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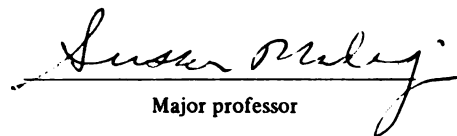
Images of Women in Arthurian Art

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Carolyn Marie Damstra

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Images of Women in Arthurian Art

By

Carolyn Marie Damstra

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ABSTRACT

Images of Women in Arthurian Art

By

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Both late medieval manuscript images and Victorian revival art dealing with Arthurian legend reflect truths about the cultures to which they belong. The specific way women are represented in depictions of Arthurian myth indicate those truths. Arthurian legend was, in part, a product and reinforcement of the idea of *fin amour,* or courtly love, in the late medieval ages. Women's role in courtly love involved being a catalyst for the chivalric behavior of knights. Manuscript images of the legend reinforce women's role in this social construct.

In the nineteenth-century Victorian Revival of the legend, issues of national identity and a renewed emphasis of sexual morality fostered another flowering of this particular mythology. A group of artists, the Pre-Raphaelites, painted many Arthurian subjects. Like the manuscript images, Pre-Raphaelite paintings contained elements that imply certain moral lessons and women's roles. Female beauty and sexuality are the means by which these messages are transmitted. Furthermore, the personal relationships the male artists had with their models and other women are similar to themes and attitudes in Arthurian legends.

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INTRODUCTION

An examination of the art of Arthurian legend allows one to gain an understanding of its various levels of meaning. The focus of this thesis will be on the art of the two most significant flowerings of the myth of Arthur: medieval manuscripts and the nineteenth-century Victorian revival. Within the latter period, the work of selected Pre-Raphaelite artists will be explored. I will examine how the way women are depicted in these legends reveals gender attitudes in their respective medieval and nineteenth-century cultural contexts.

The character of Arthur appears in Welsh chronicles of the tenth century as a warlord who died battling the Saxons. A fuller version of his story appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1136). Here Arthur is first established as a king. This is a secular history of important personages of British ancestry, re-affirming England's political authority and autonomy. Geoffrey also gave form to many of the main characters such as Guinevere; Arthur's wife, and Merlin, a magician who aids Arthur throughout his life.

The love story of Lancelot and Guinevere, as well as Lancelot's quest for the Holy Grail, would eventually dominate both the literature and the art of Arthurian legend at the courts of France. A more complete, romance version of the story, Chretien de Troye's *Lancelot,* was written in the late twelfth century under the sponsorship and influence of Marie de Champagne. The legend expanded into many different versions around this period, branching off into other characters and their stories. One hundred and eighty manuscripts survive of the *Vulgate Prose Cycle* originally composed between 1215 and 1235.[1] This was the most

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[1] Walters, p. 42.

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popular version of the story consisting of five parts arranged in chronological order. The story of Lancelot and Guinevere figures prominently in three of the sections of the cycle, starting in the middle section, known as the Prose Lancelot.[2] Finally, Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur (1470) is an important source for Victorian art.[3] This author downplays the theme of Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery, instead focusing on chivalry and secular knighthood.[4]

There are numerous other manifestations of Arthurian art that are not fully addressed in this essay. There is hardly an art form that the legends did not touch at one time or another. Some of these are 'Love Caskets,' combs, mirror-backs and misericords. These typically show delicately painted or carved scenes of Lancelot and Guinevere as well as other popular literary couples such as Tristan and Isolde. Wall murals and tapestries of Arthurian themes were in vogue for a period between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Records indicate that Arthurian subjects were quite prevalent in the arts. However, much has not survived due to the fragile nature of the materials as well as it being a secular rather than religious subject.[5]

By the fourteenth century Arthur had a pan-European following.[6] Germany produced many popular folk manuscripts. In Italy and Spain there existed versions of The Vulgate Cycle copied from French models.[7] The Crusaders transported the small, easily portable manuscripts across Europe and even into Asia and Northern Africa.

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[2] Lori Walters (p.4.) points out that the Prose Lancelot includes an extended prose version of Chretien's Chevalier de la Charrete.

[3] Malory was re-published in the 1820s which helped spur the Arthurian revival. Tennyson's Idylls of the King furthered the myth's popularity and use as social commentary. The Pre-Raphaelites looked at both Mallory and Tennyson as a basis for their art.

[4] Walters, intro. xxxi.

[5] Lacy, p. 492-3.

[6] Lacy, p. 492.

[7] Whitaker, p. 53. Tristan and other romances were also popular and Italy produced many original works.

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century Arthurian myth is virtually non-existent, especially in the visual arts.[8] However, the Gothic Revival in England brought about renewed interest in the theme. One of its first re-appearances is William Dyce's idealized, heroic frescos for Queen Victoria's robing room (Figure 12). These early Victorian Arthurian themes served a nationalistic function of glorifying British history—comparable to Geoffrey of Monmouth's original formulation of the hero of Arthur. Tennyson's popular poetry reinforced this nationalistic interpretation of the theme. It would take the efforts of certain innovative Pre-Raphaelites to draw out more personal, private visions of the Arthurian world. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holden Hunt, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones are among the artists whose work emphasizes this personal vision.

My investigation will parallel the point of view of the twentieth-century mythologist and author Joseph Campbell. His idea of the third function of myth, the sociological function of validating and enforcing a specific social and moral order, can be applied to imagery as well as literature.[9] One must not see these images as a true reflection of reality, but rather as an interpretation of cultural issues.

It is interesting to study a legend that was based loosely on historic events, but has been re-invented over and over to fit within the context of different periods. Indeed, the story of Arthur has been re-written to the point that it is mythology, not history. But mythology, like art, often gives us more insight into the culture it resides in than factual details of events ever could. It is even more

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[8] Mancoff, p. xvii. Mancoff characterizes the interest in Arthurian legend as having lapsed into "skepticism and burlesque," and as non-existent in the visual arts.
[9] Joseph Campbell, "Man & Myth," *Psychology Today*, July 1971.

interesting to study visual images of an oral or written legend because they offer new or different interpretive possibilities. Images, even when they are about events that occurred long ago, are often painted in the style of their contemporary period, and often reveal physical evidence, such as clothing or furnishings, of the artist's present culture. Therefore, these images are uniquely qualified to reveal evolutions that have occurred in a mythological subject due to cultural changes. While much Pre-Raphaelite and Victorian art scholarship exists, there is less art-historical study of vernacular manuscript illustration. Many of my observations of the manuscript images, therefore, originate from information gleaned from the literature as well as stylistic and iconographic interpretations appropriate for manuscript illustration.

I focus on the women in manuscripts of the Middle Ages in order to show how they compare with certain Pre-Raphaelite images of female characters. By focusing on specific ways women have been shown in the imagery—or not shown, as the case may be—I hope to look beyond the surface plot and investigate the connections between women of the myth and women in their contemporaneous cultures.

Both periods share an interest in serving the interests of a strong monarchy, establishing ordered roles for citizens, and enforcing sexual morality. An example which demonstrates how these ideas were embodied in Arthurian myth is from Chretien de Troye's *Lancelot*. Arthur is betrayed by Guinevere and Lancelot's adultery which leads to the eventual collapse of Arthur's kingship.[10] This theme of tension between natural, personal passion and civic responsibility is echoed in the art of both periods. The Arthurian scholar Lori Walters writes about this in the introduction to *Lancelot and Guinevere: a*

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[10] The effect of Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery varies in different versions.

Casebook. "From its inception, the legend opposed the private and public domains: an overwhelmingly passionate love that promised personal happiness came into irrevocable conflict with the common good."[11] I intend to explore the role that women have in this dynamic. Women have carried more than their share of the burden for moral and sexual responsibility. When looking at the images of Arthurian legend, I will be asking if there is evidence of that responsibility in the images and how it is manifested. Furthermore, I will explore the question of whether or not the portrayal of women changes between the two periods. These questions may help show how visual culture operates in reinforcing women's roles.

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[11] Walters, p. 1v.

Chapter 1

Medieval Manuscript Images: Pedestals or Prisons?

The rise of romance literature and *fin amour,* or courtly love, was a reflection of changes in Northern European society during the Middle Ages. The increasing presence of Arthurian myth in vernacular literature from the twelfth century on both reflected and reinforced new developments in politics, class structure and gender roles.[12] In this chapter I will investigate the relationship between Arthurian and related manuscript illustrations and these cultural developments, focusing specifically on women and the relationships between the sexes.

Northern Europe in the Middle Ages

One important use of Arthurian legend at this time was political: the affirmation of monarchical rule.[13] Beginning in the ninth and tenth centuries, the nobility began to accumulate lands and set up small, independent dynasties. Squads of warriors were established for the defense of surrounding villages.[14] Eventually this system would expand into a more elaborate court system of knights, ladies, kings and queens. It was a separate sphere containing its own sub-culture and art forms. Beginning in the eleventh century, the stories of Arthur and accompanying characters evolved along with the court system. By

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[12] Muriel Whitaker, p. 6.
[13] Georges Duby, *The Courtly Model*, p.263.

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the end of the Middle Ages many transformations of the story would take place. This is partly due to the ongoing conflicts between France and England. For example, their competition contributed to the decline of Arthur as the main focus of the legend because French authors and artists wanted to downplay the heroism of a British king.[15]

Another factor that contributed to the evolution of Arthurian legend was the growth of hierarchical economic systems. Advances in technology as well as a period of unusually benevolent climate conditions[16] led to increased agricultural development. One consequence of this was an increase in human population. However, the lower classes did not significantly benefit from the abundance because the profits were systematically channeled to the aristocratic class. The economic structure therefore became more unbalanced. [17] The upper class's newfound wealth and leisure provided the means for a rich court system and a flowering of the arts which included Arthurian legend.

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[14] Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle ages,* p. 66.

[15] Debra Mancoff, p. xviii.

[16] Based on scientific soil analysis. see Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages,* p. 64.

[17] Duby, *The Courtly Model,* p. 151. Population reached a peak in the last quarter of the twelfth century (in France). The nobility protected the system of seigniorial taxation by reducing donations to the church, limiting their birth rate and exerting control over marriage in order to prevent the watering down of their wealth and holdings.

Courtly Love

Within the larger political context a more individualistic social function was performed by romance literature. The events of the romance narratives revolve around a few main themes. These are loyalty, chivalry, and sexual temptation. Women are often portrayed as catalysts for heroic actions by men, the protagonists. Women are both the motivation and the reward. It was ultimately the young, unmarried male for whom this story was written and illustrated. In Georges Duby's words, "Courtly literature is concerned with the effect of love on a man, his development of self-awareness and the ensuing conflicts. The woman whom the poet loves is a mirror in which he sees his ideal self."[18] Duby explains that the legends acted as a reinforcement of male egos and helped young men mature into responsible adults and knights.

The legends grew more popular as part of the flowering of *fin amour,* or courtly love.[19] This can be broadly explained as the man's service and devotion to a particular woman. He gains glory and honor by placing her on a pedestal and she is the receiver of his attention and protection. Two important questions are: who benefits more overall? and is it really to the advantage of women to be placed on a pedestal?

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[18] Duby, *The Courtly Model,* p. 10.

[19] In *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia,* Norris Lacy mentions a debate over whether or not courtly love was a "historical and cultural phenomenon or simply a literary convention" (p. 101). My essay assumes that courtly love was integral to Arthurian literature and images, which were, for the most part, a product and reflection of the age in which the story was created and manifests in some way its contemporary cultural attitudes and gender relationships.

A number of influences inspired the formulation of *fin amour*. Knights

returning from conquests in the Holy Land brought Moorish ideas of love poetry,

but the reason for its popularity was due to the needs and circumstances of

medieval court systems. Specific gender roles for men and women in the

construct of *fin amour* mimic and support the hierarchical structure of the feudal

system:

> Poems developed around the theme of courtly love emphasized the self-denial implicit in serving the lady, which meant serving not one's equal, another man, but one's inferior, a woman. They thus reinforced the ethics of vassalage on which the whole political structure of the time rested. Courtly poetry thereby helped to firm up the foundation of the feudal state.[20]

To continue the analogy, knights would be the ruling, protector class who,

paradoxically, appear to serve women, their vassals.

Georges Duby, a leading medieval scholar, theorizes in his essay *The Courtly*

Model that one purpose of *fin amour* was to aid in managing men's sexual

desires by channeling them towards chivalrous acts.[21] Love games developed

in this context. There was a need at this time to control the sexual desires of a

growing population of young, aristocratic bachelors. Because inheritance was

passed down through blood lines, it was important for the status of families to

keep lines strong. Spreading the wealth too thinly among the sons would cause

their economic power to dissipate. A way of doing this was to marry the eldest

son well and expect the younger brothers to become celibate knights.

These were games where men competed for women as the prize, however,

there was the understanding that the love was professed but not physically

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[20] Duby, *The Courtly Model,* p. 261.
[21] Duby, *The Courtly Model,* p. 259.

consummated.[22] "The code of courtly love provided a useful function for the aristocracy, acting as a safety valve in a society of frustrated bachelors and chaste wives whose marriages were arranged for political reasons."[23] This was a new, emotional kind of love. It had the additional benefit of strengthening some marriages indirectly by providing an outlet for the expression of passion when it did not occur within the context of arranged marriages.

Religion

The legend of Arthur is based in part on a Celtic myth of a Welsh hero, but in the medieval stories the whole panorama of events and characters combines Christian faith and morality along with pagan practices and magical events. Northern Europe by this time had a long history of Christian and Celtic syncretism. "For a whole millennium, the church was obliged to struggle with and to absorb and adopt many pre-Christian elements belonging to an agricultural and seasonal cult."[24] It is difficult to designate precise links between pre-Christian mythological characters or deities and their possible ancestors in Arthurian literature because the stories were usually transmitted orally.[25] Connections to the past can be made through the names of places and

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[22] It must be stated that there was no one standard code of conduct or uniform system, and the relationship between events in literature and actual circumstances are complicated. The price for adultery in medieval society was high, often incurred the penalty of death for women.

[23] Bornstein, p. 45.

[24] Williamson, p. 28.

[25] Darrah, p. 3. During the Norman conquest Bretons traveled to Wales and brought back stories to France. These developed into romances such as the *matiere de Bretagne,* or the *matter of Britain,* begun by Chretien de Troyes. One of the heroes of an epic was Lancelot. Roger Sherman Loomis in his landmark work: *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* supported this theory, however later scholars debate the

characters, as well as similarities in themes. For example, the theme of a man

fighting, often to the death, for a woman of high rank is a common in ancient

tales. "Success in joust or tournament conferred on the winner a temporary

kingship. He would be replaced by a stronger when his vigor declined. The

dogma behind this long continued system was that the sexual potency of rulers

was thought vital to the well-being of their subjects."[26] There are parallels

between the chivalric, courtly code of conduct of the middle ages and many

earlier pagan rituals.[27]

Although Christianity certainly dominated medieval codes of sexuality and

morality, the influence of the aristocracy increased through the middle ages. The

late eleventh and twelfth centuries brought economic and demographic

expansion, along with more sophisticated courts: "The great princely

patrons—such as William, duke of Aquitaine, and, a half-century later, Henry

Plantagenet, duke of Normandy, count of Anjou, and husband of

Eleanor—whose luxurious courts set the tone, launched new fashions, and

offered protection to poets, countered the austerity of the Capetians and the

claims of the church by encouraging the development of a profane culture."[28]

These romances became, in part, a defiant response to the church and its

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origins, such as Claude Luttrell in *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance* (Norris Lacy, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia,* p. 408).

[26] Darrah, p. 5.

[27] Williamson; A similar theme is that of the "Oak-king" and the "holly King", from the Celtic practice of fertility rituals based on their yearly calendar. In order to assure fertility in both crops, animals and humans, the High Priestess had two consorts: an Oak King and a Holly king. They needed to be sacrificed twice yearly in order for their souls to remain young and healthy through their transference into succeeding kings. If they were allowed to grow old and die, then their powers and the power of the land would diminish with them.

authority over people's lives by creating another realm just for the people of the court.[29]

The single most important advantage for women was the lessening of misogynist Christian views of women as purveyors of the evils of sensuality and sexuality. Male spiritual leaders led the crusade against women: "He [St. Jerome] also furnished generations of misogynist writers with a battery of elegant vituperation and ferocious mockery directed against the foibles and follies of women. Patristic discussions of the place of sex in the Christian life are shot through with a fundamental ambivalence about the place of women in the scheme of salvation. Augustine agreed clearly and emphatically with other patristic writers in requiring that men observe the same norms of sexual conduct as women. At the same time, however, Augustine, like other patristic authors, considered women frankly inferior to men, both physically and morally."[30]

To a certain extent there were parallels in courtly and Christian ethics. The monotheistic religion of Christianity reinforced ideas of loyalty and fidelity as part of human existence. In this period, those ideas take on new meaning and have new power by their application to gender roles. One could see a parallel to Christian ideas in the knights acting as Christ-like saviors, noble defenders of goodness and honor. Women's role in these legends is like that of the body, or the church. It is a sanctuary to be protected.

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[28] Duby, *The Courtly Model* , 262.
[29] Scholars debate over whether romance literature serves as a teaching tool for morality, or acts to separate aristocratic culture from the church. The threat of female authority in the church led   to tighter

Images

I have chosen four image types that occur repeatedly in Arthurian, as well as other illustrated romances. These are: women watching knights at their games (often from a tower); women kidnapped and held in a tower until rescued by knights; trysts (affectionate displays that take place outdoors); and the consummation of Lancelot and Guinevere's desires. Although these categories of images are ones that actually include women, it is important to note that the majority of scenes focus mainly on males and their adventures and do not include female figures. References to women in manuscript illustrations are, for the most part, secondary to the actions of men. Women often occupy space in the background or sides of the picture space.

Scenes of knights at games such as jousting usually include the observation of women who are safely elevated behind castle walls. "Although the protection of women and children was one of the main tenets of the code [of chivalry], the system excluded women as participants and relegated them to the sidelines, where they formed an audience at tournaments."[31] In an illustration from *The Chronicles of England* the architecture serves to divide the women from the action (Figure 1).[32] It is as if they are cut off from the world of action and progressive time. Their role is to observe and be catalysts for the show of martial prowess: "In the typical romance, little attention is given to the

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restrictions on their influence in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Kreuger claims "lay noblewomen did bear indirectly the effects of clerical misogyny, which permeated vernacular literature" p. 21.

[30] Duby, *The Courtly Model*, p. 11.

[31] Kreuger, p. 20.

characterization of the lady, who exists mainly as a motivating force or source of inspiration for the knight."[33] She belongs to the world of structure and permanence symbolized by the architecture. Her role is of an enclosed container like the castle walls and towers.

There is an iconographic parallel to images of women in towers in some Christian images of Mary. Around this same time, reaching a peak in the thirteenth century, Mariolatry permeated Northern European culture.[34] Whitaker informs us that vernacular manuscript illustration often adapted patterns of composition from religious illustrations.[35] Here, women in towers as part of the architecture and in enclosed garden scenes (discussed later in this essay) have parallels in Mary as the embodiment of the church and an enclosed garden (*Hortus Conclusus*). However, art historian Henry Kraus denies the common assumption of a close connection between the cult of the Virgin and courtly love poetry. "But modern scholarship has rejected the hypothesis, arguing that the two are profoundly contradictory in essence, the frankly hedonistic nature of the one and the sex-denying emphasis of the other being only one phase of their antagonism"[36] Regardless of the relationship in meaning between the two, they share similar 'trappings' in visual imagery.

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[32] Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique: MS 9243, f.45.
[33] Bornstein, p. 1.
[34] Kraus, p. 43.
[35] Whitaker, p. 31. "To speed production workshops used model or pattern books." one interesting adaptation is King Arthur's round table from Last Supper scenes. Occasionally Arthur's table   is square due to imitation.
[36] Kraus, p. 50.

One of the more well-known illustrated Arthurian manuscripts is MS 805, of the Pierpont Morgan Library. A scene from this manuscript shows Guinevere and her ladies watching Lancelot and other knights jousting at Camelot (Figure 2).[37] The scene reads from left to right, starting with the women in the far upper left corner, safely contained in the tower of the castle. The scene spills onto two pages with the majority of the space taken up by the chaotic forms of swords, shields, horses and helmets engaged in mock battle. Guinevere gestures towards a wounded soldier, drawing the viewers' attention to the men.

The confusing arrangement of the men in the forefront in these images indicate their position in a world of chaos and conflict. It must not be overlooked that the safety of the court, men and women alike, depended on the readiness and skill of its warriors whose skills were kept sharp by games and competitions. These games strengthened fidelity among men who relied on each other in battle. Male relationships with males are central to the plot of Arthurian legend as well. For example, scholars have debated whether or not Arthur benefited more by Lancelot's love for Guinevere than suffered from it: Arthur's wife was part of the motivation for his loyalty and skill in battle.

Another scene containing a women placed in a tower is from Peter Langtoft's *The Chronicle of England*, written between 1307-27 (Figure 3). This is a scene depicting the story of Arthur's parentage: Uther Pendragon is conferring with Merlin, who uses his magic to disguise Uther as the Duke of Cornwall, Igraine's husband, so she would sleep with him. Arthur is the product of this union. Early

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[37] Pierpont Morgan Library, *Lancelot,* MS 805, f.262.

in the story of Arthur (before his birth) there are themes of adultery, betrayal and the use of sex for political purposes. Merlin enables the deception but by doing this he helps bring Arthur to the world for the greater benefit of society. Sex is integral to political maneuvers here, playing a role beyond procreation.

It is interesting that the depiction of Igraine has her arms hidden. Only her head is shown. She is an inanimate part of the structure. The clearly depicted keyhole, signifying a locked door, emphasizes her powerlessness in controlling her fate which extends to the sexual union that follows this scene. The woman plays the role of the victim while the men act as the protagonists.

A related type of image depicting women shows them abducted, usually kept in a tower, and rescued by knights. This theme includes an underlying eroticism and a suggestion of rape and abduction. Often the women reward their rescuers, as does Guinevere in Chretien de Troye's *Lancelot*. This creates a distinction between those men who play by the rules of honorable acquisition motivated by love and emotion and men who sexually violate because of physical lust. Men ultimately control the women's fate, but chivalrous men play by a different set of rules involving risk to themselves. They have to overcome dangerous obstacles in the act of rescuing the women, giving them an opportunity to display their chivalry.[38]

Murial Whitaker, an Arthurian scholar, gives Chretien the credit for shifting the focus of the Arthurian mythos from Arthur to Lancelot and also transforming it

into a "courtly" story rather than a historical one. "The crucial *conjointure* of chivalry, courtesy and Celtic magic which constitutes the essence of Arthurian romance was the achievement of Chretien de Troyes." She claims that the knight's motivations in Chretien's stories are no longer political or feudal, but motivated by a sense of "individual worth."[39]

Chretien de Troyes was the first to portray Guinevere as an adulteress in *Chevalier de la Charette* ("Knight of the Cart" also known as *Lancelot*) written in 1177. He was also the first to give her character a primary role.[40] His works have been seen by modern scholars as writings that set up the courtly model with women as central, though often problematic to the chivalric ideals. "Chretien's romances place his fictional heroines in a similarly contradictory position of privilege and displacement: seemingly at the center of court dilemma, they are marginalized from the action. They may appear to wield power, but their autonomy is threatened and appropriated by the plot of chivalric honor."[41]

Themes of rescue may be traced back to stories of abduction of women and goddesses that abound in Celtic mythology. Lori Walters proposes that Guinevere's character came out of Welsh legends where her character was originally "good." One predecessor was the *Aithed*, a story about an abduction

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[38] See Duby, *The Courtly Model,* p. 256. Knights could treat lower-class women "as brutally as they pleased." Treating women of the court differently was a way of aligning the knights with the   ruling aristocracy.
[39] Whitaker, p. 9
[40] Noble, p. 218.
[41] Roberta Kreuger, p. 34.

and rescue of a woman.[42] "The story of Guinevere and her abduction is ultimately based on a Celtic narrative in which a fairy leaves her otherworldly mate to become the wife of a mortal only to be reclaimed later by her original partner."[43] Perhaps Lancelot fulfills the role of the "otherworldly mate" who comes to claim his mate. In fact, Lancelot's parentage is unknown, even to himself. He was raised by priestesses on the Isle of Avalon, an enchanted, otherworldly place that figures prominently in many versions of the Arthurian legend.[44] A delicately illustrated manuscript of a romance *Lancelot* shows the knight as a young boy on the island (Figure 4, upper right quadrant).[45]

Chretien's *Lancelot* takes up the theme of abduction. The plot is centered around Lancelot's efforts to rescue Guinevere from Meleagant's castle, which is guarded by lions and surrounded by water. Some of these scenes are depicted in Morgan library MS 805 (Figures 2,5,6,7).[46] The images are depicted in narrative form and combine two scenes into one, as shown by the change in color of the border and background as well as a subtle compositional split in the middle. The images reflect the literary technique of interlacing form (*entrelacement*). Many plots are intertwined and come in at different times and

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[42] Norris, p. 269. One of the first images dealing with Arthurian theme is depicted on the tympanum at Modena, which illustrates a version of the *Aithed*. The sculpture may have been based on an oral tale brought by Bretons on their way to the Holy Land (Loomis).

[43] Walters, p. xiv. Also mentioned in *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, p. 269.

[44] Lacy, 25. Geoffrey of Monmouth names Avalon as an otherworldly island of Celtic mythology, home of Morgan le Fay, though the name may stem from older traditions such as one of the Fortunate Isles of classical myth. It appears in stories throughout Europe, especially in the Mediterranean, as a place of enchantment and paradise.

[45] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Arsenal 3479, f..1.

[46] This manuscript is the *Prose Lancelot*, an expansion of Chretien's *Lancelot*.

cause a complex weave of the strands of the story.[47] The illustrations are usually located in a place of transition in order to indicate the author's return to another sub-plot.

The first test of Lancelot's valor shows him riding in a cart in order to reach the castle (Figure 5).[48] The cart was a pillory reserved for those who committed murder or treason; it was therefore shameful to ride upon it. Lancelot had to put aside his pride and reputation for his love. At first Guinevere refuses to speak to Lancelot after he crosses the sword bridge because he hesitated to ride in the cart, showing a selfish importance placed on his reputation over his love. Roberta Kreuger looks into this event. "Woman's 'power' is a fiction of the male subject who needs her to resist so that he can desire her."[49] Guinevere's rejection, then, was simply a continuation of the game. Georges Duby takes the idea one step further, saying that these games "exalted the value which, at that period, was placed at the pinnacle of male values, and thus of all values-- sexual aggression. In order to heighten the man's pleasure, he demanded that the woman suppress her desire."[50]

Chretien "mystifies" woman, making her akin to the ever-elusive Holy Grail, justifying the knight's existence through his quest for both. There is a certain paradox inherent in this theme: women's subjugation has power over men. The women in the towers could be seen compositionally as rulers rather than

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[47] Bruckner, p. 58.
[48] Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 805, folio 165r.
[49] Kreuger, p. 238.
[50] Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages.* p. 58.

prisoners. They are above the danger below, which is taking place for their benefit. It is a complex arrangement of managing desire.

The next illustration of the rescue shows the queen and King Baudemagus (Meleagant's father) at the top of a tower watching Lancelot cross the "sword bridge" (Figure 6).[51] When he reaches the other side he must then defeat the lions that guard the queen. I see both mystical and sexual symbolic references here. The sword is symbolic of the danger and sacrifice that he is making. The water surrounding the castle represents the mystery of female sexuality, a boundary which he must cross. Crossing over the water is symbolic of the consummation that will take place if Lancelot endures the trials. The castle is like a womb, or Guinevere's protected sexuality, which he is trying to penetrate. Lancelot tames rather than acts challenged by the lion on the other side. The lion was a symbol of a knight in the middle ages. "For a man to win a beast to his service, especially a lion, the fiercest and noblest of beasts, was no less a sign of heroic character than slaying it..."[52]

The plot of this entire story is centered around Lancelot's quest for Guinevere and the obstacles he must overcome to gain her affection. I see this part of the tale, the conquest of sexual consummation, as a symbolic return to the womb for Lancelot: a place of peace and mystery outside the world. Lancelot was raised

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[51] Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 805, folio 166r.
[52] Smith, p. 160.

on the isle of Avalon by the Lady of the Lake, and his return to an island could be

seen as a return to a similar magical world.[53]

The sword bridge is symbolic of the danger and mystery of birth. Chretien's

description of Lancelot crossing the sword bridge symbolizes this journey:

> At the end of this very difficult bridge they dismount from their steeds and gaze at the wicked-looking stream, which is as swift and raging, as black and turgid, as fierce and terrible as if it were the devil's stream; and it is so dangerous and bottomless that anything failing into it would be as completely lost as if it fell into the salt sea . . . This bridge is badly made and built, and the construction of it is bad. If you do not change your mind in time, it will be too late to repent. You must consider which of several alternatives you will choose. Suppose that you once get across (but that cannot possibly come to pass, any more than one could hold in the winds and forbid them to blow, or keep the birds from singing, or re-enter one's mother's womb and be born again -- all of which is as impossible as to empty the sea of its water); but even supposing that you got across, can you think and suppose that those two fierce lions that are chained on the other side will not kill you, and suck the blood from your veins, and eat your flesh and then gnaw your bones?... he passes over with great pain and agony, being wounded in the hands, knees, and feet. But even this suffering is sweet to him: for Love, who conducts and leads him on, assuages and relieves the pain. Creeping on his hands, feet, and knees, he proceeds until he reaches the other side.[54]

The author makes a specific reference to the crossing as re-entering the

womb: "or re-enter one's mother's womb and be born again . . ." The blood from

his injuries can be seen as both sacrifice[55] and blood from the womb. Lancelot is

injured again in a following episode when he tears the bars from Guinevere's

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[53] Darrah, 90-97. The author gives extensive references to magical uses of water in Celtic mythology, and sees Lancelot as being particularly connected with water. The character and name of Lancelot was probably a 12th century invention, but he has many attributes of Celtic origin and pagan associations in his development.

[54] Chretien de Troyes, *Lancelot* or, *The Knight of the Cart.* Vv. 3021-3194.

[55] Several scholars also associate Chretien's Lancelot-- this episode in particular--as having Christological associations in his role as "savior" in order to magnify Lancelot's magnificence (see Bruckner, p. 65).

window in order to enter her room and engage in sex. It is his blood that is found on her sheets in the morning which exposes their night of passion.

It has been suggested by several authors that Chretien was greatly influenced by his patron, Marie, the countess of Champagne. Chretien states in his prologue to the story that Marie suggested the *matiere* (subject matter) and the *sens* (interpretation).[56] "As Chretien was writing during at least part of his career for the sophisticated court of Marie de Champagne at which women played a considerable social role, it would only be realistic to portray a character fulfilling such a role, even if idealized, in the romances.[57] However, it is important to note that Guinevere is an adulteress for the first time in *Charrette* and the countess' exact wishes for the image of Guinevere can only be guessed at.[58]

The stories occasionally reflected real life events: Marie's mother, Eleanor of Aquitane, was actually locked up in a tower. She was given in a political marriage to Louis VII, Marie's father, when she was fifteen. Granted a divorce amid rumors of an adulterous affair with her uncle as well as failure to provide male heirs for the king, she then went to England to marry Henry II.[59] When they failed to get along Eleanor established her own court at Poitiers and tried to enlist her sons in an attempt to defeat her husband. However, Henry captured

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[56] Whitaker, p. 16.
[57] Noble, p. 203.
[58] Peter Noble theorizes that Marie wanted Guinevere to epitomize "a passionate woman determined to dominate and control her lover according to the rules of the courtly code," p. 218.
[59] McCracken, p. 39.

her and kept her locked up in Salisbury tower from 1174 until his death in 1189.[60]

For fifteen years this strong-minded woman was kept prisoner.

There is a distinct tension between the freedom these legends promoted and

what life was actually like for women:

> . . .But to measure the precise influence of courtly love on social practices, we must not look to the model itself. We must not look to the illusory and precarious power that literature ascribed to the female partner in the amorous joust, much less to the emblematic princesses whom the poets, in search of patronage, flattered and honored with dedications and whom they portrayed as presiding over imaginary courts of love, seated among their vassals and handing down judgments just as their husbands did.[61]

The third and fourth image types differ from the first two in which women

appear as passive observers or prisoners. In these next two types women

participate more actively in scenes of trysts: the first kiss of Lancelot and

Guinevere and the consummation of their love in bed.

The first kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere are often illustrated. It is the subject

of one of the few well-known images of Arthurian manuscript illumination, now in

the Pierpont Morgan library (Figure 7).[62] The story is *Lancelot,* from the Vulgate

cycle, popular between 1220 and 1475. Lancelot and Guinevere's first kiss is

usually depicted with consistent iconographical elements. In accordance with

the text, the couple meets outdoors and kisses over the lap of Galeholt[63] who

prods the couple together, his arm on Guinevere's back. Guinevere initiates the

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[60] Bornstein, p. 115.
[61] Duby, *The Courtly Model*, p. 266.
[62] Pierpont Morgan Library MS 805, f. 67r.
[63] Friend of Lancelot and go-between for the couple.

kiss, shown by her hand on Lancelot's chin. She takes the leading role because Lancelot has submitted himself entirely to her.

The other half of the illustration also consists of three figures: the Lady de Malehaut,[64] Lore de Carduel and a seneschal who is keeping the ladies company. Medieval scholar Matilda Bruckner suspects that the man in the right half of this scene could be Galeholt again. The man's appearance and dress are an exact match with the Galeholt on the left.[65] This explanation is aligned with the chronological events of Galeholt leaving the couple alone for a moment and then later returning to encourage their embrace.

In other depictions of this scene the court members are standing or sitting. Often they are all female such as in two images from manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Figures 8 and 9).[66] The women are outside the castle walls, on the same ground as the men, unlike the combat scenes where they look down from the towers and watch the men play (see Figure 1). The exact reason for the presence of these women is difficult to determine. I see the additional females acting as witnesses to Lancelot and Guinevere's kiss and signifiers of sexuality and fertility. The women's hands in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* manuscripts are placed over their wombs in a gesture that draws attention to their center of power. The body language of these women reveal that they, too feel the pull of life, fertility and sexuality. Manuscript 118 (Figure 8)

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[64] Guinevere later acts as a go-between for Galeholt and the Lady of Malehaut.

[65] Bruckner, p. 63.

[66] Figure 7: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. fr. 118, f. 219v. Figure 8: Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale fr. 112, II, f. 101.

shows the women facing each other in a circle. Their hands and faces draw the attention into the circle and down towards their wombs.

The location of Lancelot and Guinevere's transgression takes place outdoors, under trees and away from the eyes of the court. The composition and wall behind them reminds one of the numerous medieval manuscript images of Mary symbolized as, and present in, an enclosed garden or *hortus conclusus.* However, as stated earlier, the artist's use of compositional elements from Christian images does not necessarily mean there are implied similarities in the messages. The choice of a natural setting could be interpreted many ways, or it could simply be a direct illustration of the text and an opportunity for the artists to depict natural beauty.[67]

A fourth type of image, the actual act of adultery, is a relatively rare scene in the middle ages.[68] The presence or lack of sexual scenes are often in accordance with the wishes of the patron. Nudity was associated with sin because of the shame of nakedness incurred by Adam and Eve in the Fall. Non-sexual scenes of the bedroom are often found in Christian manuscripts of the life of Mary and saints' lives.[69] Usually it is a place for events of birth, sickness, death and dreaming.[70] Towards the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance the view toward nude figures in art became more relaxed, due to the increase in

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[67] Cunliffe, p. 187. Similarly, Celtic mythology is rich with ceremonies and events taking place in *Nemeton,* or forest clearings.
[68] Stones, p. 141.
[69] See Alison Stones, p. 139. Some illustrated biblical scenes are more erotic than secular imagery, such as King David and Bathsheba in the *Old Testament Picture Bible* (Pierpont Morgan Library, M 638, f. 41v).
[70] Stones, p. 140.

subjects from classical mythology.[71] However, scenes of adultery were not common at the peak of Arthurian popularity around the fourteenth century, though, as we will see, there are a few exceptions.

One particularly enticing manuscript is the British Library Add. 10293. Guinevere and Lancelot are in bed together (Figure 10).[72] The door to the left of the couple is open, signaling sexual entry and the success of Lancelot breaking into the castle. They look at each other and Guinevere lovingly touches Lancelot's chest. The simplicity of these scenes gives them a documentary feel, evidencing the adulterous act.

Another scene of Lancelot and Guinevere shows Lancelot fully clothed while Guinevere remains naked (except for her crown) after their lovemaking (figure 11).[73] Lancelot is ready to join the active outside world while Guinevere remains indoors, in bed. There is a rather phallic, tower-shaped feature behind Lancelot, which is like the tower he has just broken into to be with Guinevere.

If, as stated earlier, nudity signifies sin, then Lancelot escapes blame by being dressed in this scene. One could read from the visual evidence that Guinevere's nude body is the cause of their transgression. This is an example where images serve as visual evidence of links between literature and attitudes of culture. Although the text does not clearly state the interpretation I have just presented it is still suggested by the artist's choice of depicting Lancelot clothed and Guinevere naked. Furthermore, the prominent crown on her head

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[71] Grossinger, p. 12.
[72] British Library Add. 10293, Folio 312v., ca. 1315.

symbolizes her marriage to Arthur and role as queen. Its presence here emphasizes the betrayal that has just occurred.

Fin amour was an emotional, civilized game that served many purposes. When compared with earlier misogynist views of the church, the women did benefit from this new civility to a great extent.[74] They were treated with more courtesy and veneration and were allowed to have romance outside of marriage, but not sex. That was reserved for the literature. By placing women on a pedestal, however, they are still in a passive role. These pedestals are often depicted in images as towers, prison towers and castles. Women do not play an active, protagonist role in the progressive world. They are instead the motivation for knightly success. Centuries later a struggle continues between seeing women as 'ladies' or as individuals. It is a term commonly used today which literally means 'born of nobility' and implies position and role in a chivalric code of ethics.

[73] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 122, f. 147v.
[74] See Christa Grössinger, chapter one: *The History of Misogyny.*

Chapter 2

Pre-Raphaelite Depictions: Morality with a Dash of Sensuality

A resurgence of Arthurian legend took place in nineteenth-century Victorian England. This occurred for several reasons. First, as in the Middle Ages, the legend of the king and his court served political aims by reinforcing the idea of monarchical rule during the establishment of the British empire. Secondly, the legends reflected the gender attitudes and issues of Victorian England. Men were expected to be "heroic" and women were assigned types, either villainous or angelic. Finally, artists of this period embraced a return to both medieval and classical subjects, incorporating the mythology of previous eras into new forms of art and literature.

I will focus on the works of a few Pre-Raphaelite artists: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his wife Elizabeth Siddal, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris and William Holden Hunt. Depictions of Arthurian women by these artists reveal underlying statements about Victorian society and gender issues and provide biographical insights into the artists themselves. The men I have chosen to examine epitomize the Victorian male in many ways and they were in the special position of revealing their attitudes through their art.

Victorian England

Queen Victoria was a strong leader. Nevertheless, she asserted specific roles for women that went back to medieval times. She was the ultimate matron, personifying the ideals of a good mother and devoted wife, remaining in mourning long after her husband's early death. This husband, Prince Albert, was a strong proponent of the arts and together they commissioned works that brought about a Gothic revival and influenced the artistic and literary subjects of the period. As well as meeting the aesthetic preferences of the time, Arthurian legend asserted monarchical control and national pride by acting as proof of the long history of England. "For the duration of Queen Victoria's reign King Arthur served as a potent symbol: for sovereignty, for national spirit, for gentlemanly virtue."[75]

The Gothic revival in general was brought about in part to strengthen the power of monarchical rule[76] but another use was a reinforcement of "proper" behavior and roles for women. Nineteenth-century Europe is noted for having an elaborate system of 'typing' people into categorical levels of society which applied particularly to women. Art historian Susan Casteras emphasizes in her book *Images of Victorian Womanhood* that feminine themes in the Victorian period bordered on a cultural fixation. The effusion of female imagery was driven by public attention and furthered by accommodating artists.[77]

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[75] Mancoff, p. xvii. Mancoff argues that politics and British nationalism were the key reasons for the Arthurian revival.
[76] Mancoff, p. 11.
[77] Casteras, p. 14.

Women were idealized and worshipped yet constrained by expectations and roles. They had begun to participate in the marketplace in the preceding two centuries[78], but with the economic growth of the nineteenth century their position solidified as producers of children, domestic angels and enablers for male success. For example, one of the purposes ascribed to women involved their beauty and sense of fashion. Successful men needed to show off their wealth, therefore women became the platforms for evidence of their success through their clothing, homes, and artistic 'taste.'[79]

Another focus of public attention was the "sinfulness" of women's sexuality as a problem in both France and England. There was public outcry against the increase of brothels, prostitution, and venereal disease. Women were held solely responsible for licentiousness— many physicians believed that only woman could transmit venereal disease.[80] Themes of "fallen" women were manifested in both art and literature, reflecting the discourse taking place in the larger social sphere (see Rossetti's *Found,* Figure 19). The subjects were women of contemporary England as well as mythological characters. The Pre-Raphaelites are among many artists who felt it was their mission to be involved in the public discourse and rescue women. They attempted this through their moralizing art, and for certain artists, in their personal relationships with women.

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[78] Dijkstra, p. 5.
[79] Dijkstra, p. 6. Dijkstra argues that women were purposefully taken out of competition in the industrial age in order to enable male success.
[80] See Kestner, p. 5. Kestner outlines the way that mythology was used in the arts to reinforce or condemn social behavior.

Underlying the surface polish of certain images of the nineteenth century lie moral messages that once again point to the seductive power of women's beauty and sexuality. There is a paradox present in some artists' choice of medieval subjects, under the guise of a return to medieval 'purity,' and the realism and sensuality with which they depicted the female subjects. They idealized the medieval era to suit England's self-image and helped perpetuate sexual ethics and gender roles, reviving the code of chivalry. However, unlike medieval imagery, a tension surfaces between underlying morality and the visual attention given to sexuality and beauty. A similar inconsistency is found in the personal relationships of some of these artists as well.

Pre-Raphaelite Identity

The Pre-Raphaelites began forming in the 1850's. They started off as young, idealistic men, members of an educated middle class which valued gentlemanly behavior and Victorian ideals. They often chose to paint personal, intimate views of Arthurian characters through the use of idealized, beautiful women for which the story served as a pretext. There is a distinct lack of male subjects in their art, in contrast to the medieval manuscripts. This is not to say that male identity was not at issue in their art; in fact, just the opposite was true. They needed the women to reinforce their egos. They painted reflections of their personal attitudes towards women which mirrored those of most Victorian males. The artists' identities were shaped by several factors. First was their "class" as gentlemen, a social category that came directly from chivalry. Related to this is

their view of themselves—along with most men of the time— as heroes obligated to "rescue" women. Mythology from many ages—ancient, classical and medieval—was used in art to reinforce male preoccupation with heroism. Joseph Kestner attributes the surge of "rescue" missions and societies that aided "fallen" women such as prostitutes to this revival of heroism.[81]

Finally, a very important factor was their identity as artist-creators. The very notion of art and artist had changed dramatically since medieval times and must be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions about the Pre-Raphaelites' intentions. Artists were glorified as creators during the nineteenth century and as such wielded more interpretive power. Capitalism, the decline of aristocratic patronage, and the rising wealth of the middle class after the revolutions changed the market system of art. Artists had a much larger role in determining the patron's taste in an open market. Therefore, artists looked to their own experience and class for subject matter. Who they were directed the type of art they produced.

The woman of Pre-Raphaelite paintings are famous for being idealized, sensual, physically beautiful beings, whether they were adulteresses, sorceresses or martyrs. The women who modeled for the Pre-Raphaelites, referred to as "stunners" by the group, were often "found" in the lower classes or professions since modeling was not a respectable activity for a middle-class woman.[82] The artists gained an aura of heroic chivalry by "rescuing" these

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[81] Kestner, p. 54
[82] Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women*, p. 22.

women from the fate of living a lower-class life. In turn, the women lent themselves to these artists' nostalgic images of a past where women's beauty was their power, though defined and controlled by men.

Paintings

The Pre-Raphaelites rebelled against the mainstream of historicist, academic art, desiring a return to what they saw as medieval simplicity, truthfulness and morality. Typical of mainstream Arthurian imagery were William Dyce's frescoes for the queen's robing room, consisting mainly of knight's activities as allegories such as *Generosity: King Arthur Unhorsed Spared by Sir Launcelot* (Figure 12). Dyce would influence many academic artists and, along with Alfred Tennyson's poetry, the legend was transformed into an ethical symbol of national character.[83]

The Pre-Raphaelites emphasized the personal, emotional aspects of the legend. Their paintings have a new freshness and light due their use of rich oils on white ground, creating an impression of stained glass in combination with fresco. The objects in their paintings are given a detailed, Flemish exactness corresponding to their belief in truth to nature and the surface appearance of things. These artists' skill in realistic depiction was put towards embodying in physical form all of the expressive power of these narratives, putting particular emphasis on the power of female beauty.

The first gathering of the group, consisting of William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Val Prinsep, Arthur Hughes, John Pollen and

R.S. Stanhope,[84] collaborated on a mural project for the Oxford Union Hall in 1857. The subjects were scenes from Malory's *Morte Darthur.* Unfortunately the art is in very poor condition due to improper fresco techniques.

This was an exuberant, young time for these men, spent learning about literature and mythology and forming their ideology. "For the Pre-Raphaelites the tale of King Arthur epitomized the best in humanity. Arthurian subjects presented a standard of moral truth that matched their standard of aesthetic truth"[85] These youthful, male friendships had a great influence on the formulation of their personalities and outlook.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1822) was the leader of them all. He could be called an artist's artist because of his strong, individualistic temperament. He was determined to be legendary. Rossetti was fascinated with chivalry from an early age. It is known that he had studied illuminated manuscripts and woodcuts at the British Museum as well as John Ruskin's extensive collection of manuscripts made available to the Pre-Raphaelites.[86]

Rossetti's first work of Arthurian subject was a watercolor called *King Arthur's Tomb,* 1854-55 (figure 13). It is loosely based on Malory's account of the lovers' last meeting. Lancelot and Guinevere's first kiss was a popular medieval manuscript scene that was similarly set outdoors under a tree (Figures 7, 8 and

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[83] Mancoff, p. xx.
[84] Whitaker, p. 186.
[85] Mancoff, p. 142.
[86] Whitaker, p. 189. "The British Museum manuscript collection in 1857 included the Cotton, Harley, Sloane, Royal, Landsdowne, Hargrave, Burney, Kings, Arundel and Egerton manuscripts, as well as the additional series begun in 1756. In 1854 its numbering had reached 19720. See Julian Treuherz, 'The Pre-Raphaelites and Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts', *Pre-Raphaelite Papers,* pp. 153-169.

9). Unlike those manuscript images, Rossetti's scene is crowded by the figures. The Arthurian scholar Lori Walters points out that Rossetti paints a private, tragic scene rather than an ideal vision such as in Dyce's work (Figure 12).[87] Rossetti shows us the tragic outcome of their having given in to their passion. Lancelot and Guinevere meet over Arthur's tomb, Guinevere shunning Lancelot's kiss. Guinevere, now a nun because of her prior adulterous relationship with Lancelot, sees the ugliness of her past, though Lancelot has no shame: it is the woman who must take on the moral burden of sin.

Their location outdoors is significant. The trees act as a force surrounding the trio. The shadow of a trunk falls heavily across the tomb decorated with scenes of Arthur's elaborate court. This suggests the downfall of Arthur's kingdom, which resulted from Guinevere and Lancelot's love. Nature has won. Indeed, natural passion will win out for Rossetti throughout his life, along with certain other Pre-Raphaelites.

Another painting by Rossetti shows Lancelot being prevented, by his sin, from entering the chapel of the Holy Grail (Figure 14). This watercolor study for the Oxford mural project is a visionary scene. He used the Flemish way of disguising symbolism in ordinary things to give the subject allegorical meaning. Rossetti's picture is full of symbolism, such as the flowers strewn on the chapel steps. Murial Whitaker identifies these as "a Lily (purity), Poppy (forgetfulness), and a Rose (sexual passion). The mural shows the Queen stretched against a tree, her arms entwined with its branches. It is an apple tree, the tree of knowledge

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[87] Walters, intro. li.

symbolizing the fall of man. To emphasize this point a snake hangs over the head of Lancelot, for which Burne-Jones served as the model.

Unlike manuscript images, the woman is depicted in an active, domineering role while Lancelot is 'fallen'. Guinevere's body stands between him and the holy figures on the left. She is the cause for Lancelot's downfall and inability to obtain the grail in accordance with the text of *Morte Darthur*. This painting is typical of Victorian era negative female 'types' in art. These have a seductive, sensual power of physical beauty which appears to cause problems. Here Guinevere's sin is doubled by Rossetti's interpretive inclusion of iconographical elements of Eve and the Fall. The form and elements of this painting imply that the effects of her sin extend beyond Lancelot and apply to all of humanity.

What may be the most foreboding personal reference is the use of Jane Burden as a model for Guinevere. Though married to William Morris, She would become the artist's future mistress. "He (Rossetti) saw carnal love not as a human failing but as an undeniable facet of human character. In Rossetti's vision human beings could not transcend their nature."[88] Rossetti's wife of a few short years would suffer because of Rossetti's "natural" inclinations.

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Siddal was working for a milliner when she began modeling for the Pre-Raphaelites. Rossetti immediately fell in love with her. However, she was sickly and had to spend time in the South of France before returning to eventually marry Rossetti in 1860. He encouraged her to pursue her own artistic ambitions. This falls in line with the theme of "rescue" that was important to

these gentlemen. By improving the women they encountered, the Pre-

Raphaelites strengthened their own egos and image as heroes. Siddal soon

gave up her own artistic pursuits because of continuing poor health, a

miscarriage, and addiction to laudanum (a derivative of opium) given as a cure

for her illness. It was this addiction which, in part, caused either a suicide or

accidental overdose in 1862.[89]

William Rossetti's sister Christina wrote this poem for her brother and Siddal

called *In an Artist's Studio:*

> One face looks out from all his canvasses,
> One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
> We found her hidden just behind those screens,
> That mirror gave back all her loveliness,
> A queen in opal or ruby dress,
> A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
> A saint, an angel—every canvas means
> the same one meaning, neither more nor less
> He feeds upon her face by day and night,
> And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
> Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
> Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
> Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
> Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.[90]

It is the last two lines of this poem that are especially revealing of the sacrificial

role Elizabeth Siddal played for her husband. Her identity was wrapped up in

Rossetti's paintings of her. She was an ideal to him, not an individual: "Not as

she is, but as she fills his dream." Part of her fame comes from the occurance of

a grief-stricken Rossetti placing a book of poems in the deceased woman's hair,

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[88] Mancoff, p. 159.
[89] See Marsh: *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal,* for an extensive investigation into the life and death of Elizabeth Siddal.
[90] C.G. Rossetti, 1896. Christina Rossetti, *New Poems,* p. 114.

to be buried with her. Seven years later he decided to have her body exhumed so that he could retrieve the poems and have them published, justifying this action in the name of art.

Elizabeth Siddal became a historical figure because of her tragic life and association with Rossetti, and recently the focus of feminist theory and historical study. Interestingly, by looking at her art we can more clearly see what male Pre-Raphaelite art was not: pure, moralizing painting much closer to medieval manuscript depiction. The women in Siddal's paintings and drawings are simple and honest—unlike most of the Rossetti's portraits of women, who seem to be a little wicked no matter whom they represent.

Siddal's *Lady of Shalott* (1853), is very simply drawn, with little decorative elaboration to detract from the meaning in the scene (Figure 15). The lack of embellishment gives strength to the intense mood of the drawing. It reflects Siddal's personality and experiences by her quiet focus on the solitary woman, trapped physically in a tower and psychologically by her desire to have a direct glance at Lancelot. The Lady of Shalott could only view his reflection in the mirror or else die by entanglement from the threads with which she weaves.

The story is of a woman (named Elaine, the Lady of Shallot, or Ascolat in some medieval versions) whose sleeve Lancelot carelessly accepts as a token in order to be in a jousting tournament that would show off his skill and impress Guinevere. Tennyson re-interpreted the medieval story to include this theme of imprisonment and her death caused by looking into the mirror. The character of Elaine became very popular, representing the ideal, chaste, self-sacrificing woman to the late Victorian public.[91]

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[91] Poulson, p. 173. Tennyson's poem: *The Lady of Shallot* was one of the best-known nineteenth-century poems to take as its subject the death of a beautiful woman and and was certainly the one most frequently used as a source by artists."

Siddal's version captures the moment when the Lady of Shalott looks over the crucifix and directly at Lancelot. Debra Mancoff points out that Siddal's inclusion of the crucifix implies that the Lady is choosing damnation over salvation—even her faith cannot control her desire for Lancelot.[92] He is seen reflected in the mirror which has already begun cracking because she gave in to temptation. In a twisted way the story is similar to Siddal's own situation. She is trapped in Rossetti's paintings as an ideal, therefore he cannot see her directly. It is a foreboding picture which has portents for her future—a death perhaps hastened by the sacrifice of her identity for Rossetti's art.

William Holden Hunt was one of the most moralizing of all the Pre-Raphaelites. Like Rossetti, he set out to 'rescue' and educate a working class girl named Annie Miller. He attempted to prepare her for marriage to him, "in effect to create his own Lady of Shalott."[93] She became a popular model with the group and eventually made a successful marriage with someone other than Hunt.

Hunt had a lifelong fascination with the subject of the Lady of Shalott.[94] His last work was an oil painting that he completed fifty years after it was begun (Figure 16). It closely resembles an illustration done at the start of his career which was published in a book of Tennyson's poems dealing with Arthurian themes[95] (Figure 17). The lady's hair floats up and covers the top edge of the scene. Long, wavy hair was a common presence in Pre-Raphaelite art as an aspect of female beauty. The Lady of Shalott's hair is like the threads that bind her and the weaving. She is actually caught in the circle of the loom itself, a design like the tapestry she creates. 'Breaking loose' of her role creates the

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[92] Mancoff, p. 146.
[93] Poulson, p. 193.
[94] Mancoff, p. 145.
[95] Alfred Tennyson, *Poems,* 1857.

breaking loose of the threads, undoing her art. Death is the punishment for venturing to look at the real world and finding her love unrequited.

The Lady of Shallot theme reflects larger social attitudes towards women, and is a theme that many Pre-Raphaelite artists painted.[96] It shows the punishment of a "fallen" woman who has given in to her desire, rather than doing her domestic duty while imprisoned in a tower. Jan Marsh, a Pre-Raphaelite scholar and biographer of Elizabeth Siddal, gives an excellent summation of the cultural significance of the recurring theme:

> . . . it is hard to read his [Hunt's], or the other, images as anything but an oblique account of the confined and restricted world of the Victorian woman—accursed and prohibited by virtue of her sex alone—and the dire consequences attendant on rebellion. The rejection of seclusion in the shadowy sphere of proscribed femininity, where the approved activity is weaving or embroidery, leads immediately to social ostracism and death. The enclosed rooms in which these ladies live, looking out on inviting sunlit landscapes, and the tangled strands binding their vigorous limbs, are surely metaphors of woman's condition, signifying the docile, passive, reflective and domestic role that dominated Victorian ideas of femininity.[97]

Middle-class Victorian women were prisoners of a sort in their homes. Bram Dijkstra in his book *Mythology and Misogyny* classifies this type of woman as the "household nun." She is expected to devote herself to her husband and her family before herself. "The expulsion of the middle-class woman from participation in practical life had become fact; woman had never been placed on a more lofty pedestal. An apparently insuperable plateau had been reached in her canonization as a priestess of virtuous inanity."[98] The free, natural, outside world seen through the Lady of Shalott's window emphasizes the confinement of

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[96] Whitaker, p. 219. J.W. Waterhouse painted her seven times. Many artists focused on the death of the Lady of Shallot where she floats down the river in a barge to Camelot and is discovered by Lancelot and King Arthur.

[97] Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Woman*, p. 152.

[98] Dijkstra p. 4.

her home. This dichotomy between architectural structures and outdoor settings occurs throughout Pre-Raphaelite as well as manuscript depictions. Finally, her weaving, containing scenes of love, is yet another human artificial creation and a way to pass the time rather than experiencing the real thing. Lancelot is allowed to remain in the "real" world outdoors and continue his quest for Guinevere without consequence for his action towards Elaine, similar to Lancelot's attitiude in Rossetti's *King Arthur's Tomb* (Figure 13). It is the woman who is held responsible for containing her affections, to resist looking out the window. Her reality is confined to a reflection, like women confined in the home who submit their presence in progressive, linear time to a cyclical existence of maintaining domestic functions.

This theme is about reflection and reality on more than one level. As the viewer, we live outside, in "real" time, and look into the artwork, which is always a reflection. The viewer of these paintings was originally the artist, then the artwork's contemporary society; viewing from the late twentieth century, we now see them as signifiers of many levels of history, both actual and mythological.[99]

Another member of the original Pre-Raphaelite group was William Morris. He was a complicated man of many talents, gaining more fame later in life for his literary endeavors and design enterprises than the few paintings of his youth. Jane Burden and William Morris married in 1859. He undertook her education as a "lady," raising her up from her origins as a stableworker's daughter.

In 1858, shortly before their marriage, Morris had Jane model for one of his few easel paintings, the subject and title of which is often debated: *Queen Guinevere*, or *La Belle Iseult* (figure 18). A dog is seen curled up on the unmade bed. This is the source of the debate about the subject: the dog has

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[99] Poulson, p. 177. Tennyson, in fact, saw his 1833 *Poems* concerning the Lady of Shallot and her 'shadows' as a metaphor for the artist and his duties to his art versus his duties to society.

been attributed by some scholars as being Iseult's emblem, a gift from Sir Tristram, but it is also seen in manuscript images of Guinevere. The iconography is fitting for both queens. However, Morris may have preferred to represent his future wife as Iseult. Her adultery with Tristram was more acceptable due to the fact that their love was created by mistakenly drinking a love potion, instead of Guinevere and Lancelot's clear choice of betrayal.

The painting involves questions of fidelity. There are oranges on the bed, orange trees as part of the wall-paper in the far background, and stylized orange or pomegranate shapes on the cloth covering the table in front of her. Oranges were symbolic of marriage, and pomegranates symbolized fertility in the middle ages. The placement of the dog (who symbolizes loyalty) and the oranges on the bed link issues of marriage and fidelity with sex. A bible or book of hours lays open in front of the woman, but her troubled expression is focused inward. There is a reference to the story of Eve through the golden belt which resembles a snake, its head and mouth not very subtly positioned over her womb.

The woman's character is psychologically revealing. She seems torn between her sexuality, her hands and belt drawing attention to her womb, and the confinement of morality signaled by the bible and the enclosed room. At the time that Morris was painting this he was contemplating engagement with Jane Burden. He may be showing the conflicting thoughts she would have about giving up her freedom for domestic life. In fact, marriage for a woman in the mid-nineteenth century meant giving up most economic and legal rights.[100]

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[100] See Perkin., pp. 8-11. The issue of marriage at the time of this painting was an often debated subject. Basically, the Common Law, solidified in the feudal ages, was still in effect and had gained strength in the preceding two hundred years. All property rights and authority over the custody of children was surrendered at marriage. The women was "in the custody" of her husband This was particularly applicable to the middle-class to which Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites belonged for the most part. It was middle-class women who pushed for the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 which substantially increased the rights to property for women.

Morris's early formative years were heavily dependent upon his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites and Rossetti in particular:

> In choosing a woman singled out by Rossetti and admired by his circle, Morris was using marriage to confirm his relationship with Rossetti and his place within the circle of young men who surrounded the artist. His engagement to Jane Burden replicated the sexual triad that had obsessed Morris in *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* romances. In consequence, it is difficult to sort out the vicissitudes in his relationship with Jane from the vicissitudes in his relationship with Rossetti. As a person in her own right, Jane remained an enigma to Morris.[101]

The triangular relationship of Morris, Rossetti and Burden is analogous to that of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere. Rossetti had a lengthy romantic relationship with Burden after his own wife's death. Morris appeared to have had an open-minded outlook on such matters. In the same year that he painted *Guinevere*—the same year that he became engaged to Jane Burden—he published a poem called *In Defense of Guinevere*. He does not literally defend Guinevere's guilt, but rather presents her in a way that gives her an identity in her own right.

Lori Walters points out the similarity between this and Rossetti's work. "As a self-contained, brooding beauty, Morris's queen recalls Rossetti's. Exhibiting a woman consumed by her own private vision, Morris's mood painting is an apt metaphor for extreme tendencies in the Pre-Raphaelite group of artists and writers."[102] I believe this particular painting differs in an important way from Rossetti's idealized depictions of women. Here she has a sense of self-

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[101] Kirchhoff, p. 59.
[102] Walters, intro. lii.

awareness and identity rather than the blank, empty stare of Rossetti females.

Morris is struggling with the inconsistencies of Pre-Raphaelite rhetoric as well as

growing away from the male bonding and idealism of his youthful involvement

with the group. Frederick Kirchoff points out some of these issues through his

discussion of *In Defense of Guinevere*:

> In creating the figure of Guinevere, Morris attempts to create a human
> center to the paradoxes inherent in the Pre-Raphaelite movement itself:
> its use of photographic realism to transcend the real; its use of narrative
> reference to overcome narrative time; its unstable blend of sensuous self-
> indulgence and spiritual Puritanism; the narcissistic fascination with
> personal guilt it passed on to the decadence.[103]

By allowing the affair of Rossetti and Burden to happen later on in his marriage,

Morris acknowledged his wife as a free individual, declining to be a part of the

group's and Victorian era's male preoccupation with controlling women. This is a

lesson that Rossetti never learned, until perhaps late in life.

The subject of the "fallen women" was of great concern to mid nineteenth-

century England and "perhaps received its characteristic formulation in the circle

of the Pre-Raphaelites and their friends."[104] Precedents for moralizing painting

came from artists such as William Hogarth a century earlier, and Ford Maddox

Brown, Rossetti's teacher. Brown's influence is revealed in Rossetti's painting

titled *Found*, begun in 1854 and worked on intermittently until 1881 (Figure 19).

It has been suggested that Rossetti had an affair with the model for this painting;

Fanny Cornforth, although not until 1858.[105] She was working as a prostitute

when the Pre-Raphaelites 'discovered' her. Interestingly, the subject of the

painting is of a women who had turned to prostitution and became run-down and

despairing when discovered by her former lover.

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[103] Kirchoff, p. 89.
[104] Nochlin, pp.139-53.
[105] Marsh, p. 23.

Linda Nochlin wrote an essay: "Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman" in which she sees the painting as "a paradigm of Rossetti's own conflict-ridden existence, beginning with the idea of himself as the 'Preux Chevalier' dedicated to rescue and the highest sort of artistic achievement, the most ideal way of life, and ending with despair and illusion."[106] Nochlin theorizes that Rossetti may have felt like a 'fallen woman' at the end of his life, when he became disillusioned about his painting abilities. She typifies him as "a nineteenth-century man of strong sensuality who at the same time believed fervently in some kind of ideal goodness but could rarely bring himself to act on this belief."[107]

It is interesting that Rossetti changed his first name to Dante after the poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321). In *The Divine Comedy*, Lust is characterized as the least offensive of the seven deadly sins. It is a sin of incontinence: an inability to control bodily passions that are not in themselves bad. Rossetti and Dante Alighieri shared a fascination with Arthurian legend as well. Canto five of Dante's *Inferno* describes the famous scene of Paolo and Francesca reading from a manuscript the story of Lancelot and Guinevere's first kiss and "were led by the lover's example to kiss and thus commit the sin of adultery that sent them to hell."[108] According to Dante, their sin was giving in to passion over reason, and the author treats them with great sympathy.

Other Pre-Raphaelites besides Rossetti had extramarital affairs as well. There is tension between certain Pre-Raphaelite's middle-class values and medieval 'purity' with their roles as innovative, bohemian artists. Perhaps, like their relationships with women, it was the nature of some of these artists to

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[106] Nochlin, p. 149.
[107] Nochlin, p. 150.
[108] Bruckner, p. 63.

intensely love a painting while creating it. However as soon as they are finished they must begin another, like chasing rainbows or, to put it in medieval terms, like searching for the Holy Grail.

Edward Coley Burne-Jones (1833-1898), one of the original Pre-Raphaelites who took part in the Oxford Union murals, also painted many medieval themes of knights and chivalry, though both his style and subjects differed from Rossetti's. Like William Morris, Burne-Jones was heavily influenced by his friendship with Rossetti that began at Oxford. They shared similar attitudes towards women, usually typing them into roles as subjects from mythology. "To Rossetti the Arthurian story was a romantic paradigm, offering a metaphoric vindication of forbidden love. To Burne-Jones the same narrative offered an imaginative retreat, a haven from the external world, where all was fragile and beautiful but little was explained."[109]

Burne-Jones' work is closer to the medieval manuscript style of narration, containing many figures of both sexes. All of his figures have an androgynous quality and women often dominate the picture space, as in *The King's Wedding* of 1870 (Figure 20). Women dressed in blue robes dance before Arthur and Guinevere, who are placed at the edge of the picture space. It is as if two worlds are present or two scenes are conflated (as in manuscript images): one of communal celebration and ritual indicated by the circling women and another world of the intimacy shared by a husband and wife. Burne-Jones was a painter of idealized, mystical beauty, not of individual types, but with a repetitive decorative style like the luxuriant foliage of his outdoor scenes. Human beauty had more in common with nature than individual personality to this sensitive

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[109] Mancoff, p. 242.

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artist. He also used the human figure, especially women, to denote "types" or allegories, in keeping with Victorian attitudes.

The lack of clear gender differentiation of Burne-Jones' figures is viewed by Joseph Kestner as proof of narcissism.[110] Burne-Jones' *Pygmalion* series (Figure 21) backs up this view through the artist's attraction to the subject. Even though it is not part of the Arthurian myth, classical subjects share many of the same underlying themes in the representation of women. "Ovid's account states that Pygmalion turned away from the women of the island of Cyprus because they were whorish. To compensate, he finished an ivory image of his idealized woman, dressing it and even taking it to bed..."[111] The story embodies the idea of artist-as-creator, glorifying the notion of male dominance to the extent of designating what is beautiful in the perfect woman. Even though life is given to the sculpture by the goddess Aphrodite, it is Pygmalion who has created her form. The artist creates a woman as a female counterpart of himself instead of having to deal with a 'genuine Other' which may not be 'pure.' The idealistic beauty of all of his figures reveal Burne-Jones as a man who is not comfortable with the vicissitudes and ugliness of reality and needs to paint to control his vision of what life should be and to reinforce his power as a creator.

The artist held complicated views towards woman, perhaps related to the fact that his mother died six days after his birth. Burne-Jones married Giorgiana Macdonald around 1860 and settled into a domestic role that included children. Giorgiana's modest appearance and stability embodied the archetypal Victorian image of women. He often stated openly his dissatisfaction with married life, feeling that artists shouldn't marry: "...children and pictures are each too

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[110] Kestner, p. 62.
[111] Kestner, p. 93.

important to be both produced by one man."[112] This statement also reinforces the importance he placed on his own creative process, as demonstrated by his *Pygmalion* series.

After seven years of marriage Burne-Jones became involved in a tumultuous and passionate relationship with one of his models: Maria Zambaco. An artist in her own right, she possessed the beauty that the humble Giorgiana lacked. Their relationship was the inspiration for his 1873 *Beguiling of Merlin* (Figure 22). The story is of Nimue, a "Lady of the Lake" or Celtic goddess. Merlin is enamored of her and in order to escape his advances she beguiles him into teaching her the secrets of his magic. She uses his own spells on him and traps him under a rock for eternity. The man, then, is the victim of his own passion which he cannot control. Burne-Jones saw himself as Merlin and Maria as Nimue. Arthurian scholar Murial Whitaker speaks of the character of Merlin as a symbol for artists because of the power of his insight. She concludes that the magician's sensitivity brings about his doom.[113] The one time in his life that Burne-Jones gave up his "powers" by subordinating himself to Maria and his own passion, he became "trapped" by it. He had let himself be vulnerable to an "Other." Eventually he returns home to mend his relationship with Giorgiana, choosing the life of quiet domesticity and stability.

The male Pre-Raphaelites' sensuality and creative innovation lent an air of contemporary Victorian attitudes to the mythological, moralizing scenes of medieval subjects. Or perhaps they were simply representatives of their age, combining aesthetic beauty with borrowed moral overtones from the past? The artists truly did revive medieval attitudes in terms of focusing on woman as "bodies," as physical objects to desire. We can particularly see this focus in

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[112] Kestner, p. 81.
[113] Whitaker, p. 4

Rossetti's work. He portrayed many women with blank facial expressions and empty, glassy eyes who are often absorbed with their image in a mirror or brushing their hair. *Fazio's Mistress* is a typical example (figure 23).[114] She is absorbed in her own image and does not confront the viewer, who is left free to observe her features and not her personality.

The artist's work correlates with the way that men valued women for their physicality, as objects of beauty or as producers of children, rather than for their humanity. Hidden beneath the guise of medieval purity, however, lie images of women who, though fully clothed, passive and emotionally inaccessible, have a raw sensuality and sexuality. This reveals these artists' and the Victorian period's fascination with sublimated sexuality. It is similar to the game of *fin amour* in the fourteenth century where the goal is to increase desire rather than fulfill it.

The male game of acquisition, the "quest," plays a central role in forming the art of both of these periods. Like the knights of the Middle Ages, the Pre-Raphaelites' involvement with each other often superseded the relationships they had with females. The artists were the protagonists and prescribed the women's role as a catalyst that they ultimately controlled. They used women as objects of beauty and desire in order to promote their own powers as artist-creators. Indeed, Edward Burne-Jones' *Pygmalion* series is representative of all of this type of painting. They thought they were actually elevating or rescuing women by giving them a role in their world. The Pre-Raphaelites lived the life of knights, pledging their love to the most beautiful women, who in turn gave them their beauty to use to elevate their status as artists. However, as in the legend of

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[114] See Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*. Pre-Raphaelites are featured prominently in this study dedicated to the Victorian era's prolific imagery of languid, dead, sickly and passive women.

Arthur, fidelity was not always everlasting, but only a momentary passion which served as a means to an end.

Conclusion

The meaning of the Arthurian legend was transformed by artists, writers and their respective societies in the period between these two flowerings. In *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia,* Debra Mancoff summarizes the differences between the two periods in regards to the legend. She states that (unlike the legend in the medieval period) the Arthurian Revival was "a royal, sanctioned allegory with a clear, moral iconology."[115] I am not convinced that this is much of a difference from what occurred before. The ruling aristocracy in the middle ages were the promoters, patrons and developers of vernacular literature. I have argued that they did so in order to promote monarchical and feudal interests as well as a specific type of relationship between the sexes involving morality.

What took place in Western Europe during the five hundred years between the two periods? In general there was a shift from a hierarchical, feudal ,and community-dominated culture to a more individualistic, democratic way of life for Europeans. However, when one looks at the power of women as defined by the choices available to them, only subtle shifts rather than significant changes occurred. The position of women is best understood by viewing it in a relative context. 'Courtly love' in the late Middle Ages was actually a step up from the misogynist characterizations and restrictions the Church had previously imposed

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[115] Lacy, (ed.) p. 494

on women. Choices for women were as limited in the Victorian era, if not more so.[116]

I agree with Mancoff's next observation on the differences between the periods which concerns the changes in art itself. "Also, the visual arts in the Victorian era developed in parallel rather than subsequent to the literature. Further, artists developed definite prototypes, assigned physical characteristics to characters, and formulated a clear iconography."[117] This is certainly true, but an additional observation is that the physical characteristics assigned to the characters, especially in Pre-Raphaelite art, were still idealized types from mythology. Though realistic depiction was the mode of representation and the women were drawn from models, they have a generalized appearance akin to manuscript illustration.

For example, let's compare Edward Burne-Jones' painting of *The King's Wedding* (Figure 20) with the first manuscript illustration studied in Chapter one: a scene of knights jousting from *The Chronicles of* England (Figure 1). Though Burne-Jones' figures are closer to the front of the picture plane and are shaded to emphasize their three-dimensionality, they all look very much alike and we don't get any more sense of who they are than we do of the women behind the castle wall in the manuscript image. In fact, those earlier women have more variation in dress and headgear than Burne Jones' women. The row of minstrels

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[116] Smith, p. 192. The Reformation restricted women even more and brought about an increase in moral legislation. One must always take into account the class level of women because choices were inexorably linked to income.
[117] Lacy, (ed.) p. 494.

tucked behind the wall in *The King's Wedding* lends a compositional similarity to the women in the manuscript image. The Pre-Raphaelites beautifully mimic the compositional structure of manuscript illustration by use of strong horizontals and verticals and shallow space.

William Holden Hunt, as well as many other Pre-Raphaelites, made illustrations for books. Comparing one of these to manuscript images may be more useful because of the similarity in medium. Hunt's *Lady of Shallot,* made for a book of Tennyson's poems, takes the point of view of the interior of the woman's prison (Figure 17). The woman's full body is cramped in the picture space and emphasizes her containment. The Pierpont Morgan Library scene of Lancelot crossing the sword bridge (Figure 6) is a different story but there is an imprisoned woman: Guinevere, signified by her crown. She is as disproportionate to and as confined by the castle tower as Hunt's lady is to her room. Both artists use elements in a decorative way. Hunt uses hair as part of the linear movement of circular lines that trap the woman. The medieval artist uses pattern, the other figures and a tree to embellish his scene. One main difference is Burne-Jones' emphasis on the woman's body. The winding thread causes the material to press upon her curves and breasts in a revealing manner. Overall, both women are generalized and incorporated into the artistic composition.

Though the fourteenth-century manuscript images are more narrative in form and function than the Pre-Raphaelites' personal, sensual, artistic visions, they do share a similarity in the way that women in both art forms are, in a sense,

'captured.' Passive positions and expressions of the women characterize them as helpless and not in control of themselves. The theme of women in towers epitomizes the notion of women trapped, first in the plot of the story and again in art. In the medieval period women are shown at the top of towers, often with only their heads sticking out, but the Pre-Raphaelites take the idea of helplessness one step further by using their skills of depiction to show the very emptiness of a woman's eyes or the lack of musculature in her neck. The outer appearance of females in both periods differ through the treatment of shading, detail, and amount of picture space that they occupy.[118]

However, they function as signifiers of the same message. One cannot deviate very far from the underlying construction of women's roles in Arthurian legend, no matter what art form they appear in or what version of the story is used. The nineteenth-century revival occurred because of the revisitation to medieval court culture of which women, and sexual morality played a large part. There is an inconsistency in the sexual morality which underlies much of the meaning and subjects of the Pre-Raphaelite's Revivalist paintings. This morality is betrayed by the sheer sensuality of color, realism and focus on the female bodies. The effect is that the paintings point to the lure of sexuality embodied in the female, and this actually increases desire.

Is it the very nature of sex and romantic love with all of its complications that affected the lack of significant change in women's roles between the two

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[118] There are exceptions, notably in the twentieth century such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* which reinvents the story from the women's perspective.

periods? Beauty is often a metaphor for sexual desire in art. It resides in images of women and nature which are enhanced by color and composition. I have examined how certain artistic choices concerning the female body affect the messages of art, but perhaps in a larger sense they are based on the fundamental nature of the female body. One of the most influential, though underrated, scientific discoveries of all time could be when humankind first realized the intricacies of reproduction and the respective roles males and females play in its workings.

The advantageous role women have in identifying the paternity of their child gives them a certain advantage over men, causing power struggles to occur in the various forms of sexism. Barbara Kreuger looks at this fact of nature in relation to French verse romance.

> "Women were quite literally at the reproductive center of these social processes: they produced the male heirs upon whom primogeniture and agnatic descent depended. But, paradoxically, their very centrality necessitated male control of their sexual autonomy. Precisely because paternity could not be proven, female sexuality and reproductive powers threatened male lineage. The aristocracy's interest in genealogical descent made female sexuality increasingly the focus of male anxiety."[119]

Other scholars agree with the assessment that the the nature of reproduction is fundamental to gender roles. The medieval scholar Diane Bornstein emphasizes that the persistence of importance placed on the virginity and chastity of women up to modern times stems from men's need to control women's sexual behavior.[120]

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[119] Kreuger, p. 20.
[120] Bornstein, p. 29.

The prominence of issues of paternity has a long history in the Western world. There is a direct relationship between Western ideas of material progress, acquisition of wealth and property through blood lines, and the subjugation of women and their reproductive powers for these ends. The two largest flowerings of Arthurian legend coincide with economic expansion and, in the nineteenth century, industrial development. Ownership of property was a key factor in the growth of patriarchal societies. Christianity reinforced Roman ideas of conquering lands and establishing such systems, replacing nomadic herding societies such as the Celts with agricultural production which requires ownership of land. With property comes a necessity of clear awareness of lineage, setting up the blood lines through the father, in order to ensure inheritance rights. Also, the women are taken out of competition because they are confined to the sphere of the home and its maintenance and as producers of children to carry on the blood lines. Marriage and sexual legislation, aimed particularly at women, strengthened patriarchal lineage systems.

Paradoxically, images of women sometimes reveal more about men and their power. In both of the periods of this study, and in both the literature and reality, there is a strong presence of male relationships with other males. The Pre-Raphaelite men had very close friendships with each other. The female models they used served their purposes of making art and inspired them in their quest for greatness. The men embraced the chivalric code, not only as a source for art, but in their relationships with both women and men.

In the medieval period women were the catalysts for the actions of knights, but the men took oaths of loyalty to each other that often superseded oaths of fidelity to women. The triangular nature of the Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot relationship says as much about fidelity among knights as it does about infidelity in marriage. The fact that Lancelot was Arthur's best knight complicated Arthur's attitude towards the adulterous affair. Should Arthur ignore it and retain his knight and, in fact, inspire Lancelot's bravery and skill?

There is evidence to suggest—at least in the literature—that loyalty among men was just as important as loyalty to their chosen woman, if not more so. Interestingly, Guinevere is barren in the legend, but this is not made into a significant issue. Giving the king a son is usually the main purpose of a queen, which is why infidelity in that situation would be an even greater crime. However, this is a romance. Infidelity in these legends focuses on the act itself, and political consequences. Peggy McCracken discusses the issue of the queen's body and finds a dichotomy between her body's main function of producing heirs in actual courts, and the focus of romance writing being centered on the queen's body as an object of sexual desire, rather than as a producer of children. Kreuger believes that by focusing on actual adultery the women are seen as endangering the faith and loyalty between men of the courts and potentially disrupting the political system.[121] Therefore, I believe that while medieval society's anti-adultery views were concerned with protecting lineage, the

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[121] McCracken, p. 38.

romances addressed adultery as a direct threat to male-dominated social systems.

The myth of Arthur involves many facets of civilization; from politics and war to the religious quest for the grail. At first it seems like a 'boy's' myth. My intention was to investigate how the myth operated as visual culture. Specifically, I wondered if the way women were shown could relate to the larger Western history of controlling sexuality and furthering the interests of patriarchial systems. I would conclude that, previous to twentieth-century interpretations, it is indeed a 'boy's' myth.

Although science, religion, and artistic form changed significantly over the five hundred years between these periods, the power of sex remained problematic and heavily weighed towards a male advantage as long as women were seen only for their physicality and not their individuality. A woman's character has long depended on what she does with her body and the Western artistic tradition often reinforced this by focusing on female beauty. Arthurian legend and other romances are part of the artistic traditions that helped to promote these social constructs in the past. By looking into the mirror of mythology we can see human history, including ourselves, more clearly.

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1. Knights Jousting. *The Chronicles of England*, Bibliotheque Royale de Belgique: MS 9243, f.45.

2. Guinevere and her ladies watch Lancelot and other knights jousting at Camelot. Pierpont Morgan Library, MS. 805 f.262, 14th c.

3. Meeting of Merlin and Uther Pendragon. *the Chronicle of England* by Peter Langtoft, MS Royal 20 AII f. 3v. c. 1307-27, British Library

4. Frontispiece to the romance of *Lancelot*, c. 1400. Paris, Bibliothèque
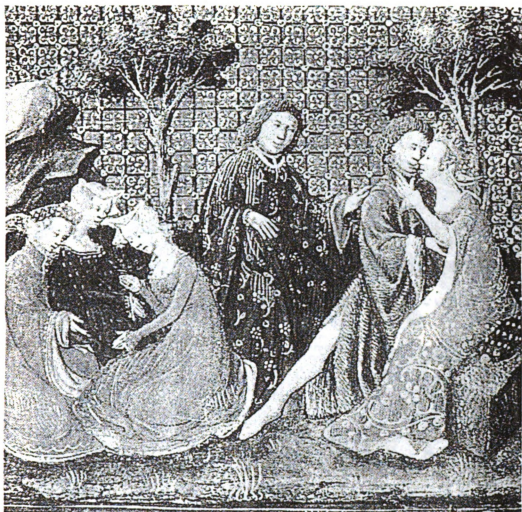Nationale, MS Arsenal 3479, f. 1.

5. Lancelot rides in the shameful cart. Pierpont Morgan library MS 805: *Lancelot*, 14th c.

6. Lancelot crosses the sword bridge. Pierpont Morgan library MS 805: *Lancelot*, 14th c.

7. The Kiss. Pierpont Morgan library MS 805: *Lancelot,* 14th c.

8. The meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. fr.
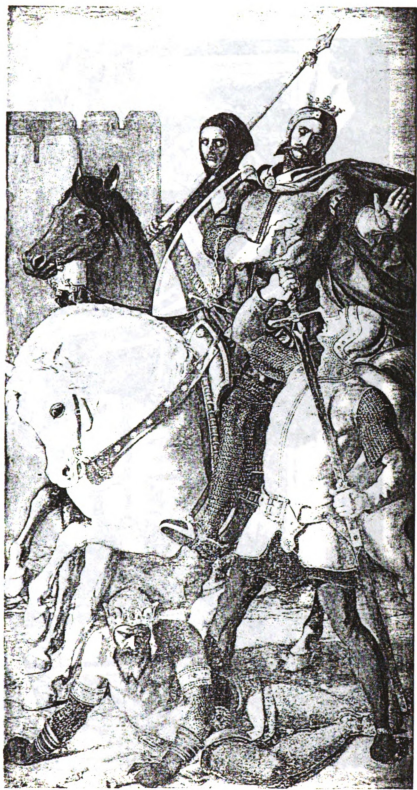118, f. 219v.

Lors se turent tous m/ensemble et
font semblant de conseiller et la royne
t bien que lerbld non ause plus faux.

9. The meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
fr.112, II, f. 101.

10. Guinevere and Lancelot in bed. British Library Add. 10293. Folio 312v.

Cōment lanf uit auoec la roÿne t deue
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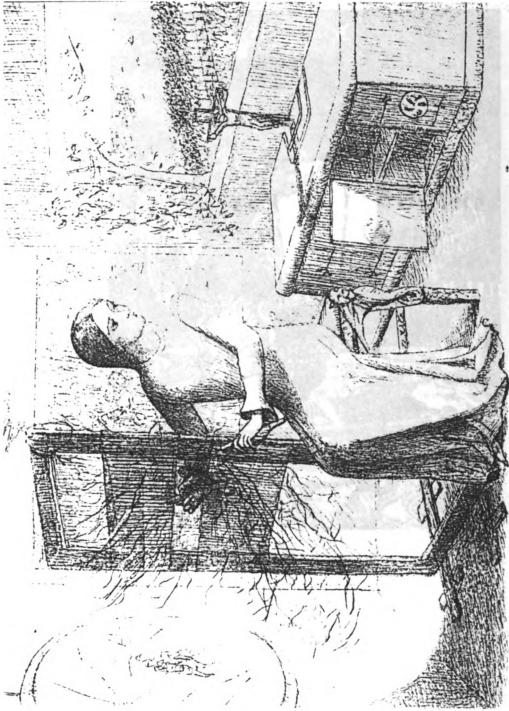11. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 122, f. 147v.

12. *Generosity: King Arthur Unhorsed Spared by Sir Launcelot*, William Dyce, 1852.

13. *King Arthur's Tomb*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1854-55.

14. *Lancelot's Vision of the Sanc Grael* (study for the Oxford mural project), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1857.

15. *The Lady of Shalott,* Elizabeth Siddal, 1853.

16. *The Lady of Shalott*, William Holden Hunt, 1858-1905.

17. *The Lady of Shalott,* William Holden Hunt, 1857.

18. *Queen Guinevere*, or *La Belle Iseult*, William Morris, 1858.

19. *Found*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1854.

20. *The King's Wedding*, Edward Burne-Jones, 1870.

21. *Pygmalion and the Image IV: The Soul Attains,* Edward Burne-Jones, 1879.

22. *the Beguiling of Merlin.* Edward Burne-Jones, 1873.

23. *Fazio's mistress*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1863.