Scott Telek's Swithin series about the Arthurian legend just keeps getting better and better. The fourth book, *The Flower of Chivalry*, has just been published, and in it, Telek imagines an incredible childhood for King Arthur, culminating in his pulling the sword from the stone.

I have previously reviewed the first three books in the series, beginning with *Our Man on Earth*. The first two books focused on Merlin's early life and the third book on Arthur's conception. This fourth book begins with Arthur as a young boy living with his foster parents, Sir Carlyle Ector and Nerida, and foster brother, Kay. Neither his adopted family, nor Arthur know who he really is, and Arthur does not even know he is not Carlyle and Nerida's real son, although as the novel progresses, Kay comes to guess the truth, resulting in Arthur becoming very conflicted about who he is.

Telek's goal is to retell the Arthurian legend, sticking to the early and most revered of the medieval texts without in any way swaying from them, other than to fill in the blanks. Here he has had a lot of room for liberties since little was written of Arthur's childhood by the medieval authors other than that Arthur went to a tournament with his brother Kay as Kay's squire, forgot to bring Kay's sword to the tournament, and unwittingly borrowed a sword he found in a churchyard, not realizing it was the sword—the sword in the stone, the pulling out of which would make one rightful king of Britain. Consequently, Telek has a lot of fun getting the reader to that important event, and he imagines Arthur’s childhood fully in surprising ways that are both entertaining while still keeping the tone of the earlier texts.

There are many good things to write about in this book. Arthur’s rivalry with Kay is fully explored as Arthur comes to realize he is different from his foster brother who is rather a lout, at times jealous of Arthur, and far more violent and far less thoughtful. Things come to a head in Arthur and Kay’s relationship when they discover a giant frog that Kay tries to kill and Arthur tries to protect. Kay ends up ripping off the frog’s leg, but Arthur manages to arrange for the frog to get away. Kay then declares he will find the frog and kill it, so Arthur finds it first and takes it to a new place where it will be safe.

This is not just any frog, but one that grows to be about three feet tall. It is seen as a monstrosity by Kay, who declares it a threat to children so it must be killed. Arthur, however, ends up befriending “Frog” and developing a relationship with him. In time, Frog becomes something between a friend and a pet, being intelligent enough to interact with Arthur while not quite being able to speak. Frog also has the ability to regenerate his leg.

I thoroughly enjoyed the scenes between Arthur and Frog while wondering what made Telek decide to include Frog as a character since he seems rather out of place in this Arthurian universe, but eventually, Frog’s purpose in the book becomes very clear and I totally embraced it.

Another important theme in the book is the treatment of women and a knight's duty to protect them. This theme hearkens back to Malory where there is initially a great deal of violence against women in Arthur’s early reign, including the violence of Balin against the Lady of the Lake. Telek remains focused on Arthur's childhood in this book although there is the occasional
is cared for by Sir Hector and his wife Elaine, and he has a foster brother, Cai, just like in most
The story takes place in a castle where Arthur has been brought by Merlin to be raised. Arthur
never thought of it that way; why has no one else until now?”
and surprising ways that ultimately leave you thinking, “Yes, that makes perfect sense” or “I
this book to enjoy, especially how Matthews uses many aspects of the Arthurian legend in new
interested in the more historical Arthur, but setting those two elements aside, there is much in
novel, so I didn’t become as engrossed in it as I
Sword of Ice and Fire
It turns out I greatly enjoyed this first book. The
novels.

Matthews' first Arthurian novel is complete with Vortigern, dragons, and even shapeshifters and a Celtic god.
Another fascinating part of the storyline is the inclusion of Bercilak, the Green Knight. While the medieval poem Sir Gawain and the Green Knight doesn’t tell us much about the Green Knight’s background, here we get his back story, and he even ends up becoming Arthur’s teacher.

Merlin has brought Arthur to Avalon to keep him safe, and to ensure that safety, Arthur has not been taught anything about his childhood, so in the novel we also watch him finally become aware of his heritage as son to the late King Uther Pendragon, as well as why his safety is in jeopardy. Early on, we learn there is someone evil who wants to see Arthur fail and who wants to take possession of the Sword of Ice and Fire for himself. Eventually, we learn this villain’s identity—this is where I was most surprised by Matthews’ choices. The villain is a magician named Amanions, whom in his Author’s Note Matthews tells us is a magician from an obscure French medieval story, The Elucidation. I have to wonder why Matthews chose to include this character and also make him a relative of Arthur’s—hence, his desire to kill Arthur and obtain the throne for himself. That said, perhaps Matthews wanted to save the other better-known Arthurian villains for his later works.

One of the best uses of the Arthurian legend in the book is how Matthews treats the Questing Beast Glatisant. I really enjoyed his depiction of the beast and how the beast plays into the plot. I also liked how he introduced into the novel the Treasures of Britain—he refers to them as the Hallows of Albion. In the Arthurian legend, there are Thirteen Treasures, but Matthews has reduced them to four. The Sword of Ice and Fire is the first of these treasures, which Arthur must achieve. Needless to say, he does, and the remaining three volumes of the series will tell the stories of how he achieves the remaining three.

I feel like I’ve already said too much in terms of revealing the plot so I’ll stop here and just add that I think anyone who enjoys Arthuriana, and isn’t a stickler for a solely historical and realistic novel, will find this book a fun read. It’s really enjoyable Arthuriana for all ages, and I’m eager to read the remainder of the series. Congratulations to John Matthews for creating a successful first volume.

The Sword of Ice and Fire (ISBN-13: 978-1911122173) is published by The Greystones Press. It is available at Amazon and most online and retail bookstores.

Tyler Tichelaar, PhD, is the author of The Children of Arthur series, which includes the novels Arthur’s Legacy, Melusine’s Gift, Ogier’s Prayer, Lilith’s Love, and Arthur’s Bosom. He has also written the nonfiction scholarly works King Arthur’s Children: A Study in Fiction and Tradition and The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption, plus numerous other books. You can learn more about Tyler at www.ChildrenofArthur.com.

Interview with Award-Winning Arthurian Author Nicole Evelina about “The Once and Future Queen”

Posted in Arthurian Books, Guinevere. tagged Battle of Camlann, Camelot, Camelot’s Queen, Daughter of Destiny, Guinevere, King Arthur, Malory, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Mistress of Legend, Nancy McKenzie, Nicole Evelina, Persia Woolley, T.H. White, The Once and Future Queen, Women’s History Month. on November 21, 2017 | Leave a Comment »

Today, I will be interviewing Arthurian novelist Nicole Evelina about her new book The Once and Future Queen, a nonfiction study of Guinevere as she’s been depicted in literature for the last fifteen centuries.

Nicole has previously been my guest when I’ve interviewed her about the first two books in her Guinevere’s Tale trilogy, Daughter of Destiny and Camelot’s Queen.

Nicole has spent the last fifteen years researching the Arthurian legend, Celtic Britain, and the various peoples, cultures, and religious practices that shaped the country after the withdrawal of Rome. She is a proud member of the Historical Novel Society.

Nicole holds a B.A. in English and an M.A. in media communications, as well as accreditation from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), a distinction that tests writing and communications skills, and is held by only 8,000 people worldwide. Her goal in writing Arthurian fiction is to create a strong female protagonist in the person of Guinevere in the series. And it looks like she’s succeeded because Daughter of Destiny and Camelot’s Queen have already won several awards. But now she has come out with The Once and Future Queen, a nonfiction book about Guinevere.

Read Full Post »
Nicole Evelina, author of “The Once and Future Queen,” is also the author of the Guinevere’s Tale trilogy.

Nicole: I was asked to give a presentation on Guinevere for Women’s History Month in March 2017 at a local library. I was thinking, “Ah, she’s not real. What am I going to talk about?” So I decided to look into how she has changed over time. The result was 30,000 words worth of notes—and a thesis that I thought was very interesting: the idea that Guinevere changes over time along with society’s views on women.

At a presentation the previous November, one of the audience members suggested I write non-fiction, so I thought this was the perfect opportunity to take his advice. Besides, I was an English major in college so this was fun for me—like writing a really long research paper!

Tyler: Your book focuses on the literary record of Guinevere, but have you read any of the nonfiction works that try to pinpoint who the historical Arthur is, and even sometimes the historical Guinevere? How important do you think it is that we search for the historical counterparts of these characters?

Nicole: I've read a lot of books on the possibly historical nature of King Arthur as research for my fictional Guinevere trilogy. I particularly enjoyed Christopher Gidlow’s The Reign of Arthur, David Day’s The Search for King Arthur, and King Arthur: The True Story by Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman, although I know that one is controversial. And of course, all of Geoffrey Ashe's books. The ones on Guinevere are few and far between, mostly because it’s hard to prove she existed until we can prove Arthur did, as he was the doer of big deeds. I’m assuming you’re referring to Norma Lorre Goodrich's book on Guinevere? I own it and I’ve read it (twice, actually) and I’ll just say it is best used to inspire fiction.

I do believe the historical research is very important. If nothing else, it sheds light upon a very mysterious and often misunderstood time period (the Dark Ages or early Middle Ages). It would be great if we can someday prove or disprove the existence of Arthur because that will give us clarity and, no matter what the answer is, will provoke additional research. Even if Arthur is historically disproven, I don’t think that will dampen the power of his myth. Look at Robin Hood; the best anyone can do is call him an amalgamation of historical people, but yet the lessons in his myth continue to inspire us. The same would be true for Arthur and Guinevere.

Tyler: Who are some of the major and more traditional (pre-twentieth century) authors you discuss in the book and how are they different in their portrayals of Guinevere?

Nicole: Knowing that my target audience was non-academics who are interested in the Arthurian legend, I tried to pick works most people would have at least heard of and maybe studied in school. I touch on some of the key Celtic documents, like The Mabinogion and the Welsh Triads, and then cover the major medieval writers—Gildas, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon, Chrétien de Troyes, the Vulgate Cycle, and Thomas Malory, among others. Then I moved into the Victorian Era with Alfred, Lord Tennyson and William Morris. T. H. White is really the one who straddles the traditional and modern for me, although he’s probably considered modern.

Tyler: Was there anything that surprised you about how Guinevere was portrayed in these earlier works?

Nicole: I think the inconsistency was the biggest surprise for me. While Guinevere is pretty much universally depicted as negative in the traditional texts, exactly how—her personality and motivations—and why—the author’s message and motives—often differ wildly, even among a single author’s oeuvre. Chrétien de Troyes and Thomas Malory are examples of authors who depict Guinevere one way in one story or even a part of a story, and totally differently in the
Tyler: Who do you consider to be the first author to treat Guinevere in a truly revolutionary way and how does that author do so?

Nicole: There is more than one, and I think it depends on what aspect of the story and character you're thinking about. I think Chretien was revolutionary in that he gave Guinevere and Lancelot a bit of a happy ending because Arthur never finds out about their affair in his version of the story. William Morris certainly was because he gave Guinevere a chance to speak for herself—although her “defence” really isn’t so much a defense as audience manipulation. Parke Godwin gave us the first truly intelligent and independent Guinevere in the 1980s. Sharan Newman was the first to depict Guinevere’s childhood and give her a fully-formed backstory. Of course, I like to think that my own novels have revolutionary elements as well—i.e., Guinevere being a priestess, Arthur’s marital situation in Camelot’s Queen, but I’m certainly not impartial. I’ll let time and reader opinion decide that one.

Tyler: You talk about Marion Zimmer Bradley in the book, although you don’t like her depiction of Guinevere, but would you agree with me that she is probably the biggest influence upon Arthurian fiction in the last forty years? How would you define that influence and do you think she influenced depictions of Guinevere also?

Nicole: Oh, most definitely. Even though others have done more for the character of Guinevere, Bradley turned Arthurian legend on its head by marrying it with feminism and focusing on the female stories. She also shifted the story from being solidly built on Christianity to being built on paganism with Christianity being a disruptive influence.

My books certainly would not exist without hers, and I’m sure she influenced at least two generations of writers who came after her. But I don’t know that that is true for most of the Guinevere novels that came out either in the 1980s or 1990s, at least the ones I examine in The Once and Future Queen. Looking at the timeline and the motivations of the authors, I think they would have written theirs anyway. Parke Godwin’s books came out either before or nearly at the same time as Bradley’s so unless the two were in correspondence (which I doubt), they wouldn’t have influenced one another. Likewise, Gillian Bradshaw’s novels and Sharan Newman’s first Guinevere book were published before Mists. The only authors who could have been reacting to Bradley would have been Woolley, McKenzie, and Miles. I haven’t read anything about McKenzie’s motivations, but I’m pretty sure Woolley and Miles both said their books were at least started before Mists. I think the trends that we see in the 1980s and 1990s to focus more on Guinevere and make her a strong female character were more motivated by the cultural shifts taking place and the influence of feminism than on Bradley’s work.

Tyler: You mention several other modern female novelists in the book, some of whom you think did nothing to help develop Guinevere’s character but others you find favorable. Can you give us some examples?
Nicole: I’ll give you one example on each side of the question. (You have to read the book for the others! J) I think Persia Woolley did much to advance the character of Guinevere. Her queen is equal to Arthur and very much knows her own mind. She’s even a sex-positive character without being portrayed as a whore.

On the other hand, Nancy McKenzie’s Guinevere is a throwback to the weak, indecisive character that we saw in Malory. Rather than acting from her own will and agency, this Guinevere is constantly reacting to the stronger characters around her, especially Elaine and Arthur. This dependence on the thoughts and deeds of others lessens Guinevere in the eyes of the reader, especially in light of the stronger Guineveres produced by other authors.

Tyler: As a male novelist of Arthuriana myself, I couldn’t help noticing the lack of reference to novels by male authors, especially the ones that are modern classics, such Jack Whyte, Bernard Cornwell, and Stephen Lawhead? Why did you choose to ignore many male authors?

Nicole: If I was doing an overall survey of Arthurian legend I would have included them—and I mean no disrespect by not focusing on their works—but this is specifically a book on Guinevere. My reason for not including them is that none of them really focus on Guinevere. She’s there, of course, but it’s easier—and I would argue more effective—to analyze changes in the character when she’s a main character as opposed to secondary or tertiary.

I do discuss T. H. White at length, as well as Parke Godwin, so it’s not that I abandoned male novelists when talking about modern books. But I believe the shift from male authors having total control over Guinevere’s story historically to female authors telling her story from a female point of view for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s cannot and should not be underemphasized. We know that men portray female characters differently than female authors do (just as female authors write their male characters differently than male authors do), so analyzing how she changed at their hands tells us a lot about society and the views of readers.

Tyler: You talk about how it’s too early to say what place your own novels will have in the Arthurian canon and whether they’ll have any influence, but how do you think your Guinevere is different from all the others?

Nicole: I feel like she’s built on the shoulders of those who came before me. There is no way my Guinevere could exist without those who broke the ground in the ’80s and ’90s and seeded reader acceptance of a strong Guinevere. And because I was raised in a family and society that taught me to the value of “girl power” (we can thank the all-girls high school I went to for a lot of that), I think my Guinevere is more aggressive than many others, much more empowered, and determined to have her own way. That is both a plus and a negative for her, as it also means she’s very self-centered. I also think the relationships she has with other characters in my books—especially Aggrivane and Morgan—help set her apart from previous versions because they put her in unusual situations and present her with challenges no other Guinevere has had to react to.

Tyler: When can we expect the final volume of your trilogy to be published? Any hint at how Guinevere will fare in it? Will readers be surprised by the end?

Nicole: I am determined that it will be published in 2018. I’ve had a partial draft written since 2013, but with my change from the traditional publishing path to independent publishing and all the work that has entailed, I haven’t had as much time to focus on it as I would like. Within the last year, I finally figured out what it was missing (oh you know, most of the middle of the book). Now I just have to make that happen, which is easier said than done, especially now that I know how much people like the first two books.

I will tell you that after the battle of Camlann and the fall of Camelot, Guinevere heads north into her mother’s native Votadini homelands to try to figure out who she is now that Camelot is gone. With her husband and many of her friends now dead, being a Votadini is the only bit of identity she has left, and it ends up propelling her into a new stage in life, where her skills both in the political arena and on the battlefield have the potential to change history. Obviously, Lancelot is a huge part of the story, as is Morgan, but you’ll also see a lot of characters reemerge that might not expect—Mayda, Elga, Accolon, and others who were bit players in previous novels now come to the fore. And there is one that I’m not going to tell you about, but I’ve been waiting years to write his comeback!

I’ve known all along how the series would end. I think some people will be surprised and possibly irritated by what happens, but I think others will find it very satisfying. Hopefully, more of the latter! I will say that despite all Guinevere has gone through and will go through in this book, Mistress of Legend has a happy ending…at least as happy as any Arthurian story can be.

Tyler: What do you think Guinevere will look like in future books and films?

Nicole: I think there is no telling, but that is a good thing. That means she can be anyone or anything society needs her to be. Personally, I hope she continues to be a strong woman who fights for herself and for what is right. I’d love to see more historical fiction/historical fantasy
authors delve into what life was like for Celtic women in post-Roman Britain using her story as a basis, especially if archeology continues to point to that historical period being the most likely for Arthur to have lived. I've done that somewhat, but my skills and education have their limitations. I'd love to see what a true expert can do.

I do speculate a little on how Guinevere might change in the future in the conclusion to The Once and Future Queen. I can imagine her becoming a person of color (yes, I know, the TV show Merlin did that already, but I mean more regularly), perhaps even gay or transgender. For those of us used to traditional portrayals of her, that might seem like a leap, but for a long time so did a strong Guinevere. A friend of mine just posted on Twitter the other day that she’s reading a comic book called, oddly enough, The Once and Future Queen, in which Arthur is a gay woman. That means her relationship with Guinevere will be non-traditional. So in many ways, the evolution is happening right before our eyes.

**Tyler:** Thanks for all that information, Nicole. Since it's so much fun to speculate, if the historical Guinevere could be here with us today and you could only ask her one question, what would it be?

**Nicole:** The first thing that popped into my head was “Was Arthur worth it?” but upon serious reflection, I think I’d ask her where it all went wrong. By that I mean the dream of Camelot and a united Britain, but she could take it however she likes.

**Tyler:** Thank you again for joining me today, Nicole. It was a very informative discussion. Before we go, will you let our readers know where they can get copies of The Once and Future Queen?

**Nicole:** Thanks again for having me. You are too generous with your time. Here are the links to the major online retailers:

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Once-Future-Queen-Guinevere-Arthurian/dp/0996763244

Barnes and Noble: https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-once-and-future-queen-nicole-evelina/1127289906


Google Play: https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Nicole_Evelina_The_Once_and_Future_Queen?id=nEM_DwAAQBAJ&hl=en

Smashwords: https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/755384

**Tyler:** It's been a pleasure, Nicole. Good luck with The Once and Future Queen, and I'll look forward to talking to you again when Mistress of Legend is published.

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**New Book Offers Survey of Guinevere’s Depiction in Literature Throughout History**

I absolutely love the title of Nicole Evelina’s new scholarly book The Once and Future Queen. Although there are no legends claiming Guinevere will return like there are of Arthur, she is Arthur’s counterpart and deserves equal treatment. To date, Guinevere has not received anywhere near the amount of attention, much less full-length studies of her character as Arthur has. In fact, the only full-length book on her I’m aware of, Norma Lorre Goodrich’s Guinevere, is a mish-mash of pseudo historicity that must be taken with a grain of salt. Nicole Evelina, however, doesn’t delve into trying to claim whether or not Guinevere was historical. Instead, she takes a more scholarly and practical approach by looking at how Guinevere has been treated throughout literature from the earliest Welsh Triads to present day novels, including her own.

Evelina is herself the author of a trilogy about Guinevere, consisting of Daughter of Destiny, Camelot’s Queen, and the upcoming Mistress of Legend. Her interest in Guinevere, as she states, stems from a love for Marion Zimmer Bradley’s novel The Mists of Avalon and her treatment of Morgan le Fay, but also from a dislike for how Bradley portrayed Guinevere.
Evelina makes some fascinating points about how Guinevere has been depicted in literature, pointing out the significance of Guinevere from the early mention in The Welsh Triads where it is clear that one of the causes for the Battle of Camlann was the blow she struck to her sister Gwennwyvach. Not surprisingly, as Evelina surveys the medieval works about Guinevere, she is struck by how frequently sexist they are.

One point she makes when she gets to the works of the Renaissance—or lack of Arthurian works for this period—is that the lack of work probably stems from the Protestant Reformation and the effort to rid England of all things that reeked of Catholicism. The Holy Grail legends would certainly be included there, as well as Guinevere and Lancelot ending up in a nunnery and a monastery. I have always been aware that the Renaissance didn’t know what to do with King Arthur, but I had never considered why before, so I thought this point was very illuminating.

Evelina goes on to explore Guinevere’s treatment in more recent classics like Tennyson’s ‘aldyls of the King and T. H. White’s The Once and Future King. For me, however, being a writer of Arthurian novels myself, the most interesting chapters were those on modern Arthurian fiction. While Marion Zimmer Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon (1982) may be considered the mother of feminism in the Arthurian legend, not surprisingly, Evelina faults Bradley for not presenting Guinevere as a strong female character. Evelina also points out that, surprisingly, some other women novelists of the late twentieth century also failed to provide a positive depiction of Guinevere, including Nancy McKenzie and Mary Stewart.

Although I try to read every Arthurian novel I can, there were some authors included whom I have not yet read, including Rosalind Miles, Gillian Bradshaw, and Lavinia Collins, so I am now looking forward to reading their works. While many of the authors Evelina treats, such as Persia Woolley, (to whom she dedicated the book) provide positive and strong portraits of Guinevere, I have to say I was surprised by Lavinia Collins’ Guinevere—her novels sound more like bodice-rippers than true Arthurian romance.

If I would fault The Once and Future Queen in any way, it would be that Evelina didn’t discuss more of the recent male authors. She does mention Parke Godwin, whose Beloved Exile (1984) was the first novel to depict Guinevere after the Fall of Camelot and give her a new story for that period of her life, but she does not discuss male authors like Stephen Lawhead, Jack Whyte, or Bernard Cornwell. Honestly, though, it would be impossible to discuss every treatment of Guinevere in modern fiction—countless Arthurian novels are now being produced every year—and I honestly can’t remember much, if anything, of the Guineveres in those authors’ novels—granted I read them all nearly two decades ago, but they were also all heavily written from the male perspective.

Overall, I think The Once and Future Queen draws a positive light upon the need for more research into how Guinevere has been depicted in the past and how the often negative image of her as just an adulteress needs not only to be reassessed but turned around to show that she can be a positive role model for women of how a woman can be strong in a man’s world. It would be wonderful if The Once and Future Queen would inspire future research, including how Guinevere has been depicted in film and on TV—Evelina even includes a little guesswork about how multiculturalism and other forces in our culture will influence Guinevere’s future depictions. I welcome this addition to Arthurian scholarship, and I think anyone who is especially interested in modern Arthurian fiction will find it engrossing.

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Tyler Tichelaar, Ph.D., is the author of The Children of Arthur series, which includes the novels Arthur’s Legacy, Melusine’s Gift, Ogier’s Prayer, Liilth’s Love and Arthur’s Bosom. He has also written the nonfiction scholarly works King Arthur’s Children: A Study in Fiction and Tradition and The Gothic Wanderer: From Transgression to Redemption, plus numerous other historical novels. You can learn more about Tyler at www.ChildrenofArthur.com.
Aubrey Beardsley’s image of Sir Bedivere returning the sword to the lake. Beardsley, who may have been homosexual or asexual, was known for his androgynous looking characters in his Arthurian illustrations, and for very erotic works, complete with enlarged genitalia, in other works not geared toward children.

content depicting Lancelot and Arthur as lovers. The book has created a controversy and even hate mail to Luddington and her publishers. In response, she has created a special Kindle edition at Amazon, for sale for $3.00, to raise funds to help the LGBT charity Stonewall in Britain.

But what is all the fuss about? The Arthurian love triangle of Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot has always had a hint of homoeroticism in it—and romantic feelings between Lancelot and Arthur seem a reasonable reason to many for why Arthur would not do anything about his best friend sleeping with his wife. Luddington may be the first one overtly to depict a homosexual relationship between Arthur and Lancelot, but the possibilities have been implied or suggested in numerous Arthurian works, especially in the twentieth century.

Even as far back as Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte D’Arthur, there are homoerotic hints in cross-dressing scenes and a scene where two knights accidentally end up in bed together. Dorsey Armstrong’s Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory’s Le Morte D’Arthur has explored this topic and how the knights of Camelot themselves are aware of the possibility of homosexual rumors surrounding a group of men in an organization like the Round Table.

More recently, in T.H. White’s The Once and Future King (1958 but published in smaller pieces 1938-1941), the scenes of Lancelot’s youth where he dreams of coming to Camelot express a sort of boy crush upon King Arthur. Later, the story takes normal turns of Lancelot loving Guinevere, but is that not a more acceptable outlet for his love for Arthur? T.H. White was himself later treated at the end of his life for his own homosexuality.

In Marion Zimmer Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon (1982), Arthur endorses the romance between Guinevere and Lancelot. He cannot provide an heir so he hopes Lancelot will do it for him, leading Lancelot to his bed to sleep with Guinevere. Arthur joins them in bed, and later, Guinevere comments to Arthur that she saw how he touched Lancelot.

But White and Bradley only hint at homosexuality. Other authors introduced it into the legend, but perhaps felt creating a gay King Arthur was going too far. Furthermore, homosexuality is a negative behavior in these works that can bring about Camelot’s downfall, so other characters than Arthur are the ones afflicted with homosexuality—notably, the villains.

In Joan Wolf’s The Road to Avalon (1988), Agrivaine is homosexual and the downfall of Camelot comes largely due to his jealousy because of his crush on Bedwyr, the Lancelot character in this novel. Because he can’t have Bedwyr, he doesn’t want Guinevere to have him so he reveals their love and brings about Camelot’s downfall.

Douglas Clegg goes even further in Mordred, Bastard Son by depicting Mordred as homosexual—and while Mordred is not a villain in this book (it’s only the first of a planned trilogy), homosexuality being associated with him seems to imply a negativity to it. Mordred is hopelessly in love with Lancelot, and while he is well-meaning in this first novel, we know from the story’s frame that he will bring about Camelot’s fall nevertheless. (Clegg has not yet published the remaining two volumes of the trilogy.)

And that brings us to “Merthur.” If you don’t know what Merthur is, where have you been? I’m talking about the legions of fans for the successful BBC television series Merlin who insist and badly want Arthur and Merlin to be in love in the show. These fans are convinced there is a secret love between Arthur and Merlin and they are even making YouTube videos with clips from the TV show either to promote their argument that there is a Merthur bromance going on, or even splicing to make there be actual love glances and scenes between the two characters. Just go to YouTube and search for “Merthur” and you’ll find dozens of these videos.

So why has Lancelot and the Wolf created such a fuss? I think it’s because while these other works depict homosexual desires not acted upon, Susan Luddington is the first author to depict actual sex between Arthur and Lancelot—not in her reviewers are calling the book an adult version of the Merlin TV series.

And while Luddington might be getting hate mail, she’s also found a gay readership longing for such stories, and her Kindle sales are reportedly skyrocketing. With Luddington, perhaps the Arthurian legend has taken a new turn and will never be the same again, and it is always an
I haven’t yet read *Lancelot and the Wolf*, but I plan to and will review it in the near future.

Meanwhile, for more information about *Lancelot and the Wolf* and the special edition to raise funds to support the LGBT British charity Stonewall, visit: http://www.xtra.ca/blog/ottawa/post/2012/08/14/King-Arthur-and-Lancelot.aspx

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Meet Cheryl Carpinello, author of “The King’s Ransom,” the first book in the “Young Knights of the Round Table” series

**Tyler Tichelaar, Ph.D.** is the author of *King Arthur’s Children: A Study in Fiction and Tradition*. You can also visit him at [www.ChildrenofArthur.com](http://www.ChildrenofArthur.com)

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Today, I am very pleased to interview my fellow Arthurian author Cheryl Carpinello.

Cheryl is the author of the young adult novel *Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend* and today she will be talking about her new novel *The King’s Ransom*, the first in her new series *Young Knights of the Round Table*.

**Tyler: **Welcome, Cheryl. It’s a pleasure to talk to you today. I’ve read and enjoyed both of your books and I only wish they had been around for me to read when I was a kid. To begin, will you tell us what made you decide to write books about the Arthurian legend for children?

**Cheryl: **I’ve always been fascinated by King Arthur. I’ve probably read just about every fiction story written over the last 15-20 years. One of my favorites is Deepak Chopra’s *The Return of Merlin*. I’ve also ventured to nonfiction or scholarly accounts like your *King Arthur’s Children: A Study in Fiction and Tradition*. However, I’m more of a romantic, and it’s that side of the legend that appeals to me. I like the ideas that surround the legend like might is not right; how when seen from the air, there are no lines or boundaries on Earth—we are all here together, and we need to learn how to get along; and how in Arthur’s time hope still lives. Underneath it all, I believe this is what draws young and old to the legend. What the legend says to kids without them realizing it is that there is a right way and a wrong way to live. This is done with the stories of the knights with their quests, their jousts, their rescuing of the damsels, and their fighting for the underdog. These stories present young readers with vivid accounts of honor, loyalty, and friendship. This is why I chose Arthurian Legend.

**Tyler: **And in this first book, just who are the Young Knights we’re talking about?

**Cheryl: **The Young Knights are three kids who have become friends via their friendship with a beggar/vagabond called the Wild Man. Without the Wild Man, it is likely that they would not have met and become friends because they are from very different backgrounds. Eleven-year-old Gavin is the youngest prince of Pembroke Castle in southern Wales. Fifteen-year-old Bryan has been sent to Pembroke by his parents to learn to be a blacksmith. Thirteen-year-old Philip is an orphan who wandered into Pembroke village and lives and works at the church. They are really just three lonely kids who find friendship with the Wild Man and each other.
Tyler: Will you set up the plot a little for us?

Cheryl: Someone breaks into the king’s (Gavin’s father) treasury in Pembroke Castle and not only steals the medallion The King’s Ransom, but also kills Aldred, the king’s advisor. Being a beggar/vagabond, the Wild Man is captured and charged with the crime. It doesn’t help that a bloody knife is found with his belongings. Gavin, Bryan, and Philip are determined to prove that the Wild Man is innocent. In order to do this, they embark upon a quest where each is tested and must conquer his fears or face humiliation and/or even death.

Tyler: I think the Wild Man is my favorite character. Where did you get the idea for him?

Cheryl: Ah, the Wild Man. He is much more important than it appears. I knew that in order to make The King’s Ransom (Young Knights of the Round Table) work, I had to have a strong tie-in with Arthurian Legend. Sure, King Arthur makes an appearance, but that wasn’t enough. Then I remembered the Wild Man from T.H. White’s The Once and Future King. He worked perfectly. The Wild Man is also mentioned in a number of other Arthurian books, but my Wild Man comes from White.

Tyler: How many books do you think you’ll write for the series?

Cheryl: Right now, I don’t have a definite number in mind, at least two or three more.

Tyler: Is Guinevere going to be tied into the series down the road or is it a completely separate book?

Cheryl: Guinevere won’t be tied into the series because it occurs at the beginning of Arthur’s reign. Young Knights takes place after Arthur is more established. However, another book featuring Guinevere and Cedwyn is in the planning stage. I’ve had several requests from readers to write about what happens to Cedwyn. That’s what the next book or two will deal with in that line.

Tyler: Do you have a favorite Arthurian novel of your own or which ones most influenced you in your own writing?

Cheryl: I would have to say my favorite is T.H. White’s The Once and Future King. I like how White makes the legend so accessible to a variety of readers. Many people—kids included—are already familiar with White’s story even though they may not be aware of it. Of course, I’m talking about the fact that Disney made the animated feature story The Sword in the Stone from Book I of The Once and Future King.

Tyler: You include several educational items in the book for teachers. Will you tell us a little about those?

Cheryl: I also have a copy that I can send to readers for free and hand out in classrooms and at workshops. The guide carries that great castle cover and is loaded with resources and materials for teachers and homeschooled students. Included are a synopsis, information on the Arthurian Legend and the medieval time period, castle vocabulary, and a word find puzzle. Teachers have suggestions for discussions, projects, and writing exercises as well as additional medieval references specifically geared for young readers. I also put together a complete set of comprehension questions/answers for all eighteen chapters.

Tyler: How has being a teacher yourself influenced your writing middle grade/tween books?

Cheryl: I’ve written several books over the years. I’ve done an adult romance, a YA romance/bildungsroman, and several stories suitable for picture books. I just never seemed to find a genre I was passionate about writing. Then I started teaching The Once and Future King. My students loved the story and the whole medieval world. After writing Guinevere, I started doing medieval writing workshops in the elementary schools and found every classroom full of kids crazy about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and the medieval time period. I have to say that being in the classroom and working with the younger kids has been my entire motivation for writing my books.

Tyler: What do your students think about having an author for a teacher?

Cheryl: My students were excited when I told them my book would be published at the end of the school year. Then when they found Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend in the school’s library, one of my senior boys told me, “That’s light, miss.” When the cover proofs for The King’s Ransom arrived, several of my students thought the name Cheryl Carpinello was the name of an author they should consider buying the book by. I was excited about that, but I was a little concerned. I wrote The Once and Future King as an English teacher but didn’t think about the students who would be buying the book. Then I was at a book signing in a local city library when the library staff asked me if I would sign copies of both of my books. I was overjoyed and was given the opportunity to speak to a group of students about my books. It was a great experience.
The Mists of Avalon: Rewriting Myth through the Women's Movement

Marion Zimmer Bradley’s magnificent novel, The Mists of Avalon, although it is a retelling of the ancient Arthurian myths, is a novel that has definite connections to views from the women’s movement, particularly their beliefs toward patriarchal religions and the future downfall of Christianity.

In The Mists of Avalon, we have all the renowned characters of King Arthur’s Court, the love of Gwennwyfar and Lancelet, Arthur’s battles against the Saxons, the quest for the Holy Grail, and all the other traditional storylines that are found in Arthurian legend. But if this novel had only been meant as a retelling, there would have been no purpose for its being written. Instead, the novel retells the Arthurian legends from the women’s point of view, something that has never been done before, and it is done more splendidly than anyone else could have ever imagined.

But why did Marion Zimmer Bradley decide to retell the Arthurian legend from the feminist perspective, and what purpose did she think it would serve? I believe she wished to express her own views on religion, in contrast to how far she thought the negative reactions of the women’s movement toward patriarchal religions were practical.

When the women’s movement began, one of its major goals was to overthrow the patriarchal society in which women lived. This patriarchal society was largely formed as a result of the Jewish and Christian religions. These religions worship the god, Yahweh, and because He is a male god, they hold the belief that men are superior to women. Examples of this sexist behavior can be found in the Bible and the Judaic Christian traditions. One example is the tale of Adam’s first wife, Lilith. Because she refused to have Adam lie on top of her, therefore allowing him to be the dominant figure in the relationship, Lilith was thrown out of the Garden of Eden. The Jewish tradition then turned her into a witch who curses men with sterility and wet dreams. The first woman who sought to be liberated was cursed and ridiculed by men (Goldenberg ’72-3). Other examples can be found in the epistles of St. Paul when he tells women to be submissive to their husbands.

*Wives should be submissive to their husbands as if to the Lord because the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of his body the church, as well as its savior. As the church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands in...
The Mists of Avalon

Marion Zimmer Bradley is a feminist who believes we must rewrite myth and history; women should no longer be portrayed as evil because of things they did which were in conflict with patriarchal society; instead, they should be credited for all the good they have accomplished for mankind. This includes rewriting myth so that women, who were misunderstood by patriarchal societies, are not perverted in the retelling of the story as they have been in the patriarchal versions; instead, in rewritten myth, the women should be depicted as they very probably were, rather than how patriarchal societies chose to view them. By retelling the story through the character of King Arthur’s sister, Morgan Le Fay, known as Morgaine in The Mists of Avalon, Bradley shows how the Arthurian legends were distorted by male writers.

The front page of the novel begins with a quote from Sir Thomas Malory’s Morte d’Arthur, saying “Morgan le Fay was not married, but put to school in a nunnery, where she became a great mistress of magic” (Bradley n.p.). Then in the prologue, Bradley allows Morgaine to speak for herself and refute Malory’s statement as being untrue:

“In my time I have been called many things: sister, lover, priestess, wise woman, queen. Now in truth I have come to be wise woman, and a time may come when these things may need to be known. But in sober truth, I think it is the Christians who will tell the last tale. For ever the world of Fairy drifts further from the world in which the Christ holds sway. I have no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests, who call the Great Goddess a demon and deny that she ever held power in this world. At best, they say that her power was of Satan. Or else they clothe her in the blue robe of the Lady of Nazareth— who indeed had power in her way, too—and say that she was ever virgin. But what can a virgin know of the sorrows and travail of mankind?” (Bradley ix)

These words begin the enticing novel, which then goes on to show us who the real Morgaine was … a priestess of the Great Goddess, and a woman who fought to preserve her religion against the spread of Christianity, which claimed the Goddess was evil and that Christianity was the only true religion. Morgaine, as a priestess of Avalon, is a devotee of a matriarchal type of religion because her religion worships a Goddess, rather than a God. Whenever a patriarchal religion such as Judaism or Christianity came into contact with a matriarchal religion, it tried to transform the matriarchal religion’s beliefs to be in agreement with their own. What the patriarchal religions could not convert into their own beliefs, they then perverted to make it appear evil. In many cases, this meant that patriarchal religions believed religions where a goddess was worshipped had to be evil simply because women are evil.

And of course, women inherited this evil from Eve when she sinned in Eden.

“…it was through a woman that mankind had fallen into original Sin, and every woman must be aware that it was her work to atone for that Original Sin in Eden. No woman could ever be really good except for Mary the Mother of Christ; all other women were evil, they had never had any chance to be anything but evil” (Bradley 268)

In The Mists of Avalon, not only are women evil, but the Christian priests whose religion is replacing the religion of the Great Goddess in King Arthur’s Britain, are imposing evil interpretations upon Morgaine’s religion. As Christianity compares all women to Eve, thus making them evil, so “the priests say that their Goddess is that same old serpent of evil whom our Lord drove from the Garden of Eden!” (Bradley 554). What the priests are doing to the Goddess in Celtic Britain is exactly what their forebears in the patriarchal Jewish religion did to the matriarchal societies they came into contact with. Archeological evidence shows that the worship of a Goddess at one time was common throughout most of the Western world, and probably existed even before the patriarchal religions. Joseph Campbell believes the Goddess, which was originally an Indo-European belief that spread throughout the ancient world, survived longer and in a closer to the original form in Ireland than in any other part of the world. Campbell discusses how the patriarchal religions did not always wipe out the belief in the mother goddess, but instead they rewrote the belief in the mother goddess for their own benefit. In the Levantine, before the Jewish people came in and rewrote the story of Adam and Eve to their own advantage, there existed a belief in a goddess whose consort was a serpent; this serpent’s title was Ningizzida, “Lord of the Tree of Truth” (Campbell 9). The goddess and her serpent consort also had a son who had to follow a “quest for release from the bondages of birth, disease, old age, and death” (Campbell 16). Joseph Campbell goes on to explain how this family, which was worshipped throughout the Middle East, was transformed by a patriarchal religion into the Biblical Adam and Eve story. The goddess was transformed into Eve, and because she listened to the serpent, she became evil. Ningizzida, “Lord of the Tree of Truth,” is of course, the serpent who already ate of the apple, and because he is wise, therefore the patriarchal religions decided that he was also sinful. The son of Ningizzida and the Goddess is probably the Adam of the Bible story. In the Biblical version, Adam is then made to be the spouse, rather than the son of Eve. Whereas his mother should be dominant over him, the patriarchal religion then did something even worse, by stating that Eve was created out of Adam’s rib, therefore again stating that men are superior to women. (Campbell 29-30)

In The Mists of Avalon, Marion Zimmer Bradley shows how this old Mother Goddess/Serpent religion which had been wiped out by patriarchal religions in the Middle East, was still in existence in fifth century Celtic Britain. Along with the worship of the Goddess, the serpent was also preserved in the Celtic religions. In The Mists of Avalon, the kingmaking involved the king taking part in the Beltane festivals. At this festival, the king would marry the land and pledge to
support the holy isle of Avalon. As a symbol of their support, kings would be given serpent bracelets or tattoos around their wrists. At one point in the novel, Morgaine states that the story of how St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland is really a way of saying he drove out the Druids – which are the serpents of wisdom (Bradley 769). The Druids were renowned for their wisdom, and therefore their connection to serpents is not surprising; furthermore, the connection of serpents to wisdom can obviously be seen as stemming from the old story of Adam and Eve, where the serpent is wise from eating of the apple, no matter whether you look at the Biblical or the more ancient version. Furthermore, the idea of the apple as providing wisdom was also preserved in the Celtic world, because the name of the holy isle, Avalon, comes from the welsh word “aval” meaning “apple” (Westwood 21), and this isle was said to be filled with apple trees, as Bradley describes it in her novel.

In the novel, King Arthur’s reign is a time when Britain and the Celtic religions are in danger of succumbing to the patriarchal religion of Christianity. Since Britain is one of the last strongholds of the “true religion,” the religion of the Great Goddess, Morgaine cannot allow Christianity to rewrite the Goddess and her religion as evil or to reinterpret it to suit their conventions.

Throughout the early part of the novel, Morgaine does not agree with the Christian priests, but also feels that everyone has a right to believe what they want. However, when her brother, King Arthur, marries Gwenhwyfar, the trouble begins. King Arthur has been sworn to protect the isle of Avalon and promote the worship of the Goddess, since Avalon helped to set him on his throne. Yet at the same time, he allows Christianity to exist in his realm, believing that all men have the right to choose their own religions. However, Gwenhwyfar is a very strong Christian woman, and like the Christian priests, she believes that the Goddess and all religions other than her own are evil.

After several years of marriage to Arthur, Gwenhwyfar is still unable to produce an heir to the throne. Her strong Christian faith leads her to believe that the reason she cannot have a child is because God is angry with Britain since the pagan religions are still allowed to exist in it. Gwenhwyfar thinks that if Arthur truly makes Britain a Christian land, then God will look with favor on Britain, provide an heir for the throne, and continue Britain’s stability. When Arthur’s army goes out to battle against the Saxons, Gwenhwyfar convinces her husband to not carry the banner of Avalon, but only the banner of Christ into battle. After much argument, Arthur agrees with his wife, but this makes many of his people, who are followers of Avalon, angry enough with Arthur to desert his army. Even with reduced numbers, Arthur still succeeds in winning a major victory against the Saxons. Gwenhwyfar convinces him that it is God who has given him this victory because he has put away the old pagan ways and carried the banner of Christ into battle against the pagans. When the King of Britain forsakes Avalon, which he has sworn to protect, by becoming a Christian, the religion of the Goddess cannot expect to survive

Morgaine, of course, is furious that her brother has betrayed the holy isle. The final straw for her is when peace is made with the Saxons, and Arthur’s sword, Excalibur, which is part of the holy regalia of Avalon, is flipped upside down to form a cross, upon which the Saxons and King Arthur swear an oath of peace. Morgaine knows that if her religion continues to be treated with such disrespect, and the sacred regalia of Avalon continues to be desecrated, her religion will disappear. She makes an attempt to kill her brother and establish her lover and fellow worshipper of the Goddess, Accolon, upon his throne, but instead Arthur slays Accolon, and Morgaine flees to Avalon where her brother can not reach her.

After several years of hiding, Morgaine decides that she must return to Camelot one last time to remind Arthur of his vows, by force if need be, and to try and preserve the religion of Avalon and the Goddess. With her fellow priestess, Raven, she disguises herself as a peasant woman and journeys to Camelot. The two priestesses arrive on Pentecost, the greatest feast day in Britain, when King Arthur hears petitions from his people. On this particular feast day, the Church and kingdom are celebrating Christianity’s conquering of the old pagan ways in Britain. To solemnize this event, a mass is going to be held, and the bishop intends to use the holy cup of the Druids in the Mass to symbolize that Christianity has defeated the evil pagan ways.

Already, the sword of the Druid Regalia has been used sacrilegiously, and Morgaine cannot allow such an act of sacrilege to also occur against the holy cup. As one woman, there is not much she can do to stop it, but she prays to the Goddess to use her as a means to prevent this from happening. Suddenly, her body is literally taken over, and she is transformed into the Goddess. She picks up the holy cup of Avalon, and holding it in her hands, she appears as the Goddess before all of the court. Morgaine floats about the room in the form of the Goddess while she brings the cup to everyone in the court and they drink from it; they drink the holy water of the sacred well of Avalon, drink from the cup which represents the cauldron of Ceridwen, the Goddess, which is the cup of life.

After everyone has drunk from the cup, through the power of the Goddess, Morgaine makes the cup disappear from the court and return to Avalon so it can never be under threat of desecration again. Morgaine then resumes her regular form, but this remains unnoticed by everyone because they are too overwhelmed at the miracle. Before anyone realizes what they have actually seen, the bishop goes around the room telling everyone they have seen Mary, the Mother of God, and that the cup which they have all drunk from is nothing less than the Holy Grail, the cup which Christ used at the last supper. Everyone believes this, and when Gawaine notices that the vessel is gone, the knights become determined to bring it back to Camelot, thus beginning the famous quest for the “Holy Grail.”
Will this happen? Will Christianity and other patriarchal religions fall because of the women's movement? It's a question that's been pondered for centuries. As men themselves (Goldenberg 31, 36) struggle with the fear of being stripped of their power, there is a growing sense that Yahweh and Christ are losing their grip on the world. The Oedipal complex, which has kept men in a subservient position for so long, is beginning to crumble. When women become liberated, men will finally be able to free themselves from their own fear of being toppled by a supreme female figure (Goldenberg 9). But men should not fear this – by recognizing the power of women, they can no longer rule in Heaven (Goldenberg 10). When women become liberated, men will realize they are no longer the supreme rulers on earth, and if they cannot rule on earth anymore, shouldn't they also realize that they can no longer rule in Heaven (Goldenberg 9)?

Today, there is a large number of women seeking to become priests, ministers, or holders of other positions in the clergy which have traditionally been held by men. Many denominations, including the Catholic Church, are against having women enter the clergy. Pope Paul VI made a statement in 1977 that if women were to play at being priests, then they would play at being God, and Christianity can only afford to have men in that role (Goldenberg 7). The women's movement interprets this as men's fear that women will take over religion and destroy the male supremacy (Goldenberg 7). The women's movement, however, doesn't seem to be buying this idea. Christianity is trying to make peace with the women's movement by showing verses in the Bible that praise women, or state that God is not just a God for men. One of the most often quoted verses for this purpose is that "in Christ 'there is neither male or female'" (Goldenberg 80). Christianity is trying to make God appear androgynous so He can be a god for both men and women. The women's movement believes that women can bring about the end of God's reign because the church has made Brigid a saint, another example of how patriarchal religions distort other religions to fit their own needs, the Goddess will live on in Christian form.

As the novel ends, Morgaine prays to the Goddess: "Mother," she whispered, "forgive me. I thought I must do what I now see you can do for yourself. The Goddess is within us, yes, but now I know that you are in the world too, now and always, just as you are in Avalon, and in the hearts of all men and women. Be in me too now, and guide me, and tell me when I need only let you do your will..." (Bradley 876)

Morgaine realizes that even if the Goddess is not apparent in the world, she still exists there. The same is true with the holy chalice of the Druid Regalia. It is no longer in the world, but in the holy isle of Avalon, yet as Morgaine knows, "It is in Avalon, but it is here. It is everywhere. And those who have need of a sign in this world will see it always." (Bradley 875).

Because the church has made Brigid a saint, another example of how patriarchal religions distort other religions to fit their own needs, the Goddess will live on in Christian form. As the novel ends, Morgaine prays to the Goddess: "Morgaine, was it all for nothing then, what we did, and all that we tried to do? Why did we fail?" [Morgaine replies,] "You did not fail, my brother, my love, my child. You held this land in peace for many years, so that the Saxons did not destroy it. You held back the darkness for a whole generation, until they were civilized men, with learning and music and faith in God, who will fight to save something of the beauty of the times that are past. If this land had fallen to the Saxons when Uther died, then would all that was beautiful or good have perished forever from Britain. And so you did not fail, my love. None of us knows how she will do her will – only that it will be done." (Bradley 867-8)

In the epilogue, Morgaine goes to Glastonbury to visit the graves of her brother, Guinevere, and her aunt, Viviane, who had once been Lady of the Lake. They are all buried at Glastonbury, a Christian abbey. Yet, despite the spread of Christianity throughout Britain, Morgaine is not upset. This visit is an awakening for her – particularly when she is surprised to see that among the Christian saints, St. Brigid is venerated at the abbey.

"But Brigid is not a Christian saint, she thought, even if Patricius thinks so. That is the Goddess as she is worshipped in Ireland. And I know it, and even if they think otherwise, these women know the power of the Immortal. Exile her as they may, she will prevail. The Goddess will never withdraw herself from mankind." (Bradley 875). The belief in the Goddess has returned to mankind because of the women's movement. Women are angry at patriarchy, and part of the patriarchal religions which have kept them down. They are tired of a male God who works the way that men want Him to, and they are equally tired of hearing that women are evil as the Bible claims they are. Because of this dissatisfaction with Christianity and other patriarchal religions, women are rediscovering the ancient Goddess whom the patriarchal religions oppressed and destroyed, just as men oppress women. Because the Goddess has reemerged and women are turning to her, seeing themselves as having the Goddess within them, many in the women's movement believe patriarchal religions will come to an end.

Meanwhile, Morgaine returns home to Avalon. Years continue to pass as she hears tales of how the knights have left Camelot on their quest and how many of them have died. Eventually, she also hears that Mordred, Arthur and Morgaine's son who was conceived in an act of incest before Arthur and Morgaine realized they were brother and sister, attempted to steal the kingdom from Arthur, resulting in both father and son being slain.

Morgaine goes to Arthur as he is dying; she takes the holy sword, Excalibur, from him and throws it into the lake where it will forever be safe from the Christians. As her brother now lies dying in her arms, she is no longer angry at him for his betrayal of Avalon. He is simply her brother, the same brother who lay in her arms as a child. While his kingdom is torn by war, and he lies dying in his sister's embrace, he asks:

Will this happen? Will Christianity and other patriarchal religions fall because of the women's
movement? Although there are women in favor of the fall of Christianity, there are also members of the women's movement who believe the Goddess must be brought back, but at the same time, the continual presence of male gods won’t be harmful to women. Women may even be able to find some value in keeping old patriarchal gods and finding places for them in religion (Goldenberg 82). There are also some women who want to keep a male god simply so they have someone to yell at and blame for things that go wrong, and then they can turn toward the nurturing, caring Goddess for comfort. In a way, these ideas are being stolen from Christianity or at least rewriting it; whereas now we have God who is good, and the Devil who is evil, if these women get their way, then God will become the bad guy, and the Goddess shall be the one mankind, and womenkind, turn to in their time of need. Even if these changes take place, to put a single deity in charge of evil is a Christian tendency (Goldenberg 82), yet it is a tendency the women's movement may not want to give up if they want to continue blaming men.

But how does The Mists of Avalon fit in with this desire to topple God and bring back the Goddess? Marion Zimmer Bradley certainly believes that patriarchal religions have rewritten pagan religions to be evil, rather than the beautiful things that many of them were. Her argument with Christianity, told through Morgaine's voice, seems to be that the Celtic religions and the Goddess are needed because Christ is not enough for a religion to be. The Celtic religion was very similar to Hinduism in that it also believed in the concept of reincarnation. At one point in the novel, Morgaine and Arthur's mother, Igraine, has the thought “Christians said they were free of the superstitions of the Druids, but they had their own, and Igraine felt that these were even more distressing, being separated from nature” (Bradley 48). In truth, Christianity does not seem very connected to Nature because mankind is not supposed to be in communion with Nature, but the master of it, and therefore, above it. However, Morgaine feels the need to commune with Nature because “Those who live in close kinship with the earth need something more than salvation” which is all that Christianity offers (Bradley 681). Morgaine believes Christianity does not work because fear of priests, or God's wrath “or anything else, will ever keep mankind from committing sins,” … “but only when they have gained enough wisdom in all their lives that they know that error is useless and evil must be paid for, sooner or later” (Bradley 783). Morgaine believes Christianity's beliefs are wrong, that as a religion they have forgotten the true Mysteries, the ones which her religion follows, but then she realizes:

“They have not forgotten the Mysteries,” she said, “they have found them too difficult. They want a God who will care for them, who will not demand that they struggle for enlightenment, but who will accept them just as they are, with all their sins, and take away their sins with repentance. It is not so, it will never be so, but perhaps it is the only way the unenlightened can bear to think of their Gods.”

Lancelet smiled bitterly. “Perhaps a religion which demands that every man must work through lifetime after lifetime for his own salvation is too much for mankind. They want not to wait for God’s justice, but to see it now. And that is the lure which this new breed of priests has promised them.” (Bradley 808).

Morgaine, like her modern day counterparts in the women's movement, seeks to overthrow Christianity, and make sure the Goddess is remembered, but by the end of the novel, she is no longer advocating this. As at the beginning of the novel, Morgaine realizes that she has “no quarrel with the Christ, only with his priests...” (Bradley ix). It is not necessarily the God the Christians worship who has made women subordinate to men, but the men who are in charge of running that religion. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton said, “The first step in the elevation of women under all systems of religion is to convince them that the Great Spirit of the Universe is in no way responsible for any of these absurdities” (Daly 13). Morgaine realizes that “the God they both worshipped was greater and less bigoted than any priesthood” (Bradley 118), and that “our differences make no difference at all to God” (Bradley 38). At the end of the novel, she has gone even a step further by stating, that whatever is the will of the Goddess, it will happen, and no matter how mankind fights for or against this will, it will come to pass if it is what the Goddess wants to happen. Perhaps this is Marion Zimmer Bradley's view of the women's movement and their feelings toward religion. Patriarchal religions have repressed women and matriarchal religions. Perhaps the women's movement is right and we should pray to the Goddess instead of God, and perhaps God will be toppled, but Morgaine herself has no real argument with God, only with the religions that claim it is God who says women are evil and inferior. Marion Zimmer Bradley may choose to believe in the Goddess, yet at the same time, she doesn't seem to believe we have to get rid of God and Christ. In one sense, she doesn't take a definite stand on which side is right. Instead she seems to be saying that whatever the truth is, and no matter what the women's movement or any other groups say, what the Goddess, or Supreme Being wants to happen is what will happen.

Upon the publication of The Mists of Avalon, the reviewers did nothing but rave. Isaac Asimov called it “The best retelling of the Arthurian saga I have ever read. Completely compelling” (New York Times Book Review8). Other reviewers compared the novel to Mary Stewart's Merlin novels written in the 1970's and early 1980's, and also as of equal or greater value to T.H. White's The Once and Future King (Cassada 2351). Even Christian reviewers applauded the novel. One female Christian said that the novel raised fundamental questions about the relationship of the old Goddess religions to Christianity, and that it “Offers a feminist critique of patterns of power, sexuality, and salvation which the Christian Church and contemporary society take for granted.” (Zikmund 490)
Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend by Cheryl Carpinello

Guinevere Comes Alive as Thirteen-Year Old Prospective Bride in Children's Novel

There is no end to the number of novels being written about the Arthurian legend, and exciting new children's author Cheryl Carpinello can now be added to the number of writers recreating the legend for new generations with “Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend.” Carpinello has been teaching the Arthurian legend to her high school English classes for nearly twenty years, and now that interest has resulted in her first novel about a young Guinevere, on the eve of her thirteenth birthday, when her life is about to change forever.

The reader is first introduced to Guinevere when she is in the forest hunting rabbits with her seven-year old friend Cedwyn. She is not quite as ladylike as a princess should be, considering she is the daughter of King Leodegrance. Nor is she happy that as her thirteenth birthday approaches, she will be expected to take on a more adult role in the castle and prepare for possible marriage.

Guinevere finds that things get a bit easier when the wizard Merlyn arrives to participate in her birthday celebrations. But King Arthur also comes, and through her father, he makes a proposal she is uncertain is in her best interests.

After a fantastic birthday party and a couple of encounters with a magical beast in the forest, Guinevere starts to accept what her role will be in the future. She also realizes she still has...
some time left to enjoy her youth, and she is happy that her adult role will allow her young friend, Cedwyn, eventually to fulfill his own dream of becoming a squire and then a knight.

"Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend" is not a long or complicated story. It is just over one hundred pages, but it is a pleasant reading experience. It does not try to accomplish too much, but rather it is one of those rare books where the author understood that less is more and fully delivers in making each page valuable and interesting. The sighting of a unicorn in the book is an example of this—the delicate handling of the scene leaves the reader as much in awe as Guinevere over the magical beast. Similarly, the illustrations are not elaborate but simple drawings, yet they are magical for what they leave to the reader’s imagination. While the influence of T.H. White can be felt in the novel’s pages, and perhaps a bit of Disney’s film version The Sword in the Stone in the illustrations, Carpinello manages to create a unique and original version of Guinevere’s childhood.

Carpinello is obviously enthusiastic about sharing the Arthurian legend with young readers. Her biography states that “The focus in her writing is on reluctant readers.” I felt she provided enough magic and detail to appeal to readers of all ages, especially in her realistic portrait of Guinevere coming of age. I also appreciated her short, educational section at the book’s end, including a discussion of the King Arthur Legend, a glossary, discussion questions, and some additional reading. The book is suitable for readers, depending on their reluctance or proclivity to read, from about third grade through middle school, although as an adult, I enjoyed the book thoroughly.

Well done all around, “Guinevere: On the Eve of Legend” is a novel sure to win readers’ hearts and add to the many fans of the King Arthur legend. Perhaps best of all, Carpinello is now busy writing “The King’s Ransom,” the first in her prospective “Young Knights of the Round Table” series. To learn more about Cheryl Carpinello and her books visit www.beyondtodayeducator.com.

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