot and Tristram. (62)

Elizabeth Archibald similarly notes the number of speeches Malory includes in *Morte Darthur*'s final tale that serve to "celebrate his ideal of fellowship or mourn its imminent demise, where the French texts contain nothing comparable" (317). Such scholarship highlights how Malory's own views affect his version of the Arthurian legend. Malory's text emphasizes how it is the loss of

fellowship that plays a crucial role in destroying the structured homosocial realm that grounded the ideal society set forth by Arthur and his knights. Consequently, the power of a female character such as Morgan who is able to disrupt homosociality at key instances in the plot becomes significant as it threatens something that is given great value.

Morgan's own role in perpetuating male homosociality is established early in *Morte Darthur* as she functions as a pawn in a transaction meant to cement male bonds. Prior to Arthur's birth, King Uther arranges for all three of Igryane's daughters from her previous marriage to the Duke of Cornwall to be married off to kings. As the youngest of the three, Morgan's marriage to King Uriens takes place after her schooling in a nunnery. Such royal marriages were arranged as a means to secure bonds between men of great importance. As Gayle Rubin notes, "If it is a women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it" (174). Indeed, Uther's transaction of three females who are not his own biological daughters to powerful kings equates them to instruments in his bid to secure his own power. In doing so, important relationships are established between Uther and the three kings rather than to his daughters by marriage, allowing them to be objectified as mere "conduits" as he cements political bonds that translate into an elevated standing in a highly homosocial realm. Rubin additionally notes, "As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges" (174). While Uther would have benefitted from such exchanges, Arthur himself would benefit as well as it would establish possible connections with powerful allies upon taking over his father's throne. This certainly proves to be the case with Morgan's husband Uryence as he later proves to be a trusted friend of the king. The homosocial bond Uther forms with Uryence by transacting Morgan transfers to his own son

as he too seeks allies in order to legitimize his standing as king early in the text. While late medieval English romances typically addressed the ability of men "to exchange women between themselves in order to form dynastic, political, and / or affective bonds," Morgan attempts to destroy established bonds and make exchanges on her own, thus presenting a profound threat to a structured patriarchal society (Fisher 152). Her plot to accomplish this involves the attempted murder of both her brother Arthur and her husband Uryence in order to make a lover of her own choosing, Sir Accolon, king. Her active involvement in both the planning and attempted execution of Arthur and Uryence demonstrates Morgan's intense desire to negate the exchange that was made upon her arranged marriage to King Uryence. An alliance between two men that resulted from her arranged marriage would be effectively destroyed through their deaths. Moreover, Morgan no longer functions as the passive object who is married off by a male family member in order to benefit a male-structured society. Instead she becomes the powerful agent, one who actively pursues her own interests despite the possibility of destroying the established homosocial bonds existing between men. Morgan seemingly takes the typically masculine role of one who exchanges others as she seeks to exchange her own brother as king for her lover as king in order to obtain a new level of power for herself as Accolon's queen.

Morgan's attempt to kill Arthur and her own husband additionally disrupts homosocial bonds that involve both her lover and her own son. Despite Accolon's agreement to do Morgan's bidding in the plot to remove Arthur as king, he too had been a trusted friend of the Arthur and member of his royal court. However, he violates an important tenet of homosociality as he allows a male-female relationship to take priority over his homosocial obligation to the king. In his own confession to Arthur, Accolon presents his heterosexual relationship with Morgan in the most negative of ways as he pointedly remarks that "she lovyth me oute of mesure

as paramour, and I hir agayne" (88.12). Such an admission seems to violate a key component of the Pentecostal Oath that states "that no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarrel for no love ne for no worldis goodis" (75.43-44). Given the Pentecostal Oath's importance in establishing guidelines for homosocial behavior in the fellowship, Accolon violates the very expectation he was held to follow by taking part in a battle against the leader of the homosocial realm he was expected to support in order to fulfill his paramour's desire. As Sheila Fisher points out in her discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it is considered dangerous within the codes of chivalry for a knight to place his own private life and desires above the masculine bonds of knighthood (154). In Malory's text, Accolon proves to do just that as he follows through on personal promises made to Morgan. His decision to do so could only result in the most negative of outcomes: the death of a king or the death of a seemingly loyal knight.

Morgan's involvement of a knight in her plot against her brother ultimately leads to her lover's death, emphasizing the potential destruction caused when homosocial bonds are disrupted. Morgan's initial plans did not anticipate Accolon's death provided that she intended to make him king upon Arthur's and Uryence's death. However, her orchestration of the plot signals the unintended yet destructive effect of the disruption of homosocial bonds, one that leads to the ultimate fall of a man of respectable stature. One may also consider how this event may foreshadow Lancelot's own similarly worded confession to a hermit during his quest for the Holy Grail as he declares how "he had loved a queen unmesurablely and oute of mesure longe" (539.5-6). His confession comes after Lancelot is unable to enter an old chapel and further falls asleep while the grail appears and heals a sick knight. His shame leads him seek repentance as he confesses to the hermit, "And all my grete dedis of armys that I have done for the moste party was for the quenys sake, and for hir sake wolde I do batayle were hit ryght other wronge" (539.7-

9). While Accolon's inability to place homosocial bonds over heterosexual bonds inevitably leads to his own demise, Lancelot's inability to do so later in the text is instrumental in the demise of Arthur's entire fellowship. Neither Accolon's death nor the downfall of Arthur's kingdom were the intentions of the women who were respectively the object of their knights' affections; however, the end result remains, thus revealing the destructive effects that result when homosocial bonds are destroyed.

Morgan's attempts to kill her own husband and brother further serve to disrupt homosocial bonds for her own son, Sir Uwayne. This largely results from Uwayne's inability to detach himself emotionally from his mother even upon discovering her in the midst of attempting to kill his own father King Uryence. As Bird has observed, a key component of homosociality that contributes to the continuance of hegemonic masculinity is that of emotional detachment. Such an occurrence is constructed through relationships within families in which young men effectively detach themselves from their mothers and develop their own gender identities in relation to that which they are not (121). Uwayne is presented with a clear opportunity to detach himself from his mother and her devious actions upon preventing her murder of Uryence as he declares "with this swerde I sholde smyte of thyne hede" (90.38-39). However, despite referring to her as an "erthely fende," he is unable to distance himself from her emotionally as he instead gives in to her cries for mercy and chooses to forgive her (90.40-41). The consequence of Uwayne's failure to detach himself completely from his mother is for Arthur to banish him from the royal court as he effectively labels Uwayne as an accomplice to Morgan in her plot to destroy him. Rather than being hailed a hero had he destroyed Morgan—an enemy to the king—Uwayne is instead identified with his mother and falsely viewed as a traitor as a result of being unable to sever himself from her emotionally. Morgan ultimately causes her own son's identity to merge

with the feminine as he is ostracized from the masculine realm associated with Arthur and his court. Furthermore, this results in additional disruption of homosocial bonds within the court as Sir Gawain chooses to leave Arthur's court along with Uwayne upon declaring "for whoso banyshyth my cosyn jarmayne shall banyshe me" (94.19). The actions resulting from Arthur's banishment lead to "grete sorowe amonge all the astatis" with Gawain's brother Gaheris lamenting, "Now…we have loste two good knyghtes for the love of one" (94.23-35). Morgan's role in disrupting homosocial bonds between Arthur and his knights affects the men involved to various degrees, from death to banishment to great sorrow. However, no such negative effect is felt by Morgan as she instead escapes certain death and manages to retain her own power. Her ability to affect both her lover and son along with Arthur speaks to the power she holds by effectively disrupting the very bonds that are meant to uphold a highly patriarchal realm.

Morgan's strategy to disrupt homosocial bonds within the fellowship of Round Table knights also targets the central female figure in the legend—Queen Guinevere. While there is no doubt that Guinevere and Lancelot's adulterous affair inevitably contributes to the ultimate demise of Arthur's kingdom, Guinevere initially plays a key role in establishing homosocial bonds within the king's realm. This is apparent early in Arthur's reign as king as he acknowledges the need to legitimize himself and his crown through the ceremony of marriage when declaring to Merlin, "My barownes woll let me have no reste but nedis I muste take a wyff" (59.20-21). Merlin quickly affirms this expectation by responding, "Hit ys well done…that you take a wyff, for a man of youre bounte and nobles scholde not be withoute a wyff" (59.22-23). Guinevere therefore establishes a legitimacy that comes along with marrying the daughter of a king as it establishes a royal alliance between Arthur and her father King Leodegrance, but also, as was the historical case with kings, seemingly secures a future heir to

the throne. More importantly for Arthur, however, is that along with Leodegrance's approval of Arthur's request for Guinevere's hand in marriage, he also presents Arthur with a most important gift—the Round Table that once belonged to Arthur's own father King Uther Pendragon (59.27). Arthur's possession of an object so closely identified with his father serves to legitimize his own newly established reign, one that is initially met with hostility and doubt from other nobles. The exchange made in order to secure Guinevere as wife is one that truly benefits Arthur as it secures and elevates his standing in a highly homosocial realm. Elizabeth Edwards notes, "Guinevere's role is not to uphold the court, but to uphold the 'homosocial' bonds between men who uphold the court" (45). This is certainly a concept that is not lost on Morgan as she uses it to her advantage when plotting to disrupt those very same bonds in two key instances found in Book Five of *Morte Darthur*.

Morgan's first attempt comes when she sends one of her knights to Arthur's court with a magical drinking horn that only a wife who was true to her husband could successfully drink out of without spilling its contents. Not only would her plot disrupt the loyalty that had been so strongly established between Arthur and his knights as represented by Launcelot, but it would also effectively destroy Guinevere's role in maintaining homosocial bonds within the court. Morgan's intention of targeting Guinevere in order to expose her adulterous involvement with Launcelot is made abundantly clear by Morgan's knight as he is stopped and questioned by Sir Lamerok. Lamerok, however, redirects the horn to the court of King Mark in order to get revenge on Tristram for recently defeating him and then refusing to fight him further. While clearly not Morgan's original intention, the negative impact of her plot to disrupt homosocial bonds within the court is evident as King Mark uses the horn to test one hundred ladies of the court and discovers that only four, not including his own wife Isode, are able to drink

successfully without spilling their drink. His immediate decision is to have Isode along with all of the guilty women burned at the stake (270.24-28). Rather than condemn the accused ladies and agree with Mark's decision, however, the men of the court bond together to refuse the burning of the ladies as they instead label Morgan as a false witch and "an enemy to all trew lovers" (272.33). As William Fitzhenry notes, the men of Mark's court "sacrifice interpretive legitimation and try to neutralize the disruptive implications of the horn by displacing them onto, and discrediting, their feminine origin" (7). In their willingness to deny any disruption of homosociality within their realm, the men demonize Morgan and refuse to accept the results of the drinking horn test. Indeed, accepting such results would be tantamount to accepting Morgan's power to disrupt the harmony of the court as it would possibly pit king against knight and knight against fellow knight. It is a potential power that they are quick to negate.

Soon thereafter, Morgan attempts to disrupt the homosocial realm of Arthur's court yet again by targeting Guinevere. In this case, she involves Sir Tristram whom she had taken prisoner. Upon learning of Tristram's identity, Morgan agrees to release him as prisoner if he promises to deliver a shield to the Castle of Harde Roche where King Arthur is holding a great tournament and further agrees to "do as much of dedys of armys for me as ye may do" (340.15-16). Morgan's attempt to once again disrupt Arthur's homosocial setting becomes clear as she explains to Tristram that the shield's image of a knight standing on the heads of a king and queen represents "kynge Arthure and quen[ne] Gwenyver, and a knyght that holdith them bothe in bondage and in servage" (340.27-29). Even though it is evident to the reader that Morgan's intention is to reveal Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship, she refuses to disclose who the knight on the shield is to Tristram, instead saying that he need not know at the time. Her plan seems rather strategic given that she sends Tristram to the most masculine of settings—a

tournament in which knights take part in physical competition in order to assert their chivalric identity in full view of spectators. The large scale of this particular tournament is emphasized as it is noted that Tristram arrives to the castle to find "fyve hondred tentes" as Arthur's knights are challenged by those of the kings of Scotland and Ireland (342.43-44). Morgan's plot is one that aims to threaten the stability of an entire homosocial realm in the midst of maintaining its own masculine identity through the tournament process. Keeping Kimmel's theory in mind that masculinity is largely "a homosocial enactment fraught with danger, with the risk of failure, and with intense relentless competition" (120), a tournament would provide multiple opportunities for knights to confirm and bolster their own knightly manhood as they essentially perform against and in front of other knights and kings. This is certainly what Tristram accomplishes as he successfully defeats several knights; however, while Guinevere immediately recognizes the intent of the shield he carries and its destructive potential, Arthur is unable to read its significance. His reaction may be interpreted as either a failure on his part to effectively interpret signs that threaten his court or as a subconscious way of denying any threat to his standing as the leader of a homosocial community that relies heavily on his knights' unwavering loyalty to him. His anger only appears when one of Morgan's ladies openly declares, "Sir kynge, wyte you well thys shylde was ordayned for you, to warn you of youre shame and dishonoure that longith to you and youre queen" (342.33-35). While Tristram does reveal upon questioning that the shield was given to him by Morgan, he is unable to state why the shield was made and further refuses to reveal his own name to Arthur. In what seems to be an effort to reaffirm his own masculinity, Arthur then responds by demanding that Tristram fight him. Given Bird's observation regarding the importance of competiveness in maintaining homosociality, Arthur's reaction seems to be a direct response to minimize the disruption that has been caused by the

presence of Morgan's shield. Moreover, Tristram and Arthur's agreement to do combat with each other functions as a way for both to suppress the distraction of the shield as they instead focus on an intensely physical activity. Both men's physical prowess becomes the focus of the scene rather than the ramifications of the king's possible dishonor as hinted by the shield's image. It seems to be a rather aggressive way to avoid Morgan's efforts to disrupt the homosociality of the setting as Arthur and one of his fellow knights instead acknowledge Tristram's victory over them and admirably refer to him as "a stronge knyght…as ony is lyvynge" (344.26-27). Gone is the anxiety of the shield as it seems to be glossed over by Malory with a scene that highlights the importance of competition in reestablishing male homosocial bonds. Fitzhenry observes that at times chivalric identity "requires intellectual blinders, with certain elements of its consciousness remaining unilluminated" (8). This certainly seems to be the case in this scene as a show of intense competition is what is required in order to deny Morgan's power to disrupt the very homosocial community represented by Arthur and his fellowship of knights. Interpreting the shield's potent message would effectively disrupt the loyalty that allows the fellowship to remain a source of unified strength.

The importance of competition in establishing the homosociality is highlighted throughout Malory's text. However, as quick as men are to compete against each other to reaffirm masculine identities or establish male bonds, Morgan is quick to eliminate their ability to do so in order to disrupt the homosocial realm of which they are a part. As discussed in chapter one, in both the case of Lancelot and Alysaundir the Orphan, Morgan is able to overpower each in their respective tales to the point that they are imprisoned and at the mercy of the women they come across. In both instances, Morgan's ability to objectify men sexually is made clear as she seeks to make both men her lovers while they are imprisoned. As previously

mentioned, Morgan's power comes from refuting prescribed gender roles as she takes on the masculine role of aggressor and subjects both knights to the passive feminine position. Such a reversal prevents knights from perpetuating a key component that is associated with a sustained homosocial setting—that of objectifying women. As Bird points out, "The objectification of women provides a base on which male superiority is maintained" (123). Morgan, however, distorts such a process as she instead views men as objects for her own pleasure, therefore placing her own sexual needs as superior to any particular need of a notable knight. More importantly, however, she effectively targets the key component of competitiveness that is so crucial to sustaining homosociality. This is accomplished through Morgan's acts of imprisoning knights as she physically removes them from the field of competition and battle, leaving them unable to enact or confirm their knightly manhood in such a masculine setting.

In Lancelot's case, one of his chief desires is to establish honor for both himself and King Arthur's court. D. S. Brewer's observation that honor functions as the strongest motivator in Malory's version of the Arthurian legend certainly holds true for the character of Lancelot as he is regarded as the best of all knights and "the floure of knyghthode" (478.1). Brewer additionally notes the importance of fighting bravely as it is the primary way to achieve honor in Malory's text, whether the fighting is against an enemy or to help a friend in distress (25). Lancelot's honorable status is highly dependent on such a role; indeed, his martial prowess is on full display as he defeats enemies and assists both women and men who are in need of rescue. However, as Armstrong notes, it is his devotion to Guinevere that constantly drives him to prove himself both as a fighter against enemies and as a gentlemen with ladies (74). Such an observation is in line with Edwards' own argument regarding Guinevere's role in establishing homosocial bonds as Lancelot's love for Guinevere leads him to perform chivalric deeds in order to gain her favor

over and over again (45). Such deeds contribute not only to Lancelot's own masculine identity but also reaffirm the bonds among the Round Table knights as he consistently comes to the aid of fellow knights in danger. Perhaps even more importantly, Lancelot's chivalric deeds serve to enhance the reputation of King Arthur's fellowship of knights as he is viewed as the perfect representation of the Round Table knights.

Morgan's imprisonment of Lancelot, however, presents a direct challenge to such a process. She clearly recognizes the importance that Guinevere carries in Lancelot's knightly performance. Soon after Morgan and the three other queens take him prisoner, Morgan declares that they "know well there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is queen Gwenyvere" (152.6-8) before ordering him to choose either one of them as a paramour or to die in prison. Lancelot's emphatic refusal to become an illicit lover to any of the four queens is followed by a declaration of devotion to Guinevere as he proclaims, "…were I at my lyberte as I was, I wolde prove hit on youres that she is the treweste lady unto hir lorde lyviynge" (152.18-20). Armstrong points out that such a declaration allows Lancelot to affirm "both the chaste nature of his love for the queen and the positive role that his devotion for her has in refining his knightly identity, thereby supporting the community of which he is a member" (101). At this early point in the text, Guinevere therefore functions as an appropriate object of devotion, one who does not distract him from his knightly obligations yet serves as a motivating factor for him to seek out adventures that would win her favor (Armstrong 102). These adventures in turn lead to heroic exploits that bolster both Lancelot's own reputation in Arthur's homosocial realm and that of the Round Table Fellowship.

Morgan's imprisonment of Lancelot and the options presented to him therefore serve to eliminate two important components for upholding homosociality: devotion to Guinevere and the

ability to compete against other men. By presenting the first option of choosing herself or one of the other queens as a paramour, Morgan seeks to sever the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. Accomplishing this would eliminate the motivating factor behind Lancelot's devotion to Arthur's queen as well—a factor that is instrumental in Lancelot's quest for adventure as it presents opportunities to gain honor for his queen and the fellowship of the Round Table Knights. The role that Guinevere plays in constructing Lancelot's knightly identity is apparent as Malory tries to portray a relationship between them that is chaste and free of adultery at this stage (Armstrong 102). Morgan, however, seeks to abolish it in her bid to make him her own lover. Guinevere's role as the appropriate object of devotion that drives Lancelot to perform deeds of honor would be destroyed as would her capacity to maintain the homosocial bonds enacted through her relationship with Lancelot. The second option Morgan presents to Lancelot similarly serves to disrupt male bonds as it threatens to remove him completely from Arthur's homosocial realm by leaving him to die in her prison. In keeping with Kimmel's theory that masculinity is in large part a "homosocial enactment" (120), as Morgan's prisoner, Lancelot would be unable to confirm his own knightly manhood in view of other men. Moreover, his imprisonment would completely remove him from the competitive sphere, leaving him unable to fight for glory in an attempt to gain honor not just for himself but for his king as a sign of loyalty to Arthur's homosocial community.

Lancelot is eventually able to escape Morgan's imprisonment only with the aid of a lady. However, almost immediately following his release, Lancelot re-establishes his masculine identity and homosocial standing by engaging in intense displays of physical competition. This is first achieved as he keeps his promise to the young lady who helped him escape Morgan's prison by fighting for her father King Bagdemagus. This requires that he take part in a large scale

competition as he agrees to champion Bagdemagus against the king of North Galys and his knights. During the tournament, his martial prowess is noted as he "smote downe with one spere fyve knyghtes, and four of them he brake their backys" (155.30-31) before proceeding to defeat the king of North Galys himself and over thirty additional knights. Such an incredible feat is quickly followed by several others, including Lancelot battling and eventually killing the evil Sir Terquyn in order to free over sixty knights being held prisoner and coming to the aid of a woman who reports a "knyght that dystressis all ladyes and jantylwomen" (160.7-8). Once again, Lancelot is able to confirm his knightly manhood through his chivalric performances, something that seems essential following an imprisonment at the hands of Morgan that left him at his most vulnerable and powerless position in the tale. Malory concludes "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake" with a final scene of restored homosociality as the Round Table knights and King Arthur gather for the annual feast of the Pentecost. Male bonds are reaffirmed as the knights recount the honorable deeds performed by Lancelot. While Morgan's attempt to remove Lancelot from the homosocial realm of Arthur and his fellowship ultimately proves unsuccessful, its presence is felt nonetheless, particularly as the tale evolves into a vigorous effort to reestablish male identities and masculine bonds that were so easily threatened by someone as perceptive as Morgan. In a tale filled with dangerous situations and notable antagonists, Morgan comes closest to leaving Lancelot with a sense of powerlessness as his worth in a homosocial community is nearly eliminated.

Malory's emphasis on the importance of fellowship and loyalty is largely responsible for making Morgan appear more menacing than in previous versions of the Arthurian legend. It certainly highlights a power she wields as she is able to perceive the importance of male homosocial bonds and looks for opportunities to disrupt them in order to serve her own desires.

It is a process that affects multiple men in multiple ways. Even more importantly, her persistence is notable as it signals the presence of a potentially destabilizing energy in a highly structured homosocial community. She continuously disrupts the unity of Arthur's fellowship and remains undeterred by aggressive efforts to re-establish homosocial bonds. Therefore, while homosociality can secure power for men, it can also prove to be a weakness when its key components are strategically targeted. Morgan represents a force that has the potential to destroy such bonds between men, and along with her power of enchantment and ability to reject and manipulate prescribed gender roles, she continuously exerts a unique power among Malory's women.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In presenting three key components of Morgan's power—shifting gender roles, enchantment, and disruption of homosociality—I argue that she exhibits a unique strength that is not found in any other character in Malory's text, one that suggests anxieties regarding powerful women in medieval society. It is a power that allows her to wield an independence that is lacking in many of the text's characters as she directly defies a traditional society that is largely dependent on established gender codes. Indeed, Morgan creates a distinct space for herself as she continuously rejects or strategically manipulates the codified gender roles that are representative of Arthur's patriarchal community and positions herself as a deviant figure in her plots to achieve what she desires. While some have presented Morgan's efforts as "inferior" and "inefficient" (Lynch 148, 149), it is worthwhile to understand the multi-dimensionality of her power as it speaks to potential strength that can be held by women in a society that seeks to minimize their worth.

There is no doubt that the knights' greatest and most powerful means of influencing events in *Morte Darthur* relies heavily on physical combat in a field of action. Morgan's debarment from such a process calls on her to find alternate ways to influence the outcome of events in her bid for power. The fact that she does not have to resort to a single means allows

her to exert a power that consistently threatens a highly masculine community. She is not the predictable force on the field; she is the unpredictable force off the field that a knight is unable to combat through traditional means. Her strategy is one that is foreign to a physical combatant. Therein lies a power that immediately places her at an advantage. Even more telling is her ability to merge all three components of power in her efforts to disrupt Arthur's reign as she does when targeting figures of authority and strength such as Arthur himself and Sir Lancelot. Her power is far removed from the physical sphere of combat so closely associated with the Knights of the Round Table. Morgan instead relies on strategy that requires her to read and act upon the weaknesses that exist in a chivalric society. It is an ability she possesses as she targets vulnerabilities that are built into a highly homosocial community that relies on a predictable, subjugated feminine presence. It is also an ability that creates a source of power for women without relying on the traditional physical means associated with men; hence, it presents a threat to any society that seeks to retain a patriarchal structure.

The multi-dimensional nature of Morgan's power consistently allows her to create conflict for Arthur and his knights. And while she often fails at her attempts, it is important to note what her persistence would have signaled to a medieval audience. Her potential to disrupt a patriarchal society is one that remains steady at key points in the text. It is one that is often misunderstood and therefore difficult for some of the strongest men in the text to combat. Even more significant is the fact that Morgan is able to survive any and all attempts to eliminate her, unlike all other enemies who pose a direct threat to Arthur and his knights. Perhaps the greatest example of this is Arthur's own son Mordred. Both he and Morgan share similar ambitions to seize power from Arthur. However, while Arthur openly declares a vow to seek vengeance against Morgan following the Accolon episode, he never succeeds in achieving it. Indeed, his

vow to do so certainly does nothing to curb Morgan's attempts to create further conflict for him. This vastly differs from the outcome of Mordred's treason, one that only appears in the final tale of *Morte Darthur*. While Mordred can be credited for bringing down Arthur's kingdom, his efforts to seize power ultimately prove useless as Arthur kills him in hand-to-hand combat in the final battle. Mordred's power largely emanated from his feats on the battlefield, and, as fierce as this may have appeared, it also proved to be one-dimensional. The nature of his power was one that ultimately did not allow him to survive.

Female characters who directly threaten Arthur certainly do not fare any better. While they share the same gender with Morgan, the nature of their power differs as it too presents itself as one-dimensional. One need only recall the sorceress Aunowre who, despite her magical abilities, is unable to overcome Arthur with her crafts and is instead promptly beheaded by the king (301.42-44). Furthermore, Arthur's own half-sister Morgause also plays a key role in the downfall of Arthur's kingdom as she knowingly sleeps with her own half-brother and according to Armstrong, "produces arguably the most destructive element in the text: the incestuously begotten Mordred" (49). It is interesting to note that contemporary film versions of the Arthurian legend such as John Boorman's *Excalibur* attribute the incestuous event to Morgan, perhaps in an effort to tie such an incredibly negative occurrence to the most recognized villain in the tale. However, Morgause's adulterous ways do not go unpunished as she is unceremoniously killed by her own son Gaheris upon discovering her with her lover, Sir Lamorak (377.41-43). Unlike Morgan, who is able to demonstrate her ability to manipulate her own son to convince him to spare her life and continue with her plots, Morgause holds no power in such a situation as she and her adulterous ways are effectively eliminated.

I would also argue that Morgan's powerful presence is indeed necessary in the text as her acts of defiance lead to attempts to strengthen chivalric identity as men seek to minimize her importance. While there is no doubt that knights rely on passive women in need of rescue to bolster their masculine identity, Morgan's actions lead Arthur and his knights to react aggressively in order to restore their own reputations. This is seen time and time again as men such as Lancelot, Tristram, and Arthur react to her deviant plots by reaffirming their own masculine worth through acts of competition and bravery. Therefore, while many would argue that Malory's men rely on a subjugated feminine presence to retain their sense of power and authority, Morgan highlights how it is indeed necessary to acknowledge the importance of powerful women in society who refuse to conform to traditional expectations. It would seem to support the idea that her deviance is necessary in such a situation; the worse that she is, the better that Arthur and his knights ultimately appear. However, it is a dynamic that requires a strong masculine presence, in this case one that is defined by Arthur's fellowship of knights. It is what drives them to continue performing acts of chivalry to counterbalance her aggressive threats to their own masculine identity.

The question that must then be addressed is what happens when that fellowship is destroyed as Arthur's is at the culmination of this story. Perhaps it is this consideration that sheds light on Morgan's dramatic shift in character at the end of *Morte Darthur*. After consistently threatening Arthur and his knights throughout the text, she is one of four ladies, along with the Lady of the Lake, who receives the mortally wounded king on a barge. Gone is any sense of conflict or hatred as she instead says, "A, my dere brother! Why [ha]ve ye taryed so long frome me? Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught overmuch coulde!" (716. 16-17). Her unexpected change in demeanor leads Geraldine Heng to suggest:

> The tones are the gentle, chiding ones of a protectrice and healer, not those of a mortal enemy, and in them may be discerned a suggestion of the final instability and impermanence of all constructed identity. An affinity between them is at once suggested: the bond perhaps of two actors finally away from the pageant, who need no longer play their temporarily assigned roles. (108)

Indeed, Morgan's threatening presence is effectively diminished in her final scene. This comes at a point in which Arthur's once mighty fellowship no longer exists—gone are his knights as he is left in the barge with the four women. And while one would expect that Morgan would seize the moment when Arthur is at his weakest, she instead takes on a role of a caring woman, one who exhibits what seems to be a genuine sympathy for her wounded brother. I suggest that her abrupt change in character presents a way for male writers to prevent a strong female character from benefitting from men's own destruction of bonds between themselves. Tradition would seem to call for her to acquiesce by shedding her role of antagonist. Thus, her threat to a patriarchal society is neutralized as it would have been a threat that would have been unstoppable without a chivalric body to oppose her. Doing so eliminates the potential of a woman to seize power when male bonds are destroyed, something that Morgan sought to do at key points earlier in the text.

Morgan remains an enigmatic character, one whose power is unique in Malory's text. Her power is one which is multi-faceted and therefore allows her to survive when other characters, men and women alike, are unable to do so. Indeed, the only way to minimize Morgan's power is to abruptly, almost inexplicably, change who she is. However, her persistence prior to such a change speaks to her power; it reveals the potential that remains in disrupting a patriarchal society. Perhaps, even more importantly, it signals a power that exists within any

society in which a woman refuses to conform to traditional expectations. It is a thought that would have been frightening to a medieval audience, and it is a thought that continues to fascinate the modern reader.

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