8-16-2024

Medieval to Modern: Morgan Le Fay As Folk Icon of Women in Power in Modern King Arthur Stories

Colleen Victoria Etman
University of South Carolina

MEDIEVAL TO MODERN: MORGAN LE FAY AS FOLK ICON OF WOMEN IN POWER IN MODERN KING ARTHUR STORIES

by

Colleen Victoria Etman

Bachelor of Arts
College of Charleston, 2013

Master of Arts
University of Charleston, South Carolina, 2018

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2024

Accepted by:

Qiana Whitted, Major Professor

Holly Crocker, Committee Member

Ed Gieskes, Committee Member

Katja Pilhuj, Committee Member

Ann Vail, Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

For my star-flung princess, my oversized support system, and my very own scheming sorceress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the hard work of many people.

I would like to thank firstly Qiana Whitted, who has helped me in many ways during my time here at USC. My committee, Holly Crocker, Ed Gieskes, and Kate Pilhuj, provided invaluable contributions to my writing and my growth in this project.

I would like to thank my cohort, who were not just a solid support system but a group of true friends. A silly little joke borne out of shared stressful circumstances became a connection that will, I hope, last a lifetime. Thank you, fellow Hive-rs, for being here every step of the journey. Jen, Drew, Ian, Kate, Brittany, Sophie, and Parker, you made these crazy years bearable.

I would like to thank my parents, who supported me through what was a very rough time. I don't think you expected to have to step up this much, but you really did.

I would like to thank my doctors, who shepherded me through truly unexpected circumstances and managed to get a brain-damaged student to a doctorate. It was truly a team effort, and I would not have gotten this far without you all.

I would like to thank Heather for putting up with me and keeping me sane these past however many years now. You are my favorite and I love you.

And finally, I would like to thank Elizabeth. Without you, I would not be here. This doctorate is thanks to you and your tireless efforts to keep me going.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation interrogates the ways that society views women with/in power through Arthurian adaptation. The body of work that makes up the Arthurian story is a sort of folk legend, a myth being told and retold by various authors in their own way. By using folk studies to analyze both medieval and modern texts, we can dissect what is important enough to remain over time. This signifies cultural values; things that have remained over time are reflective of the values of the writers producing these works, as well as the audiences consuming them. By interrogating these stories, we can make a judgment about how the Arthurian legends reflect these values across time.

This is especially true regarding the character Morgan le Fay, the focus of this project. The most powerful female character in the Arthurian legends, Morgan is a very complex character. She starts off as a very vague but benevolent character, but as the story develops, becomes very antagonistic. What does this have to say about societal comforts/discomforts regarding women with power? How do these portrayals change over time, both within the medieval texts themselves and from the medieval canon to the modern adaptations? How do different media and genres affect her portrayal? These are the questions this project addresses.

The project seeks to understand how these different portrayals of Morgan – from medieval to modern – reflect how she serves as a lens through which to view how society feels about women with/in power. Morgan is a powerful character. This makes her

alternately either a hero or a threat. What does it say when she is a hero? What does it say when she is a threat? Why does she take on either role? What is the context in which she takes on that role? How does that context shape that role? These questions are important to ask, not just for the answers themselves, but for what the answers can tell us about the society that produces and consumes these texts. These stories can tell us a lot about the way we *still* feel about women with/in power.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The body of work that makes up the nebulous legend of King Arthur is mysterious, unwieldy, and often contradictory, with the original texts coming from unsourced accounts and building on each other to create a sort of non-canonical sense of mythology rather than a solid canonical text or even set of texts that sets out one "true" story. This has not, in any way, harmed the longevity of the legends, but has instead allowed the story to flourish, as the different versions have been propagated and spread throughout not just England but all of Anglophonic society and, as popular adaptations have become more common (and imperialism made Anglophonic culture a dominant force in popular culture), throughout the world. Therefore it is thanks to this non-canonical canon that the King Arthur legend has become a long-lived, defining mythos of British culture, as modern creators are able to reinvent the myth again and again in the spirit of the medieval authors, adding their own spin to things just as their forebears did. As they rewrite the story and redefine the legend, it is important to investigate what story they are telling, particularly when it comes to the characters whose stories speak truths about what society might not be willing – or able – to confront about itself. One of the ways to do this is to interrogate the ways that adaptations of the King Arthur legend – both medieval and modern – tell the story of Morgan le Fay, as one of the prominent (or only) female characters in the myth, and decidedly the most prominent female character with any sort of power. How does the way Morgan le Fay is presented reflect the ways

that the creators of these legends, as well as the audiences who consume them, feel about women who hold positions of power? Looking deeper into the mythology behind the King Arthur legends and the modern adaptations of these stories can tell us not just what medieval authors thought about women with power, but about how far society has – or has *not* come – in this regard.

As the King Arthur story is told and retold, it is vital to look at what is being kept and what is being left behind as the story is reinvented by each author. The Arthurian legends are some of the longest enduring and most prominent myths in Anglophonic culture, and can be considered a form of folklore – a body of work created by the common public. While folklore studies, in general, focuses in on more anonymous works, the ideas inherent to the study of folklore can be applied to a broader study of the medieval and modern texts that showcase various versions of Morgan le Fay. James P. Leary describes folklore, when speaking about the folk productions of immigrant peoples, as "personal, creative choices to practice community-based traditions" by "diverse artists who… typically have deep understandings of those traditions over time, including their importance within historical moments and movements." While the Arthurian legends may not be made in the same ways that traditional folk art may be, it can be considered as personal choices made by individual authors that reflect community tradition. Tradition dictates that Arthur has a trusted group of knights, representing his egalitarian nature. Tradition dictates that Arthur has a doomed romance with Guenever. Tradition dictates that Arthur is the child of Uther Pendragon, conceived through some form of magic or trickery. These traditions, these common knowledge ideas that shape

the building of a legend, are integral to understanding the adaptive material that shapes our perception of Morgan le Fay.

As J. D. A. Widdowson points out, the "literal meaning" of folklore is "the knowledge/learning of the people" (126). Even if the many of the works considered "Arthurian" – especially when discussing modern adaptations – may be far removed from traditional folk art, they are still based in the knowledge and learning of the common, everyday person – both the creator making the book or television show, and the audience consuming it. Folklore studies is thus a valuable way to analyze the Arthurian legends if we consider them as a body of text with no original author that has been told and retold numerous times in numerous ways. It is a community-based story, based on popular tradition and culture, told by the people. As the story has been recycled and revisited, then, by specific people, many of the details have been changed just slightly, while others have been kept and others have been dropped entirely.

When looking at adaptations of the Arthurian legend, what are the details that have been kept, what have been changed, and what have been dropped entirely? What does it mean when those details have been changed – or *not* changed, as it were? Considering Morgan, there is a lot to look at, and those details leave us with many questions to be answered. Some details stay throughout many of the retellings and renditions – Morgan being Arthur's sister, being a sorceress, even her being lusty – indicating that they are important enough culturally that they did not fall out when the story was being retransmitted by different authors in different contexts. Many of these details even remain when moving from the medieval contexts to the modern adaptations,

indicating that there is *something* about these details that make them vital to the character of who Morgan intrinsically is.

Yet the question of Morgan's basic nature – villain or hero (or something else entirely) – remains in the air across her many renditions. In her earliest appearances, she was a figure of benevolent divinity. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, for example, see Morgan primarily as a healer. It is only in later appearances, such as in the French Vulgate cycle or Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, that we see her move more into the realm of scheming villain. Having left the realm of goddess, Morgan has devolved into an antagonist for Arthur, out to inhibit his destiny as Camelot's fated king. She remains no less a complex figure moving from medieval texts to modern adaptations; as modern creators borrow from their medieval predecessors, they, too, choose what to borrow and what to keep, propagating those contradictory details that lead to Morgan's contradictory nature. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* revisits the idea of divinity, though her Morgaine is not solely benevolent – she can be seen as righteous defender of her faith, but perhaps more counter-hero than hero. Children's and young adult literature complicate the written word further, offering entirely different approaches to portraying Morgan. Children's literature flattens the character, offering a benign mentor in Mary Pope Osborne's *The Magic Tree House* versus a cackling villain in Amber Castle's *The Spell Sisters* – a secondary character to the main child characters. Young adult literature, on the other hand, humanizes Morgan by making her an adolescent herself, putting her in the shoes of the young adult readers. Alex Epstein's *The Circle Cast: The Lost Years of Morgan le Fay* and Nancy Springer's *I Am Morgan le Fay* present a Morgan struggling with identity, fate, and choice as she becomes the character

we are more familiar with. Then in a different medium we see what a medieval rendition of Morgan might look like come to life; contradictory, detailed, reinvigorated, Starz's *Camelot* and the BBC's *Merlin* offer two versions of Morgan that complicate the familiar narrative while still retaining the ultimate end – the villainous Morgan le Fay.

That revisioning – from medieval to modern, from page to screen – is an example of folklore passing on from one rendition of a story to the next. Lynne McNeill describes folklore as a sort of "telephone game" style of storytelling, where details are changed but the overall message might stay the same. McNeill's point about the way folklore is "malleable, adaptable, changeable" is vitally important to considering how adaptation shapes our understanding of the importance of studying both Arthurian legend and Morgan le Fay herself, insofar as she points out that:

> "Considering that folklore is being slightly adapted and molded every time it's passed on, after a while it's quite representative of the group as a whole rather than of a single individual. The stuff that no one found meaningful or illustrative or entertaining will eventually get leeched out, and the stuff that most people thought was especially important or relevant or significant will remain in. Group consensus shapes folklore, and so folklore is a great measure of group consensus."
>
> (McNeill)

Folklore – in this case as a way of studying adaptations of a body of mythic text – offers a perfect avenue to understand the ramifications of literature on society, or the ramifications of society on literature. Just as folklore is the result of social understandings and common knowledge, certain ideas become common knowledge because of folklore,

in an unending cycle. Folklore is more than just simple storytelling to pass the time. It has, by dint of its very folk, common nature, a huge influence on popular culture and values. By viewing critically these stories and examining their impact, we can understand the ideas and thoughts behind the people who both create and consume these folk tales and myths.

Myths and legends have much to say about what we value when we tell our stories. Being such a large body of work, and something that has been revisited time and time again, the Arthurian legends are a prime candidate for mythology and folklore studies to analyze the way the stories function to create and reassert the "political identities and hegemonic and hierarchical social orders" Stephen Olbrys Gencarella describes. Folklore is a reflection of society as society sees it; therefore, it can reveal much about how society views dominant social structures and powers. Morgan is a character that rests at the intersection of many conflicting social positions. She is the sister of a king and she holds literal power as a magician. Yet at the same time, her position as a magician marginalizes her in a court where magic is held as suspicious, and she is a woman in a man's world. How do the stories about Morgan view her as a woman with power, in a world where a woman with power is often seen as a troubling thing?

For example, how do the medieval texts, such as the French Vulgate Cycle, reflect social tensions about women in power when they portray Morgan as a scheming villain out to steal Arthur's throne? How does this relate to political tensions at the time, and what does this say about the production of the Vulgate texts and their various authors? Does Geoffrey of Monmouth's more benign portrayal of Morgan reveal a kinder view of women with power, or is it a reflection of the more matriarchal, pagan roots still not quite

stamped out in Britain at the time of his writing? What about the modern texts – still not removed from ideas about women with power being troubling things? How do young adult retellings, such as *I Am Morgan le Fay* and *The Circle Cast*, which portray a young Morgan removed from Camelot's court, showcase a Morgan on a journey young readers can relate to – a young woman without power? If Morgan is not the sister of a king and her social standing is diminished, how does that allow young readers to relate to her?

What if Morgan's position in the social hierarchy is threatened, as in *Merlin*, if her power in the social standing comes into conflict with her powers as a magician, where does that leave her, with two conflicting positions of power? How do we read her if she becomes more evil as her powers increase? Is this meant to be a lesson on the dangers of giving women access to power, reinforced by the powerful portrayal of Morgan in *Camelot*? If children's literature shows Morgan as a scheming evil sorceress, as in *The Spell Sisters*, is that a reflection of the way children are supposed to view magicians? Or just *female* magic users? Or is *The Magic Tree House* series more accurate in its portrayal of Morgan as a benevolent if mysterious guide? What can we learn from the difference in time between these two series – with the more nefarious Morgan being more recent, is there a reason women with power are viewed more negatively in recent years?

By using folklore studies – using McNeill's approach as viewing retellings as versions of the story through the lens of a literary "telephone game" – to understand these modern versions of the Arthur story, we can understand what was important enough in the circumstances of the retelling to keep and what was not. The versions that keep Morgan as a scheming villain – why? What were the social circumstances that led to those choices? If retellings of a folk legend keep what was important by social consensus,

why did social consensus at the time decree Morgan a villain? Is it just tradition, well-worn at this point and too ingrained to change? Or is it a deep-seeded discomfort at the idea of a powerful woman being anything other than innately corrupt? By contrast, what led to some stories deeming Morgan a hero, or at least a more complex and sympathetic figure? Do these versions indicate changing feelings about women with power? Are they a reflection of burgeoning feminist movements?

If we view the stories as a reflection of social values – a reflection of what society deemed important enough to keep in the legend at that point in time and that social situation – we can understand what society valued. Morgan le Fay is not just a simple character from simple stories told for a good time. She is an icon of what it means to be a woman with power in an iconic story. Looking at renditions of Morgan's story across time, genre, and medium can show how feelings about Morgan have changed in these different representations. And because Morgan is an icon of a woman in power, these renditions also can show how feelings about women with power have changed across these circumstances. Looking at the folk retellings, the telephone game we have been playing for a millennium now, it is clear that feelings regarding women in power have been and remain complicated, but that Morgan le Fay will always be an icon.

Chapter One: Medieval Morgans: Building a Canon

Chapter One focuses on the portrayals of Morgan le Fay in the "original" texts that form the basis of the non-canonical canon being adapted in the later, modern versions of the texts the rest of the book analyzes. In order to understand what those adaptations have to say, we must first build the foundation for understanding the myths

and where the character originated in the medieval canon. This chapter will deal heavily with building the idea of the Arthurian stories as a legend that builds on each rendition, with details being kept throughout the retellings that indicate some importance to the storyline and to the people telling these stories. The primary goal of Chapter One is to show the development of Morgan's character from the earliest stories, which feature her as a minor character, into the more familiar character of the later myths – the scheming, antagonistic sister of King Arthur – that is primarily adapted into modern renditions.

Chapter One starts with Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose *Vita Merlini* gives one of the earliest extant written renditions of Morgan le Fay. Although Monmouth is not the originator of the Arthur legend, as it was prevalent in the British Isles before he wrote the *Vita Merlini*, he provides an authoritative voice for the earliest versions of the myth. His *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the predecessor to the *Vita Merlini*, details how nine magical sisters take Arthur's body to Avalon after his death, for him to rest and heal until he is needed once again. The *Vita Merlini* further details that the chief of these sisters is Morgen, and that she took charge of healing Arthur with her magical powers. Monmouth's Morgan is not very thoroughly developed, but the development she does get relates a benevolent magician dedicated to the service of Arthur and, ultimately through him, Britain.

Following Monmouth, Chapter One proceeds through a variety of medieval sources to show the development of Morgan's character. Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* both further the idea of Morgan as a healer and mostly a benevolent character. de Troyes also gives an early example of Morgan being identified as Arthur's sister, one of the most important developments in her character,

though this is earlier briefly mentioned by Stephen of Roeun in his *Draco Normannicus*. Robert de Boron's *Merlin* expands on this, developing Morgan's family history and connection to Arthur, as well as developing her character into a more fleshed out individual. de Boron is not overly harsh to Morgan, but does indicate that she is lewd and has a harsh temper, showing early signs of characterizations that will follow her as she becomes more antagonistic.

This would become exaggerated through the French Vulgate Cycle and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which make up the bulk of the rest of Chapter One. These texts are the driving force of much of what is considered the Arthurian legend today. Focusing in on the Vulgate Cycle's *Lancelot*, Chapter One examines stories about Lancelot, Guenever, Arthur, and, of course, Morgan, and it is here that we develop more of Morgan as the scheming dastardly figure that tends to linger in modern popular culture. Morgan tries to break up the marriage of Arthur and Guenever, schemes against the throne, uses her magic to gain allies against him, and generally becomes a villainous character. Malory expands on the Vulgate Cycle and presents a similar character, though he does somewhat redeem Morgan at the end, allowing her to accompany Arthur to Avalon at his death in an echo of Monmouth's origins. The Vulgate Cycle and Malory present Morgan as a warning, an example of what happens when women dabble in magical arts, are left to pursue their own, lewd affairs, or are able to challenge the legitimate ruler.

Chapter One focuses on these early portrayals of Morgan to see where she comes from in the "original" text to figure out the starting point for the legend. The texts themselves are analyzed in close detail and placed in conversation with topics such as the

Christianization of society that demonized both magic and women to help elucidate just why Morgan seems to devolve from a goddess-like figure to a scheming hag. These themes will be built upon as the book continues, showing how the "original" legendary Morgan continues to evolve into the modern era.

Chapter Two: Into the Mists: *The Mists of Avalon*

Chapter Two transitions from the origins of the myths to the more modern versions, although we do not move completely to contemporary adaptations immediately. First we look at a foundational text in understanding how Morgan is viewed as a character, Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1983 retelling of the myth, *The Mists of Avalon*. *The Mists of Avalon* is one of the fundamental changes to the "Morgan canon," giving us Morgane as a protagonist and what the story might look like told from *her* perspective. Given that Morgan is the protagonist and not an antagonist or relegated to being a vague side character, we see a Morgan who is not evil, but fighting for a righteous cause, a Morgan who uses her powers for good. This Morgan is a reflection of an entirely different cultural moment, the American 1980s, a moment of second wave feminism and neo-paganism. While earlier texts might have played around with the idea of Morgan as a good character, *The Mists of Avalon* gives us a Morgan who is a hero, *the* hero of the story.

Chapter Two focuses on the differences between the medieval canon and *The Mists of Avalon* and understanding what changes are being made and why. There are solid reasons for many of the differences from a simple practical standpoint, of course. For one thing, Morgan is the protagonist of Bradley's novel, not Arthur, which makes her

the focal point of the story rather than something on the sidelines. We are seeing the myth through her eyes, this time. Then there is the matter of formatting. The difference between medieval text and modern novel is striking and lends itself to an entirely different reading. Novel form allows for an interiority that is not present in the medieval texts. One could argue that there is not even a protagonist at all in the early texts, despite the prominence of Arthur, or the stories being told about Merlin's life or the adventures of Lancelot. It is not necessarily just that Bradley has chosen to focus on a different character than Monmouth or Malory; she is focusing on Morgan in an entirely different format, and that makes a huge difference in the way we read the character. Morgan is a lot more sympathetic when we are able to understand her motivations and thoughts than when she is a one-note villain like she so often is in the medieval texts. Bradley gives her depth, something she is so very lacking in the earlier renditions.

One of the main ways that Bradley gives Morgan depth, and one of the main focuses of Chapter Two, is on the relationships developed in the nearly-1000 page novel. Bradley creates incredibly rich female connections, both positive and negative, something that adds new meaning to the stories that are primarily androcentric in the medieval texts. By giving Morgan a female community, Bradley creates a new way of looking at the character. Who is Morgan when she is not in isolation? Who could she be? Bradley also ties into that matriarchal, pagan past that may have swayed earlier writers like Monmouth, crafting that divine image of the earliest Morgan appearances. This is made literal in Bradley, as Morgan worships a goddess religion and takes on aspects of the goddess herself.

The Mists of Avalon has a wealth of context to work through as we read through the story itself. Bradley as a writer is very interesting to have created this text; *The Mists of Avalon* is a very feminist, neo-pagan text, yet Bradley specifically states that she is neither feminist nor neo-pagan. What drove her to create this novel? What is it about this circumstance – this author, this character, this moment – that created *The Mists of Avalon*? Chapter Two seeks to put *The Mists of Avalon* in this context, as well as to examine Morgan free from her medieval bounds. Who is Morgan, at her core? Is she inherently an antagonist? Bradley argues that no, she is not. While the medieval canon struggles to settle the question of Morgan, uneasy with her position and power, Bradley argues that she is not a villain but simply a woman trying to do her best in a world that wants to stop her from surviving and keeping her way of life alive.

Chapter Three: Small Screen Morgans: *Merlin* and *Camelot*

Chapter Three brings us to the contemporary moment and to the world of television with two portrayals of Morgan that embody a modern view of her as a complex figure that cannot be viewed as simply good or evil. These portrayals – the BBC's *Merlin* and Starz's *Camelot* – treat Morgan as a figure to be broken down, taken apart, and viewed at a deeper level, to be understood as a character with her own thoughts, motivations, and feelings, much in the same way as Bradley does in *The Mists of Avalon* – then they ask what would happen if she were still the villain. Chapter Three brings questions about interiority and sympathy and whether or not a sympathetic antagonist is still a villain. It also asks examines format and medium, the moment of production and anticipated audience, and brings us back to the idea of Arthur stories as legends to be adapted, built upon, or changed as needed.

Camelot and *Merlin* both present a more complicated Morgan than the original canon, much like *The Mists of Avalon*. Unlike *The Mists of Avalon*, however, Morgan is the ultimate antagonist of both shows, although she does not start out as the antagonist of *Merlin*. The two shows bridge the gap between the one-note villainy of many of the medieval texts and the ultimately heroic depth of *The Mists of Avalon* to create something different – a perhaps heroic, or at least sympathetic, villain. This is something that comes across well because of the choices of the creators, but also because of the inherent qualities of the television medium. Especially with *Merlin*, which is able to show character development over fifty hours of television, Morgan is given ample time to descend from heroic side character to primary antagonist. Television may not allow for glimpses into a character's headspace in the way a novel might, but by giving visual cues such as costuming as well as acting choices, the medium can present a wealth of additional signifiers for the way a character is thinking and how that influences their actions. Chapter Three analyzes the characterization of Morgan through these cues and the way that television functions as a medium to create an entirely different way of viewing Morgan. Television allows for a new way of telling these myths that was previously unthought of in medieval text or novelization.

Chapter Three also compares these two shows as unique portrayals, showing that not all television portrayals are the same, even if they have similar goals for Morgan. Comparison of networks – Starz versus the BBC is a big difference – budget, time frame, and setting all come together to create different effects. *Camelot*'s shorter runtime creates a tighter character arc than *Merlin*'s five seasons, allowing *Merlin* a slower progression towards villainy for their Morgan. Starz's more adult audience allows for a different

portrayal of Morgan as an adult than the BBC's more family-friendly rendition. Both shows will be analyzed as unique retellings of the same story, different branches of the "telephone game" that is the ultimate body of Arthurian legend, and what ultimate effect these two stories achieve. What does it matter, ultimately, that Starz is able to present a more adult Morgan? Is it a darker portrayal? Does *Merlin*'s slower slide into villainy make for a more tragic Morgan? Does that feel more removed from the one-note characterization of the medieval canon, or is the ultimate effect still the same because the end is still the same?

Chapter Three ends with a look at these shows in their context, as television shows produced in the early 21st century. Just as *The Mists of Avalon* was shaped by its author and the cultural moment in which it was written, these shows are shaped by their contexts. "Girlboss" feminism shapes the way Morgan is portrayed as a woman with power and seeking more power, and the backlash to third-wave feminism shapes the way an audience is meant to respond to her actions. The mechanics of television production and changes in the entertainment industry also shaped the shows, with a particular moment in television – or moments – showing how Morgan is changed based on the shows created around her. Chapter Three moves us into the modern moment and into a new medium, but the ultimate questions remain the same. Who is Morgan in this context? How does these television shows contribute to the legend and to the character that is Morgan? What are we supposed to take away about how these offerings present Morgan, as a reflection of social feelings regarding women with power?

Chapter Four: Morgans for the Youth: Children's and Young Adult Literature

Chapter Four presents a contrast from the versions of Morgan seen so far in this book. From the original medieval canon, through *The Mists of Avalon*, and to Starz's *Camelot*, Morgan has so far been depicted mostly for an adult audience and as an adult character. The BBC's *Merlin* shows her as a young adult and the show is accessible for a young adult audience, but by and large the portrayals of Morgan thus covered are not very kid-friendly. But Arthurian literature adaptations are popular not just with adults, but with kids and young adults as well. So the question arises, how do children's literature and young adult adaptations tackle the issue of Morgan? Is she a scheming duplicitous villain out to get Arthur? Is she an antihero or hero in her own right? Chapter Four tackles these questions by looking at several adaptations meant for children and young adults. Two series of children's books will be covered – Mary Pope Osborne's *The Magic Tree House* books and Amber Castle's *Spell Sisters* books – and two young adult novels – Nancy Springer's *I Am Morgan le Fay* and Alex Epstein's *The Circle Cast: The Lost Years of Morgan le Fay*. Coming from the perspective of children and young adults, written for children and young adults, these books allow for a different look at the character.

Both series for children feature Morgan as a side character that serves as an adult interacting with the main child characters. The way they portray her, however, is incredibly different. *The Magic Tree House* shows Morgan as a benevolent, if mysterious, figure that guides the young heroes, whereas the *Spell Sisters* books show her as the antagonist the heroes must defeat. Because she is an adult in a children's book – by nature a side character there to serve the story of the main, child characters – Morgan in

each case is flattened out, reduced to playing one facet of a character, either a kindly guide or a nefarious villain. Children's literature by no means lacks developed characters, but here Morgan is left with little nuance.

By contrast, young adult books have much more room for nuance. The texts are longer and more developed, intended for more mature audiences with a higher reading proficiency. This allows for greater character development – as does the interiority emphasized by the books' storylines, which often focus on the journeys and identities of young adult characters. The two books studied in Chapter Four give a look at a Morgan who is not quite the antagonist, or perhaps not *yet* the antagonist, as she lives outside the traditional Arthurian court as a teenager who has not yet come into her full might. Both novels are centered on the idea of Morgan's fate, who she is meant to be, and the choices she makes on the way as she either fights her fate or strives desperately towards it. Both novels also showcase the young adult literature tradition of becoming, or showing how the young adult readers can identify with the journeys and realizations of the characters in the story. Morgan is, by nature of this storytelling and this journey, a somewhat sympathetic character, even when she does unsympathetic things.

Chapter Four focuses on the genre constraints of children's literature and young adult fiction to analyze how they create characterizations for Morgan that add to the story of who she is. In particular, the chapter examines how children's literature and young adult literature, which are often grouped together, are inherently different, and how these depictions of Morgan showcase this difference. By showing how these different stories adapt Morgan in different ways, we can learn more not just about Morgan but about the ways these types of literature function. We can also learn more about the lessons intended

by the authors. These forms of literature – especially children's literature – are often intended to teach a lesson to the young audience. What lesson is being sent by having Morgan either a kindly guide or a scheming hag? What do the adult authors want the young readers to take away about women in power? What about the young adult readers, who are intended to relate to Morgan? How are they supposed to feel about themselves when they read about Morgan becoming the character she is in the medieval canon? More than any other chapter, Chapter Four looks at the importance of these works in reflecting certain messages.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this book seeks to complicate the idea of Morgan le Fay as a one-note character, whether that be hero or villain. The original texts from the medieval canon make it clear that there is no one way to view the character, though this is owed to the folklore basis of the body of work. Each individual text may have its own opinion on the matter, although even there, certain texts contradict themselves or show character growth, such as Malory giving Morgan a late addition redemption. Some of this is lost in modern adaptation, which transitions more out of folktale formatting, but the ultimate questions surrounding Morgan's character remain the same. How are we supposed to read Morgan le Fay? The story of King Arthur is one that seems to have the collective popular culture imagination in hold, and his sorceress sister remains a popular and dynamic character. Understanding who she is in popular, modern canon, and why the choices are being made in how she is portrayed, can uncover much about the people making those choices and the society consuming the material being made. Morgan le Fay can be a very revealing character. As a woman in a male-dominated power structure in Arthurian legend, a

woman with an unusual degree of power and who is often treated poorly by the narrative, she holds a unique position to provide an angle of commentary for analysis. Taking that analysis through to modern adaptations, seeing what remains in the adaptive "telephone game" of folklore and legend and understanding the importance this has in the power structures reflected in these adaptations, make her a revelatory figure well worth studying.

CHAPTER ONE

MEDIEVAL MORGANS: BUILDING A CANON

Morgan le Fay's earliest appearances, in the medieval romances that would form the basis for most of the Arthurian legends that endure today, would set a standard that subsequent adaptations and revisions would grapple with for centuries. Namely, that standard is primarily one of contradictions. In her earliest appearances, from the early medieval Geoffrey of Monmouth *Vita Merlini* to the budding Renaissance *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory, Morgan is not one solid character who can be easily characterized and placed in a box as hero, villain, or anti-hero. Morgan is one of the most prominent characters in the King Arthur story, and she plays a major role in the way the myth shapes out, but that role is not static. Even within the same story she may change from one point in the legend to the next. These contradictions that are inherent to Morgan's character can be seen as reflecting medieval hesitations regarding women with power. Morgan is arguably the most powerful woman in the Arthurian story, so it makes sense that a medieval audience or a medieval author would struggle with how to handle that power.

As more matriarchal Celtic societies were losing power in Western Europe and being overtaken by the more patriarchal Christian powers in the early Middle Ages, ca. the 7th and 8th centuries, women's rights and prominence in society were dwindling. As such, it makes sense that these newcomers would struggle to understand a character from

native mythology who was once seen as a nearly divine character in her own right. As the Arthurian legend was coopted and retold by various societies, Morgan's story was changed to adapt to the new position of women in society and to deal with these social anxieties. If Morgan is to remain a powerful character in her own right, as a powerful sorceress, a royal with political prominence, and a personal advisor to the king with great power in Arthur's court, then the medieval authors must find a way to address that power while making the story palatable to the sensitivities of their audiences. They did this, particularly as the centuries passed and Europe became more Christian and more patriarchal, by making Morgan a villain. Even then, however, she remains contradictory; Malory's Morgan, perhaps the quintessential Morgan, achieves a sort of redemption at the end.

Who is the medieval Morgan? The answer is hard to pin down, due to the conflicting sources and the ways in which they strive to understand her character in a world that is not set up to accept her. There are a multitude of Morgans on offer; across time, across country, different Morgans will appear in different ways. There is more of a temporal divide than a cultural one, but even so, British Morgans in Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (ca. 1150) and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (ca. 15th century) share similarities that Malory does not share with his French source, the French Vulgate Cycle (ca. 13th century). On the other hand, the Vulgate Cycle may draw on its French predecessors, such as Robert de Boron's *Prose Merlin* (ca. 12-13th centuries) but does deviate somewhat from the also French Chrétien de Troyes *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain* (ca. 12th century). There does seem to be a direct throughline as Morgan almost devolves as a character from the early standard set by Monmouth, culminating in the dastardly villain

seen in the Vulgate Cycle and *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Even then, some things remain true across the centuries. Morgan is royal. Morgan is powerful. Somewhat incongruously, Morgan is a healer. And most of all, in ways fair or foul, Morgan fights for agency, a symbol of women's resistance against the dominant male hegemony – and this is often what makes her a villain in the eyes of the medieval audiences.

Roger Loomis argued in 1945 that Morgan le Fay's portrayals had not yet been properly addressed in literary criticism. His theory was that this was because she was "manifestly a creature of tradition rather than invention," and, in those traditions, one of "infinite variety" (Loomis 183). According to Loomis, understanding Morgan is made difficult by

> the diversity of attitudes, from extreme repugnance to charmed wonder, which the medieval romancers exhibit in their descriptions of her person and their delineation of her character. Morgain may be the most beautiful of nine sister fays, or an ugly crone. She may be Arthur's tender nurse in the island valley of Avilion, or his treacherous foe. She may be a virgin, or a Venus of lust. (183)

The theory, of course, is that Morgan le Fay is demonized in Arthurian legend because she is a powerful female figure. Dalicia K. Raymond argues that Morgan "often is vilified in late medieval Arthurian texts for her female acquisition and adaptation of male power sources and structures to accomplish tasks traditionally only acceptable for men to perform" (547). Or, as Marta Cobb puts more bluntly: "in the late medieval period, magic increasingly became associated with witchcraft and the devil. But Merlin tends to be treated kindly… He is, of course, also a man. Meanwhile Morgan is condemned for being

a woman who seeks magical and political power for herself." Maureen Fries argues that the answer is pure and simple misogyny. According to Fries, Morgan's "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" (*From the Lady* 2). How does that progression happen? And is Fries correct in her prognosis?

Morgan's first named appearance comes in the *Vita Merlini* (ca. 1150), Geoffrey of Monmouth's ostensible chronicle of the life of the famed sorcerer Merlin. The story, based off of Geoffrey's earlier historical works, is one of the earliest tellings of the King Arthur mythology. At the end of the *Vita Merlini*, when Arthur is mortally wounded at the Battle of Camlan, he is taken to "the island of apples which men call 'The Fortunate Isle'" to be healed from his wounds (Monmouth). This is the island of Avalon, which would come to be a staple of the Arthurian legend, where Arthur always retires to either die, one day to return from the dead, or to be healed from his mortal wounds and emerge, immortal. The island of Avalon is ruled, in the *Vita Merlini*, by nine sisters, and "she who is first of them is more skilled in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person. Morgen is her name" (Monmouth). Here, then, we meet Morgan for the first time, as the ruler of Avalon and a famed healer. Geoffrey tells us that Morgan "has learned what useful properties all the herbs contain, so that she can cure sick bodies" and "knows an art by which to change her shape, and to cleave the air on new wings like Daedelus" (Monmouth). Morgan is established as not just a healer, but a powerful magician and shapeshifter.

Arthur is brought before her, and she tells his companions that "health could be restored to him if he stayed with her for a long time and made use of her healing art" (Monmouth). His companions, then, "rejoicing… entrusted the king to her" (Monmouth). This line is one of the more notable of the *Vita Merlini*. Geoffrey's Morgan is not a terribly well-developed character, only appearing at the end as the ruler of Avalon who can heal Arthur. She is a far cry from the more developed Morgans that later authors will create. This Morgan is not related to Arthur; Geoffrey does give Arthur a sister, Anna, but she exists almost solely for dynastic purposes. This Morgan also is not an adversary, but an ally. Arthur's companions *entrusted* him to her care and leave him there, without any hesitation despite not knowing her before this moment. Geoffrey's Morgan is a trustworthy, benevolent ruler, a magician and healer, distant from the narrative but essential to its conclusion. This is a role that Morgan will often take, as a shepherd of Arthur's final moments in the narrative.

Charlotte Spivack and Rebecca Lynne Staples argue that "from her first appearance in literature, then, Morgan seems identified with the Wise Woman aspect of the goddess" (32). They explain further that "in four medieval texts she is actually referred to as a goddess, but these in turn are but facets of 'the' goddess, the feminine deity who in her totality represents the life cycle and psychic dimensions of all women as maiden, mother, wise woman, and warrior" (31)[1]. According to Spivack and Staples, our

[1] Spivack and Staples borrow this concept from "the typology of psychologist Carl G. Jung," where "the female psyche is structured as a quaternity, with polarized dimensions representing the maiden and the mother, the wise woman and the warrior. Similarly, the male psyche is represented as son and father, wise man and warrior" (46).

first Morgan is linked with divinity[2]; although she may not herself be divine, she channels divinity and is a representation of female and feminine power. Geoffrey's Morgan sets the stage for a Morgan who is powerful and respected. She has a position of prominence, as the leader of the Fortunate Isle and a skilled and powerful healer. She is presented as not just talented but learned, opportunities that many women would not have unless they were very privileged. She also has the final say in Arthur's story. Divine or not, Geoffrey's Morgan is undoubtedly a female power to be reckoned with.

Morgan's powerful role would continue, as subsequent authors took Geoffrey's foundation and built further. The earliest (surviving) mention of her as Arthur's sister comes in the epic *Draco Normannicus,* an epic written by Stephen of Roeun, a Benedictine monk, in approximately 1167. In the *Draco Normannicus*, there is a series of satirical letters written between a revived King Arthur and King Henry II on the subject of Breton independence. King Arthur tells Henry that he has been restored to full health as a warning: "Suscipit hic fratrem Morganis nympha perennis" (qtd. in Marzella). The phrasing here is important; *fratrem* Morganis, definitively linking Morgan to Arthur by a fraternal/sibling bond. This also seems to imply that Morgan, like Arthur, may be immortal, as she is described as a nympha *perennis* – further indication of her unworldly powers. Carolyne Larrington argues that this because of this development, "when Morgan becomes Arthur's sister… the course of literary history changes" (29). Indeed, Morgan as part of Arthur's family remains a prominent part of the narrative moving forward. Making Morgan not just a powerful sorceress but a royal and part of Arthur's

[2] According to *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, this representation may be a Welsh translation of the Irish goddess the Morrigan, further solidifying not just Morgan as a divine figure, but as a representation of the Celtic pagan religion slowly pushed out of Europe for Christianity (Zipes).

family adds to her position of prominence and her power in the narrative. She becomes more integral to the story; she is no longer just the benevolent but distant figure that appears at the end to shepherd Arthur to his final resting place, but now is a part of Arthur's life.

In the 12th century, Chrétien de Troyes would continue the development of Morgan as both sister to Arthur and as prominent healing figure in his poems *Erec and Enide* and *Yvain*. In *Yvain*, the titular character has gone out of his head and is in need of aid when he is found by a lady. She tells her handmaiden that she may be able to help Yvain, "for I recall a certain ointment with which Morgan the Wise presented me, saying there was no delirium of the head which it would not cure" (de Troyes *Yvain* 41). Morgan's reputation as a healer continues, and she is given the epithet "the Wise," a title of respect. At this point in her character progression, Morgan is still viewed as a benevolent figure, someone whose power is seen as a good thing, rather than something to be feared. In *Erec and Enide*, Morgan is again mentioned as a great healer in the same manner, while also being referenced as Arthur's sister when the titular character Erec is gravely injured: "The King… has a plaster brought which Morgan, his sister, had made. The plaster, which Morgan had given to Arthur, was of such sovereign virtue that no wound, whether on nerve or joint, provided it were treated with the plaster once a day, could fail to be completely cured and healed within a week" (de Troyes *Erec and Enide* 57). Though both of these mentions are more focused on the effects that Morgan's powers can bring about, these mentions do indicate that she remains known as a figure of healing and a member of Arthur's court. They may be brief, but they establish her as a prominent member of Arthurian storytelling, and in neither case does she seem to be a

figure of disdain or antipathy. *Erec and Enide* also links Morgan with a figure who would be important in later stories, Guigomar, here listed as "lord of the Isle of Avalon… we have herd it said that he was a friend of Morgan the Fay, and such he was in very truth" (de Troyes *Erec and Enide* 27). Guigomar will be an important factor in Morgan's fall from grace in the *Prose Merlin*.

The *Prose Merlin* (ca. 12-13th century), a massive poem by Robert de Boron dedicated to telling the life of Merlin, does not start off with a negative view of Morgan, but it does begin the slow slide towards the later medieval view of Morgan as seductress and antagonist. Morgan is introduced as the daughter of Ygerne, soon-to-be mother of Arthur, who is marrying Uther Pendragon. At the marriage of Ygerne to Uther, "on the recommendation of the whole family, the king sent the daughter named Morgan to school at a convent" (Rosenberg 343). Here we learn the backstory of how Morgan became the powerful sorceress she will be: "she was so gifted that she learned the seven arts and quite early acquired remarkable knowledge of an art called astronomy, which she used all the time. She also studied nature and medicine, and it was through that study that she came to be called Morgan the Fay" (Rosenberg 343-4). This is innocent enough, and could easily fall in line with earlier depictions of Morgan. She goes away to a school and learns her healing arts and earns the moniker Morgan le Fay that becomes her most famous title in the Arthurian legend. It seems to take Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgan and develops her further. We see how she becomes a learned healer and scientist, the opportunities she had to go to school, and the talents she displayed that led to her becoming the "wise woman" that Spivack and Staples dub her.

It is later in the *Merlin*, after Arthur is king and married to his queen that things start to go downhill for Morgan. While living at the court of Arthur, she comes into contact with a cousin of the queen – called Gonnore in de Boron's edition – named Guyomar. At this point, "Morgain was a yonge damesell, fressh and jolye" (Conlee 56). de Boron has positive things to say about Morgan: "the beste workewoman she was with hir hands under hevene, and sholdres well shapen" (Conlee 65-66). But she is not so innocent anymore. He describes her as lecherous and lustful, with a fierce temper; while "she hadde feire eloquense, and tretable and full debonair she was, as longe as she was in hir right witte… whan she were wroth with eny man, she was evell for to acorde" (Conlee 67-69). Guyomar finds Morgan working on a scarf for her sister and they talk and, in what de Boron calls the natural order of things, fall in love and "pleyde the comen play" (Conlee 85). Gonnore finds out, is ashamed of her cousin, and banishes him. Morgan's fierce temper kicks in, and she forever after hated the queen more than anyone. According to de Boron, this is the reason that Morgan caused mischief for Arthur. Her hatred for Gonnore turns a lusty but overall cheerful young woman into a spiteful sorceress bent on revenge, and with no care for who gets caught in her attempts to hurt Gonnore.

This is a common theme in Morgan stories – antipathy between Morgan and the queen is just as likely to push her into her dastardly schemes as any other reason. The woman against woman struggle seems almost designed to diminish both characters. Queen Guenever[3] and Morgan are the two most prominent female characters in the

[3] The queen's name is spelled different ways in most of the different author's renditions, and even in different editions of the same text prepared by different editors. I am using Malory's version.

Arthur legends, and neither is treated overly kindly by medieval authors. Each has their own negative stories – Morgan's scheming for power and Guenever's infidelity are major driving forces in Arthur's ultimate downfall and are the most prominent features of each woman's fictional identity. By using these two characters against each other, medieval authors diminish these otherwise very powerful characters. They each have other adventures in the legends, and their actions will have a major impact on the overall story, but starting much of their actions out of their negative feelings for each other reduces their actions to petty squabbling over men.[4]

The *Merlin*'s motivations for Morgan's actions are not the only starting point for Morgan's slide towards villainy. The contemporaneous French language Vulgate Cycle develops Morgan heavily in *Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac*, as Lancelot becomes another focal point for Morgan. In many versions of the Arthur story, Morgan focuses in on the affair between Lancelot and Guenever and her attempts to reveal it are part of her machinations against Arthur. There are two reasons for this: her previously established hatred for the queen is one, but she also desires Lancelot's love and constantly pursues him. The Vulgate's *Lancelot* (early 13th century) includes many episodes of Morgan's attempts to get Lancelot in her custody and gain his love by means fair or foul.

In the episode "Morgan's Treachery" from the Vulgate's *Lancelot,* After being betrayed by a knight she loved, she set up an enchantment where only a knight who was true in love could enter the vale and leave again. She captured many knights in this way, for many knights were false in their love. Lancelot, however, was true in his love for

[4] If we were to use the Bechdel test on Morgan and Guenever, it would be a sad representation of women in medieval literature.

Guenever and was able to break the enchantment. After, Morgan chided him. While he may have thought he did a good thing rescuing all those knights – "mai as chevaliers naves vous fait se bien non quar il sont deliver si sen porront aler a lor amis charneus qui lez quidoient avoir perdus a tous jors mais" – it would cause untold suffering among the women who would now be wooed falsely again – "mal de ce que vous aves maintes beles dames & maintes beles damoiseles eslonguies de lor amors" (Sommer Vol. 4 123).

While this is painted as "treachery," this is a moment of (failed) empowerment for Morgan. Spurned and betrayed, Morgan sets out to protect other women from meeting the same fate. She is powerful and can do something about it, unlike most women. So she does. Her enchantment is seen as unfair by Lancelot – and of course by the knights she has held captive – but Morgan sees it not as holding men captive but as holding them accountable, and as protecting the women they will go on to hurt. This Morgan is a guardian of women. Her female power is used to (attempt to) empower other women. She defies the masculine hegemony, and this makes her "treacherous" and she must be stopped by Lancelot, the ultimate hero. While she does in the end lose, and this is seen as a good thing by the narrative, she stood up for something she thought was right and fought for agency and for the good of women. Naturally, the narrative *does* see it as a good thing that she was defeated; a woman standing up against the masculine hegemony would be a bad thing for a medieval audience, so her efforts to assert her agency must be stopped and she must be seen as defeated by that same masculine hegemony. Still, the episode shows that Morgan's power is not always used against the crown or for purely nefarious purposes. Here she is using her power in an attempt to protect – there are still aspects of the divine healer in her.

Morgan's love/hate relationship with Lancelot continues throughout the *Livre de Lancelot*. She kidnaps him, not recognizing him, with her friend Sebile and tries to force him to choose between them. Later, she forces him to reveal his identity and when he says unkind things about her, she threatens him – "cest an passer que vous vous en repentires" – to make him take back what he says (Sommer Vol. 5 167). Yet later still, she holds him captive again and spies on him, describing him as "la grant biaute de lui" and the man she loves most in the world (Sommer Vol. 5 218). It is always hot or cold with Morgan when it comes to Lancelot. And, of course, for Lancelot there is always Guenever. While he is Morgan's prisoner – and while she is spying on him – he is painting the walls of his tower with his life story. This will in the end lead to Morgan having her ultimate revenge, because Lancelot cannot help but include the story of his love for Guenever.

Having mostly retired from the narrative, Morgan reappears in *La Mort le Roi Artus*, in the episode "Artus at Morgan's Castle." Arthur comes to stay at a beautiful castle, richer than anything he has ever seen. It turns out that this is Morgan's castle, where she had previously held Lancelot captive. Arthur is pleased to see his sister, despite their earlier enmity. He remarks that he had thought her dead a long time, "et puis quil plaist a dieu que jou vous ai trouee saine" – this is not just a matter of saying he is shocked that she is not dead, but that he is *pleased* to find her healthy (Sommer Vol. 6 238). Although Morgan seems to have calmed down somewhat, saying she has no desire to return to court but that she will only leave her own castle to journey to Avalon, she still desires revenge: "ele haoit Lancelot plus mortelment que nul homme" (Sommer Vol. 6 241). She convinces Arthur to stay, and puts him in the room where Lancelot had painted

his story. This is the final straw that leads Arthur to believe the truth of Lancelot and Guenever's affair, giving Morgan revenge on both Lancelot and Guenever and, ultimately, setting the stage for Arthur's death. However, when the time comes and Arthur does set off for Avalon, as he always does, Morgan is there with him, as she always is. "Morgain la seror le roi Artu par la main," holding him by the hand, she leads him to the boat to Avalon (Sommer Vol. 6 381).

Morgan's relationship with Arthur is one of the most complex and interesting parts of her character. The two are often enemies, but are also inextricably linked by being siblings and part of the same court. Morgan's scheming places her at odds with Arthur, as she is trying to undermine and usually kill her brother. Her reasons vary – a desire for power for herself, revenge against Guenever that just sweeps Arthur in the mix, jealousy over Arthur's power and prominence – but the end results are the same. At the same time, though, the end of the legend often reunites the two as Morgan, like she does in Geoffrey of Monmouth's earlier rendition, shepherds Arthur on to his next destination. Morgan's role as a powerful sorceress and healer leaves her as the natural person to take care of Arthur as he is dying, even though they have been bitter enemies for so long. Arthur's willingness to trust and forgive his sister can be seen as a sign of his innate goodness and excellence of character. Morgan's willingness to take care of Arthur, on the other hand, adds depth to her own depictions. She has been at odds with her brother for so long, yet at the end she is willing to use her powers to help him. What does that say about her? Do these stories reflect a willingness to accept Morgan's earlier deeds on the basis of forgiveness and family reconciliation?

Morgan's character, her desire for agency, and her relationship with Arthur are all developed further in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, written in the late 1400s and perhaps the quintessential Arthurian story. *Le Morte* is now considered one of the most influential Arthur texts, a massive tome that compiles many earlier texts to create what Malory hoped to be a complete, overarching story of Arthur's life and death. Malory includes many earlier episodes, but also expands on the texts to create a rich, full look at the Arthurian story and all its myriad characters and themes, creating a text that stands the test of time to form the basis of much of the modern interpretations of the King Arthur mythos. Morgan's character in *Le Morte* draws on much of the earlier sources, most notably the Vulgate Cycle, but Malory is clearly influenced by the earlier authors and how they had all tried to reconcile with this powerful and dangerous character.

Morgan's first appearance in *Le Morte* is nothing new. She appears when Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father, slew her father the Duke of Cornwall in order to steal his wife, Igraine, Morgan's mother. After Uther marries Igraine, Morgan and her sisters are politically dealt with; her two sisters are married off to Uther's allies and she "was put to school in a nunnery, and there she learned so much that she was a great clerk of necromancy" (Malory 4). She is then also married off to an ally. Here she is referred to as "Morgan le Fay," already given her title and given a degree of respect not granted to her sisters. This is also seen in how she was sent to school while they were only married off. It is unclear why she was treated differently, whether she displayed innate skill or if she was just too young to marry immediately. Whatever the reason, she made great use of her opportunity. Here she adds to her historical prowess in science and herbology, learning "necromancy," showing a clearer link with magic.

Later appearances of Morgan in the narrative will show a stronger and more fully developed Morgan, one who has come into her power and taken her position at the court of King Arthur. This can be seen perhaps most clearly in the Accolon episode, which Malory expands from earlier sources to give a richer picture of Morgan's actions. In the Accolon episode, Morgan seeks to kill Arthur and supplant him with her lover Accolon of Gaul; she also seeks to kill her husband, King Uriens of Gore. This is arguably Morgan's most direct attempt to take the throne, as she overtly attempts to overthrow Arthur, even if it is through Accolon, rather than assaulting him herself. She manipulates the situation to set everything just right in order for the action to play out as she has planned; the men involved are merely puppets that act out her play.

Arthur, Accolon, and Uriens are hunting, and Morgan enchants them, setting the stage for a duel between Accolon and Arthur where neither knows who they are fighting. Accolon ends up with Arthur's enchanted sword, Excalibur, and its magical scabbard, which prevents the wielder from bleeding, thanks to Morgan's machinations; Arthur believes he still wields Excalibur because one of Morgan's ladies had given him a sword that looked like it and said "Morgan le Fay sendeth here your sword for great love" (Malory 115). Their duel is fierce, and Arthur is severely wounded without his sword, but another powerful woman, the Lady of the Lake, intervenes, returning Excalibur and its scabbard to Arthur, allowing him to defeat Accolon.[5] As he is dying from his wounds, Accolon confesses, not knowing it is Arthur to whom he speaks. Morgan's motivations

[5] It is notable that although this is ostensibly a duel between two powerful men, what it really comes down to is the infighting between two magical women. Morgan's plan would have succeeded and Arthur would have lost if not for the intervention of the Lady of the Lake, who intervened for love of Arthur – one woman's hate versus another woman's love decided the fate of the kingdom.

here are different than in earlier works; according to Accolon, “ye shall understand King Arthur is the man in the world that [Morgan] most hateth, because he is most of worship and of prowess of any of her blood” (Malory 118). Malory seems to say that Morgan hates Arthur because of simple jealousy, which is supported by her plan to take his throne with Accolon by her side. She feels that she is more deserving of power, and therefore she is going to take that power for herself.

This is supported by the way the incident continues to play out. After Arthur defeats Accolon, he retires to a church to recover from his wounds. Morgan, furious that her plan failed and mourning for Accolon, goes to the church to exact her revenge. At this point, she is at a low. Arthur has won, Accolon is gone, and she did not even manage to kill Uriens, having been stopped by her son Uwaine. Morgan has to reassert her power. She does this by going directly to Arthur, no longer working with an intermediary. She found Arthur asleep in the convent and bullied her way in to see him, and stole the scabbard, since she could not get Excalibur without waking him and, presumably, getting killed. She rides away from the convent and is chased by Arthur. When she knew she could not escape with the scabbard, she threw it in a lake, crying “whatsoever come of me, my brother shall not have this scabbard” (Malory 124). Morgan here values her revenge over her own life. While she does eventually escape, using her magical powers to shapeshift and hide among a valley of stones, her initial thought is not escape but to hinder Arthur and take away one of his most prized possessions. This is both petty revenge – he has killed her lover and thwarted her plans, so she will get back at him by stealing his stuff – and a clever attack – the scabbard saves him from wounds, so without

the scabbard Arthur has now become vulnerable. Even when she is gripped with vengeful rage, Morgan still manages to undermine Arthur in the most precise and deadly way.

The Accolon episode concludes with another assassination attempt against Arthur, showing how Morgan's relationship with him fully devolved. Morgan sends a messenger to the king with a richly decorated mantle as a gift, with the message that she "desireth that ye should take this gift of her; and in what thing she hath offended you, she will amend it at your own pleasure" (Malory 126). Arthur is pleased at the gift, and seems to not find it suspicious that Morgan has just tried to have him killed and then stolen one of his prized possessions. Instead, it seems like this is normal behavior; she has hurt him, now she sends him a gift, so all will be well. It is again thanks to the intervention of the Lady of the Lake that he is saved. The mantle is cursed[6], and the Lady of the Lake tells Arthur to have the messenger wear it to prove this. She does, and dies brutally, showing Arthur that Morgan's attempt at "reconciliation" was merely a ploy.

Three times in a row Morgan attempts to hurt Arthur – she has Accolon attempt to kill him in a duel, she sneaks in on him while he is sleeping to try and steal Excalibur and the scabbard, and she sends him a cursed mantle. Each time she uses her position and power in Arthur's court and life to gain access to him and to enact her plots. She is able to have Accolon fight against Arthur by sending her lover and her husband out hunting with her brother. Arthur uses the false sword because he believes Morgan has sent it to him and trusts that her "great love" gives her the desire to protect him. When Arthur is convalescing in the convent, Morgan is able to get in because of her position as royalty

[6] The cursed mantle has shades of Euripides' *Medea* and her use of a cursed mantle to murder her husband's new bride. The two stories feature powerful women who use magic to achieve a greater power and to enact revenge on a man who they feel has wronged them.

and kin to Arthur. When Arthur awakes to find his scabbard gone, he is told that "his sister, Queen Morgan" had taken it (Malory 123). He is angry with the guards, but they defend themselves, saying they "durst not disobey your sister's commandment" (Malory 123). She is a queen and she is Arthur's sister, therefore she has the power to command. With the mantle, her power as a sorceress comes into play. She is able to curse the garment in order to plot her revenge. But her position as Arthur's sister is still important. It gains her messenger entrance into the court, and it allows Arthur to believe that she still desires reconciliation.

Arthur himself wants to believe in Morgan, so he does. Her connection to him is important – as his sister, she is a major part of his life. But she is also someone he trusts and relies on. He tells Accolon that "God knoweth I have honoured her and worshipped her more than all my kin, and more have I trusted her than mine own wife and all my kin after" (Malory 119). Morgan is not just a sister to Arthur. She is an advisor, someone he can count on. She is entrusted with his scabbard, a charge of great importance, something that she uses to her advantage. Arthur raises Morgan to a position of great importance in the court and she uses this power against him. It would seem that, given power, she has been corrupted and seeks only to gain more. If there is a lesson there, that lesson would be that giving women power and authority makes them turn against those who have given them the power. They will crave more and they will be jealous of those who have more power than them. Morgan has too much power to begin with, and she must be stopped before she can achieve her end goal, which luckily she is in this episode.

But Malory grants Morgan more credit than that. There is depth to her and her actions (and *re*actions). She has real emotions, greater than just jealousy or anger. She

seems to genuinely love Accolon; she mourns his death when she hears, though she cannot show it outwardly. After Accolon dies, Morgan "was so sorrowful that near her heart to-brast" (Malory 123). In a later episode, another lover of hers, Sir Hemison, is also killed, and "when Morgan le Fay saw him dead she made great sorrow out of reason" (Malory 430). So it is clear that, according to Malory, Morgan is capable of having deep romantic feelings for the men she is involved with. This correlates with the previous sources – consider Morgan's actions in "Morgan's Treachery" in the Vulgate *Lancelot*, for one. She would not have acted the way she did if she had not had her heart broken in the first place. Her enmity against Gonnore for breaking off her affair with Guyomar also shows deep romantic connections.

Of course, this also extends to Lancelot. In a direct reference to his source, Malory remarks that "as the French book saith, Queen morgan loved Sir Launcelot best, and ever she desired him, and he would never love her nor do nothing at her request" (Malory 428). This is another reason besides a lust for power that drives Morgan's actions in *Le Morte*; like in the Vulgate Cycle, she is likely motivated to create mischief at court due to her feelings of being spurned. Her actions to Guenever showcase that she is still engaged in that mischief. In an episode that sparks drama in Cornwall in the book of Sir Tristram, Morgan sends a knight with a horn that "had such a virtue that there might be no lady nor gentlewoman drink of that horn but if she were true to her husband, and if she were false she should spill all the drink" (Malory 335). Naturally, she is still trying to reveal Guenever's unfaithfulness, though her actions have other ramifications. Morgan also tries to capture Lancelot in a later episode, along with Sir Tristram. When Sir Gawaine appears to stop her, he is appalled at her behavior, remarking "for shame…

that ever such false treason should be wrought or used in a queen, and a king's sister, and a king and queen's daughter" (Malory 396). By this point in time, Morgan has fallen out of favor with the court. Her actions have shamed her, but she still holds prominence due to her position as part of the royal family.

The family connection is what is perhaps the most confusing part of Morgan's story. In the end, once again when it comes down to it, the sibling relationship is restored at Arthur's death. Following his mortal injury, Arthur is taken by Sir Bedivere to "a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen" (Malory 923). Bedivere watches as "in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me?" (Malory 924). Lifelong enmity means nothing when it comes to mortal injury. Morgan's numerous murder attempts are forgotten, and Arthur once again is entrusted into Morgan's care, though this time he is the one doing the entrusting. It is not the same as Geoffrey of Monmouth's queen of the isle of apples, for this time there is a much deeper relationship between Arthur and Morgan. But while one could argue that Morgan has been degraded by the way that centuries of authors tried to whittle her down, the opposite case could also be made.

Here, Arthur entrusts himself into the care of his sister. In the *Vita Merlini*, the unconscious king is given over into the care of a benevolent but largely anonymous sorceress. She is powerful and impressive, to be sure. But she is also impersonal and remote. In Malory, Morgan has come far, and some might say she has *fallen* far. The benevolent and powerful sorceress is now a lusty, scheming, continuously thwarted queen who is motivated by spite and jealousy to cause mischief. She is the epitome of a

scare tactic, the reason why women should not be given power. Yet, at the end, she is still the healer. She is still the one given care of Arthur's life and body and health. And it means *more* in Malory, or in the Vulgate Cycle, where she is a more developed character. It means more for Arthur to make the decision himself, rather than to be unconsciously deposited by his retainers. And it means more that his decision is to trust his duplicitous, often murderous sister. Their relationship has been problematic from the start, and he has been betrayed multiple times. Yet at the end, as he is dying, it is to Morgan he turns. He has lost nearly everyone who matters to him, everyone he trusted – he mourns the loss of Lancelot and Gawain at the beginning of this chapter. But he still has Morgan. And he still, despite everything, trusts Morgan, and *chooses* to trust Morgan, at his lowest and weakest point.

Maybe that is the lesson that Malory wants us to take – a lesson of redemption, of the power of trust and love, familial love, to overcome whatever has past come between two people. It reflects what Elizabeth Bryan says about Malory – that he was "a man of *ideals* who believed in courage and loyalty" (Malory v, emphasis mine). As Malory was responding to a time where "the problem of kin fighting kin" was the issue of the day, perhaps he sought to make a final statement about the power of reconciliation. This also goes back to Larrington's argument about "the consequences of inserting Morgan into Arthur's family" (29). As Larrington argues, "whatever the conflict between the two, from the early thirteenth century onwards, Morgan is always a comforting presence on the barge that bears Arthur away from his last battle" (30). This comforting presence that links Morgan to Arthur is the image Malory chooses to leave us with. Not the brutal, murderous magician – "as false a sorceress and witch as then was living" – or the lusty,

jealous spurned woman (Malory 336). No, the image Malory leaves us with is closer to her *Vita Merlini* appearance; "even in Malory some traces of her former, more benevolent character remain" (Cobb). But, like he does with most sources, Malory expands and improves upon the original. The Morgan of the *Vita*, distant and impersonal, is now a loving sister bearing her brother away to a healing Avalon. That is the final image we have of this powerful woman – still powerful, incredibly complex, always a healer.

It is a long road from the *Vita Merlini* to *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgan takes quite the tumble from divine femininity to power-hungry, scheming, jealous sister. The path Morgan takes mirrors the long progression of societal views regarding women in power. As society began to view women more critically, Morgan began to be viewed less as a benevolent healing figure and more as a threat. She is a threat to Arthur's throne, as a royal challenger, she is a threat to the masculine hegemony, as a woman who exercises agency, and she is a threat to Christianized society, as a woman with magical powers and a representation of a pagan past. As such, she must be undermined and diminished, shown in a negative light, so that audiences understand that all of these qualities mean that she is, inherently, *bad*.

Maureen Fries argues that Morgan's character progression shows extreme misogyny that developed across the medieval world. She claims that "this character elaborations, incidentally coinciding with the growth of woman-hatred in the latter Middle Ages… turns Morgan from a nurturing ruler of a sea-girt paradise into a destructive sorceress who entraps men sexually rather than healing them" (Fries *Female Heroes* 13). Fries argues that this misogyny is what turns Morgan into "the most extreme villain of Arthurian romance" (*Female Heroes* 14). There are certainly other villains in

the King Arthur story. Morgan is not even the one to ultimately kill Arthur, although one may argue that by stealing the scabbard that would have prevented him from being mortally wounded, she is in part responsible for his death. With Mordred the one to deal the final blow, why does Morgan stand out as such a prominent villain? It is because, according to Fries, she "holds values which are not necessarily those of the male culture in which she must exist," qualities that make Morgan a "female counter-hero" (*Female Heroes* 12). Morgan is not simply a villain – she is someone who is counter to the hero.

Spivack and Staples argue that Morgan's character degradation is due to the Christianization of society in the medieval era. Arguing that her earlier divine appearance is no longer welcome in a Christian society, they claim:

> "The reasons for Morgan's degeneration are complex, but one clear fact emerges from the emphasis on her healing powers. As a feature of the goddess, associated with the Wise Woman, this is a benign gift, even when associated with death… In a Christian milieu, however, the arts of healing with herbs and other natural remedies became in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance associated with older women accused of witchcraft." (32-33)

Morgan is a sorceress; it is one of the roots of her power. She is a healer, one of the defining facets of her character. These things, according to Spivack and Staples, make her an outcast in the newly Christian societies.

Serenity Young agrees. She claims that "one of Morgan's functions in the text is to be a counterpoint to the new, idealized Christian woman of the period" (184). Young looks at the society in which these texts were being produced and argues that the process

of social conversion to Christianity "took several centuries to complete and entailed a change in, among other things, the status of women, a change that is frequently understood to have been a reduction of status" (182). This correlates to the depictions of Morgan le Fay; as the depictions changed over the course of centuries, she experienced a reduction of status. She goes from a divine ruler of a paradisical island to a scheming, jealous royal. For Young, like Spivack and Staples, Morgan's role as a sorceress is an inherent part of this reduction in status. For the Christianizing societies, magic was something to be looked on negatively. "For instance," Young says, "the frequent association of women with magic and the supernatural among both the Norse and Celtic peoples suggests suspicions about women and a fear of their power that contributed to negative assessments of womankind in general and the imposition of limitations on their rights and privileges" (183). Magic and femininity were linked in medieval society, according to Young. Morgan's character, as a magical woman, represented all that was to be feared about women's power. Thus it was natural and *necessary* for her power to be limited and for her to be undermined in the narrative.[7]

No matter how the narrative treats her, however, Morgan remains a powerful woman. Even as the story attempts to undermine her, it still grants her a degree of power that no other woman in the story manages. Dorsey Armstrong notes that "while Igrayne, Morgause, and Guenevere are all noble-born and become the wives of kings, none of these women can enjoy and wield power in the way or to the degree that Morgan does,

[7] Interestingly, another magical female character exists in the narrative, however, the Lady of the Lake is not demonized as Morgan is. Morgan's character degradation makes her a villain; why does the Lady of the Lake get to remain a hero? One argument that could be made is because she is a safer character to have magical powers – she lacks the agency and social power that Morgan has, so she is not as much of a threat.

nor do they attempt to" (59). Morgan is *the* powerful woman in the Arthurian story. This makes her inherently the villain, because she challenges the Christian male hegemony. But it also makes her a character with a degree of agency that few other characters in the story have. Even the knights are subservient to Arthur and must do his will. Morgan stands under no one. She does what she wishes. She is not always successful – in fact, she almost always loses, because the narrative says that, as the villain, she must lose so that Arthur can win. But she still shows what it looks like for a character to be powerful and resistant. She shows what it looks like for a *woman* to be powerful and resistant. Armstrong notes that "Morgan's power and status are exponentially amplified through the multiplicity of relationships and sources – marriage, kinship, witchcraft – from which her power derives" (59). Morgan takes advantage of all her privileges. She is the sister and wife of kings, she is royalty, she is a powerful sorceress. She uses this power for her own ends, and stands as someone who does what she will. It is a strong display of agency for a woman in the medieval era.

Naturally, this means she must be treated as the villain; as women began to be viewed more suspiciously, she is downgraded from the feminine divine to the femme fatale. This is not something that is unique to medieval authors; female empowerment is often seen as a threat to society, and therefore strong female characters are hindered or mistreated in some way. For Morgan, the way to restrain this powerful woman safely into the hegemonic society was to show that she *could not* be restrained, and that that made her dangerous. She was explicitly othered to show what happens when you give women power. Morgan's demonization was both a natural reflection of its time and a driving force of the social factors that created and continued these negative views of women.

Arthurian literature was very popular in medieval times, and these stories would have been very commonplace. Thus, the idea of Morgan as both a woman with power and a woman to be feared/scorned would have been a common viewpoint. As popular culture always does, this would have seeped into the collective consciousness, furthering the idea that women should not be given power. As the most prominent female character in the Arthurian legends, that does not speak well to the representation women were getting in the folklore. On the other hand, even as Morgan remains a warning about the dangers of women in power, she still remains just that – a view of a woman with power. As a nebulous, sometimes pure evil, sometimes shades-of-grey character, Morgan offers up a view of a woman who challenges milquetoast ideas of what female characters can look like.

CHAPTER TWO

INTO THE MISTS: *THE MISTS OF AVALON*

Morgan le Fay as a character originates in a very complicated, often contradictory set of texts in the medieval canon. She is never just one set thing, villain or hero or counter-hero, but a complex and hard to label character. Much of this owes to the multiplicity of sources and the development of these sources over time, drawing from each other and creating a palimpsestic image of who this character is. Moving into the modern age, however, as sources began to be more individualized and discrete, Morgan began to become more defined. Each text draws from the medieval canon, of course, but they are able to draw what the creator wants and discard the rest to create their *own* Morgan, to put forth *their* vision of who she should be and what her role is in the story. One creator, Marion Zimmer Bradley, does just that in 1983's *The Mists of Avalon*, and created a Morgan that would become a foundation for later depictions of Morgan le Fay as she moved into the turn of the century and beyond. Emerging in the midst of second-wave feminism and a burgeoning neo-pagan movement, *The Mists of Avalon* shows a Morgan who embodies Maureen Fries' counter-hero[8] as she fights against a Christianizing, masculinizing society and asserts her freedom and independence.

[8] Fries defines the counter-hero in her work "Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition" as "the female counter-hero holds values which are not necessarily those of the male culture in which she must exist. Her actions are as likely to hurt the hero as to help him" (12). See Chapter One for more on Fries.

Charlotte Spivack calls *The Mists of Avalon* "probably the most ambitious retelling of the Arthurian legend in the twentieth century" and describes it as "colorfully detailed as a medieval tapestry" (*Merlin's Daughters* 149). In fact, Spivack goes further, saying that *Mists* is "more than a retelling" but instead "a profound revisioning. Imaginatively conceived, intricately structured, and richly peopled, it offers a brilliant reinterpretation of the traditional material from the point of view of the major female characters" (*Merlin's Daughters* 149). *Mists* is a massive, nearly 1,000-page novel that seeks to retell nearly the whole of the Arthur story from the perspective not of the king himself or of his knights, or even from the point of view of Merlin, but from those characters whose lives and thoughts have long been overlooked: the women of the court and particularly of Arthur's family. What makes *Mists* so dynamic and compelling is that it revisits those famous stories and settings but asks a vital question: what about the women? Where were the women behind the scenes, and what were their experiences, thoughts, desires, as they went through the same circumstances we see in the medieval retellings of the knights' tales. By giving us the perspective of the women, Bradley opens up a new lens through which to view the Arthurian story.

There are several women who have prominent roles in *Mists*, with perspective sections giving us insight into Gwenhwyfar, Viviane, who at the start of the novel holds the title of Lady of the Lake, and Igraine, mother of Morgaine and Arthur, among others. But the novel is framed, both structurally and narratively, by Morgaine, "who was in later days called Morgan le Fay" (Bradley xi). Morgaine – daughter of the Duke of Cornwall, sister and advisor to King Arthur, successor to the Lady of the Lake – is a character at the intersection of many paths of power, not least her own connection to the magic of Avalon

and her position in the pagan religion that used to rule the land. Her story in *Mists* reflects Bradley's own perspectives on paganism and Christianity, female empowerment, and the need to tell women's stories.

Morgaine is, first and foremost, a pagan character, and her changing role in the story – from wise advisor to scheming betrayer to background character to righteous redeemer – reflects both the medieval canon's inability to comfortably categorize her and the continuing inability to reckon with women who hold power in society. While Bradley ultimately seems to settle on a view of Morgaine as someone who holds power comfortably but has suffered greatly because of it, this still reflects a potentially negative outlook on women with power. However, by giving Morgaine her own voice and the ability to tell her own story – literally, as Morgaine interrupts the narrative at times to present, in first person narration, her reminiscent perspective on events – Bradley shows what happens when we move from the medieval (male) sentiment and put women center stage. This gives women a different sense of power – agency in telling their own stories.

Morgaine's story is told through her experiences, but it is primarily her relationships that shape her character progression. From the start, her relationship with her mother sets the stage. Igraine is actually the first character whose perspective we see in the novel (aside from Morgaine's first person prologue). In fact, Bradley spends the first hundred or so pages laying out the story of how Arthur came into being and all that went along with that, not from the point of view of Uther Pendragon or Merlin, but from Igraine, manipulated by her sister, the Lady of the Lake, and her father, the Merlin. However, this section is vital in showcasing how different Bradley will be from the medieval authors. Right off the bat, Bradley shows that she is going to develop the

foundation that earlier storytellers set in terms of story beats and from there shine a light on characters' thoughts and feelings, their motivations and desires, by developing this oft overlooked character. Morgaine's relationship with her mother would be complicated by Igraine's passionate relationship with Uther, leading to a future struggle with motherhood, mother figures, and her own identity as a woman.

Morgaine would next find a mother figure in her aunt Viviane, the Lady of the Lake. Viviane is High Priestess of Avalon, the Holy Isle. After an assassination attempt on Arthur when he is six, both children are sent away from court to keep them safe. Uther, who is nominally Christian, considers sending Morgaine to a nunnery, but Viviane has her sights on Morgaine as her successor and convinces him to send her to Avalon instead. Given that Uther is not overly concerned with the religious implications, and that Christianity has not asserted its hold on the land yet, Morgaine is sent, pleasing Viviane. Morgaine has the blood of the fairy people, and has already shown magical predisposition, such as natural use of the Sight, a prophetic ability. Viviane has high hopes for her, and raises her to be a priestess in Avalon. Morgaine learns, just as she does in the myths, herblore and healing and astronomy, and hones her ability to use the Sight. Morgaine reflects on her training: "How do you write of the making of a priestess? What is not obvious is secret" (Bradley 136). As someone who is "priestess-born," as Viviane puts it, Morgaine is a natural, and in seven years she is a fully trained priestess of Avalon. It is, in many ways, an expansion on the medieval stories that mention Morgan going away and learning the magic skills she will later be famous for. However, it is of note that Morgaine is not sent away to a nunnery as she often is in the medieval canon; in fact, she is *explicitly not* sent to a nunnery, the choice is actively made not to, but to send her

away for pagan schooling instead. In this way, Bradley asserts the pagan ideology over the Christianization that will later plague both the land and the novel.

Viviane, for Morgaine, represents her pagan roots. She represents a mother figure, but also a divine mother, a goddess figure. As the Lady of the Lake, Viviane is removed from being Morgaine's aunt, though they have some closeness. This would later be a burden to Morgaine, but when she came to Avalon with Viviane as a child, she only saw a divine figure who rescued her from a dull and Christian court life. She swears her life to the Goddess, but also to Viviane, as they are one in her eyes: "I am in the hands of the Goddess … and in yours …" (Bradley 136). Morgaine puts her faith in Viviane, who admits freely that "it may be that [she] will have tasks for [Morgaine] as cruel as those the Great Mother has laid on" herself " (Bradley 136). It is only later that Morgaine will realize that Viviane had already a cruel task in mind for Morgaine, had had a cruel task in mind for Morgaine for years, and had already made peace with the fact that "a time will come when you will hate me as much as you love me now" (Bradley 136).

Morgaine's break with Viviane will cause, in many ways, a break with her paganism. Just as Viviane represents to her the divine Mother, breaking from Viviane must mean a break from the religion that has steadied her all her years in Avalon. However, a breach in trust between Morgaine and Viviane sends her running from Avalon, and from her priestess roots. Morgaine's convictions are tested when her virginity is offered up to the Goddess in the Great Marriage, where the Horned One and the Virgin Huntress are joined together to reaffirm the commitment to the land and ensure peace and bounty. Morgaine is offered up by Viviane, but does not know the extent of her aunt's manipulation. She finds the ritual invigorating, and gives herself fully to the

Horned One when he comes to her, "dazed, terrified, exalted, only half conscious… she felt the life force take them both" (Bradley 178-79). Yet in the morning, the two are horrified to realize that the Horned One is Arthur, who she has not seen in years, and that they have committed incest together. Arthur is more upset, and Morgaine attempts to comfort him, turning to her religious convictions: "don't cry. We are in the hands of her who brought us here. It doesn't matter. We are not brother and sister here, we are man and woman before the Goddess, no more" (Bradley 181). Still, "even as she soothed him, despair beat at her" (Bradley 181).

Morgaine's paganism leads her to be more accepting of what has happened than Arthur's ostensible Christianity, but she is still shaken by the events, and does not know how to reconcile this act with the religion that has bolstered her all these years. As she holds Arthur, trying to give him comfort, she seeks her own comfort: "*why did you do this to us? Great Mother, Lady, why?* And she did not know whether she was calling to Viviane, or to the Goddess" (Bradley 181, emphasis in original). Again, Viviane is linked explicitly with the divine Mother, but in this case, this is a figure who has betrayed Morgaine, not guided or comforted her. Vivian is determined, telling Morgaine that she had warned Morgaine that one day she would see Viviane in a different light. If Viviane is a reflection of the divine, it is a reflection of the duality of divinity, how the Mother can hurt as well as help, for her own purposes. That leads to Morgaine's break with paganism, at least for a time, when she discovers she is pregnant with Arthur's child. Realizing that this was all planned, and that Viviane plans to use her child, Morgaine leaves Avalon, seemingly forever. In a final confrontation with Viviane, it all comes to a head: "'that day will never come!' Morgaine cried out, 'for here and now, I tell you that

you have worked upon me and played with me like a puppet for the last time! Never again – never!'" (Bradley 228). This exclamation plays true; Viviane never sees Morgaine again, though in later years, when Morgaine takes on the mantle of Lady of the Lake herself, she thinks fondly on her aunt again.

Leaving Avalon – leaving Viviane – will put Morgaine into two of her biggest female relationships for the rest of the novel, one with her aunt Morgause and one with her sister-in-law Gwenhwyfar. Both are complex, for very different reasons, and strain Morgaine and her convictions. Morgause is simpler. She is, seemingly, a simple woman, who likes fine things and handsome men. She is lecherous and good-natured. She takes in the pregnant Morgaine after she leaves Avalon, giving her a place to recuperate and rest as she goes through her pregnancy. Morgause, who had often taken care of Morgaine when she was a small child, is a surrogate mother-figure for Morgaine – again seeking the maternal care she did not receive from Igraine. Morgause has given birth several times and is able to give Morgaine advice and help her with a very difficult pregnancy. However, Morgause's husband Lot is a political schemer, and points out that Morgaine's son would have a claim on the throne if something happened to Arthur – even not knowing that the child is actually Arthur's, just as a child of Arthur's sibling. Since Lot and Morgause's son Gawaine is currently Arthur's heir, Lot suggests that something could "happen" to the baby, securing Gawaine's spot in the line of succession.

Morgause is appalled, but also ambitious. After Morgaine has a very difficult birth and lies resting, Morgause holds the baby and thinks "*If I want to see Gawaine on the throne, this child stands in his way*" (Bradley 249, emphasis in original). She thinks about how much she cares for Morgaine, and how she could not harm the child, but then

she wonders about his father, and she suspects Viviane's son Lancelet. Morgause resents Viviane, so that spills over to Lancelet; "yes, Lancelet's son she could abandon to death without a qualm" (Bradley 249). Desperate to know who the father is, Morgause uses her limited skills in magic to perform a ritual, and finds out that Arthur is the father. Morgaine, near death, curses Morgause to keep her silent, then reaches for her baby, but Morgause sees a new avenue for power and keeps the child from her. "It was just as well to have Arthur's firstborn son, the son he dared not acknowledge, feel the highest loyalty to Lot and Morgause as his truest parents… *this will be Lot's fosterling, and we will always have a weapon against the High King*" (Bradley 251, emphasis in original). Where Lot sees a threat, Morgause sees an opportunity, a tool. And although she loves Morgaine like a daughter, she does not hesitate to steal the child from Morgaine in order to gain that tool from herself. Just like Viviane, the mother figure Morgaine has reached out to has betrayed her, forsaken her need for comfort. In this case, Morgause does not represent the Great Mother, but she is still *a* mother for Morgaine.

Morgaine reaches out next – or is forced to reach out next – not for a mother but for a sister. In one of the most complex relationships in the entire novel, Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar cohabitate in Camelot, clashing as pure opposites and representations of the dual natures of the land. The relationship between Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar can be seen as, in some ways, the thesis of the novel. Bradley's ultimate goal in showing the dangers of Christianizing society and pushing out paganist community can be seen in the clashes between Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar, and the power struggles between their communities in Camelot. Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar are the primary voices that provide the perspective of the text, showing two very oppositional looks at the story as it unfolds

and bounces between their voiced sections. They are complete foils. Morgaine is small and dark, Gwenhwyfar is tall and light; Morgaine is pagan, Gwenhwyfar is pious Christian; Morgaine is fearless and bold, Gwenhwyfar is timid and afraid of everything. Yet they circle each other and mirror each other, and it is through their interactions with each other and their interactions with the men in the novel that much of the story – and the creation and downfall of Camelot – unfolds.

This dynamic between Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar does have roots in the mythology; while the myths primarily focus on the doings of the male characters, Morgan and Guenever and their oppositional relationship are driving forces in a lot of the conflict in Arthur's story. Much of this conflict does stem from their contradictory yet similar natures, as women struggling for selfhood when the medieval canon does not lend itself well to women having that agency. As highborn, well-married women, they enjoy more power than most, yet they still face obstacles. Their representation in the myths stems from the conflicting feelings the authors have about women who have power and agency. Charlotte Spivack and Rebecca Lynne Staples note that "in medieval literature both Morgan and Guenevere vacillated between divinity and depravity" (*Company of Camelot* 45). Pushing up against their male-dominated societies, especially with regards to romantic and sexual agency, Morgan and Guenever are sticking points in the myth, and Bradley draws upon this basis to create a rich and compelling narrative and a complex relationship between these two characters that really drives the story in *Mists* more than anything else. If the medieval canon refuses to give these characters agency, Bradley asks: what happens if we did give them agency? How would that change the story – or would it at all? The power these two women have reflect the powers at hand in the

struggle they represent for Camelot and for Arthur. Morgaine, powerful pagan priestess, on the one hand, and Gwenhwyfar, pious meek Christian queen, on the other, do battle not just for Arthur's heart and mind but for the very soul of the land. This is the driving conflict of the novel, and the conflict between Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine encapsulates that.

The Christianization of Camelot is one of the biggest storylines in *Mists*. Arthur was put on the throne as High King by Vivian and the Merlin Taliesin, who wanted someone from the old line of Avalon. That was why they maneuvered things so that Igraine and Uther came together and had a son. By joining the new, Roman line with the old, Celtic line, they are able to, hopefully, unite the land. Part of Arthur's crowning is to pledge himself to "deal fairly with Druid as with Christian," and to "be guided by the sacred magic of those who have set [him] on the throne" (Bradley 203). This takes place in a ceremony where Viviane, High Priestess of Avalon, presents him with the holy regalia of Avalon, and gives him Excalibur, but only if he swears his loyalty. She also gives him a scabbard that Morgaine made, woven with magic to protect him from blood loss – similar to the legends, only here the scabbard that Morgan le Fay steals in the legend is one that she has made herself.

From the start, then, Arthur's rule is one founded by, enmeshed with, and blessed by Avalon and the Druid people. He made the Great Marriage, he swore to support Avalon and the Old Religion, and he flies the Pendragon banner as a sign of his loyalty to all people in his kingdom. This is what Viviane and Taliesin hoped and schemed for. But it does not last forever. When Arthur marries Gwenhwyfar, he finds himself with divided loyalties. He has his loyalties to Avalon and the Druids. But his wife is a devoted and

almost fanatical Christian, and very upset at his ties to the Old Religion. She begins to chip away at his pagan ties, and over time wears him down.

This is the primary conflict of the novel. The kingdom of Camelot undergoes many changes in Arthur's reign. He overcomes many incursions from Saxon invaders, bringing peace to the island. He establishes a system of knighthood and a sense of equality in the Round Table. But the biggest change is the Christianization of the land. This was in a sense inevitable. Christianity was already encroaching. Avalon, we learn at the start of the novel, was already retreating from the real world. The many priests we meet in the novel are harsh and exacting, and even Igraine, raised in Avalon, becomes Christian when she marries Uther.[9] Arthur's court begins egalitarian, with counselors Taliesin and Bishop Patricius standing by his sides. But over time, the court becomes more and more Christian and even the Merlin begins to give way to the new religion.

Much of this, perhaps even most of this, is due to Gwenhwyfar. She, like Camelot, starts off with a strong Christian presence and only becomes more devoted as the novel progresses. Raised in a Christian household, Gwenhwyfar is sent to a convent for schooling. She finds herself very happy at the convent, and would have liked to stay there, but her father has other ambitions for her, namely marrying the High King. Gwen, who is very timid, is not happy about being sold off for power and connections, but feels it is her duty, something that has been engrained into her being by the church. "Gwenhwyfar thought she would smother with the rage that was choking her. But no, she

[9] This is revealed later to have been a ploy, rather than true belief. As she lays dying in a convent, she confesses (to Gwenhwyfar, of all people) "I put aside the Sight to have peace in my home, since Uther was a follower of the Christ" but when Gwenhwyfar chides her for speaking thus in a nunnery, she exclaims "the Goddess is beyond all your other Gods" (Bradley 360).

must not be angry, it was not seemly to be angry… Women had to be especially careful to do the will of God because it was through a woman that mankind had fallen into the Original Sin, and every woman must be aware that it was her work to atone for that Original Sin" (Bradley 268). Gwenhwyfar's natural emotions are smothered by her religious upbringing. While she bristles at being "part of the furniture" that her father sends to Camelot, she thinks that this is "her punishment for being like Eve, sinful, filled with rage and rebellion against the will of God" (Bradley 268). This early upbringing, which teaches Gwenhwyfar to will "herself into semiconsciousness" rather than feel her feelings, will have massive ramifications for not just herself but the whole of Camelot and all its inhabitants (Bradley 268).

This indoctrination, this deep-seeded belief that women are inherently sinful and that Christianity is the only way to preserve not just humanity but the very land itself, drives the struggle with Morgaine. The two fight for the heart of Arthur and the heart of Camelot, and their struggle will ultimately bring about the doom of both. Gwenhwyfar seems to win, initially. She succeeds in convincing Arthur to Christianize his court, little by little. First he gives up the Pendragon banner that was a signifier of his allegiance to the Old Religion. This causes some upset with some of his people, but for the most part does not have much impact on the kingdom. He sets aside the banner before a major battle and takes up the cross instead, using a banner that Gwenhwyfar made for him to represent the Holy Virgin. When Arthur wins the battle and ushers in an era of peace, Gwenhwyfar takes it as a sign that Christianizing the land was the right thing to do and that she is not just morally correct but that she is doing the will of God.

This urges her to continue pushing against the Old Religion and its presence in Camelot and its influence over Arthur. She is resentful of the Merlin, first Taliesin and then his successor Kevin. She has a special hatred for Kevin, who is disabled and has deformities; she blames him for her miscarriage and it is that event that she used to convince Arthur to carry her banner. She attempts to convince Arthur to get rid of the Beltane fires, and to cut down the sacred groves. Heartlessly, Viviane is murdered at court, Gwenhwyfar declares that it is God's will because she was a heathen. Viviane was a sinful woman, flagrantly impure, pagan, assertive, and everything Gwenhwyfar saw as evil, so her death was nothing to grieve. Where a good Christian might mourn the loss of life, Gwenhwyfar sees this instead as righteous punishment. There is no connection or community, either. Gwenhwyfar feels no link to Viviane as another woman in the court of Camelot, nor as a kinswoman. Viviane is so removed from what Gwenhwyfar feels a woman ought to be that she does not get the respect Gwenhwyfar is willing to give her fellow women – respect she struggles to give even Morgaine, who has left behind Avalon by the time she comes to Camelot.

Though Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar have a brittle but civil relationship for a time, however, when Viviane is murdered Morgaine is compelled to action. Little by little, she has watched Gwenhwyfar chip away at the conventions and rituals of the Old Religion – the religion Vivian embodied, the religion *she* was supposed to embody before she left her home in Avalon. What had once been an egalitarian and open-minded court at Camelot had been turned into a rigid, distinctly Christian – hierarchical, patriarchal, punitive – court. It is one where Morgaine feels Arthur has gone wrong, and she begins to fight back. Here is where Morgaine begins to resemble the scheming creature of the

medieval legend. However, Bradley's Morgaine is not a *simple* scheming creature. She has reasons for what she does, and those reasons stem from her pagan roots and her connections to Avalon and the Old Religion, the religion of the Great Mother and the mother she strives to find. She feels like she has to push back against the Christianization of the court or else the Old Religion – and Avalon – will be lost forever and so, in essence, will she. This comes back to the central crux of the matter – the dangers of encroaching Christianity taking over pagan spheres. By showing Morgaine fighting back, Bradley shows that this powerful, mythic figure is the icon of pagan resistance.

Notably, this all comes out through another important relationship, and one drawn directly from the medieval canon, though strongly developed in the Bradley text. However, this is not a female relationship – here we enter Bradley's extended version of the Accolon episode. For half the novel Morgaine has been a mostly passive character. She followed Viviane's will, then she lived peacefully, if unhappily, at court after leaving Avalon. After an experience in the fairy country, however, she returns to court changed. She finds a charming young man, Accolon, and thinks to marry him, but Gwenhwyfar, who has learned of the child Morgaine bore to Arthur after the Great Marriage, arranges for her to marry Accolon's elderly father Uriens instead. Morgaine goes along with it, but begins to yearn for more. After a pagan ceremony to bless the lands, which is still allowed in Wales, where Morgaine and Uriens rule, Morgaine finds herself reawakening to her earlier training. "I am a priestess still. Strange how I am suddenly sure of that again, after all these years, when even the dreams of Avalon are gone," she muses while rubbing Uriens' feet (Bradley 581). She mourns the lack of influence she has, realizing that Viviane meant for her to have more power over Arthur, "yet, in her folly and pride,

she had let him fall into the hands of Gwenhwyfar and the priests" (Bradley 581). She feels that Arthur has broken his vow to Avalon, and that "he bears, still, the great sword of the Druid Regalia" despite being "the priests' creature" (Bradley 581). Full of conviction, she vows to "take up the work that Viviane let fall" (Bradley 581).

This is a turning point for Morgaine. Reawakening to her Avalon roots makes her much more dynamic, and her power shines through. This shows the potential for a return to the past as an empowering action, rather than giving in, despite Morgaine fighting against Avalon and the control she felt it represented. Morgaine becomes a much more active character, at this point. She takes a foster daughter, Lancelet's daughter Nimue, and brings her to Avalon as her successor. She begins an affair with Accolon, joining with him in a ritual that she feels reconsecrates her as a priestess of Avalon after her long years away. She begins to reassert herself, rebuilding her connection to the Sight, connecting with the wild peoples of the land, and enjoying her relationship with Accolon. Still, Avalon plans. Niniane, the current High Priestess of Avalon, and the new Merlin, Kevin, call upon Morgaine to do something about her affair with Accolon. She has begun to sway Wales back into the Old Religion and they believe that she can raise Accolon to kingship there, and have a king of Avalon rule Wales. Morgaine, for her part, looks higher. She sees the potential for Accolon to rule all the land as a king of Avalon.

This sequence is where Bradley's use of the source material adds depth, even as she fleshes out the characters and story details. The Accolon episode is one of the most distinct Morgan le Fay adventures in the medieval canon. Malory's text is clear about Morgan's actions, but does not give much of a reason for them beyond simple petty jealousy. Bradley develops this further, giving real insight into why Morgaine acts as she

does and showing what is going on behind the scenes in this filicidal encounter: Morgaine is righteous defender of the pagan people, and she sees Arthur as a tyrant to be stopped. This adds so much depth to her character; she is not just a villain, not an antihero, but here truly a hero in her own story. She *is* the defender of paganism against encroaching Christianity. Marilyn Farwell points out the significance of the Accolon scenes in *Mists*: "The enigmatic scenes in Malory in which Morgan le Fay attempts to kill her brother, such as her attempt to slay Arthur using Accolon and switching Excalibur for another, but innocuous, sword, are in Bradley's text given explanations that place Morgaine as the defender of the Goddess religion and as an advocate of its return to Britain at any cost" (152-53). With female empowerment and paganism as the central themes of *Mists*, this moment, with Morgaine taking up the task of defending paganism as the rightful avatar of the Goddess, really encapsulates why Bradley chose Morgaine as her champion.

While the essential story is the same, giving the interiority and showing Morgaine's thought processes and her perspective, not just that of the men, makes this sequence more full and impactful on the story. Bradley's story is fundamentally a story of the women of Arthurian legend, characters who were overlooked in the medieval canon. Giving this woman center stage makes the case that the women of Arthurian legend did not just have something to say – they might have had the most important things to say. However, Bradley also develops Accolon as a character. In Malory, he is a contradictory character, swearing to kill Arthur but also swearing loyalty to him; he is redeemed by Arthur for confessing, but he also dies a traitor. Bradley makes Accolon a hero, a priest of Avalon, a true believer. He is Morgaine's sword; he channels her power and her

conviction. Bradley develops further the hints of a truer relationship between Morgan le Fay and Accolon seen in Malory. While Malory does seem to indicate a depth of feeling in Morgan that allows her greater sympathy than other instances of her character, Bradley takes this and runs with it, developing a whole love story. This shows that Bradley can recognize the hints of development seen in earlier incarnations of Morgan le Fay and develop them into full-blown realizations of character and depth, and often does this through building relationships with other characters. Connection, in *Mists*, is often the most important part of the story – or disconnection. Here, though, Morgaine has finally found someone to connect to. Accolon, as a full character in his own right, is not a peon to be used and thrown away at Morgaine's whim. He is her champion.

The sequence where Morgaine calls upon Accolon to do her will is rich with meaning. Accolon, full of fear, though he does not know what he is afraid of, faces Morgaine down; she is pleased, as "if he was to face the final test he must go to it consenting" (Bradley 674). Once he has given in, she begins her call: "Arthur has twice betrayed Avalon; and only from Avalon can a king reign over all this land" (Bradley 675). He responds: "You mean it truly – that you will bring Arthur down?" (Bradley 675). Morgaine's answer will have world-changing ramifications:

> "Not so, not unless he refuses still to bring his oath to completion," Morgaine said. "I shall give him, still, every opportunity to become what he has sworn to be. And Arthur's son is not yet ripe to the challenge. You are no boy, Accolon, and you are trained to kingcraft, not Druid-craft… Say then, Accolon of Wales, if all other shifts fail, will you be champion of Avalon, and challenge the betrayer for that sword he holds by betrayal?" (Bradley 675)

It is an equanimous statement. Arthur has refused to stand up to his vow to Avalon. He has Christianized his court, setting aside the Pendragon banner, using the sword that is part of the Druid Regalia in Christian rituals, and revoking the rights to celebrating pagan festivals. Slowly but surely the pagan roots of the kingdom are being torn up. Morgaine is righteous champion of her people, and she is choosing Accolon to represent her in the physical realm of fighting. He is her martial representative, as she is the religious representation of the Goddess. It is a far cry from Malory, where Morgan le Fay is merely a jealous sister of the king and Accolon her lover. Here she is a warrior, a challenging monarch, almost – she has come to challenge Arthur for the right to the land, if not the throne itself. Morgaine *is* the land, is the pagan root of Avalon and all it represents, is the Goddess, and she takes that as divine right to challenge a king. It can be seen as a representation of how paganism represents female empowerment – whereas Christianity and the masculine hegemony keeps Gwenhwyfar meek and humble, the Old Religion and Avalon are matriarchal and give Morgaine, not Accolon, the power to reign. But it can also be seen as a lesson from Bradley, that this character who was a representation of what happens if you give women power – bad things – can instead be turned into a figure of empowerment. Whereas the medieval authors saw Morgan le Fay as a challenge to a rightful, *male* ruler, and therefore needing to be stopped, Bradley shows that Morgaine has power in her own right and has her own claims to authority – and that this can be used for good, to fight for the people and their freedoms.

First, Morgaine does attempt to stand as her own champion, challenging Arthur directly. When Arthur desecrates the sword by using it to make the symbol of the cross, Morgaine has had enough. She goes to Arthur directly, saying “now I am come to finish

the work [Viviane] left undone, and to demand from you that holy sword of Excalibur which you have presumed to twist into the service of your Christ!" (Bradley 716). This leads to a fight with Gwenhwyfar, whom Morgaine calls a "canting fool" (Bradley 716). When her first appeal does nothing, she calls upon her power as a priestess and speaks more forcefully: "Hear me, Arthur of Britain! As the force and power of Avalon set you on the throne, so the force and power of Avalon can bring you into ruin! Think well how you desecrate the Holy Regalia! Think never to put it to the service of your Christian God, for every thing of Power carries its own curse" (Bradley 717). Here the might and power of Avalon is on display, as Morgaine pulls upon the root of her power to make her claim. Her divine right to rule comes from Avalon, so she draws on Avalon to make her challenge to Arthur. She is not challenging her brother, she is challenging an enemy king – or, more clearly, a religious foe.

Arthur also becomes upset, telling Morgaine she cannot speak to a king like that, and their conversation devolves further. He seems to recognize that this is not his sister speaking to him – although he tries to appeal to her based on their kinship – but that this is a challenge to his royal power. When Arthur claims that, even if the sword may have come from Avalon, he has won the right to carry it by using it to drive the Saxons from the land, Morgaine replies "and you have tried to subject it to the service of the Christian god… Now in the name of the Goddess I demand of you that it be returned to the shrine of the Lake!" (Bradley 718). Definitively, Arthur states "in a voice of studied calm, 'I refuse. If the Goddess wants this sword returned, then she herself will have to take it from my hands'" (Bradley 718). Unknowingly, he has thrown down a gauntlet that Morgaine will pick up. She has attempted the peaceful way, calling on Arthur to uphold his oath.

She has used her authority as a priestess of Avalon, and he has rejected this. He has rejected the Goddess. Now she will call upon her champion to pick up the challenge that Arthur has unwittingly put forth – she *will* take it from his hands.

Morgaine plans it all out. She maneuvers things so that Arthur, Accolon, and Uriens end up out of the castle together. They stray into the fairy country, and Accolon gets Excalibur and the magic scabbard while Arthur is sleeping with a fairy maiden who bears a resemblance to Morgaine. If he wakes up and accepts the dream, he can stay in the fairy country, but if he wakes and calls for his sword, he will be given a false sword and he will meet Accolon in battle. He calls for the sword. Back at Camelot, Morgaine falls into a trance and she sees the battle unfold. It is fairly similar to the Malory version. The two men are very equally matched, and the battle is close. We get new details, such as Arthur's realization that his scabbard is fake: he "began suddenly to bleed, crimson streaks flowing down his arm, and he looked startled, afraid, one hand going in a swift gesture of reassurance to his side where the scabbard hung… but it was the sham scabbard" (Bradley 739). Accolon breaks Arthur's sword, and Arthur snatches Excalibur from him, throwing it aside and stealing the scabbard, which instantly staunches the flow of blood from his wounds. Morgaine's vision is cut off as she sees "two litters carrying the wounded men into the abbey at Glastonbury, where she could not follow" (Bradley 740). Morgaine is struck with excruciating pain as she either miscarries or aborts a baby that she believes is Accolon's, and the death of the baby seems to be linked with the end of the battle.

As she recovers, a rider from Glastonbury arrives with a body. Morgaine "made herself beautiful," thinking that she "must ready [herself] to hear that Arthur is dead"

(Bradley 742). She gets all dressed up and braces herself to receive the news, only to find Accolon's body and a message from Arthur: "Your brother Arthur lies wounded in Glastonbury, nursed by the sisters there, but he will recover. He sends you this [Accolon's body] as a present, and he bid me say to you that he has his sword Excalibur, and the scabbard" (Bradley 743). There is a lot in here that is drawn from Malory, but a lot that Bradley adds in, particularly Morgaine's witnessing of the fight and loss of her baby. The miscarriage/abortion is noteworthy because the baby represented a future for Morgaine, a starting over whereas the baby she had with Arthur was a failure and a representation of a past she wanted to forget. The baby also would have been a celebration of the pagan love she shared openly and joyfully with Accolon, rather than a child conceived by trickery. It is unclear if the baby is lost by miscarriage or if Morgaine causes herself to lose the baby, but either way it represents the closing off of Morgaine's future and the transition from one phase of her life to the next.

She steals out in the night and returns to her childhood home of Tintagel. There she sinks into grief and nearly dies, until the Merlin Kevin comes to her and reminds her of her duty to Avalon. She almost refuses, choosing instead to pass "through to that utter quiet which was beyond life," knowing that "if I lived, if I returned to Avalon, I must enter again into a death struggle with Arthur whom I loved… I could endure no further the pain that was in my heart" (Bradley 754-55). Kevin, a talented bard, sings her a ballad that enchants her and she has a vision of "the eternal One who summoned [her] forth to life" and sees herself as the incarnation of the Goddess and feels herself called back to the living (Bradley 756). She returns to Avalon and takes up her position as the Lady of the Lake, the role that Viviane had chosen for her when she was only a child. She had

abandoned Avalon after discovering that she was with child after the Great Marriage that she had performed with Arthur, furious with Viviane for arranging circumstances thus. Now, she has finally returned, and she "floated in a vast and nameless peace, beyond joy and sorrow, knowing only serenity and the little tasks of every day" (Bradley 758). She chooses her own successor, Lancelet's daughter Nimue. Morgaine even finds peace with Christianity, as some Christians seek refuge from persecution at Avalon, finding the priests' ways too narrow-minded for their tastes. She realizes that her "quarrel was never with the Christ, but with his foolish and narrow priests who mistook their own narrowness for his" (Bradley 758). It shows her growth of character, that she is able to set aside the enmity that she had held for the religion she saw as her opponent, realizing that bigotry was her true opponent.

This religious truce is one of the biggest lessons Bradley lays down in *Mists*. The novel is ultimately about Morgaine's attempts to keep Avalon safe from encroaching Christianity, but it is not Christianity itself that is the danger; rather, it is the power-hungry bishops and priests who advise Arthur, and Gwenhwyfar herself, that are the true danger. Avalon can coexist with Christianity as a concept and an expressed religion, but not in the way that it is ultimately going to be expressed in Camelot. This basis – that the Goddess religion and Christianity can coexist – is one that runs throughout the novel, but one that Morgaine struggles to grasp. It is a lesson put forth repeatedly: "for all the Gods are one God… and all the Goddesses are one Goddess, and there is only one Initiator," Morgaine says before the novel even begins, revealing that Viviane, "who hated a priest's robe as she would have hated a poisonous viper, and with good cause too, chid [her] once for speaking evil of [the Christian] God" (Bradley x-xi). Avalon's perspective is one of

openness and equality. Taliesin often speaks the same lesson, and his philosophy is so gently argued that even Gwenhwyfar finds herself sometimes unable to counter him. It is Morgaine who struggles most to find the balance between the Goddess religion and Christianity, and in the end she is able to find that peace.

The expression of this comes in her ultimate triumph as the Goddess incarnation, the Grail incident. The legend of the Grail is one of the most famous episodes of the King Arthur legend, and Bradley turns to it as Morgaine's final foray into Camelot's court and Arthur's life. When Kevin steals the Holy Regalia of the Druids and brings it to Camelot, in what Morgaine sees as a true betrayal of Avalon and his state as the Merlin, Morgaine is forced to leave her peaceful state in Avalon and go forth to retrieve the Regalia. Kevin gives the Regalia to the priests to use in Arthur's Pentecost feast, where Morgaine sneaks into the court. She "felt she would go mad with rage and despair. Were they going to profane the Holy Regalia beyond any possibility of cleansing, by using it to serve a Christian mass?" (Bradley 769). Seeing that they have "defiled [the Goddess'] chalice with wine," she calls upon the Goddess to grant her power: "You have called upon the Goddess, O ye willful priests, but will you dare her presence if she should come? …I am thy priestess, O Mother! Use me, I pray, as you will!" (Bradley 770). She is filled with a rush of power and "she knew with certainty that all her life had been preparation for this moment when, *as the Goddess herself*, she raised the cup between her hands" (Bradley 770, emphasis mine).

For all this book, Morgaine has grown throughout her life as a servant of the Goddess, her devoted priestess. She is powerful, "priestess-born," as Viviane put it, and a natural leader of Avalon. In this moment, though, she becomes all-powerful, not just a

servant of the Goddess but a divine incarnation of the Goddess herself. Here we see echoes of when Morgan le Fay was a divine being in the original myths. Bradley links Morgaine with the Goddess religion of Avalon, "what she had borne was the cauldron of Ceridwen.[10] But for the other tales she had no explanation and she needed none. *She is the Goddess, she will do as she will…*" (Bradley 771). Yet at the same time, this does not erase the basic lesson that all Gods are one God that has been established from the start of the novel. Morgaine notes, as she is passing the cup around the court for everyone to drink from, "*I am all things – Virgin and Mother and she who gives life and death. Ignore me at your peril, ye who call on other Names… know ye that I am One*" (Bradley 771). No matter what name you call for – the Virgin Mary, who has prominence in the court of Arthur and is a particular favorite of Gwenhwyfar, or the Great Mother, or any other name, Morgaine is channeling the One Goddess.

Even Gwenhwyfar has a revelatory experience as Morgaine passes around the cup:

> "And then it seemed to Gwenhwyfar that a great angel, wings falling away in shadow behind the shining form, raised between its hands a cup that glowed like a great shining star… she saw that it was not an angel but a woman veiled in blue, with great sad eyes. There was no sound, but the woman said to her, *Before Christ ever was, I am, and it was I who made you as you are. Therefore, my beloved daughter, forget all shame and be joyful because you, too, are of the same nature as myself*." (Bradley 775)

[10] "In Welsh mythology, the goddess of poetic inspiration, an enchantress said to live beneath a lake; her magic cauldron conferred the gift of second sight" (Oxford Reference).

Gwenhwyfar, who had just been thinking again about the inherently sinful nature of womankind, is suddenly struck with great joy and peace in her soul. She feels innately happy at what she thinks is divine joy and acceptance, believing this vision to be the Virgin Mary. She does not know that this is the Goddess, speaking through Morgaine. The two, who have been at times sisters, friends, and bitter enemies, are now sharing a moment of deep companionship in this spiritual awakening. Morgaine is the spark to Gwenhwyfar's acceptance of herself and her nature. Although it does not lead to a greater peace between the women themselves, as Gwenhwyfar does not know it was Morgaine speaking to her, it leads to a greater peace within Gwenhwyfar and therefore within the court, as she no longer feels a need to be so militantly devout. Thus Morgaine and her moment as the Goddess does bring about a more benign Christian court, even if she is not able to bring Avalon back to a seat at the table.

Ultimately, the Grail incident is Morgaine's last major moment in the story. She continues to be a player, arranging for Kevin's death – which leads to the death of her own foster-daughter Nimue – and other matters as the Lady of the Lake, but does not leave Avalon anymore. She hears things from court, knowing that after the Grail incident, the knights of the court have left Arthur nearly alone as they seek the Grail she has hidden in Avalon on holy quests. This will eventually lead to Arthur's downfall, as he is left alone when his son – Morgaine's son – Mordred attacks. Mordred, who was raised by Morgause to be ambitious and cold and who hates both of his parents for creating him and abandoning him, tries to conquer Camelot by force. Although he has spent much time at Avalon and even had an affair with Niniane, the past Lady of the Lake, he has no love for the Old Religion, or for Christianity. He represents oppression, taking away religious

expression altogether, and must be stopped, but Arthur is powerless, having been worn down all his life and now left without supporters.

Much like the battle between Arthur and Accolon, Morgaine is given a vision to see her brother and their son do final battle. She despairs how "a new thing was coming upon this land – father and son enemies, and sons to challenge fathers for a crown… it seemed to me that I could see a land that ran red with blood, where sons were not content to await their crowning day" (Bradley 865-66). When Arthur wonders why Mordred has turned against him, he says "I knew Morgaine hated me, but I did not know she hated me as much as this" (Bradley 866). Mordred, for his part, replies bitterly "if anything could bid me spare you, it is that – that I do Morgaine's will, that she wishes you overthrown, and I know not whether I hate more her or you" (Bradley 866). While she watches through the Sight, Morgaine is struck with the tragedy of the whole situation. Father and son face off, and the two are her only family left. Her brother, who she raised from infancy, who she loved and who loved her, and who became her bitterest enemy, is now facing off against the son she never got to raise, who hates her more than anyone else in the world.

Morgaine tries to intervene, "stepping forth into their dream or vision or whatever it might be" and "call[s] upon [them] both, in the name of the Goddess, to amend [their] quarrel" (Bradley 866). She tells them that "your hate is for me, not for each other, and in the name of the Goddess I beg of you –" but they cut her off, each rejecting the Goddess (Bradley 866). Arthur replies "what is the Goddess to me? … I saw her always in your face, but you turned away from me, and when the Goddess rejected me, I sought another God" (Bradley 866). Here Arthur comes to the crux of their conflict, the religious gulf

that always stretched between them. Arthur had seen Morgaine turning away from him after their encounter in the Great Marriage as a rejection, not knowing that she had tried to spare him from the news that she was pregnant. He had turned to Gwenhwyfar, who had pushed her religious views onto him. In the absence of Morgaine's influence, Arthur had fallen under the sway of the priests and Camelot had become a Christian land. Feeling rejected by the Goddess, who had always been Morgaine to him – as he had first experienced the Goddess, during the Great Marriage – he had in turn rejected the Goddess back.

As Arthur and Mordred turn to fight, Morgaine falls out of the vision in despair and horror, "the taste of ruin and death was bitter" in her mouth (Bradley 867). She laments: "I had failed, failed failed! I was false to the Goddess, if indeed there was any Goddess except for myself; false to Avalon, false to Arthur, false to brother and son and lover… and all I had sought was in ruin" (Bradley 867). Here at the end of the story Morgaine can only see the failures of her life. She had schemed for Arthur's downfall, but now that it is at hand, she can only see the tragedy inherent in the way it is coming about. She also knows that Mordred will not be the king that Avalon needs. In the end, it does not matter; Arthur kills Mordred, and Mordred deals Arthur a mortal wound. As Arthur lays dying on the shores of the lake, Morgaine comes to him one last time. As in the myths, where a company of queens approach on a barge,[11] Morgaine herself *is* the company:

[11] The number of queens varies per legend. In Malory, there are three, one of whom is Morgan le Fay: "Now put me into the barge, said the king. And so he did softly; and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so they set him down" (Malory 924).

> "I stood in the barge alone, and yet I knew there were others standing there with me, robed and crowned, Morgaine the Maiden, who had summoned Arthur to the running of the deer and the challenge of the King Stag, and Morgaine the Mother who had been torn asunder when Gwydion was born, and the Queen of North Wales, summoning the eclipse to send Accolon raging against Arthur, and the Dark Queen of Fairy… or was it the Death-crone who stood at my side?"
>
> (Bradley 867)

Here at the end Morgaine encompasses the triple Goddess, maiden and mother and crone all in one. At all these points in her life she has become an incarnation of the Goddess, and all at these points in her life she has intersected in a major way with Arthur's life and his story. As the Maiden, she was his first experience with the Goddess as they made the Great Marriage. As the Mother, she gave birth to his child, who would ultimately kill him. She was also the Mother when she sent Accolon to challenge him. Now, finally, she approaches Arthur as the Death-crone to take him on to the next stage of being. It is in these last moments that they are able to reconcile, just as Malory has them find their peace. But as she continually does, Bradley expands on what Malory gives, showing Morgaine's inner thoughts. She also gives more of Arthur's development as he dies; Malory does not show much of what Arthur thinks as he returns to Morgaine at the end, showing only his faith in returning to Avalon to heal.

Here, Bradley develops the complex, loving, resentful, deeply intertwining relationship between Morgaine and Arthur as he dies. Arthur complains that he would not be dying if he only had the scabbard that Morgaine had taken from him, and beseeches her to take him to Avalon where she can heal him. He despairs the end of his rule and

wonders if it was all for naught, and Morgaine reassures him that he did great things for the kingdom, but she thinks to herself "I knew not, even then, whether what I spoke was truth, or whether I spoke to comfort him, in love, as with the little child Igraine had put into my arms when I was but a child myself" (Bradley 868). As he lay dying in her arms, Morgaine reflects on her early relationship with him and the responsibility Igraine put on her to take care of him, and how it has impacted their relationship all their lives. "Morgaine, my mother had called impatiently, take care of the baby… and all my life I had borne him with me" (Bradley 868). The love between them, strong despite all their conflicts, shines through in Arthur's final moments:

> "It is you, Morgaine… you have come back to me… and you are so young and fair… I will always see the Goddess with your face… Morgaine, you will not leave me again, will you?"
>
> "I will never leave you again, my brother, my baby, my love," I whispered to him, and I kissed his eyes. And he died, just as the mists rose and the sun shone full over the shores of Avalon.
>
> (Bradley 868)

"My brother, my baby, my love" truly encapsulates everything that happens between Arthur and Morgaine in the novel and why their relationship is so complicated. But in the end, Morgaine holds Arthur as he dies, granting him a peaceful end. In the end, it is Morgaine who Arthur sees as the divine and who he wants with him as he goes.

Like in Malory, Bradley gives Morgaine and Arthur a final conclusion that is one of reconciliation and love. Unlike in Malory, this is not a redemption, because Morgaine

needs no redemption. Bradley's Morgaine is not a villain. She is Fries' counter-hero, working against a masculine, Christian world that seeks to supplant hers. She stands up for Avalon and the Druids, working to protect and preserve their way of life in a world that is changing and rejecting the old ways. She is a hero in her own way, not a villain. Malory, and many of the medieval authors, show Morgan le Fay from the perspective of that masculine, Christian world, which frames her as the villain because she pushes back against the dominant hegemony. But by showing a different lens, Bradley puts forth the idea that perhaps Morgan le Fay was not a villain at all.

This different lens comes through two angles: a feminist lens, and a Neo-pagan lens. Both are necessary for understanding Morgaine and the way that Bradley developed her in *Mists*. Diana Paxson, a friend and colleague of Bradley's, explains how Bradley grew and developed as a writer who had an early interest in mythology. As she began writing science fiction and fantasy works, Paxson reveals that Bradley looked for new writing material: "the Arthurian legend, which she had loved since childhood, has had enduring popularity, and Bradley's background, especially in women's spirituality, put her in an ideal position to treat the story from a new point of view" (115). While Paxson makes it clear that "Bradley has stated that she is not a 'feminist' – indeed, she is far too original to be contained by any 'ism," she also argues that "her writing, without following any 'party line,' has certainly focused on and explored issues related to female self-determination and power" (113-14).

The feminist angle of the novel, however, cannot be extricated from its spirituality. Kelly Budruweit explains that "the novel recasts the Arthurian legend through the lens of the growing feminist spirituality movement of the late 1970s,

projecting Goddess worship into the mythic past" (1). She goes on further to argue that "the aspects of the novel which have been diagnosed as an incomplete feminist project can instead be taken as evidence of Bradley's preference for a deep spiritual engagement over what she saw as a feminist agenda" (Budruweit 5). Like Paxson says, Bradley is not about a party line. She wants to put forth more than a simple argument about feminism; her argument is about the power of feminist spirituality – the Goddess religion.

The Goddess religion as depicted in *Mists* comes from Bradley's experiences with Neo-paganism. While she herself was not Neo-pagan,[12] she spent a lot of time working with other religious aspects than mainstream Christianity. Paxson, who worked with her on occult matters, revealed that "Bradley attended workshops put on by others involved in the emerging Neo-Pagan and Women's Spirituality movement and explored the history of the Goddess religion" (114). This influenced her work in *Mists*; Carrol Fry argues that "paganism as it exists in the novel is clearly modeled on Neo Paganism as it is most frequently practiced today" (73). For Fry, this is most clearly evident in the way that "Bradley clearly identifies with the values of feminist Pagans" (77). In *Mists*, feminism and paganism are intertwined. Fry argues that an "important aspect of Bradley's fiction is her adaptation of the Pagan monomyth for use in a criticism of traditional gender roles" (68). Additionally, Fry sees Bradley as using "the traditional Arthurian lore to criticize institutional Christianity. She levels much of that criticism at her perception (which is precisely that of Neo-Pagan feminists) of the church's misogyny" (73).

[12] Bradley stated in an interview that she was not Neo-pagan: "I don't know that much about it. I'm a practicing Christian. People are always surprised when they find that out, but it's true… But I have a good many friends who are in the Neo-Pagan movement. And as far as I can tell, most of them are harmless nature worshippers" (Fry 76).

Fry sees Bradley as using paganism – whether or not she herself is Neo-pagan – to achieve a feminist goal – whether or not she is feminist. She uses both approaches to critique the history of these myths and their retellings, and the ways that they have traditionally overlooked the female half of the story. Janice C. Crosby points out how these two approaches work together symbiotically:

> *The Mists of Avalon*, then, does more than retell Arthurian legend from the point of view of a female character. By combining the perspective of female experience with a feminist analysis of the implications of the change from Goddess worship to God worship, Bradley transforms an androcentric narrative into a text within the new tradition of contemporary sacred storytelling. (54)

Mists is, in its own way, a feminist, pagan project, despite coming from an author who does not identify as either feminist or pagan. It achieves goals that are both feminist and pagan, putting forth an ideal of a world where Goddess religion is valued, and showing what can happen when that value is diminished. Bradley gives voice to characters who have those values, and shows the interiority of a character who embodies the feminist, pagan voice. By doing so, "Bradley offers us a different type of tale, one which gives us a glimpse of life where the Goddess and women are central and powerful, sexuality is sacred, and nature is valuable for its own sake" (Crosby 54). Even if that view fails in the end – although to what extent that view fails is arguable – for a time, Morgaine represents a world where women have a greater voice, where she embodies the Goddess in all her incarnations, where she can and will fight back against the dominant hegemonies that threaten her way of life. It is a very empowering tale.

Lee Ann Tobin underscores the importance of what Bradley accomplishes in *The Mists of Avalon* by making Morgaine the hero. Tobin argues that Bradley has to "venture outside of the historical Arthur story, since that story pays little attention to female experience," in order to create a feminist, and feminine, understanding of the myth (148). According to Tobin, "Bradley's achievement is enormous; by popularizing a female Arthurian tradition, she is in essence serving the role for women – 400 years later – that Malory served for men" (156). Marion Wynne-Davies also drives home this point, that Bradley's work is foundational in the new understanding of the Morgan le Fay story. Citing *Mists* as "the earliest feminist attempt to reinterpret the existing narratives," Wynne-Davies argues that "the publication of this overtly feminist retelling of the Arthurian story was inevitable, and, once its basic radicalism had challenged the dominant male discourse of the legends, the possibilities for more complex gendered reworkings became clear" (176-77).

The Mists of Avalon is "a pathbreaking work" that changes the way we think about Morgan le Fay "(Wynne-Davies 184). Coming out at the height of second-wave feminism, in a time of Neo-pagan revivalism, *Mists* was able to take the thoroughly masculine, Christian, hegemonic narrative of the King Arthur legend and turn it on its head by asking a simple question: what about the women? Marion Zimmer Bradley turned to these overlooked and misunderstood characters, and gave them interiority. She added depth to the conflicts by giving a new religious angle that focused on the more matriarchal, sexually fluid pagan Goddess religion, making Morgan le Fay a hero defending her people and her way of life, rather than a petty, one-note antagonist. Bradley paved the way for future renditions of the King Arthur myth to ask greater

questions about the story and give the characters greater depth. While not all future stories will treat the characters or the myth the same way – naturally, as all storytellers will want to put their own spin on things – Bradley gave future mythmakers a foundation to create a Morgan le Fay that can be a counter-hero in her own right.

CHAPTER THREE

SMALL SCREEN MORGANS: *MERLIN* AND *CAMELOT*

In *The Mists of Avalon*, we encounter a Morgan le Fay unlike any seen in the medieval canon. Some of this is due to the choices Bradley makes, inspired by her experiences with neo-Paganism and feminism. Her Morgaine is clearly influenced by Bradley's own life experiences, giving a fiercer, prouder, and more righteous character than the medieval authors offer up. But a lot of what makes Morgaine so nuanced and more of Fries' counter-hero is also due to the way the story is presented as a novel, allowing for the interiority of first-person narration and point of view storytelling. In *The Mists of Avalon*, we actually get to see Morgaine's story, as she would tell it, with her as the protagonist. This makes a huge difference in how she is perceived by the audience. Given insight into how the character thinks and feels, an audience is going to be more sympathetic to her choices. This is one of the major positives of a novel and one of the reasons that *The Mists of Avalon* is such a powerful moment in the progression of Morgan le Fay. But another medium – television – offers a different perspective on storytelling that, while less interior, has different ways to present nuance to create a compelling version of the character.

Two recent shows, BBC's *Merlin* and Starz's *Camelot*, both showcase a Morgan le Fay character that adds depth to the medieval version, presenting new entries into the body of work that makes up our perceptions of who Morgan le Fay really is. These shows use the positive aspects of television storytelling – the episodic nature of the genre, the audiovisual aspects of the medium – to create the ideas that are conveyed via text in the sources previously discussed. By giving hints at Morgan's perspective through things like costuming, television allows for a deeper level of analysis and understanding of character. These two shows both focus on Morgan's duality of nature, not hesitating to show her as both a kind, humanizing figure as well as a cruel, vicious villain. Each has a lot to add to the body of work surrounding Morgan le Fay in the modern King Arthur canon.

In the introduction to a special issue of *Arthuriana* focusing on television adaptations of the King Arthur legend, Tara Foster and Jon Sherman lament that "while cinematic re-imaginings of medieval Arthurian narratives have received much attention from scholars, television adaptations – with an equally impressive spectrum of co-opted Arthurian characters, motifs, and plots – have not seemed to generate similar academic interest" (3). They rightfully argue that it is worth paying attention to television as a specific medium with its own merits that create a unique way of viewing Arthurian adaptation. Film may be seen as the more prestigious offering, but the small screen offers a different and no less fascinating approach to adaptation. In fact, it is arguably the better way to adapt the Arthurian legends. Melissa Ridley Elmes argues that television is the best medium for adapting these stories, claiming that "anyone who has read more than one medieval romance might note how closely modern television programs follow that

genre in terms of the basic structure of individual narrative installments" (99). Elmes focuses on the *episodic* nature of the stories, how the medieval legends are told in specific episodes or smaller narratives that translate well to the television format of individual, self-contained, one-hour blocks of programming. These episodes can then be combined into a whole, overarching narrative in a television season much the same way medieval episodes might be grouped into a published story.

As Elmes puts it, "while, like television, films are comprised of individual scenes that work together to create the overall story, no two- or even three-hour film could recreate the incremental, episodic nature of the medieval romance as can a television serial aired over the course of months and years" (115). The longer format of a television show allows for a deeper dive into the story than a short, one-and-done movie does. While they may both be audiovisual formats that allow for specific techniques that create new nuance in similar ways, the difference in presentation creates an entirely different experience of the story. This can be seen especially in the way that characters are developed. You cannot get much character development in a two-hour movie; there are multiple characters, all with their own story, and only one or maybe two are going to get enough time in the spotlight to really show depth. A television series, on the other hand, has enough room to show a whole cast of characters, not just their actions but their feelings and motivations. If a show goes on across a length of time, it can show how a character changes over that stretch of time, showcasing real character progression in a way that a short movie would really struggle to accomplish.

We can see a lot of this merit to television success in both *Merlin* and *Camelot*, though it comes across more strongly in the five-season *Merlin* than it does in the much

shorter, ten-episode *Camelot*. Both shows are able to give a lot of depth to their characters, focusing in on more than just a single protagonist. Notably, both shows feature a Morgan le Fay character in a prominent role and give her considerable screentime and space to be fully realized as a person in her own right, not merely a caricature. While in both shows she is the primary antagonist – though this is only in the final seasons in *Merlin* – she avoids the one-dimensional villainy of the later medieval canon. Here, we see her actions in context, from her point of view. While the television shows may not have the narrative capabilities that *The Mists of Avalon* made great use of, their access to audiovisual cues and other techniques allow them to signal interiority to the audience in different ways.

The BBC series *Merlin* premiered in 2008 and ran for five seasons of thirteen episodes each, giving a total of 65 one-hour episodes – a lot of screentime to play with. The show plays with the medieval canon, showing the familiar characters in an unfamiliar way. Merlin, the advisor to Arthur's father Uther and party to the trickery surrounding Arthur's birth, is here a young man who becomes Prince Arthur's servant. Arthur is neither king nor unacknowledged son but crown prince of Camelot and Uther's proud heir. Guinevere is the daughter of the blacksmith and a servant in the royal household – to Uther's ward, the Lady Morgana, a spirited but compassionate young woman who frequently banters with Arthur and challenges Uther. There is a ban on magic in the kingdom, as Uther has bitterly declared war on magic-users after the death of his wife, Igraine. A CGI dragon lives chained-up beneath the castle, and frequently gives Merlin cryptic advice that he may or may not follow. It is a family-friendly,

original, and often goofy take on the legends. It also offers one of the best portrayals of the Morgan le Fay archetype.

Morgana begins the series as one of the deuteragonists, a supplementary character for Merlin's adventures. She is primarily there to interact with Arthur and Gwen, though she serves as a demonstration of resistance to Uther's harsh regime. Soon, however, her story develops as signs emerge that she herself has magic, placing her at risk of harm from Uther himself. Morgana's story becomes a major plotline as she becomes a foil for the more proficient magician Merlin, the prophesied greatest sorcerer ever. As Morgana's power emerges and she finds herself frightened and alone, Merlin struggles with whether or not to reveal himself to her so that they can work together, but is held back by the dragon, Kilgharrah, who warns him repeatedly of Morgana's fate as Arthur's enemy. In a tragic self-fulfilling cycle, Merlin's refusal to help Morgana leads her down a path of darkness, eventually sending her to that fated enmity.

In the beginning of the show, Morgana is presented as a voice of compassion and righteousness. Ann F. Howey expands on this, arguing that "the first two seasons demonstrate Morgana's integrity, loyalty, and courage, whether protesting Uther's decisions or fighting kidnappers, so the show initially makes Morgana a female hero: strong-willed, outspoken, compassionate, and concerned with justice" (43). Morgana is, as Howey puts it, a *hero* – not a villain or a counter-hero, an actual hero. She uses her position in the royal household, the privilege she holds as Uther's ward, to help the people. She stands up for what is right and she is one of the only people to push back against Uther's harsh regime. She is a figure of righteousness.

This is clear from the get-go. In the first episode, as Merlin arrives in Camelot, there is an execution taking place in the castle courtyard. Uther is sentencing a young man to death for using magic and enchantments. It is a chilling introduction to Camelot for Merlin as a young magician. For Morgana, it is a showcase of Uther's cruelty and tyrannical judgment. She is not afraid to push back at him when he finds her later and asks her why she is not celebrating. Snapping back that there is nothing to celebrate about ending a man's life, she confronts him with what she sees as the inevitable truth: "you know the more brutal you are, the more enemies you'll create" ("The Dragon's Call" 09:24-09:26). This proves to be an astute observation, as the episode's overarching plot sees the mother of the man Uther executed plotting her revenge and nearly killing Prince Arthur, who is only saved by Merlin's magical intervention. By killing one magician, Uther made an enemy of another. It is also the story of the show as a whole; by being a brutal and fanatical enemy of magic-users, Uther creates enemies out of his own family. Uther's hatred of magic will cause Morgana, initially the "apple of Uther's eye," to first fear and then hate him, eventually causing his death (Mediavilla 52).

Like Morgaine, Morgana's strong relationships with those around her will drive her character progression and her ultimate fall from grace. Morgana's conflicting feelings towards Uther begin this character progression. Her first brush with darkness comes late in season one, when her maid Gwen's father Tom is sentenced to death for consorting with a sorcerer. Morgana is very close with Gwen, so she is irate when Uther has him killed. Having grown disillusioned with her father figure for his brutish ways and grown fearful as she starts to develop her own signs of magic, Morgana believes that the world might be better without Uther. When the same sorcerer kidnaps Gwen, Morgana meets

him in the woods and arranges an assassination plot with him. She maneuvers Uther into place, as the two of them go out to visit Morgana's father's grave together. When the time comes, however, Morgana cannot go through with it. Uther has an emotional moment as they stand there together, speaking of his love for her, and she realizes that she cares for him too much to see him killed. This will change, eventually, but for the moment her flash of anger subsides and she saves him from the assassin.

What brings her to the breaking point is a series of betrayals. Gaius, the kind, wise mentor figure in the show who Morgana turns to for aid when she begins to suspect she is developing magical powers, "turns out to use his skills only to gaslight her," fearing that if she is revealed to be a magic-user then Merlin, his ward, will also be revealed (Bourontzi 103). Merlin, who has the opportunity to stand by Morgana's side and help her the most, falls short, though he does try to get her help. When he takes her to a Druid camp to help her learn more, however, this only causes more trouble, as Uther pursues her and has Arthur attack the camp. Later, another Druid will come to Morgana for help stealing from Camelot's vaults. When Arthur captures him and Uther sentences him to death, refusing clemency, Morgana snaps: "From this day forward, I do not know you. From this day forward, I disown you" ("The Witch's Quickening" 34:20-34:22). While she will later play nice and act as if she has forgiven Uther, this causes an irreparable break within her regarding him.

What really breaks Morgana, however, is when Merlin is forced to take drastic action in the penultimate episode of season two. Morgana's sister Morgause has crafted a sleeping spell that is affecting all of Camelot. The spell is tied to Morgana's life force, and only by killing Morgana can Merlin end the spell. Forced to choose between

Morgana and all of Camelot, Merlin chooses to poison Morgana. Betrayed by someone she thought was a friend, *poisoned*, Morgana loses all trust in the people she had placed her faith in. Morgana has always had strong relationships and her emotional connections to the people she cares about have been a big part of her character. To have all these characters, who have initially meant so much to her, turn against her in some way, took the goodness that was innate to her and eroded it at the root. This is further exacerbated when Morgause saves her life but removes her from Camelot. Morgause seeks to destroy Uther and all he has built. During her time with Morgana, she is able to get inside her head and further break down any of Morgana's lingering affection for or faith in her Camelot family. Morgause, left with a broken and lonely Morgana, rebuilds her into a weapon against those she formerly loved, using all the pain and anger she felt.

When Morgana returns in season three, she is a different character entirely. The sweet, compassionate character we grew to know and love in the first two seasons is now bitter and scheming. She plots against Uther and Arthur, and works with Morgause to undermine their grasp on Camelot. Morgause seeks to restore freedom for magic-users and return the Old Religion to prominence in Camelot. She sees Morgana as the vehicle to do so, and Morgana is a willing tool. Their determination – and Morgana's hatred – only strengthens when a hidden truth is revealed after Morgana is mortally wounded. Pleading with Gaius to save her, Uther reveals that Morgana is actually his illegitimate daughter, and that he is willing to use magic to save her life. His hypocrisy is revealed – he will execute magic users but will use magic to save those close to him – showing why Morgana is right to take him down. After hearing the truth, she initially thinks that this revelation will be the key to restoring her rightful place at Camelot. When she is healed,

however, Uther is not willing to acknowledge her, and places Arthur and his needs above her.

Incensed at what she sees as the theft of her birthright and the rejection by her birth father, Morgana is only all the more determined to steal the crown of Camelot, and Morgause is all the more convinced that this is the way to win the war against magic. Morgana's magic is a tool that Morgause can use, yes, but it is her *political* power – her position as the daughter of the king, if an illegitimate one – that makes her the perfect weapon to take Camelot. Just like in the medieval canon, Morgana is important – and a threat – not just because she is magical, but also because she is royal. When the sisters do briefly take Camelot, Morgana confronts Uther with the truth, breaking him and repaying the pain that has been dealt unto her. She will later lead to his death in the fourth season, finally enacting her revenge against the father who wanted her but could not admit it, and the king who would have her burned.

The remaining two seasons see Morgana as more of the scheming caricature that is familiar to audiences of the medieval canon. She is constantly coming up with new plans to undermine Arthur, from brainwashing Merlin to try and make him kill Arthur, to enlisting Arthur's uncle Agravaine as an inside man in Camelot. The relationship with Agravaine in particular is interesting. It can be seen as somewhat familiar to the portrayals of Morgan le Fay in the legends as a bit of a femme fatale; Agravaine seems captivated by Morgana's beauty and power and is utterly enchanted by her. He does as she commands and is completely willing to betray Arthur, his own kin. In some ways this could be seen as a shadow of the Accolon episode, where a pawn in Arthur's court is a willing tool used by Morgana to achieve her deadly ends. However, unlike Accolon,

Agravaine is completely unrepentant for his actions. He remains bitterly loyal to Morgana to his end, even when she is harsh and demanding. The relationship does show, however, that Morgana is more than willing to use her feminine wiles to further her goals.

In the end, it is through a relationship with another male character that Morgana is ultimately successful in defeating Arthur, as she was prophesied to do. It is also an interesting relationship, given the past history of depictions of Morgan le Fay – she pairs together with Mordred to defeat Arthur, though this time he is not her son (or Arthur's). However, there is a very dynamic and complex relationship between the two that is developed across the show's run that clearly draws on past portrayals. Morgana and Mordred meet in season one, when Mordred, a young Druid boy, is being chased by Camelot guards – if captured, he will be put to death as a magic user. Responding to his mental call, Merlin rescues him and brings him to the one place he thinks Mordred will be safe, Morgana. At this point in the show, Morgana is still the righteous champion of magic, the signal of all that could be good about Camelot. This is demonstrated in the way she steps up to help Mordred without question, putting her life on the line and standing up to Uther for his backwards ways. Although she is initially afraid, she soon jumps right into action and does everything she can to help Merlin and Mordred, whose name she does not even know, simply because they need help.

At first, she is just helping because she thinks it is the right thing to do. However, it soon becomes clear that there is more going on between Morgana and Mordred than meets the eye. She becomes very engaged in taking care of the boy, who develops a fever from an injury. She is distressed at his weakened state, and Gwen seems very confused at

how much this matters to Morgana. At this point in time, Morgana's powers have not fully developed, so her connection to magic and the Druids is not clear. She is simply reaching out in compassion to someone she feels needs it. Still, her magical nature is reaching out to Mordred; she says that "there's a bond between us… it's like nothing I've ever felt before. Perhaps I was always meant to help him" ("The Beginning of the End" 34:55-35:05). While she has so far shown herself willing to stand up to Uther and speak her mind about his policies regarding the magical citizens of Camelot, it is this bond with Mordred that pushes her to take bold action and put herself and her life on the line. It is also one of the first times she really faces her conflicting feelings regarding Uther, and she feels no hesitation when the ultimate plan to rescue Mordred involves her deceiving Uther by pretending to fall in line with Uther's beliefs and to act the doting daughter, foreshadowing her future playacting in season three.

The bond between Morgana and Mordred will last long after he escapes and returns to his people, and he will appear several more times in the show before becoming a regular in the final season. In season two, Mordred plays a part in the development of Morgana's magic and her fears regarding Uther's feelings about magic and how he might harm her if he knew the truth about her. When Morgana's magic manifests fully, Merlin helps her escape to a Druid camp to learn more about her powers, rather than teach her himself and expose his secret. There, she reunites with Mordred and is very happy to see him alive and well. The two reinforce their bond, and Morgana is happy. However, Uther believes that Morgana has been kidnapped and attacks the Druid camp. Morgana is forced once more to see this boy that she cares about in danger thanks to Uther's policies. While Mordred escapes, Morgana has no way of knowing that, barely escaping herself

thanks to Merlin. She will meet up with Mordred again later in the season when he and another druid, Alvarr, come to Camelot to steal an artifact from the vaults. The two turn to Morgana for help thanks to Mordred's bond with her. While Morgana is hesitant to help, she still feels the deep connection to the boy and ultimately gives in. This leads to tragedy when Alvarr is captured, leading to Morgana's break with Uther.

What makes the relationship with Mordred more interesting is how it develops after Morgana leaves Camelot. Having lost her family and her claim to the throne and descended into the ranks of villainy, Morgana is very disconnected and alone. So when Mordred reappears in her life, she is initially thrilled to see him. Here is someone who knows her and cares about her, someone who will stand by her when everyone else has betrayed her. She is confident that he will stand by her, as someone who has been so persecuted by Camelot. Yet Mordred also betrays her, standing with Arthur. He in fact becomes a knight of Camelot, a symbol of everything that goes against her and her campaign to depose Arthur and restore magic to the land. At one point, having rescued Arthur and Merlin from Morgana, Mordred sums up why he has taken a stand against her: "Know this: such hatred as yours can never triumph. I hope one day you will find the love and compassion which used to fill your heart" ("With All My Heart" 30:16-30:21).

Morgana and Mordred used to have a close bond, yes. But it was when Morgana was pure of heart and truly cared about other people. Mordred saw that Morgana was good and reflected this back. When Morgana lost that innate goodness, Mordred would no longer stand by her – his devotion was not blind, but based in shared values, and once those values were no longer shared, he left her behind. Mordred and Morgana's connection was borne not out of their shared magic but out of their shared character, one

of deep emotionality and conviction and righteousness. Morgana helped Mordred when he was just an anonymous little boy in need of help, showing him from the start that she was someone *good,* someone worthy of trust and affection. Now she has lost that innate strength of character, and he no longer finds her worthy. The show, of course, has deeper reasons for this, reasons from Merlin's perspective as he is the protagonist, but taking this from Morgana's perspective, as the antagonist, this is just yet another moment when someone she cared about has turned against her. Notably, this is a moment when another man in her life has turned against her. When Mordred first reappears in her life, she is happy to have someone she can finally trust at her side, and it is revealed that that trust was a mistake: she can trust no one. The once bright and open Morgana, who had trusted in her community fully, has lost all ability to give faith to anyone but herself.

The other reasons the show has for this confrontation – Merlin's perspective – is to deepen the doubts Merlin has about Mordred, who he does not trust. As with Morgana, Merlin takes the advice of Kilgharrah and believes that Mordred is destined to destroy Arthur, so he views Mordred with innate suspicion. Kilgharrah warns Merlin early on that Mordred is not to be trusted, and specifically when it comes to Morgana, saying that "the ancient prophecies speak of an alliance between Mordred and Morgana, united in evil" ("The Witch's Quickening" 16:55-16:57). Once again taking the dragon's words to heart and allowing them to shape his actions, Merlin will treat Mordred poorly, in turn crafting the future he tried to avoid. Mordred sees that Merlin does not trust him and works hard to change Merlin's opinion, but is unsuccessful. Ultimately, he leaves Camelot when his childhood sweetheart is put to death for attempting to assassinate Arthur. He is brokenhearted that his relationship with Arthur is not enough to grant her

clemency. Enraged, Mordred runs straight to Morgana, and seals the fate of Camelot by telling her the one thing she wanted most to know – that the true identity of her fated enemy Emrys is Merlin.

Despite his recent betrayal, Morgana is all too eager to take Mordred back at this point. He has given her that which she most sought. But he has also shown that he believes he was wrong, and that she was right. This is validation for her point of view, validation she desperately needs as someone who needs to believe her cause is just. Having Mordred, someone she had a deep connection with, question her actions would have shaken her convictions a little. With him returned to her side, she can move forward confidently – and she does. The two of them make their final assault. Mordred is able to mortally wound Arthur, fulfilling his prophesied role – a familiar one from the medieval canon – before dying himself at Arthur's hand – also familiar. That is where the story begins to go sideways, however. Rather than going the medieval route and having Morgana take Arthur's dying body to Avalon, the show continues its emphasis on the relationship between Merlin and Arthur and has Merlin take Arthur to Avalon in a desperate attempt to save him. Meanwhile, Morgana tries to stop them, torturing their plans out of one of the knights and killing a fan favorite character before setting out to meet them on their way. She finds Arthur and triumphantly mocks him as he lays dying on the ground: "oh don't worry, dear brother, I won't let you die alone. I'll stay and watch over you… until the wolves gorge on your carcass and bathe in your blood" ("The Diamond of the Day Part Two" 37:44-37:48). It is a mockery of her usual role, where Morgan le Fay stays watch over Arthur's body and takes it to its final resting place in

Avalon, giving their enmity a kinder conclusion in Arthur's death and their final reconciliation.

Instead, in *Merlin*, Morgana's final interaction with Arthur reinforces her hatred and villainy, underscoring not just how far she has fallen from her early kindhearted and pure characterization but how different she is from her depiction in the medieval canon. As Ebony Elizabeth Thomas describes *Merlin*, "none of the major characters from the Arthurian cycles assumes his or her most familiar form from the legends" (78). With Morgana, we see this across the series – in her initial representation she is more innately *good* than she is in most medieval depictions, whereas in her ending she lacks the final redemption that the later medieval canon, especially Malory, grants her. In this way, *Merlin*'s subversion both reflects and challenges the multiplicity of representations of Morgan le Fay in the medieval legends. Just as there is no one Morgan le Fay in the medieval version of the King Arthur story, Morgana is not just one character in *Merlin*, but a vastly different character from start to finish.

One of the clearest ways that *Merlin* demonstrates this degression in character is using a typical trick of the trade – costuming. Morgana's wardrobe is an integral part of the development of the character, and, as Eirini Dimitra Bourontzi puts it, "Morgana's gradual change in character and spiral towards evil is also symbolized by her personal style" (103). Early in the show, Morgana is richly dressed in beautiful, vibrant gowns. She wears gossamer silks and rich velvets, in jewel tones and shimmering whites. She dresses elaborately and beautifully, and definitely catches the eye, something that she is well aware of. Her silky black hair is either brushed loose in waves down her back or styled elegantly with fashionable headpieces. In other words, she is dressed elegantly

befitting her position as a lady of the court. She is also dressed as befits a cheerful young woman, and seems to take joy in her appearance and the affect it has. After she leaves Camelot and begins her quest to take the throne, however, things change drastically. Her costume for the final seasons does not display the same variety as the early seasons; she appears to be wearing the same tattered black dress nearly constantly. The dress is not rich or elegant, but made of coarse fabric and ill-fitting. Her hair is matted and tangled. She looks like a witch in a children's story, a far cry from the elegant young lady she was in her Camelot days.

Television uses elements like costuming to provide new insights into the characters that a novel might portray through narration. While *Merlin* might not let audiences know directly what Morgana is thinking, by using visual clues like costuming, the viewer gets insight into her psychological state. A viewer watching *Merlin* and seeing Morgana in a shimmering white nightgown will see this as a sign of her innocence and purity, whereas her raggedy dress and messy hair showcases her fall from grace. It is a sort of common knowledge visual cue for the audience, who may not know *why* they see a white nightgown as a symbol of innocence and purity – and, of course, this would not read the same way in different audiences – but it fills in as a shorthand for the internal narrative we are missing. We do not see, as the audience, what Morgana is thinking when she is kicked out of Camelot. But when we see her in a tatty black sack and compare it to the beautiful gowns she wore before, we can imagine her bitterness at her fall from grace and her removal from what she feels is her rightful status. Costuming is a visual cue that fills in for what a textual narrative might be able to do with a first person perspective, and adds depth that a descriptive text might not be able to accomplish.

Another thing that textual narratives cannot quite accomplish is bringing characters to full detailed life. While a reader might be able to envision a character, it is only their own idea of the character, not how the creator fully intended. With television, the creative powers are able to present a fully realized version of the character – *their* version of the character. The casting of Morgana in *Merlin* is a masterclass in showing what can be done with the Morgan le Fay character's dual nature and character progression. Katie McGrath has a young, wide-eyed innocence in the early seasons that suits her character. She looks bright, fresh, and cheerful. When she stands up against Uther her voice is strong and rings clear. After she starts her slow progression towards villainy, however, she begins to display a snide smirk, showcasing just how different that happy face can look in other circumstances. McGrath is also Irish and uses her natural accent in the show, putting her at odds with the English accents of the rest of the cast. Even this minor touch positions Morgana as an outsider in Camelot from the start. Although Colin Morgan, who plays Merlin, is also Irish, he uses an English accent, showing that Merlin blends in – hides his magic – whereas Morgana is destined to stand out in – or stand against – Camelot.

Television tricks and tactics are also at hand in Starz's *Camelot*, whose Morgan is perhaps less developed than *Merlin*'s, but still very nuanced and interesting. Much like *Merlin*, the show is an attempt at a more modern revisioning of the legend, suited for modern audiences. Unlike *Merlin*, *Camelot* is decidedly not family friendly or sanitized, and reflects the much darker tones familiar to Starz's network values. This creates an entirely different feeling than *Merlin*, aside from the show's perhaps more faithful approach to the legend. In *Camelot*, like in the medieval canon, Arthur is the son of Uther

Pendragon conceived by trickery at the hand of Merlin. He is hidden away, raised by Ector and educated well, until Uther is killed, then brought to Camelot to become the next king. However, he faces backlash from Uther's daughter Morgan, who feels she is the rightful heir to the throne of Britain as Uther's only acknowledged child. *Camelot* showcases the power struggles between the siblings as Morgan schemes for the throne and Arthur adjusts to his new life as king and figures out who he is in his new reality.

Morgan is the clear antagonist of the series, the foil to both Arthur and Merlin. They are the main players on the board, and the three fight for power in different ways. Morgan, despite being a woman, holds a surprising degree of power and proceeds to wield it skillfully and subtly as she attempts to protect her birthright and take the throne. She emerges as one of the first characters seen on screen, returning to Britain after a long time away to reunite with Uther. However, he decidedly rejects her, slapping her across the face and disowning her. This will prove his undoing, as Morgan takes great offense and seeks her revenge. She had already felt negatively towards her father for sending her away as a child, but being so blatantly cast aside pushes her past her limit. The opening of the episode shows her revenge, as she uses her magic to disguise herself and poisons Uther, killing him. Unfortunately for Morgan, Merlin intervenes. He does not save Uther, but instead maneuvers the situation so that Uther names Arthur as his heir. This is a surprise to Morgan, who did not even know of Arthur's existence, and who takes this challenge as a great offense not just to herself but also to her mother, who was killed to make way for Arthur's mother Igraine.

Morgan sets out to prove herself the rightful heir, making her court at Castle Pendragon. At first, she directly challenges Arthur, forming an alliance with King Lot to

challenge Arthur martially. Lot, a political rival of Uther's, is hesitant, but is drawn in by Morgan's keen mind and sexual power. Their union is a very charged one, and in typical primetime fashion, is displayed quite graphically on-screen. Lot is lecherous and petty, and Morgan uses him to achieve her ends. However, he pushes back when she challenges him, and she finds herself soured on their partnership. In the end, she warns Arthur when Lot is going to attack, and though it is a bitter victory, Arthur and his allies are able to defeat Lot and win the day. Morgan finds herself thwarted, but not beaten. She decides that a different tactic is needed: "men are not my way to this. I'll find another way to take it" ("The Sword and the Crown" 45:23-45:25). Having tried a direct, martial challenge and seen its drawbacks, Morgan moves into a different, more shadowy realm, or rather two shadow realms – magic and politics. Here Morgan settles more into her own power, rather than using the power of others to achieve her ends. Notably, it is also when she moves away from male power and steps into a more female world. Although her attempts are shadowed by Merlin – in politics more than magic, ironically – Morgan's power, her knowledge of magic and her political acumen, will both allow her to accumulate more power than Merlin anticipated or is prepared to thwart.

First she tries to use her burgeoning magical powers to manipulate the situation to her advantage. Like in the medieval canon, Morgan was educated at a nunnery, and, as Merlin puts it, "she came back from the nunnery with some interesting talents, not particularly Christian" ("The Long Night" 22:24-22:25). She learned to manipulate her image, taking the form of her younger self, which allowed her to sneak into Uther's castle and poison him, as well as entering Camelot to spy on Arthur. She also learned how to summon greater powers, but she did not learn about the price magic would take, and this

begins to show as she experiences suffering at the hands of her magic. Early in the season, as she plans to enchant Guinevere and begin manipulating Arthur's personal life, she starts having pains and collapses. Although she recovers from what she believes to be a fever and begins ravenously eating, she soon starts bleeding from her eyes, and it is clear that she is not well. She nearly dies, or perhaps does die, and is only saved thanks to the intervention of the nun Sybil, who has come to Castle Pendragon in her time of need – and perhaps because Morgan has a greater purpose still to serve. After her rebirth, she is gifted a new face to wear, Igraine's. Though she is not well pleased at first, she soon finds it will serve her purposes well, and she uses the face to sneak into Camelot and begin manipulating circumstances to achieve her goals of destabilizing Arthur's reign.

As she is recovering from her illness and preparing her intrusion of Camelot, Morgan is also amassing political power to begin a true challenge to Arthur's claim to the throne. As the legitimate heir of Uther Pendragon, Morgan has a right to the throne, but people have acknowledged Arthur as king. Thus, Morgan has to ensure that people look up to her as a rightful power so that, if she does succeed in undermining Arthur, they will respect her as their leader. She does this by holding court at Castle Pendragon as a minor liege lord, listening to her people and solving problems for them. There is a notable scene where two parents are debating over who will keep custody of their son. The mother claims that the father has abandoned them and has no right to the child, while the father claims that he needs the son to work the land and that it is his right as the father to keep his child. Morgan handles the situation deftly in a King Solomon-esque way, showing political savvy. She offers to buy the child from the parents. While the mother balks, the father haggles, eventually reaching a high enough price that he sells away the child.

Morgan takes this as proof that he has no parental rights; a true father would never sell his child away. It shows her power as a leader, and proves to her people that she is fair and just. The situation wins her great acclaim.

However, it is not only through good leadership that Morgan wins over political power; she is also pulling the strings to ensure that the people are on her side and not her brother's. Together with Sibyl, she creates an image of herself as protector of the people. Sibyl, who takes for herself the role of Morgan's guide and protector, goes above and beyond to ensure that Morgan reaches her goals. When Morgan needs to gain the support of local merchants and landowners, Sibyl sees that the best way to earn their trust is to show that no one is safe while Arthur is king. She does this by hiring a thug to beat her – if a nun is in danger in public, who is safe? This is the central foundation of Morgan's argument, that Britain has become a center of lawlessness since Uther's death, and that whatever one thinks of Arthur, he just is not a strong enough king. She sets herself up as his foil, as someone who is strong enough to do what it takes. She proves this by handling two situations regarding Sibyl. First, when the man who Sibyl hired comes to Castle Pendragon and they are in danger of being exposed, Morgan instead turns the tables, slitting his throat so he can't talk and handing him over to the angry crowd as the man who would attack a nun. She posits this as a sign of her willingness to take a bold stand against those who would do violence in her lands against the weak and vulnerable, and the crowd eats it up.

Another situation is more delicate, however, and puts Morgan in a difficult situation. Sibyl has become one of the cornerstones of Morgan's life, and her support is invaluable as Morgan gains more power and cements her position as a challenger for the

throne. This makes it all the more troubling when a woman comes to Castle Pendragon and claims that Sibyl burned down the nunnery with her daughter still inside, and needs to be put to death for her crimes. Morgan is stuck between a rock and a hard place. Sibyl has been publicly accused, and to let her go unpunished would undermine her authority and her stated position as a protector of justice. Yet at the same time, Sibyl has done so much for Morgan, and she does not feel like she can kill the nun. In the end, Morgan strikes a compromise. She burns Sibyl, putting her hand in an open fire in an act of punishment for burning down the nunnery. She claims that Sibyl will feel the pain of the burns for the rest of her life and feel shame for what she did. While the woman is initially unsatisfied, Morgan stands her ground. Sibyl, naturally hurt at being burned, is grateful at the compromise Morgan reached. They are still able to stand together as they manipulate the people and the situation to achieve their ends of reaching power.

Morgan manages to be fairly successful in this while she is at Camelot wearing Igraine's face. She stokes the flames of controversy, knowing exactly which buttons to push to create problems for Arthur. Arthur has been having a difficult relationship with Guinevere, who is married to his champion Leontes. Morgan, in the guise of Igraine, manages to reveal to Leontes that Arthur had sex with Guinevere on their wedding day. This causes a schism in Leontes and Guinevere's marriage and breaks the trust between the king and his champion. Morgan also, while wearing Igraine's face, has sex with Merlin, who has been struggling with emotional intimacy all season. The next morning, the real Igraine reaches Camelot, having escaped imprisonment at Castle Pendragon, and meets Morgan in the courtyard. She sees Morgan wearing her face and believes herself to

be going mad. Morgan, pleased to see her work so successful, sneaks out and returns home to see how her schemes play out.

The final showdown comes as all of Morgan's work comes together in the Battle of Bardon Pass. Morgan sends a man who is obsessed with her to Bardon Pass to assault Arthur's holding there. He is told that, no matter what, he is to kill the king and bring Morgan his sword Excalibur. In the meantime, Morgan gathers up her people, who have come with complaints about the increasing dangers in the countryside, and promises to bring them safely to Camelot to petition the king directly. Things work out even more to her favor when Igraine and Merlin come to accost her, and she is able to apprehend them as traitors who would assault the sister of the king, especially the mad sorcerer Merlin. They set off for Camelot, with Morgan knowing Arthur will not be there. Morgan arrives triumphantly at the castle and asks for her brother, acting shocked to hear that he is not there. She continues to manipulate the crowd, assuring people that the rumors are not true when word begins to spread that Arthur has run off after an affair with Guinevere.

Morgan's crowning moment comes when Excalibur is brought triumphantly to her. She takes a moment to enjoy her victory in private, and then emerges into the crowd, sorrowfully exclaiming that her brother is dead. She plays up the situation, and manages to get herself named his successor by the crowd, who by this point in time are primed to view her as their natural leader. It is a master class in manipulation, and the culmination of all of Morgan's hard work since returning to Britain. As she awaits her coronation, she takes a moment to let it sink in: "Is this it? Have I done it? … This was everything" ("Reckoning" 30:55-31:05). All that she had worked for, all the magic and the suffering

that came with it, all the manipulation and the political scheming, it had all come to a successful conclusion.

Naturally, Arthur shows up at the last moment to ruin it all for her, showing that not only is he alive but that he now knows her to be his enemy. He accuses her of arranging Bardon Pass, bringing forth one of her men who bears witness against her. Sibyl takes the fall, confessing to everything, even the murder of Igraine. She is summarily executed, beheaded and dumped in an unmarked grave, and in her last moments she laments that Morgan did not come to see her off. Sibyl, who gave everything for Morgan, had to be forsaken in the end for their ultimate goals. Morgan is left at Castle Pendragon, where Arthur confronts her, saying that he knows she did it. He disowns her, taking away his protection and even her name, something that incenses her. As she puts it, she is more deserving of the name than he is: "I *am* Pendragon! You are nothing! You will always be nothing but my father's bastard!" ("Reckoning" 42:58-43:03).

The series ends, as it begins, with Morgan using her magic to begin a new quest for power. Sobbing over Sibyl's grave, believing herself to have lost everything, she gets a message from beyond that to achieve power, she must give birth to a king. We see Guinevere approach Arthur and the two have sex, seemingly reinforcing this notion, only for it to be revealed that "Guinevere" was actually Morgan in disguise, hinting towards the notion of Mordred as Morgan and Arthur's incestuous child. This is where the story leaves off; the show was not renewed after the first season, leaving Morgan's quest for power and revenge in the air.

Morgan is arguably the most powerful character in *Camelot*. Though Arthur holds power as the king and Merlin holds power as a magician (who admittedly rarely uses this power), Morgan is both political and magical, reflecting the power dynamics of the medieval legend that make her such an uncomfortable character for many authors. This makes her an interesting character in *Camelot*; as the villain, she remains a signifier that this may still be an uncomfortable character idea for the creators of the show, and yet she is a nuanced and carefully handled character, not one-note. She is given a lot of backstory and sympathy, and her portrayal makes her anything but a caricature of what villainy looked like for the medieval authors. As she volleys against Merlin, you can see that even he finds her charming, against his will; the audience is intended to like Morgan, even if we find her discomfiting.

Morgan is real to us, the audience, not just a character on a page. Much of this is due to the compelling portrayal by the bold and otherworldly Eva Green, who encapsulates the magical nature that haunts Morgan throughout the show. Green is equally at home manipulating a crowd of petitioners as she is performing arcane rituals, making Morgan easy in her skin as a powerful, political, magical woman. She also displays this power through her costuming, much like *Merlin* does. *Camelot* shows Morgan's political acumen through the way she presents herself visually, such as letting the viewer know that she considers herself the rightful heir in the way she wears regal headpieces throughout the show, even before she "wins" the crown.

Morgan's costuming is carefully chosen for each circumstance, and is used as another tool in her political maneuvering. She often wears rich garments that convey an air of sophistication. She is usually portrayed in dark colors, accompanied by golden

accents, though she odes occasionally stray into red tones as well – showing her to be a shadowy, but regal, figure. But in some cases, her costuming is not just carefully chosen to convey a general sense of character, but rather chosen to send a specific message. In the scenes where she is taking her people to Camelot to petition Arthur during the Battle of Bardon Pass, she is dressed in a form-fitting dark gown with a chainmail vest-like garment over the top. The chains drape elegantly over her form, managing to combine a hint of preparation for danger with dashing elegance and sensuality. It is in this outfit that she appears before the people holding Excalibur and pronouncing Arthur dead, a striking image – Morgan in mail, holding aloft a bloody sword, tearfully proclaiming the death of the king. Every aspect of her appearance is carefully shaped to suit her ends, as can be seen in her appearance for her coronation. In a black dress with a stunning gold embellishment under a richly embroidered black and gold gown, Morgan wears her black hair long and loose down her back and no jewelry. While she has often favored elaborate hairstyles and dangling earrings, at this point she knows that anything of that nature would distract from the main point, the crown. Even the gold on her robe is muted, to match the muted nature of the crown itself.

Much like *Merlin*, *Starz* carefully uses television elements to craft a version of their Morgan(a) that lives and breathes, not just thinks. Although *Merlin* does sometimes get a little simplistic in the later seasons with how over-the-top Morgana can act, both shows avoid caricaturizing their Morgans. They can afford to make the character so compelling due to the depth of character allowed in an extended runtime given in a television series. With Morgana and Morgan as major characters who play a major role in the story, particularly the endings, both shows devote a considerable amount of time to

developing how the character works, giving backstory, relationships, and motivation room to blossom. This creates a very nuanced character, something that is not seen in the medieval canon. This is much more similar to *The Mists of Avalon*, which gave us deep insight into Morgaine as a character. All three offerings showcase a unique but distinctly similar Morgan le Fay character who brings notes of the original storyline into a new, modern age.

One thing that all three offerings bring into the light is an emphasis on the relationships between female characters and how that impacts the Morgan le Fay role. Morgaine's relationship with the women around her was fundamental to *The Mists of Avalon*. In the early myths, Morgan le Fay's relationship with Guenever is one of the driving factors in all of her actions against Arthur. This relationship with one of the only other prominent female characters plays through in the modern versions as well. Morgana's relationship with Gwen in *Merlin* is very important to her character and her development, if not necessarily her driving motivation as it is in the mythology. Early on in the show, Gwen and Morgana are very close, almost like sisters. Gwen is Morgana's servant, and they are devoted to each other. When Gwen is arrested, Morgana stands up for her. When Gwen's father is killed, Morgana nearly kills Uther in revenge. They have a deep and kind relationship that is unexpected for servant and employer, and it is one of the ways the show demonstrates Morgana's good nature.

As Morgana changes into a darker character, however, this relationship sours. In particular, Morgana is infuriated by Gwen's rise in status. She sees Gwen as a threat to her rule after she has a vision of Gwen crowned queen of Camelot. As she puts it, "I have dreamt the future and in it that *servant* sits upon my throne. I would rather drown in my

own blood than see that day" ("The Darkest Day Part Two" 14:48-15:00). Morgana, who had initially not cared about Gwen's status, now sees it as appalling that a servant would take her place as queen. She uses Gwen as a tool in her plans against Arthur, torturing Gwen until she changes allegiance and becomes loyal to Morgana instead. It becomes a mockery of their earlier close relationship, as Gwen, now queen, is devoted to Morgana, an evil sorceress bent on deposing Gwen's husband. The two plan together and meet in the woods and interact like sisters once again, but it is all meaningless because Morgana has removed everything that makes Gwen who she is and placed herself inside her instead.

Morgana also has a close relationship with her half-sister, Morgause, who first appears in season two. As a priestess of the Old Religion, Morgause is able to help Morgana understand better her magical talents and develop as a sorceress. Unfortunately, she is also very antagonistic towards Camelot and helps turn Morgana further against the kingdom. It is her actions, tying the sleeping spell to Morgana's life force, that pushed Merlin to poison Morgana, causing her to lose all faith in her former comrades. It is at Morgause's urging that Morgana plots against Uther, and Morgause is the one who helps Morgana figure out how to use her talents to undermine Uther's rule. While the two are shown as devoted to each other, their relationship is deeply toxic, and ultimately ends when Morgana sacrifices Morgause in an arcane ritual to destabilize Camelot. While this was done at Morgause's urging, it shows that their relationship was based less in mutual love and acceptance and more in a shared hatred of Camelot.

Morgan, in *Camelot*, interestingly seems to have healthier female relationships. Her relationship with Guinevere is almost nonexistent, which deviates from the medieval

canon. Their interactions are limited solely to some small conversation while Morgan is in Camelot wearing Igraine's face. Morgan does not feel anything towards Guinevere but sees her as a means to an end, a tool to destabilize her brother's rule. Morgan's hatred is directed instead at Igraine herself, who she sees as an interloper into her family. When Igraine emerged, her father rejected her mother, sentencing her to death so that he could marry Igraine instead. Uther then banished Morgan as well, and Morgan never forgave him – or Igraine, who she blames for all of this. In the end, though, as Igraine is dying from a stab wound Morgan inflicted on her, she reveals that she saved Morgan. Uther had wanted to kill Morgan to get her out of the way, but Igraine convinced him to banish her instead. The woman she had hated all this time had saved her life. Still, Morgan cannot feel anything but hatred. Igraine had undermined her entire childhood and destroyed what she saw as a solid family, and it is thanks to Igraine that Morgan is now an orphan fighting for her birthright.

On the flipside, Morgan has a lot more positive female companionship than Morgana does. She has Sibyl, who becomes a surrogate mother figure for her. Sibyl helped raise her at the nunnery, and initially Morgan is very antagonistic, refusing to allow her entry into Castle Pendragon. It is as she is dying that she allows Sibyl to come in, and Sibyl holds her and keeps her safe as she is reborn. Sibyl is experienced in the arcane rituals Morgan learned at the nunnery, and she is able to help Morgan better utilize her talents and be safer in how she wields her powers. It is with Sibyl by her side that Morgan is able to amass political power, and though Sibyl is by no means the power behind the throne, Morgan would not have been as successful as she was without her. In the end, the loss of Sibyl nearly undoes Morgan. Sibyl was a necessary sacrifice, but one

that Morgan genuinely mourned. *Camelot* shows Morgan weeping on her grave, clearly demonstrating that this loss is not an empty one.

Sibyl is not Morgan's only companion, however. A servant in Castle Pendragon becomes a close companion early in the show, before even Sibyl shows up. Vivien was one of Uther's servants, and when Morgan takes over Castle Pendragon, she takes Vivien as an important advisor. She gives Vivien high privileges and rank in the household, and Vivien becomes a personal servant and companion. This becomes a close relationship, and Vivien is very devoted, not just a bland servant. It is Vivien who brings Morgan home when Morgan's use of her magic pushes her body too far, and Vivien who brings Sibyl to save Morgan. Vivien's devotion shows that Morgan is someone worth serving, not just someone people serve out of fear. She is not mindlessly devoted; when Igraine escapes her captivity, Vivien turns a blind eye, having not approved of Igraine's torture. She also does not serve Sibyl as closely when Morgan is gone, showing that her loyalty is to Morgan personally, rather than to the cause. But it is clear that Morgan has a close companion who cares about her as an individual, rather than someone who can grant them power or status. It is important that Vivien is another woman – female companionship is an integral part of Morgan's story at this point. Having been raised in a nunnery and rejected by the men in her life, Morgan can turn to the women surrounding her and find comfort and support.

Relationships are so important to these offerings; it is clear that the Morgan le Fay character is developed best by showing how she actually has relationships with the characters around her. By developing these relationships and how much other people mean to her, this character can be made more nuanced and, often, more sympathetic. *The*

Mists of Avalon does this well by showing how the complicated female relationships Morgaine had throughout her life shaped her perspective on herself, her religiosity, and her womanhood. *Merlin* showed how betrayal from the men in her life led Morgana to internalize and isolate, leading to corruption and hatred. *Camelot*, on the other hand, shows how strong female support systems allowed Morgan to become a strong political player and achieve a great degree of success, though this was mostly taken away from her at the end of the series. The medieval canon does not do much to develop Morgan's relationships. She has them; her relationship with Accolon is one of the driving forces of her part of the story, as well as her obsession with Lancelot and hatred for Guenever. But those relationships are not teased out, which is one of the reasons Morgan does not *herself* feel teased out. This three Morgans are allowed that time to stretch and feel more exposed. Both *Merlin* and *Camelot* do a good job building on the foundations of *Mists* to showcase how important relationships are for building out a realistic version of this character.

That is not to say that these two offerings are in many ways – or even most ways – similar. Though they deal with the same subject matter, they are two very different shows. *Camelot* as a whole is a lot darker and intended for a more mature audience. Premiering on the primetime network Starz, it has an entirely different flavor than the family friendly BBC offering *Merlin*. Looking at the two shows in comparison shows how television as a medium has a lot to offer in terms of variety even when tackling the same subject material. Starz as a network has an approach that is marketed more with sex and violence, and this comes across strongly in *Camelot*. The show does not shy away from portraying such matters graphically, which creates a different feeling to the story.

Merlin, on the other hand, is distinctly marketed towards a younger audience. This is especially clear in the way the story has been altered to be about younger characters, but even in terms of the darker undertones, the show is highly sanitized. Violence is portrayed and death is shown on screen, but little blood; sex might be hinted at, but Arthur and Guinevere are not even shown sharing a bed. The two offerings present a divergence on either side from the original stories. On the one hand, *Camelot* takes things to a graphic extreme, showing a modern-day acceptance of explicit sex and gratuitous violence that most medieval authors would likely have been appalled by, yet stays in many ways more faithful to the original stories. On the other hand, *Merlin* makes the material so suited to a more youthful audience that it might be more palatable to a medieval sensibility, but it is more removed from the mature feeling of the legends.

These shows exist in a specific context that is seen in the way they put forth their material, in addition to the influences of network and audience. *Merlin*, coming out in 2008, exists just a little earlier in the television timeline than *Camelot*, in 2011. While it seems like a short gap, a lot can happen in even just a short period in the television world. *Merlin*, in 2008 on the BBC, exists in a contextual world alongside shows like *Doctor Who* (2005), *Torchwood* (2006), and *Being Human* (2008), all vaguely fantasy shows on the BBC that played with heroic stories, occasional dark characters, and often poor cinematic effects. The feel of these shows is similar and there is a very "early 21st century BBC" feeling that comes across. *Camelot*, on the other hand, lives in a world with *Game of Thrones* (2011) and *The Borgias* (2011), heavily dramatized shows that deal with political maneuvering, family dramatics, and high-budget cinematic effects. Compared to *Merlin*, there is an entirely different feeling, despite the three-year gap.

Television does have its drawbacks, which is seen most clearly in the lack of follow-through with *Camelot*. While *Merlin* told a complete story, *Camelot* left things hanging after one season. This shows the fickleness of television as a genre; with things often up in the air regarding renewal and continuity, it can be hard to tell a story in its entirety. *Merlin* was able to do this thanks to good ratings, support from the network, and circumstances working out. This worked out for the showrunners, who "always felt the story of the legend was best told across five series" ("Merlin Casts Final Spell"). They chose to end the show when they did, "believ[ing] the story ha[d] reached a natural end" ("Merlin Casts Final Spell"). With *Merlin*, the showrunners were able to tell the story as they wanted to tell it, complete and final, without either cutting it short or dragging it on too long. This did not work out so well for *Camelot*, which was not renewed after its first season "due to significant production challenges" ("Starz Shuts Gates"). Hurdles like scheduling difficulties with the actors caused the network to choose "not to conjure up a second season," leaving viewers in the lurch ("Starz Shuts Gates"). This was bothersome especially since the show ended on a cliffhanger with Morgan presumably conceiving Mordred, hinting at a further developing storyline, a storyline which would never be pursued thanks to the network cancelling the show. While a novel like *The Mists of Avalon* presents a full narrative in completion, television shows are more of a gamble. You never know if the show will be able to be completed or if something is going to come up and things will end on a cliffhanger. While it works out well sometimes, like with *Merlin*, in other cases you end up feeling unsatisfied, like with *Camelot*.

Still, even with her story left in the air, *Camelot* presented an interesting and nuanced Morgan that other mediums have struggled to manage. Both *Camelot* and *Merlin*

do an excellent job utilizing the unique benefits of television to create a Morgan le Fay character that is a rich take on the legends, updated for a modern age. Cindy Mediavilla argues that these two shows "shatter the stereotype and present highly compelling versions of Arthur's half-sister and frequent nemesis" (44). According to Mediavilla, *Merlin* and *Camelot* "stand out as being among the most fully realized versions of her character in any medium" (52). Much of this is thanks to the dynamic and richly plumbed depths of character development seen across the shows' runtimes, and the ways that the shows utilize the visual medium to dive deeper into the psychological workings of the character.

The shows are also artifacts of the modern age, however, and bring in modern ideals. This is both promising and troubling. Bourontzi argues that *Merlin* "takes a feminist twist in several instances, as a way to keep up with society's demand for equal representation" (101). Jennifer C. Edwards argues that, "perhaps to appeal to modern audiences, these series [*Camelot* and *Merlin*] have also chosen to plot feminist arcs for these characters, espousing ideals such as equality, female power, and feminine community" (57). Both shows emerge at a tense point in feminist history, as early 21st century feminism was at a crossroads. In a backlash to second-wave feminism, the women's movement in the 21st century became less cohesive and less definitive. Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune write that "people have been saying that feminism is dead for years" (4). However, Redfern and Aune are optimistic about 21st century feminism, writing that "most young people, then, are feminists without realizing it. In theory at least, the principles of equality, fairness and non-discrimination are burned into younger people's brains" (4-5). There is a very specific kind of feminism, then, that

Merlin and *Camelot* are emerging into. Early 21st century feminism is a shy feminism, a feminism that does not want to claim the word but wants to espouse the ideals. That comes across in the way Morgan(a) is portrayed, as a step forward for feminist portrayals of a powerful female character, but still falling prey to stereotypes and negative consequences.

Several critics point out that these feminist ideals may be there at the drawing board, but fall flat when it comes to follow-through. Howey points out that "powers (magical or narrative) given to female characters like Morgan seem to address feminism's historical concern with representations of women, yet the narrative structures undermine that power" (46). Edwards claims that "both shows ultimately narrate the danger of empowered women as a feminist plot that fails to fulfill its promise and must be heroically stopped" (57). These shows fall prey to a sort of 21st century "girlboss feminism," where the point of feminism is to show that "women are, by all measures, as capable as men," even if the standards women are being held to are not positive ones (Mukhopadhyay). Morgan(a) proves that she is powerful and capable – just as powerful as the men in these shows – but the heights of power she is achieving are not ones to be admired.

Later, Edwards pushes further, stating that "by building narratives of empowerment around characters whose ultimately negative fates are known, the shows make the falls of these characters even more cruel" (75). According to Edwards, the predestination of Morgan(a) as an antagonist means that making her a feminist character undermines the feminist aspect. If Morgan(a) is destined to be the villain, she cannot be a good representation of feminism. There is an argument to be made here, about

predestination and adaptation. Is Morgan(a) predestined to fall from grace? If these shows are adaptations, must they be faithful to her role as the antagonist? We already see in *Merlin* how the show changes her hopeful, redemptive ultimate end to make her even more of a villain than she is in the medieval canon. Could she not, then, be changed to be *less* of a villain? If the showrunners want to push a more feminist agenda – argue that women in/with power are *not* inherently problematic – then should they choose a different character, or just give this character a different ending, and if so, does that lessen the impact of the story? We see in *The Mists of Avalon* that giving Morgaine a more sympathetic portrayal does not lessen the impact of Arthur's end (indirectly) at her hand. So why not do the same in television? It seems like this is a deliberate choice by the showrunners to keep Morgan(a) as the villain, regardless of whatever feminist message they hoped to send.

However, Bourontzi argues that there is still merit in the lessons of these shows. They may ultimately fall short of a feminist goal, but they still provide a richer look at the Morgan le Fay character than the medieval canon grants us. Discussing *Merlin*, she argues that "from the beginning of the story, we know that Morgana is bound to fail, because of the predictability of her journey, familiar to us from the Arthurian legends, which always described her as Arthur's enemy. This TV series, though, chooses to give Morgana a full life and representation in order to show that there are more aspects to her character than just being Arthur's antagonist" (107). Even if *Merlin* does not take a grand stance for feminism, it still pushes the mark further for this powerful female character. The show "demonstrate[es] unequivocally that she is not inherently evil, as the tendency is in most Arthurian film adaptations" (Bourontzi 108). As an offering in the pantheon of

Morgan le Fay portrayals, *Merlin* is a nuanced look at the character that takes time and attention to how her downfall happened and just how exactly she became the villain she ends up as. *Camelot* does not show a downfall, per se, but it does show insight into why Morgan acts as she does, and gives us a look at her motivations and her feelings. Both shows humanize the character deeply, adding new depth to what is familiar to audiences of the Arthurian legend. No longer is Morgan le Fay a one-note villain, or a voice on page; now she is a fully realized person on screen, with a voice of her own. She is someone not to be ignored as she takes her stand and makes her own choices. And as these shows develop her into her own, richly portrayed character, the audience can get a fuller sense of who she is and why she is the way that she is – granting a better understanding of her place in the overall story.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORGANS FOR THE YOUTH: CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Television, like the novel, can be an excellent way to present a fuller picture of who Morgan le Fay can be if given room to expand from her medieval roots. But what happens if we take Morgan to new genres – genres that force her into new shapes and sizes? Children's and young adult literature might look like familiar ground – as written forms of literature, they hearken back to the novel form or the medieval canon. However, children's and young adult literature have their own defining characteristics and stylistic choices that set the genre(s) apart from literature for more adult audiences, and these frameworks make for an interesting approach to Morgan le Fay. The more youthful approach allows for a different understanding of Morgan, much like the difference in understanding between the more youthful *Merlin* and the more mature *Camelot*. By appealing to a younger audience, children's literature and young adult literature make choices that often craft characters that are designed to be understood at a more basic level. However, the two are distinct from each other in many ways. While children's literature and young adult literature are often grouped together, they create very different versions of the character that are worth discussing in depth. Children's literature, crafted for younger readers with an often more simplistic view of the world, presents a Morgan

who is flattened out to be a supporting character – whether mentor or antagonist – to the "ordinary kid" protagonists. In many ways, she resembles the one-note characterizations of the medieval canon, even as the format of the stories themselves have been updated. In young adult literature, on the other hand, Morgan is able to be a protagonist in her own right. As these books are written for tweens and teens going through periods of self-discovery, these Morgans are also going through periods of development and growth, and showcase a greater interiority and depth than might be expected of novels not meant for adult readers.

Children's and young adult literature is markedly different than literature developed for and marketed towards adult readers. Yet to lump them together into one category does them – and their characters – a disservice. It is only by looking at them carefully, both in isolation and in conversation with each other, that we can ask ourselves: who is the Morgan being presented to the youthful population? How does she change as the assumed reader ages? What is the impact of this presentation? A young reader is going to have their perception of the world shaped by the books they read, and the stories, characters, and themes presented in these books will become touchstones in their development. Having a character like Morgan le Fay presented as a benevolent mentor or a cackling hag as a child can impact a young reader's perception of powerful women, while reading about the struggles and growth of a young Morgan as a young adult reader can engender sympathy and a feeling of relatability. The way that Morgan le Fay is presented to any audience can be a strong reflection of the audience and creator (dis)comforts regarding women with power, but when it comes to young readers, the way that Morgan le Fay is presented is also an *opportunity*, a chance to shape young minds.

Children's and young adult fiction are often lumped together, as the contrary *other* to the more normative adult literature market. Despite the differences, there is an overlap between the genres. These books are often taught in schools, and because of children's diverse reading abilities, there is considerable blurring of lines when it comes to who is actually reading what. Each contains subgenres; in recent years dystopian fiction has become a big hit in young adult fiction, and fantasy is a perennial hit in both children's and young adult literature. And, fundamentally, they have a similar spirit to them. According to Kerry Mallan, "children's literature has conventionally and historically been concerned with identity and the often torturous journey to becoming a subject who is generally older and wiser, a journey typically characterized by mishap, adventure, and detours" (12). The same could arguably be said about young adult fiction, which is also concerned with "this familiar coming-of-age narrative" where "there is often an underlying premise of an essential self that will emerge or be uncovered" (Mallan 12). Roni Natov argues that "books with unconventional stories, characters, narratives, and ways of telling stories can provide an opening for the imagination" when it comes to young readers (3).

Those unconventional stories are key, here. Fantasy stories, such as stories about magic that are essential to depictions of Morgan le Fay, are a big part of the children's and young adult market. M. O. Grenby claims that, "as a concept, fantasy is clearly central to any understanding of children's literature. Some have argued that fantasy is the very core of children's literature" (144). Explicating this further, Grenby claims that "quite apart from the many satisfactions [fantasy] offers to the readers, authors find the form eminently suitable for the transmission of lessons on selfhood, these being regarded

now as the best kind of instruction that good children's literature can and should teach" (164). Fantasy author Tamora Pierce, on why she writes fantasy novels for young adult readers, explained that "the one thing fantasy does… is we give kids exposure to parts of the real world at a safe distance, so that they can read about it and think about it, and turn it over, close the book, go away, talk about it with people they trust, then come back and think about it again" (qtd. in May 52). This tension between the exposure to reality and the necessary distance to process is something educators Kristi Amatucci and Ruth Caillouet use when teaching about speculative young adult literature: "separated from the burden of the present, students can gain perspective and read/think about imagined worlds, while still exploring themes of justice and equality relevant in our own" (42). Fantasy, then, is an integral part of how children's and young adult literature can allow young readers to develop that sense of selfhood and their conception of their own place in the world. It can also help young readers understand more about the world and how they want that world to be.

This is important when it comes to Morgan le Fay, a character who by nature belongs to fantasy; though some depictions will try to place her into a pseudo-medieval historical context, her nature as a magician makes her a character of the fantasy genre. Children's and young adult literature do not shy away from this, leaning into the unreality of the character in order to use her as a source of exploration. How that exploration plays out looks different depending on whether this is a book for children or a book for young adults. But the fact remains that Morgan le Fay is perennially a character that allows for children's and young adult literature to do what they by definition try to do – to help

young readers develop their sense of identity and consciousness. And, of course, to have fun while doing so.

Fun – as well as exploration and no little amount of magic – is in abundance in Mary Pope Osborne's *Magic Tree House* books. Written "for beginning chapter book readers," the first 28 books in the *Magic Tree House* series are "perfect for readers ages 6-9 who are just starting to read chapter books" ("Celebrating 25 Years"). The series tells the adventures of young siblings Jack and Annie, who one day find a mysterious tree house in the woods near their house in Frog Creek, Pennsylvania. The tree house is full of books, and when Annie points to a picture of dinosaurs in a book and wishes to go there, the whole tree house, including Jack, Annie, and all the books, are whisked away to the land of the dinosaurs. Adventures ensue, including a run-in with a Tyrannosaurus Rex, but they eventually return home safely – with one addition. Jack finds a gold medallion engraved with "a fancy *M*" and realizes "Someone was here before us!" (*Dinosaurs Before Dark* 30). Later, when he tells Annie about the medallion, she speculates that it has something to do with the tree house's magical powers, asking "you think *M* stands for *magic person*?" (*Dinosaurs Before Dark* 63).

The mystery of the *M* will follow Jack and Annie for the first four books in the series. In the second book of the series, *The Knight at Dawn*, Jack and Annie are transported to a medieval castle. The book they used to travel there contains a blue leather bookmark, which Jack accidentally takes home with him after he and Annie safely return. It is only once he is safe in his room and preparing to go to sleep that he realizes the bookmark has an embossed M that matches the medallion:

"Now this was an amazing new fact.

Jack took a deep breath. One mystery solved.

The person who dropped the gold medallion in the time of the dinosaurs was the same person who owned all the books in the tree house.

Who *was* this person?" (*The Knight at Dawn* 65)

Jack remains concerned. As he and Annie have adventures, they continue to find themselves in tight spots, only to be saved by an unexpected ally. He finds himself wondering "did the knight, the pteranodon, and the cat all know the M person?" (*Pirates Past Noon* 6).

The mystery does not last forever. In the fourth book, *Pirates Past Noon*, Jack and Annie finally meet their mysterious benefactor. The unexpected friend who had helped them this time – a parrot who had helped them escape from dangerous pirates – comes back to Frog Creek with them. This is unusual; none of the previous helpers had returned with Jack and Annie. Jack is concerned, then Polly begins to grow, and, "in a great swirl of colors – in a blur of feathers and light – in a flapping and stretching and screeching – a new being took shape" (*Pirates Past Noon* 56). Where the parrot had been now stood "an old woman. A beautiful old woman with long white hair and piercing eyes" (*Pirates Past Noon* 57). She quickly identifies herself as Morgan le Fay, King Arthur's sister from Camelot. Jack remarks that he has read about Camelot, and seems to have reservations:

"'What did you read about me, Jack?' said Morgan.

'You – you're a witch.'

Morgan smiled. ‘You can’t believe *everything* you read, Jack.’

‘But are you a magician?’ said Annie.

‘Most call me an enchantress…” (*Pirates Past Noon* 60)

Here, Morgan seems more than aware of her dubious reputation, and unbothered by it. But she does want to clear things up, if she can. She is not a *witch*, she is an *enchantress*. She also notes that she is a librarian, hence why she has a treehouse full of books, and she uses magic to travel through time and collect books for the library at Camelot. It is a far cry from the medieval Morgan – this Morgan seems to have no scheming ambition, but is a wise old woman with a gentle sense of humor and a thirst for knowledge, not power.

Over the next 24 books, Jack and Annie will go on various adventures for Morgan. Each adventure the children go on follows a predictable format. The children go to the woods and find the treehouse, where they either begin or continue a quest from Morgan. They travel to their destination, where Jack wants to do research and Annie wants to forge ahead and explore. Hijinks ensue, often because of Annie’s reckless nature, though her compassion and connection with nature just as often save the day. In the end, they are often surprised when they realize they have accomplished whatever goal they set out to achieve, and are happy to finally be able to set out for home, where they eagerly await their next adventure. Over the series, Jack, the protagonist, learns to open up more and take more chances, though the younger Annie does not seem to do any similar maturing. This is interesting; in children’s books, there are often intended lessons

for children in how to behave and grow. The lesson seems to be that it is okay to be adventurous, rather than timid, even if it puts you in danger.[13]

Morgan le Fay, in this series, takes on the role of a beloved mentor to the children. She is not always present, and does not take an active role in their adventures aside from giving them the goals they strive for and occasional cryptic wisdom. From her start as the "mysterious M person," Morgan shapes the series and the way the two characters interact with the world. Of course, Morgan crafted the titular tree house that allows the children to have all their adventures in the first place. But in the opening four books, Morgan shows up as the minor characters – the pteranodon, the knight, the cat, and the parrot – who come to Jack and Annie's aid at their direst need. While Jack and Annie are trying to break a spell on Morgan in books 5-8, they do not realize she is accompanying them as a mouse, and Morgan takes the opportunity to provide assistance where she can, asking trusted figures on each adventure to aid Jack and Annie. However, Morgan is not a completely benevolent figure. While she never harms the children, she does send them on adventures that put them at risk. The children often face great danger on their adventures, from earthquakes and tornadoes to bandits and Viking raiders. She sends the children to two active warzones. While Jack and Annie escape all their adventures safely, it can be said that Morgan shows a distinct lack of concern or understanding for their well-being. While she does, after they successfully escape Pompeii with a lost scroll, thank them for "risk[ing] everything to bring this to me," in

[13] There is perhaps also an interesting parallel to be drawn between Jack and Annie, as a sibling pair, and Morgan and Arthur – Jack and Annie showcasing what could have been with a healthier, happier relationship between the Camelot siblings. This is not really teased out in the books, but it is noteworthy.

most cases, she simply sends them on another, most likely dangerous, adventure next time (*Vacation Under the Volcano* 68).

It is clear that Jack and Annie see Morgan as a figure of good, though. They are always excited to see her, and do not hesitate to hug her. Her appearance is very interesting. Children's books often simplify aesthetics, with beauty being associated with goodness[14], and Morgan is often described as beautiful. In one book, she is described as "a lovely old woman with long white hair," a very benevolent old mentor description, but the book also says that "she looked beautiful in a red velvet robe" (*Dolphins at Daybreak* 4). The robe is interesting; red velvet is a very regal fabric, and could help underscore her role as King Arthur's sister, something that is not really made clear after its initial mention in the reveal of the "mysterious M person." The books also include illustrations, which help further demonstrate that Morgan is meant to be a beautiful character. When she is first revealed in *Pirates Past Noon*, she is shown with lavish robes – a medieval style gown, with a long feathered cape that the book notes is green, going along with her characterization as a parrot in this story. She has long pale hair and a jeweled circlet on her head, with a jeweled brooch on her cape, a jeweled necklace, and a long jeweled belt with stylized wings. Though she is described as an old woman, she shows little signs of aging. Later images of Morgan will have similar stylings. In *Dolphins at Daybreak*, where she is described as beautiful in her red velvet robe, there is a picture of her giving Jack and Annie their next mission. The picture is more simplistic than the previous one,

[14] In a discussion of Disney movies and their role in shaping stereotypes, Doris Bazzini, Lisa Curtin, Serena Joslin, Shilpa Regan, and Denise Martz note that this phenomenon has a long history in psychology studies. According to Bazzini et. al., "seminal social psychological research conducted 30 years ago documented the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype."

but the robe is still stylized and medieval, and Morgan wears a jeweled circlet on her head of long, white hair. There are no wrinkles to be found on her face. She looks, if anything, like a medieval icon of a saint.

Most interesting about Morgan's depiction in the *Magic Tree House* books, however, is her relationship with Camelot. As Camelot's librarian, it seems that all of Morgan's nefarious impulses, if she had any, were put to better use collecting knowledge throughout history. She is mentioned as King Arthur's sister, and she is an enchantress, but other than that, there is little to connect her to the medieval character. Some little bit does remain, though. Morgan is a little vain, and has some rivalry with Merlin. When she mentions Merlin having been the one to transform her into a mouse, Jack exclaims that Merlin is "the greatest magician who ever lived!" (*Midnight on the Moon* 63). In response, "Morgan sniffed" and says "he's not that great" (*Midnight on the Moon* 63). It is a level of pettiness unlike the character otherwise seen. Morgan's relationship with another familiar Camelot character is also hinted at – Arthur himself. Yet it is a shallow imitation of everything they share in the medieval canon. Morgan has had Jack and Annie collect four pieces of writing, and has them come to her library where a man is waiting despondently; "he and his knights have been defeated" and "he has given up all hope for his kingdom" (*Earthquake in the Early Morning* 61). In the scene, Morgan and Arthur do not even interact – Jack and Annie talk with Arthur, and are able to inspire him, but then he leaves without speaking to Morgan at all. But it is Morgan who was able to bring this all together so that Arthur could regain hope. Here Morgan is not antagonistic towards her brother, but wants to help him. Morgan in the *Magic Tree House* books is always

working for the better of Camelot, whether it is helping King Arthur regain heart, or just doing her job finding new knowledge for her library.

Compare that to the Morgan of Amber Castle's *Spell Sisters* series, who is about as dramatically villainous as one could imagine. Just as Osborne's Morgan le Fay is flattened out into the benevolent mentor and guide, Castle's Morgana le Fay is flattened out into the scheming antagonist who will stop at nothing to gain control of the mystical land of Avalon. Morgana and her evil serve as the spark for the main plot of the story, which follows the adventures of girl hero Gwen and her cousin Flora. Morgana has imprisoned the eight Spell Sisters – her own sisters – in various places across the land. Without the Spell Sisters to guard Avalon, the island is falling apart. Only Nineve, the Lady of the Lake, has stopped Morgana from taking control completely, but her power is waning. Nineve calls on Gwen and Flora to find and free the Spell Sisters before the next lunar eclipse, when Morgana will be able to take Avalon once and for all. The stories focus, as children's books do, on the adventures of Gwen and Flora. There is adventure and mayhem, as the two explore new locations. Gwen learns more about herself and her place in the world, as a tomboy who chafes at the restrictions of her life in the pseudo-medieval world in which the books take place. She is always compared to her more feminine cousin, but the two get along quite well, and Flora grows as the stories progress as well, learning to be bold and take risks.[15] As the two embark on their magical adventures, they make new allies, experience terrifying ordeals and beautiful sights, and learn about a whole new side of their world.

[15] Much like in the *Magic Tree House* books, the lesson to be learned here about how to have an ideal childhood is to have adventures. Specifically, in the *Spell Sisters* books, the lesson is that the ideal *girl* childhood is an adventurous one, which seems important.

Unfortunately, part of the world they learn about is darkness and danger. The adventures the girls go on to free the Spell Sisters pit them directly against Morgana le Fay and her ambition to take over Avalon and destroy – or take over – the kingdom. It is unclear what her overall goal or motivations are; she seems to be simply bent on villainy for villainy's sake. The story Castle is adapting says Morgan le Fay is the antagonist, so in the *Spell Sisters* series, Morgana le Fay will be the antagonist. This shallow characterization is clear throughout the depiction of Morgana in all eight books. She is a caricature of the medieval Morgan, a scheming, cackling witch who will stop at nothing to achieve her ends, not even harming two young girls.

From the start, Morgana is described in exaggerated tones. She is the first character to appear in the series, approaching the isle of Avalon in an attempt to conquer it, only to be stopped by Nineve's shield. The narration describes her: "Her dress was long and black, decorated with dark jewels that seemed to greedily draw in the light from around her. Although the early autumn air was cold, the woman wore no cloak and not a single shiver crossed her pale skin. Her cruel lips caught in a smile. 'Mine. All mine!'" (*Sophia* 2). The descriptors are coded heavily negatively; her clothing is dark and darkens the world around her, she feels no cold, she is greedy, pale, cruel. Compare this introduction to the first description of Nineve, our adult mentor figure: "the shimmering waters parted and a beautiful young woman rose up through them. She was dressed in flowing blue and green robes. Her long chestnut hair almost reached down to her feet, caught back from her face by a headband of silvery pearls. A sparkling blue pendant on a silver chain hung round her neck" (*Sophia* 2-3). In contrast to the dark, unnatural Morgana, Nineve brims with color, light, and natural beauty. She is youthful and bright.

Even when later descriptions of Morgana are, debatably, kinder, they still make sure to point out that she is *other*; she is later described as "a strangely beautiful woman" whose "jet eyes glittered in her pale face" (*Lily* 1). They could not be shown any more clearly as the scheming villain character and the kindly guide character.

Morgana's villainy continues to be displayed throughout the series in her actions to stop Gwen and Flora from releasing the Spell Sisters. Each time Gwen and Flora find a Spell Sister and come close to realizing their goal, Morgana sends a hurdle their way, using her magical powers – often powers stolen from the Spell Sisters she has imprisoned – to cause harm to the girls. While trying to release Lily, the Spell Sister with the power over plants, Gwen and Flora are attacked by a swarm of giant hornets. It soon becomes clear that this is no ordinary swarm. As the two girls are running for shelter, "an evil laugh rang out suddenly and the buzzing faded slightly. Gwen looked round again and gave a startled cry. The hornets had stopped in the sky and were moving into a shape as if controlled by something – or someone… The hornets had formed into the image of a woman's face" (*Lily* 99). When Morgana commands the girls to give up their quest and leave, Gwen defiantly states that they are not going to go back on their promise to save Lily. This enrages Morgana; "'Silence child!' shrieked Morgana through the hornets. 'You dare to challenge Morgana le Fay? You will suffer for this! If you will not leave, then prepare to face my hornets!' With a furious scream, her face vanished" (*Lily* 101).

Though she rarely confronts the girls so directly, Morgana sends dangers to confront the girls each time they go on an adventure to rescue a Spell Sister, often putting their lives in grave peril. The adventure to rescue Amelia, the sister with power over metal, sees another time that Morgana confronts the girls directly. She sends a violent

windstorm and a pack of ravens to confront the girls after they release Amelia. Speaking through the ravens, she threatens the girls: "*you shall not escape!* they shrieked in a single voice. *I shall not let you get away this time!*" (*Amelia* 101). Though the other adventures see dangers, it is when Morgana confronts the girls directly that her villainy is made even clearer to Gwen and Flora and she becomes a more distinct figure, rather than a vague evil.

Storm magic, which Morgana seems to use frequently, comes to a head in the final book, *Chloe the Storm Sister*. Chloe, the Spell Sister with the power over weather, is the final sister to be found and released. Things have come to a head; the lunar eclipse is that night, and Chloe must be freed and returned to Avalon immediately or Morgana's plot can still succeed. Luckily, Nineve is able to locate Chloe and send Gwen and Flora to get her – she is in the chapel on their own estate. They quickly find Chloe and release her, and Gwen is suspicious that things are happening too easily: "Gwen half expected the doors of the chapel to slam shut or furniture to start magically hurling itself at them… But nothing dangerous happened at all. Could Nineve have been wrong? Perhaps Morgana had not placed any spells of protection around the sister this time. Gwen certainly hoped so, but she knew they had to stay alert, just in case" (*Chloe* 53). Gwen's hesitation is justified. This time, Morgana confronts the girls directly. Whereas before she had spoken through her minions, this time she appears at the chapel and speaks to them face to face. Morgana traps them all in the chapel, preventing Chloe from returning to Avalon and stopping Morgana's plot.

While they are able to escape the chapel thanks to the intervention of Merlin, the story does not end there. Morgana still attempts to conquer Avalon, and Gwen and Flora

must act bravely to stop her. Morgana is able to stop Chloe from crossing the lake to Avalon, meaning that there are not eight Spell Sisters on the island, and she can move forward with her plot. Gwen and Flora attempt to stop her, but are unsure of how. Gwen, a talented archer, shoots her with her arrows, but this proves futile as Morgana enchants her so that she cannot lift her arms. However, Flora is able to puzzle out a riddle Merlin gave them, telling Gwen that she carried great power. When Gwen remarks that she has no power, Flora realizes that she *carries* it – the power lies in a magical necklace given to her by the Spell Sisters. Chanting the one magical spell she knows, the one she used to release all the Spell Sisters, Gwen is able to empower the Spell Sisters to stop Morgana: "*Sisters of Avalon I now release… Return to the island and help bring peace!"* (*Chloe* 92). With Gwen's help, all eight sisters are able to unleash their powers on Morgana, forcing her to flee Avalon. Having thus saved the day, the sisters, Nineve, and Gwen and Flora go to Avalon and have a grand feast, enjoying that the isle has been restored to its proper glory. On the way home, Gwen and Flora are saddened that they will not be going on any more adventures, but think about how they have grown over the course of saving the Spell Sisters. It is a proper conclusion to a series of children's books.

The books, after all, are for and about children, not the adult characters. The adult characters are there as supporting cast, and frequently boiled down to very simple characterization. Each Spell Sister, for example, is defined by what she controls. Sophia is "the Flame Sister," Evie "the Swan Sister," Olivia "the Otter Sister," etc. Gwen's Aunt Mathilda is defined by being prim and proper. Nineve is defined by being beautiful and good. So it really is not surprising that Morgana is defined by being simply evil. The story needs an antagonist, after all, and Morgana fills that role. It is the extent to which

Morgana fills the role of "evil witch" that stands out as caricaturistic. Morgana is a downright cackling hag – at one point this is basically literal, as one book describes how Morgana's pet "raven cackled in delight and Morgana laughed with him" (*Lily* 2). Her plot is cartoonish, not necessarily in detail, since she successfully manages to ensnare all eight of her sisters and in the end is nearly successful in taking over Avalon, but in projected impact. It is not clear what Morgana hopes to achieve. At one point, ruminating on her plan, she thinks about how "the island had great power, and she intended to harness it and use it for her own dark purposes. Everyone in the kingdom would know her name and fear her" (*Chloe* 2). She seems to be after power and prestige, but nothing further beyond that. What does she want to use her power for? What are her dark purposes? The narration does not care; it is enough that she *has* dark purposes. She *is* evil, and that is that. No need to look any further.

The two series are a study in contrasts. Both borrow from the medieval canon, but what they borrow is an interesting mix. The *Magic Tree House* books keep Morgan le Fay as the sister of King Arthur, but here she is not his antagonist. Instead, she supports him in his time of need. Osborne's Morgan is good and kind, if a little reckless. The *Spell Sisters* books, on the other hand, seem to borrow more from Geoffrey of Monmouth's origins, with Morgan le Fay as the leader of nine sisters on the isle of Avalon. However, while Monmouth's Morgan is a benevolent healer, Castle's Morgana is a scheming, wicked sorceress. Both, however, remain rather flattened, even more so than the medieval canon's Morgan le Fay. Osborne's Morgan gets a little more characterization, such as her pettiness over Merlin, but in both cases, the character fills a specific role in children's literature. Osborne's Morgan is the good mentor figure, so she remains wise, kind, and

guides the protagonists. Castle's Morgana is the villain, so she is scheming, wicked, and harmful to the protagonists. These characterizations help the stories keep the focus on the main characters – the "ordinary kid" protagonists that the child readers are meant to relate to and engage with.

Young adult readers, on the other hand, are able to relate to the protagonists of their stories on a deeper level, and the characterization in young adult literature therefore sees a deeper interiority. Two novels, *I Am Morgan le Fay* by Nancy Springer and *The Circle Cast: The Lost Years of Morgan le Fay* by Alex Epstein, take that interiority and apply it directly to Morgan le Fay, making her the protagonist and letting the young adult readers relate directly to her. This creates a more complex characterization, something that defies a simple categorization. By looking inward and giving Morgan the space to grow and develop alongside the reader, these novels create a more dynamic and nuanced Morgan than the children's novels, one who is still distinct from the mature and thoroughly developed Morgaine seen in *The Mists of Avalon*. What makes these novels – and young adult fiction in general – stand out is the usage of a teenage protagonist. By giving us a teenage Morgan le Fay, Springer and Epstein create a whole new angle from which to view the character. Notably, both novels focus on the years before Morgan takes on her role as Arthur's antagonist, showing how she came to be the character known in the medieval canon. This development makes the stories interesting for a reader. Morgan here is neither good nor bad; she is *becoming*.

This process, *becoming*, is what makes a young adult novel distinctly young adult. While there is overlap between children's literature and young adult fiction, young adult fiction is more interior and focuses on the development of the protagonist. Patty

Campbell explains that in fiction for young people, "the action is centered on the task of growing up" (68). However, in "the grittier and more stylistically innovative novels" of young adult fiction, "the central action… is essentially internal, in the turbulent psyche of the adolescent" (Campbell 75). Adolescent protagonists are a defining characteristic of young adult literature, as the young adults reading the stories see themselves reflected in the characters acting out the stories. Just like the young people reading the stories, the characters are *becoming*: "the central theme of most YA fiction is becoming an adult, finding the answer to the internal and eternal question, 'Who am I and what am I going to do about it?'" (Campbell 70). This is what the two young adult novels achieve that the children's stories do not – they show Morgan le Fay becoming a distinct character, rather than already being who she is and staying static.

Nancy Springer makes clear from the very first page of *I Am Morgan le Fay* that this character is always in the process of becoming. Morgan opens the narration looking retrospectively at her childhood, and she is nebulously older and settled in her fate. But she reflects back on who she was and how she became that person:

> "I am Morgan le Fay, and I will never die. I hover on the wind, and fate falls out of each slow beat of my wings. That is what my name means: Morgan the fate, Morgan the magical, fey Morgan of the otherworld, Morgan who must be feared. But I was not always Morgan le Fay. When they killed my father, I was only little Morgan." (Springer 3)

Over the course of the book, Morgan will struggle against her role as Morgan the Fate(d). She wants to push back on the idea of fate, wants to regain control of her life, control

what was lost when she was a young child and Uther Pendragon killed her father and stole her mother. It is only at the end of the novel that she comes to accept who she is, though it was a long and hard road.

Morgan grows up a child in a normal household. She has a gentle mother, who favors her more ladylike older sister Morgause, and a loving father who endorses her rebellious spirit. When she is still very young, she witnesses a man who is not her father, but has his appearance, enter the castle and have mysterious relations with her mother. The next day, it is revealed that her father is dead. Morgan flees the castle to mourn, and finds a mysterious blue stone, which she later discovers is a druid stone and possesses great magic. She has a run-in with Merlin, who names her Fay and remarks that he sees in her "fate upon fate… cycles upon cycles of fate" (Springer 14). The great magician sees something extraordinary, and perhaps frightening, in the six-year-old Morgan, asking "Who are you… What is your name, child? Is it Morrigan?" (Springer 14). Here he connects her with the Celtic goddess of war and death.[16] Morgan, terrified of the darkness she sees in Merlin, flees, but it is a preview of the fate she cannot escape.

Igraine, Morgan's mother, soon moves away with Uther, and has a son, Arthur. When Uther is killed, however, the tides turn for the family. Morgan's nurse, who she later learns is a wise woman/witch named Ongwynn, takes Morgan and Morgause away with the help of a young squire named Thomas. Ongwynn knows that the political turmoil that will ensue from Uther's death will see Morgan and Morgause as pawns in any power struggle, and takes the girls to her old dwelling, Caer Ongwynn. There

[16] Although this is not explored in much depth, we do return here to the Celtic paganism that has been linked to Morgan le Fay at so many times in the past, including the speculation that Geoffrey of Monmouth's first mention of Morgan was a translation of the Morrigan.

Morgan undergoes a transformation, as she begins the process of becoming Morgan the fey. Ongwynn, as a wise woman, has much to teach Morgan. Reflecting back on her time at Caer Ongwynn, Morgan notes that "in those years I learned knowledge forbidden to other women" (Springer 77). Morgan is thrilled to learn everything that Ongwynn has to teach, from basic education – "only gradually did I come to understand that letters were a power and a magic just as surely as my milpreve was a tool of fearsome power" – to the more magical powers she craved to learn from the wise woman. However, Ongwynn has little she is able to teach Morgan in that regard, claiming that she is "a pedlar, that is all. Not a fay or a sorceress" (Springer 86). This leaves Morgan unsatisfied, but she is soon given a quest, to go to Avalon and learn from the fay that live there.

Morgan's quest is another step on her journey of becoming. She learns many lessons and experiences much turmoil on the actual journey alone, even before she reaches Avalon. First, she realizes her own foolishness when it comes to her beloved older pony, Annie. Having pushed Annie too hard in her quest to reach Avalon quickly, Morgan is devastated to realize that Annie is becoming lame, but that she has no time to turn back and heal her. This is compounded when, as they are confronted in the woods by a lecherous and distinctly un-chivalrous knight, Annie attacks the knight to defend her and is violently killed. Annie had been one of Morgan's longest companions, and she had loved Annie since she first met the pony as a young child. She makes a cairn for Annie, and remarks that "by the time I got Annie covered, I no longer noticed that I was crying. Sobs came out of me rhythmically, just a noise like the turning of a millwheel" (Springer 112). Her grief is compounded by the fact that she has run into Thomas, the squire who had helped her escape as a child. Annie was originally Thomas's pony, and Morgan feels

guilty that she got Annie killed when Thomas had given her the responsibility of looking after her. Worse, Morgan is in love with Thomas, so she is overwhelmed with a lot of conflicting emotions – and she is still being pushed to get to Avalon as quickly as she can.

Avalon is a unique experience for Morgan. There she finds "a laughing, feasting throng of – ladies? Goddesses? Women, at any rate, with not a man among them, women richly garbed and some gloriously ungarbed, old women and matrons and damsels and some maidens barely more than girls, queenly women and simple, pretty peasant women, some wearing the milpreve and some not" (Springer 132). She is initially worried about her reception, as she is told that "the pure of heart have nothing to fear" in Avalon, and she reflects on how she was "not pure of heart, not at all" (Springer 131). Despite her fear, however, she is eagerly welcomed. She even finds her mother, who has been missing after the death of Uther and her capture by villainous fiends. Igraine is lost in her own mind, but Morgan is still glad to see her.

Morgan struggles, somewhat, in her time at Avalon. Thomas is not allowed in with her, as men are not welcome in Caer Avalon. For a time he sleeps outside the gates, and she visits him, but he becomes too restless with nothing to strive for. She knights him and sends him on a quest to find her brother Arthur, though this seems to be just something for him to do, not a genuine desire to help Arthur. She tries to learn from the fay in Avalon but cannot quite find her balance, remarking that "Avalon offered me power and peace. The power I learned eagerly, but the peace I could not learn" (Springer 150). She needs to accept herself and who she will become – the fate that she is constantly at odds with – in order to find peace, but she will not accept the fate that she is

offered. When Cernunnos, the consort of the leader of Avalon, tries to give Morgan a lesson about her fate, she fully rejects it, saying "No. I'll not have it" (Springer 153). Giving up after several failed attempts, Cernunnos concedes, "very well, Morgan. I see you will learn wholeness in your own way, in your own time, if indeed you learn it at all" (Springer 154).

Eventually, Morgan leaves Avalon. She first decides to make her own fate, promising to save Thomas from his prophesied death in battle. Then, she sees Ongwynn's coming death, and wants to head back to Caer Ongwynn so she can be with her at the end. She leaves Avalon and travels the same dangerous roads she took to get there, but this time faces no trouble, as she poses a dangerous sight on her own now. She reaches Caer Ongwynn and finds Morgause haggard and bitter, and Ongwynn abed, though she rouses enough to speak to Morgan. The two sisters wait for Ongwynn to die, and Morgan tells Morgause of her destiny to marry King Lothe of Lothian. Both sisters are pleased by this, Morgause because she will still have a pleasant life away from the hidden dwelling, and Morgana because she has plans for Caer Ongwynn. At last, Ongwynn dies, and Cernunnos comes for her soul personally, showing great respect. Then, Morgan sets forth on her plan. She sends Morgause off to marry her king, though Morgause is wary of "whatever mischief is in [Morgan's] eyes" (Springer 179).

Though Morgan reassures her, once Morgause is gone, she does in fact get up to some scheming. She starts by manipulating the magical servants of the dwelling. Previously mischievous piskies, unseen servants who would as like play pranks as help you, Morgan molds them into demure brownies, who follow her every whim without complaint. Morgan also shapes the dwelling itself. It had been a hillside cave dwelling,

carved out of the earth itself, humble but sufficient for the needs of a wise woman like Ongwynn and large enough for the small family that had moved in. Morgan has greater aspirations, however, and crafts Caer Morgana, "a domed palace magicked out of honeysuckle and sea foam, sunset gold and my memories of Ongwynn's smile" (Springer 183). She builds invisible, mobile walls, and enlists a guard of ravens she names Rook. As she puts it, Thomas "has almost lost heart" and Caer Morgana must be "a paradise for him" (Springer 182).

However, Morgan's good intentions go awry. She summons Thomas with her magic, and he comes to her. They are united in love, and things seem perfect. Things are *too* perfect, though. It is not realistic. Thomas is under Morgan's sway. He is kept prisoner at Caer Morgana; when he tries to go wandering one day, he discovers that he cannot breach the invisible walls. If he wants to go for a walk, he needs Morgan's company or permission so that the walls can be moved to allow him access. He is restless without a quest, and Morgan's request for silly things like strawberries and cream out of season do not count in his eyes, especially when she can achieve any of these things with her magic. Thomas feels like a captive, feels like a plaything, and although he loves Morgan, he cannot help but feel like this is not where he is meant to be. When he tells Morgan he wants to leave, she does not take it well. She follows him and then commands him to come back, using her druid stone magic to overcome his free will. She remarks that "the horror on his face stabbed me like a dagger to the heart, yet I could not admit that I, I who loved him, was hurting him" (Springer 202).Pushed to his limits, trapped body and soul, Thomas takes desperate action. He kisses Morgan, something that he has never done before, and while she is distracted, removes her druid stone ring, destroying

all her magic. Though this releases him, it also breaks the protection of Caer Morgana, right as they are attacked by enemies. Thomas springs up to defend her, and is immediately murdered. It is everything Morgan has been striving to prevent, and she has indirectly caused it.

Morgan will lash out at the attackers in such a violent manner that her druid stone is fused to her hand, and then she loses her grip on sanity and wanders in the wilderness for a while. Cernunnos finds her and brings her to Avalon to recover, just like he did her mother years before. It takes some time, but eventually Morgan comes back to herself in the peace of Avalon, though she is still burdened by what she did. In the end, however, her past comes back to haunt her when Merlin comes to Avalon and reveals that her brother Arthur is to be crowned king and that he has come to escort Igraine to the coronation. He invites Morgan as well, and she has to choose between the peace of Avalon and the real world. It is the choice she had been afraid to make the whole time – to be fey, to be peaceful, to use magic wholeheartedly, or to become the sorceress she is destined to be, scheming, grasping for power. In the end, she remarks that she has no use for peace: "what do I care for peace, or love either? Look what love has done to me" (Springer 221). She chooses her destiny, at last, and leaves Avalon with Merlin. The epilogue, from Igraine's point of view, shows the ramifications of that decision. Morgan has become the villain, Arthur's foe. Igraine bitterly remarks that "no amount of wishing would make Morgan go away" (Springer 226). Morgan has become inevitable.

Fate was Morgan's shadow since she was a child and was first dubbed "fay." She pushed back against her fate, even rejecting the teachings of Cernunnos himself. But at times she accepted that fate was something she had to reckon with. When Ongwynn gets

sick after rescuing Morgan and Morgause, Morgan calls upon her fledgling powers to save her. When she is not strong enough, she "flare[s] into a rage" and gives in: "'Damn everything!' And in that tantrum moment I somehow knew what I had to say, what I had to surrender. I yelled, 'All right, I am Morgan and I am fey, damn it, and I will be – I will be whatever I have to be to save her!'" (Springer 68). Here she surrenders to her nature as a fey creature and her immense power lurking, waiting for her to give in. Later, at the end of her narrative, having suffered and lost everything and returned to Avalon, Morgan finally accepts the fate she has been fighting:

> "I knew.
>
> In that moment I knew.
>
> I was the one who would bring down King Arthur." (Springer 223)

Morgan had previously held conflicting feelings about her brother Arthur, mostly petty jealousy over him getting more attention than her and still having Igraine's love after Igraine loses her mind. But at this point, she accepts that her destiny is to be Arthur's true foe. This is the moment Campbell talks about when she says that young adult fiction is about "finding the answer to the internal and eternal question, 'Who am I and what am I going to do about it?" (70). Morgan has finally figured out who she is and what she is going to do.

The question of identity is a huge matter in another novel about Morgan le Fay's teenage years, Alex Epstein's *The Circle Cast: The Lost Years of Morgan le Fay*. This conundrum is evident right from the start, in the prologue, where "Morgan, who had once been named Anna," reflects on her journey to where she is, crossing the sea to Brittania

(Epstein 11). She reflects that "the storm was what she was… She had never been an Irish chieftain's wife, not really. She had never really been a holy Christian woman. She had never really been a wise woman's slave in a lake village. She had been born of the sea so that she could return by sea, to reclaim who she really was" (Epstein 10). The story then goes back to her childhood, when she had been a girl named Anna, beloved daughter of Gorlois and Ygraine. At eleven years old, Anna does not quite understand what happens between Uter Pendragon and her mother, only that her father abandons the army and his legions return to Din Tagell to await Uter's attack. When the local women ask Ygraine to complete a ritual for luck, she tries but fails to complete it fully. Anna, however, feels great power rising up, connecting to an unnamed force.

Naturally, Gorlois's army loses and he is killed, and Uter, thanks to Merlin's magic, is able to enter Din Tagell and have sex with Ygraine while disguised as Gorlois. Anna sees something wrong, but is unable to do anything about it, and Merlin puts her to sleep. The next day, it is revealed that Gorlois is dead, and Ygraine realizes that they will need to make peace with Uter if they have any chance of survival. Unfortunately for Anna, that means leaving Din Tagell. Explaining the situation to her daughter, Ygraine says "what does a tomcat do to a litter of kittens?" (Epstein 52). The chilling explanation reminds Anna of the unchecked danger she is in if Uter is to take over Din Tagell, and she flees at her mother's command. She crosses the sea to Ireland with her nurse, who is an Irish slave, another slave, who is Greek, and one of her father's soldiers. She is frightened by the expedition; not only is crossing the sea dangerous, but Ireland is said to be a wild, barbarous place, where they have no civilization and people brutalize their neighbors. Still, she has to go. She says goodbye to her mother, who gives her a parting

gift: a new name. “She whispered a new name in Anna’s ear. ‘It means “born from the sea.”’” (Epstein 54). The name is, of course, Morgan.

Morgan proceeds to go through a series of awful misadventures in Ireland. First they have to reach their destination, the stronghold of her relation Ciarnat, a minor liege lord. Crossing the sea is difficult. They catch a bad storm, and rather than being frightened, “Morgan was suddenly angry. The sea had no right to her. She belonged to Din Tagell, to the land; if she was going to die, it would be there” (Epstein 60). This is the first inkling of Morgan’s connection to the land, something that will come up again and again. As Morgan “howl[s]” and “scream[s]” at the storm, a miracle emerges: dolphins come to guide the boat to safety (Epstein 60). Once they are free of the storm, they are still not safe. They need to find a way to land and make it to Ciarnat, and no one will help them. The reputation of Irish people as brutal and vicious seems to be playing true, and all the people they meet run away in fear. It is only through bribery that they are able to finally get some directions. Then Eithne, Morgan’s Irish nurse, runs away in the night. Finally, Morgan and her two companions make it to Ciarnat.

Things seem mostly okay for a while. Ciarnat is vain, reckless, and a little shallow. She has all the violent savagery ascribed to the Irish people, and is happy to go on raids and fight against her neighbors for prestige and supplies. Morgan is happy to be near kin, but struggles to get along with the other girls in the village. Unfortunately, the peaceful life she has built, where she is protected by her status as Ciarnat’s kin, is broken when Ciarnat’s forces lose a battle and Morgan is taken captive by enemy forces. She finds herself in an unexpected position, as a slave. She reminds herself often that she had been the daughter of a governor of Britannia, but she still remains a slave. When the

victors come to claim their spoils, Morgan "called to the earth to make her unnoticed, the way the earth is" (Epstein 84). The technique mostly works, and she is passed over by most of the people seeking slaves. One woman, however, named Buanann, sees her and takes her for her own. Buanann is a wise woman, and takes Morgan as a sort of unofficial apprentice. She has Morgan fetch herbs and memorize chants. Morgan remarks that Buanann is getting older and her memory is getting thin, so Morgan often guides Buanann, rather than the other way around.

However, it is in Buanann's care that Morgan begins to explore her own power. When Buanann messes up a ritual, Morgan thinks of doing it herself to get it done right. She reflects that "she had never, out of nowhere, tried to reach the place where such power seemed to abide. It had come to her only when she needed it" (Epstein 91). She begins the ritual in her mind, but stops when she realizes Buanann is paying attention, not wanting to get caught and punished. She tries another trick later, distracting a group of women, and Buanann notices and confronts her after. Rather than punishing her, however, she promises to teach her. Morgan finds Buanann's teaching clumsy, though, and builds upon the basics to create a foundation of stronger and more nuanced magic. As she notes, in a concealment cantrip, "you not only had to hide the thing that you wanted to conceal, you had to hide the spell too" (Epstein 95). Morgan stayed in the village with Buanann for several years, growing into a teenager, but never stopped thinking about her home and her desire for revenge against Uter.

She finds her escape when a Christian missionary comes to the village. He tells her of an encampment nearby where she can be free. The missionary is sadly set up by the village headman and sentenced to death in the triple murder, though he goes to his

death a blissful martyr. Still, Morgan takes the uproar as a chance to escape. She is caught and claims to be a Christian, knowing that it will give her time to plot while they plan her execution. They lock her up with an iron collar and beat her, but Morgan calls upon her magic to set her free. It was a big task: “in the three years she had lived in the lake village, she had done small magics… but she had never done a great magic” (Epstein 125-26). But when she reached out, let herself go beyond the boundaries of hiding her magic, “she realized how much she had been holding back… She touched the earth, and the silent power of earth surged into her” (Epstein 126). Using this immense power, she is able to rust the collar off, and slips away in the night to freedom.

Eventually, Morgan comes to the Christian encampment. She is astonished at how welcoming everyone is there, how they do not question her but welcome her openly. She has crafted a story to tell, but they seem unconcerned with who she was. Even the revelation that she is not a Christian does not seem to cause too much furor; the leader of the village simply believes that she is there to be converted. Morgan does not know if she believes this, but thinks that she could find peace in this village if she was not so determined to return to Britannia. She spends a while in the village happily, making friends with another girl her age, Luan, teaching her how to read and write. Unfortunately, the real world comes calling when Luan’s father, who owns the land the encampment inhabits, comes to take Luan away for an arranged marriage. Luan, who is regarded as a holy woman in the village, does not handle this well. She blinds herself in order to get out of the marriage, and her father blames the Christians for warping her mind. He forces the Christians to leave the land or be exterminated. Morgan manages to convince him to let Luan go with the Christians, as they are her people now. He is

distraught at losing his daughter, but agrees, reluctantly respecting the girl who challenged him.

Morgan does not go with the Christians. Her time with them was always limited, and it has come to an end. While at the village, she had interacted with Luan's brother Conall, who had tried to understand Luan's intense fervor for Christianity. He and Morgan had developed a strong connection, and Morgan had fully rejected Christianity – pushing Conall to reject it as well – when the two have sex in the woods in an almost ritualistic encounter. When Morgan leaves the empty encampment on her own, she heads towards Conall, but has her doubts. When she finally sees him, though, she is happy – reservedly so. Noting that "she didn't like his cocky smile" she tells him that she "didn't need rescuing" (Epstein 207). They go back and forth for a couple minutes, but eventually Conall proposes, and Morgan agrees to marry him. As they head back to his village on his chariot, "Morgan looked at Conall with a wild wonderment. He laughed, and she laughed, and they kissed again" (Epstein 209).

Marriage is a complicated situation for Morgan. On the one hand, she loves Conall. She is also proud of him. He becomes chief very soon after their wedding; his father is killed in a celebratory raid. He is a strong a wise chief, listening to her council. As someone who was raised in Britannia watching Roman style warfare, Morgan has a great deal to say about the way Conall can conquer his neighbors and build a stronghold in Ireland. On the other hand, Morgan chafes because she is still connected to her homeland. She is still driven to avenge her father and rescue her mother. She rejects any permanent connection, at one point even magically aborting a baby and causing infertility so that nothing ties her down to Ireland. Conall loves Morgan entirely, so he does not

understand that her love comes with reservations. He listens to her suggestions and builds a great kingdom in Ireland, but it is never enough. Conall can sense Morgan's unhappiness, and in the end gives her the out she has needed. When he asks what she needs to make her happy, she replies "fifty men with no land of their own, and no children, and no wives… To go on a raid. With me" (Epstein 252). When he tries to dissuade her, telling her they have enough gold, they can be king and queen of Ireland. But when she explains that this is about vengeance, he "nodded, for there was nothing more that needed saying. Any Irishman understood blood calling out to blood" (Epstein 253). Heartbroken, Conall gives her the soldiers she asks for, and lets her leave. She tells him not to wait for her, that she will not be back. She was never Irish; she has always been tied to Britannia. She loved him, but it was not enough.

However, when Morgan gets back to Britannia, she finds out that her quest for vengeance was for naught. Uter has died while she was gone, less than a year before she returned. If she had come back just a little sooner, she could have had her revenge. As she reflects, "Uter was dead. She would never be able to make the world right" (Epstein 265). However, Ygraine still lives, so there is something left in Britannia for Morgan. She finds out that Saxons plan to attack Din Tagell, and heads there with her soldiers. They arrive just in time to turn the tide, and Morgan enters her childhood home to find it changed nearly as much as she has. Her mother is familiar, however. Ygraine struggles to place Morgan, at first, but then seems to recognize her daughter. Wanting to be sure, she asks Morgan, "I gave you something when you left… what was it?" (Epstein 279). Morgan thinks it might be a trick question, but then puzzles it out: "you gave me a name" (Epstein 279). Identity confirmed, the two are united at last.

Unfortunately, their reunion is not for long. Morgan performs an act of great magic to free Din Tagell from the Saxon army, and nearly loses herself to the spirits of the land in the process. Ygraine is able to save her, but she had already been weakened by a mysterious illness. The act of magic she performed to save Morgan took what she had left, and Morgan is forced to watch her mother waste away. It was not all bad; Morgan was able to spend more time with her mother before the end, and "the weaker Ygraine became, the more content she seemed, as if death was a gift she had been long hoping for" (Epstein 297). As Ygraine dies, Morgan also finds contentment, realizing that she has achieved all that she can. She has taken back her home, seen her mother, and protected her people. Finally at peace, she struggles to reconcile herself, Morgan who was once Anna. She thinks "she was her father's daughter" but reflects that "her father could never have done any of the things she had done" (Epstein 297). On the other hand, "she wasn't her mother's daughter either," given that Ygraine had "given away her power when she came to Din Tagell" (Epstein 298). Finally, she realizes the truth: "She was the land's daughter. She owed it everything" (Epstein 298). This is the running theme of the novel, that Morgan's connection is to the spirits of the land, especially her homeland.

Both Springer's and Epstein's novels present Morgans who struggle with identity, with fate, with who they are and who they want to be. They are, as young adult protagonists so often are, just trying to figure things out. Things happen along the way – magic, mayhem, even a little murder. But "no matter what events are going on in the book," finding yourself and your truth "is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that moves toward shaping an adult identity" (Campbell 70). For Springer's

Morgan, this is about accepting her role as a powerful sorceress who is destined to be the downfall of her own brother. For Epstein's Morgan, this is about finding peace in renouncing vengeance and reconnecting with the land.

Both novels are interesting stories about the role choice plays in identity. Springer's Morgan struggles with choice, with the idea of having no choice, with taking away others' choices, with giving in – making a choice or succumbing to inevitability of no choice? She is Morgan the Fated, she seems to have no choice. She spends most of the novel running away from that fate, making choices for herself. Most of those choices lead to bad outcomes, seeming to indicate that choice is, in and of itself, bad. She seems to internalize this message, taking away Thomas's choices in what she believes to be for his own good. This ultimately leads to his doom and the destruction of all that was good between them. When she gives in to her fate, in the end, it is her actively making the choice. As Cernunnos says, she has to make the choice, the acceptance of peace and wholeness or she will never find it. When she thinks more on that message, she *chooses* to reject peace in favor of her fate to destroy her brother.

Epstein's Morgan, on the other hand, has all her choices taken away from her. A war orphan, so to speak, she is sent away for her own safety, removed from her home and taken from her mother. She is sent to a foreign land, where she does not know the customs, and is eventually enslaved. Her choices, her autonomy, are all stripped away. But she finds ways to make choices. She chooses to expand her magical knowledge and to use that knowledge to free herself. She chooses to go to the Christian encampment despite having no link to that religion. She chooses to marry Conall, out of both love and ambition, and then she chooses to abort their child out of a continued thirst for revenge –

a strong and unexpected push for reproductive choice in a young adult novel. She chooses to leave her marriage to return home, and she chooses to stand on her own when her goals fall flat. Epstein's Morgan should have fallen to her knees, no choices available, but she took every opportunity given to her, scrabbled together every choice she could find, and made a life for herself, built a power of her own, out of choice.

By building on these themes – identity, choice, fate – both novels present an interesting approach to the concept of Morgan le Fay. Showing how this character develops from youth to the cusp of adulthood allows these novels to make clear just what it is that makes Morgan le Fay the character that she is mythically – who is the Morgan that we know and love (or love to hate) and more importantly, *why*? That is what these novels seek to answer, by showing Morgan's process of *becoming*. Springer's Morgan *becomes* Morgan le Fay through the process of a lot of trauma. She fights against fate repeatedly until she can fight no longer. While she is definitely petty from an early age, it is only once she has lost everyone she loves that she turns to vindictiveness. Morgan le Fay – the villain archetype – here emerges from a sympathetic viewpoint. Yes, she is the scheming villain, but the reader can empathize with her and understand where she is coming from. And, notably, the book cuts off before she descends into that promised villainy. Her actions regarding Thomas were not exactly kind and heroic, but it is only once she accepts her nature as a scheming sorceress that she descends into villainy, and Springer does not portray that in the book, allowing the reader to hold onto the more sympathetic Morgan of her youth. Epstein's Morgan, on the other hand, spends so long trying to be the villain – or, perhaps, antihero – and in the end breaks free from that mold. She pursues violence, constantly lies to get her way, and uses the people around her. Her

only goal is to rain destruction on Uter for what he did, and that in many ways helps her survive the horrors that await her in Ireland. But once she returns to her homeland and realizes her quest is not possible, she is able to feel free and become herself again, without the burden of violence pressing her down. As Springer's novel ends with Morgan approaching a dark adulthood, Epstein ends with a Morgan who has found peace in maturity.

These novels, the young adult Morgans, offer a glimpse at a multidimensional, complex, sympathetic Morgan that avoids the trap of the one-note Morgan from the medieval canon. It also shows a greater depth than the Morgans offered in the children's literature, which simplifies Morgan into an easy to digest stereotype meant as a supporting character for the main child cast. Looking at all these different Morgans shows the differences between children's and young adult literature and how they develop their characters in different ways. In children's literature, there is less interiority. Characters are not so introspective, and the adventures are meant to be fun and exciting, if occasionally dangerous. A character like Morgan le Fay offers a wealth of material to borrow from, and she can be either a benevolent enchantress who guides children through time or a scheming witch bent on domination – both depictions have some basis in the medieval canon, after all. But the depictions are ultimately flat, as they are meant to be. Young adult depictions, particularly ones where Morgan le Fay is the protagonist, offer the interiority that children's literature lack. As the young readers grow and develop, they have questions about their own identity and place in the world that young adult literature reflects and builds upon. Young adult readers can find themselves in these Morgans, even if they lack magic or do not go on adventures in fairyland. They can still relate to

Morgan's attempts to resist authority or to connect to their home. Most of all, they can relate to her struggles with her identity, something all adolescents are familiar with.

Literature for young people provides an interesting glimpse into adaptations of Morgan le Fay. Alexandra Garner points out that children's and young adult literature can be used "to reinvent, reinvigorate, and retell familiar stories from that amorphous time *before*" (365, emphasis in original). Children's and young adult literature deals well with adaptation; Benjamin Lefebvre argues that "textual transformations demonstrate the wide applicability of texts for young people in the twenty-first century" (6). This is demonstrated by the way all of these stories handle the source material they are working with. The medieval canon is a huge body of work with a wealth of material to draw from. Each of these stories chooses different things to borrow, and different things to change, and it creates a unique experience. Osborne keeps Morgan le Fay as the king's sister, but removes much of the villainy. Castle draws on Monmouth's depiction, but changes it so that Morgan le Fay is not a benevolent goddess-like figure, but a scheming, cackling witch. Both depictions can be said to be equally true to their origins – and equally untrue. Yet they come up with such extremely different portrayals. The young adult novels are also diverse in what they draw from. Both novels are pretty clear and direct in some matters – the role of Merlin, Uther's relationship with Igraine, Morgan as a powerful magician who ultimately wields her power for nebulously antagonistic things. But by moving away from the medieval view of Morgan le Fay as a full adult character and focusing in on what the canon overlooks – those missing years, as Epstein labels it – the young adult novels find a space for adaptation that allows new roads of development for the character.

Children's and young adult literature is also a good focal point for viewing the empowerment of young women. Morgan le Fay is a female character with power, and thus is a polarizing icon. In young adult literature, this can make her a source of empowerment. Amanda K. Allen and Miranda A. Green-Barteet argue that "literary girls may learn their own power by persisting, but they also learn by challenging and resisting larger power structures." This also connects back to the question of identity – Allen and Green-Barteet argue that "through such persistence *and* resistance, girl characters come to understand themselves, their desires, and the worlds in which they life" (emphasis in original). Morgan is a girl who resists, and a girl who persists. This is true in the young adult novels covered here, and although it could be argued that neither Morgan is a particularly strong role model, both are potentially someone a young female reader can identify with. Children's literature presents categories – here is the kind mentor, here is the bad witch. But young adult literature presents *characters*. Through these characters, young readers can truly connect to the material and to themselves. This connection is important, and shows the power of adapting these stories into the modern age. Morgan le Fay is still a powerful – and empowering – character. Her story deserves to be told, to young readers who might find a bit of themselves in her. As Kerry Mallan puts it, "children's literature will not change the world but it does make significant and often undervalued contributions to how its readers see the world and their place in it" (23). By reading these stories, connecting to these characters, young readers might come to know themselves a little better just as they know Morgan le Fay a little better.

CONCLUSION

Kerry Mallan says that "children's literature will not change the world" (23). But is that true? Does literature – even children's literature – *especially* children's literature – not have an immense impact on the way we see ourselves, our world, and each other? Folklore, folk stories, are the collected common knowledge of the everyday people. Where does that knowledge come from if not from those stories themselves? It is an ouroboros, where stories feed into new stories, Lynne McNeill's telephone game. And as these stories are told, over and over again, changing over time, naturally they are going to change the people telling the stories. In a telephone game, you naturally believe the words you are told, even if they are not the "truth" the original person said. Stories have the power to change the listener. None of this is new or revelatory.

Yet it can be easy to overlook popular culture as an avenue for change, or for introspection. Because it is popular, rather than highbrow, it is often overlooked in study. But it is the very studies we tell around our metaphorical campfires – the modern folktales – that have the biggest impact on our way of thinking. That is why it is so important to study folklore and folk stories – even if they might not look the way you think – so that you do not overlook important opportunities for reflection. Stephen Olbrys Gencarella notes that folklore has a "socially and politically constitutive nature" that lends itself to further study (173). Mikel Koven notes that this is gaining attention in academic folklore studies, which is starting to focus in more on modern, popular folklore;

Koven argues that "folklorists have noted further areas for fruitful explorations of popular culture texts, such as how popular culture texts reflect contemporary belief traditions" (176). What can we learn, if we look more into the belief traditions shown in the modern folklore studied here? What is the social and political nature of these texts?

It is clear that there *is* a social and political nature of these texts (even the children's literature). Morgan le Fay is a character who, by her very nature, is both powerful and marginalized. She is contradictory. She is dynamic and changes both by source and sometimes *within* source. Understanding Morgan le Fay in her various representations is important not just for the sake of understanding an interesting character, but for understanding what she represents. Morgan le Fay is an icon: she stands in for women with power, women in positions of power, and the way she is treated – by the narrative, by society, by the other characters around her – reflect the ways that *we* – the audience, the creators – metaphorically treat women with/in power. Therefore it is important to look closely at what these representations have to say, to understand more about ourselves and our context.

The medieval texts feel easy. We have distance from them. They are safe to judge. It feels natural that a man writing in the 12th century would be uncomfortable with the idea of a powerful woman. Yet Geoffrey of Monmouth, writing in the mid-12th century, presents a divine female figure. Monmouth's Morgan is not just divine, however; that would be, in its own way, just as limiting. Monmouth's Morgan is powerful, but she is *learned*. She is a healer and a scientist. It makes sense that she be given the all-important trust of the king, in context of the story. Out of the storyworld, however, it makes you question. What was the situation like that allowed Geoffrey of

Monmouth to feel so at ease with the idea of a woman taking charge of the fabled high king of Britain? We might perhaps feel less confused at the later medieval authors, the authors of the Vulgate Cycle and Malory who present a duplicitous, scheming, vicious Morgan. This makes sense, in the context of what we perceive to be the medieval world. In a patriarchal world where women had few rights and very limited power, a woman who stood up for herself and challenged the legitimate ruler would be a very frightening thing – and thus must be demonized. That is not even to mention the fact that she has magical powers, in a heavily Christianized society; her magic, in conjunction with her femaleness, makes her a wicked figure.

Thinking of a perhaps stereotypical view of the medieval era, Malory's Morgan makes more sense than Monmouth's. What does it say, then, that our modern Morgan draws more heavily from Malory than Monmouth? In the telephone game we have been playing for the past millennium, is it just that Malory is more recent, so he is the one we listen to? Or is it that his voice is more compelling? In many ways, this has to do with details – Malory has a much greater body of work, so there is more to draw upon when creating a retelling. Monmouth's Morgan, on the other hand, is a blip in the story. But there is also the sense that, despite what many people may like to think, our views of female empowerment have not come so far from Malory as we may like to think. Women who seek power, whether for themselves or for their cause, are often viewed with suspicion at best and hostility at worst. Female politicians are berated while their male colleagues are praised for the same behavior. Actions taken by female celebrities, such as singing about sex or money, are demonized while the same actions gain awards for their male counterparts. And while Morgan's magical powers may be relegated to the world of

fantasy, the aggressive Christianization that demonized her in earlier stories remains prevalent, and theocratic efforts to stifle expression are leading to the suppression of even children's books.

What does it mean, that our Morgans are more Malory than Monmouth? If we can take these portrayals as a reflection of social values, we must then wonder if feminism is a failing project. Jennifer C. Edwards seems to think that these offerings showcase the dangers of being overconfident in our sense of progress. Speaking about *Merlin* and *Camelot*, she argues that "both shows ultimately narrate the danger of empowered women as a feminist plot that fails to fulfill its promise and must be heroically stopped" (57). These shows, which present "strong female character" Morgans, bold and determined and also decidedly antagonistic, are a solid demonstration that powerful women are inherently a negative thing. Elysse T. Meredith makes this explicit, claiming that "as a cultural artifact, *Merlin* suggests a deep-seated unease about the role of women and religion [and] politics" (168). Morgan le Fay becomes, in these two shows, artifacts of the early 21st century, still a warning, a signpost that one should not give a woman too much power, or she will do bad things. This is especially true with Morgana, who is initially shown to be such a purehearted character.

Not all modern Morgans send so clearly negative a message, however. *The Mists of Avalon*, one might argue, sends a strongly *positive* message. Morgaine's struggles of resistance and selfhood throughout the novel, and her ultimate peace in the end, show that women having power – especially in this case explicitly religiously coded power – does not necessarily have to make them evil. Although she is an enemy to Arthur, at times, she loves him deeply, and only stands against him to protect her own religion. And she may

not “win,” so to speak, but she is able to serve out her life in her own way. Marilyn Farwell points out the nuance inherent to Bradley’s revisioning of Morgan: “she is not blameless even in this feminist text, but neither is she the enigmatic figure or Malory’s text who hates Arthur without cause” (153). It is a good thing, in fact, that Morgaine is not blameless. That would make her a flat, empty character, unrelatable, unrealistic, and completely removed from any reflection of social truth. By showing a complex, contradictory, *complete* character, Bradley makes Morgan feel real. This Morgan is not evil, nor holy. She just is, and she is allowed to be, because she fights to be. This is a much better message.

When it comes down to it, however, we have to ask what messages are we telling. What messages are we telling our children, who are malleable? Are we telling children that female magic users are just like any other magic users – whimsical, reckless, distant – or that they are cruel, drunk on power? What are we telling our young people, who are desperate to see themselves in these representations? Are we telling them that if they seek to be masters of their own fate, it will make them evil? That exercising choice is the mark of someone with a rotten fate?

Elizabeth Rose Gruner sums up the importance of these folk stories perfectly when she says that “the potentially emancipatory plotlines of [stories] suggest that despite the power narrative has to shape imagination – perhaps even development – such power is far from determinative” (17). Folk tales are power. We shape the folk tales and the folk tales shape us in turn. What do we want to tell the next listener in the telephone game? Do we want to send a better message about women with power? We can start by critically examining the ways we represent Morgan le Fay in modern King Arthur stories, and

asking ourselves if maybe we might not want to start doing better. Malory was over 500 years ago – it is time to move forward.

WORKS CITED

Allen, Amanda K. and Miranda A. Green-Barteet. "Girls Who Persist and Resist: Resistance in Girlhood Studies and Girls' Literature." *Women's Studies*, vol. 52, no. 6, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2023.2238234.

Amatucci, Kristi and Ruth Caillouet. "Choosing the Monsters to Slay: Speculative Young Adult Literature and Social Justice: Two Educators Discussed Speculative Young Adult Literature With Preservice Teachers to Promote Social Justice." *English Journal*, vol. 112, no. 6, 2023, pp. 40-46.

Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's* Morte d'Arthur. University Press of Florida, 2003.

Bazzini, Doris, et. al. "Do Animated Disney Characters Portray and Promote the Beauty-Goodness Stereotype?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 10, 18 Oct. 2010, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2010.00676.x.

Bourontzi, Eirini Dimitra. "The Heroine's Journey: The Case of Morgana from BBC's *Merlin*," *British and American Studies*, vol. 29, 2023, pp. 99-109, https://doi.org/10.35923/BAS.29.10.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982.

Budruweit, Kelly. “Women’s Religions in *The Mists of Avalon*: Marion Zimmer Bradley’s Postsecular Fantasy.” *Religion & Literature*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-24, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27099081.

Campbell, Patty. *Campbell’s Scoop: Reflections on Young Adult Literature*, Scarecrow Press, 2010.

Castle, Amber. *Amelia: The Silver Sister*, Simon & Schuster, 2012.

---. *Chloe: The Storm Sister*, Simon & Schuster, 2013.

---. *Lily: The Forest Sister*, Simon & Schuster, 2012.

---. *Sophia: The Flame Sister*, Simon & Schuster, 2012.

“Celebrating 25 Years of Growing Readers!” *MagicTreeHouse.com*, https://www.magictreehouse.com/teachers/celebrating-25-years/. Accessed 24 Nov. 2023.

Cobb, Marta. “Morgan le Fay: how Arthurian legend turned a powerful woman from healer to villain.” *The Conversation*, 31 Jan. 2019, https://theconversation.com/morgan-le-fay-how-arthurian-legend-turned-a-powerful-woman-from-healer-to-villain-109928#:~:text=Morgana%2C%20also%20called%20Morgaine%20or,Gorlois%2C%20the%20Duke%20of%20Cornwall.. Accessed 4 May 2021.

Conlee, John, ed. “The Tournament at Logres; King Lot and his Sons; and Morgan and Gyomar.” *Prose Merlin*. Teams Middle English Texts, https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/conlee-prose-merlin-tournament-at-logres-king-lot-and-his-sons-and-morgan-and-gyomar. Accessed 4 May 2021.

Crosby, Janice C. *Cauldron of Changes: Feminist Spirituality in Fantastic Fiction*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000.

de Troyes, Chrétien. *Erec and Enide*. Translated by W. W. Comfort, In Parentheses Publications, 1999.

---. *Yvain*. Translated by W. W. Comfort, In Parentheses Publications, 1999.

Edwards, Jennifer C. “Casting, Plotting, Enchanting: Arthurian Women in Starz’s ‘Camelot’ and the BBC’s ‘Merlin.’” *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2015, pp. 57-81, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2015.0001.

Elmes, Melissa Ridley. “*Merlin, Camelot* and the Visual Modernization of the Medieval Literary Romance Tradition.” *Middle Ages on Television: Critical Essays*, edited by Meriem Pages and Karolyn Kinane, McFarland & Company, 2015, pp. 99-121

Epstein, Alex. *The Circle Cast: The Lost Years of Morgan le Fay*, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2010.

Farwell, Marilyn. *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*. NYU Press, 2012.

Foster, Tara and Jon Sherman. “King Arthur in the Twenty-First Century: ‘Kaamelott,’ BBC’s ‘Merlin,’ and Starz’s ‘Camelot’.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no.1, 2015, pp. 3-4, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2015.0007.

Fries, Maureen. “Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition.” *Popular Arthurian Traditions,* edited by Sally K. Slocum, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992, pp. 5-17.

---. “From The Lady to The Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance.” *Arthuriana*, volume 4, issue 1, 1994, pp 1-18.

Fry, Carrol L. “The Goddess Ascending: Feminist Neo-Pagan Witchcraft in Marian Zimmer Bradley’s Novels.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 27 no. 1, 1993, pp. 67-80, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1993.64521458967.x.

Garner, Alexandra. “Neomedievalism, Feminism, and the Sword in Tamora Pierce’s *Song of the Lioness*.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2020, pp. 364-381, https://www.doi.org/10.1353/CHQ.2020.0044.

Grenby, M. O. *Children’s Literature.* Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Gruner, Elizabeth Rose. “Telling Old Tales Newly: Intertextuality in Young Adult Fiction for Girls.” *Telling Children’s Stories: Narrative Theory and Children’s Literature,* ed. Michael Cadden, University of Nebraska Press, 2011, pp. 3-21.

Howey, Ann F. “Arthur and Adaptation.” *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2015, pp. 36-50, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2015.0059.

Larrington, Carolyne. *King Arthur’s Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition*. I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2006. E-book.

Lefebvre, Benjamin. “Introduction: Reconsidering Textual Transformations in Children’s Literature.” *Textual Transformations in Children’s Literature: Adaptations,*

Translations, Reconsiderations, ed. Benjamin Lefebvre, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012, pp. 1-6.

Loomis, Roger S. "Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses." *Speculum*, volume 20, issue 2, 1945, pp. 183-203.

Mallan, Kerry. "(Un)Doing Gender: Ways of Being in an Age of Uncertainty." *What Do We Tell the Children? Critical Essays on Children's Literature*, eds. Ciara Ní Bhroin and Patricia Kennon, pp. 12-23, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

Malory, Thomas. *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Introduction by Elizabeth J. Bryan, The Modern Library, 1999.

Marzella, Francesco. "Letters from the Otherworld. Arthur and Henry II in Stephen of Roeun's *Draco Normannicus*." *Tabularia,* 2017, https://doi.org/10.4000/tabularia.2858. Accessed 4 May 2021.

May, Whitney S. "The Lioness and the Protector: The (Post)Feminist Dialogic of Tamora Pierce's Lady Knights." *Children's Literature*, vol. 48, 2020, pp. 51-79, https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2020.0003.

Mediavilla, Cindy. "From 'Unthinking Stereotype' to Fearless Antagonist: The Evolution of Morgan le Fay on Television." *Arthuriana*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2015, pp. 44-56, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.2015.0016.

Meredith, Elysse T. "Gendering Morals, Magic and Medievalism in the BBC's *Merlin*." *Middle Ages on Television: Critical Essays*, edited by Meriem Pages and Karolyn Kinane, McFarland & Company, 2015, pp. 158-173.

"Merlin Casts Final Spell for BBC1," *Broadcast*, 26 November 2012, BCST, Accessed 10 October 2023, https://global.factiva.com/ha/default.aspx#./!?&_suid=169695973319300769605 4610015235.

Monmouth, Geoffrey of. "The Life of Merlin." *Sacred-Texts.com*. https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/vm/vmeng.htm. Accessed 4 May 2021.

Mukhopadhyay, Samhita. "The Girlboss is Dead. Long Live the Girlboss." *The Cut*, 31 August 2021, Vox Media, Accessed 7 December 2023, https://www.thecut.com/2021/08/demise-of-the-girlboss.html.

Natov, Roni. *The Courage to Imagine: The Child Hero in Children's Literature*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017.

Osborne, Mary Pope. *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, Random House, 1992.

---. *Dolphins at Daybreak*, Random House, 1997.

---. *Earthquake in the Early Morning*, Random House, 2001.

---. *Midnight on the Moon*, Random House, 1996.

---. *Pirates Past Noon*, Random House, 1994.

---. *The Knight at Dawn*, Random House, 1993.

---. *Vacation Under the Volcano*, Random House, 1998.

Paxson, Diana L. "Marion Zimmer Bradley and *The Mists of Avalon*." *Arthuriana*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1999, pp. 110-26, https://doi.org/10.1353/art.1999.0030

Raymond, Dalicia K. “Motives, Means, and a Malevolent Mantel: The Case of Morgan le Fay’s Transgressions in Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur.” *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*, edited by Albrecht Classen, Walter de Gruyter, 2017, pp. 547-563.

“Reckoning.” *Camelot*, season 1, episode 10, Starz, 10 Jun. 2011.

Redfern, Catherine and Kristin Aune. *Reclaiming the F Word: Feminism Today*, Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013.

Rosenberg, Samuel N. “The Prose Merlin and The Suite du Merlin (Episodes).” *The Romance of Arthur: An Anthology of Medieval Texts in Translation*, edited by James J. Wilhelm, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994, pp. 305-363.

Sommer, Heinrich Oskar. *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Vol. 4*, Carnegie Institution, 1908.

---. *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Vol. 5*, Carnegie Institution, 1908.

---. *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Vol 6*, Carnegie Institution, 1908.

Spivack, Charlotte. *Merlin’s Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy*, Greenwood Press, 1987.

Spivack, Charlotte and Rebecca Lynne Staples. *The Company of Camelot: Arthurian Characters in Romance and Fantasy*. Greenwood Press, 1994.

Springer, Nancy. *I Am Morgan le Fay*, Firebird, 2001.

"Starz Shuts Gates on 'Camelot' After One Season," *Multichannel News*, 11 July 2011, NewBay Media LLC, Accessed 10 October 2023,

"The Beginning of the End." *Merlin*, season 1, episode 8, BBC, 26 Jul. 2009.

"The Darkest Hour Part Two." *Merlin*, season 4, episode 2, BBC, 8 Oct. 2011.

"The Diamond of the Day Part Two." *Merlin*, season 5, episode 13, BBC, 31 May 2013.

"The Sword and the Crown." *Camelot*, season 1, episode 2, Starz, 1 Apr. 2011.

"The Witch's Quickening." *Merlin*, season 2, episode 11, BBC, 18 Jun. 2010.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, NYU Press, 2019.

Tobin, Lee Ann. "Why Change the Arthur Story? Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*." *Extrapolation* vol. 34 no. 2, 1993, pp. 147-57. https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.1993.34.2.147.

"With All My Heart." *Merlin*, season 5, episode 9, BBC, 3 May 2013.

Wynne-Davies, Marion. *Women and Arthurian Literature*, St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996.

Young, Serenity. "King Arthur and Morgan le Fay." *Goddesses Who Rule*, edited by Elisabeth Benard and Beverly Moon, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 181-194.

Zipes, Jack, ed. "Morgan le Fay." *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, Oxford University Press, 2015.