THE DEVELOPMENT OF GUINEVERE'S CHARACTERIZATION IN THE ARTHURIAN LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

By

PEGGY MCDONALD GIPSON

Bachelor of Science in Education
Oklahoma Christian
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
1966

Master of Arts
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Oklahoma
1980

Master of Arts
University of Central Oklahoma
Edmond, Oklahoma
1982

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Thesis Approved:

Randi Eldevik
Thesis Advisor

Elizabeth Cudgeld

Michael Mice

John Paul Bischoff

Thomas C. Collins
Dean of the Graduate College

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Chapter One

Introduction

Most readers who have heard of the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table are familiar with the Arthur and the Camelot presented in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, the culmination of the Arthurian tradition that developed in the Middle Ages. Many readers may not realize that the story probably had its beginning in the oral Welsh tales dating back to the early Middle Ages or earlier; but the first significant written account, that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, does not appear until about 1136. From the time of Geoffrey's account until the culminating work of Malory in 1484, the written tradition of the Arthurian legend enjoyed great popularity in many lands, changing slightly with a change in language or culture or the particular purpose of the author. Among those changes are a shift in focus from the military to the courtly, the inclusion or deletion of magic and the supernatural, the addition or deletion of characters, and changes in the depictions of certain key characters. For example, in early accounts the villain Mordred is Arthur's nephew; in later accounts Mordred, still the villain, is Arthur's son from an incestuous relationship with his sister, Morgan le Fay. Some accounts do little more than mention Merlin, and others make him central to the Arthurian legend. While Gawain and

Bedivere are the worthiest knights in early accounts, Lancelot is Arthur's champion in later accounts. Most of the key male characters have been the focus of numerous scholarly works, but the central female character has been conspicuously absent from the scholarship. That female character, Queen Guinevere, is the focus of this study.

In Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, considered the first written account of significance since it gave the legend instant renown, Guinevere is mentioned only five times. She does not speak. She is not a fully developed character, but she is a significant character. In his brief treatment of Guinevere, Geoffrey manages to tarnish Guinevere's reputation; and even though she is a more fully developed character in Malory's account, she is still tarnished. Geoffrey's emphasis is on male prowess, specifically Arthur's. By the time Malory writes *Morte Darthur* at the end of the Middle Ages, the emphasis is on the love between Lancelot and Guinevere. In Malory's account the world of male prowess, specifically Camelot, falls apart; and he gives Guinevere as much of the focus as he gives Arthur. I am interested in why Malory gives Guinevere a more prominent role in the story, but I am more interested in the development of Guinevere's character from Geoffrey to Malory. In both accounts Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur, is an adulteress, or is at least labeled an adulteress, but she has become a different kind of

adulteress by the time Malory writes his story. I will attempt to discover why Guinevere goes from being more or less the victim of Mordred's abduction in Geoffrey's account to being a full-fledged, willing adulteress in Malory's. Furthermore, I will attempt to find out why her abduction ruins her reputation.

Guinevere has been given at least token treatment in several works dealing with the Arthurian legend, with most of them labeling her an adulteress and blaming her for the fall of Arthur's kingdom, but she has been the focus of very few studies. As Florence Sandler points out, Guinevere does not receive much attention or interest from scholars until the women's movement began to alter the questions and the subjects of academic inquiry in the 1970's (13). Prior to the 1970's, most of the studies by prominent scholars in medieval studies devote a chapter or a few pages to Guinevere, if they do more than just mention her name as she touches the lives of Arthur and his knights. Only one study actually focuses on Guinevere: Kenneth G. T. Webster's *Guinevere: A Study of Her Abductions* (1951).

Webster's study begins with the Celtic tradition and continues to Malory, but he does not really seem to be interested in Guinevere. Webster admits that his original intent was to make an early biography of Guinevere, but the recurrence of Guinevere as the object of abduction changed his focus. He concludes that Guinevere is a fairy or

"testing fee" of an otherworld husband, which explains the abductions and the suggestion that the action resulting from those abductions alternates between the supernatural world and the Arthurian world (126-27). Webster seems unaware of the fact that abductions were a reality of life during the development of the early oral tradition and even throughout much of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, his conclusion that Guinevere is a fairy is too easy. The Celtic tradition definitely influenced the legend of Arthur and Guinevere, but it is premature to form conclusions about Guinevere without going beyond the Celtic influence. Webster's using the words "ravish," "rape," and "abduct" interchangeably is significant, even though he makes no effort to explain why he uses the words interchangeably; but I will deal with the significance in a later chapter.

In *The Character of King Arthur in English Literature* (1966), in which she gives Guinevere minor consideration, Elise Van der Ven-Ten Bensel makes an argument similar to Webster's. She claims that Guinevere is the sun-maiden of pre-Christian ritual who is captured by the powers of darkness. Early on, Arthur is the culture-hero who rescues the queen, but later he is replaced by Lancelot. Van der Ven-Ten Bensel credits the abduction with Guinevere's faithless character throughout literature (51). The author does not attempt to explain why the stigma becomes so firmly attached to the character of Guinevere, but in her

conclusion she sees the abduction or faithlessness of the queen as the pivot around which the Arthurian legend turns (206). Again, like Webster, Van der Ven-Ten Bensel cannot seem to reach beyond the Celtic influence in her look at Guinevere, nor does she explain the connection between abduction and faithlessness. Although there seems to be an enormous difference between abduction and faithlessness, I will explain in a later chapter how the two are connected. Van der Ven-Ten Bensel does not offer any real insight into the character of Guinevere, which can be excused, perhaps, since Guinevere is not her focus.

In his 1891 work, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, John Rhys devotes an entire chapter to Guinevere; but his focus is more on the men who were supposed to be her captors and her rescuers than on Guinevere herself. Rhys says that Guinevere has always been a notorious character but admits that it is not easy to explain how she acquired her notoriety. While Rhys shows the influence of mythology, specifically the myth of the god of darkness capturing the goddess of the dawn, on the abduction motif associated with Guinevere, he does not explain how or why Guinevere's reputation is ruined. The abductions are the cause, but we are still left not knowing exactly why (50-51).

James Douglas Bruce writes *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance From the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300* (1958) without devoting much attention to Guinevere at all. In

fact, he mentions Guinevere only as he is discussing the development of male characters central to the Arthurian legend. Bruce seems to see Guinevere as secondary to Arthur and Lancelot, not really significant enough to warrant her own individual analysis. He does make some effort to discover her origins but does not go beyond concluding that Guinevere is not linked with Irish legends.

Tom Cross and William Nitze's *Lancelot and Guenevere: A Study on the Origins of Courtly Love* (1970) is very similar to Webster's study of Guinevere's abductions. The authors begin with Chrétien de Troyes' *Roman de la Charrete* and trace it to its sources to show how easily the Celtic sources were adapted to Chrétien's story of courtly love and how ingeniously Chrétien and his patroness, the Countess Marie of Champagne, used the story to reflect the spirit of their own age (1). The recurring motifs the authors point out are all connected to the abduction of Guinevere. (1) A "marvelous" being carries off the heroine, a wife. (2) The abductor asks a boon of the husband, and when the husband agrees asks for the lady. The husband is unwilling but must keep his promise. The abductor offers to win the lady by combat, and then takes the lady away without ceremony. (3) The abductor does not take immediate sexual advantage of the lady. (4) The abductor is pursued by the husband alone, the husband with a band of followers, or the lady's lover who is also one of the husband's retainers. (5) The abductor lives

in a supernatural realm, even if the supernatural is not obvious; and the pursuer must overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reach that realm. (6) The rescuer does succeed in rescuing the lady, usually with the help of a "wise man" or by a ruse. (7) By the time she is rescued, the lady has already had sexual relations with the abductor, sometimes willingly and sometimes as the innocent victim of a "brutal marauder" (31-32). Cross and Nitze conclude that the material for Chretien's romance can be found only in Celtic literature (61). Chrétien's work does not include all of those motifs, but there is at least an influence. Although Guinevere shares the title with Lancelot, the focus of Cross and Nitze's work is courtly love, not the Queen herself. As a result, what the authors say about Guinevere is not innovative.

In her doctoral dissertation entitled *Malory's Women* (1979), Janet Marie Jesmok devotes a chapter to Guinevere and makes several important observations about the Queen in Malory's work. First, Guinevere supports chivalric ideals from her wedding day. Second, her role as queen, judging and inspiring chivalric deeds, influences Arthur, Lancelot, and other members of the court. Third, as long as Guinevere puts duty first and sacrifices self-interest, "Malory treats her with the greatest sympathy and respect. But during her temporary fall from grace, he emphasizes Guenevere's jealousy and obdurateness in order to make her appear more

unappealing and destructive than she is in the French source" (192). Fourth, Guinevere exemplifies the association between love and prowess. I agree with these assertions about Guinevere, but I have trouble with the logic of some of Jesmok's other views. For example, she suggests that Malory may intend for the reader to see Guinevere's adultery as the result of a character flaw: her awe of great deeds of prowess. If, as she says, Guinevere's role as queen is to promote chivalry and if Lancelot's love is "technically unlawful, but it is ennobling and sympathetically portrayed by Malory because the primary consideration of both Guenevere and Lancelot is chivalry" and because their love has been stable and enduring (197), there seems to be a contradiction that Jesmok does not account for. She says nothing of the patriarchal system that seems to have influenced Malory in his depiction of Guinevere as she is forced to deal with a double standard that excuses men's sexual activity but condemns women's. Furthermore, Jesmok thinks that Malory's remarks about the old days when lovers could go seven years without giving in to their lust are intended to convince the reader that Lancelot and Guinevere's love was chaste for seven years, which somehow excuses their adultery later on. It seems more likely, in light of the possibility that Malory was once charged with rape, that his statement is intended to be ironic rather than idealistic. It is even possible that

Malory was making light of the Church's efforts to promote continence within marriage.

Overall, what Jesmok says about Guinevere contributes to the literature on Arthur's queen rather than repeating what has already been said. She points out the differences in the Queen when she is with Arthur and when she is with Lancelot, as well as the differences when she supports her men and when she acts selfishly. Jesmok makes little effort to understand or explain the influences on Malory's depiction of Guinevere. Basically, Jesmok concludes her chapter by saying that Malory credits Guinevere with contributing to Lancelot's greatness: she is the woman who stands behind the man.

Like Jesmok, I am interested in the changes in Guinevere within Malory's work, but I am more interested in the change that occurs between Geoffrey and Malory. Jesmok sees Guinevere as a character who portrays the various roles and functions of women in Malory's *Morte*, but I see her more as the product of Malory's synthesis of his sources. What I want to know is what else influenced Malory to portray Guinevere as a female character who changes or at least seems to change when most of his other women characters remain fairly consistent. If there is something else, it may be linked to the development of Guinevere between Geoffrey and Malory.

Peter Korrel offers a fairly thorough look at some of Malory's sources and suggests some possible influences on various authors of the Arthurian legend in *An Arthurian Triangle* (1984), in which he traces the relationship of Arthur, Guinevere, and Mordred from the historical records and early Welsh tradition through Malory. While he attempts to show the historicity of Arthur, he simply says that Guinevere probably never existed as an actual person. If it is important to show the historicity of Arthur, why is it not equally important to show the historicity of Guinevere? If Guinevere was not a historical character, what can history tell us to explain why Guinevere must always be a tainted character, an adulteress?

Korrel says that Guinevere is not a very prominent character in the Welsh tradition, but at least traces of her are found in early Welsh poetry, Welsh saints' lives, the triads, the tales in the Mabinogion, and the popular oral tradition. After looking at Guinevere in each of these sources, Korrel concludes that Guinevere does not have a bad reputation in pre-Geoffrey Welsh literature. She is the fateful queen who causes Arthur's downfall in the battle of Camlann, but she does not want to cause Arthur's downfall. She does not betray Arthur. Guinevere is also abducted against her will in this early Welsh literature, but there is no implication of guilt. Furthermore, there is no indication that her relationship with Arthur is strained.

Korrel disagrees with Webster that Guinevere is a fairy or a testing fee of an otherworld husband and shows that Guinevere's abduction by Mordred is very similar to the actual wife-stealing raids by the Celts. Other accounts of Guinevere's abduction indicate that she is abducted by a supernatural being who falls in love with a mortal, i.e., Guinevere, and carries her off to his Otherworld realm. There is no indication that Guinevere is a supernatural being (94).

Korrel suggests that the development of Guinevere's notoriety may be connected to the abductions of the queen, but he finds nothing in the Welsh tradition to account for Guinevere's negative reputation. In these accounts of her abduction, Guinevere does not show despair, nor does she flee from her rescuer before she can be rescued. The fact that she is smitten with despair in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* says to Korrel that Guinevere is actively involved in the betrayal of Arthur. Furthermore, he sees her flight as a confession of guilt (122).

> I think it is very likely that the guilty role Guinevere played in the downfall of Britain's greatest monarch, collaborating in such a detestable crime as high treason, gave her the bad name she was to have ever after. The germ of her bad reputation, then, was probably planted by Geoffrey who needed a cause for the inevitable

> downfall of so eminent a ruler....Geoffrey's choice put a strain on Guinevere's character, which unfortunately for her, developed into a permanent trait, essential to her characterization ever since. (124)

Korrel says that Geoffrey was not the only writer responsible for the deterioration of Guinevere's character. He credits Chrétien's account of her guilty relationship with Lancelot in *Conte de la Charette*, written some thirty years after Geoffrey's *Historia*, as being, in essence, the other half of the cause. He blames Chrétien's portrayal of Guinevere on Marie de Champagne, Chrétien's patroness, and her eagerness to promote the courtly love code (125).

Both of Korrel's explanations for Guinevere's bad reputation seem too easy. One author needs a cause for the downfall of Britain's greatest monarch, and the other simply follows his patroness' wishes. Korrel seems content not to dig any further. However, I am not content. I want to know why a woman would be made responsible for the fall of a nation or why the daughter of a queen would want Queen Guinevere portrayed as an adulteress. It is possible that Marie did not consider the long-term consequences of her courtly love as she encouraged Chrétien to show its momentary pleasures (I will examine her philosophy more extensively in later chapters). Furthermore, I will disagree with Korrel as he takes what seems to be the

typical stance among male scholars that Guinevere is guilty in her relationship with Modred. Geoffrey's account does not give enough detail to indicate whether or not Guinevere wants to be Mordred's wife and queen, detail that would indicate her "guilt"; but later authors seem to assume that Geoffrey intends for the reader to see Guinevere as a willing adulteress. Such an interpretation may be the result of the general misogynistic attitude toward women in the Middle Ages. I do agree with what Korrel says in his epilogue: "...every author uses the Arthurian legend to suit his own purposes. Every author has his reasons for portraying his *dramatis personae* the way he does" (284). Part of my goal is to discover what might have been the authors' purposes.

Georgianna Ziegler gives a partial answer to the question of the authors' purposes in her Ph.D. dissertation entitled *The Characterization of Guinevere in English and French Medieval Romance* (1974).

> I believe that the vilification of her character which we have seen in several of the works may be explained by four factors. First, the Launfal and Testing romances represent two traditions in which the plots themselves call for a negative depiction of the Queen. Even here, the degree of negation rests in the control of the author, and it is this authoral choice which represents a second

> important factor. We saw how the anonymous author of *Landavall* and then Thomas Chestre progressively blackened the character of Guinevere. By contrast, Robert Biket and the anonymous author of *Le Manteau Mautaillie* emphasized her wisdom and self-control in a time of personal distress. Closely related to the author's choice, and often determining it, is the audience for which he is writing. The three ballads were directed toward a non-courtly audience interested in the ever-popular stories of scandal among the upper classes. Finally, place and time seem to play an influential role in the tone and attitude of the romances. (121)

Ziegler points out that many of the works most critical of Guinevere were written in England in the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. Such information leads me to question why the French literature is more tolerant of Guinevere's adulterous relationship with Lancelot and almost completely ignores the Guinevere-Mordred problem. Ziegler's first point that the plot sometimes calls for a negative depiction of the Queen sounds much like Korrel's explanation for Geoffrey's making Guinevere the cause of the downfall of Arthur. She does not explain what kind of plot calls for a negative depiction or why such a plot was favored. Furthermore, she does not deal with the attitudes toward

women in the Middle Ages that might have prompted Geoffrey and other Arthurian writers to blame Arthur's fall on Guinevere instead of on Arthur himself. Those same attitudes might have prompted trivial episodes of adultery like those in the *Launval* lais, which are not disastrous but are pejorative towards Guinevere. Ziegler's other points--authoral choice, audience, and place and time--also call for greater investigation into the attitudes of the time, and specifically the attitudes toward women.

Ziegler offers a thorough survey of English and French medieval romance to examine the character of Guinevere. She observes that the few scholars who had dealt with the characterization of Guinevere at the time she wrote her dissertation describe a more complex and highly developed personality than one would expect after reading general discussions of romance characterization. According to Northrop Frye, "The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes" (19). Richard Chase seems to agree with Frye when he concludes that romance characters, "probably rather two-dimensional types, will not be complexly related to each other or to society or to the past. . . . they will share emotions only after these have become abstract or symbolic" (19). Finally, Eugene Vinaver, after a lifetime of studying romances, says that Chrétien does not attempt to make the behavior of his characters

realistic. ". . . everything they do is related to a problem and its elaboration within the work, since it is with problems that courtly poetry is concerned, not with human realities" (20). Ziegler faults Frye, Chase, and Vinaver for working with generalities that create a type, a heroine who is above the men who serve her and at the same time inferior because she is passive. Guinevere, according to Ziegler, is not typical. She is unique. Her ability to respond in an unpredictable way as a medieval heroine may explain why few Arthurian writers provide a physical description of her beyond saying that she is beautiful. To Ziegler, Guinevere is not a type. She says that the only generalization one can safely make about the characterization of Guinevere is that her personality is more highly developed in the prose romances than in the poetic romances (21).

After her extensive study of Guinevere in medieval French and English literature, Ziegler concludes that Guinevere is lifelike. The fact that she has both positive and negative sides to her personality makes her lifelike rather than a two-dimensional "type." Some Arthurian works emphasize one of Guinevere's characteristics, while others emphasize another. In an effort to understand the real Guinevere, Ziegler creates a portrait of Guinevere by looking at the big picture, not just one or two works: "She is generous and jealous, wise and passionate, mother-figure,

wife, and mistress, integrating all in a nature that is strong-willed but courtly and refined" (26). But Guinevere was not created full-grown in one work. I agree with Ziegler that we see a little bit of Guinevere in each work, but it seems important to learn what made each author retain certain qualities from his sources, discard others, and add some new ones of his own. It also seems important to look for influences, other than saying rather easily that Guinevere is lifelike, that produced the contradictions in Guinevere that are especially noticeable in the French writers and Malory.

Another Ph.D. dissertation devoted to the study of Guinevere is Theodore Irving Reese's *The Character and Role of Guenevere in the Nineteenth-Century*. Although Reese's dissertation focuses principally on nineteenth century Arthurian literature, he does devote a full chapter to the legend in the Middle Ages. In that chapter Reese makes some statements about Guinevere that he does not support. For example, he says that the unprecedented popularity of Geoffrey's account of the legend is probably due to his portrayal of Guinevere and her role in the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. Reese must have made such an assumption with Geoffrey's misogynistic readers in mind, for he makes no effort to prove Guinevere's complicity. Her role in the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, if indeed she played an active role, was probably popular because of the apocalyptic

obsession of the Middle Ages, which was, of course, tied to Eve and the fall of mankind; but Reese does not say that either. Reese also says that Guinevere's "shameless adultery with the nephew of the mighty conqueror would shock and fascinate Geoffrey's readers," but he does not explain how he knows so much about those readers (16). His idea that audience influences author is in line with Ziegler's theory, but, again like Ziegler, he does not give any background about the audience or the times to indicate why Geoffrey's readers would be intrigued by the story of an adulteress queen, especially when Geoffrey devotes so little of his story to Guinevere. Reese says the ideal court of Arthur reflects the values of Wace's society in Wace's verse paraphrase of Geoffrey. Unlike Geoffrey, Wace wants to entertain his audience, not convince them that Arthur actually existed; and he uses Guinevere and her imminent betrayal of Arthur to build tension in the story. Wace emphasizes the ruin of Guinevere's reputation where Geoffrey stresses the effect of Guinevere's action upon Arthur, the warrior king. Important to Wace's audience is the fact that Guinevere is sincerely repentant; for although her action offends the mores of society, her repentance earns their sympathy (18-19). Again, Reese's observations may be correct, but he offers no support for such statements.

Reese goes on to say that Layamon makes Guinevere a stock villain who, in spite of her social accomplishments

and personal stature, deserves no sympathy. He does not explain why he sees Guinevere as a stock villain or why Layamon makes her an unsympathetic character by the end of his story. If Reese knows the condition of women in Arthur's day or even in Layamon's day, he does not use that knowledge to explain Guinevere's character in Layamon. He ignores the fact that Guinevere has no say in whether or not she marries Arthur, nor does he mention that Arthur and Guinevere have already been married for more than twenty years and the last time Arthur was gone he stayed gone for nine years (although Guinevere may have been expected to be like Penelope and wait twenty years for Arthur if that was how long he was gone). Reese acknowledges that women were relatively unimportant in a martial culture, and he acknowledges that Layamon was a priest, but he does not mention the power of clerical misogyny. He does not seem to see the possibility that Guinevere may be more of a victim than a villain. Reese's response seems to be exactly what Layamon may have wanted, but it may not be the most appropriate response at the conclusion of a more thorough study.

In his summary of Guinevere's character and role in the literature of the middle ages, Reese says,

> Early in the development the Queen was the unmitigated villainess who betrayed Britain's otherwise invincible "national" hero. As the

> legend moved to the more cultured civilizations on the Continent she assumed the virtues of a society interested in refinements of behavior and in the sophisticated affairs of the heart. (68)

He goes on to say that Guinevere's role in the Arthurian legend accounts for its popularity throughout the Western World for several centuries. He attributes that popularity to the readers' fascination with the woman who could destroy so great a king and to Guinevere's role as it represented the social issues in the various cultures (69). But Reese never does elaborate on those various cultures to support his statements. If, as Reese says, Arthur's society is repeatedly looked back to as a model of the ideal, with Arthur being the ideal king, how does he explain the fact that some authors portray Guinevere sympathetically and others do not? If "from Chrétien on Guinevere becomes a focal point of the medieval rediscovery of romantic, ennobling love" (69), how can an "ennobling" love cause the destruction of the most ideal society ever? Perhaps Reese leaves those questions unanswered because his focus is not on the Arthurian literature of the Middle Ages. I do not want to be overly critical of his treatment of the background material, but I do think he is given to making unfounded statements about Guinevere that he might have been able to substantiate but does not. If his opinions represent some sort of general consensus about Guinevere and

her character, then I am indebted to him for stating them so I can deal with them at length in my own study.

Florence Field Sandler's doctoral dissertation on Guinevere, *Guinevere's Quest: A Jungian Viewpoint* (1987), takes a Jungian approach to explain the problems most often associated with Guinevere. Sandler says the alluring, mysterious, and dualistic qualities in Guinevere are those found in what Jung calls the female archetype, a sovereign goddess projected by earliest man (1). Instead of condemning or apologizing for Guinevere's sexuality, Sandler suggests that "the sexual expression of true love enhances personality and expands the spirit..." and that adultery does not destroy Arthur's kingdom, even though it serves no social end (15). I agree that Guinevere's adultery is not responsible or should not be viewed as responsible for the destruction of Arthur's kingdom, with or without the factor of true love. In Geoffrey's account, Arthur leaves Guinevere in Mordred's care; and he takes over the crown and the queen. Geoffrey does not include enough details to show the reader the extent of Guinevere's role. In Malory's account, Guinevere is an adulteress; but Arthur and Mordred (and later on Gawain) seem to be responsible for the series of events that lead to the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. Ultimately, Sandler's point is that Guinevere, the female archetype, experiences the same sorts of struggles that the male does (24).

As Sandler examines the Arthurian legend from the Celtic sources through twentieth century versions of the story, she is looking for "Guinevere's entry into the Otherworld of the unconscious where growth can take place, provided the archetype faces her dark self" (57). In other words, Guinevere is on a quest just as most of the male characters are. Guinevere represents the feminine ego struggling to integrate its masculine element into itself in order to make a new beginning (57). Some accounts of the legend take Guinevere to a convent, not for a conclusion to her life but for a new beginning, a spiritual beginning. Sandler likens the changes in the Guinevere in the Vulgate Cycle to stages of alchemy; her experiences purify her and transform her into gold (113). Although Sandler's analysis of the literature after Malory is not particularly relevant to my own study, her suggestion that changes in the character of Guinevere at various historical moments can be linked to the influence of an historical woman, particularly Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie, is especially relevant to my own study.

I have found only one scholarly work published on Guinevere in this decade: Barbara Ann Gordon-Wise's *The Reclamation of a Queen: Guinevere in Modern Fantasy*, which was published in 1991. Gordon-Wise gives a thorough background on Guinevere before focusing on modern fantasy that portrays the feminine consciousness in response to the

Arthurian material of the Middle Ages that presents the traditional patriarchal image of the passive feminine (149).

This Guinevere, perhaps the most significant female character in the Arthurian legend, changes slightly with the changing sociological and ideological pressures in each historical period; but the lens of androcentrism dictates recurring motifs: her adultery, childlessness, abduction, rescue, and convent retirement. Gordon-Wise suggests that Guinevere is, then, the masculine interpretation of women. However, she warns us that the way we see Guinevere from the medieval literature is not necessarily the way a medieval audience would have viewed her (1-4).

In contrast to Florence Field Sandler's view that the alluring, mysterious, and dualistic qualities in Guinevere are those found in what Jung calls the female archetype, a sovereign goddess projected by earliest man (1), Gordon-Wise sees the archetypal qualities in Guinevere as those least threatening to a patriarchal culture: the Terrible Mother, the Seductress, and the Witch. Drawing on the work of Toni Wolff, Jung's disciple and companion, Gordon-Wise concludes that the failure of the Arthurian literature of the Middle Ages to develop any major positive images of Guinevere--the Great Mother, Maiden, or Sibyl--and the total absence of any traits related to the Amazon pole confirm the unease with which patriarchal cultures view warrior women, wise women, or women who are independent of male control. Furthermore,

Gordon-Wise thinks Jung was incorrect in assuming the universality and instinctual nature of these archetypal images, especially since the myths, literature, and art that Jung studied were the products of patriarchal culture (4-5).

In my own study, I am especially interested in Gordon-Wise's suggestion that Guinevere's negative reputation is the product of the masculine interpretation of women. I do not suggest that all the authors of Arthurian literature represent their own views of women in their depiction of Guinevere, but I do suggest that those authors are influenced by the patriarchal views of women that dominate the periods in which they write. Like Gordon-Wise, I want to adopt a feminist perspective to examine the figure of Guinevere; but the focus of my examination will be Guinevere in the literature of the Middle Ages rather than the Guinevere of modern fantasy. I hope to show that the development of Guinevere's character in the Arthurian literature of the Middle Ages shows that although the authors made no real effort to portray the female experience in their portrayal of Arthur's queen, they did, however, reflect the effects on women of a misogynistic male-dominated society.

Chapter Two provides a background for the study by establishing the condition of women in the Middle Ages and examining briefly the lives of a few specific women to offer some insight into the female experience in the Middle Ages,

to show the differences between what women choose to write about themselves and what men write about them, and to show how the lives of real women have changed at the hands of different historians. In Chapter Three I examine the depiction of Guinevere in the works of Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon. In Chapter Four I deal with the depiction of Guinevere in the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Marie of France, with some attention to other women characters to shed light on the depiction of Guinevere. Chapter Five briefly summarizes Guinevere's depiction in the *Vulgate Cycle*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* before concluding with Thomas Malory's depiction of Guinevere. Chapter Six, then, presents a brief conclusion.

Chapter Two

Representations of Elite Women in the Middle Ages

The condition of women through the Middle Ages is inferior to that of men and reflects a misogyny that was prevalent throughout the Middle Ages. Although that misogyny may have been influenced by ancient Judaic law, classical Greek and Roman satire, Greek physiology, and the Church Fathers, it was the Church and the aristocracy seeking to preserve feudal society who perpetuated the negative attitudes toward women during the Middle Ages (Blamires 2). Ancient Judaic law introduces the story of Eve who is responsible for the fall of man. Classical satire claims that woman has wild sexual urges, that woman is sexually promiscuous, that woman enjoys forced sex (Ovid 16, 30-31), and that chastity is a thing of the past (Juvenal 131-48). Greek physiology views woman as inferior to man because of her menstruation (Aristotle 89, 103, 175, 461; Galen 630-31). The Church Fathers advocated chastity and censured women (Chrysostom 69-72), viewed chastity as superior to marriage (Jerome 346-416), and opposed marriage (Ambrose 398-99). The faults assigned to women in these sources are the same types of faults that are associated with Guinevere's characterization during the Middle Ages: sexuality, desire, moodiness, seductiveness, destructiveness, faithlessness, selfishness, and pride. It

is important to remember that these qualities are assigned to women by men who, for various reasons, have a low regard for women. If, as Christine de Pizan suggests, these men who speak against women are hiding some fault of their own by pointing to the faults of someone more defenseless, that may help explain why Guinevere is portrayed as a traitorous adulteress.

In the early Middle Ages the men who devoted themselves to the Church viewed woman very much as the Church Fathers viewed her. The men in the aristocracy viewed woman as an ornamental asset or as a means of acquiring more land, their primary asset. Both agreed that she must be in subjection to man because of her inferior sex. Neither recognized her as "a free and lawful person." Those same people who saw woman as inferior to man, however, also developed the doctrine of the superiority of woman, which led to the adoration of the Virgin Mary in religion and the adoration of the lady through the ideal of chivalry (Power 9-10).

The specific function of women in the Middle Ages was to bear children, and it seemed to be taken for granted that women would fulfill that function. A society based on land and war needed a high birthrate to ensure its continued existence. The people needed heirs to landed estates and numerous warriors to defend the land (Brooke 2). With a high mortality rate among women giving birth, among infants,

and among warriors, it makes sense that women should be valued for reproduction.

Because marriage was the very foundation of the aristocratic structure in feudal society, most women faced uncertain lives from the moment of birth. Seldom was a marriage based on love. A man married to gain his wife's fortune or to produce a legitimate heir, preferably a son. Very often a marriage was arranged shortly after the child was born. If a girl baby was also an heiress, she was in great demand. If she was married before puberty, she usually went to live with her husband's family until she was old enough to consummate the marriage; and it was not uncommon for her husband to be ten or twenty years older than she was. If she bore no children, she would be blamed as the marriage partner who was sterile; and when her husband died, his estate would pass to his nearest living male relative, making her the ward of that relative. What little childhood a girl had was often spent in segregation. If she lived at home, she stayed in the women's quarters doing women's work. However, her father might send her to a convent to await marriage, or he might expect her to become a nun and stay there permanently (Duby 258, L'Hermite-Leclercq 209-211, 218).

Although the Church supported marriage for perpetuating the species, it viewed virginity as the ideal state for women and taught that the primary concern of women must be

the preservation of their virginity. Although widows and married women could become nuns, a woman who lost her virginity after she became a nun could no longer be married to Christ. Furthermore, the fallen virgin remained forever corrupt (L'Hermite-Leclercq 240). Feudal society in this period was fascinated, perhaps even obsessed, with virginity. While virginity in males was praised, as is apparent in the Grail segments of the Arthurian legend, virginity was expected in women before marriage.

Men dominated and controlled the religion that viewed women as inferior. Men had the power to define the differences between men and women and to decide that women were inferior physically, mentally, and morally. Men made the laws that gave women an inferior legal status. Men wrote the histories that recorded the "significant" events and lives. Men wrote the literature that portrayed men and women. There can be no doubt that men were dominant and that they did all they could to protect their power.

That male power is evident even in the lives of women who may be seen as exceptional. What Pauline Stafford says of the queens of the early Middle Ages is true of women throughout the Middle Ages: "They are the victims of malicious gossip, political propaganda, deliberate suppression of facts, inadequate knowledge, blatant antifeminism, and even simple lies" (3). The lives and writings of women who made something of a name for

themselves during the Middle Ages make even more evident the fact that Guinevere's male authors are more interested in depicting their audience's (and perhaps their own) image of woman than in depicting the female experience. If these authors were aware of the female experience, they seem to have considered perception more important than reality; and they do not seem to be at all sensitive to the role of their portrayal in the perpetuation of such a perception.

The experiences of elite women in the Middle Ages are important to a study of the depiction of Guinevere because they show the female response to abduction, war, and marriage and because they show how different authors chose to represent those experiences in different ways. The women who earn a mention in the histories of the Middle Ages or, more rarely, the focus of a biographical work have caught the writers' attention because they are like men in their military roles or like Eve in their adulterous roles or like Mary in their desire to lead chaste lives. These women are strong-willed and independent thinkers who refuse to conform to the roles prescribed for them in their day. Very often, they are remembered because they were considered rebellious or dangerous.

Scholars today know only what was recorded about those women and/or by those women during the Middle Ages. Those who did not write their own lives or record their own experiences and thoughts are as much at the mercy of the

male authors as are the women in romance or *lais* or other fictional or fictionalized works of literature. Even those who did write about their own lives, such as Radegund and Heloise, could not escape the power of men who doubted that a woman could write such a work and attributed the quality of writing to the influence of Fortunatus in Radegunde's case and Abelard in Heloise's case.

Radegund, born to King Berthar of Thuringia early in the sixth century, was a captive of war like many women in legend and romance. She was part of the booty taken by Lothar, son of Clovis, when the Franks slaughtered the Thuringians in 531. Lothar kept her in his royal villa, converted her, and educated her until she was old enough to marry him. She tolerated her husband until he had her brother killed, and then she "built for herself a monastery in Poitiers; by virtue of her prayers, fasting, charities, and vigils she won so shining a repute that her name was held great among the peoples" (Gregory III.7.91).

If Radegund's life and writings tell us anything about Guinevere, it is that war from the feminine point of view is not so glamorous as the Arthurian literature portrays it to be. While men go to war to prove their manhood or to keep from becoming soft, the women are left more vulnerable than usual. Like Guinevere in Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of the Arthurian legend, Radegund is left to the mercy of the strongest man. Unlike Guinevere, however, she is not

accused of treason or treachery because of her alliance with the man who destroyed her father's kingdom. Had she been an adult at the time of her abduction, she might have suffered the same fate as the fictitious queen. When the war is over and the men tell about their daring deeds, the women remain quiet or praise the men for their prowess. With Radegund's account of her own captivity, however, we are reminded of the suffering that the survivors of war must endure. We are also reminded that the accounts that Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon present make no effort to show what it was like to be a woman when Guinevere was queen nor do they make an effort to represent the contributions of women outside the male realms of war and lineage. Although Radegund matures into a strong and forceful woman, she is still less powerful than the men in her life. When she is praised by Fortunatus and Gregory, she is praised for her male qualities of spiritual leadership, political leadership, and courage or her feminine quality of self denial. When she is praised by Baudonivia, a fellow nun, she is praised for her feminine attributes of maternal concern for the other nuns, her efforts to promote peace in her husband's family, and her acts of kindness to the sick and poor. Much of Radegund's behavior might be characterized as maternal, but there is no mention of her having children. The male authors, both of whom knew Radegund personally and thought highly of her,

value male qualities or feminine qualities that do not threaten a male-dominant society.

Gregory of Tours indicates that Radegund was assertive and dauntless. When she could not gain support for her monastery from the local bishop, Maroveus, she looked for direction outside his diocese, obtaining a copy of the rule of St. Caesarius from Arles. Although Radegund was never successful in acquiring the good graces of the bishop of Poitiers, she was highly praised in a letter written to her by the bishops Eufronius, Praetextatus, Germanus, Felix, Domitianus, Victorius and Domnolus.

> We give thee joy, most honoured daughter, in that by divine grace there is revived in thee the example of this celestial love; for though the world waxeth old and the times decline, the faith flowereth afresh through the eager striving of thy heart, and that which had grown chill in the long frost of age at length gloweth anew by the flame of thy fervent mind. . . . The rays of his doctrine shining forth in thee, thou dost so suffuse with celestial light the hearts of all that hear thee, that everywhere the minds of virgins follow the call, aglow with the spark of the divine fire; ardent in the love of Christ, they are rapt away to quench their thirst at the fountain of thy bosom, each abandoning her kin

> chooseth thee rather than her own mother. Which thing is wrought not by nature but by grace. (IX.39.411)

Gregory includes in his *The History of the Franks* a copy of the letter Radegund wrote to the bishops of the neighboring cities asking for their protection. In this letter she includes a brief account of her establishment of the monastery at Poitiers, saying that she endowed it "by the gift of all the property which the royal munificence had bestowed upon me" (IX.42.418). More significant, however, may be her referring to her husband as "the most excellent lord King Lothar" and praising him for allowing her to establish and reside in the monastery. Radegund shows herself to be a skilled writer and very shrewd in dealing with the men in power, humbly asking for their help and protection and then getting their commitments in writing lest they change their minds later on (IX.42.418-21).

As Radegund says in her letter to the bishops, she gave up her wealth to devote her life to God, but according to Baudoniva's biography of Radegund she did not give up her concern for the court.

> Always concerned about peace, worried about the country, [Radegund perceived that] relations among them [the kings] were shaken. Since she cared for each of the kings, she prayed for their lives and instructed us to pray without ceasing for their

> stability. Whenever she heard that they had stired up strife against each other, she was very upset and sent letters to the one and the other, so that they would not wage war and arms against each other, but would fashion a peace so that the country would not perish. (Cherewatuk 24)

Although Radegund exhibits strength and confidence in both her actions and words, she reveals a more vulnerable side in the verse epistles she writes to relatives. These writings are important because they tell us from a feminine point of view what it was like to be a woman in time of war.

> From here the wife, bound, was dragged away by her mangled hair,/She could not bid a tearful farewell to her household gods./The prisoner was not permitted to fix kisses on her doorpost/or to turn her gaze on familiar places./The wife's naked foot trod through her spouse's blood/and the charming sister stepped over her fallen brother./The child, torn from his mother's embrace, lingered on her lips. (Cherewatuk 27)

There is nothing in this description that might be interpreted as romantic. Radegund does not focus on the heroic deeds of the men who fought and lost, and the deeds of the victors make them look barbaric rather than heroic. Had the Thuringians not been defeated, Radegund would have

been heir to the throne, so she feels the loss on more than one level.

> I, a foreign woman, cannot cry enough tears/were I able to swim in a lake full of my tears./Each has tears, but I alone weep for all:/For me the private grief is public. (Cherewatuk 28)

She grieves for her country, she grieves for herself, and then she grieves for her brother.

> A gentle boy with a downy beard, he was pierced through,/Absent, I, his sister, did not see his cruel death./Not only did I lose him, but I did not close his pious eyes/nor did I throw myself on him and speak a final message to him./I did not warm his cold heart with my hot tears,/nor did I receive kisses from my dying beloved./I did not, crying, grasp his neck in a miserable embrace/or, panting, clutch his ill-omened body to my breast./Life was denied him: Why couldn't his passing breath/be preserved in the brother's mouth for his sister? (Cherewatuk 28)

Radegund mourns not only because her brother is dead at such a young age but also because she did not get to perform her duty to her dying loved one. By showing her grief for her brother, she emphasizes her own plight.

As the legitimate heir to the Thuringian throne, Radegund is perhaps expected to be a strong woman. She sees

her countrymen killed, she is taken to a foreign country, she is forced to accept a new religion, she is forced to marry a polygamous king, and she loses her brother at the hands of her murderous husband. She could easily be a character in a chronicle or romance if we knew no more about her, but what she writes suggests that she is not like most of the women depicted in literature by men. Her letter to her cousin Hamalafred shows that she views abduction as an outrageous act. Her compliance to Lothar in converting to his religion and later marrying him does not indicate that she condones anything that has happened to her or her countrymen. She may have been biding her time, or she may have endured her situation out of concern for her brother, but there is a strength and dignity in Radegund which indicates that she has not forgotten who she is. After her brother is murdered, she has no reason to stay with Lothar. She flees his court but exhibits a strength that draws people to her defense.

We get another image of woman and her role through the writing of Brunhild, a Visigothic princess who married Sigebert, the son of Radegund's husband. Pauline Stafford suggests that Brunhild was a scapegoat because she was powerful and because she had conflicts with Columbanus, a self-proclaimed prophet of morality. Stafford attributes the discrepancies in the accounts of Brunhild's life to distortion of the truth because of bias, propaganda, gossip,

and sheer antifeminism (12-14). The depiction of Guinevere may have been similarly shaped by bias, propaganda, and antifeminism. Brunhild's letter to the Byzantine empress pleading for her grandson's return hints at the sort of suffering Radegund felt when her countrymen were killed and she was taken captive.

> Because, most serene majesty, through chance the infancy of my little grandson has learnt to make pilgrimage, and his innocence has begun to be captive in tender years, I ask in the name of the Redeemer of all peoples--as you hope never to see your own most devoted Theodosius taken from you, your sweet son severed from your motherly embrace, as your eyes may always take joy in his presence and your motherly womb delight in its august progeny--that you command arrangements to be made through Christ's favour, for me to have my little one back again, so that in my inmost being I may be refreshed by his embrace, I who sigh with grievous sorrow at my grandson's absence: let me, who have lost a daughter, at least not lose her sweet child, who remains for me; and, inasmuch as I am tormented by my daughter's death, let me be consoled by you through my captive grandson's swift return--so that, when you look upon my grieving and his innocence, you may, by releasing

> the captive, receive the reward of glory from God, who is the redemption of all mankind, and thereby too charity may be multiplied and the bonds of peace extended between East and West, with Christ's merciful aid. (Dronke 27;Brunhilda 403)

Brunhild's appeal is that of one mother to another but with the restraint that might be expected from a woman of royalty. However, there is no hint that the role of mother (or grandmother) is any less important than the role of queen or empress or that the tenderheartedness of a mother is inferior to the courage of a warrior. Brunhild shows no weakness but does not try to intimidate the woman she addresses. While men threaten war, women reason with each other.

The image we get of Brunhild from this brief correspondence is quite different from that recorded in the chronicles of Gregory of Tours, a sixth-century writer, and Fredegar, who wrote his account in Burgundy more than a generation later. Both accounts center around her feud with her archenemy, Fredegund, her husband's brother's wife. However, Gregory's account treats Brunhild much more favorably than does Fredegar. Gregory introduces her with this praise.

> Now King Sigibert, seeing his brothers take to themselves unworthy wives and even wed serving-maids, sent an embassy to Spain with many gifts to

> demand in marriage Brunhild, daughter of King Athanagild. For she was a girl of graceful form, fair to look upon, honourable and comely, prudent in judgement, and amiable of address. (IV.27.137)

Then he tells that she was converted and remained a Catholic until the time that he was writing. When her husband is killed, Brunhild's reaction is similar to Radegund's when her family and countrymen are killed.

> When the news was brought to her, and in the tumult of her grief and anguish she knew not what she did, Duke Gundovald took Childebert, her little son, and bore him away in secret, snatching him from imminent death. . . . Now in the first year of his reign King Chilperic came to Paris, seized Brunhild and banished her to Rouen, took possession of the treasures which she had brought to Paris, and ordered her daughters to be detained at Meaux. (V.1.168)

Within a short period of time, Brunhild loses her husband, her son, and her daughters. Although Gregory presents Brunhild in a positive light, his depiction does not show the tenderness of the mother that we see in her own letter. Gregory depicts her in a political role, and pays her the highest possible compliment when he says that she "armed herself with a man's courage and threw herself between the

hostile armies. . ." (VI.4.234). He records her speech to the two armies and credits her with preventing a conflict.

> 'Desist, O warriors, from this wickedness; cease to persecute the innocent; join not battle on account of one man, nor destroy the strength of our country.' (VI.4.234)

Gregory, who did not live to see the end of Brunhild's life, may have let his dislike for Fredegund color his depiction of Brunhild as the justified avenger of her murdered sister.

Fredegar creates a completely different picture of Brunhild.

> Aegyla the patrician was bound and put to death, though innocent, at the instigation of Brunechildis for no other reason that her cupidity; for his property would be taken by the fisc. (14)
>
> A synod assembled at Chalon, which deposed Desiderius from the bishopric of Vienne at the instigation of Bishop Aridius of Lyons and of Brunechildis. (15)
>
> Brunechildis was persistent in urging her grandson Theuderic to attack Theudebert; he was a gardener's son, she declared, not Childebert's. (18)
>
> In the twelfth year of Theuderic's reign, that Uncelen whose cunning had brought about Protadius'

> death had a foot cut off at the instigation of Brunechildis. He was stripped of his belongings and reduced to the most pitiable circumstances. (19)
>
> But his grandmother saw to it that Theuderic's marriage was never consummated: the talk of Brunechildis his grandmother and of his sister Theudila poisoned him against his bride. (20)
>
> Theuderic followed the wicked advice of Bishop Aridius of Lyons and of his grandmother Brunechildis and ordered him to be stoned to death. . . . (21)
>
> The king deferred to what the man of God said and promised to abstain from illicit love; but the Old Serpent slipped into the mind of that second Jezebel, his grandmother Brunechildis, and by the sting of pride provoked her against the holy man of God. Observing how Theuderic yielded to him, she feared that the substitution of a queen for mistresses at the head of the court would deprive her of part of her dignities and her honour. (23-24)

Fredegar gives a detailed account of Brunhild's death, which seems extreme even for the queen he describes in his chronicle.

> Brunechildis was brought before Chlotar, who was boiling with fury against her. He charged her with the deaths of ten Frankish kings--namely, Sigebert, Merovech, his father Chilperic, Theudebert and his son Chlotar, Chlotar's son the other Merovech, Theuderic and Theuderic's three sons who had just perished. She was tormented for three days with a diversity of tortures, and then on his orders was led through the ranks on a camel. Finally she was tied by her hair, one arm and one leg to the tail of an unbroken horse, and she was cut to shreds by its hoofs at the pace it went. (35)

Thus, with the stroke of a pen Brunhild has been transformed from a worthy queen who was politically astute into a bloodthirsty Jezebel. While Gregory may have been prejudiced in Brunhild's favor because of his dislike for Fredegund, Fredegar may have been prejudiced by Brunhild's barbaric death. In either case, the prejudice of the author seems to be important in the depiction.

Another woman important to the study of Guinevere is Æthelflæd. Our image of this historical character, like that of the fictional Guinevere, is shaped by what the authors who recorded her life tell about her. Æthelflæd ruled Mercia after her husband's death in 911 and showed such military leadership that she was able to recover some

of the lands that had fallen to the Danes. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says that she built a fort at Shergate and one at Bridgenorth in 912. In 913 she built fortresses in Tamworth and Stafford. In 916 an expedition she sent to Wales captured the king's wife, as well as others. In 917 she occupied the town of Derby. In 918 she subdued the Danish army at Leicester and gained control of the fort there. Before the people of York could keep their promise to her in that same year that they would be under her rule, she died. It was the eighth year she had ruled the Mercians.

When Henry of Huntingdon tells the story in the twelfth century, he says that Æthelflæd ruled "in the name of Ethered [sic], her infirm father" rather than at the death of her husband (166). However, he does list her great deeds and accomplishments in detail. When he tells of her death, he says,

> This princess is said to have been so powerful that she was sometimes called not only lady, or queen, but king also, in deference to her great excellence and majesty. Some have thought and said that if she had not been suddenly snatched away by death, she would have surpassed the most valiant of men. (168)

Henry's final tribute to the queen is a poem in which he calls her "A man in valour, woman though in name" (168).

The deeds of Æthelflæd have already begun to fade when another twelfth-century historian, William of Malmesbury, includes her in his history.

> And here, indeed, Ethelfleda, sister of the king and widow of Ethered [sic], ought not to be forgotten, as she was a powerful accession to his party, the delight of his subjects, the dread of his enemies; a woman of an enlarged soul, who, from the difficulty experienced in her first (or rather only) labour; ever after refused the embraces of her husband, protesting that it was unbecoming the daughter of a king to give way to a delight, which after a time produced such painful consequences. This spirited heroine assisted her brother greatly with her advice; she was of equal service in building cities, nor could you easily discern whether it were more owing to fortune or her own exertions, that a woman should be able to protect men at home, and to intimidate them abroad. (109)

Æthelflæd has gone from ruling the Mercians after her husband died to helping her ailing father rule and finally to helping her brother rule. William adds the element of childbirth, perhaps as a strong reminder to the reader that Æthelflæd is, after all, only a woman. By the time Robert of Gloucester writes about her in the thirteenth century,

all he says is that she "thoughte hire so sor" after the birth of her child that she "willed it nammor" (396).

This chronological fade-out is significant in that it shows how extensively the lives, accomplishments, and reputations of women are at the mercy of male writers. If the historian has little interest in the woman or in women in general, her entire life might be reduced to a few insignificant words. Even when a woman is included in the histories, there is no real consideration of what it was like to be a woman. It is because of her being like a man that she makes it into the histories at all. When a historian does give any space to motherhood, he belittles the role by focusing on petty details.

One of the most significant women of the Middle Ages and perhaps a strong influence on the character of Guinevere, as well as something of a victim of chronological fade-out, is Eleanor of Aquitaine. There are similarities between the life of Eleanor (or at least the depiction of her life) and the depiction of Guinevere, from her sexual desire to her ultimate retirement to a convent at the end of her life. However, she may have also had some influence on her daughter, Marie of Champagne, who gave Chrétien of Troyes the material for his tale that deals with the love between Guinevere and Lancelot.

In *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, Georges Duby draws on

several historical sources to explain the failure of Eleanor's marriage to her first husband, Louis VII. Duby's account is consistent with the more detailed account given by Amy Kelly in *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings*. Although the reputation of Eleanor may have had no influence on Chrétien's depiction of Guinevere, at least the possibility exists. During the Second Crusade, Louis and Eleanor stopped in Antioch because the army needed to reorganize and stayed with Eleanor's uncle, Prince Raymond. The time Eleanor and Raymond spent in familiar conversation made Louis suspicious that they might be playing at courtly love. Hoping to keep the two from sharing other pleasures, Louis decided to go on to Jerusalem, but Eleanor would not go with him. Raymond's intentions are not clear. He may have wanted to enjoy Eleanor himself, or he may have wanted to arrange another marriage for her that would benefit him. What is clear is that Eleanor wanted out of her marriage with Louis, so she introduced the idea that they were too closely related to stay married. The claim of incest was a brilliant plan to dissolve the marriage without making remarriage impossible for either of them. On their way home, they stopped to visit Pope Eugene III, who resolved the problems between them, sent them to bed together, and forbade anyone to say anything else against the marriage; but they still ended the marriage three years later. Louis' advisors were concerned that the King's image would be hurt

if people thought Eleanor had been stolen away from him. They were also concerned that the King's reputation would be hurt if Eleanor gave birth to a child that was not his. The King was accused of being childish in his love for Eleanor, that is, for loving her with a carnal, earthly passion that led to his falling under her power. Eleanor was accused of calling her husband a monk and wanting someone more suited to her amorous disposition. She was also accused of being a foolish woman who liked amusements, which enabled Raymond to carry her off "by violence and occult machinations." The problem was "just a commonplace matter of female adultery." Even those who blamed Louis put the blame indirectly on Eleanor: the whole problem started when Louis took his wife on the Crusade, a holy pilgrimage, instead of remaining continent to win battles. When Eleanor married Henry Plantagenet, all the English historians blamed her, calling her an adulteress and a whore. Henry was likened to a knight who had valiantly abducted the wife of the King of France to avenge his grandfather, Fouque Réchin (Duby 192-196).

Duby points out that it seems to have been fairly easy for men to gain access to the lady in princely houses. When Eleanor was in Raymond's house in Antioch, she apparently was not given much protection. She may have been as accessible in Paris because apocryphal stories tell of her affair with Geoffroi Plantagenet, Henry's father. Female

adultery was a part of high society, according to Duby, and while it was cause for divorce, men rarely divorced their wives on such grounds lest their own reputations be hurt. Those men who would or could not protect their wives were careful to protect their own reputations and their own benefit from a double standard. Blaming the wife, as Eleanor was blamed, was an effective method of diverting the blame from the husband (196-97). This same sort of diversionary tactic is used in the depiction of Guinevere when she is portrayed as an adulteress to take the focus away from Arthur's lack of interest in the Queen or to lessen the act of abduction or male adultery in Meleagant and Lancelot.

The Church was as flexible with the laws concerning marriage as were the secular courts on rape. The Pope supported the law of indissolubility above all others, using the law of consanguinity only when it was needed. The Church did consider the marital union destroyed by the wife's infidelity, so a couple that was reconciled after the wife's unfaithfulness had to repeat the nuptial rite. However, if they could not be reconciled, neither was allowed to remarry. No such rule applied to the husband's fornication since there was no chance of his giving birth to a bastard child (192-97).

With secular laws and the laws of the Church obviously favoring men, there was little room for or inclination

toward tolerance for women like Eleanor or Guinevere. That Eleanor became queen of England under rather scandalous circumstances did not serve in her favor, but that did not keep her from inviting the elite of England and France to her court to experience the courtly love they had heard about from the troubadours of southern France. Kathleen Casey suggests that Eleanor's encouraging these elite "to acquire a taste for the artificial relations of adulterous love" may have been, in part, a response to the Church's efforts to regulate sex and feeling (104). If Casey is correct, then it seems possible that Eleanor's subscribing to the life of courtly love may also have been in response to the Church's efforts to confine women to the inferior state it had assigned to them.

Just as Louis and his court blamed Eleanor for the failure of their marriage, Henry blamed her and her court in Poitiers for his problems with his sons and the threatening political destruction of his kingdom. As a result, he closed down the court with the use of force and took Eleanor back to England and imprisoned her in Salisbury Tower. Henry wanted to divorce Eleanor and marry again, but he could not risk letting her go back to Poitiers and possibly raising an army against him, and he did not want to keep her imprisoned indefinitely. Furthermore, he could not afford to divorce her because he would lose the property she had brought to the marriage. Finally, he proposed that, after a

divorce, Eleanor should embrace the cloistered life at Fontevrault. At the age of fifty-three, she could join the other ladies of rank whose worldly destinies were at an end, but the same Eleanor who refused to leave Antioch with Louis refused to enter the convent. She endured her fifteen year imprisonment to emerge, at the age of sixty-eight, a strong and influential ally to her son Richard, King of England. Where she died, in her eighty-third year, is uncertain, but some chroniclers say that she went to Fontevrault and became a nun before her death (Kelly 183-84, 190-91, 225-26, 248-50, 386).

Even such an abbreviated treatment of Eleanor's life shows some of the events that may have inspired fear or admiration in those who knew her or knew of her. It also shows the threat, whether real or imagined, that she and women like her posed to the stability of a society structured and dominated by men. By imprisoning Eleanor in Salisbury Tower, Henry may have inspired the writers of romance to confine their heroines in a similar manner, but it was Eleanor, with her independence, her political astuteness, her amorousness, and her support of poets and courtly love, who inspired poets to write about her and dedicate works to her. Kelly summarizes her influence as follows:

> Queen Eleanor knew all the personages; she was concerned with all the movements, to many of which

> she contributed notably; and she knew every city from London and Paris to Byzantium, Jerusalem, Rome, besides all those of her own provinces in western Europe. Her story, which runs through the last three quarters of the century, provides a "plot" almost as compact as that of a novel, for she was the center of the feud between the Capets and the Plantagenets that agitated the whole period and culminated in the collapse of the Angevin empire. (vi)

Eleanor had the power to inspire poets, and she fostered the children of important and influential nobility. She was powerful, but she was less powerful than the man who imprisoned her in Salisbury Tower for fifteen years. She was also less powerful than the men who gave accounts of her failed marriage to Louis. William of Tyre calls her "one of those foolish women" and says she was "unfaithful to the marriage bed." He leaves the impression that female adultery was commonplace and that Eleanor was no different than other women. William of Newburgh sees her as a modern Eve whose sexuality and deceitfulness caused Louis' defeat in the Holy Land. Giraldus Cambrensis blames her for corrupting the whole race of English kings. The Cistercian Hélinand of Froimont said that she "behaved not like a queen but like a whore" (Duby *Knight* 95-96).

It is easy to see similarities between Heloise's experiences and those of the fictional Guinevere. She gives herself to her lover without concern for the laws of society that frown upon pleasurable sex, she shows little regard for the sanctity of marriage or the idea that marriage is good for society, she loves passionately, she is both selfless and selfish in her love, she is frustrated by her situation but is powerless to change it, and she lives out her days in a convent even though she claims no true commitment to God. Just as Heloise is skillfully manipulated by Abelard, so the character of Guinevere is carefully manipulated by both the other male characters who share her stories and the authors who decide what details to include. Like Abelard, the authors tell the male side of the story; but Heloise's letters make us aware that something is missing in the story of Guinevere.

Heloise, born around 1100, was first lover and then wife to Abelard, called the greatest logician of the twelfth century. She was Abelard's seventeen-year-old pupil who was seduced by her teacher, a man twice her age. When the two were caught in bed together, Abelard proposed marriage but insisted that the marriage be kept secret to save his reputation. After the two were married, Heloise's uncle, Fulbert, had Abelard forcibly castrated, which ended the love affair and apparently Abelard's love for Heloise as well. The two had a child, Astralabe, who seemed to be

relatively unimportant to both of them. After his castration, Abelard convinced Heloise to enter a convent and become a nun; and he became a monk. Although they did see each other again and they did correspond, they were not reunited until after their deaths when they were buried side-by-side.

The letters written by Heloise reveal a trained logical mind, the result of her education by the nuns at Argenteuil, the encouragement of Fulbert at a time when women were rarely educated, and the instruction by Abelard (Radice 16). Unlike Radegund and other women throughout the Middle Ages who were happy to give up an earthly marriage for life in a convent, Heloise longs for the life she once had with Abelard. Heloise is a passionate woman who longs for the sexual love she and Abelard once shared, and she is also searching for a sense of her own identity. For her, the passion could be satisfied only by Abelard, and her identity, her self, could be realized only in a life with Abelard. She looks to Abelard for love, consolation, encouragement, and explanation; but all she gets is impersonal religious instruction, as if the castration cut her out of Abelard's heart as well as his bed. Finally, she concludes that all he ever felt for her was lust, not love.

Heloise shows herself to be a skilled thinker and writer as she cleverly disguises her physical longings in religious language.

I hoped for renewal of strength, at least from the writer's words which would picture for me the reality I have lost. But nearly every line of this letter was filled, I remember, with gall and wormwood, as it told the pitiful story of our entry into religion and the cross of unending suffering which you, my only love, continue to bear. . . .Through its feminine nature this plantation would be weak and frail even if it were not new; and so it needs a more careful and regular cultivation. . . .While you spend so much on the stubborn, consider what you owe to the obedient; you are so generous to your enemies but should reflect on how you are indebted to your daughters. Apart from everything else, consider the close tie by which you have bound yourself to me, and repay the debt you owe a whole community of women dedicated to God by discharging it the more dutifully to her who is yours alone. . . .Yet you must know that you are bound to me by an obligation which is all the greater for the further close tie of the marriage sacrament uniting us, and are the deeper in my debt because of the love I have always borne you, as everyone knows, a love which is beyond all bounds. (109, 111, 112, 112-113)

Glenda McLeod says that a twelfth century reader would have interpreted "debt" as a sexual obligation within the context of the writings of Paul (66).

Heloise wants some hint that Abelard feels the same sort of love for her that she feels for him, but all she reads in his history of their love is negative. She seems to be scolding Abelard for having nothing good to say about their love and for thinking that he is the only one who has suffered out of the ordeal. When she says, later in the same letter, "All of us here are driven to despair of your life, and every day we await in fear and trembling the final word of your death," there seems to be a mixture of true concern for Abelard's life and a hint of sarcasm at his excessive concern for himself.

When Abelard writes of their love in his *Historia calamitatum*, he is writing to sooth another man's passions, so he tells of his own misfortunes. Much of what he writes sounds like the typical male bragging after a conquest.

> In short, our desires left no stage of love-making untried, and if love could devise something new, we welcomed it. We entered on each joy the more eagerly for our previous inexperience, and were the less easily sated. . . .Separation drew our hearts still closer while frustration inflamed our passion even more; then we became more abandoned as we lost all sense of shame and, indeed, shame

> diminished as we found more opportunities for love-making. (67-68, 69)

After Heloise gave birth to their illegitimate son, Abelard went to her uncle to make amends by offering to marry Heloise. It is there that the love story ends and the true Abelard is revealed.

> I protested that I had done nothing unusual in the eyes of anyone who had known the power of love, and recalled how since the beginning of the human race women had brought the noblest men to ruin. (70)

What starts as a love story ends as the old story of Eve seducing Adam and getting them both thrown out of the garden. Abelard may have shown himself to be a typical man, but Heloise was not the typical woman: "she was strongly opposed to the proposal, and argued hotly against it for two reasons: the risk involved and the disgrace to myself" (70). When Abelard tells the story, the focus stays on Abelard. When Heloise retells the story, she shows that women suffer just as much or more than men do at the hands of love.

> You know, beloved, as the whole world knows, how much I have lost in you, how at one wretched stroke of fortune that supreme act of flagrant treachery robbed me of my very self in robbing me of you; and how my sorrow for my loss is nothing

compared with what I feel for the manner in which I lost you. Surely the greater the cause for grief the greater the need for the help of consolation, and this no one can bring but you; you are the sole cause of my sorrow, and you alone can grant me the grace of consolation. You alone have the power to make me sad, to bring me happiness or comfort; you alone have so great a debt to repay me, particularly now when I have carried out all your orders so implicitly that when I was powerless to oppose you in anything, I found strength at your command to destroy myself. I did more, strange to say--my love rose to such heights of madness that it robbed itself of what it most desired beyond hope of recovery, when immediately at your bidding I changed my clothing along with my mind, in order to prove you the sole possessor of my body and my will alike. God knows I never sought anything in you except yourself; I wanted simply you, nothing of yours. I looked for no marriage-bond, no marriage portion, and it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours. The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word mistress, or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or

> whore. I believed that the more I humbled myself on your account, the more gratitude I should win from you, and also the less damage I should do to the brightness of your reputation. (113)

When Heloise talks, her words show that the true blame lies with the man because the woman has been submissive to him from the beginning of the affair. Her version of the story makes Abelard look less like a victim and more like the villain he really is. He admits that he did not ask her to enter a convent for her good or for her happiness but because he could not bear the thought of sharing her with anyone else. While she cherishes the memories of their sexual union, he makes sure that she will not make similar memories with anyone else.

The love Heloise proclaims for Abelard is the type to inspire romances and other tales of courtly love. However, in the hands of a male author, the story will tell of the man's undying love for the woman and the woman's unfaithfulness to the man. In *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, Peter Dronke states the possibility that Heloise's letters could have been written by someone later than Heloise, but he accepts those letters ascribed to her by the manuscript tradition as hers (108). Heloise claims to love Abelard more than she loves God. Even though she entered the convent because he instructed her to do so rather than out of any personal conviction, she does the work expected

of her and even becomes abbess. When she cannot get from Abelard the sort of personal response she wants, she asks him for spiritual guidance and rules for women, which must, of necessity, be different from those for men.

> At present the one Rule of St. Benedict is professed in the Latin church by women equally with men, although, as it was clearly written for men alone, it can only be fully obeyed by men, whether subordinates or superiors. . . .Or indeed, with tunics or woollen garments worn next to the skin, when the monthly purging of their superfluous humours must avoid such things? . . . Which is more fitting for our religious life: for an abbess never to offer hospitality to men, or for her to eat with men she has allowed in? It is all too easy for the souls of men and women to be destroyed if they live together in one place and especially at table, where gluttony and drunkenness are rife, and wine which leads to lechery is drunk with enjoyment. . . .And even if they admit to their table only women to whom they have given hospitality, is there no lurking danger there? Surely nothing is so conducive to a woman's seduction as woman's flattery, nor does a woman pass on the foulness of a corrupted mind so readily to any but another woman; which is why St.

> Jerome particularly exhorts women of a sacred calling to avoid contact with women of the world. Finally, if we exclude men from our hospitality and admit women only, it is obvious that we shall offend and annoy the men whose services are needed by a convent of the weaker sex, especially if little or no return seems to be made to those from whom most is received. (160-161)

It is difficult to take Heloise's questions seriously even though her logic is sound. Perhaps it is because she claims Abelard as her Lord and says that she is not devoted to God that I see her toying with Abelard, showing him the inconsistencies of the religion that claims equality for men and women and behind which he has chosen to hide. If castration robbed him of his only claim to manhood, does he have a right to expect Heloise to still be submissive to him? If she cannot convince him of her right to equality with him through an unselfish love, then she will show herself to be his equal with a pen. In the process, she leaves an account of the female experience.

When Jean de Meun retells the story more than a century later in his part of *The Romance of the Rose*, he says that Abelard "Loved her so much that he must marry her/Against her good advice" (178). Jean praises Heloise for loving Abelard enough to call him, in writing, her lord and master. Then Jean goes on to say that some people see insanity in

Heloise's letters, but he says marvelous things are there for the attentive reader. Jean reads the letters the same way he writes the story: from the male point of view. If there is anything in her letters to contradict the male point of view, the letters, Heloise's story, can be dismissed as insane. Jean has built in a means of silencing Heloise if she fails to play the role expected of her, which may remind the reader of Erec's efforts to silence Enide's version of their story.

Although Heloise did not claim devotion to God, other women of the Middle Ages did. Even Radegund's life in the convent seems as much political as spiritual by comparison. The women who are called visionaries did not always live in seclusion or in the safety of a convent, and they left accounts of their spiritual experiences that add another dimension to the female experience.

At a time when religious men, even those who because they were working beside and interacting with devout women of faith must have had a great admiration for those women, were perpetuating the misogynist stereotypes of women, these mystics and other women of faith were courageous enough to use their God-given voices to retell the story, showing that women are accepted of God, that they are trustworthy, that they are no more susceptible to vice than are men, that they can interpret the will of God for themselves, that they can strengthen the spirituality of both men and women, that they

can experience the suffering and the love of Christ, and that they can be chosen by God to receive His inspiration just as men can be. The significance of the writings of these holy women to the study of Guinevere is that their visions and their relationships with God are dependent on their separation from the traditional role of wife. While the Church Fathers have taught that woman is sinful and seductive, the writings of these women of God indicate that their salvation is as dependent on their segregation from men as men's salvation is dependent on their segregation from women. Like these historical women, the fictitious Queen of the Arthurian legends is fleeing from men as she runs toward God. Perhaps a more important link to Guinevere is that these visionaries tell a story unlike the stories told by men, which prompts us to look for the untold story in the portrayal of Arthur's queen.

Hildegard of Bingen was a twelfth century visionary who was very much aware of the ridicule aimed at women, so she used her pen in an effort to lessen the criticism. As a result, many of her visions reverse the traditional roles of men and women as viewed by the Church. She portrays men as weak and women as powerful. Her men are inclined to neglect the work of God while her women are given the gift of prophecy. She even ascribes feminine qualities to God. Knowing that she is at risk of having her message ignored or putting herself in danger, Hildegard uses her visions to

validate what she wants to say. Furthermore, she devises strategies for expressing her message so that the male readers will accept it. First, she exalts her reader, assigning to him qualities such as venerability, dependability, and gentleness, and debases herself, calling herself "a miserable and worse than miserable woman" (Ahlgren 48). By asking for her reader's approval of her visions, she indicates that she is submissive and recognizes his authority, which then allows her to criticize the reader's own practices (46-49).

Another visionary, Mechthild of Magdeburg was born in the thirteenth century to an aristocratic family in Saxony. She joined a group of Beguines after she applied to a traditional convent on her own, without the expected dowry, and was rejected. She spent much of her adult life working on *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* but did not actually begin recording the work until she was forty. Mechthild's writing provoked a great deal of harassment from ecclesiastical authorities partly because her predominant imagery is erotic, which is characteristic of mystic writings, with consummation between two lovers representing divine union that transports the soul "in ecstasy to a secret and blissful place" (Beer 7). Once a soul has experienced such ecstasy, life is unbearable without the union.

Mechthild's use of erotic imagery is not all that might have aroused the ecclesiastical authorities. The same independent spirit that prompted her to embrace a religious life of poverty gave her the courage to attack clerical corruption, claiming that clerics in general have lost their purity because of greed and their humility because of the flesh. She even dares to address specific men, in this case the canon of Magdeburg, with advice for them that she has received directly from God.

> He should clothe himself more modestly than he now does; moreover, he shall wear a hair shirt next his skin to guard against the softness he has accepted in the flesh. . . He shall sleep on a straw pallet. . . He shall also keep two rods beside his bed to discipline himself when he awakes. . . He shall hold himself always in fear like a mouse that sits in a trap and awaits its death. . . When he eats he shall eat sparingly; when he sleeps he shall be chaste and alone with Me. (Mechthild 169)

A fourteenth century visionary who, like Hildegard, proposed a rather radical view of gender in religion was Julian of Norwich who in 1373 experienced several visions as she lay dying. Little is known about this woman who records her death bed visions in *A Revelation of Love*. The visions, which led to her recovery (a sort of resurrection), allowed

her to experience the suffering of Christ on the cross. Her graphic description of the changing appearance of Christ's body as the life flows out of him stands out as conspicuously different from most of the religious writings of her day. The most radical part of her visions, however, is her explanation of the Godhead.

> And thus in our makeyng God almigty is our kindely fader, and God al wisdam is our kindly moder, with the love and the goodnes of the Holy Gost; which is al one God, on lord. And in the knittyng and in the onyng he is our very trew spouse, and we his lovid wif and his fair maiden, with which wif he is never displesid;. . . . (70)

During a time that placed little value on women, Julian assigns feminine qualities to both God and Christ.

> The moder may leyn the child tenderly to hir brest, but our tender moder Jesus, he may homley leden us into his blissid brest be his swete open syde, and shewyn therin party of the Godhede and the ioyes of hevyn, with gostly sekirnes of endless bliss; and that shewid in the [x], gevyng the same vnderstondyng in this swete word wher he seith, 'Lo how I love the', beholdand into his syde, enioyand. (73-74)

As she shows this feminine side to Christ, Julian emphasizes the importance of motherhood.

> This fair lovely word 'moder', it is so swete and so kynd of the self that it may ne verily be seid of none but of him, and to hir that is very moder of hym and of all. To the properte of moderhede longyth kinde love, wisdam and knowing, and it is good; for thow it be so that our bodily forthbrynging be but litil, low and semple in regard of our gostly forthbringing, yet it is he that doth it in the creatures be whom that it is done. (74)

Ultimately, Julian says that the meaning of God's vision to her is love. God made us because he loved us. Christ died for us because he loved us. This love is God's work, and this love gives us everlasting life.

Perhaps the most significant and influential woman writer of the Middle Ages is Christine de Pizan (1365-1431). Married at the age of fifteen and widowed ten years later with three children to support, she is best known for having been the first woman to earn a living as a writer, but more significant is the fact that she is the first woman writer to produce a book in praise of women. Christine is obviously interested in women, and she uses a distinctly female voice to deal with issues that concern women and to record the female experience. What she says represents something of a culmination of the efforts of women to fight against or deal with misogyny and discrimination during the

Middle Ages. Her writing points out the attitudes of men toward women that would have influenced the depiction of Guinevere as a temperamental queen with desires that lead to the destruction of man.

Christine's writings, which reveal the true female nature, deal with the sufferings of women caused by double standards. She attacks the sterility of courtly conventions and claims that courtly literature, as well as literary culture as a whole, misrepresents women. She even warns women against men who would pressure them into participating in courtly love. In addition to promoting the education of women, she calls for a literary culture that promotes universal standards of excellence and virtue, not standards that enable one gender to oppress the other.

In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine begins by telling the reader that she devotes herself to literary studies and, as a result, has noticed that male philosophers and poets seem to speak from the same mouth on the subject of women. "They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice" (4). Even books that claim to be in praise of women turn out to be, on close inspection, books of lies. Christine wants to know why "so many different men--and learned men among them--have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior" (3-4). She

recognizes these views of men for what they are because she knows women, but she still "detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature" (5). She turns to God for an explanation, giving Him the credit for creating woman and wondering how He could have gone so wrong. Christine is clever in turning the teachings of man on woman against God, exposing the fallacious teachings for what they really are. One of her best arguments in defense of women is her own intellectual ability that enables her to reason so soundly and write in such a learned style. In answer to her prayer to God, the three virtues appear before her to answer her questions about men and

> to vanquish from the world the same error into which you had fallen, so that from now on, ladies and all valiant women may have a refuge and defense against the various assailants, those ladies who have been abandoned for so long, exposed like a field without a surrounding hedge, without finding a champion to afford them an adequate defense, notwithstanding those noble men who are required by order of law to protect them, who by negligence and apathy have allowed them to be mistreated. (10)

Christine learns that she should not accept the words of the philosophers as if they were articles of faith that

cannot be wrong. She also learns that sometimes the words mean the opposite of what they say, so she must learn to correctly interpret the passages that attack women. One of the virtues gives special attention to *The Romance of the Rose*, which supposedly has greater credibility because of Jean's reputation as a scholar.

> . . .it is evident and proven by experience that the contrary of the evil which they posit and claim to be found in this estate through the obligation and fault of women is true. For where has the husband ever been found who would allow his wife to have authority to abuse and insult him as a matter of course, as these authorities maintain? I believe that, regardless of what you might have read, you will never see such a husband with your own eyes, so badly colored are these lies. (7-8)

Once she establishes that men have lied about women, she wants to know why men say such things about women, if they do it because of their nature or if they do it because they hate women.

She learns that some men make sweeping statements about women out of good intentions: they want to save other men from vicious and dissolute women. Their fault is that they do not explain that not all women are vicious and dissolute.

Even if they believe that all women are evil, they cannot be excused for their ignorance. Other men attack women

> because of their own vices and others have been moved by the defects of their own bodies, others through pure jealousy, still others by the pleasure they derive in their own personalities from slander. Others, in order to show they have read many authors, base their own writings on what they have found in books and repeat what other writers have said and cite different authors. (18)

To let the reader know just how extensive her own knowledge is, Christine deals with the misogynic teachings of the Church fathers and classical literature in addition to writers of the Middle Ages.

> Those who attack women because of their own vices are men who spent their youths in dissolution and enjoyed the love of many different women, used deception in many of their encounters, and have grown old in their sins without repenting, and now regret their past follies and the dissolute life they led. But Nature, which allows the will of the heart to put into effect what the powerful appetite desires, has grown cold in them. Therefore they are pained when they see that their 'good times' have now passed them by, and it seems

> to them that the young, who are now what they once were, are on top of the world. They do not know how to overcome their sadness except by attacking women, hoping to make women less attractive to other men. Everywhere one sees such old men speak obscenely and dishonestly, just as you can fully see with Mathéolus, who himself confesses that he was an impotent old man filled with desire. (18-19)

Although it is impossible to know exactly to whom Christine is alluding, she may have been thinking of St. Augustine's pleasures with his common-law wife or St. Jerome's wilderness temptations during which he saw visions of nubile young girls. The specific man or men are not as important as is Christine's suggestion that men who speak against women are very likely hiding some fault of their own by pointing to the faults of someone more defenseless. These impotent men want to keep other men from enjoying the pleasures of sex with women. The men who say women have weak minds are jealous because they "have seen and relized that many women have greater understanding and are more noble in conduct than they themselves, and thus they are pained and disdainful" (19). Other men are just "naturally given to slander" because they are wicked of heart. Finally, she says that these men who criticize and condemn all women are unreasonable and unnatural.

Once Christine has the reasons why men are so condemning of women, she devotes the remainder of the book to proving wrong all the arguments of men against women. In answer to the argument that women should not rule because they are inferior, she lists women with political and military accomplishments to their names. She lists women who have exhibited great learning and skill. She names ladies of vision and prophecy, daughters who loved their parents, women who showed exemplary marital love, women who brought good into the world, educated women who did not give up their femininity and still proved that women should be educated, women who were chaste and found the threat of rape repugnant, women who were steadfast while men were fickle, women who were faithful in love, women who became famous, women who were attractive because of their honesty and integrity, and women who were generous. In short, she disproves the myth that all women are like Eve and that only in remaining a virgin is a woman worthy of praise.

Christine concedes that there is nothing worse than an evil woman, but she shows that all women do not deserve to be condemned or maligned because of the deeds of the few who are truly evil. She also encourages all women to be chaste and good and to accept the positions into which they were born. She seems to accept the patriarchal propaganda which says that women should be submissive and that women are not suited for certain professions as long as qualified men are

available to fill those roles. Still, hers is definitely a feminine voice that celebrates the female experience and rewrites her male sources to depict women worthy of praise rather than condemnation.

Although Christine's views are rather advanced, they come too late to have a significant effect on most depictions of Guinevere. The stark contrast between Christine's fifteenth century views of women and the views of men toward women in the twelfth century are evident as we look at the depiction of Guinevere in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Guinevere in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon

In *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, Pauline Stafford offers an excellent explanation of why the lives of queens vary from author to author and century to century. Although she deals specifically with queens living from about AD 500 to the mid-eleventh century in Frankia, Italy, and England, much of what she says applies to all of the Middle Ages. While many queens did noteworthy deeds during the five hundred years Stafford covers, she says that only eight biographies of queens came out of that time, sometimes with more than one biography on the same queen. What the kings did was always considered important, whether good or bad, and the lives of the kings were told and retold throughout the centuries. Kings were idealized to various extents because personal monarchies instilled in the subjects a need to believe in the good of the kings. What the queens did was considered unimportant by comparison, but the recording of their lives was, nevertheless, distorted by misinformation, gossip, legend, bias, stereotype, prejudice, politics, and antifeminism. Very often these women were assigned the faults, weaknesses, and excesses of their kings; or they were characterized by the evils the authors perceived or feared in women in general. For example, if a queen had the

audacity to oppose a Church official, such as Brunhild did, she might be labeled a Jezebel even if her cause was justified. An author who abhorred the female ruler or feared the powerful woman might depict the queen as a lascivious whore. Queens who founded convents very often were presented as virtuous while those who did not fit the ideal of the celibate, desexualized woman willing to preserve her chastity at any cost did not fare so well. Qualities such as generosity, vengeance, and protectiveness were virtues in men; but in women those qualities became partiality, intrigue, and personal vindictiveness. Women who were given in marriage to help assure peace were often suspected of domestic crimes through clandestine means, including poison and witchcraft, when their only crime was being an outsider. In short, it seems that any queen who played an active political role was at the mercy of those who recorded her life. While the portraits of these queens do not tell us much about the individual queen, they do show us something of what was considered the ideal (1-31). What the queen was supposed to be may have influenced the depiction of Guinevere as much as the actual life of any queen did. While it is impossible to prove that Guinevere is an historical queen or that the character of Guinevere is based on the life of a historical queen or queens, it is possible that Guinevere is a conglomerate character created from historical queens and other women very much as the

character of King Arthur was created. However, the Guinevere of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon is developed to such a limited degree that it is difficult to make historical connections at all.

Perhaps the first influence on Geoffrey's depiction of Guinevere is the genre in which he chose to write. The chronicles are monastic compositions that, early on, attempted to continue the history that had been established in legends. The early chronicles were little more than a brief record of the events of a given year. However, from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, the authors of chronicles included more detail, which reflected their own individuality. In general, each writer accepted and repeated what he found in the works of his predecessors without distinguishing between fact and fiction (Geoffrey vii-viii). While Geoffrey claims in his preface that his purpose is to trace the history of the Britons from Brutus to Cadwallader, he seems to be equally interested in proving the Britons superior to the Romans. Geoffrey is true to the chronicle tradition in that he makes society as a whole more important than individuals. The chronicle genre does focus on individuals and the relationship between individuals and society to a limited extent, but the actions of a man (or woman) are important because of the effects they have on the entire community. Thus, when Geoffrey includes Guinevere in

his account of the history of Britain, he must be interested in the way her life affected society.

Another influence on Geoffrey's depiction of Guinevere may have been the fact that the chronicles were monastic compositions. There is nothing to prove that Geoffrey was himself misogynistic, but clerics were trained by the Church, and the prevailing attitude of the Church toward women was quite negative. While Geoffrey does not necessarily blame women for the ills of society, neither does he credit them for their contributions to the good of society. In his chronicle, as in life, the important players are men.

Guinevere first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Histories of the Kings of Britain* in chapter 9 of book 9, and she is mentioned five times. The first time we see the Queen, Geoffrey tells us her name and her qualifications for being queen.

> At last, when he had re-established the state of the whole country in its ancient dignity, he took unto him a wife born of a noble Roman family, Guenevere, who, brought up and nurtured in the household of Duke Cador, did surpass in beauty all the other dames of the island. (163-164)

Geoffrey says nothing about the arrangements for the marriage or about the wedding ceremony itself. All we really know about Guinevere is that she is of noble birth

and was sent to Cador's house to be educated, a practice more often reserved for young men than for young women. We do not know Guinevere's age, but Arthur was crowned king when he was fifteen. The summer after he weds Guinevere, he goes to conquer the island of Hibernia and returns at the end of winter. He remains at home for the next twelve years. Before Guinevere is mentioned the second time, Arthur goes off to war again and this time stays nine years. After he returns home victorious, he wants to be crowned king of all his lands, including his newest acquisitions.

The second mention of Guinevere comes in the midst of a lengthy description of the coronation of Arthur and his queen.

> Of the other party, the archbishops and pontiffs led the Queen, crowned with laurel and wearing her own ensigns, unto the church of the virgins dedicate. The four Queens, moreover, of the four Kings already mentioned, did bear before her according to wont and custom four white doves, and the ladies that were present did follow after her rejoicing greatly. At last, when the procession was over, so manifold was the music of the organs and so many were the hymns that were chanted in both churches, that the knights who were there scarce knew which church they should enter first for the exceeding sweetness of the harmonies in

both. . . .And when the divine services had been celebrated in both churches, the King and Queen put off their crowns, and doing on lighter robes of state, went to meat, he to his palace with the men, she to another palace with the women. For the Britons did observe the ancient custom of the Trojans, and were wont to celebrate their high festival days, the men with the men and the women with the women severally. . . .In the palace of the Queen no less did numberless pages, clad in divers brave liveries, offer their service each after his office, the which were I to go about to describe I might draw out my history into an endless prolixity. For at that time was Britain exalted unto so high a pitch of dignity as that it did surpass all other kingdoms in plenty of riches, in luxury of adornment, and in the courteous wit of them that dwelt therein. Whatsoever knight in the land was of renown for his prowess did wear his clothes and his arms all of one same colour. And the dames, no less witty, would apparel them in like manner in a single colour, nor would they deign have the love of none save he had thrice approved him in the wars. Wherefore at that time did dames wax chaste and knights the nobler for their love. (170-171)

Geoffrey's description indicates that Guinevere's ceremony was as elaborate and as important as Arthur's. The fact that the ceremony was for Arthur and Guinevere seems to be coincidental. The ceremony is the focus and is definitely more important than any of the people present even though the most important people are all there.

Before the next mention of Guinevere, Arthur gets a threatening letter from Rome, which gives Cador the opportunity to say that toying with women and playing at follies make men soft. Rather than praising peace, he praises war as a gift from God to enable the knights to keep their manly prowess. It is important to note that women are ranked with follies. Both keep men from doing things that prove them men. When Geoffrey mentions Guinevere again, it is when Arthur is preparing to leave for battle against the Romans.

> When Arthur learned that they were upon the march, he made over the charge of defending Britain unto his nephew Mordred and his Queen Guenevere, he himself with his army making for Hamo's Port, where he embarked with a fair breeze of wind. (178)

This is the third time Arthur leaves for war after his marriage to Guinevere, but Geoffrey does not tell us that he entrusted his kingdom to anyone the first time while he was gone approximately a year or even the second time while he

was gone nine years. Now he is twenty-two years older, so it is possible that he does not feel so indestructible. It is also possible that he expects to be gone for a considerable length of time, but there is no indication of why he leaves power to his nephew, who was probably being brought up in Arthur's house just as Guinevere had been brought up in Cador's house. Leaving both Mordred and Guinevere in charge instead of giving full control to Guinevere makes Arthur at least partly responsible for what happens while he is away.

> But the summer coming on, at which time he designed to march unto Rome, he had begun to climb the passes of the mountains, when message was brought him that his nephew Mordred, unto whom he had committed the charge of Britain, had tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head, and had linked him in unhallowed union with Guenevere the Queen in despite of her former marriage. (196)

The focus here is on Mordred and his taking the crown or declaring himself the new king. Geoffrey seems to be more concerned with the "tyrannously and traitorously" element than he is with the fate of Guinevere. According to Pollock and Maitland's *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, both Mordred's taking the crown and his adultery with Guinevere are acts of treason. However, since that

treason includes "adultery with the lord's wife" and "violation of his daughter" but says nothing of the guilt or innocence of the wife and daughter, we might infer that the crime of treason applies only to the man involved (500-508). If Guinevere is guilty of treason, she is guilty only through her association with Mordred. There is no indication that she is a willing accomplice to Mordred either in the taking of the crown or in becoming linked to him sexually. Instead, she seems to be more like plunder to be taken at the same time Mordred takes over Arthur's kingdom, much as Radegund was taken by Lothar when he destroyed her father's kingdom and killed her countrymen. She is not taken to a foreign land, but she is taken, nevertheless. Geoffrey does not mention Guinevere's feelings in the matter, and he assigns no blame to her until the last time he mentions her.

> When this was reported unto Queen Guenevere, she was forthwith smitten with despair, and fled from York unto Caerleon, where she purposed thenceforth to lead a chaste life amongst the nuns, and did take the veil of their order in the church of Julius the Martyr. (198)

Here Guinevere has heard that Mordred has re-formed his army and is ready to fight Arthur once more. Geoffrey's saying that Guinevere is "smitten with despair" may be his way of saying that she had willingly become Mordred's wife and

queen. It seems that Geoffrey fails to recognize the fact that women did not enjoy being abducted or forced into marriage. As a result, his view of Guinevere is limited. However, the only real indication that Guinevere might have been willing in her link to Mordred is the despair she feels here. Perhaps Geoffrey and his successors fail to realize the possibility that Guinevere feels despair at the hopelessness of the situation, not because she is a willing accomplice to Mordred.

In *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, Kathryn Gravdal examines the representation of rape in both literary documents and legal documents. The difficulty of such a study comes from the fact that there was no single word to mean rape as we understand it today. Furthermore, the meaning of rape changed under various influences, including secular law and Church law. Early on, rape meant the abduction of a virgin. The abduction of women was a custom of pre-Christian Europe that was practiced throughout the Middle Ages, but the Latin word for abduction did not have a sexual connotation until around 1155. History indicates that abduction usually included sexual force, but having sexual intercourse with a woman against her will was not always considered a crime. In the fourth century Constantine made *raptus*, abduction of a woman, punishable by death, but his motivation was to protect the property of the man with whom the woman lived,

not to protect the woman as an individual in her own right. In the ninth century, Louis the Pious allowed rapists to avoid the death penalty by paying a fine. Rapists were even allowed to marry their victims if the victim agreed to the marriage. During the early part of the courtly period, secular law in France maintained that forced coitus was punishable by death, but Church law was more lenient. Gratian, the twelfth century canonist and jurist, wanted to soften the ravishment laws in the name of Christian love. He saw rape as a crime only when corruption took place; and corruption could take place only if the woman was a virgin abducted from the house of her father, if violence was used to accomplish the sex act, and if there was no previous marriage agreement between the two people involved. The softening of the law was obviously designed to help men, not their female victims, because it again allowed marriage by abduction. It is ironic that the Church was so outspoken against sex but did not view rape as a sin. The twelfth century experienced a blurring between rape and voluntary sex and between love and violence, which undermined the position of women. In the legal sense, rape could not be so bad if it could lead to marriage, and in the literary sense rape could not be so bad if it was the basis of a romantic story. As early as the thirteenth century the word for rape was also the word for ravishment so that sexual violence was hidden by the romantic connotation. During the fourteenth

century, the French word for violent abduction became the word for sexual pleasure. The shift, according to Gravdal, reflects the male attitude that whatever is attractive begs to be carried off or raped, which harks back to Ovid and his claims about women wanting to be forced into sex. That same courtly literature that claimed to be obsessed with woman was also obsessed with the idea of ravishment. The point Gravdal emphasizes is that the acts of sexual violence repeated in medieval literature, whether in romance or other genres, use sexual difference to force subordination (1-11).

Geoffrey portrays Guinevere in such a way that the reader is reminded of the models of virtue that would have been familiar to his readers. The fact that she does not kill herself rather than let Mordred have sex with her shows that she does not follow that model. As a result, she may be seen in a negative light. Had she chosen death, she, like the saints in hagiography, such as Agnes and Christina, might have been the sort of queen worthy of a husband like Arthur. Geoffrey gives no indication that Guinevere is faced with a dilemma. Dorigen in Chaucer's "The Franklin's Tale" is faced with a dilemma after she promises Aurelius that she will love him when all the rocks are removed from the coast and he, with the help of an illusion, removes them. Dorigen loves her husband and promises to love Aurelius only because she thinks she has given him an impossible task. Now she must decide if she will keep her

promise to Aurelius or keep her chastity for her husband who is off seeking worship as a knight. In the process, she names all the women who have killed themselves rather than submit to a man who has no right to their bodies. The agony Dorigen goes through at least suggests what Guinevere might have gone through before she opted for life. Writers who have based their stories on Geoffrey's and scholars through the centuries have implicated Guinevere in Mordred's actions by the process of extrapolation.

Although Geoffrey does include other women in his chronicle, some strong and assertive whose deeds proclaim them important even when he does not offer any elaboration, Geoffrey's treatment of these women usually implies that the women are not important or are at least less important than the men. Most of the women are mentioned because they are the daughters or wives or mothers of important men. Many of them are not given names. When the author says anything about the size of a particular group of people, women and children are not included in the number. The focus of the history is men and their deeds. Women are often important only as they contribute to the success or failure of the men.

The first woman Geoffrey names, Lavinia, is part of the spoils of battle. The second, Ignoge, is a pawn in a political arrangement. The third, Estrildis, is the object of Locrine's lust. Widen is the cause of civil war when she

kills one of her sons, "hacked him all into little pieces" (35), to avenge the other son's death. Another mother, Conwenna, effects peace between her two sons with an eloquent "prayer."

> Remember, my son, remember these breasts that thou hast sucked and the womb that bare thee wherein the Maker of all things hath created thee man of man and brought thee forth into the world through the throes of childbirth. Remember all the anxieties that I have suffered for thee, and grant thou this my petition! Yield thy pardon unto thy brother, and constrain the wrath that thou hast conceived against him, for no revenge is thine of right as against one that hath never offered thee either insult or injury. Even this that thou dost urge against him, to wit, that through him thou hast been banished from thy kingdom, if so be that thou wilt more narrowly look into the bearings of the case, nought wilt thou find therein that thou canst call a wrong. For he banished thee not that any worse thing might befall thee, but he compelled thee to forego the worser things that thou mightest be exalted unto the better. For whereas thou didst only possess thy share of the kingdom as his vassal, now that thou hast lost it, thou art his peer in that thou hast obtained the

> realm of the Allobroges. What else hath he done herein, save that from being a needy knight, he hath promoted thee to be a high and mighty king? Add to this that the quarrel which hath risen betwixt ye was none of his seeking, but was begun by thee when, trusting to the King's help of Norway, thou didst burn to rebel against him! (43-44)

Geoffrey includes little dialogue throughout his history and rarely gives words to women. This long passage makes Conwenna sound as intelligent and articulate as any man. Although the subject matter is not outside her realm of authority, motherhood, she uses an important role of women as the preamble to a political argument.

Geoffrey also includes nameless individual women and groups of women. In Book III, Chapter II, Guichtlac, King of the Danes attacks Brennius and takes from him his wife. Brennius is upset at the loss of his wife and pursues Guichtlac to win her back. Guichtlac gets to keep the unnamed woman, but there is no indication that she has any feelings one way or the other. Such a depiction dehumanizes the woman, which may be dictated by Geoffrey's pseudo-historical approach rather than his personal, monastic view. Book V, Chapter XVI shows what happens to women who will not abandon their homes, families, and chastity upon demand.

> Whilst these were roving along the seaboard plundering and murdering, they met the damsels as they were driven on to the shore in those parts. These Ambrones, beholding the beauty of the damsels, would fain have wantoned with them, but meeting denial, fell upon them and slaughtered by far the most part of them without mercy. (92)

One cannot help but wonder if Guinevere might have faced a similar fate if she had resisted Mordred.

The women in Geoffrey's chronicle resemble women in history. Although he is inventing fictions, he uses the brief, impersonal accounts of the chronicle genre. His women appear much as they might have in real life: promised, given, or abducted at the whim of the men in their lives. They are important as wives because they guarantee continuation of the royal line. They rule when their husbands die or until their sons reach legal age. They counsel their sons and husbands. Guinevere too resembles a historical woman, the wife of a king, a political pawn, the victim of war; and, like historical women, her reputation is decided by her chronicler.

When the Norman poet Wace reproduces Geoffrey's *Historia* in verse, he follows the order and substance of Geoffrey but embellishes the story and adds his own touch of individuality. The first mention of Guinevere shows several differences between the two writers.

> When Arthur had settled his realm in peace, righted all wrongs, and restored the kingdom to its ancient borders, he took to wife a certain fresh and noble maiden, named Guenevere, making her his queen. This damsel was passing fair of face and courteous, very gracious of manner, and come of a noble Roman house. Cador had nourished this lady long and richly in his earldom of Cornwall. The maiden was the earl's near cousin, for by his mother he, too, was of Roman blood. Marvellously dainty was the maiden in person and vesture; right queenly of bearing; passing sweet and ready of tongue. Arthur cherished her dearly, for his love was wonderfully set upon the damsel, yet never had they a child together, nor betwixt them might get an heir. (53-54)

Wace includes more details about Guinevere and tells us that Arthur loved her but that they did not have children. By mentioning the absence of children, Wace reminds the reader that the purpose or one of the most important purposes of royal marriage was to produce an heir, someone to inherit lands and power. The reader is also reminded that Guinevere would have been blamed as the marriage partner who was infertile. Wace may have included the love because he was a poet and because he dedicated the work to Eleanor of

Aquitaine, which may also account for his including some focus on the Norman court.

Wace tells of Arthur's going off to war for several months and then returning home for twelve years. After that he was in France nine years. When he and his men return home, "Dames held those husbands close from whom they had been parted so long," but there is no mention of a reunion between Arthur and Guinevere. A few lines later we are told that "Arthur cherished tenderly his servants, granting largely, and promising richly, to the worthy," but again there is no mention of Guinevere. We do not see her again until the coronation. While Geoffrey's account of the coronation suggests that Guinevere's was as elaborate as Arthur's, Wace tells us outright that the ceremonies are equal, and he even says that Guinevere acted on her own behalf in planning the ceremony.

> That the queen might not be overshadowed by her husband's state, the crown was set on her head in another fashion. For her part she had bidden to her court the great ladies of the country, and such dames as were the wives of her friends. Together with these had assembled the ladies of her kindred, such ladies as were most to her mind, and many fair and gentle maidens whom she desired to be about her person at the feast. The presence of this gay company of ladies made the feast yet

more rich, when the queen was crowned in her chamber, and brought to that convent of holy nuns for the conclusion of the rite. The press was so great that the queen might hardly make her way through the streets of the city. Four dames preceded their lady, bearing four white doves in their hands. These dames were the wives of those lords who carried the golden swords before the king. A fair company of damsels followed after the queen, making marvellous joy and delight. This fair fellowship of ladies came from the noblest of the realm. Passing dainty were they to see, wearing rich mantles above their silken raiment. All men gazed gladly upon them, for their beauty was such that none was sweeter than her fellows. These dames and maidens went clothed in their softest garments. their heads were tired in their fairest hennins, and they walked in their most holiday vesture. Nevere were seen so many rich kirtles of divers colours, such costly mantles, such precious jewels and rings. Never were seen such furs and such ornaments, both the vair and the grey. Never was known so gay and noble a procession of ladies, as this which hastened to the church, lest it should be hindered from the rite. (67)

The masses were equally impressive, Guinevere's feast was as elaborate as Arthur's, and she and her ladies were served with as much honor and respect as were Arthur and his men. Equality seems important until Arthur prepares to defend his kingdom against Rome. Instead of leaving his wife, the queen, in charge, he leaves his nephew in charge.

> Arthur committed the care of his realm, and of Dame Guenevere, his wife, to his nephew, Mordred, a marvellously hardy knight, whom Arthur loved passing well. Mordred was a man of high birth, and of many noble virtues, but he was not true. He had set his heart on Guenevere, his kinswoman, but such a love brought little honour to the queen. Mordred had kept this love close, for easy enough it was to hide, since who would be so bold as to deem that he loved his uncle's dame? The lady on her side had given her love to a lord of whom much good was spoken; but Mordred was of her husband's kin! This made the shame more shameworthy. Ah, God, the deep wrong done in this season by Mordred and the queen. (79)

Wace adds that Mordred has a good reputation, but Guinevere's union with him cannot be excused because he is Arthur's nephew, which makes the marriage incestuous. The reader is reminded here of the condemnation with which the Church viewed incest. What Arthur says when he learns that

Mordred has taken Guinevere as his wife suggests that Wace rests somewhere between Geoffrey and Chrétien in his view of the union.

> These tidings were carried to Arthur. He was persuaded that Mordred observed no faith towards him, but had betrayed the queen, stolen his wife, and done him no fair service. (109)

On the one hand Wace says that Mordred and Guinevere have betrayed Arthur, and on the other hand Arthur says that Mordred has betrayed Arthur and Guinevere. However, his concluding remarks about Guinevere indicate that there is no doubt about her guilt.

> That queen, who was Arthur's wife, knew and heard tell of the war that was waged by Mordred in England. She learned also that Mordred had fled from before the king, because he might not endure against him, and durst not abide him in the field. The queen was lodged at York, in doubt and sadness. She called to mind her sin, and remembered that for Mordred her name was a hissing. Her lord she had shamed, and set her love on her husband's sister's son. Moreover, she had wedded Mordred in defiance of right, since she was wife already, and so must suffer reproach in earth and hell. Better were the dead than those who lived, in the eyes of Arthur's queen. Passing

> heavy was the lady in her thought. The queen fled to Caerleon. there she entered in a convent of nuns, and took the veil. All her life's days were hidden in this abbey. Never again was this fair lady heard or seen; never again was she found or known of men. This she did by reason of her exceeding sorrow for her trespass, and for the sin that she had wrought. (112-113)

Guinevere certainly sounds guilty. However, the reader must remember that her story is told by a man who imagines that he understands the true nature of women and the way they think. He borrows from Geoffrey, who was probably a Benedictine monk, a man who knew the misogynistic teachings of the Church Fathers and probably shared those beliefs about women.

Wace may have added the details about court life and Arthur's blaming Mordred rather than Guinevere to please Eleanor of Aquitaine, to whom he dedicated the work, but Arthur's act seems to be in character for a loving husband. However, if the reader views the account of the old woman and the giant at St. Michael's Mount as a parallel to Guinevere and Mordred, Guinevere does not fare so well. The young maiden, Helena or Helen, the original victim of the giant, died as a result of the rape. In Geoffrey's account, she died at the mere prospect of rape, an act that echoes the hagiographic literature in which rape or prostitution is

the biggest threat to the saintly women depicted. The maiden who chooses to die rather than succumb to the rape earns for herself a sainthood. Because of her action, Helena is beyond reproach. The parallel makes Guinevere look guilty even if she did not want to become Mordred's wife or sex partner but accepted the union as a means of survival. Because of Helena, Guinevere looks more like the old woman who claims to be the captive of the giant but makes no attempt to escape. The old woman urges her potential rescuer to flee before the giant returns, but she does not ask him to take her with him. The words she adds in defense of herself draw attention to the fact that she does not seem to want to be rescued. Her protest, then, reminds the reader of Ovid's claim that women like to be forced: "You cannot think that I stay of my own free will on the mount. I but submit to the will of the Lord" (83). Whatever Wace's intent, he does not include the fate of the old woman in his story. What happens to her seems to be as unimportant as the details both he and Geoffrey omit from their accounts of Guinevere. If the parallel between Guinevere and the old woman is valid, the words the old woman utters represent the words Guinevere might say in her own defense if she were allowed to speak, but the medieval reader would not believe Guinevere's protest any more than he believes the old woman's because he, like Wace and Geoffrey, knows that any woman who is not like Mary or Helen

is like Eve. If we are going to read meaning into the text, it is possible that Wace is alluding to the belief of the Church Fathers, which thrived during the Middle Ages, that women had an insatiable desire for sex, a desire that made all their actions suspect. The implication might be that Arthur left Mordred in charge of the kingdom so that he could watch Guinevere and keep her from being unfaithful to Arthur. If the old woman is guilty of enjoying sex with the giant and if the parallel between her and Guinevere is at all valid, then Guinevere is guilty by association because we certainly cannot associate Guinevere with Helen. Another possibility, which may seem far-fetched in light of Wace's stress on Guinevere's remorse, is that he, knowing the rules for courtly love and knowing Eleanor's support for the courtly love literature, is suggesting that a woman should not be expected to abstain from sex while her husband is gone to war any more than her husband is expected to abstain while he is at war.

Wace's conclusion also makes Guinevere look guilty of complicity with Mordred if the reader sees it only from the male point of view: her fleeing to Caerleon to become a nun is an admission of guilt. However, if Guinevere had been allowed to speak for herself, her words might have been much like Radegund's, who was also abducted. Guinevere might have written of her sorrow at being separated from her beloved husband when he went off to war and her grief at

being abducted by Mordred. Granted, Guinevere is not taken from her home to a foreign land, but war is still the cause of her abduction. Her husband is in a foreign land and cannot save her from Mordred or rescue her reputation. Just as Radegund fled to a convent both because of her religious convictions and because of the repulsion she felt toward her husband, the man responsible for her abduction and the deaths of her family and countrymen, Guinevere may have fled to the convent both to escape her present life and make a new life because she could not restore her past life. Wace does assign to Guinevere one truly feminine thought: she knows her reputation is ruined. Even if she is innocent, she must "suffer reproach in earth and hell." Geoffrey presents an abducted Guinevere who, "smitten with despair" at the end of the story, flees to a convent. Wace adds a stronger insinuation of her guilt. From this point on, Guinevere is an adulteress.

Wace also adds to Geoffrey's story that Arthur and Guinevere cannot have a child. Early in the Middle Ages, the woman was blamed if a marriage did not produce children, so whatever Wace's intention for adding that element, from then on Guinevere is also barren.

In *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*, Georges Duby points out that adultery in the romances was barren and suggests the reason why: "Bastardy was too serious a matter to be treated lightly even in literature. People were too

afraid of it to use it as a subject for a tale" (222). In "The Body Politic and the Queen's Adulterous Body in French Romance," Peggy McCracken reminds the reader that the queen consort's political duty is to produce heirs to the throne. By guaranteeing succession, she is guaranteeing political and social stability. When the queen does not produce an heir, then, the implication is that she is at fault for the collapse of the kingdom (38). McCracken's explanation seems logical in light of Wace's story. The fact that he mentions Guinevere's childlessness where Geoffrey does not may be interpreted as an effort to make her guilt implicit.

Layamon's account of Arthur and Guinevere changes the story only slightly. The first mention of Guinevere says that she is qualified to be Arthur's queen and that Arthur stays at home through the winter because of his love for her.

> Þenene he for to Cornwale to Cadores riche.
> he funde þer a mæide vnimete fæier.
> Wes þas mæidenes moder of Romanisce mannen.
> Cadores maȝe & þat maide hī bi-tahte.
> & he heo fæire a-feng and softe heo fedde.
> Heo wes of heȝe cūne of Romanisce monnen.
> næs in nane londe maide nan swa hende.
> of specche & of dede and of tuhtle swiðe gode.
> heo wes ihatē Wenhauer wifmonne hēdest.
> Arður heo nom to wife & luuede heo wunder swiðe.

Þis maiden he gon wedde and nom heo to his bedde.
Arður wes i Cornwale al þene winter þere.
and al for Wenhæuere lufe wimmonē him leofuest.
(Vol. II, 509-11)

At the end of winter, Arthur goes off to conquer Ireland and other lands so his men will not lose their prowess through idleness. When he decides to return home, his motivation is to see Guinevere. Layamon says that Guinevere (Wenhaver) hears of Arthur's coming, but there is nothing said about their being reunited. Later, when Arthur goes off to conquer France, he stays nine years. When he returns home, there is still no mention of his reunion with Guinevere. Layamon's account of Arthur's life is not significantly different from Wace's until he tells of Arthur preparing to go off to war against Rome and leaving the kingdom in Mordred's charge. Here, he relates a more sinister side to Mordred.

Þis lond he bitahte ane selcuðe cnihte.
he wes Walwainnes broðer næs þer nan oðer.
Moddred wes ihaten forcuðest monnen.
treouðe nefde he nane to nauer nane monne.
he wes Arðures mæi of aðelen his cunne.
ah cniht he wes wunder god & he hafde swiðe muchel mod.
Arðures suster sune to þere quene wes his iwune.

þat wæs ufele idon his æme he dude swike-don.
Ah al hit wes stille in hirede and in halle.
for na man hit ne wende þat hit sculde iwurðe.
ah men to soðe i-wenden for Walwain wes his broðer.
þe alre treoweste gume þe tuhte to þan hirede.
þurh Walwain wes Modræd monnē þa leouere.
and Arður þe kene ful wel him iquemde.
He nom al his kinelond & sette hit Moddræd an hond.
and Wenhauer his quene wurðlukest wiuen.
þa þe in þissere leode wunede an londe.
Arður bi-tahte al þat he ahte.
Moddrade and þere quene þat heom was iquene.
Þat was ufele idon þat heo iboren weoren.
þis lond heo for-radden mid ræuðen uniuȝen.
and a þan ænden heom seoluen þe wurse gon iscenden.
þat heo þer for-leoseden lif and heore saulen.
and æuer seoððe laðen n auer ælche londe.
þat nauer na mā nalde sel bede beoden for heore saule.
for þan swike-dome þat he dude Ardure his æme.
Al þat Arður ahte he Moddrede bitahte.
lond and his leoden & leofen his quene.

and seððen he nom his ferde of folken swiðe hende.
and ferde ful sone touward Suð-hamtune.
(Vol. III, 9-12)

People weep as Arthur and his men leave, but there is no mention of Arthur and Guinevere. This long passage telling of Arthur's leaving includes two indications that Layamon does not view Guinevere as an adulteress, at least not from the beginning, but indicates that her fate is in the hands of Arthur and Mordred. The first is his calling Guinevere the "wifmonne hēdest," and the second is his saying that Mordred and Guinevere lose their lives, souls, and reputations "for þan swike-dome þat *he* dude Ardure *his* æme" (emphasis mine). Mordred is definitely the villain here, but Arthur must share the responsibility for Guinevere's fate because he leaves her in Mordred's hands.

Another difference in Layamon's work is Arthur's prophetic dream. Here the author seems to have changed his mind about Guinevere, for the queen he describes is definitely no longer the "worthiest of women."

Þer ich iseh Wenheuer eke wimmonnen leofuest me.
al þere muche halle rof mid hire honden heo to-droh.
þa halle gon to hælden and ich hæld to grunden.
þat mi riht ærm to-brac þa seide Modred haue þat.

Adū ueol þa halle & Walwain gō to ualle.
and feol a þere eorðe his ærmes brekeen beine.
& ich igrap mi sweord leofe mid mire leoft honde.
and smæt of Modred is hafd þat hit wond a þene ueld.
And þa quene ich al to-snaðde mid deore mine sweorede.
and seodðen ich heo adum sette in ane swarte putte. . . .
And swa ich habbe al niht of mine sweuenene swiðe iþoht.
for ich what to iwisse agan is al mi blisse.
for a to mine liue sorȝen ich mot driȝe.
wale þat ich nabbe here Wēhauer mine quene.
(Vol. III, 119-21)

When the dream is explained to Arthur, he answers,

Longe bið æuer þ no wene ich nauere.
þat æuere Moddred mi mæi þat man his me leouest.
wolde me biswiken for alle mine richen.
no Wenhauer mi quene wakien on þonke.
nulleþ hit biginne for nane weorld-monne.
(Vol. III, 123)

The reality of Arthur's dream is confirmed when the messenger from home arrives.

he is king & heo is que of þine kume nis na wene.

for no weneð heo nauere to soðe þat þu cumen aʒain frō Rōe. (Vol. III, 124)

The messenger says that he is loyal to Arthur and has seen the "swikedom" (treachery) with his own eyes. Arthur's men must then show that they too are loyal, so they brag about how they will destroy Mordred and Guinevere. Arthur says,

Nu to-mærʒe þēne hit dæi bið & drihten hīe sende.

forð ich wulle buʒe in toward Bruttaine.

and Moddred ich wulle scaln & þa quen for-berne.

and alle ich wulle for-don þa biluueden þen swikedom. (Vol. III, 125)

Walwain says he will hang Mordred and draw and quarter the queen. Neither being burned nor torn to pieces sounds like an appropriate end for Layamon's "worthiest of women." However, again the reader is reminded that Brunhild was tied to a horse and trampled to pieces; so such fates were meted out even to worthy queens.

There can be no doubt that Layamon wants the reader to see Guinevere's guilt when she goes to Mordred to tell him that Arthur is coming.

Þa quene com to Modred þat was hire leofuest monnes.

and talde hī tidende of Arðure þan kinge.

hu he wolde taken an & al hu he wolde don.

(Vol. III, 128-9)

Mordred is dearest of men to Guinevere at this time, but that does not mean that she plotted with Mordred against Arthur. Mordred may have grown dear to her after Arthur's long absence. However, it is also possible that Guinevere cared for Mordred even before Arthur entrusted the kingdom to him. Like Geoffrey and Wace before him, Layamon leaves room for either possibility, which tends to reflect the ambiguous feelings toward women through much of the Middle Ages.

When the battle is over, Arthur mourns his lost men, but he expresses nothing but anger toward Guinevere. In this version, as in the earlier two, the queen flees to a convent and becomes a nun, never to be heard from again. Even years later no one knows what happened to her.

Þa qne læi inne Eouwerwic næs heo næuere swa sarlic.
þat wes Wenhauer þa quene særȝest wimmonne.
Heo iherde suggē soððere worden.
hu ofte Modred flah and hu Arður hine bibah.
wa wes hire þere while þat heo wes on life.
Ut of Eouerwike bi nihte heo iwende.
& touward Karliun tuhte swa swiðe swa heo mahte.
for ȝeo nolde Ar..ur more ise for al þan ..orle-riche.

þider heo brohten bi nigte of hire cnihten tweiȝe.
and me hire hafd bi-wefde mid ane hali rifte.
and heo wes þer munechene kare-fullest wife.
Þa nusten men of þere quene war heo bicumen weore.
no feole ȝere seoððe nuste hit mon to soðe.
whaðer heo weore on deðe and ou ȝeo hinne .ende.
þa heo here seolf weore isunken in þe watere.
(Vol. III, 137-8)

In this mention of Guinevere being "isunken in þe watere," Layamon may be suggesting that Guinevere was taken with Arthur to Avalon or to some other supernatural world where all sorts of wounds might be healed, even wounds to the soul and reputation. Such a possibility may be important, but more important is the abduction of Guinevere. On Arthur's first campaign after his marriage, he meets King Doldanim of Gutlond who says,

Hail seo þu Ardur aðelest kingen.
Her ich bringe tweiene mine sunen beiene.
heore moder is kinges istreon quene heo is min aȝene.
ich tache þe mine leofen sunen mi seolf ich wulle þi mō bicumen.
ich heo biȝat mid ræflac ut of Rusie.
(Vol. II, 526)

When Arthur stays in France for nine years, Mordred takes his kingdom and all his possessions, including his queen, so Guinevere becomes, in a sense, part of the spoils that Mordred won by default.

It is impossible to say that Geoffrey intended to give Guinevere a negative reputation because he does little more than mention her as he focuses on the exploits of Arthur. Her reputation is established because that is the way Wace and Layamon interpret Geoffrey's bare bones story. In spite of women's objections to abduction, as seen in the writings of Radegund and Christine de Pizan, these authors ignore reality to portray what they think is realistic. Geoffrey's Guinevere is not a fully developed character, and she changes little at the hands of Wace and Layamon. When Chrétien adds the element of courtly love to the legend, Guinevere rates more attention and commands more power.

Chapter Four

Guinevere in Chrétien and Marie of France

Sometime in the second half of the twelfth century, after or around the time Wace wrote his account of the history of Britain, Chrétien de Troyes created the first Arthurian literature in the courtly romance genre (Kibler and Carroll 1). Unlike Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon, who attempt to give a complete history of Britain, Chrétien focuses on Arthur, his kingdom, the courtly aspect, and love. His "The Knight of the Cart" contributes to Guinevere's reputation as an adulteress with the introduction of an affair between Guinevere and Lancelot. He begins the story with a prologue in which he explains that he is writing the story at the request of "my lady of Champagne," from whom he received the subject matter and meaning. His acquiescence to Marie's request sounds very much like Lancelot's responses to Guinevere's requests in the story proper.

"My lady of Champagne" was Marie de Champagne, the daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and King Louis VII. Like many other women of nobility during the Middle Ages, Marie was a political pawn in a marriage arranged by her father, Louis VII, King of France, to repair old rifts with the Franks. When Eleanor left her second husband, Henry II of England, to set up her independent court at Poitiers, she

chose her daughter Marie to serve as her deputy. The sort of love Eleanor and Marie endorsed may have been something of a protest against their own arranged marriages. Although that love may have been an improvement over their own personal experiences, the representation of that love in Chrétien's work falls short of enhancing Guinevere's reputation or placing women on a par with men.

Chrétien centers his story around the abduction of Guinevere without giving any history of Arthur or Guinevere or any indication of how long they have been married or the state of their marriage. "On a certain Ascension Day," a knight comes to Arthur's court and brags that he has imprisoned knights, ladies, and maidens from Arthur's land and then challenges Arthur to send a knight and the queen to meet him in the woods where he will fight the knight. If Arthur's knight wins, the challenger will return all the captives and the queen; if Arthur's knight loses, the challenger will take the queen. Kay pouts and threatens to leave Arthur's court but will not tell anyone why. Arthur sends Guinevere to Kay to find out what is wrong. In Chrétien's account Guinevere is allowed to speak, and her first words show her an able mediator.

> Sir Kay, Im [sic] most upset at what I've heard said of you--I'll tell you straight out. I've been informed, and it saddens me, that you wish to leave the king's service. What gave you this

> idea? What feelings compel you? I no longer see in you the wise and courtly knight that once I knew. I want to urge you to remain: Kay, I beg of you--stay! (205)

Kay agrees to stay if she and Arthur will grant (in advance) his request. Kay wants Arthur to entrust Guinevere to him and let him go after the knight who made the challenge. Both Arthur and Guinevere are upset at the circumstances, but Arthur has never broken his word, so he lets Kay take his wife, the queen. Here the reader cannot help but think of Arthur in the three previous accounts foolishly handing his wife over to Mordred for safe keeping. As Guinevere prepares to leave, "weak, sad, and sighing," she whispers to herself, "Ah! My beloved, if you knew, I don't believe you'd ever let Kay lead me even a single step away" (210). Because Guinevere does not call her "beloved" by name, the reader may think at first that she is referring to Arthur, but the meaning becomes clear later in the story when Lancelot comes to her rescue.

Kay loses the battle, and Guinevere is abducted by Meleagant, but she is protected from rape by King Bademagu, Meleagant's father, who is as good as Meleagant is evil. It is hard to believe that Meleagant's lust for Guinevere could have been stayed by his father, but Chrétien emphasizes the fact, as does Bademagu. Chrétien seems to be playing down the seriousness of abduction and rape by assuring the reader

that Guinevere is safe from men like Meleagant as long as there are men like Bademagu and Lancelot around. He has cleverly taken the focus away from abduction and rape, crimes of violence against women, and put it on the prowess of men. Called "the knight" or "The Knight of the Cart" throughout much of the story because his true identity is unknown, Lancelot steals the reader's attention away from Guinevere and what might be happening to her as he pursues the queen with such vigor that he rides two horses to death and then, after hesitating for a moment, accepts a ride in a cart, a vehicle used to expose criminals to public ridicule, to continue his pursuit. Before he proves himself a worthy knight, Lancelot is ridiculed because of his ride in that cart, but he is ridiculed by Guinevere because he hesitated before he got into the cart. Throughout the story, Chrétien includes some of the rules of courtly love, but he makes Lancelot look silly when he puts Guinevere's hair next to his chest and when he loses his concentration on Guinevere's plight and gives in to meditation on his beloved, becoming deaf and blind in the process. Then when Guinevere feigns anger at Lancelot (after he has defeated Meleagant) for hesitating before getting into the cart, the reader begins to see courtly love as the game it is and wonders if Chrétien takes the game seriously. Guinevere's honor, if not her life, is truly in danger if Lancelot does not defeat Meleagant, but instead of rewarding him with an expression

of appreciation, she greets him with silence, never even raising her eyes to meet his. Her words reflect her anger: "He cannot please me, sire. I have no interest in seeing him. . . .Sire, in truth he has wasted his efforts. I shall always deny that I feel any gratitude towards him" (256). Lancelot can play the game well, but he again looks silly.

> You could see Lancelot's confusion, yet he answered her politely and like a perfect lover: 'My lady, indeed this grieves me, yet I dare not ask your reasons.' Lancelot would have poured out his woe if the queen had listened, but to pain and embarrass him further she refused to answer him a single word and passed instead into a bedchamber. Lancelot's eyes and heart accompanied her to the entrance; his eyes' journey was short, for the room was near at hand, yet they would gladly have entered in after her, had that been possible. His heart, its own lord and master and more powerful by far, was able to follow after her, while his eyes, full of tears, remained outside with his body. (256)

By portraying Guinevere as a temperamental lover, Chrétien has portrayed Lancelot's adventures as more traumatic than the queen's experience. The reader begins to feel sorry for Lancelot and even wonders is Guinevere might not have staged her own abduction as a test of Lancelot's love. Just as the

rape or attempted rape of Helen in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon reflects on Guinevere because she does not resist Mordred in the same manner, so the staged rape of the woman who offers lodging to Lancelot in his pursuit of Guinevere makes Guinevere's own abduction look suspect, especially since Chrétien does not indicate that she is any worse for the episode.

Although Guinevere seems to be in charge, the true state of her authority is revealed when Bademagu says to Lancelot, "Of course she is wrong, for you have risked death for her" (256). Bademagu thinks her response is incorrect for a queen to the knight who has just saved her honor, but what he does not realize is that her response is incorrect on another level. A lady whose lover has served her so well is expected to give a different response. However, Lancelot's hesitation before getting into the cart is a flaw that cannot be overlooked. The abduction by now is completely forgotten.

Lancelot leaves, bewildered, in search of Gawain. Chrétien does not explain why the two men did not recognize each other earlier in the story when they were together. Nevertheless, Lancelot leaves his love to go off on another adventure, perhaps hoping to win back her favor with more deeds of daring. Before he can find Gawain, he is captured by some of Bademagu's men who do not know all that has happened. While they are returning him to Bademagu's court,

Guinevere gets word that Lancelot is dead and "she nearly killed herself." Guinevere shows restraint in public, saying, "Indeed, his death pains me, and I am not wrong to let it; for he came into this land on my account, and therefore I should be sorrowful" (258). Later, in private, her words are completely different.

> Oh misery! What was I thinking, when my lover came before me and I did not deign to welcome him, nor even care to listen! Was I not a fool to refuse to speak or even look at him? A fool? No, so help me God, I was cruel and deceitful! I intended it as a joke, but he didn't realize this and never forgave me for it. I believe that it was I alone who struck him that mortal blow. . . .Oh misery! How it would have brought me comfort and healing if I had held him in my arms once before he died. How? Yes, quite naked next to him, in order to enjoy him fully. Since he is dead, I am wicked not to kill myself. (259)

Guinevere does not kill herself. Instead, she rationalizes that "A woman who would prefer to die rather than to endure pain for her love is unworthy of that love" (259). But just as she failed to choose death rather than become Mordred's Queen in Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon, she fails to die for lost love here. She has failed, then, to join the ranks of female saints who died to preserve their chastity or

virginity, as well as Ovid's list of worthy women who died in the name of love. For two days she mourns, refusing food and drink, so that everyone thinks she is dead, a rumor that reaches Lancelot. As a result, he tries to kill himself. When Guinevere and Lancelot are finally reunited, neither plays coy games of love. They are genuinely happy to see each other, and Guinevere honors him "with her kindest attentions." They arrange a private meeting for later that night, expecting to be limited to talking and holding hands through the bars on the window of Guinevere's room, which she shares with the still wounded Kay. However, love gives Lancelot the strength to tear out the bars but not without Guinevere's blessing.

Chrétien is deliberately vague about what happens when Lancelot reaches Guinevere's bed.

> Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith. The queen stretched out her arms towards him, embraced him, clasped him to her breast, and drew him into the bed beside her, showing him all the love she could, inspired by her heartfelt love. . . .Now Lancelot had his every wish: the queen willingly sought his company and affection, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth the two of them

> felt a joy and wonder the equal of which has never been heard or known. But I shall let it remain a secret for ever, since it should not be written of: the most delightful and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted at, but never told. (264-265)

When Chrétien says that "Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith," the reader is reminded of the cult of the Virgin Mary that developed simultaneously with courtly love. However, Guinevere is not the Virgin Mary. The fact that Lancelot worships her may have made Chrétien uncomfortable with courtly love, which claims to worship woman. In any event, the contrast between Guinevere and Mary is implied in Lancelot's words, which reflects the ambivalence toward women during the Middle Ages. Men like women but at the same time fear them for their sexuality.

According to Georges Duby's explanation of the rules of courtly love, it is possible that Lancelot and Guinevere do not have sexual intercourse here.

> The code of love required that those favors [the ones his chosen lady was obliged to grant him] be parceled out in small doses, however, and the woman thereby regained the advantage. She gave herself, but not all at once. According to the prescribed ritual, she first allowed herself to be

> kissed, then offered her lips, then submitted to more ardent caresses whose effect was to spur her partner's desire even more. . . .the ultimate trial. . . to which the lover dreamed of being subjected. . . .was an obsession, a breathtaking fantasy. The lover imagined himself lying beside his lady and allowed to take advantage of the proximity of her naked flesh, but only up to a certain point. At the last possible moment the rules of the game required him to hold back, to desist, in order to prove his worth by demonstrating total physical self-control. The final surrender of the beloved, the moment when her servant might take his pleasure in her, was thus postponed indefinitely. The locus of the male's pleasure was thus shifted from the satisfaction of desire to anticipation of that satisfaction. (252)

When Guinevere thinks Lancelot is dead, she wishes she had not rejected him so she could have lain next to him, naked, one more time. That seems to fit Duby's ultimate trial until she adds "in order to enjoy him fully." Chrétien suggests that Lancelot is facing the ultimate trial when he says that Lancelot has his every wish: "the queen willingly sought his company and affection, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers." However, he also suggests that

they do have sexual intercourse when he adds that "the two of them felt a joy and wonder the equal of which has never been heard or known." They do not just have sex; they have great sex. Hemingway would say that the earth moves for both Lancelot and Guinevere. Chrétien will not go into greater detail because "the most delightful and choicest pleasure is that which is hinted at, but never told." He will leave the details to the reader's imagination. He may have been deliberately ambiguous to accommodate Marie's wishes without compromising his own morality or misogynistic views.

That is the only sexual encounter between Lancelot and Guinevere in Chrétien's work, but each is tempted by someone else. When Lancelot is pursuing Guinevere, he spends the night with a girl who offers him lodging only if he will sleep with her and then stages her own rape to evoke lust in Lancelot, but Lancelot does not feel lust. While Chrétien's male readers may have received some sort of voyeuristic gratification at the prospect of rape, Lancelot's behavior serves as a reminder that men should no longer resort to violent sex. After Guinevere has been abducted or won from Kay and Lancelot is coming to her rescue, Chrétien explains the courtly love rule on rape.

> The customs and practices at this time were such that if a knight encountered a damsel or girl alone--be she lady or maidservant--he would as

> soon cut his own throat as treat her dishonourably, if he prized his good name. And should he assault her, he would be for ever disgraced at every court. But if she were being escorted by another, and the knight chose to do battle with her defender and defeated him at arms, then he might do with her as he pleased without incurring dishonour or disgrace. (223)

Chrétien does not say whether or not the same rule applies to married women, nor does he say anything about the damsel's reputation as a result of either case. The focus is on the knight, so we must assume that the rule is designed to protect the male. Using a staged rape to evoke lust in Lancelot suggests both that woman is a seductress who will do anything to satisfy her insatiable sexual appetite and that man finds the prospect of rape sexually titillating. The rule or suggestion that a woman alone is safer from rape than is a woman accompanied by a man is itself seductive. If the woman is alone, there is no one but herself to accuse her attacker of rape; and if her protector is defeated, she is fair game for the attacker. That the rule works is believable only if one recognizes that the prospect of sexual violence against women is a vehicle for displaying the physical prowess of men in knightly combat.

Duby reminds his readers that courtly love was a game in which the player plays to win. The love that rewarded the winner was not platonic. "To win meant, as in hunting, to capture one's prey. Let it not be forgotten that this was a game controlled by men" (251). Chrétien alludes to the game when the girl at the crossroads tells Lancelot and Gawain how to find the queen.

> If you promise me enough, I can show you the right road and direction and can name for you the land where she is going and the knight who is taking her. But whoever would enter into that land must undergo great tribulations: he will suffer dolefully before getting there. (215)

Kenneth Webster suggests that "that land" is the otherworld, the world of the supernatural, which is difficult to enter and impossible to leave (125). Chrétien may have gotten the idea from his sources that Meleagant's land is otherworldly, but the great tribulations and doleful suffering fittingly describe Lancelot's escapades in the name of love. His knightly prowess seems to be less important than his willing submission to his beloved. The fact that he lives in something of a frenzied state, madly riding about the country in search of his beloved, not knowing who he is at times, suffering public rejection and humiliation at the hands of his beloved, serving as the sex symbol of every maiden, and rarely being rewarded for his efforts supports

the idea that "that land" is the domain of courtly love. In spite of the fact that Chrétien is writing to please his patroness, he does not paint a picture of courtly love that might be compelling to men contemplating playing the game. Guinevere, Lancelot's beloved, the woman on the pedestal, the woman in control, is hot one minute and cold the next.

What Chrétien does not do, even though he allows Guinevere to speak and depicts her as being in charge, is depict the feminine point of view or the female experience. The matter and manner may have come from Marie, but the viewpoint is male. Guinevere does her husband's bidding at court, and her words seem to have been put in her mouth by Arthur. She lives in a world in which she is threatened by rape and other violence, and her safety is dependent on the actions of a man or men. Even though she is married, her husband may surrender her to a stranger to save his reputation or his possessions. She gets her identity, not from her own deeds and merit, but from her husband or her lover. The power she has is relegated to her by a man; without his consent, she has no power at all. She is kept in a house that she adorns with her beauty and sexuality so that her keeper can be admired for possessing such an admirable object. While she does inspire adventures, she is not allowed adventures in her own right. The closest she comes to an adventure of her own is her meeting her lover in secret and experiencing the danger and intrigue that

accompany the tryst. If she is caught, she will be "in grave trouble." Even if she is not caught, she can be accused of being unfaithful to her husband, and even if her accuser has a reputation worse than her own (as does Meleagant), she is required to prove her innocence. Even when Guinevere contemplates dying when she thinks Lancelot is dead, she seems to be more concerned about having failed at the game of love (courtly love) than with her own true feelings. Chrétien shows just how superficial the power of women is when he lets the man who threatens Guinevere with sexual assault accuse her of sexual misconduct.

Twice, the words Guinevere speaks represent the feminine viewpoint. The first time, when she says that her beloved would never put Kay in charge of her safety, she is saying that a man who truly loved her would not surrender her or put her at risk to save himself or his reputation. The second time, when Meleagant accuses her of letting Kay do "all he pleased with you," she says, "All those who hear of it will think me guilty, unless you force him to retract it" (268). She knows how easily a woman's reputation can be destroyed. Throughout the rest of the story, she seems to be the figment of a male author's imagination, reciting the lines and making the moves he has written for her. She no longer resembles a historical woman so much as she resembles a conventional male image of woman.

"The Knight of the Cart" is the only work in which Chrétien portrays Guinevere as an adulteress, and it is the only one of his works in which she plays a very significant role. In his other Arthurian works, she plays the role the queen is expected to play, with the exception, perhaps, of her repartee with the obnoxious Kay in "The Knight with the Lion," and she enjoys the reputation of a worthy woman. Although some scholars doubt that Guinevere and Lancelot consummate their love in "The Knight of the Cart," the fact that Lancelot does not win his battle against Meleagant in defense of her reputation (he quits fighting at Guinevere's request) is probably significant. When he finally does kill Meleagant, Guinevere's honor is no longer of central importance. Lancelot is avenging his own imprisonment in the tower at the hands of Meleagant, not Guinevere's reputation. The fact that Chrétien does not finish the story may mean that he did not like writing about adulterous love, or it may mean that neither he nor Marie had a suitable ending for the story. At least he does not blame Guinevere for the fall of Arthur's kingdom, but from this time on she is guilty of an adulterous relationship with Lancelot.

From Geoffrey's account of Arthur, in which Guinevere appears on stage five times but does not have a speaking part, to Chrétien's account of Lancelot and Guinevere, Guinevere has lost some of her two-dimensional qualities.

First a mediator and then a political pawn, she steals the spotlight from her once athletic husband who now seems soft from too much feasting and too little fighting. Where Arthur once went looking for action, Guinevere is now a sort of catalyst for all the action. She is the reason Meleagant comes to Arthur's court, and she is the reason Gawain and Lancelot pursue Meleagant. Before Chrétien, she was confined to her uncle's house or her husband's house, but now she travels from Arthur's court to Bademagu's court and back and even gets permission from Arthur to attend a tournament sponsored by ladies looking for husbands. Her presence at the tournament draws seven times more people than usually attend. Guinevere now has power over the worthiest knight in Arthur's kingdom, even when she is not present in the scenes. Without question, she has made great strides. However, when she demands too much power or too much of the focus, Chrétien does something to remind the reader that Guinevere has stepped outside the realm assigned to women. Her development is carefully orchestrated to prevent her becoming too powerful and transforming the Legend of King Arthur into the Legend of Queen Guinevere.

According to Margaret Gist, the romances are realistic in their portrayal of prevalent rape (or threat of rape) and adultery. She maintains that the constant warfare and the social disorder that went with it during the Middle Ages convoluted the issue of ethical conduct. If society

sanctioned brute force and barbaric deeds on the battle field, did it not also condone force to satisfy lust? After all, women were considered spoils of war to be distributed among the warriors, whose sexual desires might not have been satisfied for some time on the battlefield. Therefore, even though laws were enacted for the protection of women, those laws could not protect women from the victors in battle. Chivalry and courtly law were just as incapable of protecting women from rape. The prevalence of adultery, Gist maintains, suggests the unhappiness many women experienced in their marriages and the desire for pleasure at any cost during times of extreme unrest and disorder in society. However, the laws show that there was a definite double standard that favored men in cases of adultery, and the romances indicate that society was not critical of those laws. Courtly love does not try to say that society condoned adultery and fornication, but it does exonerate wives and maidens to some extent since their romantic love affairs inspire deeds of valor in the recipients of their love (75-112).

Kathryn Gravdal says that the depiction of rape and ravishment of women in the courtly love literature is responsible in part for society's indifferent attitude toward sexual violence toward women, which seems to have been fairly commonplace. She shows parallels between the language used to depict rape in literature and that used in

records of rape trials in France during the Middle Ages and concludes that while the courtly love literature did not create the problem of sexual violence against women, it did tend to make rape and ravishment look less like crimes and more like natural acts, acts that women protested loudly but secretly enjoyed. She also shows that women did not enjoy unparalleled sexual power and freedom in the days of courtly love and that they were not raped because society was barbaric or because men did not know any better (141).

The problem of rape may have been created or at least intensified because there were two legal systems that dealt with rape: secular law and Church law. The secular laws of medieval England and France viewed rape as a serious crime that was punishable by death or dismemberment. However, there was a serious gap between law and practice. The Church laws were more lenient than the secular laws and even more lax in sentencing, often imposing only a token punishment or no punishment at all for rape. Records of rape in rural Normandy dating from 1314 show that both the Church and society were in something of a shambles. Local priests are cited in the court records for drunkenness, brawling, and illicit sexual activities. In ten of the twelve trials recorded, churchmen were being accused. When a woman charged a man with rape, she often ended up being the one punished by the law. A rector accused of breaking into the house of a woman and raping her daughter was not

sentenced at all, but the woman was charged with keeping a house of prostitution. A widow who accused two men of breaking into her home and raping her was fined three times more than they were for allowing them to have sex with her. When the rapists were young clerics, their fathers often paid their fines. Sometimes the young clerics were charged with collective rape, which, according to Gravdal, may have been a sexual rite of passage. However, when those clerics became priests and rectors, they continued their practice of sexual abuse (122-127).

The same sort of corruption can be seen in the court records of England at the same time, with clerics composing the largest group to stand trial for rape in the secular courts. Both the English records and the Normandy records indicate that crimes against persons were less serious than crimes against property. At least one father who paid his son's fine in Normandy was more concerned that his son not be in debt than he was that his son had committed a sex crime. The records of crime in Saint-Martin, located in the area of Paris, during that same time include only six cases of rape over twenty-five years. Only one of the six rapists received the death penalty, a man accused of raping two twelve-year-old girls, both virgins. Two of the rapists disappeared, and three were absolved. The courts were not so lenient with women accused of complicity in rape. One woman accused of helping a soldier rape a ten-year-old girl

is sentenced to be burned at the stake, but there is no mention of the soldier. Another woman who helped a rapist was given that same death penalty, but the rapist was not even arrested. When a man was accused of raping his chambermaid, the chambermaid was ordered to produce a witness to prove that she had been raped. Another man who assaulted a seven-year-old girl was not convicted because he was not able to complete coitus. When a man was convicted in these courts, the penalty was very harsh, but the court seems to have been reluctant to prosecute, placing the burden of proof on the victim, who had to show that she had done everything she could to resist the attack. If the victim had any mark against her character or if she failed to follow the correct legal procedure, the case was dismissed (126, 128-130).

The Saint-Martin court was not reluctant to prosecute women, nor was it lenient in sentencing women for their crimes. While men might be absolved of rape even when there was evidence that they committed the crime, women were given the death penalty for stealing. The courts, under the guise of preserving female modesty, would not sentence women to death by hanging but seemed to have no qualms about burying them alive or burning them at the stake. Gravdal concludes that medieval French law supported the indifference to male violation of female sexuality that had existed for years. Men committed the crimes of sexual violence against women,

served on the juries that decided whether or not a crime had been committed, and determined the penalties for those crimes. While secular law and Church law, both devised by men, claimed to celebrate female chastity, neither made more than a token effort to protect that chastity. Gravdal maintains that those laws, which actually provided men easier access to women, reflect a society that not only placed little value on female life but even lowered that value (130-131).

Women of noble birth, "ladies," were not in danger of being raped by local men, men who might break into their houses one night and face them in court the next day. The rape that threatened noble women, including queens, was euphemized as abduction. The result of abduction, whether from the home of father or husband, was a forced marriage, which might last until the death of the new husband or until another abduction. However, the nobles were aware of the violent sex crimes that plagued their country and made a conscious effort to set themselves apart from such behavior. The vehicle for that distinction was courtly love.

When Eleanor, estranged from both her husbands, returned to her own palace in Poitiers in 1170 to make her son the ruling count and duke of the realm of Aquitaine, which she had inherited from her father, she came with the determination to make the most of the value she held in the feudal world.

> She was prepared of her own unguided wisdom to reject the imperfect destinies to which she had been, as it were, assigned. In this, her third important role in history, she was the pawn of neither prince nor prelate, the victim of no dynastic scheme. She came as her own mistress, the most sophisticated of women, equipped with plans to establish her own assize, to inaugurate a regime dedicated neither to Mars nor to the Pope, nor to any king, but to Minerva, Venus, and the Virgin. She was resolved to escape from secondary roles, to assert her independent sovereignty in her own citadel, to dispense her own justice, her own patronage, and when at leisure, to survey, like the Empress of Byzantium, a vast decorum in her precincts. (Kelly 158)

In addition to restoring order in her provinces, she was entrusted with the education of princes and princesses west of the Rhine and north of the Pyrenees. At the same time, vassals came to her court to pay homage, squires came for training, and courtiers came to serve, many of whom had grown up without the stabilizing influence of a fixed court and had little to occupy their time outside of local warfare and whatever escapades they could devise for themselves. To help her create a system for educating and refining these young people, which would also ensure the safety of her

royal charges, she chose her own daughter, Marie, Countess of Champagne, to be her deputy. It is not surprising that Marie, the great-granddaughter of William (Guillaume) of Poitiers, the presumed author of the oldest poems describing courtly love, and the daughter of a woman who had been queen to two different kings and the target of male suspicion because of her spirit of adventure and unwillingness to assume the submissive role assigned to her, would direct one from among the throng of poets, clerks, and chroniclers at Eleanor's court to formulate

> a code of manners to transform the anarchy and confusion that confronted her into something refined, serious, and decorous, a code to give currency to her own ideals for an elect society to be impelled not by the brute force that generally prevailed, nor by casual impulse, but by an inner disciplined sense of propriety. (162)

This code, which was to be based upon love, was not at all like the advice for penitents Andreas Capellanus was accustomed to writing. The basis for Andreas' model was Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, but instead of following Ovid in making man the master, he assigns the authority to woman, who teaches man how to serve her. At Marie's instruction, Andreas added to Ovid the code of chivalry practiced in King Arthur's court; the "courts of love" tradition practiced by Marie's Poitevin forebears, in which ladies served as judges

in problems of love; and the tradition of the troubadour poetry (162-163).

Thus, as Georges Duby asserts in "The Courtly Model," women did not invent courtly love (253). However, at least two women seem to have influenced the model and to have had a significant role in keeping the model alive. That Eleanor and Marie had the freedom and power to initiate such a lifestyle was an anomaly, but the courtly love model they promoted did improve the status of women, who had long been condemned by the Church as the cause of the fall of man and as instruments of the devil. Furthermore, the courtly code had just the effect Marie wanted, and soon the refinement of Eleanor's court was widely known. "Here was a woman's assize to draw men from the excitement of the tilt and the hunt, from dice and games to feminine society, an assize to outlaw boorishness and compel the tribute of adulation to female majesty" (Kelly 164).

Both Andreas and Chrétien seem to have been uncomfortable with the "matter" of their writing under the instruction of their patroness Marie. We know that Andreas was a clerk, and it seems likely that Chrétien was one too, judging from the extent of his learning (Barron 32). Both spent time at the court of Eleanor and then later at Marie's, but that does not mean that they were sympathetic with the philosophies or lifestyles of these women. Although they profess to please Marie, they both seem to

rankle at the subject matter, which is so opposed to the teaching of the Church and to the role for women imposed by society at that time. Andreas' attitude is not obvious, perhaps, until Book Three, in which he encourages his readers to reject love: "Any wise man is bound to avoid all the deeds of love and to oppose all its mandates" (187). His reasons for avoiding love sound very much like the misogynistic views expressed in classical literature and in the writings of the Church Fathers: a man who serves love cannot serve God, love causes man to injure his neighbor, love causes estrangement between friends, love defiles both body and soul, the man in love is sure to suffer from jealousy, love leads to poverty, love brings torments in this life and the next, love must be a vice since chastity is a virtue, love leads to criminal excess, only evil comes from love, love deprives men of honor, a man in love becomes lax in his own affairs, the Devil is the author of love, love leads to warfare, love breaks up marriages, love weakens men's bodies, a man in love loses his wisdom, women are incapable of loving, woman brings with her an endless list of faults, man is sure to be hurt by a woman who will not return his love. Andreas ends the book by admonishing men to avoid love and watch for the return of Christ (187-212). Just in case the reader is not convinced by these negatives of love, he points out very specifically the faults of women.

> The mutual love which you seek in women you cannot find, for no woman ever loved a man or could bind herself to a lover in the mutual bonds of love. For a woman's desire is to get rich through love, but not to give her lover the solaces that please him. Not only is every woman by nature a miser, but she is also envious and a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech, disobedient and impatient of restraint, spotted with the sin of pride and desirous of vainglory, a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil, and never loving any man in her heart. (201)

The indications, not proof, that Chrétien dislikes the "matter" and "sens" assigned to him are twofold: the fact that he does not finish the work and his treatment of Guinevere within the work. Although the idea of Guinevere's adulterous relationship with Lancelot may have been Marie's idea, Chrétien very cleverly keeps Guinevere from looking better than Lancelot. Arthur makes no effort to keep Guinevere from the inevitable abduction, and Chrétien does not say much about the Queen there except that she does not want to go. The people at Arthur's court do not expect the Queen to come back alive; but when she does return, she is given no voice to tell of her terrible ordeal. Even when

Lancelot comes to her rescue, Chrétien deliberately takes the focus off the terrifying nature of abduction and threatened rape and focuses on the illicit love between Lancelot and Guinevere. The stories recounted are those that tell of Lancelot's adventures, which are considered far more important than anything that has happened to the Queen. Even when the Queen is allowed to speak, she does not speak in her own defense. At the beginning of the story, she says what Arthur wants her to say. When she expresses her own feelings, she does so in a whisper. In spite of the passages that make Lancelot look somewhat silly, Chrétien succeeds in fashioning him into the perfect lover and the worthiest of men, a man that all the maidens desire. However, he does not make Guinevere the ideal lover or the worthiest of women. While Lancelot risks the danger of being caught to have sex with Guinevere, he enjoys a night of sex and escapes undetected. Ironically, he is to blame for Guinevere's being accused of adultery because it is his blood on her sheets that makes Meleagant think she has taken Kay, who sleeps in the room with her, into her bed. Lancelot escapes unaccused, unharmed, and unsmirched, but Guinevere is forever labeled an adulteress, a woman who betrays her husband and causes her lover a disproportionate amount of suffering, a woman who proves the truth in Andreas' warning against love.

There are several factors that may have influenced Chrétien's depiction of Guinevere: the views of the Church toward women, the subordinate role of women in society, his own views toward women, and the depiction of Guinevere in his sources. Even though the Guinevere in Geoffrey and Wace is more a victim of abduction and forced sex than a willing adulteress, her fleeing to a convent when Arthur returns assigns to her at least the guilt of complicity, which, according to Gravdal, was often punished more harshly by law than was the crime of rape. Geoffrey, whom Barron calls a Welsh cleric teaching in Oxford (30), claims faithfulness to his sources in his history, but his historical sources do not mention Guinevere.

The fact that Chrétien gives Guinevere her most prominent role in the Arthurian literature at that time is probably due to his desire to please his patroness. The story of a mobile queen who enjoyed the novelty and excitement associated with the courtly love tradition, as well as the love at the center of that tradition, was sure to please an audience of women who attended the festive gatherings at the feudal courts in France. That such a queen enjoyed the love of the worthiest knight may have held a special appeal to the women whose marriages were arranged when they were mere children, without their knowledge or consent. An occasional marriage may have bordered on the ideal, but for the most part marriage was a businesslike

affair, with political and dynastic considerations constantly in the forefront. If courtly love literature appealed to men because of its prurient elements, it must have appealed to women because it allowed them the fantasy of love in the safety of a genteel world, a world in which their primary function was not reproduction. If Chrétien wanted to create a female character that would appeal to both his patroness and his female audience, he may have had to look beyond his sources for inspiration, and he may have found that inspiration in Marie's mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Another woman who may have influenced Chrétien's depiction of Guinevere is Heloise, the student, lover, and wife of Abelard. The qualities that may have stood out to Chrétien and later writers were her boldness in love and her willingness to go against the norms of society for her love of Abelard. While men from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries may have fantasized about sexual encounters with women, it is possible that they feared a woman who was so bold as to enjoy sex, as Abelard suggests Heloise did.

> In short, our desires left no stage of love-making untried, and if love could devise something new, we welcomed it. We entered on each joy the more eagerly for our previous inexperience, and were the less easily sated. . . .Separation drew our

> hearts still closer while frustration inflamed our passion even more; then we became more abandoned as we lost all sense of shame and, indeed, shame diminished as we found more opportunities for love-making. (Radice 67-68, 69)

The love Abelard describes is reminiscent of the love between Lancelot and Guinevere:

> Now Lancelot had his every wish: the queen willingly sought his company and affection, as he held her in his arms and she held him in hers. Her love-play seemed so gentle and good to him, both her kisses and caresses, that in truth the two of them felt a joy and wonder the equal of which has never been heard or known. (Chrétien 264-265)

The misogynistic teachings told men that women were instruments of the devil and that they had insatiable sex drives that could destroy men. Certainly Heloise's sexuality and her willingness to act outside the edicts of the Church (outside the bonds of marriage) had destroyed Abelard's life. It was no wonder that Abelard sent her to a convent to protect the rest of the world from her female ways. Instead of seeing the unselfishness in Heloise's desire to do what was best for Abelard, it might be easy to focus on the power Heloise held over Abelard until the possibility of sexual relations was no longer a factor.

Chrétien was, undoubtedly, as familiar with the letters of Abelard and Heloise as he was with Eleanor and all the stories inspired by her, but it is impossible to say that he was actually inspired by either woman in his depiction of Guinevere. With Marie as his patroness, he could not be too blatantly critical of Guinevere, but out of concern for his own reputation, he could not leave the impression that he condoned or admired her infidelity either. Still, with Arthur's court representing contemporary society, Chrétien may not have been comfortable blaming Guinevere for the fall of Arthur's kingdom. Like Eleanor, she does lead the focus away from the King's court, but she does not destroy that court. The change in focus from Arthur to Lancelot does, however, suggest that the King (Louis, Henry, or Arthur) is not the man he was in the two earlier accounts. The implication is that as Guinevere gains power by keeping the story focused on herself rather than Arthur, the King loses power. Rather than blame the King, even an English king, the author blames the Queen by focusing on her adultery. She has transformed the bold warrior into a cuckold, and she cannot escape untainted for that.

Thus, Guinevere, who is more or less abducted by Mordred in Geoffrey's and Wace's accounts, has become a full-fledged adulteress in Chrétien's account. Scholars who assign her a share of the blame in the destruction of Arthur's kingdom share the viewpoint of the authors who

assign her such a role. As my earlier discussions of rape indicate, the laws at the time of the writing would have been more likely to find an abducted woman guilty than innocent, but no guilt would have been assigned to her husband for leaving her in the care of another man for nine years or for neglecting the "duty" he owed his wife. I do not agree with those scholars who think Guinevere was Mordred's willing accomplice. In Geoffrey's account, there is as much evidence for her being abducted as there is for her agreeing to become Mordred's wife. What is significant here is the refusal of the authors to see her as a victim of rape. That no one depicts her as the victim of rape is indicative of the attitudes of men during the Middle Ages. Whether or not Mordred really wanted her or just took her with the rest of the kingdom is not important. The fact that he did take her is significant. The ultimate insult to Arthur would have been, in addition to taking over his kingdom, to take over his wife as well, to replace him in the marriage bed. The role of Guinevere in those two early accounts is minimal at best. Arthur would have married her to expand his kingdom and/or to produce an heir. If she does not produce an heir, she has not done her duty. She is suspect from the start. While Geoffrey does not mention children, Wace makes a point of saying that Arthur and Guinevere are childless. Arthur would not have been blamed for not producing a child even if the fault had been his.

However, the fact that Guinevere does not have children automatically leads to the questioning of her character. She may have practiced some sort of witchcraft to keep from conceiving, but more than likely she would have taken some sort of potion to prevent pregnancy or to cause an abortion, the sort of potion Trotula mentions in her treatises. Although women did practice birth control, crude and often dangerous though it was, the queens in romance literature were usually barren and did not need to worry about an unwanted pregnancy. It is possible that the barrenness of Guinevere is linked to her being portrayed as an adulteress, but it is also possible that she is labeled an adulteress because she was not able to ward off Mordred's sexual advances. Such abductions were an accepted (but not necessarily condoned) part of the feudal society that produced the literature and the Celtic society that originated the Arthur legends.

Guinevere's becoming a full-fledged adulteress in Chrétien's "The Knight of the Cart" is the result of the courtly love element introduced into the story at the request of Marie of Champagne, but I am not sure that Marie intended the knights to control the game as much as Duby says they do. Their control may be the result of Andreas' and Chrétien's discomfort with the assignment Marie gave them. I would not argue that Guinevere is innocent, but I would suggest that she is not completely guilty either.

Just as she was a victim of rape (disguised in the word "abduct") in the earlier accounts, she is the victim of forced sex in Chrétien's account. According to Georges Duby, courtly love was a game in which the object was to "capture" the desired woman. The game was designed for men (knights who did not have wives and wanted more of a challenge than they got from going to prostitutes), and the rules were made by men. That the word "capture" is connected to "abduct" reinforces the connotation of force. Furthermore, Duby says, the lady was expected to accept the man who wanted to be her lover, and ultimately she was expected to reward him with sex. In the sense that she is expected to play the game and play it by male rules, she is forced into sex. She would not think of refusing to play the game because then her reputation as a worthy lady would suffer (250-266). Andreas' rules for courtly love say that men should take peasant women against their will in the game of love (150), but he reminds his readers again and again that love is not worthwhile if the lady gives it too easily. In Chrétien's work, Guinevere is the epitome of what a lady playing the game of courtly love was supposed to do. In spite of the risk to her life and reputation, Guinevere plays the game. Guinevere seems to truly love Lancelot, and their bedroom scene does not seem to be forced. However, when she gets caught in the game, Lancelot does not step forward to share her guilt, but he is obligated to defend

her honor. Here, he is not attempting to prove her innocent of adultery but innocent of adultery with Kay. The suggestion of force may be seen in the way Guinevere plays the game, with her expressing displeasure for Lancelot as her only way of protesting her role in the game. Her moodiness or temper tantrums are more numerous in Malory's work.

From the beginning of Chrétien's account when Guinevere whispers that her beloved would not allow her to go off with Kay, the reader may be inclined to blame Arthur for Guinevere's ordeal, which may include rape. However, once Guinevere is accused of adultery, the focus is off Arthur and on Guinevere. With the focus on Guinevere, the reader may forget the rules of courtly love (in the story) that allow a man such as Meleagant to legally rape Guinevere if he defeats her male protector in a fair fight. The reader may be supposed to think that Arthur does not resist Meleagant himself because he knows that Guinevere is an adulteress. The reader may also be supposed to think that an adulteress would enjoy rape. In any case, her adultery is a distraction, a mechanism for covering up the flaws in a male-dominated society. The fact that Guinevere is caught and Lancelot is not may also be a vehicle for intimidating female readers. Like Eve, Guinevere the adulteress does get caught, and, as she fears, "All those who hear of it will think me guilty" (268).

Guinevere appears in Chrétien's "The Knight with the Lion (Yvain)" but plays only a minor role. Chrétien begins the story by reminding the reader that Arthur is "the good king of Britain whose valour teaches us to be brave and courteous." When we first see Guinevere, she has "detained him, and he tarried so long at her side that he forgot himself and fell asleep." While Arthur sleeps, his men tell stories; and Guinevere leaves his side to sit with his men. Not only does she sit with the men, but she also fits in with the men and sounds very little like a queen when she scolds Kay.

> 'What? Are you out of your mind, my lord Kay?' said the queen. 'That tongue of yours never stops! Cursed be your tongue, for there's so much bitterness on it! Indeed your tongue must hate you, since it speaks the worst it knows of everyone, no matter who they may be. May the tongue that never tires of slander be damned! The way your tongue behaves, it makes you hated everywhere: it couldn't betray you any more completely. I assure you, if it were mine I'd accuse it of treason. A man who cannot learn his lesson should be bound before the choir screen in church like a lunatic.' (302)

Like the men whom she has joined, Guinevere appreciates a good tale. In fact, when Arthur wakes up, she recounts

Calogrenant's adventure "word for word, for she knew well how to tell a tale" (303). The King listens as eagerly to her telling of the tale as his men listened to Calogrenant's. It is significant that Guinevere tells the adventure "word for word" as she had heard it. Her telling the story does not pose a threat because she does not retell it from a woman's point of view.

Guinevere is mentioned later in the story when Chrétien alludes to "The Knight in the Cart." Twice he says that the Queen has been carried off by a knight. Once he says that Arthur was a fool to entrust Guinevere to Kay, but he also says that the Queen was imprudent to trust herself to Kay. That is the most negative comment about Guinevere in this story, but Chrétien includes several editorial statements about women in general and about love.

> I was correct to speak of 'right now,' for a woman has more than a hundred moods. (312)
>
> But she had in her the same folly that other women have: nearly all of them are obstinate in their folly and refuse to accept what they really want. (315)
>
> So she is right to call him a prisoner, for anyone who loves is a prisoner. (319)
>
> Here and now I give myself to you, for I should not refuse to marry a man who is both a good knight and a king's son. (321)

A woman does not know how to bear a shield nor strike with a lance; she can help and improve herself greatly by taking a good husband. (321)

But we can consider simple-minded those who believe that when a lady is polite to some poor wretch, and makes him happy and embraces him, she's in love with him; a fool is happy for a little compliment, and is easily cheered up by it. (326)

What! Would you be one of those men who are worth less because of their wives? May he who diminishes his worth by marrying be shamed by Holy Mary! He who has a beautiful woman as wife or sweetheart should be the better for her; for it's not right for her to love him if his fame and worth are lost. Indeed, you would suffer afterwards for her love if it caused you to lose your reputation, because a woman will quickly withdraw her love--and she's not wrong to do so--if she finds herself hating a man who has lost face in any way after he has become lord of the realm. A man must be concerned with his reputation before all else! Break the leash and yoke and let us, you and me, go to the tourneys, so no one can call you a jealous husband. (326)

> Ha! so like a woman: miserly with the truth, and generous with lies! (350)

In spite of these negative statements, the two heroines of this story demand as much of the story as does Yvain. Laudine spars verbally across as many pages as does Yvain physically. She is a strong woman who knows how to love and how to rule. She recognizes the need for and willingly accepts strong counsel, and she knows how to manipulate weak subjects. One cannot help but wonder if Chrétien makes her male subjects weak and cowardly as a subtle suggestion that strong women rulers emasculate the men they rule. Even though Laudine is strong, she does not make demands when she wants something. Instead, she often protests so that what she wants is pressed upon her, to the satisfaction of all involved, making her seem more typically female. Outside the realm of love, she does not seem to be typically female, except that she is not physically strong enough to defend her lands. However, she is not cowardly. In sharp contrast to Laudine's willingness to do whatever is necessary to protect her realm, her male subjects gladly give the responsibility to someone else.

Laudine loves her husband, Esclados the Red, and mourns his death. Although the two had been married nearly six years, the story does not say that there are any children; nor does it mention that Esclados has a male relative who should inherit the lands at his death. It is possible that

Laudine is the heiress of these lands from her own bloodlines and that Esclados was her consort. Laudine is left in control of the realm at least until she marries again, and she has the option of choosing her next husband for herself. When she chooses Yvain, she does not seem to base her choice on her attraction to him. She chooses him because he says he will love her more than anyone else, himself included, and will defend her spring. Even when the narrator tells us that she would have married Yvain even if her people had not agreed to the marriage, we are not sure that she shares Yvain's feelings of attraction or love. When Arthur and his knights press Yvain to return with them to Arthur's court, Laudine gives him permission to go but says Yvain will be banished from her love if he is not back within the year. However, she does not seem distraught at his leaving. Yvain leaves his heart behind with his lady, but we do not know for certain where her heart is. She does not cry or grow pale. She simply counts the days until he returns; and when he does not return, she quits loving him. Of course she forgives him and takes him back at the end of the story; but, again, she seems to have closed a business deal rather than being reunited with the man she loves most in the world. The story tells us that Yvain is happy, and Lunete is happy, but nothing is said of the happiness of Laudine.

Lunete plays a key role in the happiness of Yvain and Laudine partly because she is loyal, courageous, and levelheaded. She also plays a key role for women in that she shows that women can give advice as sound as that from men. Unwilling to leave her lady's happiness in the hands of God or fate, she plans a strategy for victory in love that upstages Yvain's errantry. When Arthur and his knights are entertained by Yvain and Laudine, Lunete and Gawain grow very close.

> She was soon on friendly terms with my lord Gawain, who esteemed her highly and loved her dearly. And he called her his sweetheart, because she had saved his companion and friend from death, and generously he offered her his service. She described to him the difficulty she had encountered in persuading her lady to take my lord Yvain as her husband, and how she protected him from the hands of those who were seeking him: though he was in their midst they did not see him. (325)

Gawain's response is to laugh good-naturedly and promise to be hers from that day forward. They become intimate friends. However, beyond Gawain's calling her "sweetheart" and his amorous reputation, there is no indication that anything but friendship exists between the two. Lunete's telling her tale sounds very much like Calogrenant telling

his at the beginning of the romance. She is not like the women in other romances who recount tales to show the prowess of the knights; she is the focus or heroine of her own tales even though she may tell them under the guise of talking about Yvain. Obviously not the typical female who is in the story to be rescued by the protagonist, she rescues Yvain, risking her life in a sort of mental combat to save his. Later, he rescues her when she has been accused of treason for having defended Yvain and introduced him to Laudine. Lunete has an attractive body and fair face, but something about her puts knights off.

> Once my lady sent me with a message to the king's court. Perhaps I was not as prudent or courteous or correct as a maiden should be, but there was not a knight there who deigned to speak a single word to me, except you alone, standing here now. (307)

She wants nothing from Yvain but to keep him company. At the banquet for Arthur and his men, the knights "could pass a pleasant moment embracing and kissing" the ninety or more ladies present; but there is no indication that Lunete is part of "this much pleasure." Later, when she rides to Arthur's court to tell Yvain of Laudine's displeasure with him, "She dismounted before their tent without anyone helping her, and without anyone seeing to her horse" (329). Lunete seems to be unaware that a woman might be praised for

qualities that make her seem like a man, but those qualities might keep her from being romantically attractive to men. Chrétien does not necessarily seem to be criticizing women who are strong, but he does indicate that men are intimidated by such women.

Laudine and Lunete are more than decoration or sex objects in this romance. They do not practice learned helplessness that may or may not have made them more attractive to Chrétien and his audience. They are not controlled by fathers or husbands, and their purpose in life is not reproduction. In short, there is little that is typical about them. However, they do not fit the role of the lady in courtly love either. In fact, their roles more nearly resemble those of men responsible for the welfare of a nation. Even though Laudine does seem to be interested in finding a husband, that interest is more pragmatic than romantic.

Another story in which Guinevere appears but plays only a minor role is "Erec and Enide." In this story the Queen is the catalyst for Erec's adventure that leads him to Enide. Guinevere is again an excellent story teller, but this time she tells of her own adventure.

> She recounted to them the adventure that she had had in the forest: about the armed knight she had seen and the evil little dwarf who had struck her maiden on her bare hand with his whip and had

> struck Erec in just the same way most horribly on the face; and how Erec had then followed the knight in order to avenge his shame or increase it, and that he would return, if he could, by the third day. (41)

Obviously, the adventure is the maiden's and Erec's. Guinevere is nothing more than a witness to the deeds, but she claims the adventure as her own. In addition to being a story teller, she is also an advisor to the King.

> 'My lord,' said the queen to the king, 'just listen to me! If these barons approve what I say, postpone this kiss until the day after tomorrow, so that Erec may return.' There was not one who disagreed with her, and the king himself granted it.

Later, when Erec is off on his adventure, the Queen inspires him. He thinks of the Queen and his vow before her to avenge his shame, and his strength is renewed. Guinevere also passes judgment, saying, "That knight is most unchivalrous to have allowed such a freak to strike so beautiful a creature" (39). However, when Erec defeats the knight and sends him to Guinevere, she is merciful. Chrétien calls her "the prudent and wise queen" and "the generous and noble lady" (52,57).

When Erec asks the Queen to give Enide a dress, Guinevere answers, "You have acted very properly; it is

right that she should have one of mine, and I shall immediately give her an elegant and beautiful, brand-new one" (57). When Enide puts on the clothes chosen for her by the Queen, from her own wardrobe, Enide becomes even more beautiful; and the Queen loves her because she is beautiful and well-bred. When Guinevere sits beside Arthur after she and Enide have entered the hall together, she says,

> 'My lord, as I think and believe, anyone should be welcome at court who can win such a beautiful lady by deeds of arms in another land. We did well to wait for Erec' now you can bestow the kiss upon the most beautiful damsel in the court. I think no one will take it ill; no one without lying will ever be able to say that this is not the most beautiful of the maidens present here and of those in all the world.' (59)

It may be significant that Guinevere uses the word "maiden" rather than "woman" when she describes Enide as the most beautiful. Her choice of words leaves room for the possibility that she thinks herself the most beautiful woman but grants that Enide is the most beautiful maiden. The entire passage describing the clothing that Guinevere picks out for Enide suggests that the Queen is performing a ritual, passing on the robes of the most beautiful woman to the maiden who will one day take her place.

In the story of "Erec and Enide," Erec and Enide are evenly matched in courtliness, beauty, and great nobility. They are equal in spirit and well suited to each other. "They were so similar, of one character and of one essence, that no one wanting to speak truly could have chosen the better one or the more beautiful or the wiser" (56). Each has stolen the other's heart, so theirs will be the perfect marriage.

Erec shows himself worthy of Enide through his knightly prowess and his generosity. She shows herself worthy through her beauty and virginity. "At the first union Enide was not stolen away, nor was Brangain put in her place" (62). Brangain was Isolde's maid who took the place of her mistress in the marriage bed when Isolde married King Mark, Tristan's uncle. Erec and Enide have nothing to hide from each other on their wedding night, and they hold back nothing. "That night they fully made up for what they had so long deferred" (63). Most of the romances indicate that sexual intercourse is the ultimate goal for the knights, but they say little about the woman's response to sex. Enide blushes the first time she sees Erec and again when all the knights of Arthur's court stare at her. However, when she shares Erec's bed, she does not blush or seem at all embarrassed. "The love between the two of them made the maiden more bold: she was not afraid of anything; she endured all, whatever the cost. Before she arose again, she

had lost the name of maiden; in the morning she was a new lady" (63). The implication is that she not only fulfills her duty but even enjoys doing so. Although she does make Erec happy, she makes herself happy as well.

Even a romance cannot tolerate such happiness so early in the story. While it might seem like every woman's dream to have a husband so content with loving her and being loved by her, it is Enide who brings to an end, temporary though that end might be, this Edenic life with her husband. Erec is so much in love with her that he no longer cares for arms or enters tournaments. He has found both wife and mistress in Enide and wants nothing more than to enjoy his wife's company. Enide is no less content than he is until she hears the other noble men saying what a shame it is that he has lost his interest in arms. She immediately blames herself.

> The earth should truly swallow me up, since the very best of knights--the boldest and the bravest, the most loyal, the most courteous that was ever count or king--has completely abandoned all chivalry because of me. Now have I truly shamed him; I should not have wished it for anything. (68)

Her words are accompanied by tears so that Erec awakens and asks what is wrong. When she says nothing is wrong, he accuses her of lying; so she reluctantly tells him.

> My lord, since you press me so, I shall tell you the truth; I shall conceal it from you no longer, but I fear it will distress you. Throughout this land all people--the blondes and the brunettes and the redheads--are saying that it is a great shame that you have laid down your arms. Your renown has greatly declined. Previously everyone used to say that there was no better or more valiant knight known in all the world; your equal was nowhere to be found. Now everyone holds you up to ridicule, young and old, high and low; all call you recreant....That I am blamed for it grieves me particularly, and everyone says it is because I have so bound and captured you that you are losing your renown and your concern for anything else. Now you must reconsider so you may put an end to this blame and regain your former glory, for I have heard you blamed too much. I never dared reveal this to you. (68)

When Erec says she was right to tell him and instructs her to prepare to ride, Enide thinks she is to be exiled. Instead, she is to accompany him in search of adventure to prove that he is still the most valiant knight in all the world. One cannot help noticing the contrast between Guinevere and Enide here. Although Enide is the catalyst for Erec's adventures very much as Guinevere is for

Lancelot's, her motivation is selfless. She is truly concerned with Erec's reputation, not with her power over Erec. There is also a sense of equality between Erec and Enide that does not exist between Guinevere and Lancelot. In "The Knight in the Cart," Guinevere sees herself as superior to Lancelot and toys with him when all is going well and she is safe, but she ends up looking fickle and shallow while Lancelot looks a bit foolish in spite of his prowess. Enide, on the other hand, is more self-effacing but ends up looking like a truly worthy woman.

When the two set off on their adventure, Erec instructs Enide not to speak a word unless he first speaks to her. The first time they encounter knights, Enide warns Erec. He defeats the knights and then threatens her not to speak again unless he first speaks to her. When she disobeys him the second time, he speaks very harshly to her.

> Woe to you, who decided to disobey my orders and do what I forbade you to! And yet I knew very well that you had little esteem for me. Your kindness has been wasted, for I am in no way grateful to you; in fact, you may be certain that I hate you for it. I have told you this already and I tell you again. I shall forgive you again this time, but take care next time and do not even look in my direction, for it would be a very foolish act: I do not like your words. (74)

In spite of Erec's warning, Enide is unable to remain quiet when she thinks Erec's life is at risk. She warns him again and again because she cannot bear the thought of life without him. When he orders her to sleep while he stands watch, she refuses, saying that he needs sleep to maintain his strength. She also makes a deal with a count who wants to kill Erec and take Enide as his wife. Convincing the count that she finds him sexually attractive and despises her life with her husband, she gets him to pledge that he will not hurt Erec until the next day. She awakens Erec early the next day to warn him of the count, and the two are gone before the count and his knights attack. When they catch up to Erec and Enide, Erec is ready for them.

It is obvious to the reader early on that Erec is not trying to prove his prowess to the world. What he really wants is that Enide think he is the worthiest knight in all the world and that she obey him as a good wife should. Again, there is a sharp contrast between Lancelot and Guinevere because Guinevere is the one to be obeyed in that relationship. Enide attempts to obey Erec, but she does not value obedience more than she values his life, so she disobeys Erec and speaks. However, when he chides her for disobeying him, her response is quite different from Lancelot's. Whether or not Erec proves anything to Enide, their adventures prove to him that Enide truly cares more about him than his reputation.

Enide is a typical woman early in the story. She is the most beautiful maiden in the world, and she blushes modestly. She serves her father, and she serves Erec without even knowing him. She seems to be in the story as the ideal woman who knows her place in a man's world. She is silent and compliant. We do not even learn her name until she marries Erec, and there is no indication that he knows her name before that time either. After the wedding, she is still the ideal woman because she is a willing lover, as much a mistress as a wife. It is when she begins to talk that she becomes a problem.

In *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*, E. Jane Burns explains that Enide's speech is disruptive because the tale she tells is quite different from that told by men to men in Arthur's court. It undermines the essence of the adventure by focusing on the dangers that might cause great injury or death: the unknown is replaced by what is about to take place ("three knights are coming"). It shows a female with greater knowledge than the males ("Your reputation will never be enhanced by capturing or killing a knight who is unable to get up"). It shows a woman who is discontent with the role typically assigned to women in the chivalric tales, which is based on the feudal tradition of women in marriage ("Nothing you can say or do will bring me joy"). If Enide is allowed to tell the story, Erec's reputation as a knight might suffer.

Thus, she threatens his reputation if she keeps him from knightly adventures by offering sexual pleasure, and she threatens his reputation if she is allowed to speak (169-179).

Although Enide's speech is threatening to Erec's reputation and to Guivret when she speaks to them, she tells a different story to the maiden of the Joy of the Court. Her story seems to coincide with the one Erec tells. Enide's focus is first on Erec's love for her and hers for him and then on his adventures. When a third woman repeats Enide's story to the group of men, they are pleased with Enide's account. However, this second-hand account does not preclude the necessity of Erec's telling the tale himself. The true value of the adventure seems to be that it provides the knight with a tale. When Erec tells the story for King Arthur and his men, the focus is on himself and the deeds of valor that reflect his prowess. There is no indication that he mentions Enide's role or presence in the adventure at all.

By the end of Chrétien's story, Enide is again silent. She has been restored to Erec's bed, and she will fulfill her marital duty, but her sexuality will no longer be a threat to Erec's reputation. At the coronation, the focus is on Erec; and she is silent as she was when Erec and her father discussed the tournament and marriage at the

beginning of the story. What little focus Enide gets she shares with her father and mother.

> Enide is beautiful, and beautiful she must be by reason and by rights for her mother is a most beautiful lady and her father a handsome knight. She does not betray them in any respect, for she greatly resembles and takes after them both in many ways. (118)

Thus, by mentioning heredity, Chrétien has reminded the reader that the true role of the queen is to provide an heir. She is a prize to be won, much like winning a sparrowhawk at a tournament; she is the fulfillment of a male sexual fantasy; she is the inspiration for deeds of valor. Ultimately, however, she is to be praised only so long as she does not distort the world of the knight.

When the story of Erec and Enide ends, the two are apparently very much in love. However, one cannot help but wonder if Erec will tire of loving Enide after a year, especially if she fails to give him an heir. Guinevere was once the most beautiful woman in the world, but her beauty could not keep her husband at home. In Wace's account of Arthur and Guinevere, Arthur loves Guinevere and stays at home for most of the first year they are married because of his love for her. However, love eventually loses out to war; and Guinevere ends up in the bed of another man. Whereas Chrétien could not or would not finish the story of

Lancelot and Guinevere, perhaps because he did not condone adultery, he concludes the story of Erec and Enide with their resignation to the roles dictated by their rank. Instead of perpetuating the idea that there can be no love in marriage, he seems instead to be saying that love must eventually take second place to duty.

Another of Chrétien's stories that focuses on a woman is "Cligés," which tells of Fenice's dilemma in being married to one man and loving another. She is more concerned about her reputation than she is about abiding by the code of courtly love. Unwilling to give her body to her husband, whom she does not love, or to the man she loves but to whom she is not married, she withholds her body from both.

> And you must know, so help me God, that your uncle has never had a part of me, for it did not please me and he did not have the occasion. He has never yet known me as Adam knew his wife. I am wrongly called a wife, but I know that those who call me his wife do not realize that I am still a maid. Even your uncle does not know it, for he has drunk of a sleeping potion and he thinks he is awake when he is asleep, and he imagines he has all the sport with me he wants, as if I were lying in his arms; but I have shut him out. (187)

Fenice explains to Cligés that when she gave him her heart she also gave him her body and promised that no one else could have it. However, she will not let Cligés enjoy her body until their good reputation is guaranteed.

> I will not run off with you like that, for then everyone would speak of us after we had left as they do of Isolde the Blonde and Tristan, and men and women everywhere would condemn our passion. No one would ever believe what really happened, nor should they. Who would believe that while still a maid I stole away and escaped from your uncle? I would be considered shameless and loose, and you would be taken for a fool. It is best to keep and observe the advice of Saint Paul: if you cannot remain pure, Saint Paul teaches you to conduct yourself with discretion, so that no one can criticize, blame, or reproach you. (188)

Fenice's plan to die is inspired by her love for Cligés. She tells him that she wants no man but him, and she cares not what sort of life they live as long as they are together. Earlier, she is called a perfect love for him "since she both feared for his death and sought his glory" (169). She knows the importance of female virginity and preserving the male line, for "she intended to save her maidenhead to preserve his inheritance" (162). Although Fenice may be the perfect love for Cligés, she is not the

typical woman. She is more than a beautiful woman whose role is to sit passively, waiting for some man, preferably her lover, to rescue her. She is the one who faces great dangers in the name of her love for Cligés. She is subjected to an emotional torture as she contrives to keep her virginity. She is subjected to a physical torture when the three physicians come to prove that she is faking her death. The three sanctimonious men pour boiling lead onto her palms, burning holes through her hands in an ironic sort of crucifixion. Next they put her on a grate to burn her to a crisp. Neither her husband nor Cligés comes to her rescue. More than a thousand ladies use axes and hammers to force their way into the torture chamber and fling the doctors out the windows to their death in the courtyard below.

Fenice is a woman of action. She does not sit wringing her hands; she plans and acts on her plans in spite of the risk. In the end, Fenice is rewarded.

> Then they gave Cligés his sweetheart to be his wife, and the two of them were crowned. He had made his sweetheart his wife, but he called her sweetheart and lady; she lost nothing in marrying since he loved her still as his sweetheart; and she, too, loved him as a lady should love her lover. Each day their love grew stronger. He never doubted her in any way or ever quarrelled

> with her over anything; she was never kept confined as many empresses since her have been. (205)

There is no mention of children or even a hint that Fenice's life will eventually "return to normal." However, empresses whose husbands heard of Fenice kept them prisoners and allowed them near no other men but eunuchs so they could not make cuckolds of their husbands.

Chrétien gives a happy ending to Fenice and Cligés in spite of the fact that they deceived his uncle, Fenice's husband. The differences between this story and that of the love between Guinevere and Lancelot seem to justify the happy ending, however. First, Fenice does not want to be associated with Isolde, an adulteress like Guinevere; so she will not have sex with Cligés even though she has never had sex with her husband either. She will not sacrifice her reputation for sexual fulfillment, nor will she present any threat to purity of Cligés' lineage. Second, the emperor had broken his oath to Cligés' father that he would never take a wife. The injustice done to Cligés and Fenice's concern for her reputation and Cligés' heirs seem to be justification for their love. It is important that Fenice is not an adulteress. By contrast, Guinevere seems selfish and deserving of condemnation. Because she has not given Arthur a child and because she is an adulteress with Lancelot, she is a double threat to the stability of the

male-dominant society that can survive only through the perpetuation of the bloodline. Chrétien does not condemn love between unmarried men and women, but he makes clear that he does not condone adultery.

Marie de France, a contemporary of Chretien, writes *lais* rather than romances. In the introduction to *The Lais of Marie de France*, Burgess and Busby explain that the *lai* is much shorter than the romance and recounts an adventure, usually associated with love, in the life of one or more individuals. The adventure may be a special event or even a period that is unexpected but preordained. While the romance is concerned with society and with reintegrating the individual into society, the *lai* focuses on the individual without any real concern for society. The *lai* is like the romance in that both have the love element and both have a courtly setting, but the protagonist of the *lai* does not seek the adventure as the protagonist in the romance does. Furthermore, the protagonist of the *lai* is in some way shaken by the adventure and experiences a fundamental change in his or her life as a result of the adventure. The adventure does not benefit society as the adventures in romance often do. The most distinguishing characteristic of the *lai*, however, is that the women characters are more forceful than the men (8, 32-33).

Marie's *lai* that includes Guinevere does not present a flattering picture of the Queen. The story of Lanval begins

with Arthur giving gifts to his counts, barons, and knights; but somehow he overlooks Lanval. Lanval is the son of a king, but he has spent all his wealth. Because Arthur gives him nothing, he is destitute. Then he meets the most beautiful maiden in the world, who remains unnamed but grants him her love (and limitless wealth) as long as he does not tell anyone about her. Later, when he is at the court of Arthur, Guinevere sees Lanval all alone and approaches him.

> Sitting down beside him, she spoke to him and opened her heart. 'Lanval, I have honoured, cherished and loved you much. You may have all my love: just tell me what you desire! I grant you my love and you should be glad to have me.' (76)

Although it is possible to interpret these lines to mean that Guinevere is offering Lanval sexual favors, it is also possible that she is simply doing her queenly duty and trying to make Lanval feel included. However, her saying that he should "be glad to have me" does cast a doubt that her motives are entirely selfless even if they are honorable. When Lanval refuses her offer, saying that he does not want to betray the King, we know that he interprets her offer as sexual. Her response, then, reveals a truly nasty side of the Queen.

> 'Lanval,' she said, 'I well believe that you do not like this kind of pleasure. I have been told

> often enough that you have no desire for women. You have well-trained young men and enjoy yourself with them. Base coward, wicked recreant, my lord is extremely unfortunate to have suffered you near him. I think he may have lost his salvation because of it!' (76)

Guinevere's response is not only unwise, as Marie tells us, but also arrogant. She obviously sees herself as the most desirable woman and believes that the man who can resist her must be homosexual, or else she thinks she can taunt Lanval into accepting her offer. She does not succeed in getting what she wants, but she does succeed in making him break his promise to his lady that he will not tell anyone about her. He tells the Queen that he loves someone (and is loved by her) who is so good, wise, and beautiful that even her servants are more worthy than the Queen. The Queen is humiliated and moved to tears, but she does not give up on Lanval. When Arthur returns home, she lies to him about what really happened; and the King promises to have Lanval burned or hanged if he cannot defend himself. It is important to note that Arthur does not seem to be upset that Lanval requested the Queen's love; he is upset over the insult. Perhaps saying that the Queen is less beautiful and less worthy than someone's handmaid reflects more negatively on Arthur than does an attempt to win the Queen's love.

Guinevere is not actually portrayed as an adulteress, but the implication is there.

In "Equitan" the king, Equitan, falls in love with the seneschal's wife and persuades her to love him back. At first the king says that he would be acting wrongly if he loved the woman because he should keep faith with his seneschal and love him. Then he rationalizes quite the opposite: "How could she be a true courtly lady, if she had no true love?" He is even willing to share her with the seneschal. According to the rules of courtly love, he tells the lady that he is dying because of his love for her. She replies with a rather long speech.

> My lord, I must have time to reflect on this. At this stage I am not sure what to do. You are a king of great nobility; I am not wealthy enough to be the object of your love or passion. If you had your way with me, I know well and am in no doubt that you would soon abandon me and I should be very much worse off. If it should come about that I loved you and granted your request, our love would not be shared equally. Because you are a powerful king and my husband is your vassal, you would expect, as I see it, to be the lord and master in love as well. Love is not honourable, unless it is based on equality. A poor man, if he is loyal and possesses wisdom and merit, is of

> greater worth and his love more joyful than that of a prince or king who lacks loyalty. If anyone places his love higher than is appropriate for his own station in life, he must fear all manner of things. The powerful man is convinced that no one can steal away his beloved over whom he intends to exercise his seigneurial right. (58)

The king convinces her of her worth and promises to be her vassal in love, serving her and doing her bidding. She, then, promises her love in return and gives him her body. Although the king claims to be following the rules of courtly love, he is not. He is not married, so he is not trapped in a loveless marriage. Furthermore, he chooses the wife of a man beneath him, a man whose life he rules. Early in the story Marie says that the seneschal is married to a woman who would bring great misfortune to the land, but she is not the one who instigates the illicit love affair. However, hearing rumors that the king will marry, she confronts him with the possibility that she will lose him when he takes a wife. He assures her that he will not take a wife but would marry her if her husband were dead. Although she does not plant the seed for either the adulterous relationship or her husband's death, she does devise a plan for his death. The plan backfires, however, killing both the king and the woman. Had Equitan and the woman been content to continue their courtly love affair,

perhaps Marie would have let them live and enjoy some measure of love with each other; but when they plotted evil against the seneschal, they went too far. Marie does not seem to be condemning the adultery as much as she is condemning the other evil.

In another lai Marie seems to fully condone an adulterous love affair and even grants the couple happiness ever after. "Guigemar" is the story of a knight at the height of his fame who is wounded in a hunt and cursed by the hind he himself wounds. Guigemar has never found a woman he could love, and the curse says that the wound in his thigh will not heal until it is cured by a woman who will suffer because of his love and will cause him to suffer because of her love. Guigemar finds that woman, but she is married and kept in a secure place where she cannot meet other men because her husband is old and jealous and fears that he may be cuckolded. She offers to help Guigemar, and then he asks her for her love.

> My lady, in God's name, have mercy on me! Do not be distressed if I say this: a woman who is always fickle likes to extend courtship in order to enhance her own esteem and so that the man will not realize that she has experienced the pleasure of love. But the well-intentioned lady, who is worthy and wise, should not be too harsh towards a man, if she finds him to her liking; she should

> rather love him and enjoy his love. Before anyone discovers or hears of their love, they will greatly profit from it. Fair lady, let us put an end to this discussion. (50)

It is ironic that Guigemar, who has never experienced love, is such an authority on love that he can instruct the lady. Marie does not seem to mind that, for she wishes them well in their love.

> He kissed her and henceforth was at peace. They lay together and talked, kissing and embracing. May the final act, which others are accustomed to enjoy, give them pleasure. (50)

Nevertheless, their year and a half of love ends when they are discovered and Guigemar is sent back home. More than two years later they meet again. Guigemar is not sure that the woman he sees is the lady he loves because "women look very much alike" (53). Before they were parted, each had devised a test to know the other when they met again; but only she is asked to pass the test.

Although the story is written by a woman and includes a woman who is important in the story, the ending reminds us that the story is intended primarily for a male audience.

> He captured and destroyed the castle and killed the lord within. With great joy he took away his beloved. Now his tribulations were over. (55)

If the lady is important in the end, or anywhere else in the story, she is important only in that she contributes to the happiness of Guigemar. Marie claimed to be versifying traditional Breton tales in French, so they are not altogether her tales. It is possible that she did not want to make drastic changes lest her writing be completely ignored. Still, she does give us some additional feminine touches, and she lets us see the female point of view at least to a limited extent.

The title of another lai by Marie bears the name of a woman and tells of the adventures that befall that woman from birth. Le Fresne is a twin born to a woman who had slandered another mother of twins, saying that a woman who gives birth to twins has known two men. When Le Fresne's mother then gives birth to twins, she must get rid of one child to save her own reputation. At first she says that she must kill one but is convinced by her attendants that the crime is too great, so she gives up one daughter to be taken to an abbey to be raised there or given to a wealthy man to raise.

The suggestion that a wealthy man might take the child does not mean that the man would personally care for the child, but he had the authority to allow his wife or someone else in his household to care for the child. Furthermore, he had control of the money that would be needed to feed and clothe the child.

The child is reared by an abbess who claims the child as her niece and names her Le Fresne. When Le Fresne reaches the age of maturity, she is noticed by Gurun, the "best loved lord there ever was," who takes her to his castle to love but not marry. Gurun is pressured to marry so he can have an heir, and he is advised to get rid of Le Fresne because no woman would want to share her husband with a concubine. The intended bride turns out to be Le Fresne's twin sister, but the biological mother redeems herself by learning the truth about Le Fresne and insisting that she marry Gurun.

Several passages within the lai suggest that the author is a woman. For example, the second woman to bear twins clearly states her crime, which is not the typical sexual offense that causes the downfall of a man or an entire society. "I have been my own judge: I spoke ill of all women" (62). The story also includes a woman who suckles her baby, a natural act not often included in a story centered around romance. If a woman in a romance or lai "suckles" anyone, that someone is usually a knight who has been injured in combat or one who has lost his mind because of love. A third passage that suggests a female author is the one that deals with Le Fresne's coming of age. "When she reached the age when Nature forms beauty, there was no fairer, no more courtly girl in Brittany, for she was noble and cultivated, both in appearance and in speech. No one

who had seen her would have failed to love and admire her greatly" (64). This passage very subtly points out the link between "beauty" and "love" and the ability of a woman to stir up sexual desire in a man. Le Fresne may have been a beautiful child, but this is the beauty a man would be interested in. The "age" and "beauty" here indicate that Le Fresne has matured physically: she is old enough to have sexual intercourse, and she is old enough to reproduce.

One of the most puzzling passages, on first reading, comes from Gurun. "Fair one, you have now made me your love. Come away with me for good! I assure you that should your aunt notice she would be most aggrieved and extremely angry if you became pregnant in her house" (64). The passage is puzzling in that Gurun seems worried that Le Fresne might become pregnant. Not only is pregnancy not typically mentioned between lovers, who seem to think of nothing but their pleasure, but it certainly is not mentioned by the male lover. In fact, pregnancy does not seem to ever be a consideration for the man unless he is concerned about an heir. The man may delay the ultimate act with his beloved because of the heightened thrill of anticipation, not because the threat of pregnancy is a problem for him. The fact that the possibility or threat of pregnancy is mentioned at all suggests that the writer is someone who might have had to deal with the possibility herself. A closer consideration of the passage shows that

Gurun brings up pregnancy not because he is sensitive but because he does not see Le Fresne as often as he wants and wants to have access to her whenever he chooses.

Gurun does love Le Fresne, but she is good only for sex, not for producing an heir. Thus, when he is pressured by the landed knights to fulfill his duty, that is, to produce an heir, he agrees to take a wife. The idea that sex interferes with duty appears again and again in the courtly literature of the Middle Ages. What is unusual in this story, which may be attributed to its coming from a female author, is that in the end the woman who is good enough to be Gurun's concubine is also good enough to be his wife. She is good enough not because of her behavior or because he loves her or because she satisfies him sexually but because of her birth.

Throughout the story, Gurun plays a role secondary to the roles played by the women in the story. Even at the wedding, the focus is on Le Fresne, with her mother and father lavishing gifts on her. Nothing is said about Gurun's happiness; but La Codre, the twin he does not marry, later makes a rich marriage. These women, Le Fresne, her mother, and the abbess, move the action of the story. They claim the spotlight, and they show the significant role of women in the lives of other women, as well as, perhaps to a lesser extent, in the lives of men. In this story, the greatest crime for a woman is slander--not sexual

transgressions, abandoning a child, or even contemplating killing a child.

Guinevere and the other major female characters in this chapter are obviously more fully developed than the women who appear in the works of Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon. The reason for that development may be, in part, the different genres represented here. However, part of the reason may be the patronage of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie of Champagne and the influence of a female audience. In spite of the development and the fact that some of these characters are presented in a positive light, it is important to note that these characters are confined, with the exception perhaps of Marie's Le Fresne and her mother, to the male world. What little we see of the feminine realm in the possibility that Le Fresne could get pregnant and in her mother's dilemma over twins comes from Marie. Chrétien's Guinevere does not have to deal with the possibility of pregnancy. When he does broach the subject of an heir, he does little more than mention it. Marie also shows what it was like for a woman to be married to a jealous husband who perhaps had lost much of his sex drive and locked her up to keep her from enjoying sexual pleasures with someone else. By omitting the female experience, or limiting it as Marie does, the authors keep the focus on the male world and perpetuate the belief that it is the uncontested center of the universe.

Chapter Five

Guinevere in Malory

If there was any doubt of Guinevere's guilt in Geoffrey and Wace, there is none from Chrétien on. Before I consider Sir Thomas Malory's synthesis of the legend at the end of the Middle Ages, I will mention briefly the treatment of Guinevere's adultery in three works between Chrétien and Malory: the *Vulgate Cycle*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and the stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*. In the *Vulgate Cycle*, the love felt by Arthur for Guinevere in Wace is replaced by a mutual love. They even embrace and kiss publicly, at the suggestion of Merlin, before Arthur goes off to war. When he is away, she stays in her room and grieves, and when he returns, she is happy. Arthur, the worthiest king, makes several blunders throughout the story, but Guinevere always responds with long-suffering. Guinevere is still an adulteress, but she appears less guilty because of Arthur's lechery. He is both father and uncle to Mordred, whose mother is Arthur's half sister, and he is also the father of Lohot, whose mother is Lisanor. When Guinevere and Lancelot consummate their love, Arthur consummates his lust for the Saxon enchantress Camille at the same time. Furthermore, he falls for the flattery of the false Guinevere, the daughter King Leodegan fathered with his seneschal's wife the same night he fathered Guinevere with his own wife, taking her

for his true wife and condemning Guinevere to be disfigured and then exiled. Lancelot proves the Queen's innocence, but she is still exiled. Two and a half years later she reluctantly returns to Arthur after he learns the truth from the dying false Guinevere.

The courtly love elements are still present in the affair between Guinevere and Lancelot. He is still given to meditations of his lady that make him look as silly as he did in Chrétien's account, and he is still the victim of Guinevere's mood swings. However, in the *Vulgate Cycle*, her criticism of Lancelot goes beyond alienation to causing long spells of madness, and tales of his love affairs make her extremely jealous, producing a type of madness in her as well. Guinevere is young when she and Lancelot first see each other, and she is confident as she initiates and controls their relationship, but when she is older (about fifty) and hears rumors of his love affairs, she is less secure. It is interesting that the writer or writers or redactor of the *Vulgate Cycle* is sensitive to the age factor. Although we know that women lived to be fifty and even much older, as did Eleanor of Aquitaine, it is difficult to think of Guinevere, who seems to be forever young, as aging. If Guinevere has grown older, so has Lancelot, but he can still attract young women. There is no indication that the writer is sympathetic toward Guinevere as she deals less than admirably, but realistically, with a

problem that women must still cope with today. Marie deals with a young bride imprisoned by a jealous, much older husband; but the reality of aging women being replaced by younger women in the prime of their childbearing years does not enter in. Perhaps the closest anyone comes to dealing with the subject from a woman's point of view is Chaucer in the Wife of Bath's tale.

For just a moment in the *Vulgate Cycle*, the female viewpoint slips in, and Guinevere reveals her humanity: she is more than the male fantasy of the ideal worldly woman. I wonder if we should not look for the humanity in her mood swings as well and recognize what they tell us about both the author and Guinevere: women had to cope with menstruation and PMS even in the Middle Ages (and without modern products and conveniences), and, because men did not understand what was happening to the female body, they, like Aristotle, attributed the natural bodily functions of woman to her inferiority. The author definitely blames Guinevere for her mood swings that alienate Lancelot from Arthur's court, and so do the other knights. However, Guinevere has no words to explain why she behaves in such a way. If menstruation or PMS was in any way to blame, Guinevere would not have understood it or talked about it if she had understood it because, after all, there is no place for bodily functions in courtly literature. Among all the writings extant from women in the Middle Ages, the treatises

of Trotula are the only works I have discovered that deal with the personal, private side of being a woman. Trotula writes about menstruation, pregnancy, abortion, childbirth, intercourse, flatulence, "foul smelling sweat," incontinence, vaginal odors, cosmetics, and many other subjects that would have been of interest to women in the Middle Ages. Those topics, obviously, do not appear in the romance literature. It is this private side of woman, however, this misunderstood, if understood at all, side that results in her being so quickly labeled as Eve or as an adulteress.

If Guinevere is to blame for initiating her relationship with Lancelot, Arthur must share the blame for the continuing relationship. He tells Guinevere that he would allow Lancelot to love her rather than lose Lancelot. Arthur may seem to be trying to atone for his lechery and numerous blunders, but he is really being selfish. Just as he was willing to let Meleagant take Guinevere rather than go back on his word in Chrétien's account, here he is willing to let Lancelot have the queen to make himself look better by keeping the worthiest knight at his court.

In spite of the fact that Guinevere and Lancelot are disloyal to Arthur and attempt to deceive all those around them, their love affair is presented in a favorable light until Lancelot's failure in his quest for the Holy Grail is attributed to his connection with Guinevere and again at the

end of their lives when both Guinevere and Lancelot repent and devote themselves to God. Peter Korrel calls the treatment of Guinevere a conscious "whitewash" that was probably prompted by the author's admiration for Lancelot. "He could not praise the high deeds of Lancelot, and at the same time present the love of his life as a treacherous harlot" (201). It is interesting that Korrel would worry about the worthiest knight being linked with "a treacherous harlot," but he does not find it at all disturbing that the worthiest king is linked with the same woman. I am not sure that Korrel realizes his own inconsistency.

The alliterative *Morte Arthure* follows the chronicle tradition rather than the romance tradition in the portrayal of Guinevere. Although Lancelot is named among Arthur's men, he is not Guinevere's lover. The first noticeable difference in Guinevere is that she is allowed to speak, and she begs Arthur not to go off to war. Arthur tries to comfort her by saying that he is leaving her in the care of Mordred, a knight she has praised. However, that news does not seem to comfort Guinevere. The fact that she begs Arthur to stay and Mordred begs to be allowed to accompany Arthur suggests that either Guinevere truly fears Mordred or she fears what she might do if she is left alone with him. Mordred's request to go with Arthur may indicate that he fears what he might do if left alone with Guinevere, or it might be a clever attempt to make Arthur trust him even

more. At least the scene attempts to depict the feelings of a queen who is about to be separated from her lord and does not know if or when she will see him again. Her pleading with Arthur is reminiscent of Radegund's pain at seeing her countrymen dead and being separated from those she loved. However brief the scene might be, at least Guinevere conveys to the reader the fact that war is an ugly reality for the women who are left at home. Arthur, who is anxious to go off to war to prove his worthiness as king, seems to romanticize and glamorize war, as do the authors who write about it, but there is no effort to romanticize or glamorize what happens to Guinevere when her husband is not at home to protect her. Her role is to wait at home or to be taken captive, deprived of adventure or deprived of her good reputation.

While Wace mentions that Guinevere and Arthur do not have children, in spite of Arthur's love for her, the *Morte Arthure* says that Mordred and Guinevere have children together. Even though Guinevere is usually condemned for her union with Mordred, there is no indication that she was any happier about that union than Radegund was about her forced union with Lothar, nor is there any indication that she is happy about having Mordred's children. When Mordred tells her to flee to Ireland to save herself and the children from Arthur, she does not obey. Instead, she goes alone to Caerleon to the safety of the convent. The author

accuses her of acting out of fear and false pretense rather than true repentance. Korrel suggests that the author gives her children to further damage her reputation, making her a bad mother on top of everything else (220). However, there is nothing to convince the reader that Guinevere would have abandoned children fathered by Arthur, legitimate children, heirs to the throne. The assumptions that a woman who would abandon her children is a bad mother and that a good woman naturally loves her children do not take into consideration the traumatic effects of rape or forced marriage. Although the author implies Guinevere's complicity with Mordred, there is still room for the possibility that Guinevere truly feared what Mordred might do in Arthur's absence but resigned herself to the union after Arthur stayed away for so long. If Mordred was Guinevere's knight, who was left to defend her against her own knight? Nevertheless, Guinevere comes out of the *Morte Arthure* looking guilty of adultery, which is all the worse for its attachment to treachery.

The stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* returns the focus to Lancelot and Guinevere and, like Chrétien and the *Vulgate Cycle*, diminishes the role of Arthur in the process. Early in *Le Morte Arthur*, Guinevere sounds very much like Chrétien's Enid when she blames Arthur for the decline in his reputation and the deterioration of his court. Like Enid, Guinevere's version of the story is different from the ones told by men. Arthur is not the worthiest king, and his

court is not the best. Instead of taking Guinevere on a quest with him to reestablish his reputation, as Erec did, Arthur holds a tournament to placate the Queen. However, for some untold reason, the Queen does not attend the tournament.

Guinevere and Lancelot again have the misunderstanding over "the other woman" as they did in the *Vulgate Cycle*, this time with the Maiden of Ascalot. When all the misunderstandings have been cleared up and the lovers are reunited, though they are never careless, they are caught in bed together by Agravaine and Mordred. Still, Lancelot is willing to fight to show Guinevere "clean" after he saves her from burning at the stake and later returns her to Arthur.

When Arthur is dead, Guinevere enters the convent, having lost interest in Lancelot and all other worldly affairs. Lancelot comes to the convent, and she instructs him to take a wife, telling him that he must never again come to her for comfort. Guinevere claims that she is now concerned only for her soul, but her great sorrow at parting from Lancelot suggests some ambiguity of feeling. Lancelot promises to remain true to her and to follow her example in devotion to spirituality. That some sort of bond exists between them even after their parting is implied in the fact that they die at approximately the same time.

In the chronicle tradition of the Arthur legend, Guinevere seems to be portrayed in a more negative light, not so much because of her sexual alliance with Mordred, in which most scholars see her as complicitous, but because of her role in the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. In the romance tradition, Guinevere is portrayed in a more sympathetic light because of her courtly love affair with the worthiest knight, Lancelot. It is interesting that, in spite of the fact that she is never proven guilty of trying to hurt Arthur or help Mordred, her role in the loss or destruction of Arthur's kingdom in the chronicle tradition is a more serious offense than is her adultery in the romance tradition. Perhaps the loss of property is the key. As was mentioned earlier, Kathryn Gravdal tells us that during the Middle Ages women accused of stealing were sentenced to being burned at the stake or buried alive. If stealing was punished more harshly than were sex crimes, then Guinevere's real crime in the chronicle tradition is her connection to the loss of Arthur's "property." There is no indication that Mordred was as interested in Guinevere as he was in Arthur's kingdom, nor is there any consideration of the fact that Guinevere would have been considered one of Arthur's possessions herself and that she herself is stolen. Nevertheless, to further damage her reputation, the authors tell us that she flees to a convent, not because she is truly penitent and wants to focus on the spiritual life, but

because she is afraid of Arthur. She is simply trying to protect herself.

If Guinevere is condemned for her role in a series of events over which she has no control in the chronicle tradition, it seems only fair that she be exonerated, to some extent, through her adulterous alliance with Lancelot in the romance tradition. Thanks to courtly love, Guinevere is no longer merely property, and, even when her husband is absent, she now has someone who cares enough about her to protect her from sex crimes and slander, both products of the male-dominated society, something Arthur has been unable to do in spite of his military prowess and worthiness. Furthermore, Guinevere gains power for herself through her adulterous link to Lancelot, whereas she has been relatively helpless in her ties to Arthur. While Guinevere is blamed for Lancelot's failure in his quest for the grail, she is also responsible for his salvation as she turns to a spiritual life and encourages him to do the same.

In Malory's work, Arthur sees Guinevere for the first time in the book of "Merlin" after he has rescued her father, Lodegraunce, King of Camylarde. Arthur falls in love with Guinevere at first sight and marries her. Before more is said about Guinevere, King Lot's wife comes to check out Arthur's court in Carlyon, and Arthur wants to have sex with her, which he does and fathers Mordred. Later, he learns from Merlin that King Lot's wife is his sister and

that the child of their incest will destroy Arthur and all the knights of his realm. As a result, Arthur kills all the boy children born on the first of May because that is the day Merlin said Mordred would be born, but Mordred alone escapes. In this book, Arthur is praised for risking his life in battle with his knights, but he is also responsible for his downfall because of his activities in bed. This important bit of information seems to be forgotten after Guinevere becomes an adulteress. Merlin is blamed for the deaths of the children, and Guinevere is blamed for the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. From the first, then, we know that the King has special privileges: when he does something blameworthy, he is entitled to a scapegoat.

In the book of Torre and Pellinor, Malory tells of Arthur's marriage to Guinevere again. This time Arthur takes a wife because Merlin advises him to. Arthur claims that he loves Guinevere and calls her the "moste valyaunte and fayryst that I know lyvyng, or yet that ever I coude fynde" (59), but it is difficult to tell if he really loves Guinevere or if he just wants the round table that his father gave her father. Mordred warns Arthur that ". . . Gwenyver was not holsom for hym to take to wyff. For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne. . ." (59). Malory does not place much emphasis on the wedding either times he mentions it. The first time he says, "And aftir they were wedded, as hit tellith in the

booke" (26), and the second time he says, "Than was thys feste made redy, and the kynge was wedded at Camelot unto dame Gwenyvere in the chirche of Seynte Stephyns with great solempnité" (63).

Guinevere has a minor role throughout the adventures until "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere." Arthur takes her with him to do battle early on because he cannot bear to be without her. He says she will inspire him to great deeds, and he promises not to let anything happen to her. Her response shows her to be the perfect queen: "I am at youre commaundemente, and shall be redy at all tymes" (77). Although she is his inspiration, when Arthur lies with her at night, he is caught off guard by his enemies. When Arthur attempts to get her to safety, she must attempt to cross a flooded river or face Arthur's enemies if he is defeated. Even though she trusts Arthur enough to accompany him on his adventure, she is not sure that he will defeat his enemy: "Yet were me lever to day in this watir than to falle in youre enemyes handis. . . and there to be slayne" (78). Her words have the ring of Enide's that tell a story different from Erec's. Guinevere knows that, in spite of his prowess, Arthur could be wounded or killed in battle and leave her at risk. The female account of the story told in anticipation of the battle does not contain the braggadocio the men use before battle to intimidate their opponents. Arthur sends her to safety, a woman's place in times of war

or civil unrest, and, with the help of a few men, kills thirty thousand before bringing her back to him. Guinevere's concern for her own safety forces the focus away from Arthur and onto herself, so she must be banished from the male world so that order can be maintained. Once she assumes the proper roll for a woman, praising the men for their great deeds in battle, she is permitted back on the scene.

When Arthur goes off to conquer Rome, he leaves Guinevere with Sir Constantynes and Sir Baudewens, and she meets him in London when he returns. In "A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," Guinevere is mentioned several times as being the only woman Lancelot loves. He explains that he will never marry because he would have to leave arms, tournaments, battles, and adventures to stay with his wife. Guinevere gives him the best of both worlds: she is his lover, and she inspires him to do what he most wants to do anyway. In the book of Tristram, Guinevere is mentioned by La Beale Isode as one of four lovers in the land: Lancelot and Guinevere, and Tristram and Isode. It is her role as Lancelot's lover that keeps him from achieving the quest for the Grail, and he tries to stay away from her but cannot.

"The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere" begins after Lancelot returns from the quest. Lancelot forgets his promise to strive toward perfection and goes back to the Queen, and "they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud

toforehonde, and had many such prevy draughtis togydir that many in the courte spake of hit, and in especiall sir Aggravayne, sir Gawaynes brothir, for he was ever opynne-mowthed" (611). As a result of the gossip, Lancelot is careful to take up the cause of every lady and damsel who asks him for help, which makes the Queen angry. His response seems to come, not from her lover, but from someone who is familiar with the Guinevere's anger and has waited for his chance to put her in her place.

> 'A, madame,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'in thys ye must holde me excused for dyvers causis: one ys, I was but late in the quest of the Sankgreall, and I thanke God of Hys grete mercy, and never of my deservynge, that I saw in that my queste as much as ever saw ony synfull man lyvynge, and so was hit tolde me. And if that I had nat had my prevy thoughtis to returne to you[r]e love agayne as I do, I had sene as grete mysteryes as ever saw my sonne sir Galahad, Percivale, other sir Bors. And therefore, madam, I was but late in that queste, and wyte you well, madam, hit may nat be yet lyghtly forgotyn, the hyghe servyse in whom I dud my dyligente laboure.' (611)

After his chiding, gentle though it may be, he tells her that he is thinking only of her, for he can escape, but she must tolerate anything that is said about her. Then he

reminds her, perhaps not so gently, that he is the one who must come to her rescue if she is in distress. While he claims to feign delight in defending ladies and damsels to fool anyone who might try to catch him and the Queen in a compromising situation, Guinevere accuses him of being untrue to her and banishes him from her presence.

Guinevere may be one of only four true lovers in the land, but she is still a woman. Lancelot's speech to her reminds her that the man is ultimately the one in charge of the game of love, a man's game, an authority he allows her only when it suits him. Her response, "she braste oute of wepynge," emphasizes the differences between men and women. While Lancelot is thinking only of Guinevere when he does deeds of valor, deeds that build his reputation among both men and women, Guinevere is selfish and irrational, definitely inferior. In case the reader does not see Guinevere's femaleness, Malory spells it out in the words of Bors de Ganys: "And women in their hastyness woll do oftyntymes that aftir hem sore repentith" (612). Bors also comforts Lancelot by adding that Guinevere is always the one to admit that she is wrong after a fight.

When Guinevere tries to play Lancelot's game of pretending equal interest and delight in other knights, she invites twenty-four knights to dinner, but her plan backfires when Pyonell poisons some of the apples because of his envy and hatred toward Gawain. When Patryse eats one of

the apples and dies, Guinevere is blamed. Because her words to Lancelot drove him away from Arthur's realm, the remaining knights are reluctant to believe Guinevere when she says she is innocent. Even Arthur, who claims to believe she is innocent in the poisoning, blames her for Lancelot's absence: "What aylith you. . . that ye can nat kepe sir Launcelot uppon youre syde?" (615). At Arthur's urging, she appeals to Bors, who also chides her for Lancelot's absence. Guinevere realizes that she is a helpless woman at the mercy of men, so she resigns all authority she might have as lover or queen and does what a woman is supposed to do: "Alas, fayre knyght. . . I put me holé in youre grace, and all that ys amysse I woll amende as ye woll counceyle me" (616).

Bors agrees to defend the Queen, not for love of her, but because of his love for Lancelot. Bors was with Galahad and Percival in the quest for the Holy Grail, so he is a worthy knight, but he is not necessarily sympathetic toward women. He does, however, remain true to his promise to defend Guinevere and does so verbally before the other knights as he attempts to defend his own actions:

> 'Wete you well, my fayre lordis, hit were shame to us all and we suffird to se the moste noble quene of the worlde to be shamed opynly, consyderyng her lorde and oure lorde ys the man of moste worship

> crystynde, and he hath ever worshipped us all in all placis.' (617)

The response of the other knights reflects the misogynistic atmosphere of the Middle Ages: Guinevere destroys good men. Bors is again fair to the Queen, reminding the men that she has always had a reputation for supporting good knights and that she has always been generous with her gifts.

Lancelot returns just in time to defend the Queen, and after his victory he explains why he defends Guinevere:

> 'My lorde,' seyde sir Launcelot, 'wytte you well y ought of ryght ever [to be] in youre quarell and in my ladyes the quenys quarell to do batayle, for ye ar the man that gaff me the hygh Order of Knyghthode, and that day my lady, youre quene, ded me worshyp. And ellis had I bene shamed, for that same day that ye made me knyght, thorow my hastynes I loste my swerde, and my lady, youre quene, founde hit, and lapped hit in her trayne, and gaave me my swerde whan I had nede thereto; and ells had I bene shamed amonge all knyghtes. And therefore, my lorde Arthure, I promysed her at that day ever to be her knyght in ryght othir in wronge.' (620)

The Queen weeps and nearly sinks to the ground because of Lancelot's great kindness after her own unkindness. Lancelot has saved her from burning at the stake, but it is

the Damesell of the Lake who reveals the truth of the incident and proves Guinevere innocent.

When Arthur proposes a tournament in Winchester and wants the Queen to go with him, "she was syke and myght nat ryde" (621). Lancelot does not plan to go either because his wounds are not yet healed after his last defense of Guinevere, which creates gossip. When Arthur is gone, Guinevere calls Lancelot to her and says he is wrong not to go to the tournament because people will say that they both stayed behind so they could "have their plesure togydirs." His response suggests that he is toying with the Queen.

> 'Have ye no doute, madame,' seyde sir Launcelot. 'I alow youre witte. Hit ys of late com syn ye were woxen so wyse! And there[fore], madam, at thys tyme I woll be ruled by youre counceyle, and thys nyght I woll take my reste, and to-morrow betyme I woll take my way towarde Wynchestir. But wytte you well,' seyde sir Launcelot unto the quene, 'at that justys I woll be ayenste the kynge and ayenst all hys felyship.' (622)

Of course, the Queen is right, but when Lancelot used the same logic on her earlier, she banished him from her presence. Even when she does the right thing, the result is the same: Lancelot has to leave. This dilemma reflects the ambivalence felt toward women in general during the Middle Ages. A woman at her best is still a woman. Just as

Guinevere's words sometimes tell a story different from the one the men tell Lancelot's words here show a Guinevere different from the one she perceives. Her words seem to come from a queen who is wise and circumspect, but Lancelot's sarcastic response suggests otherwise. Both Guinevere and the reader are reminded that the only real power Guinevere has over Lancelot comes from him. His happiness may be in her hands, but he controls both her happiness and her fate.

When Guinevere advises Lancelot not to fight against the King, "for there bene full many hardé knyghtes of youre bloode," he answers, "I shall take the adventure that God woll gyff me" (622). Lancelot does not order Guinevere to keep silence, lest her words show him to be less than the worthiest knight, as Erec does Enide; but Guinevere is Lancelot's lady, not his wife. He is supposed to serve her, but he is beginning to sound like a married man who is tiring of his wife.

At the same time that Lancelot seems to weary of his attachment to Guinevere, she begins to sound more and more like the stereotypical nagging wife. She is not happy when Lancelot stays away from her to prevent gossip, and she is not happy when he stays near her because he might cause gossip. Guinevere's words are dangerous not only when they threaten to remove the glamour from the adventure stories the knights tell, but also when they distort the image of

Lancelot's only love who "had hym in grete favoure aboven all other knyghtis" (149). The ideal lady would never say of her lover, "Have ye nat herde say how falsely sir Launcelot hath betrayed me? . . . Fy on hym! . . .Yet for all hys pryde and bobbaunce, there ye proved youreselff better man than he" (632).

Guinevere's warning to Lancelot not to fight against the King and his men proves true, for he is badly wounded by Sir Bors. However, Lancelot is less worried about his wounds than he is about the Queen's anger when she learns that he wore the sleeve of the Fair Maiden of Astolat, which he wore to enhance his disguise so that he would not be recognized by Arthur and his men as he fought against them. True to Lancelot's fears, the Queen is angry and says, "Fy on hym, recreayde knyght! . . . For wyte you well I am ryght sory and he shall have hys lyff" (637). When Lancelot returns to Arthur's court, she will not speak to him until after the Fair Maiden's death, and then she chides him in the presence of Arthur, saying, "Sir. . . ye myght have shewed hir som bowntė and jantilnes whych myght have preserved hir lyff" (641). Lancelot's response explains the situation to Guinevere and includes a brief statement of his philosophy of love, which sounds very much like a warning to the Queen.

> 'Madame. . . she wolde none other wayes be answerde but that she wolde be my wyff othir ellis

> my paramour, and of thes two I wolde not graunte her. But I proffird her, for her good love that she shewed me, a thousand pound yerely to her and to her ayres, and to wedde ony maner of knyght that she coude fynde beste to love in her harte. For, madame. . . I love nat to be constrayned to love, for love muste only aryse of the harte selff, and nat by none constraynte.' (641)

Lancelot makes it clear that he will not allow a woman to force him into love or any other action. Arthur's response sounds like an effort to encourage Guinevere to accept Lancelot on his own terms, and it also contains a hint of longing for the days when he enjoyed such freedoms himself.

> 'That ys trouth, sir,' seyde the kynge, 'and with many knyghtes love ys fre in hymselffe, and never woll be bonde; for where he ys bonden he lowsith hymselff.' (641)

The irony of Arthur's statement is that Guinevere, who has taken the King's freedom and threatens Lancelot's, is herself the one who "ys bonden" and has "lowsith" herself. While the knights realize themselves and their destinies through knightly combat, Guinevere is allowed to realize herself only through her sexuality. Thus, Guinevere is trapped; for it is also her sexuality that condemns her. Her situation reminds the reader of the laws that bind women to father or husband, giving her no real freedom of choice

in her own affairs unless she is widowed. Furthermore, while the King is bound by only one woman and Lancelot will be bound by no woman, Guinevere must try to please two men, knowing the whole time that she is at the mercy of men in a men's world governed by rules made by men. When she apologizes to Lancelot for treating him unfairly, his words attempt to reshape her into his image of the ideal woman: "Thys ys nat the firste tyme. . . that ye have ben displese with me causeles. But, madame, ever I muste suffir you, but what sorow that I endure, ye take no forse" (642). He wants her to be ruled by him without questioning what he says or does. He wants absolute authority, and she has no choice but to grant what he demands. By shifting the blame onto Guinevere, he can avoid the responsibility that is his for the suffering of both the Fair Maiden and his lady because he would not heed the Queen's advice not to fight against Arthur and his knights. Guinevere may be a wise and worthy queen, but the part she is allowed to play in the game of knights is superficial, and she ends up looking inferior.

Malory's Guinevere is different from both Geoffrey's and Chrétien's. She is not the silent victim of abduction who cannot defend herself against claims that she betrays Arthur and destroys his kingdom in Geoffrey's account, nor is she the same Guinevere who seems to enjoy and sometimes abuse her control over Lancelot in Chrétien's story. Up to the book of Lancelot and Guinevere, Malory's Queen is mostly

silent or says what she is supposed to say, and, as a result, is praised as the worthiest queen. In "The Poisoned Apple" and "The Fair Maid of Astolat," the Queen cannot seem to get anything right. She alienates Lancelot and then is blamed for whatever happens after that alienation. It seems that Malory is suggesting one of two things: that courtly love, or anything else that gives women power, is not what it has been whitewashed to be, or that Guinevere needs to be reminded, as she once reminded Isode, that Lancelot is a noble knight who will love no other woman except by sorcery. Arthur's kingdom, as created by Malory, is peopled by exceptional men of high status, but the women, even those of high status like Guinevere, are, nevertheless, women, with all the weaknesses and imperfections attributed to their sex.

In "The Knight of the Cart," Guinevere redeems herself to some extent as she proves to be a true lover.

> And therefore all ye that be lovers, calle unto youre remembraunce the monethe of May, lyke as ded quene Gwenyver, for whom I make here a lytyll mencion, that whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende. (649)

When Mellyagaunce (Meleagant) comes to abduct Guinevere while she is out Maying with her knights and ladies, she shows herself bold of tongue and true to both Arthur and Lancelot.

> 'Traytoure knyght. . . what caste thou to do? Wolt thou shame thyselff? Bethynke the how thou arte a kyngis sonne and a knyght of the Table Rounde, and thou thus to be aboute to dishonoure the noble kyng that made the knyght! Thou shamyst all knyghthode and thyselffe and me. And I lat the wyte thou shalt never shame me, for I had levir kut myne owne throte in twayne rather than thou sholde dishonoure me!' (651)

Furthermore, Guinevere shows herself to be a worthy queen when she surrenders herself to Meleagant rather than see her knights slain in an effort to protect her, but she will surrender only if her conditions are met.

> 'Sir Mellyagaunte, sle nat my noble knyghtes and I woll go with the uppon thys covenaunte: that thou save them and suffir hem no more to be hurte, wyth thys that they be lad with me wheresomever thou ledyst me. For I woll rather sle myselff than I woll go wyth the, onles that thes noble knyghtes may be in my presence.' (651)

Surely Lancelot could not have found fault with Guinevere's woman's wisdom in such a bold speech. The Queen has slipped the bonds of gender, at least momentarily, to become one of those exceptional people of Arthur's court. At that moment, she is truly worthy to be queen to the worthiest king and lover to the worthiest knight. Perhaps it is significant

that she is such a bold woman when she is not in the presence of Arthur or Lancelot and under their molding influence. She is like Radegund who built a convent and made both spiritual and political contributions after her husband freed her from the bonds of marriage and like Æthelflæda who ruled Mercia "like a man" after the death of her husband.

Malory acknowledges the seriousness of abduction in Lancelot's explanation to the Queen of why he is so angry at Meleagant.

> 'A! madame. . . why aske ye me that questyon? For mesemyth ye oughte to be more wrotther than I am, for ye have the hurte and the dishonour. For wyte you well, madame, my hurte ys but lytyll in regard for the sleyng of a marys sonne, but the despite grevyth me much more than all my hurte.' (655)

In Chrétien's account, Guinevere's anger at Lancelot obscures the serious crime that has been committed against her, but here the crime would not be overlooked except for Guinevere's assurance that her honor in intact. There seems to be some ambivalence in Malory's treatment of rape. Early in the work he includes Arthur's rule to his knights that they "never to enforce" ladies, damsels, and gentlewomen "uppon payne of dethe" (75), but he also tells, in the words of Torre's mother, that Torre's father, King Pellynore, "half be force he had my maydynhode" (62). Malory includes

graphic details of the giant raping the young maid on Saint Michael's Mount: "he forced hir by fylth of hymself, and so aftir slytte hir unto the navyll" (120), but later has Lancelot cut off the head of a knight who was a ravisher of women. When Lancelot wants to avenge the Queen's hurt and dishonor, Guinevere's response minimizes the whole affair. She seems to prove both Ovid and Andreas Capellanus correct in their assertions that women like to be forced. The emphasis is on Lancelot's anger, suggesting that he is the one who has been hurt by Guinevere's abduction, which may be an allusion to medieval laws that treated women as the husband's or father's property and required restitution to them for the rape of a wife or daughter.

To further diminish the seriousness of abduction or rape, Malory puts Guinevere in charge. She tells Lancelot that everything will be made right "for all thynge ys put in myne honde" (655). Later, after she has spent the night with Lancelot, her abductor accuses her of adultery, which proves that all things cannot be right in a woman's hands. The reader may then look back and question Guinevere's surrender to Meleagant in the first place, wondering if her abduction was not, in fact, only "half be force." Juxtaposing abduction (which involved rape or at least the threat of rape) and adultery works very effectively to discredit Guinevere while, at the same time, preserving the male value system. The fact that Meleagant is not punished

for abducting Guinevere and Lancelot is not caught or blamed in the adultery supports such a theory.

Malory's last book, "The Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon," begins with the foreshadowing of Arthur's death and explains that Aggravayne and Mordred were to blame because of their hatred for Lancelot and Guinevere and their determination to catch the lovers in the guilty act. According to Aggravayne, Lancelot and Guinevere lie together day and night, an indication that the frequency of their intercourse has increased as they have aged or an indication that they literally just lie in bed together or an indication that Aggravayne is given to gross exaggeration. It is significant that, in spite of the fact that Guinevere is wife to the worthiest king and lover to the worthiest knight, none of the knights responds to the accusation with a good word for Guinevere, but all of them praise Lancelot and say that they should ignore the lovers because of all that they owe Lancelot. Even the King shares their sentiment.

> For, as the Freynshe booke seyth, the kynge was full lothe that such a noyse shulde be uppon sir Launcelot and his quene; for the kynge had a demyng of hit, but he wold nat here thereoff, for sir Launcelot had done so much for hym and for the quene so many tymes that wyte you well the kynge loved hym passyngly well. (674)

Nevertheless, the King lets Aggravaine and Mordred set a trap for Lancelot and Guinevere. After all Malory has said about the two being true lovers and not wanting to cause gossip but loving each other all night, he now casts doubt on their guilt by saying that love is different now than it was when the French book was written. He has already said in "The Knight of the Cart" that "nowadayes men can nat love sevennyght but they muste have all their desyres" (649), but in the days of King Arthur men and women could love each other seven years without lust. That love was based on truth and faithfulness. However, the fact that the two are caught together is enough proof that they are guilty.

After the two are caught and Lancelot is ordered out of the Queen's bedroom, he takes her in his arms, kisses her, and reassures her that if he is killed defending her that Bors and his other kindred will save her from the fire. Guinevere's reply is equally worthy: "Truly. . . and hit myght please God, I wolde that they wolde take me and sle me and suffir you to ascape" (677). Guinevere's deep love for Lancelot is not new, but her desire to please God is. They both realize that their love is ended and regret that it has ended in such a way. Lancelot kills Aggravaine and twelve of his knights to rescue Guinevere and then asks her to come away with him so that he can guarantee her safety because their true love is now ended: Arthur is now his enemy. Guinevere will not run away, but she asks Lancelot to be

ready to rescue her if she needs him, and she does need him. Even though Guinevere does not want to run away, after Lancelot saves her from burning at the stake, he takes her to Joyous Garde to keep her safe.

In a fashion that has become typical of him, Arthur mourns the loss of his knights but does not mind the loss of Guinevere: "And much more I am soryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company" (685). He would have been reconciled to Guinevere and Lancelot, but Gawain would not allow it. It is an edict from the Pope that brings Guinevere back to Arthur's court (which reminds the reader of the same sort of edict that sent Queen Eleanor back to King Louis VII's bed after their disagreement during the crusade), but Gawain still will not allow a reconciliation with Lancelot, who leaves Arthur's court forever. Before he leaves, he asks Guinevere to pray for him and tells her to send for him if she needs him. Everyone is sad at Lancelot's leaving except Gawain.

This fictional character Guinevere shares the plight of historical women such as Brunhild who were blamed for the destruction of kingdoms and the deaths of kings. However, like historical women, she seems to be a scapegoat while Arthur remains the worthiest king. Guinevere becomes a character type, the adulterous queen; and her name is

forever associated with the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. In spite of the fact that Arthur fathers Mordred, who, according to Merlin, will destroy Arthur's kingdom, he is portrayed as less responsible than his queen. Arthur and Mordred are responsible for what happens to Arthur's kingdom. If Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery has anything to do with the destruction of the kingdom, again, Arthur must share their guilt because he does not mind what goes on between them as long as he can keep Lancelot at his court. Finally, Arthur is responsible because he, the King, allows Gawain's thirst for revenge to overrule what he really wants to do and knows is best. He is three times guilty. It also seems impossible, or at least unlikely, that an object so easily replaced, the Queen, could be important enough to cause the destruction of Arthur's kingdom.

Utley points out that the romances reflect the conflict between courtly love, which encouraged adultery, and the Church, which encouraged celibacy or chaste marriage. That conflict is evident in the portrayal of woman as merciless one moment and merciful the next, as the inspiration for men to do worthy deeds one minute and the cause of their destruction the next, and as someone to be reverenced one minute and reviled the next. These conflicts or contradictions, according to Utley, "are the very essence of the courtly tradition" (33). These conflicting views of women are also a reflection of the society that viewed women

with ambivalence because of the extreme views of Church and courtly society. When a society holds such views of women, it might expect the literature to reflect those views. Authors then, as now, wanted to please their audiences. As a result, sometimes those authors seem to be squirming under the pressure of reconciling the story and the reader.

The end of Arthur's life, then, calls for the end of the life of his queen. If she is not truly dead, she must at least be dead to the world. It would not be right for her to go on enjoying life after her lord, the worthiest king, is dead. To reconcile the court and the Church, Guinevere repents of all her courtly ways and embraces the life of a nun. Such an action reconciles her to Arthur's subjects and enables her to save her own soul. Furthermore, she is responsible for saving Lancelot's soul, something he could not do for himself even after his quest for the Grail.

Guinevere seems to be controlled by anger, jealousy, and changeableness, qualities assigned to females as typical of that sex. However, in light of what we know about the experience of women in the Middle Ages, we can see that she is a woman of the Middle Ages, usually assigned little value and often ill treated. Her abduction in Geoffrey is a reality of the Middle Ages, as is seen in the writings of Radegund and in the laws of medieval France and England. Although many authors portray her as guilty of complicity with Mordred in betraying Arthur, I see a woman with limited

choices: she can flee to a convent (if she can get away from Mordred), she can accept her fate with Mordred and make the best of an impossible situation (as did Radegund with Lothar), or she can kill herself to preserve her own honor and that of Arthur.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

From Geoffrey's account of the Arthurian legend on, Guinevere is shaped by a patriarchal society that views woman as inferior to man and treats her as the property of man: her father or her husband. She is barely mentioned in Geoffrey's account, and she is not allowed to speak or even give the appearance of being a three-dimensional character. When the character of Guinevere develops, she is represented as the sinful, lustful woman who destroys Arthur's kingdom because this seems to be the way male writers interpreted the bare outline they inherited, despite evidence that women did not want to be abducted as Mordred abducted Guinevere. Under the influence of the love made popular by the troubadours of southern France, refined at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and recorded at the direction of Marie de Champagne, Chrétien transforms Guinevere into a queen who fears, talks, travels, and loves. She takes center stage away from Arthur and inspires knights to do worthy deeds even though she is not allowed to do those deeds herself. The code of courtly love liberates her and, at the same time, manages to confine her to a role primarily associated with sex. In the sense that, according to the rules of courtly love, she is expected to grant her lover's ultimate desire, sexual intercourse, she is still the victim of

forced sex. Georges Duby says in *Medieval Marriage* that courtly love was abduction in a more sophisticated and sublimated form (105). While Geoffrey, Layamon, and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* are not sympathetic toward Guinevere, Wace, Chrétien, the Vulgate Cycle, and the stanzaic *Morte Arthur* are, at least to some extent, sympathetic. In all she is either abducted or commits adultery. In all but Chrétien, she flees to a convent either immediately before or immediately after Arthur's death. We can assume that in such an act the author is implying her guilt, or we can assume that she represents many women of the Middle Ages, both innocent and guilty, including Eleanor of Aquitaine who subscribed to courtly love herself. Some of those historical women fled to a convent to escape a world of sin, others went for safety, and still others went because they had done all the things they had wanted to do and did not have to give up anything of great importance to, in the end, give their lives to God. The important thing is that her going to a convent works because she is Radegund, she is Heloise, she is Eleanor. Radegund would have been Mordred's victim only until she had a chance to flee to the convent, as was Guinevere. Heloise was a true lover who went to the convent at the request of her husband, not because she was truly penitent. Eleanor went to the convent after she had lived a full life, reached old age, and found nothing left in the world to attract her.

Like Heloise who submits to Abelard's lust without being married to him, Guinevere submits to Lancelot. Like Eleanor, she needs more than her marriage gives her.

Guinevere evolves from Geoffrey's abductee to Chrétien's willing adulteress partly because courtly love has exalted her, if it has not completely liberated her. She becomes an adulteress because she has gained power and because she has experienced love rather than pure brute force. She becomes an adulteress because she is still trapped in man's image of woman as Eve, who was responsible for the fall of man in the beginning and can cause the fall of man or his kingdom again at any time. She is an adulteress because she is man's fantasy of the ideal woman, a woman who fulfills his lust without obligation but offers him more of a challenge than would a prostitute. She is an adulteress, as McCracken suggests, because man fears her body and makes her an adulteress (which also means that she is barren) so that she cannot assert her only chance at power through her children. Finally, Guinevere is an adulteress because even adulteresses are worthy queens (Eleanor) and savers of men's souls (Mary Magdalene). Ultimately, however, she is what the male authors shape her to be. Even though Guinevere has become a more fully developed character from Geoffrey to Malory and even though she seems to gain some power as she develops, she is a constant reminder that women in the Middle Ages are less

powerful than men. As a result, her character portrays the conventional male images of woman rather than the female experience.

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VITA

Peggy McDonald Gipson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE DEVELOPMENT OF GUINEVERE'S CHARACTERIZATION IN THE ARTHURIAN LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Chickasha, Oklahoma, March 28, the daughter of Wilma and R. V. McDonald. One brother, Robert. Married Michael H. Gipson, August 20, 1965. Three daughters, Stephanie, Mandy, and Jenny. One son-in-law, Jeff Maggio.

Education: Graduated from Anadarko High School, Anadarko, Oklahoma, in May 1963; received Bachelor of Science in Education Degree from Oklahoma Christian College (now OCUSA) in Oklahoma City in May 1966; received Master of Arts Degree in English (traditional studies) from Central State University (now UCO) in Edmond, Oklahoma, in July 1979; received Master of Arts Degree in English (creative studies) from Central State University in July 1981; completed requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at Oklahoma State University in December 1994.

Professional Experience: Adjunct instructor, Department of English, Oklahoma Christian College, January 1979 to May 1984; Assistant Professor, Department of English, Oklahoma Christian College, August 1994 to present; participated in the Oklahoma Writing Project at Oklahoma University during the summers of 1983 and 1986; conducted workshops for the Oklahoma Writing Project--Cherokee Public Schools, 1984, Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1984, Choctaw High School, 1985, Sapulpa Public Schools, 1985; conducted writing workshop at the Young Writers Conference, 1984; conducted writing workshop at the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference, 1989.

Professional Conferences Attended: Conference on Christianity and Literature, October 1981, October 1990, October 1992, October 1994; Oklahoma Classroom Teachers Association, October 1981, March 1982, March 1989; South Central Modern Language Association, October 1982 (read a paper), October 1983 (served as secretary for the Psychology and literature section), October 1984 (chaired the Psychology and literature section), November 1985, October 1986, October 1989; Conference of College Composition and Communication, March 1986; National Council of Teachers of English, November 1986, November 1987; International Technical Communication Conference, April 1989 (conducted workshops), April 1990 (made a presentation); South Central Renaissance Conference, March 1991.