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Women, Empowerment and the Natural World in Medieval Literature 1200-1500.

Masters of Research

By Emily Payton

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Paganism's survival and its potential for women's empowerment are made visible through medieval literature’s depictions of the natural world in medieval literary texts. By focusing on texts such as those by Marie de France and the King Arthur legends and reading them within the framework. Including commentators such as Albrecht Classon, Sebastian Sobecki, Joan Cadden, Henrietta Leyser, Liz Herbert McAvoy and Luce Irigaray will suggest that through the treatment of ‘femininity’ in these works, we see the survival of Paganism through literary creativity. Ultimately, it will conclude that the texts become a lens through which to view the potential for female empowerment instead of the more prescriptive approaches exercised by the Christian Church.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One – The Stimulus of the Natural World 12

Introduction 12

The Natural World of the Celts 16

Celtic Women 19

Celts and the Natural World 20

Influence of Medieval Culture 25

Aristotle's Philosophy 27

Aristotle's Philosophy 27

Aristotle and the Natural World 30

Saint Augustine of Hippo 32

Augustine and the Natural World 34

Augustine on Women 35

Influence on Medieval Culture 36

Hildegard of Bingen 38

Hildegard Evolution 38

Hildegard and the Natural World 39

Hildegard's Writings 44

Conclusion 45

Chapter Two – The Use of Water and its Relation to Female Empowerment in the Lais of Marie de France 46

Introduction 46

Marie de France and her *Lais* 50

Humans and Nature 50

Lanval, *Guigemar* and *Equitan*: *Lais* and Water 52

Medieval Women and Water 53

Lai Lanval 56

Water in *Lai Lanval* 57

Water and Celtic Symbolism 59

Female Empowerment 62

Lai Guigemar 64

Guigemar and the Sea 65

Guigemar's Lover 70

Water's Reconnection 72

Female Empowerment 74

Lai Equitan 77

Lai Equitan and Feminism 79

Male Weakness 82

Conclusion 83

Chapter Three – Development of Morgan le Fay and other Arthurian Women 88

Introduction 88

Morgan le Fay's Celtic Origin 89

Morgan the Healer 93

Morgan the Sister 100

Morgan the Villain 114

Malory's Morgan Combining Paganism and Christianity 122

Morgan, Morrigan, Brigid and Lilith 126

Conclusion 131

Conclusion 133

Bibliography 136

Introduction

> …the church was not only impregnated with…Pagan philosophy, but it adopted many of the ceremonials or oriental worship…which the people clung to.[1]

Christianity converted millions of Pagans and played the most critical role in societal development worldwide. Today is Christianity's original opinion on women and the natural world. In essence, women are secondary to men and can be controlled rather than empowered: 'Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you,' as St Paul announced.[2] However, in rapid conversion methods, Christianity allowed Paganism to survive by adopting its ceremonies and integrating power-hungry leaders.[3] Polydore Virgil says, 'The Church has borrowed many customs from the religion of the Romans and other Pagans.'[4] Unwittingly, early Christian leaders mistook the quantity of conversions for the quality of believers and, in that oversight, allowed Paganism to survive, albeit in more covert forms. This thesis aims to investigate the following;

1) How previous philosophers discussed Pagan and Christian faiths, women and the natural world separately and together.
2) How are women and the natural world presented in popular Medieval texts, such as those by Marie de France?

[1] John Lord, *The Old Roman World: The Grandeur and Failure of Its Civilization* (New York: C. Scribner, 1867).
[2] *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments,* Authorised King James Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Genesis 3.16.
[3] Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 235.
[4] Abram Herbert Lewis, *Paganism Surviving in Christianity* (Glasgow: Good Press, 2019), p. 8.

3) Can the previous questions influence popular Medieval female characters, such as Morgan le Fay and Guinevere?
4) Are these women empowered at all? If so, how.

To define this more clearly, by explaining the core fundamentals. By ‘women’, I mean both a physical embodiment of that opposite of a man. Following the medieval notions of women, this project relies heavily on Cadden[5] and their cultural bodies, such as; femininity, gentleness, weakness and hysteria, which will be discussed later in the introduction in greater detail. In terms of ‘empowerment,’ it is an authority or power given to or seized by women to do something agential. It is the natural world that provides this agency for them. Considering St. Paul's edict, ‘I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man,’[6] this keeps women from knowledge, education and cultural empowerment in the Christian tradition. This directly pertains to what makes a 'woman' in the Middle Ages but how 'empowerment' is often found, as I will show. It is regularly seen as 'transgressive' within a Christian literary framework. ‘Ecofeminism’ is where I take the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between humans and the natural world. It addresses the equivalents of the repression of nature and women's repression to emphasise the idea that both must be understood to recognise how they are connected. Ecofeminist readings will not be highly theoretical but will be based on the irresistible combination of feminist empowerment. Moreover, its links to a woman's comfortable placing herself within the natural world create the ecofeminist framework. It is important to realise, as Gillian Rudd comments, ‘the medieval…and feminism…ecofeminism…run the risk of diverting attention away from the actual nature appearing in the texts.’[7] However, ‘should be a social, political, and theoretical

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[5] Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[6] Holy Bible, Corinthians, 14.32.
[7] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*, (Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 167.

movement…that is continually developing.'[8] Emerging from the texts rather than being imposed upon the material from the outside. It is using the term in the thesis as a positive signifier, rather than the negative one as it has come to be within Christian discourse - particularly that of the Middle Ages - except when applied to Aristotle as 'the Pagan philosopher'. However, suppose it is viewed through the lens of paganism and/or ecofeminism. In that case, it makes much more sense as an intrinsic part of womanhood rather than being transgressive - as the women focused on will demonstrate. This relationship between women and the natural world is the 'ecofeminist' view of the literature I will adopt, comparing it to Paganism as the typical polytheism belief but focusing mainly on the Ancient Celtic religion of Europe and the British Isles. The literature I will focus on has its roots embedded in European Celtic lands, mainly France, the United Kingdom and Ireland. It is said that Celtic religious practises varied across the Celtic lands, but by using books and academics who have researched thoroughly based on archaeological findings, specific artefacts and alternative texts to support my claims. As we shall see, particularly in chapter one, Celtic spirituality runs deep through water motifs, forest imagery and pathways to other realms and fairy. As Caroline Welsh states, all places of worship were set up where the embodiment of nature lay, such as forests or facing sunrises or sets.[9] In particular, water is an essential and magical element within the stories I have chosen and is imbued with Celtic symbolism is heavily used literally and metaphorically in understanding women biologically – this will be explored further on in this chapter.

It is important to present the chosen texts and their relevance at the start of this project. As the chapters will show, the Pagan and Celtic Spirituality links create a loophole for women. The Pagan material is transmitted orally in the first instance and then via the consideration of

[8] *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, ed. Mary Phillips, Nick Rumens (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2015), p. 2.
[9] Caroline Welch, 'These Sacred Places', *Country Life*, 14 (2020), 70–72, (p. 74).

that orality - as we see in all three of the case studies: Marie's lais; and in the figure of Morgan le Fay and her Celtic counterpart Morrigan.[10] The oral genre becomes more fixed and less malleable once it is reviewed. Nevertheless, in that examination, the Pagan becomes tangled with the Christian - and the task of the thesis is to unpick areas of such tangling. The writers all appear aware of how they are textualising a Pagan tradition, either to protect it, like Marie, or control and amend it, as in the male treatment of Morgan. My thesis is composed of four chapters focusing on different themes. Chapter one will focus on the historical development of attitudes towards the natural world in the Middle Ages, focusing on the works of Aristotle, St. Augustine and Hildegard of Bingen and the systems of Celtic belief to read them up against each other. These three individuals were chosen due to what they brought to the philosophical and theological table individually and how it impacted them collectively. The Celtic Pagan faith predated the examined philosophers and left its traces in Christianity and society,[11] such as in texts associated with the Celts of Europe and Roman Britain, such as those by St. Bede[12] and the Celtic literature. The purpose of looking at these four divisions concerning attitudes to the natural world is to build background knowledge of the history, theory and theology and, therefore, their influences on proto-ecofeminism in medieval literature.

The texts Marie de France's Lai Lanval, Lai Equitan, and Lai Guigemar have been selected for chapter two. They give different portrayals of women in different positions of influence. In *Lai Lanval*, we have the lady in a position of power in her own right. She dictates to a man and uses her influence in court. In *Lai Guigemar*, we have the lord’s wife who seeks to burst out and find freedom elsewhere after male repression, playacting courtly love and gender and class dynamics.

[10] The Morrigan Goddess is also known as what’s called a Triple Goddess as she often appears alongside her two sisters Madb and Macha. Explored further in chapter 4.

[11] Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was* (London, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2012).

[12] Known as *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum.*

Moreover, in Lai Equitan, we have the seneschal's wife, who uses the ways of the court and men to work to her advantage. She possesses much influence, and she destroys a king. It is easy to see this as manipulative and question the empowerment of the wife in this *lais*. However, it is crucial to remember that empowerment means authority or power given to someone to do something – these do not have to equate to good choices – but a view to wielding power in any format. All three texts are heavily dressed in apparent links to the natural world, such as water and the forest. Another reason for choosing Marie de France is that, as a female, Marie uses her role as an empowered female to project this power (or lack thereof), mirroring Irigaray's work on mimesis.[13] Marie often allows characters to make choices based on the empowerment she bestows upon them. Marie presents empowerment as something we all have if we channel it correctly.

Furthermore, chapter three looks at the different portrayals of Morgan in Geoffrey of Monmouth *Vita Merlini*, Chrétien de Troyes (*Erec and Enid*), the *Vulgate Cycle* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Here I explore how Morgan has always remained an independent and empowered woman in her own right. She is a female character with deep roots within Celtic mythology and survived the Christianisation of literature, making her and other Arthurian women a perfect final case study. Moreover, it will explore how Morgan declines from a once-respected equal to King Arthur to a wicked woman, sneakily plotting behind the scenes.

Research on similar topics has been conducted before. For example, Albrecht Classen provides a depiction of water in medieval literature.[14] This book, with its eleven chapters, was invaluable during research. Its extensive bibliography included numerous other sources, which helped immensely. Classen numbers of different variations bodies of water and although not

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[13] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 76.
[14]Albrecht Classen, *Water in Medieval Literature: An Ecocritical Reading Ecocritical Theory and Practice* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018).

fully explored helped to obtain my conclusions. As the introduction focuses on ecocriticism, it provides a pathway to understanding ecofeminism more widely. Predominately using chapter four, as it focuses on Marie de France's *Lais*, it was helpful to read his breakdown of *Lanval* and *Equitan* along with Marie de France's brief biography. Although from a more academic perspective, the book reads shallowly like a list of the ways water appears in medieval texts without much explorative analysis, this ensured minimal reliance on his 'list' but gave me a 'list' to research independently, alongside other contemporary stories. This book ultimately led to Sebastian Sobecki, who focuses solely on the ocean[15] and is also referenced extensively in this thesis,[16] alongside Maren Clegg Hyer on the water in the early English period.[17] Sobecki's *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* I found helpful in terms of the unconfirmed claims and stories which urged further exploration. Some conclusions were referenced later in this project that helped support the claims of the project presented with substantial evidence.

More importantly, in regards to understanding the background to this project at least, Joan Cadden's research into the views on sex and gender in the Middle Ages and Henrietta Leyser's book on medieval women themselves are crucial to this thesis and for helping to understand the historical context of medieval women. Joan Cadden's *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages* is a comprehensive and fascinating tour through a range of significant concerns regarding gender in the Middle Ages. Cadden brings together and helpfully summarises the critical work by Aristotle (d. 322BC), Hildegard von Bingen (d. 1179), Jacopo of Forli (d. 1480) and others. Organised into two sections, the book covers the science behind reproduction and human attempts to control the outcomes of that reproduction. This book takes the reader along a broad historical journey of reading and writing from before and through the Middle Ages. As the book's title suggests, Cadden's central concern is the sex

[15] Sebastian Sobecki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2008).
[16] Sebastian Sobecki, *The Sea and Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2008).
[17] Maren Clegg Hyer, *Water and the Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

difference in the Middle Ages. The book's goal is to unfold the 'relations among various distinct but overlapping sets of theories'[18] to show the development of theories regarding sex and gender.

Cadden's research is integral to this project; the main research topic is women's empowerment and empowered women 1200-1500. Cadden significantly looks at the historical context surrounding reproduction but does not explain why females are deemed inferior to men, leaving this obvious question ironically flaccid. To identify empowerment, it is vital to understand how women are not empowered in the first place. This ties into the medieval notions focusing on the body's humors, specifically whether the body was hot or cold and dry or wet. It also considered how female scholars such as Hildegard wrote about their sex, finally reviewing masculine and feminine types of children.[19] It is clear from Cadden's research that during the Middle Ages, although the woman was not as important as the man, she was still very much present. Doctors and philosophers of the time were particularly aware of the contradictions associated with women's deemed inferiority and their centrality for the continuation of the human race that to produce offspring, women were needed and were (and are) therefore 'essential'. This form of empowerment for women will explore in the project alongside traces of Paganism: questioning how empowered women are portrayed, regardless of their awareness of their empowerment.

From Cadden, I could also read further via a number of the works by Luce Irigaray. Luce Irigaray is one of the globe's most potent theorists. From her early ground-breaking work on etymological rules to her later radically focused ethics of gender difference, Irigaray has put herself all at once as the important intellectual of our opportunity. Her writings formed many of this project's arguments that women are empowered, not the way we want or

[18] Cadden, p. 10.
[19] Cadden, p. 55.

expect them to be. Luce Irigaray's writing is authoritative in asserting that Freud's (and I Argue Aristotle and St. Augustine's) theoretical approach towards women's sexuality, social position, and what we know about sexuality is viewed through the male lens. Irigaray argues that men have consistently tried to define women as a whole and are less than them because they do not have a penis. As such, women are insufficient and defective, substandard where the standard is masculinity. As such, I explored Irigary further and used mimesis, a process of submitting women to stereotypical views of women to call their views into question, the core foundation of misjudging women and playing them off against one another.

Although in a more conventional form, exploring this further is Henrietta Leyser's *Medieval Women*, an erudite and clearly-articulated explanation of medieval women's lives during 450-1500. Leyser begins her focus using substantial evidence, such as the male-dominated *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and other primary sources: *Judith* and *The Sickness of Women*, for example. While doing so, Leyser uses fellow researchers to question and draw conclusions on medieval women's lives. In considering research from Loengard, Mirk and Wogan-Browne, Leyser provides a good presentation helping the reader relate to the different scenarios in which women found themselves. Leyser's writing proves modern women still face similar dilemmas such as marriage, careers, childbirth and other crucial life decisions. This leads one to consider if empowerment is mistaken for repression in the Middle Ages.[20] Thus, this project delves into the subtle ways within medieval literature where this empowerment was mistaken for repression and how it was fought back. Quite often, it appears to be the natural world that is used as a metaphor for and facilitator of female empowerment.

[20] In correlation with Luce Irigaray's 'mimesis.'

Leyser's treatment of various primary sources shows that although medieval women did not have many legal rights, they did have responsibilities. Organised in four parts, the book covers a chronological journey for women, beginning with the Anglo-Saxons to the eleventh century and lastly, family and spirituality during the Middle Ages. Parts one and two of the book were very enlightening in their focus on Anglo-Saxons and eleventh-century women, as there are written law codes before and during the Anglo-Saxon times to enhance women's rights. These are altered during Anglo-Normal times to favour the man.[21] Leyser advises reading before her when her research starts, which this project does as 'there is a wider context, that of chronology, still to be considered…[such as] the earliest graves bear witness to those Pagan beliefs of which we know so little.'[22] Reading sources such as St. Brigid's *Vitae* leads my investigation into a heavy Celtic influence in the literature examined throughout this thesis, not just in regards to the mythology but what we can gauge about the social elements of the Celtic lifestyle.

Leyser's book plays an essential part in this project; the main research topic is women's empowerment and empowered women 1200-1500 and their interactions within vestigial Pagan contexts. Part three of Leyser's book is separated into three chapters: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood, Women at work and Widows. Each of these chapters is very useful regarding the current project as they solely focus on the different eventualities of women of the Middle Ages. Taking the first chapter of part three, Sex, Marriage and Motherhood, Leyser begins by stating that 'Medieval Women were classified according to their sexual status.'[23] Those who were marriage material were classed in high regard as they had the potential to become mothers. Being a mother was the highest award as it was acknowledged that the Virgin Mary had given birth to Christ, and without her, Christ would not have had a role in the world. All mothers

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[21] Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women* (London: Hachette UK, 2013), p. 40.
[22] Leyser, p. 12.
[23] Leyser, p. 93.

were therefore allowed influence over their children; the higher social class, the more influence. For example, a king's mother would continue to play a valuable role in court and outrank her daughter-in-law. This is the identification of empowerment for some women of superior social status, which also is explored in this project.

A common theme is that although there are many references to the natural world and women in medieval literature, they are dealt with almost entirely separately by previous scholarship. They are very rarely referenced in conjunction with each other. Therefore, the assumption that repression and empowerment go hand-in-hand means they are rarely reinvestigated. For example, in the special issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, entitled *Revisiting the Pleasure Garden*,[24] edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy, four essays argue that 'the meaning attached to the medieval enclosed garden' is associated with being an enclosed 'female.'[25] Sara Ritchey also argues in her *Holy Matter* that 'nature was not a religious concern.'[26] These earlier treatments wholly ignore the Celtic/Pagan elements of the natural world; however, both deal with how the natural world can bring about female empowerment in the Christianised (literary) milieu. Indeed, this work is placed within this gap in scholarship.

Alongside Cadden and Leyser, the main approaches include those from influential theorists. For example, as mentioned above, Albrecht Classen and Carolyne Larrington, to name a few. My wish was to be surrounded with as much evidence as possible from well-known commentators, such as Diane Watt, to those less familiar as Sharon MacLeod, to gain support for this research. We could learn from returning to medieval texts about medieval concerns about the natural world and what we can learn from them. This approach was fruitful as I balanced the evidence from the literature and analysis well to clarify my arguments. Ecofeminism goes back much further than we realise and is key to understanding

[24] Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'The Medieval Hortus Conclusus: Revisiting the Pleasure Garden', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, 1 (2014), 5–10.
[25] McAvoy, p. 5.
[26] Sara Ritchey, *Holy Matter* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), p, 7.

female empowerment, current global heating concerns, and the environmental crisis. The successful attempts of repression and control of the natural world and women are evident and everlasting. However, we see a survival of both living together as allies: supporting and peaceful interactions. They sometimes live quietly and at other times more loudly in our texts, successful in their drive to survive the 'control', similar to Paganism and Christianity.

Chapter One – The Stimulus of the Natural World

Introduction

Writing about the natural world is a difficult task. As Barbara Hanawalt asserts, 'it is both everywhere and nowhere.'[27] Logically, one thinks it is everywhere as it is imperative to human survival. Indeed, most living conditions are impacted by the natural world: agriculture, farming, medicine, and settlement. The point of this chapter is to see how the natural world influenced two important faiths (Christian and pagan) and societies (Celtic and Medieval) of the west and how this formed its view on women and their empowerment. This work spends much time discussing their biographies because it is essential in our understanding of what has influenced them in their spiritual and social forming – therefore seeing the clearer stimulus on empowerment, treatment of women and development of the natural world.

For Jones, it has been an enterprise that has historically defined who we are as a species and continues to do so in contemporary times. Despite the size and complexity of the challenge, this has never discouraged people from trying.[28] The Middle Ages were no different. Jones continues to explain how the term 'natural world' did not technically exist for medieval scholars. This phrase is never used because the existence of a 'natural world' was not acknowledged. What medieval scholars had instead was the *concept* of nature. Ninth-century scholar John Scotus Eriugena (d.877 AD), an Irish Theologian who composed *The Division of Natur*e, claimed that nature 'was the general term for all good things that are and all things that are not.'[29] Nevertheless, this was not a simplified definition. It seems nature

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[27] *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Lisa J. Kiser Barbara Hanawalt, 1st edn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 1.
[28] Lisa H. Sideris, *Consecrating Science: Wonder, Knowledge, and the Natural World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).
[29] Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Periphyseon, 866–67*, trans. by I. P. Sheldon-Williams and John Joseph O'Meara (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1987).

was seen in two senses: nature as the 'essential quality or character *of* something' and nature as 'the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both,'[30] as they are today.

This first chapter will focus on prevalent and developing attitudes towards the natural world in the Middle Ages by considering four leading influencers intersecting within the medieval worldview in the west: Celtic beliefs, Aristotle, St. Augustine and Hildegard of Bingen. These four leading influencers interweave, and their impact is seen even today.

To commence, I will focus on Celtic belief systems. This section will take up the most significant part of this chapter using a combination of primary, secondary and electronic sources. The reasoning is that not only do the Celtic people have a reputation for more equal women's rights and empowerment, but the Pagan faith systems predate the broad spread of the other influential philosophers examined here. Nevertheless, that is commonly known to have been adhered to throughout the European continent, as suggested by Hilda Davidson, therefore directly impacting my three individuals in some way at some point. Although faith changed and developed with the evolving world – as we see with St. Augustine, philosophical studies never stopped being based on nature – the foundation for human survival – as we see with Aristotle.

Furthermore, although the ponderings matured into more in-depth questions, they were centred on basic human behaviours and requirements – as we see with Hildegard of Bingen. As argued by Luce Irigaray in her book *In the Beginning, She Was*, 'a transcendence inscribed in nature itself, seems to fit human beings as such.'[31] Within this chapter section, I

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[30] Jones, p. 5.
[31] Luce Irigaray*, In the Beginning, She Was* (London, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 131

will endeavour to condense relatively huge topics into their key links with this project as a whole and their influence on the following scholars.[32]

I will consider Aristotle's (d.322 BC) teachings because I view him as a foundational figure and a philosophical authority. Aristotle's thoughts are applied theoretically to society and arguably the most influential during the later Middle Ages, particularly in medicine (a predominantly male-dominated industry). Aristotle produced the two texts I focus on below: *Physics* and *Meteorology*. However, Aristotle also brought his observations on many subjects, such as science, friendship, politics and astrology, into correlation with the natural world. 'Rediscovered' by thirteenth-century scholastics like such as Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), and his 'Pagan' philosophies became reconciled with those of Christianity in many ways and their view on women medicinally.

The following section will discuss St. Augustine of Hippo, described by Albert Outler as 'the first medieval father of Western Christianity…He gathered together and conserved all the main motifs of Latin Christianity and reconstructed the religious philosophy of the Greco-Roman world for a new use in maintaining the intelligibility of the Christian proclamation.'[33] He is selected for two reasons. The first is due to his similarities to Aristotle in his philosophical disposition. The second is his differentiation from Aristotle's formalisation of theology in his Christianisation of classical philosophy. What makes Augustine interesting is that he chose to follow Christianity after studying various faiths and wanted to apply his theology practically within society. In *Confessions,* Augustine recalls actual events in which he now sees and celebrates the mysterious action of God's grace. He follows his memories and examines his youth's upheavals and the stages of his hunt for wisdom,[34] shifting women

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[32] Irigaray, p. 131.
[33] Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans.Albert Outler (London: Westminster Press, 1955), p. v.
[34] Saint Augustine, p. viii.

to a lower status physically while equalising them spiritually. St. Augustine inherited many followers, like Aquinas and was perhaps the most influential theologian within the Catholic Church, which used his theories to limit women's empowerment.

Hildegard of Bingen is the recentring of the two men above. She is the female voice of natural philosophy. We often do not consider female voices in medieval theology, and as this project is about women, it was essential to have an intervention by a woman. A German female visionary living from the eleventh to the twelfth century, Hildegard was influenced by philosophy and her country's Germanic origins, writing copiously on the natural world, the body, and medicine. Hildegard incorporates a mixture of the above. True to medieval form, she was a staunch and faithful Roman Catholic going as far as to claim she had visions from God, empowering her with (accurate) information far beyond a woman's capabilities and education of the times. She differs from the research into medicine undertaken by Aristotle, who uses more scientific research to state what the body is. Hildegard refers to her work as being based on a 'vision.' She would have very little knowledge of any of Aristotle's work.[35] Based on these visions, Hildegard uses a natural and holistic approach to solving ailments and theological questions. She believes that God will provide, which is another way of saying that 'nature' will provide – bringing a similar attitude to the Celtic pagans while embracing her female empowerment. Hildegard wrote extensively on herbal medicine and, more importantly, why it works and how important it is to nurture the natural world. Although Hildegard writes about, and often agrees with, ontological female inferiority, she stands her ground against those (men) who try to discredit her. She always draws on women's weakness as part of God's plan but insists on that 'weakness' as offering a direct route to God.

[35] Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098–1179: A Visionary Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 167.

The Natural World of the Celts

With so much British history and the island's relationship with Christianity, it is easy to forget that the United Kingdom and Western Europe used to be a Pagan land, a Celtic area. The first reference to the Celts was in the fifth century BCE by Hecataeus of Miletus, an early Greek historian and geographer.[36] They were not seriously mentioned again until the first century BC when Julius Caesar referred to them as Gauls.[37] In his biography *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (The Gallic Wars), he discusses the vast lands held by the Celts and the Romans' superiority over them. Sharon MacLeod explains this:

> The ancient Celts inhabited a territory comparable to that of the Roman Empire, and it is their cultural traditions which are now understood as having formed a significant part of the foundations of European Culture.[38]

Here, MacLeod emphasises that studying the Celtic traditions is momentous for understanding medieval culture. The Celts were, as Julius Caesar described, 'barbarians.'[39] The Celts also occupied a brutal reputation for their love of beheading or 'head-hunting.'[40] Diodorus Siculus (d. 30 BC), in his 1st-century *History,* describes them thus:

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[36] Sarunas Milisauskas, *European Prehistory: A Survey* (New York: Springer, 2002), p. 363.
[37] Julius Ceasar, *C. Iuli Caesaris Commentariorum: Libri III de Bello Civili*, ed. by Cynthia Damon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1. 'All Gaul is divided into three parts, one of which the Belgae live, another in which the Aquitani live, and the third are those who in their own tongue are called *Celtae*, in our language *Galli*'.
[38] Sharon Paice MacLeod, *Celtic Myth and Religion: A Study of Traditional Belief, with Newly Translated Prayers, Poems, and Songs* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), p. 1.
[39] Miranda Green, *The Celtic World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 5.
[40] 'Headhunting', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online], <https://www.britannica.com/topic/headhunting> [accessed 18 March 2019].

> When at any time they cut off their enemies' heads, they hang them about their horses necks…they deliver their spoils to their servants, all besmeared with blood, to be carried before them in triumph, they themselves in the meantime singing the triumphant pæan. And as the chief of their spoils, they fasten those they have killed, over the doors of their houses, as if they were so many wild beasts taken in hunting…(though great sums of money have been offered for them), yet have refused to accept them. Some glory in this account, they refuse to take for one of these heads in its weight in gold.[41]

Nevertheless, this does not mean that they were uncivilised but is more a comment on the colonialist perspective that Caesar and Diodorus perpetuate to cast a positive light on Rome.[42] Celtic women are described harshly also though it is not confirmed if Roman historians, such as Cassius Dio (d.235 AD) and Ammianus Marcellinus (d. 400AD), met them in person. However, these Celtic women are described as 'great in size, aggressive, harsh in voice and ferocious.'[43] Although these descriptions are likely to be exaggerated, and an early example of Irigaray's 'mimesis,' to paint Celtic women as monstrous compared to the feminine, delicate, Classical Roman women, this is the picture most of us hold of Celtic women due to

[41] Diodorus Siculus, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian: In Fifteen Books. To which are Added the Fragments of Diodorus, and Those Published by H. Valesius, I. Rhodomannus, and F. Ursinus,* 15 vols, ed. by George Booth (London: J. Davis, 1814), I, p. 315.

[42] Isobel A. H. Combes, Daniel M. Gurtner and Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon,* 3 vols, (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2004), II, p. 345. 'The word "barbarian" was first referred to onomatopoetically in reference who people to enunciated words with difficulty and talked harshly…I mean those who were not Greek…therefore…we misused the term as a general ethnic term'.

[43] Green, p. 30.

such depictions. It is easier to destroy enemies if we believe them abnormal and demonic. Thus continued the first significant moulding of women through the power of words and explained cogently by Luce Irigaray:

> for a woman, to try and recover the place of her exploitation by discourse…it means to resubmit herself – in as much as she is on the side of the 'perceptible,' of 'matter' – to 'ideas,' in particular ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic but as to make 'visible'…what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover up of a possible operation of the female in language.[44]

Here Irigaray argues that for women to understand when and how they are repressed, they must know why they were in the first place. Moreover, masculine perspectives and thought processes have moulded women into discursive entities and suppressed the expression of female empowerment in language, explored further in chapter two.

[44] Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 76.

Celtic Women

The Celtic influence on medieval female empowerment is an interesting one – and a key to this present thesis. MacLeod confirms that within 'Brittania' and then 'Britain,' women's rights dwindled as the generations passed. Celtic women had far more independence than those in Greek and Roman Culture.[45] Celtic women were mainly equal to men, supported by Q.L. Pearce,[46] Carole L. Crumley,[47] and Kevin Duffy.[48] However, it is contradicted by Phillip Freeman. He states that the classical sources explain that married Celtic women were subject to their husband's will, although Celtic women had more freedom than Roman women.[49] For example, there was a law called 'union of joint property' – in which the man and the woman bring goods to the marriage. This could be land, equipment, animals, social class or material objects. In this type of union, the wife was called a 'wife of joint authority.'[50] The second was a woman's union to a 'man-property' where the woman contributed little or nothing. This lifestyle directly conflicts with St. Augustine, who believed women were inferior physically. This directly linked to the change in the Christian faith and led to the idea that societies are more likely to treat women more equally to their male counterparts if societies are not Christian.

Furthermore, the third was a man's union to a 'woman-property' where the man contributed little or nothing.[51] The Laws still recognised a woman's right to petition for divorce. However, the Breton Laws were not as hard on unfaithful husbands as they were on

[45] MacLeod, p. 185.
[46] Q. L. Pearce, *Celtic Mythology* (Farmington Hills: Greenhaven Publishing LLC, 2014).
[47] Carole Crumley, 'Celtic Social Structure: The Generation of Archaeologically Testable Hypotheses from Literary Evidence', *Anthropological Papers – University of Michigan. Museum of Anthropology*, 54 (1974), 3–116.
[48] Kevin Duffy, *Who Were the Celts?* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996).
[49] Philip Freeman, *War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).
[50] Jack George Thompson, 'Women in Celtic Law and Culture', *Women's Studies*, 12 (1996), 341, p. 139.
[51] MacLeod, p. 186.

women, something we encounter in several of Marie de France's lais, discussed in chapter two. Additional examples of Breton Laws in Marie de France's Lays include *Bisclavret,* when he tears off his wife's nose, which was imposed following twelfth-century canon law.[52] Evidence suggests that a wronged wife had the freedom 'to take whatever retaliatory actions she wished against both her husband and his paramour for three days, with full exemption from legal retribution.'[53] This was dependent on the different Clans, however. These entitlements were then reduced again during the Anglo-Saxon rule and eventually transferred to women being considered 'property' after the Norman Conquest, leaving women like Hildegard and Marie de France in the twelfth century to seek empowerment delicately elsewhere.

Celtic women often fought alongside the men in battle and were elected chieftains. This process reflects in the female leaders that we know of. For example, we are all familiar with the Celts Boudicca and Cartimandua.[54] Boudicca is known to us as the enemy of Rome, a warmonger. In contrast, Cartimandua was an ally of Rome and therefore is described as 'Regina' (queen in her own right) by the Roman historian Tacitus.[55]

Celts and the Natural World

The natural world was the foundation of life for the Celts, so it was woven firmly into their way of life and representation. Geometric patterns dominated Celtic art but always included images from the natural world, such as foliage, animals and human faces.[56] However, the best

[52] Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages,* trans. by Pamela Selwyn (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 76.
[53] Edain McCoy, *Celtic Women's Spirituality: Accessing the Cauldron of Life* (Minnesota: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2017).
[54] MacLeod, p. 185.
[55] I. A. Richmond, 'Queen Cartimandua', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Volumes 43–45 (1954), 43–52.
[56] Green, p. 6.

way to look at the Celts' relationship with the natural world is to study their ritual year. Dependant on the theory of the Goddess (explored below) and her life cycle, there were four main sabbats: Beltane, Lughnasadh, Samain or Samhein and Imbolc.

Beltane was the beginning of the summer from 1st May. Women and children moved herds away from the crops to fuller fields and kept watch while the men stayed to work the crop fields and protect them from raiders.[57] The weather was cool enough to work the ground but warm enough to feed the grains, and cakes or sweets were made and presented to the earth to 'sweeten the deal' to speak regarding the crops.[58] Geoffrey Keating writes how the dedicated Irish Beltane to the god Dagda 'who saw to the weather and the harvest.'[59] A bonfire was lit upon a hill, and sacrifices, which, as far as we know, were of animals, were made.[60]

Lughnasadh began on 1st August when all the efforts of Beltane farming came to fruition. Again, the men took charge of this, especially during harvesting time, protecting the crops, as this was the most likely time to be raided. The women would have two responsibilities, often presenting their marriageable daughters to other families and clans and setting up temporary engagements – which the involved partners could dissolve at any time.[61] They would then also protect the herds wandering the fields and mountains. From a spiritual perspective, women knew their daughters more intimately, and they were believed to know what was best for the fruition of the families.[62] The fact that the women were entrusted with these two essential responsibilities is an enormous acknowledgement that they seem to have been valued subjects, rather than objects and property, who had strength, intelligence,

[57] MacLeod, p. 58.
[58] MacLeod, p. 60.
[59] Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (London: Penguin, 1981).
[60] Nerys Patterson, *Cattle Lords and Clansmen* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p. 139.
[61] MacLeod, p. 59.
[62] Patterson, p. 139.

judgment, and wisdom if they were allocated fundamental roles within society. These discussions regarding marriage often took place on hills or mountain tops or beside lakes or rivers – where the herds would often graze and places associated with female deities.[63] Lughnasadh was linked to the god Lugh and the goddess, Carmun. In 'The Battle of Moytura,' two saga texts from Celtic mythology, the story tells of the battles fought by three clans; Tuatha Dé Danann, Fir Bolg, and Fomorians.[64] Lugh obtains victory and freedom for his people from an oppressive and unfit ruler, Nuada, and his best warrior and magician, Carmun, who uses her magic, tries to destroy all fruit from the land, as it is profoundly connected with magic. Lugh and his warrior gods destroyed the enemy but saved the ruler's brother, Bres, to exchange information regarding successful farming.[65]

Samhain marks the start of the winter season on 31st October and the start of the New Year when indoor and domestic activities begin. As food was rich from the harvest, it was a time when Clans, nobles, and clients networked regarding alliances, war, and formal marriage contracts were discussed. The beginning of the wintertime sparked concerns. With the impending darkness came sickness and misfortune. Sharon Macleod discusses how the imagery associated with death and the supernatural became associated with this time of year and how 'cosmogonic legends about the end of cycles, darkness, rebirth, creation and the beginning of new cycles' may have been enacted.[66] Divination was most potent today and was commonly performed with apples and hazelnuts as the fruits from trees were associated with portals to the otherworld and deities.[67] We find remnants of this in medieval texts. For example, in *Sir Orfeo* (fourteenth-century), Heurodis, the king's wife, is kidnapped by the fairies after napping beneath an apple tree and having a vision in her dream; 'Al on snowe-

[63] MacLeod, p. 60.
[64] J. Frazer, *The Battle of Moytura: The First Battle of Mag Tuired* (Edmonton: Theophania Publishing, 2011).
[65] Elizabeth Gray, 'Cath Maige Tuired', *Irish Texts Society*, 119, 67-69 (1982), 126–127.
[66] MacLeod, p. 59.
[67] MacLeod, p. 61.

white stedes/As white as milke were her wedes',[68] this is expored further in the following chapter. Comparatively, apples and hazelnuts are also symbolic of the Christian faith. In the Garden of Eden, apple consumption led to Adam and Eve's downfall and, therefore, its association with evil. The *Ancrene Wisse*, a Thirteenth-Century rulebook for female anchorites, refers to Eve and apples in the same breath 'Eve þi moder leop efter hire ehnen. from þe ehe to þe eappel' (Eve your mother leapt after her eyes; from the eye to the apple).[69] During Samhain, these fruits were eaten during feasting, even in the poorest households. This ensured the people gained all the goodness and powers the deities and nature offered them.[70] Samhain was characterised by interactions between this world and the inhabitants of the otherworld. It was the best time of the year to give thanks and collect food naturally. The festival is linked to three wise and powerful goddesses: Mórrígan, Tlachtga and Mongfind. Mórrígan married Dagda, and in celebration, all worlds came together.[71] All three goddesses were descended from powerful witches and druids and were sovereigns in their rights. They were all independent and wise. For example, Mongfind set tasks for her four sons to see who was worthy of a kingship - rather than just awarding it to her eldest, and she wanted to ensure she chose the proper ruler.[72] These traditions and stories were woven into the Celtic culture from at least the first century BC upon Hecataeus's acknowledgement.[73] It is also necessary to point out that Germanic tribes celebrated Yule from the 21st of December to the first of the new year, mirrored by the Christian Christmas tidings. Macleod makes a good point in that this type of 'symbolism was extremely disconcerting to Christian authorities…the fear of power associated with independent and

[68] Anne Laskaya, ed., *Sir Ofeo – Middle English Text Series* (1995), <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo> [accessed 17 December 2019] lines145-146.
[69] Robert Hasenfratz, ed., *Ancrene Wisse – Middle English Text Series* (2000), <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/hasenfratz-ancrene-wisse> [accessed 10 December 2018], p. 32.
[70] MacLeod, p. 61.
[71] MacLeod, p. 64.
[72] MacLeod, p. 64.
[73] Milisauskas, p. 363.

powerful female figures associated with magic authority and ritual may have influenced the later symbolism of Halloween…it is amazing these tales survived.'[74]

Lastly, Imbolc took place on 1st February and was the beginning of spring and the image of nature 'flourishing'. Many animals gave birth around this time, and therefore due to the births, milk was reintroduced to the diet via cows, and a goat was temporarily abandoned due to the lack of calves and kids. Due to fertility and birthing, Imbolc was considered a woman-orientated season. Although technically an intermission for the men, they used this time to strike peace treaties and practise weather divination in preparation for agriculture. Again, drawing correlations with the Christian faith, the Feast of the Annunciation occurs in Spring[75] to celebrate the Virgin Mary's conception of Jesus, offering evidence of an overlaying upon early Christianity of the old Celtic beliefs regarding Imbolc – an issue with which this present thesis will be concerned more widely with, for examples the Feast of Annunciation.[76] The time was initially dedicated to the goddess Brig and later to Saint Brigid during Celtic Christianity's development.[77] Both were associated with fertility, protection, healing, and smithcraft used in Celtic art, including geometric patterns and images from the natural world.[78]

Women, empowerment and the natural world were all conjoined as one. The Celts worshipped a variety of male and female deities, all aligned with a specific area of the natural world. While some were connected to the sun and the moon, most were connected to the natural world, such as mountains, rivers, hills, streams, trees, and forests. MacLeod explains

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[74] MacLeod, p. 64.
[75] 25th March
[76] Known as 'Lady Day', this day commemorates the visit of the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, during which he informed her that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ.
[77] It is believed that 'Brigid' was the title for a leading Druidess Brig. This figure overlooked the shrines build and later conversion from Pagan to Catholic. Courtney Weber, *Brigid: History, Mystery, and Magick of the Celtic Goddess* (Newburyport: Weiser Books, 2015), p. 10.
[78] Green, p. 6.

how one of the most important deities was the 'Sovereignty Goddess,'[79] mentioned earlier. She controlled all related to the land and its glory, and her powers were unlimited.

Additionally, a ruler could not lead successfully without her blessing. The idea was that the Sovereignty Goddess had birthed and nurtured all that surrounded them. We see this exact thing reappear in chapter two in some of Marie de France's *Lais* – men reaching out for help and power from women. However, it is done subtly and in a non-threatening way to soothe the Christian ego and sensibilities of her audience, as we shall see in chapter two.

Influence on Medieval Culture

Christopher Fee describes medieval tales as 'mosaics.'[80] It is quite an apt description of medieval romance heroes- and their tales can frequently be read as fusions of various remnants of ancient tales from earlier cultures. Therefore, as Fee asserts, '[stories] are treasure-troves of much older mythic, legendary and folkloric elements.'[81] The medieval chivalric code and the Celtic traditions shared the exact origins. For example, in their appreciation of the natural world, an interconnection between this world and the next (regardless of the faith being Pagan or Christian), the mighty sword, the importance of willingness to develop knowledge and skills and, most importantly, respect for truth, honour, and courage.[82] However, with the absence of the 'Sovereignty Goddess[83] and the presence of a steadfast Christian male God, we do not tend to have obvious medieval heroines. Irigaray's terms: 'In the beginning, it is she – nature, woman, Goddess – who inspires a sage with the

[79] MacLeod, p. 10.
[80] Christopher R. Fee, *Mythology in the Middle Ages: Heroic Tales of Monsters, Magic, and Might* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: Praeger, 2011), p. 4.
[81] Fee, p. 4.
[82] MacLeod, p. 9.
[83] MacLeod, p. 10.

truth. However, generally, the master conceals what he received from her…He does not say much about such a source…because he wants to keep it to himself.'[84] Grace Jantzen connects Celtic and Christianity by highlighting that 'if the female continues to be linked with nature then contrary to tradition, the female must be linked with goodness, with the natural ability to flourish.'[85] She also describes the 'saviour' and 'heroic figure swooping in to rescue the damsel in distress all too reminiscent of familiar male fantasies,'[86] using Jesus as an example of these super-heroic ideals. Although this project is taking a closer, more critical look at this issue, there appear to be no female heroines to exude empowered feminine qualities at face value, except for the Virgin Mary. Kristeva asserts that Mary's raising removes the goddesses' cultural need and acclimatises women to the Christian faith.[87] Mary is celebrated for everything associated with femininity and being a woman; she is faithful and nurturing in that she carries, gives birth, raises and even has to bury a child – all the things only women could and should do. Mary aside, Fee points out medieval examples of heroines can only be heroines if they exude masculine attributes; – they cannot be feminine and heroic. This pushes out the Celtic attitude of women who can use their femininity. The easiest way to excuse and celebrate these women during medieval times was by describing them as saints.

> The heroines in such narratives take many forms…are militaristic soldiers for the faith…holy warriors…holy women generally virgins who often die protecting their chastity.[88]

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[84] Irigaray, *In the Beginning*, p. 2.
[85] Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester: Manchester Uiversity Press, 1998), p. 160.
[86] Jantzen, p. 163.
[87] Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 133–152.
[88] Fee, p. 23.

Although I agree with Fee, this project's whole point is to present female heroes in their own right – to question what empowerment represents and how it is presented in various medieval texts. The 'mosaic' effect of Celtic traditions, the natural world and mythology are still so embedded within our society that it is impossible these did not influence medieval writers when crafting their female characters. Barbara Newman describes how Lady Justice, in *The City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan (d. 1430) assembles, and the Virgin Mary responds:

> I will live and abide most happily among my sisters and friends, for Reason, and you, as well as Nature, urge me to do so…I am…the head of the feminine sex. This arrangement was present in the mind of God the Father from the start…[89]

Aristotle's Philosophy

Aristotle's ground-breaking work in several philosophy and science branches formed an essential basis for almost all subsequent western thought. He studied under Plato and argued that:

> there is a basic distinction to be made between what is 'natural' and what is not.[90] Natural things do what they do: grow, breathe, reproduce and consume, by themselves and 'our first presupposition

[89] Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 24.
[90] *Human Life and the Natural World: Readings in the History of Western Philosophy,* ed. by Owen Goldin and Patricia Kilroe, 1st edn (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1997), p. 17.

> must be that in nature nothing acts on, or is acted on by, any other thing at random.[91]

Aristotle pays special attention to those that are said to be 'alive.'[92] in that 'as an animal might come to be from animal, and an animal of a certain kind from an animal of a certain kind.'[93] He also placed living things in hierarchies, a foundation fundamental to Christianity and, therefore, St. Augustine, based on other activities in which they can engage. Aristotle places human beings at the top of the life hierarchy as he considers them to be the only natural substances that can think. This is an interesting comment from 'the Pagan philosopher' in correlation with Genesis. God left his creation of Adam until last and 'let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'[94] In his metaphysical and biological writings, Aristotle argues that each living being is to be understood as a good in itself, doing what it does primarily for the sake of its 'flourishing': 'it survives through the process…for man remains a man and is such even when he becomes musical…However, one part survives…for man survives but unmusical does not survive.'[95] Jantzen's earlier reference to the Celtic and Christians means that nature has an initial value independent of whatever amount humans find in natural things.

In *Physics,* Aristotle argues that 'change is explicable through contraries' and that 'fundamental principles must not be derived from one another nor anything else.'[96] Aristotle

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[91] Aristotle, 'Aristotles/Physics', in Classics, ed. by R. P. Hardie, (Kansas: Digireads Publishing, 2006), pp. 111–222 <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.1.i.html> [accessed 15 November 2018].
[92] *Human Life and the Natural World*, p, 17.
[93] Aristotle, part 8, para. 4 of 19.
[94] Holy Bible, Genesis, 1:26.
[95] Aristotle, part 7, para. 4 of 7.
[96] Sheldon M. Cohen, *Aristotle on Nature and Incomplete Substance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 34.

tends to accept the contraries favoured by association with the traditional Greek elements: earth, air, fire, and water. He explains this by claiming that the elements, being in a different form to one another, must differ perceptibly in *On Generation and Corruption*: ‘that is why neither whiteness and blackness, not sweetness or bitterness…constitutes an element.’[97] Sheldon Cohen points out that Aristotle then discusses how all contraries are derived from two pairs: the hot and the cold and the solid and the fluid. These two pairs link the elements; ‘fire (hot and solid), air (hot and fluid), water (cold and fluid), and earth (cold and solid).’[98]

In Aristotle’s *Meteorology,* as Lettinck explains, heaven and bodies are made up of one element – ether – and their notion is circular and eternal. The earthborn world comprises four elements: earth, wind, fire, and water.[99] These elements constitute some material substrates having two primary qualities hot, cold, dry and wet.

> Earth is cold and dry; water is cold and moist,
>
> air is hot and moist, fire is hot and dry.[100]

This is closely linked to the medieval concept of the four humors, which I explore in further detail regarding Joan Cadden's work in my next chapter and its influence on women, their empowerment and their relation to the natural world.

[97] Cohen, p. 34.
[98] Cohen, p. 34.
[99] Paul Lettinck, *Aristotle’s Meteorology and Its Reception in the Arab World* (Leiden: BRILL, 1999), p. 32.
[100] Lettinck, p. 32–33.

Aristotle and the Natural World

Aristotle presents another founding connection with the natural world. He looks for an answer to what exactly occupies the space in which most meteorological phenomena occur. His medical theory uses humors because it draws on ancient medicine. The answer seems already known to Aristotle as it was with the Celts: the Earth is surrounded by wind, water, and fire. These elements each have their proper natural place - the Earth is the centre of the world and is surrounded by air which is surrounded by fire. If an element is not in its native home, it will move to if not hindered by some obstacle.[101] Aristotle applied this theory practically to every physical thing, often connecting physics with humans – similar to the attitude of the Celts that everything is interlinked. When discussing rivers, he explains that if cold condenses the vapour into the water above the earth, the same will occur below the earth. The water of the rivers is not supplied by rainfall but also by condensation. Lettinck explains how Aristotle describes the sea as some sweat of the earth that arises because of the sun's heat; this would explain its saltiness as sweat is salty. Again, this correlation between the natural world and the human body is played out in medieval lore and is evident in the texts discussed later in the project. Where the sea cannot have sources, water may be one of two options: firstly, water is stagnant and has been collected, such as lakes: or secondly, water comes from a source that is artificially made, such as a well.

Aristotle applied this theory to the human body. Aristotle's treatment of sex differences and reproduction is infused with such literal reflections. The polarisation of male and female is much more pronounced in the Aristotelian representation than Hippocratic;[102] hot and cold, the ability to produce semen and the inability to do so. Aristotle agreed that

[101] Lettinck, p. 34.
[102] Joan Caddon, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 24.

women were moist and cold and that men were drier and warmer, again prefiguring medieval medical theory. Interestingly, this is a similar theory to the Celts in that the natural world is connected to people. However, where the Celts tried to use this to empower, Aristotle presents the beginning of forcing genders into boxes. For example, he saw the heat from the male's heart as the moving force of reproduction. Thomas Lacqueur suggests that when Aristotle discusses the respective sexes' capacity to carry out the roles that distinguished them, Aristotle seems to want to consider bodies as themselves opposites.[103] Aristotle knows there is a crucial difference between men and women but acknowledges that reproduction would not happen without both.

Adrian Thatcher points out that Aristotle influenced the Roman Catholic Church through Thomas Aquinas. However, European medical professionals followed Galen's (d.210 AD) teachings.[104] This was mainly due to Galen's indulgence in the Catholic Church's teachings of a singular, omnipotent God and men's superiority over women – and his lack of philosophy on that subject, contradictory to Aristotle. Therefore, medieval Christianity was greatly influenced and imbricated by 'Pagan' philosophies that worked their way into Christian thinking and took up positions often by writers of literary texts such as those that will be discussed later on. The medieval medical theory uses humors because it draws on ancient medicine. This can be shown again in the Latin source *Passio S. Christopbori* (The Passion of Saint Christopher), appearing alongside the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* in the *Beowulf* manuscript, [105] where a great Pagan king falls in love with his humble Christian prisoner and converts. The Pagan brings his knowledge into this Christian union where it will

[103] Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 30.
[104] Galen was a Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher in the Roman Empire. See Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), p. 9.
[105] R. D. Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. x.

‘blowað 7 growað’ [flourish and grow][106] and, in doubt, passes that onto his Christian children, as will any Pagans following his suit. There was a communal hand-holding of both faiths at some point, but this combination gives the impression that although Christianity succeeded, it needed good Pagans to do so.

Saint Augustine of Hippo

Saint Augustine of Hippo was the most influential thinker in the Christian Church with his formalised theology (354– 430).[107]

According to *Confessions*, Augustine found the traditional ‘unquestioning’ of Christianity difficult[108] and began to work closely with the Manichees,[109] (previously banished from Athens during Aristotle’s residency). Manichaeism taught the origin of evil by addressing the theory of evil and its problems. This correlates well with this project in more than one way. The first is that Manichaean theology taught a dualistic view of good and evil[110] by denying the omnipotence of God and postulating two opposite powers – this is very fitting with the pagan stories of warring gods, all of whom are neither good nor bad but who can gain and lose power, at this moment mirroring the push and pull between men and women within this project. The second is that Manichaean does appear to genderise the good

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[106] Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 13.
[107] ‘Saint Augustine of Hippo’ looked up, in *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary,* ed. by J. C. Wells, 4th edn ((Harlow: Longman, 1990), p. 111.
[108] William Mann, *Augustine’s Confessions: Critical Essays* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 88.
[109] Geo Widengren, *Mesopotamian Elements in Manichaeism (King and Saviour II): Studies in Manichaean, Mandaean, and Syrian-gnostic Religion* (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1946). Manichaeism was a major religious movement founded by the Iranian prophet Mani in the Sasanian Empire 224 to 651 AD. Manichaeism taught cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light and an evil material world of darkness. It thrived between the third and seventh centuries and was briefly the main rival to Christianity before the spread of Islam in the competition to replace classical paganism.
[110] John Kevin Coyle, *Manichaeism and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

or the evil. Due to Augustine's love of philosophy, he explains what he saw in Manichaeism in Confessions.

> 'I was unaware of the existence of another reality that truly is, and when they asked me: [1] 'Where does evil come from?' and [2] 'Is God bounded by a corporeal form, does he have hair and nails?'…it was as if I were being cleverly goaded into throwing in my lot with those foolish deceivers.'[111]

Manichaeism also mocks the Christian belief that God 'made them [humans] in his own image'[112] , which appeared to irritate Augustine, but it is the first which reached out to the philosopher within him. Christianity believed there was one God who controlled and created all. However, somehow, evil still existed. The Manichees summarised that either God created the evil, even though Christians class him as 'good', or God did not create the evil, in which case he is not the sole creator. Augustine believed the answer was a mixture of the two. There is a good God alongside an independent hostile power, and it is a consequence of the success of the evil power in its cosmic struggle against God.[113] Mirrored in this project, Christianity is good; Pagans are evil, just like women are either good or bad – both required to be disempowered.

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[111] Mann, p. 88.
[112] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), p. 169.
[113] Mann, p. 88.

Augustine and the Natural World

The background of the order of nature was investigated further by St.Augustine, who was deeply attracted to the significance of the world of life, believing that 'Nature means nothing else than that which anything is conceived of as being in its kind: and that every nature, as far as it is nature, is good.'[114] Hussain Nasr defines that this 'good' that Augustine discusses connects measure, form, and order. Because only God alone is good, perfect goodness can only be found in God, nature participating in the good. Augustine, therefore, rejected the idea of the creation of God. Augustine thought God created the world because 'He is the Good, and it is like the Good to give and generate beyond itself.'[115] Nasr continues to explain how verses: 'God produced the world according to the number' (Isaias 40:26) and 'Thou has ordered all things in measure and number, and weight' (Wisdom 11:21)[116] point to the order bestowed by God upon us his Creation. According to his infinite knowledge, it is and always will be beyond the comprehension of human understanding. However, for Augustine, 'In the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth,' as it says in Genesis, means not in time but the *logos* (harmony)[117] and instantly including the heavens, the angels, and earth and material formlessness corresponding to 'the boundless waters.'[118] Therefore, it cannot be beyond human comprehension.

In addition, St. Augustine differentiates between creatures that are permanently in the same form from Creation and those created only as a germ that develops later, as in plants, animals, and humans. These 'germs' Augustine calls *rationes causalis*[119] are now pregnant by

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[114] Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ḥusain Naṣr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 56.
[115] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 56.
[116] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 57.
[117] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 56.
[118] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 57.
[119] Sarah Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 210.

God's Creation. These germs possess the principle of activity, are governed by numbers and do not imply later additions to Creation. This is due to the beginning 'wherein all things were made together.[120] God upholds the order of creation and commands all creatures to grow and function according to God's creative power.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, nature participated in Adam's fall: 'Evil was only the evil of sin in Adam, but its propagation down to our day it became the evil of nature.'[121] Augustine rejected Aristotelian naturalism and saw the world's end as being beyond the world and the order in nature as issuing from beyond nature.[122] This idea confirms the similar Celtic belief that life works around nature.

Augustine on Women

Here we see Augustine's more practical and formal theology being applied to society. Augustine believed that women were inferior to men, however, in physicality.[123] He taught a spiritual class to both men and women. E. Ann Matter highlights this by explaining that women participated in the category of 'human beings', and as men defined this section, this made women spiritual equals of men. In *De trinitate*[124]

> The woman together with the man is the image of God, so that the whole substance is one image. But when she is assigned as a helpmate, which pertains to her alone, she is not the image of God;

[120] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 57.
[121] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 57.
[122] Nasr and Naṣr, p. 57.
[123] *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia,* ed. by Margaret Schau, 1st edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 52.
[124] *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, p. 52.

> however, what pertains to man alone, he is the image of God just as fully and completely as he is joined with the woman into one.[125]

Here, Augustine tries to clarify how women are in 'God's image' only when they are considered 'humanity' along with males, but not as embodied human beings, contradicting the Celtic equality between the genders.

Matter points out that this is a reinterpretation of Corinthians 11:7, in which Paul says men are not required to cover their heads as they are a reflection of God. However, women, being a reflection of the man, ought to. As modern feminist scholars, like Margaret Schaus and Judith Stark, have noted, this is a direct contradiction of Genesis 1:27-28, which states that male and female were both created in the image of God. However, as Augustine's defenders have noted, including medieval scholars like Thomas Aquinas, only in this limited time of Genesis are women equally made in God's image. However, Genesis is also after the betrayal of God. This has been interpreted as women can be baptised and therefore saved from their fallen ancestor, Eve and as Frank Hultgren puts it, 'escape the curse.'[126]

Influence on Medieval Culture

Augustine's theories influenced most medieval thinkers. However, it must be made clear that not all of his works were available to thinkers in the medieval period, for example, female saints such as Perpetua and Felicity.[127] Perpetua suffers awfully in prison, predominantly

[125] *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine: Re-reading the Canon*, ed. by Judith Chelius Stark (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2007), p. 210.
[126] Frank Hultgren, *Breaking Eve's Curse* (Maitland: Xulon Press, 2004).
[127] Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (Oxfordshire: Oxford University Press, 2012). Perpetua was a Christian noblewoman during the third century in North Africa. Its ruler, Emperor Septimius, banned Christianity, and Perpetua and her slave, Felicity were arrested and put in prison. The women were

through the pain and relief of her breasts through feeding her infant – her femininity and womanhood is her main form of torture. After her vision, she realises the only way to salvation is through a battle with beasts and the devil – a masculine aspect. Her empowerment as a woman is reduced to the form of removal. These women were capable of heroic justice in the face of martyrdom, but this is because female saints behaved manfully – or *viriliter*. Therefore, female saints must take a male quality to become a saint and be weaker reflections of men. A woman cannot be strong and feminine, contrasting with Irigaray's 'mimesis'; she must be one or the other. Newman explains that 'both strategies were deeply…rooted in the structure of Christian thought, yet oblique enough to avoid direct and obvious threats to male dominance.'[128] Augustine's reflection of women and their existential limits are brainwashed into medieval theology, society and canon law and became the basis for Roman Catholic beliefs. Being aware of this medieval attitude regarding women and its influence is significant, especially concerning this project. There is never the question of human qualities; they are always either masculine or feminine. Men and women cannot be considered equal because they are not: they are for different things, and that is, in a crude way, an honest conclusion of how the sexes have been analysed in the west until the present day and in the evidence and research I provide here. This project intends to accept the separation of the sexes and look at how females dealt with that separation and what they could do with it.

given multiple opportunities to abandon their faith. They were removed from their young babies and then bitterly returned to them only to be removed shortly again afterwards. Upon refusal to make a pagan sacrifice, both women were sentenced to death in the arena by being mauled by animals and eventually by the sword.

[128] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 3.

Hildegard's Evolution

Hildegard's female empowerment was advanced for the time, far more so based on her knowledge of natural remedies. She lives in the practicalities of St. Augustine's societal input alongside Aristotle's theoretical discussions of the natural world. Owing to the Church's limitation on public-speaking, the medieval rhetorical arts included preaching, letter writing, poetry, and the encyclopaedic tradition.[129] Hildegard's participation in these arts spoke to her significance as a female orator, transcending bans on women's social participation and interpretation of scripture. She had several faithful followers, including Guibert of Gembloux, who wrote to her frequently and became her secretary until she died.[130] Hildegard also influenced several monastic women, such as Elisabeth of Schönau (d.1164), a German Benedictine visionary, and countless other male writers, as her copious correspondence demonstrates.[131] Preaching by women, even a well-connected and educated abbess and acknowledged prophet, did not fit the stereotype of this time. Saint Paul, for example, in Corinthians, establishes two reasons women are subservient to men. The first is that as the woman originates from the man (Adam's rib), she is inferior in rank. Very different to Celtic women negotiating marriage contracts.

Furthermore, the second is that as the woman was created *for* man, she is subject to him.[132] This was pushed when Hildegard disobeyed Archbishop Christian of Mainz.[133] In 1178 Hildegard approved the burial of a man who had been excommunicated and refused to have him removed.[134] As punishment, the Archbishop denied the nuns their Eucharist and

[129]James Herrick, *The History of Rhetoric: An Introduction* (Boston: Allyn Bacon, 2005).
[130] *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, p. 366.
[131] Joseph L. Baird and Radd K. Ehrman, *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 180.
[132] Holy Bible, Corinthians, 14.32.
[133] Beverly Kienzie, 'Hildegard of Bingen', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopaedia,* ed. by Margaret Schau, 1st edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 364-68 (p. 367).
[134] Lister M. Matheson, *Icons of the Middle Ages: Rulers, Writers, Rebels, and Saints,* 2 vols (Denver and Oxford: Praeger, 2011), II, p. 371.

any singing in the office. Hildegard fought this in writing but refused to remove the man she had buried. She used her voice and preached publicly in 1160 in Germany. She conducted four preaching tours throughout her home country, clergy and laity in chapter houses and public, mainly denouncing clerical corruption and calling for reform.[135] As well as public speaking, Hildegard worked on several literary works; Scivias, Liber vitae mertorum, Liber divinorum operum and Symphonia, and over 300 letters homilies to the gospels, the first morality play – *Ordo Virtumum*, liturgical songs, and medical works.[136] All of these are strongly dependent on the natural world. Along with a horticultural metaphor resembling the empowered goddess-figures or Celtic lore leaders, she drew upon the natural world as her authority within a world dominated by men.

Hildegard and the Natural World

Barbara Newman claims that Hildegard never identifies herself as a theologian. She often refers to herself as a *homo fragilis* (frail human being)[137] however, she is aware that she knows more than the average human being. Newman claims that we can consider Hildegard as a developer of her theology because of this.[138] These tie in with this overall project; as a woman, Hildegard is presented with information. She developed it and then shared it, despite her gender and contemporary situation, in her own right. Our first image links the Holy Spirit with what Hildegard called 'greening.' *Viriditas* (greening) was thought to sustain human beings and could be manipulated by adjusting the balance of elements within a person. This is similar to the Celtic seasonal behaviours mentioned earlier. She uses the word *viriditas* as a

[135] Rosemary Ruether, *Visionary Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 28.
[136] *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, p. 364.
[137] *Voice*, Newman, p. 52.
[138] *Voice*, Newman, p. 52.

metaphor for the health and means much more than just referring to the colour green. It refers to freshness, vitality, fertility, fecundity, fruitfulness, verdure and growth[139] and establishes *viriditas* as feminine – like Imbolc. It is natural but essential, just like ‘a mother suckling a child.’[140] Similar to Imbolc and the metaphor of ‘flourishing’ by Jantzen, mentioned previously, Hildegard’s teachings would lead to an ‘idea of the divine source and ground…the love of the world…of growth the fruition from an inner creative and healthy dynamic, rather than a theology which begins from the premise that the human condition is a negative condition…that must be rescued.’[141] When referring to the Garden of Eden, she describes it as ‘Paradise is a place of pleasantness, which blooms with the greenness of flowers and herbs and is full of delightful aromas.’[142] Hildegard's noun blooms signify rebirth, beauty, fertility, and female sexuality. From this passage, Liz Herbert McAvoy extrapolates ‘flourishing’ as central to Hildegard’s beliefs. She states that ‘the purgatorial arena of punishment…is, for Hildegard, entirely overshone by the flourishing of the maternal garden.’[143] She reasons from nature. She combines images of planting, watering and greening to speak of the presence of the Holy Spirit;

> There are three powers in a stone and three in a flame…In a stone there is moist greenness, palpable strength and red-burning fire… Its moist greenness signifies the Father who will never dry out…it’s palpable strength signifies the Son…who could be touched…its red-burning fire signifies the Spirit, who is the…illumination of the hearts

[139] *Voice*, Newman, p. 58.
[140] Hildegard of Bingen, *Saint Hildegard, Selected Writings*, trans. by Mark Atherton (London: Penguin UK, 2001), p. 210.
[141] Jantzen, pp. 161–162.
[142] Liz Herbet McAvoy, ‘Flourish like a Garden: Pain, Purgatory and Salvation in the Writing of Medieval Religious Women’, *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality,* 50 (2014), 33–60, p. 50.
[143] McAvoy, p. 50.

> of the faithful…Just as the three powers are contained within one stone, so the true Trinity is contained within one true Unity.[144]

Like the Celts who prayed to specific gods regarding their issues, and these gods varied but were similar to other Celtis such as the Irish, Welsh and Scottish, Hildegard is aware that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are names applied by tradition to signify divinity. However, as Newman points out, she draws on them by taking images from the natural world rather than from a chancery.[145]

Hildegard linked the flow of water with God's love that renews the face of the earth and, by extension, the souls of the believers. Nevertheless, *viriditas* plays a much more critical role in Hildegard's theology: 'This *viriditas*…enters into the fabric of the universe in Hildegard's cosmic scheme of things. In Hildegard's usage, it is a profound, immense, dynamically energised term.'[146] Here we have a direct link emerging from Celtic spirituality and its proposed way of living fiercely intertwined with a Christian faith and its way of living. Barbara Newman comments on this aspect of Hildegard's thoughts, claiming 'If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are filled with *viriditas*. You are spiritually fertile, you are alive.'[147] Hildegard imagines Mary as the grass and the green earth: 'the spirit is the dew to make her fruitful'.[148] In a letter to Abbot Kuno, Hildegard described her monastery patron as 'viriditas digiti Dei' (greenness of the finger of God).[149]

Adam and Eve's fall marked the entrance of disease and humoral imbalance into humankind for Hildegard. Hildegard explores medicinal and scientific knowledge via 'the

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[144] Hildegard, p. 84.
[145] Newman, *Voice*, p. 58.
[146] Baird and Ehrman, p. 7.
[147] Newman, *Virile,* p. 56.
[148] Hildegard, p. 175.
[149] Elizabeth Dreyer, *Holy Power, Holy Presence: Rediscovering Medieval Metaphors for the Holy Spirit* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2007), p. 85.

four elements (fire, air, water, and earth), the four seasons, the four humors, the four zones of the earth, and the four major winds.'[150] Although she inherited the basic framework of humoral theory from Aristotle, outlined above, Hildegard's formation of the stratified inter-balance of the four humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) was inimitable. As it was based on their correspondence to the consecrated elements of fire and air and the two bile elements of water and earth. She states in *Causae et Curae*:

> It happens that certain men suffer diverse illnesses. This comes from the phlegm which is superabundant within them. For if man had remained in paradise, he would not have had the *flegmata* within his body, from which many evils proceed, but his flesh would have been whole and without dark humor [*livor*]. However, because he consented to evil and relinquished good, he was made into a likeness of the earth, which produces good and useful herbs, as well as bad and useless ones, and which has in itself both good and evil moistures. From tasting evil, the blood of the sons of Adam was turned into the poison of semen, out of which the sons of man are begotten. And therefore their flesh is ulcerated and permeable [to disease]…All this arose from the first evil, which man began at the start, because if Adam had remained in paradise, he would have had the sweetest health, and the best dwelling-place, just as the strongest

[150] Florence Glaze, 'Behold the Human Creature', in *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 125–148

> balsam emits the best odor; but on the contrary, man now has within himself poison and phlegm and diverse illnesses.[151]

Hildegard blames humanity has fallen states on the evil and its ability to seduce Eve, an innocent woman. Rather than blaming Eve's weakness and disloyalty to God, and although Eve and Adam are punished, Hildegard still claims that paradise still exists, 'blooming [flourishing] with the freshness (*viriditas*) of flowers and grass and the charms of spices, full of fine odors.'[152] Regarding Adam and Eve's relationship, she suggests that 'the relationship of woman and man is like soft earth to hard stone. They must be bound together by love. Their interaction is as close as the air and the wind.'[153] Newman suggests a more 'Manichean' quality in this one instance that correlates with St.Augustine via the 'stark oppositions between God and Satan, purity and corruption.'[154] Newman suggests that Hildegard's concern is not so much with the feminine as with the contemporary roles of man and woman in the transmission of life itself.[155] With this in mind, and in terms of the current project, Hildegard suggests that this relationship between men and women must be equal. There is a similar crossover with the Celtic tradition, rather than Manichean, that not only should that relationship be as natural as the elements but that women may enter the majority of their unions at their own will. By taking *viriditas* into consideration, humans were given copulation by God, as they were given all-natural things for a purpose.

Hildegard understood the garden's plants and elements as direct counterparts to the human body's humors and elements, whose imbalance led to illness and disease. Florence

[151] Priscilla Throop, *Hildegard von Bingen's Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).
[152] Hildegard, p. 22.
[153] Hildegard, p. 133.
[154] Newman, *Sister Of Wisdom*, p. 105.
[155] Newman, *Sister Of Wisdom,* p. 57.

Glaze confirms that *Causae et Curae* 'explores the aetiology, or causes, of disease as well as human sexuality, psychology, and physiology.'[156] Hildegard provides advice regarding diagnosis and prognosis, including instructions to check the patient's blood, pulse, urine, and stool.[157] Finally, she provides a supplementary prognosis for disease and additional medical issues, such as conception and the pregnancy outcome. For example, she instructs that a waxing moon is ideal for human conception.[158]

Hildegard's Writings

Hildegard assembled both her theory and practice in two narratives. *Physica* is a collection of nine books describing the scientific and medicinal properties of various plants, fish, stones, reptiles, and animals. The second, *Causae et Curae*, explores the human body and its connections to the rest of the natural world, with recommended grounds and treatments for various diseases. Hildegard recorded several medical practices, including bloodletting and home remedies for common illnesses and open wounds, burns, fractures and dislocations.[159] Hildegard frequently referred to herself as a member of the weaker sex and as an unlearned woman, utterly incapable of exegesis.[160] This method of self-referencing or using Irigaray's 'mimesis' is continually explored throughout this project. Referring to herself in this way, whether she believed it or not, gave Hildegard a platform to speak freely without threatening the patriarchy. Believing that new members of her monastery should be from the nobility, she

[156] Glaze, pp. 125–148.
[157] Victoria Sweet, 'Hildegard of Bingen and the Greening of Medieval Medicine', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine,* 73.3 (1999), 381–403.
[158] Sweet, p. 400.
[159] Sweet, p. 394.
[160] Ruether, p. 10.

also stats that ‘woman may be made from man, but no man can be made without a woman.’[161]

The difference we see between our three teachers is that Aristotle and Augustine are very much philosophers renowned for ‘thinking’. Whilst also a ‘thinker’, Hildegard correlates far more with the Celtic way of living: Hildegard believes that the earth provides us with what we need in terms of living and what comes with it (such as medicine), and she searches for and finds a solution to either the spiritual or physical ailment (which she argues go hand in hand). God (or the gods and goddesses) did provide us with what we need to live, heal and progress.

Conclusion

The purpose of looking at these four approaches to the natural world (Celtic beliefs, Aristotle, St. Augustine and Hildegard of Bingen) is to build background knowledge of history and theory and, therefore, influence people regard to considering ecofeminism in medieval literature in the future chapters. The Celts unquestionable living and breathed with the natural world along with a gender balance; Aristotle was the influential foundation figure, St. Augustine as the stepping stone of classical philosophy to the formalised Christian theology and Hildegard as the living product of all three with her philosophy intervention.

In the following chapter, I will focus on developing my ecofeminist approach to medieval literature by exploring a selection of Marie de France's Lais (fl.1160-1190) and the relationship between female empowerment and water.

[161] Shawn Madigan, *Mystics, Visionaries and Prophets: A Historical Anthology of Women’s Spiritual Writings* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), p. 96.

Chapter Two: The Use of Water and its Relation to Female Empowerment in the *Lais* of Marie de France

Introduction

This research project chapter will focus on water and its connection to female empowerment in Marie de France's Lais. A great deal has been written about medieval women's lives, rights, and bodies by both male and female scholars such as Diane Watt, Brian J. Levy and Sabastian Sobecki. There has also recently been a significant upsurge in ecocritical readings, led by critics such as Albrecht Classen. However, there is very little - if any - to combine the study of literature and the environment with symbolism related to women's empowerment. This is surprising considering there has recently been a new acceptance that some women (mainly depending on their class) used the medieval socio-religious system to their advantage rather than blindly accepting its rulings.[162] Due to this, this chapter's focus will centre on water, its role in selecting Marie’s Lais, and how it often empowers its female protagonists. The lais I have chosen to work with are *Lai Lanval, Lai Equitan,* and *Lai Guigemar*. I chose these three because they give different portrayals of women in different positions of influence. In *Lai Lanval*, we have the lady, referred to as the Goddess Macha by both John Kock[163] and Meriel Riggs Wisotsky,[164] in a position of power in her own right. She dictates to a

[162] S. Foster Damon, ‘Marie de France: Psychologist of Courtly Love’, *PMLA*, 44 (1929), 968–96.
[163] John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 1231.
[164] Meriel Riggs Wisotsky, *A woman's touch in the literary initiation of the knight* (University of California, 2002), p. 179.

man and uses her influence in court. In *Lai Guigemar*, we have the Lords wife who, after male repression, seeks to burst out and find freedom elsewhere. Lastly in *Lai Equitan,* we have the Seneschal's wife who uses the ways of court and men to work to, what she thinks, is her advantage. She possesses much influence, and she destroys a king. Although it was considered comical for the contemporary audience, I will use a more literal analytical eye. I saw the behaviour within these *lais* mirrored similarly with the natural world and its Celtic mythological roots, such as the story of Niamh of the Golden Hair, Shannon and Morrigan.

Marie de France and her *Lais*

The *Lais* is written by Marie de France, a medieval poet in twelfth-century England. Although we do not know much about her, we have prologues, dedications, and epilogues written by her and included in her texts to give us a glimpse of what could be at least one part of her character and life situation.[165] For example, Marcelle Thiébaux alludes to her confidence and reputation by explaining Marie 'signs her name in all three books to confirm authorship.'[166] The driving force for choosing Marie for this present chapter is mainly due to her unusual position of being a highly educated, multi-lingual woman writer[167] living in England, who made a successful and highly praised career of writing a variety of texts such as the *Fables*, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* as well as the *Lais* studied in this project, seemingly written for King Henry II (r.1154-89) and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine.[168] Mathilda

[165] Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing* (London: Polity, 2007), p. 24.
[166] Marcelle Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women: An Anthology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 277.
[167] Watt, p. 11.
[168] Keith Busby, *The Lais of Marie De France* (London: Penguin, 1999). Many of the fables she wrote were translations of Aesop's fables into English, and others can be traced to fables Marie would have been exposed to at a young age. Marie often asserts female power and cunning, disparaging men who are ignorant or behave foolishly. 'St Patrick's Purgatory' tells the tale of an Irish knight who travels to St. Patrick's Purgatory to atone for his sins. After descending into purgatory, he is visited by several demons, who show him unholy scenes of torture to try to get him to renounce his religion. Each time, he is able to dispel the scene by saying the name of Jesus Christ. After passing an entire night in purgatory, he returns to the church where he began his journey, purged of his sins.

Tomaryn Bruckner believes that Marie is using her language skills and position to expose 'historical truth in the process of the transmission she describes.'[169] Marie's *Lais* often portrays a melancholy outlook on love as they defy the traditions of love prescribed by the church. Genesis says how a man needs 'a help like unto himself,'[170] and Matthew states, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be in one flesh.'[171] Marie will have also been aware of St. Paul's similar expression of how man was not created for woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake,'[172] as referred to in the introduction. Additionally, St. Augustine, from chapter one and influenced (albeit in an opposite fashion) by the Manicheans, claims:

> This seems to me not merely to be on account of the begetting of children, but also on account of the natural association between the two sexes.[173]

St. Augustine says that sexual intercourse is good as it leads to procreation, but the couple must be compatible due to the importance of procreation. Marie de France would have been aware of that – which we see evidenced in her texts. She writes about adulterous affairs, women of high stature who seduce other men, and women seeking escape from loveless marriages. This is where the notion of empowerment lies – in the ability to desire on her terms – despite the unhappy endings; as we know, freedom of choice does not always result

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[169] Mathilda Tomaryn Bruckner, 'Marie de France', in *French Women Writers*, ed. by Dorothy Wynne Zimmerman and Eva Martin Sartori (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 324–346 (p. 326).
[170] Holy Bible, Genesis 2:18
[171] Holy Bible, Matthew 19:5
[172] Holy Bible, Corinthians I 11:9
[173] [Quod mihi non videtur propter solam filliorum procreationem, sed propter ipsam etiam naturalem in diverso sexu societatem]. All translations taken from Cormac Burke, 'St. Augustine: a View on Marriage and Sexuality in today's World', *Angelicum*, 89 (2012), 377–403 (p. 380).

in happiness. As I shall demonstrate, Marie also embraced traditional Celtic elements, heavily relying on the type of symbolic connections with nature I explored in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I focus on such relationships in Marie's *Lais*; *Lai Lanval, Lai Equitan,* and *Lai Guigemar*. I suggest that a pattern emerges from the human relationships considered in these three lais. Despite their often-illicit nature, Marie creates couples who work together positively to help their relationships succeed. As S. F Damon describes Marie's writing: 'she respected her sex…but she had enough cattiness in her not to respect all of it.'[174] By using the term 'cattiness', Damon speculates that Marie de France condemned women who did not connect sex with love. This says a lot about how male critics view proves Irigaray's mimesis. Damon suggests that Marie uses her power as a writer at court to condemn particular couples should they not be in 'true' love, adhering to a typical idea of courtly love ideology. We see this clearly in the relationship between Equitan and the seneschal's wife in Marie's *Lai Equitan*. Here we read of a couple who are disloyal in three ways: the wife to her husband in breaking her marriage vows and being unfaithful, the king to his servant in actively seducing his wife and finally plotting to murder him. This disloyalty and evil actions deliver Marie's message that this love (and therefore empowerment) is not pure nor good – but born through badness and ending in badness. Although this is one way of viewing Marie's narrative, Marie uses her empowered status to project a more moral code of conduct. Marie often allows characters to make choices based on the empowerment she bestows upon them. Both men and women sometimes make morally wrong choices, and not all of Marie's characters are empowered, but those who experience – or are allowed – empowerment can use it for good or evil. Those who use it for good and make morally sound choices usually end up happy and content—those who do not are dispensed with. Marie presents empowerment as something we all have but something we must use wisely and in the right and proper way.

[174] Foster Damon, p. 968.

Humans and Nature

Interactions between the protagonists and the natural world in Marie's *Lais* are fundamental to her story-telling. Although human activity can often have devastating effects on nature, nature is the one human has been unable to control. As eco-critics have commented, in the Middle Ages, there was an acceptance of nature being an uncontrollable separate entity. Yet, also a world without which medieval people could not live.[175] As chapter one claims, nature is 'the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both.'[176] There are desperate attempts to understand and control the elements: water. Water was and still is a fundamental element, part (and debatably the most crucial) of the natural world. Indeed, I agree with Brian J. Levy when he states, 'Of all the elemental forces the aquatic is perhaps most densely charged with significance and symbolism, since its practical functions have always been of greatest importance: as a refreshing and life-giving agent, as a key source of motive power.'[177] Marie focuses on the Celtic traditions of water. In *Lai Lanval, La Guigemar* and *Lai Equitan,* water is used primarily to empower and strengthen women.

Water and the Medieval Mind

Albrect Classen discusses the meaningful connections of the natural world between the past and present. He explores how poets in pre-modern literature viewed the precious water resource as one of the four essential elements and how they used and engaged with it. Classen claims this focus on water proves that people were aware of how the element impacted their

[175] Classen, *Water*, p. 220.
[176] Jones, p. 5.
[177] Brian Joseph Levy, *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), p. 121.

existence altogether.[178] As one of the essentials of life, water was never far from medieval consciousness, even in early English. Rivers and their drainage systems were to influence territorial divisions in England. Rivers were also used to transport goods and were essential to attract wildlife to feed the surrounding villages, 'where the living systems of each mingle and merge.'[179] Maren Hyer and Della Hooke explain how although rivers and lakes were famous, springs held a particular cultural capital:

> Early Anglo-Saxons penetrated along the Thames Valley, and there is evidence for co-existence between the first Anglo-Saxon generations and the post-Roman populations…especially in Dorchester.[180]

This allows us to recognise that the importance of water was acknowledged by both the Pagan and Christian cultures, as described in the previous chapter.[181]

The water element appears in many different manifestations in Marie de France's *lais*, which we, as readers, often do not notice due to its being subtly blended into the narrative. However, Classen's observations refer mainly to male characters only. Indeed, throughout his study, although he refers to the odd occasion when a woman is influenced by water, especially when it directly affects the plot. For example, in his focus on *Lai Guigemar*, he refers to the lady travelling by boat to her beloved's shores but does not detail her possible connections to the sea. He also fails to refer to the Celtic traditions or symbolism connecting women to water, some of which I examined in chapter one. However, Classen does spend a

[178] Classen, *Water,* p. 220.
[179] Phillips and Rumen, p. 230.
[180] Maren Clegg Hyer, *Water and the Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.
[181] Classen, *Water*, p. 50.

large portion of his writing explaining Guigemar's connection with water. This seems ironic because an empowered woman wrote these lais, and everywhere features empowered women.

Lanval, Guigemar and *Equitan*: *Lais* and water

Crossing water regularly indicates that an individual is entering adulthood, as in the tale of Guigemar,[182] the son of a wealthy knight whose only cure for a cursed wound inflicted upon him is the love of a woman who will suffer for the love of him. He will suffer as much for her. After a magical ship travels across the sea with him to her home, he finds this woman. Her husband stops their affair, and Guigemar's life is saved by the magical boat as he escapes. His lady suffers greatly from their separation but is reunited with Guigemar when the magical boat helps her across the water to him. In other lais, the protagonists rely on water to move into other parts of the world, such as *Lai Lanval.*[183] Here, Lanval falls in love with the water Goddess Macha[184] and becomes her lover after being bathed and washed in the stream. This resonates with the story of when Dagda[185] is promised victory in battle by Morrigan if he becomes her lover after she is finished bathing in the river.[186] After returning to King Arthur's court, he is accused of homosexuality and insulting Queen Guinevere. Lanval's lady arrives to save him just in time, and they leave to live together.

Another use of the motif of entering the water in Marie's lais moves a character from life to death – in *Lai Equitan*,[187] for instance, King Equitan begins a love affair with a married woman. In the hope of marrying her, the king and his lover concoct a plan to murder

[182] Busby, pp. 43–55.
[183] Busby, pp. 73–81.
[184] Wisotsky, p. 179.
[185] Celtic god of Earth
[186] Deanna Conway, *Maiden, Mother, Crone: The Myth and Reality of the Triple Goddess*, (Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1995), p.95.
[187] Busby, pp. 56–60.

the woman's husband in a boiling water bath. However, the plan backfires, and the king and his lover perish after falling into the bath.

The reasoning for focusing on these three particular lais, however, is not merely because of their use of water motifs but also due to the fact they have a variety of female characters in different contexts who discover or reveal their empowerment, using it morally or destructively and addressing men as their equals.

Medieval Women and Water

The presentations of sexuality and pleasure from the eleventh to the fourteenth century demonstrated the belief that women had to orgasm to become pregnant. The female body was often related to wetness and fluidity, and as Rudd says, 'changeability is traditionally associated with women…central to the plot which is…governed by women.'[188] It was rightfully argued:

> I recall you said just now that a woman cannot conceive without [emitting] seed, which is not plausible. For we see women who have been raped, protesting and crying, and who have suffered violence even at that moment…have conceived. Hence it appears these women have had no pleasure at that time, and without pleasure, seed cannot be omitted.[189]

[188] Cadden, p. 86.
[189] Cadden quoting Anaximander (d. 546 BC) a Greek Philosopher, p. 95.

Joan Cadden discusses how the history of sexuality was not always focused on producing the best heirs, although it was considered necessary.[190] Medieval authors, such as the one quoted above, frequently spoke about homosexuality, nocturnal emissions by men and women, and how orgasm could cure madness, rape, and libido. Leyser explains how the Middle Ages conceptualised the difference between males and females. People believed in the ancient medical Hippocratic theory, which linked the body to the four elements - fire, air, earth and water - a strangely Celtic and Pagan belief in a Christian society.[191] Graeme Tobyn describes:

> The four temperaments of the body, then, were said to arise from the interaction of the four elements and their primary qualities…the human body was matched specifically by the predominance of the four humors …indeed, the humors, elements, qualities and temperaments were all related.[192]

This suggests that health was a matter of achieving the right balance. Men and women were different: men were hotter and drier than women, who 'accounted for their physiological and moral superiority…cold uteruses were ever in need of being warmed up by hot semen'.[193] However, next came the question by Hugh of Mepenor (d.1219),[194] 'Since the woman is naturally cold and moist, how is it that she is more heated in libido than man?'[195] Many answers were proffered, such as that women are like wet wood, which is hard to get burning, but once ignited, burns hotter and more prolongedly. Another answer was that during

[190] Cadden, p. 105.
[191] Leyser, p. 97.
[192] Graeme Tobyn, *Culpeper's Medicine: A Practice of Western Holistic Medicine* (London: Singing Dragon, 2013), p. 95.
[193] Leyser, p. 13.
[194] Bishop of Hereford.
[195] Cadden, p. 97.

intercourse, women create their own ‘wet seed’[196] and receive their partner’s; a woman’s pleasure is double. Like the metaphorical comparison to wet wood, women were supposed to be wet and moist and, therefore, untrustworthy around men.[197] Albertus Magnus (d.1280) provided an opinion expressed by similar scholars such as Bartholomeus Anglicus (d. 1272) and Jacopo of Forli (d. 1414) that was supposedly helpful for men:

> Women’s complexion is more humid than man’s. The nature of the humid receives an impression but retains it poorly…In short, I should say, every woman is to be avoided as much as the poisonous snake and a horned devil.[198]

It is easy to see, with educated and influential men making statements similar to the above, how the reputation of the female was crushed and, therefore, how this influenced women's treatment. Nevertheless, for the sake of this project, let us take this idea literally. Water, humidity, and moistness are biological, even by standards articulated by Leyser, a women's natural’ link to water in the ‘natural’ world.

As we learnt from chapter one, Celtic women were widely respected through their ability to bear children. This fertility connected them to the mother goddess, who fertilised the land through the water. Their faith in the natural world and water is highlighted by their offerings to lakes, rivers and wells.[199] Early maps indicate that rivers were associated with the Goddess in their symbolism of healing, purification, and wisdom throughout the Celtic territories.[200] Thus, in both traditions, women bore an ontological link to water.

[196] Cadden, p. 97.
[197] Cadden, p. 221.
[198] Cadden, p. 185.
[199] MacLeod, p. 99.
[200] Barry Cunliffe, *The Celtic World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), pp. 88–91.

Lai Lanval

Lanval is a joy to read, even now, from a modern-day perspective, as Marie de France turns all typical gender roles on their head. Lanval is a respected knight in King Arthur's court, but he suffers from depression due to his poverty, 'for the king gave him nothing, and Lanval asked for nothing.'[201] He escapes 'to a meadow, dismounting by a stream'[202] to contemplate his life. As he 'looked downriver',[203] he saw 'two damsels coming,'[204] They greet and deliver the message of their mistress;

> Sir Lanval, my damsel, who is very worthy, wise and fair, has sent us for you. Come with us, for we will conduct you safely. Look the tent is there.[205]

The fact that Lanval met his lady by the river cannot be overlooked. Tom Cross discusses how supernatural women's association with fountains and other bodies of water is based on early Celtic fairy-mistress stories. For example, the story of Niamh of the Golden Hair, who stole Oisín after meeting him near a fountain but had him die if he ever touched Irish soil again – which inevitably he did.[206] However, in the older version of the *Acallam na Senórach,*[207] Niamh elopes with Oisín while her father, King of Munster, is away from home. She murders thirty women and then commits suicide by burying her face in the ground. The land was

[201] 'Ceo fu Lanval ; ne l'en sovint / ne nuls des soens bien ne li tint'. 'Lanval' in *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. by Karl Warnke and Max Niemeyer (Germany, M. Niemeyer, 1885), pp. 86–112. Translation taken from Busby, p. 73.
[202] 'en un pre venuz / Sur une ewe curant descent' 'Lanval', p. 86, in Busby, p. 73.
[203] 'il le descengle / la riviere'. 'Lanval', p. 88, in Busby, p. 73.
[204] 'si vit venir dous dameiseles'. 'Lanval', p. 88, in Busby, p. 73.
[205] 'Sire Lanval, ma dameisele, / ki mult par est curteise e bele / ele nus enveie pur vus/kar i venez ensemble od nus ! / Salvement vus i cunduiruns. / Veez, pres est sis paveilluns !' 'Lanval', p. 89, in Busby, p. 74.
[206] Patricia Monaghan, *The Encyclopedia of Celtic Mythology and Folklore* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2014), p. 174.
[207] Longest surviving work of original Irish literature of the twelfth century.

named *tipra an bhantrachta* (Well of the Women), which then feeds the *loch and daimh dheirg* (Lake of the Red Stag).[208] Additionally, and as mentioned above, there is a correlation that the lady is the Goddess Macha. She if often mentioned alongside or as part of Morrigan (see further in chapter three) in research such as that by John Waddell[209] and Gregory Toner.[210] As we saw in chapter one, water was referred to as the vital link between the female deities and the natural world. Cross continues that the principal place held by female water divinities and feminine river names among the Celts is strongly emphasised early on in the lai:

> …Thus every spring, every woodland brook, every river, in glen
> or valley, the roaring cataract, and the lake were haunted by
> divine beings, mainly thought of as beautiful females.[211]

Natural world imagery provides the backdrop and influence of the Celtic symbolism peeking through the layers of an Anglo-Norman rule.[212]

Water in Lai Lanval

Water is an essential and magical element in this story and imbues Celtic symbolism. As Cross points out, Marie de France's writings, like *Lai Lanval* are based on traditions inherited from the Celts.[213] John Koch supports Wisotsky's claim that the lady is Macha[214] and that she

[208] Maurice Harmon, *The Dialogue of the Ancients of Ireland: A New Translation of Acallam na Senórach* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2009), pp. 74–75.
[209] John Waddell, *Myth and materiality* (Oxford: Oxford books, 2018), p. 125.
[210] Gregory Toner, 'Macha and the Invention of Myth', *Royal Irish Academy*, 60 (2010), 81-109.
[211] J. A. MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts* (Aukland: The Floating Press, 2009), p. 184.
[212] MacCulloch, p. 184.
[213] Tom Peete Cross, 'The Celtic Elements in the Lays of "Lanval" and "Graelent", *Modern Philology*, 12 (1915), 585-644.
[214] Koch, p. 1231.

visits the world of mortals in search of a lover. Her conversation with him, her request for silence, her relationship with the river, her generosity, the disregard of her warning and the episodes, her temporary absence and the lover's subsequent remorse, her final return and her departure with her lover to the Other World, the fairy steeds and the part played by them, may all be accounted for in early Celtic tradition. The Celtic influence can most easily explain their presence in French poems. There is a similar example in the Irish story, *Aidead Muirchertaig maic Erca*.[215] Cross agrees that these correlating plots ‘demonstrate beyond the possibility of doubt that stories of feé who hanker after mortal earth-born lovers and who visit mortal soil in search of their mates existed in early Celtic tradition.’[216] In many ways, therefore, water provides a continuous rope between Lanval and the lady in the tale, binding them together in three different manifestations from the start: the river where Lanval is introduced to the lady, the bowl of water which Lanval uses to cleanse his hands and Guinevere’s tears shed when Lanval rejects her.

As explored in chapter one, the river (where Lanval is introduced to the lady) is significant as it represents the otherworld's border.[217] There was a belief that water was a gateway to something magical, and therefore uncontrollable.[218] On his first encounter with water, Lanval enters the forest, feeling lost and isolated, settling on the forest floor where ‘he looked downriver.’ At this moment, Lanval’s life changes. As we shall see, the river represents the border to the otherworld. According to Cross, the setting for meetings between fairy queens and their chosen lovers in poems is worth focus.[219] Being a water fairy, the lady would naturally set her tent up near the water. So it is clear that Marie often relies on this

[215] Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 62. Muirchertach, High King of Ireland, dies in the House of Clettach, drowned in a vat of wine, burned by fire and crushed by a falling roof beam, beguiled by the illusions of the otherworldly maiden Sín into believing that he is being attacked by Túathal Máelgarb.
[216] Cross, p. 644.
[217] This we see evidenced further in chapter three with Morgan le Fay’s first mention and King Arthur’s journey to the afterlife.
[218] Cross, p. 603.
[219] Cross, p. 588.

Celtic symbolism in her *lais*. The text does not state if Lanval must cross it to reach the lady, however, but does say that 'the knight went with them [the maidens],'[220] who lead him to the lady – they show him the way, which insinuates that without them he could not go alone.

Upon accepting the lady as his lover, 'the damsels gave him water to wash his hands,'[221] This is more a symbolic gesture of cleansing Lanval of his life before his lady – a baptism of sorts into this new life with a fairy. Whether intentional or not, Marie combines the Christian aspect of washing away previous sins and the symbolism of the Pagan natural world, gesturing again towards how they can work together and even mean the same thing.

Water and Celtic Symbolism

A valuable point of comparison is found in *Graelent*, an anonymously written twelfth-century Breton lai. Graelent rejects his queen's advances, suspends his wages in revenge, and is forced into poverty. While travelling in the forest, he stumbles upon a lady bathing in a fountain. Although this picturesque setting is wildly romantic, it is more likely to be influenced by the Celtic fairy stories.

> Every spring, every woodland brook, every river in glen or valley, the roaring cataract, and the lake were haunted by divine beings, mainly thought of as beautiful females.[222]

[220] 'Li chevaliers od eles vait'. 'Lanval', p. 89, in Busby, p. 74.
[221] 'L'ewe li donent a ses meins / e la tuaille a essuier'. 'Lanval', p. 93, in Busby, p. 75.
[222] Cross, p. 640.

The Lady in *Lai Lanval* is one such woman. William Schofield downplays the connection by claiming that 'the maidens are simply getting water…for use in bathing the hands before meat,' as was customary in good society during the twelfth century.[223] While this may be accurate, had Lanval not looked down the river, he would not have seen them. There is a pull within the water, natural to him although supernatural as the water is in league with its watery mistress as 'he looked downriver.'[224] He naturally seeks a restful place to clear his head which he finds by this river as he 'came alone to a meadow, dismounting by a stream.'[225] However, we must use our imagination as to his surroundings: the smell of wet dirt, the running water, the babble of the brook, the clearer the smelling air. All these elements help cleanse his mind of his life in preparation for his next steps.

As mentioned above, 'the knight went with them [the maidens],'[226] who lead him to the lady – they show him how insinuates he could not find it himself without them. When Lanval and the audience first encounter this mythical woman:

> She lay on a very beautiful bed…clad only in her shift. Her body was well formed and handsome…her side, though, was uncovered, as well as her face, neck and breast.[227]

She is lounging on a bed wearing an ermine mantle and a shift that exposes the side of her whole body. Ménard and Cross have discussed Fairy's semi-nude appearance and her servants' significance in carrying water pitchers. Both present the possibility that the lady has bathed before her guest's arrival (explaining the erotic dress). However, Ménard asserts

[223] Cross. p. 608.
[224] Busby, p. 73.
[225] Busby, p. 73.
[226] Busby, p. 74.
[227] 'Ele jut sur un lit mult bel /…/ en sa chemise senglement / Mult ot le cors bien fait e gent/… tut ot descovert le costé / le vis, le col e la peitrine'. 'Lanval', p. 19, in Busby, p. 74.

that the water is later used to wash Lanval's hands before he feasts with the Fairy.[228] On the other hand, Cross has deftly woven the links between Lanval and Celtic narrative tradition. The demoiselles and their water pitchers represent a classic Celtic theme of the 'Fairy Mistress' being bathed in a fountain by servant girls when a knight stumbles upon them.[229] The explicit bath scene is now only hinted at, and the basins of water are instead perhaps used to wash Lanval's hands before supping, which was customary at the time.[230] As I have suggested above, however, this also can be read as some initiation into the land of Faerie.

In *Lai Lanval*, it is the lady who does the wooing. Even before he arrives, she knows and loves him: 'Lanval…for you, I came from my country,' and she has 'come far in search [of him].[231] Presumably, she has crossed the seas surrounding Avalon to search for Lanval. She is out of her element and therefore needs the water near which Lanval finds her. Water offers a narrative transformation needed for her empowerment since she is a woman of the water. She is, however, never pressured into becoming the mistress of anyone,[232] and when she embarks on her relationship with Lanval, she proposes her conditions, which must be fulfilled:

> Whenever you wish to speak to with me, you will not be able to think of a place where a man may enjoy his love without reproach or wickedness, that I shall not be there with you to do your bidding. [233]

[228] Philippe Ménard, *Les Histories de Loup-Garou au Moyen Age* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1984), p. 22.
[229] Cross, p. 601.
[230] Cross. p. 609.
[231] 'Lanval... / pur vus vinc jeo fors de ma terre/de luinz vus'. 'Lanval', p. 90, in Busby, p. 74.
[232] Alfred Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail* (London: A. C. L. Brown, 1888). p. 26.
[233] 'quant vus voldrez a mei parler, / ja ne savrez cel liu penser, / u nuls peüst aveir s'amie / senz repruece e senz vileinie, / que jeo ne vus seie en present / a faire tut vostre talent;'. 'Lanval', p. 92, in Busby, p. 75.

Although this empowerment is invigorating, it is tinged bittersweet. It seems to Marie's audience and even her that no human woman could make these decisions. Nevertheless, this knight has chosen to be forever with this empowered woman.

Female Empowerment

As we have seen, the Lady uses natural spring water to cleanse and connect; sometimes, she uses water changed by a human to merge the natural and human worlds. The dampness and wetness tend to be raw representations of female sexuality,[234] and she uses the sea for journeys: either within herself or to an actual location. She also uses it as a natural barrier between the world of men, militarism, duplicity and artifice and Avalon, where love and passion can flourish – as they did in the forest. In other lais, too, such voyages force the knight to return as a transformed entity. For instance, in *Lai Guigemar*, discussed below, the hero is ferried into another land by self-driving magical ships.

As mentioned above, *Lai Lanval* Lanval has to negotiate water three times to be with his Lady, who appears to be in charge throughout. After meeting his lady, life is smooth until Queen Guinevere declares her shaky love for him. True to his committed relationship, Lanval rejects her and 'thereupon the Queen left and went in tears to her chamber,'[235] Guinevere's watery tears are an example of particular power-weaving. Marie, as mentioned earlier, falls prey to mimesis, particularly with Guinevere, when she ensures her main female characters either seek empowerment or are empowered in their way; Guinevere is the latter in this instance. She takes advantage and manipulates the way the surrounding males see and view

[234] Cadden, p. 98.
[235] 'La reïne s'en part a tant / en sa chambre s'en vait plurant.'. 'Lanval', p. 86, in Busby, p. 77.

her, technically playing them at their own game, despite her behaviour's moral validity. This behaviour is not meant to be viewed positively, especially by Marie de France's readership. Guinevere's tears shed when Lanval rejects her present a typical reaction from Guinevere. Her tears are shed in an attempt to appear vulnerable – wielding power through 'water-works', so to speak, just as a Goddess would. Guinevere garners a reputation for this behaviour and successfully attempts to appear as the weak woman requiring the protection that the chivalric Arthurian court desires her to be. This will be explored further in chapter three when Lancelot's affair is threatened to be exposed.

Jerry Root, however, argues that the lady's triumphant parade of vindication at the end of *Lanval* should be seen less as the establishment of a female subject.'[236] He insists that the performance is not for the victory of the couple's relationship or the lady's strength but more for the attendant male spectators' pleasure at Arthur's court. However, if anything, it is both. I argue that the lady appears not as a performance to entertain King Arthur's boys but as a show of female power. She calmly speaks to King Arthur as an equal: questioning the Queen's word, - 'the Queen was wrong'; acknowledging Lanval's mistakes – 'the boast he made'; and finally granting his pardon, – 'if I can acquit him, let your barons release him!'[237] The lady does not acknowledge anyone else within the court, not even Lanval. She is empowered enough to see King Arthur as her equal and speak to him as such, and she is confident and entitled enough in what she says to him. As we have seen with Lanval's punishment, speaking ill of the Queen is treason – correlating with St. Augustine's hierarchy application. However, the lady gives the air that she is above this and is empowered to speak the truth to the person it matters most.

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[236] Jerry Root, 'Courtly Love and the Representation of Women in the "Lais" of Marie de France and the "Coutumes de Beauvaisis" of Philippe de Beaumanoir', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 57 (2003), (p. 17).

[237] 'la reïne a tort eü'; 'de ceo qu'il dist'; 'se par mei puet estre aquitez, / par voz baruns seit delivrez !'. 'Lanval', pp. 111–112, in Busby, p. 81.

At the end of the lai, Lanval, enchanted with love and by his lady, chooses to live in Avalon, where, we assume, his lady is empowered to make her own decisions as she has done in Carlisle. Men like Lanval do not want to love the 'good Christian wife' who is their 'property'.[238] Via Lanval's relationship with the lady, he has journeyed through a baptism of surrendering his water-empowered female lover's traditionally dominant role.

The theme of a lost man seeking comfort in an empowered woman's arms is familiar in Marie's work. Marie de France shows how it is not always the female's traditional tale needing to be rescued emotionally, but the knight. This knight challenges typical misogynistic stereotypes by not just acknowledging this required rescue but also embracing it.

Lai Guigemar

Lai Guigemar is a different tale from *Lai Lanval* in that every character is human and, therefore, more relatable for the audience. Guigemar escapes to the sea, which results in his meeting his lover. The importance of Guigemar meeting his lover after travelling there by sea is essential. As Classen states;

> In our context, we can recognise here an effort by the poet to functionalize the open sea and this mysterious ship as the crucial vehicle to allow Guigemar to depart from his previous life and find his true love.[239]

[238] Leyser, p. 21.
[239] Classen, *Water*, p. 94.

The sea was necessary for travel, trade, and exploration.[240] Therefore it metaphorically symbolises Guigemar's life in *Lai Guigemar*, to which I turn next. It is what brings Guigemar to his lady, and yet it is, at first glance, what is holding her prisoner: 'the sea enclosed it on the other side, so it was impossible to get in or out, except by boat, should the need arise in the castle.'[241] It becomes the unsung saviour, allowing Guigemar to escape ('the ship set sail, taking him back to his own country').[242] It also provides the chance to escape and eventually reunite with Guigemar, 'whom I thought I had lost forever.'[243]

Guigemar and the Sea

Sobecki claims *Lai Guigemar* provides extensive evidence for the usage and presence of water in an ecofeminine sense since the protagonists have to traverse the sea several times to proceed forward in their lives to achieve their happiness ultimately.[244] However, he only mentions it once in his study. He compares it to Marie de France's tales, *Lai Eliduc* and explains how 'they are ferried into an Otherworld….the sea becomes a testing ground for the Knights'.[245] While on the one hand, what Sobecki says is not incorrect, on the other, he, unfortunately, misses the entire point of why those knights are being led on a new adventure.

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[240] Sobecki, p. 160.
[241] 'De l'altre part fu clos de mer; / nuls n'i pout eissir ne entrer, / se ceo ne fust od un batel, / se busuin eüst al chastel'. 'Guigemar' in *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. by Karl Warnke and Max Niemeyer (Germany, M. Niemeyer, 1900), pp. 5–40 (p. 5). Translation taken from Busby, p. 46.
[242] 'La barge truevent, enz l'unt mis: / od lui s'en vet en sun païs'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 51.
[243] 'que jeo quidoue aveir perdue. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 54.
[244] Sobecki, p. 92.
[245] Sobecki, p. 64.

In Guigemar's wounding, we are already seeing the power of control removed from Guigemar and placed into the hands of a woman. It is almost painful not to laugh out loud at the symbolism and context here as a reader. Guigemar is not yet a man due to retaining his virginity, yet he is a 'noble knight'. He is metaphorically unwillingly penetrated and left at the mercy of a woman. Classen suggests, 'it [the wound] serves as a metaphor of Guigemar's growing up and experiencing his puberty.'[246] The context continues to serve metaphorically for Guigemar's pubertal journey, which he cannot complete until he 'rides the waves,' so to speak. When he encounters the Lady, at once, 'he kissed her and henceforth was at peace.'[247] Peggy McCracken confirms this by stating: '…even to an idealised masculine integrity through the preservation of virginity; this ideal is not usually promoted in stories about love and chivalry.'[248] The *Lai* delivers the message that love and sex are entwined equally, as both sexes are. Shown by the deer and its gender fluidity (antlers and yet accompanied by a fawn), it informs Guigemar:

> 'May you never find a cure, nor may any herb, root, doctor or potion ever heal the wound you have in your thigh until you are cured by a woman who will suffer for your love.'[249]

Guigemar flees and follows the most glorious pathway. He follows a luscious 'green path [that] traversed the wood which led him out into an open space.'[250] The path is 'green' and, therefore well fed and cared for by the stream: as explored in chapter one and earlier in this

[246] Classen, *Water*, p. 92.
[247] 'e il la bais / Des ore est Guigemar a aise'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 50.
[248] Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 14.
[249] 'Ne par herbe ne par racine, / ne par mire ne par poisun / n'avras tu ja mes guarisun / de la plaie qu'as en la quisse, / des i que cele te guarisse, / ki suferra pur tue amur'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 44.
[250] Busby, p. 45.

chapter, the stream is often a metaphor for feminine and motherly virtues. As Eva Kittay states: 'woman serves to mediate between man and man, and Nature, Man and Spirit…as Other and as Mother.' Guigemar could not be receiving more clues that he was on his way to his love.[251]

As he searched, 'there on the plain, he saw a cliff and a mountain and from a stream which ran below a creek was formed.'[252] This stream's visual imagery running between the earth and outpouring into a creek below is overwhelmingly elegant. From a traditional Celtic perspective, Marie has used the myths to her advantage. Owen Connellan discusses how in The Book of Dinnṡeanċas,[253] only four rivers are described, all named after women: Barrow, Boyne, Raven, and Shannon (or Sionan). [254] Marie may have been aware of this Celtic mythology, as discussed earlier in the chapter, due to her education and language skills. She could have used it with the sexualised description of the 'stream'. As Cadden has pointed out, women are wet and fluid like water; they nurture, feed and give birth to more incredible things, such as this creek and Guigemar's watery adventure.

Beyond the creek, the stream reaches a harbour where an ebony ship has been abandoned, or so it seems. This water represents the journey Guigemar must make to leave his past life, contained in the forest, and cross the water to find his soulmate, who will heal his wound. Although there is no explanation of who placed the vessel - and therefore facilitating Guigemar to find his love - the reader must go with the flow, literally and metaphorically. The tale's focus is to probe nature and instinct and highlight how helpless this man is without a woman by his side as 'Nature had done him such a grievous wrong that he never displayed

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[251] Eva Feder Kittay, 'Woman as Metaphor', *Hypatia*, 3 (1988), 63–86 (p. 64).
[252] 'En la plaigne / vit la faleise e la muntaigne / d'une ewe ki desuz cureit'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 45).
[253] *The Book of Dinnṡeanċas* contains onomastic texts in early Irish from the twelfth century recounting the origins of place-names and traditions involving events and characters associated with the places in question.
[254] Owen Connellan, 'On the Rivers of Ireland, with the Derivations of Their Names', in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* 10 vols (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1870), II and X, pp. 443-58.

the slightest interest in love.'[255] Guigemar feels safe and secure on the boat as 'he lay down on the bed and slept'[256] , and when he wakes, he finds 'the ship…already on the high seas, speeding away with him, the wind favourable.'[257] The fact that the boat helps Guigemar feel safe as it travels quickly is not a coincidence. In many ways, the boat can be seen as an encompassing womb where Guigemar lies 'down on the bed and slept' until his rebirth upon the meeting of his love. The sea (water) is almost preparing Guigemar for the rush, the fear and joy that love brings, and carrying him to it.

In both Lanval and Guigemar, both men go through an awakening experience regarding water. They both experience a submersion into the water and, upon their emergence, are welcomed into an innovative sense of being, a baptism of sorts. Before Lanval can fully commit to his lover, he is bathed in a natural water source and is, at once, enlightened. Similarly, the sea that Guigemar travels on does not lead him to his next adventure to fulfil him as a man. He is being brought to his lady, who desperately needs him and is 'in search of recreation.'[258] Mary and Walter Brennerman argue: 'water is spoken of as the source…the healer'.[259] Being compared to water was not a weakness but a strength that Celtic civilisations believed.[260]

The importance of baptism in the Christian tradition cannot be side-lined in favour of the Pagan use of water, as Marie shows how they can link and are worth equal amounts of focus in her symbolism. Water in the ancient world was a symbol of life, death and purification. Everett Ferguson explains how 'the primitive scheme [of baptism] marked a

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[255] 'De tant i out mespris nature / que unc de nule amur n'out cure'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 44.
[256] 'El lit se colche, si s'endort'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 46.
[257] 'la nes est ja en halte mer, / od lui s'en va delivrement/ Bon oré ot e suef vent'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 45.
[258] Busby, p. 46.
[259] Walter L. Brenneman and Mary G. Brenneman, *Crossing the Circle at the Holy Wells of Ireland* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 141.
[260] Cross, p. 600.

change from darkness to light.'[261] In the Book of Revelation specifically, there is a reference to the term 'water of life':

> And he said to me: It is done. I am Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. To him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely.[262]

As well as:

> And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.[263]

This 'water of life' is assumed to be a metaphor with two meanings: literal flowing water as in a river and figurative living water. James L. Resseguie explains: 'whereas ordinary water sustains life for a while (flowing water), the water God provides gives life forever (living water).[264] It is also referred to when water is used during Baptismal prayers, praying for the Holy Spirit to give it the power to become the water of life.[265] However, in the same book, where water is labelled as a positive, it is then used as punishment:

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[261] Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), p. 20.
[262] Holy Bible, Revelation, 21:6.
[263] Holy Bible, Revelation, 22:1.
[264] James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 253.
[265] Ferguson, p. 730.

> And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman, water as it were a river; that he might cause her to be carried away by the river.[266]

Like the Pagan gods, the Christian god wielded it to his (apparently justifiable) will. Its treatment *in lai Guigemar* is, in many ways, a vestige of the ancient Pagan respect for water: as we learnt from chapter one, the Celts' respected the benefits water brought to health and land but also its benefits on a spiritual level.

Giugemar's Lover

At the start of the narrative, this rescuer of all of Guigemar's problems is confined as a prisoner by her husband in a tower which 'the sea enclosed.'[267] Classen humorously comments that any maritime threats do not concern the husband.

> The location of the tower matter to the old man because he firmly believes that no danger could come from the sea-side…He does not consider pirates, or commercial shipping and he is completely unaware of the possibility that another man could arrive from the sea and take away his wife.[268]

[266] Holy Bible, Revelation, 12:15.
[267] 'fu clos de mer'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 46.
[268] Classen, *Watre,* p. 136.

This observation from Classen brings to light the conclusion that the sea is not there to repress the woman but to protect her as her natural element. The husband sees the sea as another entrapment, a fourth wall to imprison his wife. However, the sea brings the wife her beloved Guigemar: 'They looked…and saw the ship rising on the waves as it sailed into the harbour.'[269] This, in turn, can then be and, therefore, is exploited. It is not her correctional officer but her means of escape.

The lady is instantly attracted to Guigemar when she first sees him, believing him to be dead, 'grieved deeply over his handsome body, which filled her with sorrow.'[270] Upon the realisation he is alive, the lady 'gladly'[271] helps him to become well again. The lady and her maid 'treat him with loving care'[272] materially until his physical wound is healed. In respect of this project, a crucial scene is the cleaning of the wound by the lady. She '…brought water…washed his wounded thigh and…with a fine piece of white linen…bound it tightly.'[273] Just like in *Lai Lanval,* where we get a similar cleansing of the hero before any lovemaking can occur, the lady is using the water to clean Guigemar of the wound gained in his life before her. Like a baptism, he is reborn into a life with her. However, his emotional wound of love remains open:

> But love had now pierced him to the quick and his heart was greatly disturbed. For the lady wounded him so deeply…he felt no pain from the wound in his thigh, yet he sighed in great anguish.[274]

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[269] 'Guardent a val vers la marine; / la nef virent al flot muntant'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 46.
[270] 'mult pleint sun cors e sa belté. / Pur lui esteit triste e dolente'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 47.
[271] 'volentiers'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 47.
[272] 'volentiers vus sojurnerum / e de bon quer vus servirum'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 48.
[273] 'En bacins d'or ewe aporterent: / sa plaie e sa quisse laverent, / A un bel drap de cheinsil blanc / li osterent en tur le sanc'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 48.
[274] 'Mes amurs l'ot feru al vif; / ja ert sis quers en grant estrif, / kar la dame l'a si nafré, /…. / De sa plaie nul mal ne sent; / mult suspire anguissusement'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 48.

Guigemar confesses all to the lady. She 'granted him her love,'[275] having fallen in love with him while treating him. They begin a beautiful love affair for 'a year and a half'.[276] As argued above, the female-coded ship and the seas are the conveyers and the key to making the affair possible. This love between Guigemar and the lady changes the way we view the sea in the tale. It was initially viewed through the patriarchy's eyes as the fourth wall of confinement surrounding the lady in her prison. Now we see it through a woman's eyes as her route to empowerment for bringing Guigemar to her – uniting its mistress with her love.

Water's Reconnection

The ship and sea are also the saviours in this lai. When the affair is discovered, Guigemar is again saved from his lover's husband's wrath by the boat: 'The ship set sail, taking him back to his own country…the knight sighed and wept,'[277] but is nevertheless kept safe for his lady. He is protected once more by the female element, water. Both Guigemar and the lady endure heartbreak when separated: Guigemar at home 'grief unabated.'[278] reunited with his family and the lady in 'great pain, agony…anguish'[279] imprisoned 'in a tower of dark-hued marble.'[280] In a plan to commit suicide, the lady finds herself on the beach and is overcome by the thought 'that her beloved must have drowned.'[281] Water can provide love; it can also take it away. The lady is unaware of how the water is about to unite her with Guigemar and

[275] 'e li otreie senz respit / l'amur de li'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 50.
[276] 'an e demi'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 50.
[277] 'La barge truevent, enz l'unt mis: / od lui s'en vet en sun païs./… Li chevaliers suspire e plure'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, Busby, p. 50.
[278] 'dolur tenue'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 51.
[279] 'grant peine…l'anguisse…dolur'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 52..
[280] 'une tur de marbre bis'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 52.
[281] 'mis en mer'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 52.

suddenly sees the water as a threat and the enemy who removed her love from her. In her horror, she faints (conveniently) in the boat that initially brought the two together. Upon the ocean, the lady travels to Breton Castle. Similar to Rudd's conclusion that 'the sea encourages restlessness [and] is a recognition of the constant change…of the sea'[282] and Aristotle's connection to the elements, in this case, water and earth. Lord Mériaduc holds the lady prisoner after becoming obsessed with her. The lord holds a jousting match where he unintentionally unites the lovers. Guigemar does not recognise his lover until she shows him the knot he tied in her belt, suggesting that courtly love is an aesthetic idea. Guigemar appears more in love with the idea of the lady than with her as an actual entity. After discovering Lord Mériaduc's obsession and previous rape attempt towards the lady, Guigemar lays siege, where after a successful defeat, the lady and her lover Guigemar are reunited at last.

Without the water and the boat connecting the two shores, Guigemar and his lady would not have found one another in the first place or been able to be reunited. Water is therefore seen as a feminine life-force in this Lai. Classen agrees that we can recognise Marie's attempts to functionalised the open sea.[283] Regarding the lady so trapped and unhappily married, the sea delivers her a good man she can love and have those feelings returned rationally. Where she would have drowned herself, 'she could not remain upright,'[284] the boat gives her protection, as it does Guigemar, by saving her and delivering her into her lover's arms. The transfer from one shore to another shows that this couple was connected.

Female Empowerment

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[282] Rudd, p. 139.
[283] Classen, *Water,* p. 137.
[284] 'Dunc ne puet ester sur ses piez'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 52.

The area of empowerment in this lai here is a complicated one but an important one that Sobecki and Classen both overlook. It is easy to say there is no empowerment, indeed no female empowerment, in *Lai Guigemar*. However, this is a tale about how women suffer at the mercy of disempowerment. Her insecure, impotent husband imprisons the lady – 'such is the perversity of age.'[285] He gives her nothing to do but offers reminders that she should love him when, in reality, his methods push the opposite agenda:

> the walls of the chamber were covered in paintings in which Venus, the goddess of love, was skilfully depicted together with the nature and obligations of love; how it should be observed with loyalty and good service…In the painting, Venus was shown as casting into a blazing fire the book in which Ovid teaches the art of controlling love.[286]

This mistreatment, aimed at promoting sex without romantic love, breeds self-doubt, self-consciousness, and despair. Nevertheless, when Guigemar's uncontrollable (as Venus above teaches the lady) relationship provides her with love and support, the lady begins to become her person again and 'their life gave them great delight.'[287] During a time when courtly love was on the rise, the lady was still living imprisoned. Kelly Smith supports this by explaining that 'The two-sided love affair is important because it links chivalry with romantic involvement. Reciprocal love implies possessing the chivalric values of charity and humility.'[288] Tiffany Ong continues this support because the loyalty Guigemar displays derive

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[285] 'Tels est d'eage li trespas'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 46.
[286] 'La chambre ert peinte tut en tur. / Venus, la deuesse d'amur, / fu tresbien mise en la peinture; / les traiz mustrot e la nature / cument hom deit amur tenir / e leialment e bien servir. / Le livre Ovide, u il enseigne / coment chascuns s'amur estreigne'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 46.
[287] 'Mult fu delituse la vie', 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 50.
[288] Kim Smith and Polly Stewart, 'Love and War: Chivalry and Courtly Love in the Lays of Marie De France and the Romances of Chrétien De Troyes' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Salisbury University, 2002) in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

from his determination to be considered chivalric.[289] With the amalgamation of reciprocal love into the expectation of chivalry, knights (and their stories) began to desire mutual romantic partners who gave women more power within relationships. Guigemar asks the lady for her love, which she grants 'without delay[290].

Additionally, while women's lives were initially bounded by marriage, women used the new chivalric code for romance to choose; to make decisions. Before chivalry included courtly love, women were often treated as tradable property; girls were commonly married off for their families' political benefit or security.[291] The women in Marie de France's tales, and this project more widely, often take control of their own love lives. For example, in the *Lay of Milon*,[292] the maiden takes the initiative with her love interest:

> Much talk had this maiden heard of Milon's knightly deeds so that she began to set her thoughts upon him, because the good men spoke of him. She sent him a message by a sure hand, saying that if her love was to his mind, sweetly would it be her heart.[293]

Upon Guigemar's absence, the lady decides for herself. She realises, unlike before, there is an escape from her unhappy situation: suicide 'where she intended to drown herself.'[294]

<https://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/305469443/CEF21A53927E43EAPQ/1?accountid=14680 > [accessed 22 March 2021] pp. 9–19.

[289] Tiffany Ong, 'Marie de France's Courtly Love: The Liberation of Women', *Young Historians Conference*, (2018) <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1139&context=younghistorians> [accessed 19 May 2020].

[290] 'senz respit'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 50.

[291] Fiona Harris, 'Young Women in France and England, 1050–1300', *Journal of Women's History*, 21 (2001), 22–46.

[292] Eugene Mason, *French Medieval Romances from the Lays of Marie de France* (Gloucester: AMS Press, 1976).

[293] 'Ele ot oï Milun nomer; / mult le cumença a amer. / Par sun message li manda / que, se li plaist, el l'amera'. 'Milun' in *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. by Karl Warnke and Max Niemeyer (Germany, M. Niemeyer, 1900), pp. 152–171). Translation taken from Mason, p. 112.

[294] Busby, p. 52.

Although it is debatable if this is a decision based on her position between two men or 'giving up,' regardless, it is a decision made by the lady independently. As previously mentioned, the River Shannon legend seems to play out but with a different ending here in *Lai Guigemar*. The Legend of Shannon (Sionan) varies from region to region. Sometimes Shannon was a human and the daughter of a great Lir,[295] (Lord) and other times; she was a Goddess in her own right.[296] Shannon visits Connla's well, despite the warnings from her father, to gain knowledge. 'The well was located beneath the ocean surrounded by nine hazel trees that magically bore leave flowers and nuts.'[297] Different versions debate whether Shannon ate the nuts without permission or did not give thanks after eating them so that the well fills in anger and the walls in a fury.

As it becomes overwhelmingly full of water, it floods the land. Again, whether Shannon was swept away with the water or threw herself into it in shame is debated. Either way, Shannon drowns. Her spirit is absorbed into the water, and she becomes a fully-fledged Water Goddess,[298] inhabiting the waters forever and gaining the knowledge and freedom she initially sought. This connects with *Lai Guigemar* in many ways. It seems to be a loving woman within the water, guiding Guigemar from the stream to the sea. Shannon, like the lady, is warned by a dominant male to be wary. Shannon and the lady's defiant act, whatever it is, leads to danger and suicidal thoughts. When the lady comes close to reaching a deathly conclusion, the sea and the boat change her mind, and she, too, experiences freedom from her husband but knowledge of the sinister world around her. The natural female element, haunted by Shannon, urges her sister to live with the decision rather than perish.

This is important to note, as, in *Lai Lanval,* the Lady is a feé, making decisions based on her empowerment and connection with water, nature, and supernatural status. Here in *Lai*

[295] Richard Hayward, *Ulster and the City of Belfast* (Ballycastle: Clachan Publishing, 2015), p. 194.
[296] David Geddes and Ron Grosset, *Celtic Mythology* (Glasgow: Geddes & Grosset, 2002), p. 458.
[297] MacLeod, p. 156.
[298] MacLeod, p. 53.

Guigemar, we have a human woman making a favourable decision right for her, taking inspiration from the Celtic surroundings. This similar theme runs through *Lai Equitan*, but with a much more sinister motivation.

Lai Equitan

Finding any definite account of female empowerment in this narrative is not easy. As Heather Arden states, despite their wealth and even the power noblewomen of the twelfth century possessed, they were ultimately the subject of male dominance. Agreeing with Nora Cotille-Foley, she also acknowledges that this power 'is in an era where Marie's writing entertains a tense relationship with the social reality of her time.'[299] Marie is trying her hardest to speak to the world without upsetting it. Arden suggests all of Marie's lais centre on a love relationship, the threat or obstacle to that love, and the resolution – happy or tragic – of the situation. In all the lais the threat or obstacle that the lovers face is another person. Arden agrees with this project's standpoint as she describes Marie's lais as 'explicitly portraying masculine power and prerogative in medieval society.'[300]

I concur with Burgess when he suggests that *Equitan* manifests itself as Marie's first lai in the sequence. He describes its problems as: 'poor structure, stylistic obscurities, uninspired treatment of a tedious theme and an unsatisfactory ending.'[301] As he also suggests,

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[299] Heather M. Arden, 'The End Game in Marie de France's Lais: The Search for a Solution', *Dalhousie French Studies,* 61, (2002), 3-11 (p. 8).
[300] Arden, pp. 3–11.
[301] Glyn Sheridan Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 12.

the prologue reads like an introduction to the Breton lai concept and not just *Lai Equitan.* As Marie announces in this prologue:

> The Bretons, who lived in Brittany, were fine noble people. In days gone by these valiant, courtly and noble men composed lays for posterity and thus preserved them from oblivion.[302]

The tale presents in two different parts; the first is full of lengthy passages of love casuistry, and the second is based on facts and rigid theories with an unexpected ending that leaves the reader with tangled emotions towards the tale's deceptive behaviour and betrayal of her husband. However, I cannot entirely agree with Burgess's conception of Marie's writing as 'poor…tedious' and 'unsatisfactory.'[303] I agree with Alfred Thomas, who describes Marie's writing as full of 'assertive, strong women.'[304] This conclusion addresses Corinne Saunder's concern that most Middle English writers 'regarding female empowerment are often focussed on the issue of violence against women: the interrelated motifs of rape, enforced marriage.'[305] Whereas the creation of this lai comes across on occasion as inexperienced, it is nevertheless projecting what is at the forefront of Marie's mind: the importance of chivalric love and women's empowerment. Marie is negotiating a way to have these two ideas coexist in a

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[302] 'Mult unt esté noble barun / cil de Bretaigne, li Bretun. / Jadis suleient / ar pruësce, / par curteisie e par noblesce / des aventures que oeient / ki a plusurs genz aveneient, / faire les lais pur remembrance'. 'Equitan' in *Lais de Marie de France*, trans. by Karl Warnke and Max Niemeyer (Germany, M. Niemeyer, 1900), pp. 41–53. All translations taken from Busby, p. 56..

[303] Burgess, p. 12.

[304] Alfred Thomas, *Reading Women in Late Medieval Europe: Anne of Bohemia and Chaucer's Female Audience* (Berlin: Springer, 2016), p. 142.

[305] Corinne Saunders, 'Gender, Law and Order in the Thirteenth-Century Romance', in *Thirteenth Century England VIII: Proceedings of the Durham Conference 1999* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), pp. 153–179 (p. 154).

pleasing way to all readers when a female writer is regarded with 'awkwardness.'[306] As Watt comments, 'a female voice acknowledges the advantages of a female perspective.'[307]

Lai Equitan and Feminism

Luce Irigaray remarks on how women were and, to some extent still are considered. She says:

> Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into the categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use.[308]

Here Irigaray explains that women are pushed into categories, even by women themselves, to suit men and 'their' society. This position provides a useful way of approaching Marie's writing, where she tries to break this boundary, especially in *Lai Equitan*. The seneschal's wife does not receive the action she wants from Equitan and so takes matters into her own hands and plans her husband's murder via water misuse – supposedly a life-giving element. This is quite shocking for Marie to do with a female character, given the rules of heterosexual relations of the time she was writing. This chimes with the assertions of Irigaray: it is because women provide 'for the condition of making social life and culture possible.' However, they remain

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[306] Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). p. 8.
[307] Diane Watt and Liz Herbert McAvoy, *The History of British Women's Writing, 700–1500, Volume One*, (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), I, p. 164.
[308] Luce Irigaray, 'Women on the Market', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 799–811.

an unknown infrastructure of the elaboration of that social life and culture.[309] Marie shows that women can remove themselves from these fixed categories to play unconsidered societal roles. What Irigaray reminds us, however, is that this did not happen as often as Marie would like to suggest and that Marie herself is in a privileged position even to write such tales without fear of repercussions.

Compared to *Guigemar*, the two heroes' attitude towards love corresponds with their fate and the plot. Between Equitan and Guigemar, we see Marie's concept of chivalric love and what it appears to mean to her. *Equitan* is the story of fierce love, not chivalric love. A supernatural love does not protect Equitan and the seneschal's wife as other characters are in *Guigemar* or *Lanval*. We can see that to Marie, this is not an example of chivalric love. R. T. Pickens claims that 'it is not the quality of the love…but the context of the love.'[310] Returning to the issue of empowerment and the Senechal's wife in *Lai Equitan*, Marie's first lai most likely sets precedence for all of Marie's female characters. Before they become lovers, the seneschal's wife states that 'love is not honourable unless it is based on equality.'[311] Equitan then pledges to assume the male lover's inferior position: 'Do not regard me as your king.'[312] As Edward Gallagher argues, this desperate behaviour exuded by Equitan is 'only found in the most extreme examples of the courtly love ethic.'[313] To feel more secure, he gives her power, and it is she who worries Equitan about their relationship when it is proposed he marry, she who desires to be queen, and she who proposes the murder of her husband. As mentioned earlier, he is happy to take on their subordinate role in their

[309] Irigaray, *On the Market*, p. 171.
[310] Burgess, p. 40.
[311] 'Amurs n'est pruz, se n'est egals'. 'Equitan', p. 41–53, in Busby, p. 38.
[312] 'Ne me tenez mie pur rei'. 'Equitan', p. 41–53, in Busby, p. 58.
[313] Edward J. Gallagher, *The Lays of Marie de France* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2010), p. 91.

relationship: 'I swear to you…that I shall do your bidding.'[314] This, in turn, leads to the murder plot. However, Gallagher then goes on to assert;

> Like Adam taking the fruit from Eve and biting into it at her urging, Equitan, as he had promised…will obey her in all things and willingly do her bidding. In absolute thrall of this woman, he has lost all rationality and moral sense.[315]

Although I understand Gallagher's motivation, he excuses Equitan of all blame and places it on the woman. This gives the idea that if the man cannot control all – he cannot control anything, and as Luce Irigaray states, the 'the phallic mirage'[316] of power will start to fade. This is not what the seneschal's wife (or Marie) desired, proven by the simple statement mentioned above: 'love is not honourable unless it is based on equality'.[317] Because this love is not equal as it becomes driven by the female lover, in Marie's eyes, it is no longer honourable or chivalric love – resulting in the brutal ending in a bath of scalding water. It is worth recalling how, as shown in the previous chapter, Cadden discusses how the female is wet and cold. It is the male who is dry and hot. The wife is contravening her femininity by heating the water to a scalding point. It is this which Marie strives so hard to deliver in all her other lais. We see how with this rule in *Guigemar* and *Lanval* the couples are reunited and overcome all the obstacles thrown at them, but in *Equitan,* the boundary is crossed, and the opposite becomes the case.

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[314] 'Seürement vus jur e di/ que jeo ferai vostre plaisir'. 'Equitan', p. 41–53, in Busby, p. 58.
[315] Gallagher, p. 92.
[316] Irigaray, *This Sex*, p. 188.
[317] Burgess, p. 40.

Classen, then, is right when he argues, as both Equitan and the lady die themselves, we may deduce that Marie rejected such devious and murderous behaviour and strongly argued in favour of honest, sincere love – whether in matrimony or not.[318] However, even when the female protagonist seems to pursue evil intentions, guilt can also be found on the man's side.

Male Weakness

Initially, it may appear to the reader baffling that Equitan, as king, would not have his seneschal disappear somehow to make the pathway much more accessible for himself to marry his lover. In this story, he comes across as selfish and then weak –not a chivalric king's traits. I believe Marie's primary aim was to show that women could be just as manipulative and cold as men, sometimes more so, just as Guinevere was in *Lanval*. Whether it is used for good or bad, this pattern of strength is continuous in Marie's lais. Marie is careful not to give her female characters names, showing her willingness to conform to society's belief that women are property. If her female characters are 'taken', Marie clarifies whom they belong to. In their own right, autonomous women are given a title, such as 'the lady' in *Lai Guigemar* and *Lai Lanval*. By doing this, Marie is careful not to upset the balance of society too much to ensure her stories are still read and enjoyed.

[318] Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures: New Approaches to German and European Women Writers and to Violence Against Women in Premodern Times* (Berlin: De Gruyte Academic Publishing, 2012), p. 129.

Conclusion

Marie de France's reference to water in various contexts is proven strategic, especially in *Lanval* and *Guigemar,* where the water crossing regularly symbolises the turning and changing of events, a form of rebirth. As Classen states, Marie is actively interested in operating with water as it helps her move her characters and expose them to threats in pursuing love. Crossing the water is deeply connected to the Celtic symbolism discussed earlier. However, it is a reflection of Marie's situation. She was born in France but living in England and seemingly very familiar with the coasts on either channel. No doubt, this inspired her and offered creativity in using water to her lais.[319] Her circumstances and geographical location would have been a significant influence. This was because she was also on an island (Britain) and 'out of her element' in her home of France. She, too, had to cross a hazardous sea to live in the court, so water is, in many ways, central also to her predicament.

It is easy to link this to my suggestion of *Lai Equitan* being the first of Marie's written lais. Water's role in Lai Equitan is a crucial plotline but symbolically reduced. It is not until we read her other tales that water, like her partnered couples, is developed more intrinsically. Crossing water is critical and always constitutes a junction or journey for Marie's characters, even a journey into death. By placing water at the forefront as a productive hermeneutic, we can recognise and identify water bodies as a significant element in facilitating the development and achievement of an empowering love. Marie gives the water credit it deserves as she acknowledges its power to give life and, like in *Lai Equitan*, to take it away. For Marie, as Classen also argues, this also meant that water, in many cases, facilitated love as well. Marie would have been well aware of both the Celtic and Christian symbolism of water, which she developed in the later lais.

[319] Classen, *The Power of*, p. 149.

Regarding this chapter of the project, I have discussed two things: water and female empowerment. It is essential to see that these two items can be viewed independently or together. I disagree with Classen that Marie does not have an open feminist agenda because she does not need one – she strongly does. [320] Marie opens multiple perspectives of women's lives, not just in *Lanval, Guigemar,* and *Equitan,* and allows us to observe precisely how they operate within courtly society, within marriage and how they respond to men's erotic wooing. Marie is careful not to criticise her society's patriarchal structure but carefully places her individuality and independence within a male-dominated world. Marie may well have asserted her position in life and reflected on the considerable influence a woman of her calibre had. Challenging the sad state of affairs for many women of her time, she addresses the issue head-on by presenting a collection of remarkable female characters who live their lives and try to make their own decisions.

Classen then says that Marie and women like her, such a Hildegard von Bingen 'were not exceptions to the rule and that twelfth-century women enjoyed considerably more influence and both in intellectual…matters'[321]. I strongly disagree with this. We must agree with Joachim Bumke[322] that women had far fewer rights regarding property and that many males treated them like objects. A wife could be physically punished by her husband, which was publically approved, even by the church. We have no idea what Marie went through to get her material accepted publicly or how many other female writers were ignored. In her prologue, she claims her writing is 'in your honour, noble king.'

Nevertheless, still basing a conclusion on her thanks to the king or solely on Marie's writing tone, as Classen does, is unfounded. To have any of her writing read, Marie would

[320] Classen, *The Power of*, p. 132.
[321] Classen, *The Power of*, p. 133.
[322] Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992), p. 327.

have had to weave her politics within a plot acceptable to society; that meant pleasing men. Whether they enjoyed Marie's writing as a short stint of escapism or felt the idea of a woman saving a man's life was satire and hilarious – Marie played the game well.

As this project has explained, Marie uses different women and chivalry personalities to portray the differing empowerment, regardless of whether it is 'good' or 'bad' behaviour. In *Equitan,* adulterous people (both the man and woman) are condemned, not so much for their adultery but for their betrayal of a loyal husband and servant. The Seneschal's wife decides to embark on the affair and then concocts the plan based on her desires and love of a weak man as 'The king promised faithfully to do what she wished.'[323] In *Guigemar*, adultery committed by an unhappy and trapped woman has not been condemned since adultery challenges any sincere love relationship. This affair gives the lady the courage to escape her un-chivalric husband and then use her element of water to search for her lover, and thus she had the chance to escape.'[324] In *Lanval*, the betrayal committed by the man comes from a genuine love when he declares to Guinevere, 'I love and am loved by a lady who should be prized above all others…is worth more than you.'

In contrast, Guinevere's betrayal is punished as she intends to be disloyal to her loyal husband and attempts to disrupt a loyal love when she claims that Lanval has shamed her. It is clear how Marie played the game in her writing. She uses chivalry –important to contemporary men – to excuse female empowerment. They cannot argue against or notice feminism if it is drawn from their moral and social code.

Similarly, water is the connection for all love and relationships. It is also the channel linked significantly to the power of women. Whether it be used for good or evil, it tends to be in the woman's favour, unlike in *Equitan,* where, although it does exactly what the woman

[323] 'Li reis li a tut graanté, qu'il en fera sa volenté'. 'Equitan', pp. 41–53, in Busby, p. 59.
[324] 'se jeo puis eschaper'. 'Guigemar', pp. 5–10, in Busby, p. 52.

desires, it does it to the 'wrong' people, bringing it back to the original point of chivalric love.

Classen agrees that water, in many cases, stands for love, especially in *Guigemar*.[325] Marie would have been well aware of the Celtic symbolism, which she develops in the other lais, such as *Lanval*. Nevertheless, her circumstances and geographical location would have also significantly influenced her.[326] Most of the verse narratives are predicated explicitly on the water in large bodies requiring a sea voyage. Then water is also used to achieve a particular effect, emphasising how much Marie was aware of the meaningfulness of water in developing her ideas about love, sexuality, and marriage.

Upon opening this chapter, I commented on how there had recently been a new acceptance that some women used the medieval system to their advantage rather than blindly accepting its unfair rulings. Marie de France proves this idea correct by taking advantage of her high birth, education, and intelligence to pave the way for her success. What it does, however, brings about more questions: how did she do it? At what cost? If it was so easy, why are there not more notorious female authors?

Furthermore, the answers are simple; it was not easy for a woman to do anything, so there are few others. As I have previously said, Marie did it by weaving her feminism with romantic Celtic symbolism and the chivalric code in the hope that it would reach her audience in a way that empowered the female readers and changed the minds of the males who dominated society. However, the cost for Marie will never be known to any extent. Altogether, Marie de France's references to water appear to be an essential narrative strategy, especially considering the channel's crossing in the communication between France and

[325] Classen, *Water*, p. 102.
[326] Classen, *Water*, p. 102.

England. She was aware of the importance of the four humors and water's prominence and connection to the natural world. For Marie, water appears to control life and death – either ending a love like in *Lai Equitan* or assisting in its success like in *Lai Guigemar* and *Lai Lanval.* Marie combines the water element with her female characters in the same way; to either propel or destroy. The next chapter will consider how the earth's elements can be used similarly.

Chapter Three – Development of Morgan le Fay and other Arthurian Women

Introduction

In the previous chapters, this project has considered the role the natural world plays in our understanding and enjoyment of literature and how issues connected to female empowerment fit within that. I have also suggested that it is essential that the natural world, empowerment, and gender are studied comparatively in medieval literature. Recognising these changing dynamics has been brought about by what we might term a 'proto eco-feminism' perspective: using feminist approaches to better understand medieval ecology. As explained in the introduction of this project, Ecofeminism addresses the equivalents of the repression of nature and women's repression to emphasise the idea that both must be understood to recognise how they are connected.

In this final chapter and by using Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, Chrétien de Troyes (*Erec and Enid*), the *Vulgate Cycle* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, I will discuss the presentation of one of the most renowned women within medieval literature: Morgan le Fay. She is a female character who has deep roots within Celtic mythology and has survived the Christianisation of literature in the west. By examining her role chronologically and two different genres of her journey, chronicle and romance, the chapter will present how both religions and authorship changes mould and shape one woman through multiple retellings of her story. Additionally, how the differences in genre contribute to the different presentations and how the transmission texts, intertextual influences and authorial intentions may have led to changes in the presentation of Morgan over time. This chapter will continue the initial ideas from chapter one in how the natural world, theology, women and empowerment are all collectively joined in this project's triple goddess comparison: Morrigan, Lilith and Brigid. The reason for this is simple, Morrigan is the pagan roots of

Morgan, who has been twisted in turned into a representation of good and evil; Lilith is the example of how organised religion (Judaism) has applied St. Augustine's theory of women literally in that empowered women are dangerous, and Brigid who is redeemed as a saint. Moreover, it will explore how Morgan declines from a once-respected equal to King Arthur to a wicked woman, sneakily potting as the puppet master behind the scenes with the idea of feminine space. This decline correlates with women's equality through the ages, from the Celts to the Normans' establishment of women as property. While also drawing attention to the impact of genre on the representation of women's empowerment through nature/Celtic survivals.

Morgan le Fay's Celtic Origin

Christopher Bruce presents the medieval Morgan as King Urien's wife,[327] historically a late sixth-century king of Rheged, today's northern England and southern Scotland.[328] There are clear links to the Welsh goddess Modron, described in the Welsh Triads.[329] Known as a 'Mother Goddess',[330] she, like Morgan, was married to Urien, (or Euron)[331] , a deity of the underworld.[332] The first reference to the name Modron resides in the poem *Pa Gur yv y Porthaur* (C.1100).[333] *Pa Gur yv y Porthaur* is notable for being one of the earliest Arthurian stories, in which Mydron is mentioned: 'Mabon am mydron/ Guas uthir pen dragon.'

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[327] Christopher W. Bruce, *The Arthurian Name Dictionary* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 1999), p. 481.
[328] 'Urien Rheged [Urien ap Cynfarch]', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [online], <https://www.oxforddnb.com/abstract/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28016?rskey=hsGBcp> [accessed 6 November 2019].
[329] The Welsh Triads are a group of related texts in medieval manuscripts which preserve fragments of Welsh folklore, mythology, and history in groups of three.
[330] Geddes and Grosset, p. 430.
[331] Koch, p. 1299.
[332] Geddes and Grosset, p. 267.
[333] O. J. Padel, *Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 11. Poem 31 of the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, a mid-13th century manuscript, a dialogue between King Arthur and the gatekeeper Glewlwyd Gafaelfawr.

(Mabon, the son of Modron/ The servant of Uthyr Pendragon). [334] Uthyr Pendragon is famously known as King Arthur's father.[335] This would imply from the passage that he employed a goddess' son as a warrior. The Triads name her father Afallach and, within *Brut y Brenhinedd*,[336] associate him with Ynys Afallach (*Insula Avalonsis* [Island of Avalon]).[337] His name can also be connected with the Welsh word for 'apple' (afallen)[338] and easily connected, therefore, to the 'apple-tree' where the entrance to Avalon is considered to be within many medieval tales such as *Sir Orfeo* as well as the Arthurian romances: 'That slepeth under the ympe-tree.'/'Nay!' quath the king, 'that nought nere!...Hou her quen was stole owy, Ten yer gon, with fairy.''[339] The imagery of an apple-tree naturally brings a reader to a loose recollection of the Garden of Eden – which will be touched upon later in this chapter regarding Morgan and her further connections to it. Modron appears within *Kat Godeu (Cad Goddeu* [*The Battle of the Trees*]) and her husband 'Mawnut o brython. O eurwys o ewron. O euron o vodron.'[340] (The great purifier of the Brython, Of Eurwys, Euron, Of Euron, of Modron).[341] Nevertheless, Modron's most substantial appearance in Welsh literature is in the prose tale *Culhwch and Olwen* (c.1325).[342]

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[334] '*Pa Gwr'*, *Celtic Literature Collective*, (YEAR), <http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/bbc31w.html> [accessed 7 November 2019]. All translations, except where otherwise stated, are taken from 'Arthur and the Porter', *Celtic Literature Collective* (2008), <https://web.archive.org/web/20110608214931/http://www.maryjones.us/ctexts/bbc31.html#2> [accessed 7 November 2019].
[335] Bruce, p. 482.
[336] Welsh thirteenth century adaptation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.
[337] Bernhard Maier, *Dictionary of Celtic Religion and Culture*, trans. by Cyril Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), p. 3.
[338] Maier, p. 3 and 28.
[339] 'Sir Orfeo', in *Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. Anna Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995)<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/laskaya-and-salisbury-middle-english-breton-lays-sir-orfeo> [Accessed 29 November 2019].
[340] Kat Godeu', *Celtic Literature Collective* (2008), <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/t08w.html> [accessed 7 November 2019].
[341] 'The Battle of the Trees', *Celtic Literature Collective*, (2009), http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/t08.html [accessed 7 November 2019].
[342] As found in the *White Book of Rhydderch*.

Throughout the world there is not a huntsman who can hunt with this dog, except Mabon the son of Modron. He was taken from his mother when three nights old, and it is not known where he now is, nor whether he is living or dead.[343]

The legend explains how Mabon was stolen from Mydron at three days old, mirroring a similar tale involving a vital goddess Rhiannon and her son, told within the *Mabinogion.*[344] The rescuing of Mabon in *Culhwch and Olwen* is one of the various challenges King Arthur and his men faced in the story, and the adventure comprises a significant portion of the text. Scholars such as Norris Lacy[345] and Lucy Allen Paton[346] maintain that Morgan le Fay is descended from the Welsh goddess Modron. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's Vita Merlini, Morgan's name is *Morgen*,[347] universally agreed to be Welsh and connected to 'sea' (moir)[348] (or the Irish name Muirgen).[349]

There is another Irish link: a theory supported by Paton and Maureen Fries that Morgan is based upon the Irish battle-goddess Morrigan despite the little textual evidence to

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[343] 'Nyt oes / yn y byt kynyd a digono kynnydyaeth ar ki / hỽnnỽ.
o·nyt mabon mab modron. a duc / pỽyt yn teir nossic y ỽrth y vam. ny wys, /
pa|du y mae. na pheth yỽ ae byỽ ae marỽ'. 'Culhwch ac Olwen', Pt. 2. 12–16. *Celtic Literature Collective* (2008), <http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/culhwch2.html> [accessed 7 November 2019]. For the translation, see *Welsh Prose*, Oxford Jesus College MS. 111 (The Red Book of Hergest), *Culhwch ac Olwen* folio 205r:
<http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk/en/ms-page.php?ms=Jesus111&page=205r>
[accessed 7 November 2019].
[344] A twelfth to thirteenth-century compilation of stories written earlier in Middle Welsh.
[345] Norris J Lacy, *The Arthurian Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1986).
[346] Lucy Allen Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* (New York: B. Franklin, 1960).
[347] Modern form of *Morgen*, which was used by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century for the Arthurian sorceress Morgan le Fay, who was unnamed in earlier stories. Geoffrey probably did not derive it from the Welsh masculine name *Morgan*, which would have been spelled *Morcant* in his time. He may have based it on the Irish name *Muirgen* due to its similarity in pronunciation. 'Morgan' (2019), <https://www.behindthename.com/name/morgan-2> [accessed 7 November 2019].
[348]Dorothy Astoria, *The Name Book: Over 10,000 Names: Their Meanings, Origins, and Spiritual Significance* (Preston: Bethany House, 2008), p. 213.
[349] Means 'born of the sea' in Gaelic. In Irish legend, this was the name of a woman who was transformed into a mermaid. 'Muirgen' (2009), <https://www.behindthename.com/name/muirgen> [accessed 7 November 2019].

support this. The similarity of name and Morgan's unpredictable behaviour, intelligent plots and sexual independence are identical to the Morrigan depiction. Morgan is revealed to be the puppet master described as 'intimately entwined,'[350] in the entire trickeries ('For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme').[351] Morgan is additionally depicted as a seductress, much like in the older legends of the Morrígan where she has numerous sexual encounters with Merlin. The Morrígan and Morgan are frequently described as wielding power over others to achieve their purposes, allowing those actions to play out over time, to the benefit of their causes and sometimes to the detriment of other characters. Although Rosalind Clark disagrees with the connection,[352] I argue there are too many similarities in personality traits and repeated story plots for them not to be connected, as previously presented.

Morgan is shown as a creature connected to all Celtic within Britain. The Welsh and Irish Goddess connections aside, her parents were Lady Igerne and Gorlois, the Duke of Cornwall.[353] Cornwall has deemed a Celtic land within its right until roughly around 815.[354] Bernard Deacon discusses Cornwall's history from King Arthur to the Norman invasion and how colonies were established in Brittany from this area of Britain during this time.[355] Therefore, it makes sense for them to marry their daughters to similar Celtic rulers: Morgan to Urien, Morgause to King Lot of Orkney and Elaine to Nentres of Garlot in Aberdeen.

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[350] Simon Armitage, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2007), p. 111.
[351] Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', in *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, ed. by J. R.R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, 3rd edn (London: Book publisher, 1900), Note: the poem is beyond the remit of this thesis but the depiction of Morgan in that, although fleeting, is worth further study.
[352] Rosalind Clark, 'Aspects of the Morrí Gan in Early Irish Literature', *Irish University Review*, 17 (1987), 223–236.
[353] Bruce, p. 229.
[354] 'The Foundation of the Kingdom of England', in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, (Third Millennium Library, 2011, ch. XIV, <https://web.archive.org/web/20111005105356/http://www.third-millennium-library.com/MedievalHistory/Book/CHAPTERS/XIV.html> [accessed 7 November 2019]. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (ninth century) stated 'and in this year [815] King Ecgbryht raided in Cornwall from east to west', and thenceforth apparently held it as a dukedom of his kingdom of Wessex, but not wholly incorporated with it. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that in 825, after battles between Cornwall and Devon, Ecgbert, 'disposed of their territory as it seemed fit to him, giving a tenth part of it to God'. In 875, the last recorded king of Cornwall drowned.
[355] Bernard Deacon, *Cornwall's First Golden Age: From Arthur to the Normans* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2016).

However, Phyllis Ann Karr argues it was East Lothian.[356] It is possible, and based on the evidence of influence portrayed in this project, that Morgan is a convenient and expedient character to combine the traditional Pagan, Celtic and natural worlds as one singular enemy which the Christian Arthurian knights must defeat – a woman and faith that must be brought under control.

Morgan the Healer

Morgan first appears in *Vita Merlini*, a more chronicle account written by Geoffrey of Monmouth:

> The island of apples which men call 'The Fortunate Isle'… There nine sisters rule… She who is first of them is more skilled in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person. Morgen is her name, and she has learned what useful properties all the herbs contain, so that she can cure sick bodies. She also knows an art by which to change her shape, and to cleave the air on new wings like Daedalus…she slips down from the air onto your shores. And men say that she has taught mathematics to her sisters. [357]

[356] Phyllis Ann Karr, *The Arthurian Companion: The Legendary World of Camelot and the Round Table* (San Fransisco Bay: Green Knight Publishing, 1997), p. 189.
[357] 'Flores et frondes per tempora cuncta uirendo / Jnsula pomorum que fortunata uocatur.../ iura nouem geniali lege sorores.../ Quarum que prior est fit doctior arte medendi / Excedit que suas forma prestante sorores / Morgen ei nomen didicit que quid utilitatis / Gramina cuncta ferant ut languida corpora curet / Et resecare nouis quasi dedalus..../ Cum uult in uestris es aere labitur horis / Hanc que mathematicam dicunt didicisse sorores'. 'Vita Merlini', *Sacred Texts* (2010), <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/vm/vmlat.htm> [accessed 7 November 2019]. All quotations will be taken from this unpaginated and unlined edition. All translations, except where otherwise stated, are taken from 'The Life of Merlin', *Sacred Texts* (2010), <https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/eng/vm/vmeng.htm> [accessed 7 November 2019].

Above in the *Vita Merlini*, Geoffrey describes Avalon as the land of apples, which appears to be a very female-heavy realm, as I mentioned previously in Morgan's father. He tells of how Morgen is the most gifted of the ruling sisters who live there. She is a talented healer, gifted sorcerous and clever lady. Morgan becomes associated with wilderness inspired by her Celtic background, giving the modern readers an air of mystery regarding her true motives. As mentioned, her name is related to the ocean: already a wild and uncontrollable element. Additionally, her connection with trees, the natural elements of unknown lands, and her ability to control things on her merit also fuel this connection. Following the example above, Morgan agrees to heal Arthur: 'rejoicing we committed the king to her.'[358]

Additionally, Morgan and her sisters can shapeshift and use their powers only for good.[359] After the battle of Camlan, Arthur is brought to Morgan for help:

> After the battle of Camlan we took the wounded Arthur, guided by Barinthus to whom the waters and the stars of heaven were well known. With him steering the ship we arrived there with the prince, and Morgen received is with fitting honour, and in her chamber she placed the king on a golden bed and with her own hand she uncovered his honourable wound and gazed at it for a long time. At length she said that health could be restored to him if he stayed with her for a

[358] 'Gaudentes igitur regem commisimus illi'. 'The Life of Merlin'.
[359] Caroline Larrington, 'The Enchantress, the Knight and the Cleric: Authorial Surrogates in Arthurian Romance', in *Arthurian Literature XXV*, ed. by David F. Johnson Elizabeth Archibald (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), pp. 43–65 (p. 50).

> long time and made use of her healing art. Rejoicing, therefore, we entrusted the king to her…[360]

Here, Morgan is trusted above all others to heal King Arthur, which she agrees to do. She is seen as motherly, earthly and fertile (in that she can give Arthur life), and as Maureen Fries argues, is emblemised by her association with Avalon, the Isle of Apples.[361] This is reiterated in Gervase of Tilbury's (c. 1150–1220) report *Otia Imperialia* (1210-1214):

> According to the vulgar tradition of the Bretons Arthur was borne away to the Isle of Avalon in order that his wounds, annually reopening, may be cured by the Fay Morgan with her healing applications.[362]

Even though Geoffrey of Monmouth writes about the Battle of Mount Baden, where Arthur wears the Virgin Mary image and obtains victory,[363] this passage shows Arthur to be reminiscent of the Celtic seasonal year cycle, the mercy of a female goddess. The mother-goddess and Arthur can also be seen in a bronze Gallo-Roman statue where Arthur (Artio) is shown to be a symbolic bear 'being deadened by their winter sleep' heading towards Mother Nature, represented as a female goddess who is likely to be the mother-goddess or

[360] 'Jlluc post bellum camblani uulnere lesum / Duximus arcturum nos conducente barintho /
Equora cui fuerant et celi sydera nota / Hoc rectore ratis cum principe uenimus illuc /
Et nos quo decuit morgen suscepit honore / Jnque suis talamis posuit super aurea regem /
Stulta manu que sibi detexit uulnus honesta / Jnspexit que diu. tandem que redire salute /
Posse sibi dixit- si secum tempore Longo / Esset et ipsius uellet medicamine fungi /
Gaudentes igitur regem commisimus illi…'. 'The Life of Merlin'.
[361] Maureen Fries, 'From The Lady to The Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance', *Arthuriana*, 4 (1994), 1–18.
[362] Roger Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Haskell House, 1967), p. 194.
[363] Jean Markale, *The Great Goddess: Reverence of the Divine Feminine from the Paleolithic to the Present* (New Jersey: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p. 157.

Rhiannon.[364] This mirrors Arthur's return to Morgan and Avalon while he gains strength for a productive spring and summer. It is essential to remind ourselves about the underlying connection to the elements lightly touched upon in the above passages to understand their metaphorical presence in the text.

As stated previously in this project, water is and was closely linked to the earth's fertility, and many of the Celtic water goddesses double as earth goddesses. As a river goddess, the Morrigan holds the power of healing, transformation, and fertility. Morgan has Arthur bring her over the water to the Isle of Avalon to heal him. Here, she shows a similar connection to Lanvals lover, Goddess Macha, from chapter one. Water is naturally fluid and ever-changing – a natural shapeshifter. It can transform from a liquid to a solid and into gas while feeding into other natural landscapes such as woodland, forestry, and mountains. It presents the logical conclusion that being associated with water in a goddess-like way suggests a constant wave of power (or magic). Therefore, as the controller of that magic, these women were assumed to be uncontrollable. As we saw in the arguments presented by Cadden, in medieval lore, women are associated with water (cold and wet). Therefore, in both traditions, seas, rivers and lakes can be read as feminine. The fact that they flow in and through landscapes suggests that the prose's events were influenced by and responsive to the feminine - hence: the male need to 'conquer' and 'dominate' and 'shape' land and landscapes.[365]

Elke Dalecky asserts that this early portrayal of Morgan is an attempt to create a Virgin Mary-type character.[366] While Donald Carver argues that Geoffrey was influenced by

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[364] Markale, p. 87.
[365] Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1993).
[366] Elke Dalecky, *Different Faces of Morgan le Fay: The Changing Image of the Sorceress in Arthurian Literature* (Vienna: University of Vienna, 2008).

a Roman geographer Pomponius Mela (c. AD 45),[367] who described an oracle on the French island of Île de Sein who lived with nine virgin priestesses believed by the continental Celts to have the power to cure disease and use their magic to control the sea, tell the future, and shapeshift.[368] However, according to R. S. Loomis, Geoffrey was not the original inventor of Morgan's character. She already existed as Arthur's fairy, with her supernatural ability to traverse on or underwater.[369]

In Carver’s argument, there is no evidence that Geoffrey had access to Pomponius’ texts. It is more likely that such stories were shared orally, which would, in turn, influence various authors writing separately, mostly since *Vita Merlini* (c.1150) was a little-known text at the time.[370] Geoffrey’s chronicle spares Morgan of drama, and Geoffrey seems to write of Morgan in a controlled and positive way. He was more likely inspired by combining these tales with historical and religious issues of the day in crafting his descriptions of Morgan and Avalon.

In medieval French literature, Chrétien de Troyes mentions Morgan in his first romance, *Erec and Enide* (1170).[371]

> And Guigomars, his brother, came;
>
> From the Isle of Avalon, came sire,
>
> That is what we said
>
> That he was friends with Morgan, the fairy. [372]

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[367] A Roman geographer who successfully described and located the Orkney Islands and Celtic lands.
[368] Donald Carver, *Goddess Dethroned: The Evolution of Morgan le Fay* (Atlanta: Georgia State University, 2006).
[369] Roger Loomis, ‘Morgain la Fée in oral tradition’, *Romania*, 319 (1959), 337–637.
[370] Loomis, p. 343.
[371] Predated only by *Culhwch and Olwen*.
[372] ‘Et Guigomars, ses frere, i vint; / De l’Isle d’Avalon fu sire. / De cestui avons oï dire / Qu’il fu amis Morgain, la fee’. Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec und Enide*, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1909), 1954–1957 (my translation).

In translations of this passage, such as those by Ruth Cline,[373] it appears to be the consensus that Morgan is the lover of the same Guigomar - as appears in Marie de France's work, discussed in chapter two above as a translation of 'ami' is 'friend' or 'lover.' In this text, the weight of empowerment is already shifting from Morgan to her male companion. Chrétien only refers to Morgan in passing when referring to the male protagonists of his writing. He does it mainly as a healer clearing up after the men are finished or because she is having sex with one of them. In the tale, Guigomar is the Lord of the Isle of Avalon, and we see Morgan being invited to the wedding because of her connection to Guigomar, not because of who she is in her own right. She is mentioned again in *Erec and Enide* in the same poem when Arthur provides the wounded Erec with a healing balm made by 'Morgue, sa suer, (Morgan, his sister).'[374]

> The king thereto sent for a salve, one he declared his sister Morgan had prepared. The salve that Morgan, its endower, had given Arthur had such power, whatever wound one might o anoint, upon the nerve or at the joint, within one week would be revealed to be completely sound and healed, if once a day it were anointed with that same salve the king appointed. They brought the ointment as he pleased; the salve left Erec greatly eased.[375]

[373] Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, trans. by Ruth Harwood Cline (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 54.
[374] De Troyes, 4221–4230.
[375] 'Que Morgue, sa suer, avoit fet. / Li antrez iert de tel vertu, / Que Morgue avoit doné Artu, / Que ja plaie qui an fust ointe, / Ou soit sor nerf ou soit sor jointe, / Ne faussist, qu'an une semainne / Ne fust tote garie et sainne, / Mes que le jor une foiiee / Fust de l'antret aparelliee. / L'antret ont le roi aporté, / Qui mout a Erec conforté'. *Eric et Enide*, 4221–4230 (trans. p. 152).

This episode reminds us of her role as a healer, in addition to being presented as Arthur's sister for the first time; healing is Morgan's chief ability, and there seems to be an acknowledgement of her healing Arthur in the *Otia Imperialia,* as Arthur assured Erec Morgan’s talents are to be trusted – because she is his sister. It is worth pointing out that Chrétien refers to Morgan as a talented healer again in his romance *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* (c. 1180), in which the Lady of Norison claims to ‘have a magic balm. Morgan the Wise said it would calm and cure the worst insanity,’[376] and restores Yvain, the hero, to his senses. Chrétien fiercely feels the need to highlight that Morgan is always in the back pocket of his protagonists. It is a condescending attempt to remind the reader that women are capable. If Morgan is genuinely such a well-trusted and renowned healer, we do not need Arthur or other men to vouch for her – but, Chrétien at least, sees the need to justify Morgan’s talents. Morgan’s character in *Vita Merlini* already descends from a respected Goddess into a misogynistic stereotype, as Fries asserts:

> Her gradual change (one can hardly call it growth) from a connector or life with healing, as mistress of Avalon, into a connector of death with illicit sex and wrongful imprisonment…indicates the increasing inability of male Arthurian authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms.[377]

[376]‘d’un oignement me sovient, / Queme dona orgue, la sage’. James R. McGuire, ‘L’onguent et l’initiative féminine dans Yvain’, *Romania*, 112.445–446 (1991), p. 75. All transalations taken from Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain, the Knight with the Lion*, trans. by Ruth Harwood Cline (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 83.

[377] Fries, p. 2.

Morgan initially appears to be a positive force in Arthurian legends, although her empowered reputation begins to be distrusted. Here in this early romance, we begin to see Morgan involved in the drama and credited due to her close connections. She was helpful, independent and empowered via her associations with and using the natural world in her own right. So, when was she developed from this helpful and life-giving woman into a full-blown troublemaker?

Morgan, the sister

While Chrétien maintains Morgan's compassionate characterisation generally, French prose represents her in more of a villainous role. Here we see women overall using their influence negatively, and a damaging light shone on magic and a positive one on religious faith. In Robert de Boron's (d. 1212) thirteenth-century *Merlin* from that, for the first time, we ascertain where Morgan learned her magic (ironically, a nunnery – and therefore from other women) as opposed to its being ontological. Translated into Middle English 'near the middle of the fifteenth century.'[378]

> it were Morgain, the suster of kynge Arthur…taught here alle the merveiles of the worlde… And by that Castell where-of I speke [Castell del la Roche] hadde the saisnes all her recouerer.[379]

[378] John Conlee, ed., 'Merlin', *TEAMS Middle English Text Series* (1998) <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/conlee-prose-merlin-introduction> [accessed 29 November 2019].

[379] 'The Return of the Eleven Kings to Their Cities, and Their Encounter with the Saxons', in *Merlin: Or, The Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance,* ed. by Henry B. Wheatley (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench

Later on, in the exact text, is a suggestion of Morgan's original nature and the close links she has with the natural world.

> This Morgain was a yonge damesell fressh and Iolye. But she was som-what brown of visage and sangwein colour, and nother to fatte ne to lene, but was full a-pert auenaunt and comely, streight and right plesaunt, and well syngynge. But she was the moste hotest woman of all Breteigne, and moste luxuriouse… Astronomye cowde she I-nough, for Merlin hadde hir taught; and after he lerned hir I-nough as ye shull heren afterward, and so moche she sette ther-on hir entent, and lerned so moche of egramauncye, that the peple cleped hir afterward Morgain le fee…ffor the merveiles that she dide after in the contrey… she hadde oon of the ffeirest heed, and the feirest handes vnder hevene, and sholdres well shapen at devise; and she hadde feire eloquense, and tretable, and full debonair she was as longe as she was in hir right witte, and whan she were wroth with eny man, she was euell for to acorde; and that was well shewed afterward.[380]

I agree with Jean Markale's claim that this description of Morgan portrays her as a mother-goddess: warm and spiteful, helpful but also self-dependent. It must also be noted how

Trübner & Co., 1899), 1-800 (p. 187). <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/Merlin/1:12?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> [accessed 7 November 2019].

[380] [380] 'The Return of the Eleven Kings to Their Cities, and Their Encounter with the Saxons', pp. 507–508.

Morgan is described as 'hot and luxurious' for indiscriminate sexual activity. From Joan Cadden in previous chapters, we know males were referred to as 'hot,'[381] and so becomes the idea of how women should not be masculine and how Morgan portrays that. Moreover, these are traits we continue to see in Morgan in various Arthurian texts like the *Vulgate cycle*.[382]

Carolyne Larrington claims this is where we learn of Morgan being Ygerne's illegitimate daughter.[383] The *Vulgate Cycle* provides the earliest complete story of Morgan. As Robin Melrose asserts:

> According to the *Vulgate Cycle*, she is born of Igerne, and, though her father is likely Gorlois, she is at one point referred to as a bastard, is fostered and sent to a nunnery where she learns Healing, Reading, Writing, and Astrology. Merlin teaches her the magic arts while Arthur is engaged in the Saxon wars, and she eventually becomes the lover of Guiomar; he is Queen Guinevere's cousin and resembles Morgan's lover mentioned in Chrétien's *Erec*. The Queen, according to the *Cycle*, ends the relationship between Morgan and Guiomart, and Morgan hates Arthur and Guinevere from this point onwards…she attempts to expose the love affair between Lancelot and Guinevere. She also creates the Valley of No Return where she entraps various warriors; Lancelot is captured there a total of three

381 Caddon, p. 145.
382 A cycle of interconnected prose volumes of chivalric romance, originally written in Old French by unknown authors in the early 13th century. Also known as *The Lancelot-Grail*.
383 Larrington, p. 15.

> times. Despite these attempts to undermine Arthur's court, she is, quite inexplicably, the one who takes Arthur away for healing.[384]

In this drama-filled romance, it is here that we first see Morgan acting vindictively from this point onwards. This continues in the texts written afterwards, such as the *Post-Vulgate Cycle*.[385] *The Vulgate* is also where Morgan and Guiomar first become lovers, for example, which influenced the previously pre and post written texts' translations and explains the root cause of the hatred between Morgan and Guinevere.[386] However, that is not to say she is not acting in an empowered way. Empowerment can be depicted as positive or negative in these texts – and the key is whether she uses it for good or for ill, for herself or others. Her behaviour is unpredictable, which gives the reader a sense that Morgan will not be swayed by anyone and will decide based on what suits her best or just which one she prefers. Moreover, this is recognised by those around her, such as Lancelot, who describes her thus:

> The truth is that Morgan, the sister of King Arthur, knew more about witchcraft and spells than any other woman; and because of her keen interest in such things, she gave up and forsook all dealings with people and lived day and night in far off forests, so that many

[384] Melrose, p. 157.
[385] Larrington, p. 5.
[386] Morgan was already married and Guiomar was Guinevere's nephew, but Guinevere ended the affair. However, based on the previous arguments of this project, it seems more likely that Morgan resents the lack of equality and respect offered to her by Guinevere in this situation. The following events of Guinevere's affair with Lancelot only add to Morgan's resentment, especially as she imprisons unfaithful men. It is easy to imagine she hates Guinevere's disloyalty to her marriage and would like to imprison her also, as she did with the male knights.

> people…never spoke of her as woman but rather called her Morgan
> the Goddess.[387]

This passage is significant to Morgan's character development, external reputation, and psychological development. Morgan is a proto-feminist working-woman. Her brand is her magic, relationships with both sexes, and desired respect and equality. This is evidenced as we can see by the issues with Guinevere, her brother, and lovers, but also her positive contributions. Such as her support for women who cannot help themselves, her love for Arthur and her goodness towards him when he shows her the respect and equality she deserves. In this passage, we have a Christian knight of the round table speaking with Morgan's respect in all these areas. She is highly ranked by birth as 'the sister of King Arthur'[388] and is very knowledgeable. As a result, she finds it hard to live in the current society, so she 'she gave up and forsook all dealings with people.'[389] She resents the expectations of those placed upon women of the times more 'than any other woman'[390] and prefers her own company within nature and the forests. As referred to previously in the project, forests are essential for Morgan in several ways; they are strongly connected to the Celtic Pagan faith and are often the place of magical fairies (such as we found in Marie de France's 'Lanval'). However, most importantly, she is known as 'Morgan the Goddess,' not just by those at court potentially threatened by her but by those in the country and different kingdoms. Here, she is the closest to 'The Morrigan,' her original form, as she ever gets in these legends.

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[387] Norris J. Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail: Lancelot, pt. III & IV* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 128.
[388] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 128.
[389] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 128.
[390] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 128.

Morgan's magic, influenced by the natural world but given to her by education, gives her an enormous sense of self-importance and quite rightly. For example, in *Val sans Retor* (*Val sans retour* [*Vale of No Return*]) part of the *Vulgate Cycle*, Morgan tricks unfaithful male lovers into finding her castle.

> When Lancelot recognised her, he said, 'Ah, my lady, how have I deserved to be held prisoner by you?'
>
> 'I am not holding you prisoner,' she said, 'because of any wrong you may have done me, but because it's what I want to do!'[391]

Morgan does not feel the need to explain herself and her actions, just as some of the male characters do not. For example, her step-father Uther Pendragon (Arthur's father), asks Merlin to disguise him as Morgan's biological father to trick her mother into sleeping with him.[392] There is never any explanation or apology for this behaviour because of Uther's gender and rank. Morgan sees herself as equal if not above those she challenges and sees no reason to explain.

She appears to be aware of her strength and intelligence compared to other women who are not as fortunate to hold the same education and confidence but experience the same inequality. In her quest for justice for those women whose lovers are unfaithful, she manipulates the elements to lure the knights into her castle. 'The Forest of the Three

[391] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, p. 147.
[392] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur: King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, ed. by Stephanie Lynn Budin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), pp.4-5.

Perils,'[393] leads to 'the Valley of No Return…no knight has ever come out of it,'[394] with water 'so hot that he thought he (Gawain) had lost his hand forever,'[395] and fire 'blazing across his path…so intense that it seemed nothing could enter it without being burned up.'[396] Morgan held them prisoner, for an infinite amount of time; only ladies could come and go from the castle. After getting 'lost' in a vast forest and valley, they discover the route to Morgan's castle. In love with the married Guinevere, Lancelot finds the castle, where he is met with a high fire conjured by Morgan, which appears indestructible and 'so intense that it seemed nothing could enter it without being burned…it stretched from the wall on the right to the one on the left.'[397] He uses his Christian faith to give him the strength to cross and, after further combats with other knights, eventually finds Morgan and pleads for his freedom. Determined to expose Lancelot and Guinevere's affair, Morgan takes Lancelot, prisoner, steals his ring with the queen's symbol, and magically sends it to Arthur, publicly accusing the secret lovers of their affair. Due to Guinevere's passionate dispute, Arthur 'was not in any way perturbed by it but rather held everything the messenger said to be a lie.'[398] She descends into hysterical sobs and declares:

> I want God and everyone to know…that between Lancelot and me there was never a guilty love. Thus the queen defended herself in front of the whole court (52, 6-13)[399]

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[393] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 305.
[394] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 126.
[395] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 376.
[396] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 134.
[397] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 135.
[398] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 166.
[399] 'Et tant sache Diex, fet ele, et tos Ii mondes que je n'oi onques a Lancelot ne il a moi amor vi laine, mais il estoit Ii plus bials et Ii buens et Ii mieldres des buens...'. Peter Noble, 'Women in the Vulgate Cycle: From Saints to Sorceresses', *Reading Medieval Studies,* 30 (2004), 57–74 (p. 63). All transltions taken from Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 144.

It is hard not to judge Guinevere. If the affair is exposed, she will be executed. She must have Arthur believe her and the way to do that is to play into the chivalric stereotype. After all, Morgan does not play that game and is in exile. It does not matter which is morally right – we have another example of Irigaray's mimesis. We first see this behaviour in chapter one of Marie de France's *Lai Lanval* when Lanval rejects her advances. As it did in *Lai Lanval*, her tears have their desired effect, and she is believed. Driven mad for Guinevere, Lancelot draws paintings of her on his prison wall, and Morgan ensures that Arthur views these paintings to ensure he goes back to Camelot convinced of his friend and wife's guilt:

> In faith, if these inscriptions tell the truth, then Lancelot has dishonoured me through the Queen, because I can see quite clearly that he has had an association with her. If it is as the writing says, it will cause of the greatest grief that I have ever suffered, since Lancelot could not possibly degrade me more than dishonouring my wife.[400]

It is easy to view this as Morgan meddling and her way of controlling the events at the heart of Camelot, which to an extent it probably is – she is perceived and believes herself to be a goddess after all. However, based on her behaviour in allowing Lancelot to be partially freed

[400] 'Par foi, fet ii, se la senefiance de ces letres est veraie, donques m'a Lancelos honni de la reine, car ge voi tout en apert que il s'en est acointiez; et se il est veritez einsi com ceste escriture Ie temoigne, ce est la chose qui me metra au greigneur duel que ge onques elisse; que plus ne me pooit Lancelos avillier que de moi honnir de ma fame'. All translations taken from Robert Stuart Sturges, *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in Literary Narrative, 1100–1500* (Carbondale: SIU Press, 1991), p. 265.

and live in his memories of Guinevere, she respects that he has been faithful to his love. He lives up to her moral standards of decency to a certain degree. The moral complication is that his love is for a married woman who, to return that love, has betrayed her husband – Morgan's brother and the king. Her actions prove that she respects Lancelot's commitment and desires to balance the betrayal through her attempts to expose it. It is hard not to view these two portrays of women as a hatred for women in general but rather an instruction manual for how women not to behave – which is even more complicated. Morgan and Guinevere are the two different ways evil women can be bad: masculine and hysterical.

This story's essential message is that Morgan does not tolerate men who mistreat their women. She sees she is in a rare position of empowerment and uses it. Why should men be unfaithful to their women, yet it not be acceptable vice versa? She does not tolerate the double standard. However, it reads as evil, bitter Morgan taking these poor men prisoner – and despite their ability to fight, they cannot combat her magic! Morgan's behaviour towards Guinevere, who is also playing a game in her own right, is equal to this attitude of desiring equality. She uses her position as queen and a woman to convince Arthur and other knights of her innocence and trustworthiness. Marie de France also addresses this type of behaviour in *Lanval*, which was discussed in chapter two. Beverley Kennedy and Robin Melrose conclude that Morgan hates Guinevere due to her involvement in encouraging the dissolution of Morgan's relationship with Guiomar.[401] However, it runs much deeper than that. Guinevere is Queen and uses her position to betray Arthur, Morgan's brother. As we have read above, Morgan tries to prove her sister-in-law's betrayal more than once and is ignored when she expects 'the Queen to be disgraced.'[402] No wonder she tries to create drama for Camelot in order to be noticed in different ways. It is not that she wants to be recognised as a woman;

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[401] Melrose, p. 157.
[402] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 168.

she wants to be accepted as an equal to Arthur in her own right. This inequality is presented quite crassly within the tale. Morgan's actions are described as 'the evil custom.'

In contrast, Guinevere and Lancelot's affair is described with awe because of 'how much Lancelot and the Queen loved each other.'[403] There is no mention of their betrayal by Morgan. We also see a harder push for rejecting the Pagan faith more brutally. Morgan is already in this category from the start of the French prose version. Not even Arthur is exempt. In *Lancelot du Lac* (Lancelot of the Lake),[404] Arthur begins an affair with a Saxon witch called Gamille. She is mighty, knowledgeable and, according to the author, seduces Arthur - because why else would he sleep with a Pagan? It is not accidental that this is the same night Guinevere and Lancelot consummate their relationship. Their affair's guilt seems to shift more onto Arthur as he is sleeping with 'the enemy,' so to speak – the enemy of Christianity. This hypocritical take on the affairs by both husband and wife forms an exciting line of enquiry. After all, the contemporary reader would assume that Arthur is king and can do what he likes as, admittedly, it is Guinevere's responsibility to be loyal to him? Nevertheless, that is not how it is perceived. John Darrah provides some evidence on Guinevere's background, which brings to light this rivalry between Pagan princess-like Gamille and Morgan, and women like Guinevere and (for example) Iseult:

> In an Arthurain context, Ireland is not to be thought of as pertaining to the present country…but as representing in Britain a religious principle…King Lancelot (Lancelot's grandfather) married a princess

[403] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 168.
[404] Twelfth century.

> of Ireland; Guenever (Guinevere) was sister of a King of Ireland; and Yseult (Iseult)[405] was also a princess of Ireland.[406]

This implies that within most Arthurian legends, Ireland comprises an extremely devout group of Christian people with royal connections. If this piety was something that Arthur wanted to be connected with to enhance his Knights of Camelot's reputation, marrying Guinevere was a positive move. It also explains Morgan and Guinevere's abhorrence as rooted within a more subconscious place and the forgiveness towards Guinevere and Lancelot over Arthur and Gamille. It also explains Guinevere's reaction to Morgan's accusations:

> the great anguish in her heart made her faint…she grieved bitterly and did not let the king or anyone else stop her from weeping and sobbing over Lancelot.[407]

As we know from previous extracts quoted, Guinevere continues to deny an affair with Lancelot quite dramatically verbally. This resonates with Margaret MacDonald's argument that although based on women in Graeco-Roman antiquity, Christian women were used as proselytisers in their eagerness to be (or at least be seen as) pious.[408] This is undoubtedly the same in Christian hagiography – particularly the vociferous 'virgin martyrs' such as the

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[405] Morgan is cast in an identically meddlesome light in the prose *Tristan* (c. twelfth century), where she consistently attempts to undermine and destroy Guinevere. In one instance, Morgan sends chastity-revealing drinking horn to Arthur's court in an attempt to expose the queen's infidelity. The horn is rerouted, however, to King Mark's castle in Cornwall, where Iseult and Tristan are exposed instead. However, based on Iseult being from the similar Christian land as Guinevere, this appears to the reader to be a happy accident for Morgan.

[406] John Darrah, *Paganism in Arthurian Romance* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), pp. 109–110.

[407] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 166.

[408] Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Legenda Aurea (Golden Legend) of Jacobus de Voragine (d. 1298).[409] This coincides with Darrah's suggestion of Guinevere being from a noble Christian land. 'The [Christians] focus on women draws attention to the essence of a group where power is exercised in dangerous, illegitimate ways.'[410] Guinevere's behaviour is very different from Morgan's, who is often thoughtful and patient when planning her next move. For example, she decides to keep Lancelot 'for a long time because she wanted his imprisonment to drive the queen to such despair; she would either die or go mad.'

In contrast, Guinevere can indeed be described as 'hysterical' in her colossal monologue of denial and being in such a respectable position at court. Indeed, this would give her words much power in a way that is ironic for a Christian woman, except, perhaps within hagiographic contexts.[411] To surmise, the respect of taking a woman's word is proven here in Arthur's court, but the same credit is not given to Morgan because she is connected to the natural world, despite her words being the truth. The hypocrisy that Morgan detests raises its ugly head again, and the depth of hatred runs deeper. It no longer is just between Morgan and Guinevere's disagreement over a man, but what Morgan represents (intellect, the natural world, and feminism) compared to what Camelot represents (Christianity, hypocrisy, and stupidity).

Gamille is betrayed and when her books are destroyed, and reminiscent of the thoughts entertained by the lady in Marie de France's *Guigemar*, she commits suicide by leaping from a cliff, fearing she no longer has a voice Books and voice are the key to her independence, her knowledge and therefore, freedom: 'car par ses livres feroit elle corre une

[409] A text sought to compile traditional lore about all of the Christian martyrs at the time of its compilation in 1260.
[410] MacDonald, p. 126.
[411] Larissa Tracy refers to the strident voice of St Christina, for example, as a 'forceful, aggressive dialogue' in *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), p. 43.

aigue contre-mont' (for with her books she could make water flow uphill).[412] This in itself is a feature of mother-goddess in Celtic mythology, as 'water…linked to the power of the mother-goddess,'[413] and as Larrington reminds us, 'bookishness is endemic in enchantresses.'[414] In the *Prophecy of Merlin* (*Prophetia Merlini*),[415] Morgan is similarly described as referring to her collection of spells in preparation for a contest with her rival, Dame d'Avalon.[416] It is important to note that these educated women use their knowledge to garner independence, freedom, and female voice and create havoc in their pursuits. It does give out a strong message to the reader, supporting Cadden's conclusion well, that learned, educated women are trouble and therefore should not be educated 'that tended to derive from and reinforce gender typology.'[417] The same conclusion is never drawn regarding men, in terms of their swords and warfaring, for example. Arthur takes Gamille's death badly and confesses to being in love with her, which discredits him: 'King Arthur was greatly distressed by this, for he loved her dearly.'[418] It is this emotional reaction from Arthur that loses him the respect he should deserve. Arthur is a victim of the misogynistic views of pigeon-holing both men and women into categories; Gamille was Pagan and therefore unlovable. There is the briefest of hopes that Arthur will acknowledge that the love he had for Gamille, even though she was independent and not Christian, can stretch towards Morgan. That is until it is assumed by the knights that Arthur was bewitched by the Pagan sorceress, in which case the hope is snuffed out, and Lancelot and Guinevere emerge in a more sympathetic light for the reader within the text, due to their everlasting 'Christian' love. As the narrator tells us: 'It

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[412] Larrington, p. 54.
[413] McCoy, p. 90.
[414] Larrington, p. 54.
[415] Twelfth-century poem written in Latin by John of Cornwall, a Christian scholar, which he claimed was based on or revived from a lost manuscript in the Cornish language.
[416] Larrington, p. 54. *The Prophecy of Merlin* features the character of an enchantress known only as the Lady of Avalon (*Dame d'Avalon*), Merlin's pupil who is not Morgan and is in fact Morgan's rival and enemy.
[417] Caddon, p. 276.
[418] 'Et Ie roys Artus en fu moult dolans, quar moult I'aimoit, et elle amast miels a avoir perdu tels castiaus que sez livres'. Noble, p. 4. Translation taken from Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 457.

troubled her (Morgan) that the queen had the most faithful of all lovers.'[419] Gamille must be seen to be overthrown as she is a Saxon Pagan – a real enemy to the Christian Camelot that Arthur is trying to build. Whereas because Morgan is not born of magic, it must be assumed she was born a Christian as she learned about the natural world from, at first, a nunnery, and then secondly, for more specific magic, Merlin.[420]

Morgan is given a higher ranking than Gamille in that she is never killed, probably hoping that she can be redeemed. Even though she is a true meddler in Arthur's progress, it gives the impression as a more sibling-banter, infuriating for whoever loses the round but never severe enough for an assassination order to be given, at least until Malory's rendition. This issue is still to be discussed in this project.

However, here is the clear difference between Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgan and Chrétien de Troyes's Morgan. The older Morgan came from the otherworld, where their behaviour and reasoning rules differ from those of humans because she is not a human from a place where 'people live there a hundred years or more.'[421] At the same time, this newer Morgan is a product of the world, where everyone currently resides. Chrétien's Morgan can be seen in two ways: she is a victim of sin and temptation. These sins and temptations are exposed to everyone, which must be resisted at all costs. The second appears to be accidental and unintended by Chrétien yet must be considered nonetheless: that Morgan proves to women (and to a certain extent man) that background and gender do not matter; that everyone can change who they are and create empowerment and independence for themselves, as Guinevere does; and that everyone has and should adhere to fundamental right and wrong by using their voice.

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[419] Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail,* p. 168.
[420] This is discussed in the twelfth century epic *Suite du Merlin.*
[421] 'Annis centenis aut ultra viuiter illic'. 'Vita Merlini', *Sacred Texts*.

Morgan the Villain

This attitude towards Morgan is continued and magnified by Thomas Malory (d. 1471) in his *La Mort Ie Roi Artu* (*Le Morte d'Arthur* [*The death the King Arthur*]) (c. 1485). From her first appearance, she is associated with magic as she is introduced as ‘Morgan le fay’[422] and then later on when ‘the Queen was sent for, and she came and brought with her Morgan le Fay, her daughter.[423] Nevertheless, nothing of her personality is alluded to until much later on when Arthur entrusts Excalibur to her on Merlin's advice. Whereas previously in this project, it has been concluded that, in the earlier Arthurian legends, Morgan does not want to kill her brother, Malory completely changes this and henceforth changes the perception of Morgan forever:

> Sir, said Merlin, look ye keep well the scabbard of Excalibur, for ye shall lose no blood while ye have the scabbard upon you, though ye have as many wounds upon you as ye may have. So after, for great trust, Arthur betook the scabbard to Morgan le Fay his sister, and she loved another knight better than her husband King Uriens or King Arthur, and she would have had Arthur her brother slain, and therefore she let make another scabbard like it by enchantment.[424]

[422] Meaning ‘Morgan the fairy’. Thomas Malory, *The Byrth, Lyf, and Actes of Kyng Arthur: Of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table, Theyr Merveyllous Enquestes and Aduentures, Thachyeuyng of the Sanc Greal ; and in the End Le Morte Darthur, with the Dolourous Deth and Departying out of thys Worlde*, ed. by Robert Southey (London: Caxton’s edition, 1485), p. 101.
[423] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d’Arthur King Arthur and of His Noble Knights of the Round Table* (2019), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1251/1251-h/1251-h.htm> [accessed 7 November 2019]. This is unpaginated and will be cited by chapter, therefore.
[424] Malory, *Le Morte*, II. XI.

From this statement, Morgan immediately becomes sinister and disloyal in the eyes of the reader. She previously was open about her opinions; she lurks in the background by being unfaithful to her husband and wishing her brother dead, a wolf in sheep's clothing. The conversation between Morgan's lover, Sir Accolon, and one of her servants, a dwarf, indicates a solid confirmation to influence the Christian readers that Morgan is the villain: 'she hath sent you Excalibur…and she biddeth you as ye love her, that ye do the battle to the uttermost, without any mercey.'[425] Morgan is married to Uriens but takes Accolon (and others) as a lover, plots against Arthur attempts to seduce and eventually imprisons Lancelot. She also tries to kill her husband, propagates discontent at Arthur's court, and is, in general, a persistent, dangerous nemesis of Arthur until the end when, after making peace with Camelot, she takes Arthur to Avalon to heal him. However, Malory makes it clear that even Morgan's Celtic magic or 'her false crafts'[426] are no match for death, establishing a clear victor: Christianity and God:

> Here came a number of ladies, and brother hither a dead corpse, and prayed me to bury him…that was my lord King Arthur, that here lieth buried in this chapel…Thus of Arthur I find never more written in books that be authorised, not more of the very certainty of his death heard I never read.[427]

[425] Malory, *Le Morte,* IV. VIII.
[426] Malory, *Le Morte*, IV. XI
[427] Thomas Malory, *Knights of the Round Table,* p. 739.

There is no trip to Avalon for a successful healing programme; Malory is quite clear that Arthur dies like any other human. Where Morgan's character differs from Chrétien's works and the French prose is that she is colder. For example, when she inexplicably attempts to kill her husband, Uriens, she plots it cruelly:

> …on a day she espied King Uriens in bed sleeping. Then she called unto her a maiden of her counsel, and said, Go fetch me my lord's sword, for I saw never a better time to slay him than now.[428]

She plans to murder him in his bed while he is surrounded by safety and trusted people. Malory again shows Morgan to be cowardly – a very far cry from the earlier prose. One of the queens lays Arthur's head in her lap and calls him 'brother' before taking him away. It is the consensus by scholars such as Wendy Coleman Gable[429] and Larrington[430] that this queen is Morgan because of her connections with Avalon and magic, which are now being used in support of Arthur. Malory never mentions any of Arthur's other sisters as healers or, in detail, like Morgan.

Further on, the hermit witness of Arthur's burial names the three queens as 'Queen Morgan le Fay; the other was Queen of Northgalis; the third was Queen of the Waste Lands.'[431] This sudden personality change is confusing. Why would Arthur suddenly be entrusted to a woman who had tried to kill him and caused nothing but trouble for him while

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[428] Malory, *Le Morte*, IV. XIII
[429] Wendy Coleman Gable, *Repetition of Episodes in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1970).
[430] Larrington, p. 253.
[431] Malory, *Knights of the Round Table,* p. 739.

he was alive? Why would she give him a decent and respectful burial? Why would Morgan heal him? It seems much more encompassing of her character to leave Arthur to die, sail away with him and ditch him over the side. (Maybe she did, hence the burial).

Nevertheless, as a reader, we are expected to believe that Morgan suddenly has a caring side, a loving hand as she 'wept and shrieked,' for Arthur.[432] This change of behaviour is very fitting with the Christian notion that all sins can be forgiven. In recollection of St. Augustine, as outlined in chapter one, 'all our sins were forgiven in the 'layer of regeneration'.[433] Because Morgan is willing to try and help Arthur, she is a changed woman, and all her past behaviour is excused. This attitude does not fit with the Celtic fluid and flexible notion of human traits and transferable skills, also highlighted in the discussion of Celtic society undertaken in chapter one. Malory insists that Morgan can only use her healing and intelligence for good (or, more precisely, for Arthur). Read in the light of Cadden's findings, Morgan cannot ebb and flow like nature, and she must be brought to heel to one king, despite being a queen herself. Women were thought to be dangerous in terms of their ebbing and flowing, as Cadden points out.[434] They need to be disciplined and policed. Since the rhythm of ebb and flow is part of the power of the Pagan lifestyle, Malory presents us with a Christian text disciplining the feared Pagan element, which is embodied within the unruly figure of Morgan le Fay.

Similarly, Malory presents an opposing relationship between the Lady of the Lake and the sorceress Morgan. Both possess magic associated with water and are tied in fundamental ways to Arthur himself. She presents Excalibur to him; 'Sir Arthur, King…that

[432] Malory, *Knights of the Round Table,* p. 739.
[433] St. Augustine, *St. Augustine: Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels*, ed. by Anthony Uyl (Ontario: Lulu, 2017), p. 319.
[434] Cadden, p. 186.

sword is mine…ye shall have it.'[435] The Lady of the Lake in the *Le Morte* consistently supports Arthur and, in many cases, defends him against Morgan (see the intervention with Accolon, for instance, when Accolon is using Excalibur to fight with Arthur. The Lady of the Lake arrives and uses her magic to overturn Accolon's advantage and return Excalibur to Arthur so that he may win the fight.)[436] However, The Lady of the Lake's actions is as questionable as Morgan's in some cases. For example, The Lady of the Lake visits Camelot to collect a gift from Arthur, and the two get into a conversation about whom they have recently slain. She is carrying the head of a woman with her and intends to continue her hunt for a knight and requests that Arthur give her permission to carry out the murders.

Although reluctant, he does so, unaware the knight is one of his own, Sir Balin, and she justifies her behaviour because 'he slew my brother, a good knight and a true, and that gentlewoman was the causer of my father's death.'[437] This just so happens to coincide with Sir Balin's release from prison.[438] Understandably outraged by his mother's murder and the intent of his own 'with his sword lightly he smote off her head before King Arthur.'[439] Arthur is corybantic 'for this was the lady I was beholden to.'[440] Sir Balin stands his ground and argues that 'for this same lady was the untruest lady living, and by enchantment and sorcery she hath been the destroyer of many good knights, and she was the causer that my mother was burnt.'[441] Arthur sacks him, and he eventually dies in combat with another of his brothers. The Lady of the Lake, in this case, is Balin's enemy, just as Morgan is Arthur's.

[435] Malory, *Le Morte*, I. XXV.
[436] Malory, *Le Morte*, IV. X.
[437] Malory, *Le Morte*, II. III.
[438] Sir Balin is present early in Arthur's reign, before the round table is established. He is a poor knight from Northumberland and has been in Arthur's prison for six months.
[439] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.
[440] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.
[441] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.

Morgan seeks her murderous plans, just as The Lady of the Lake does. However, hers are ignored by Arthur (and/or Malory) simply because she supports him, unlike Morgan.

The Lady of the Lake becomes more a spiritual presence throughout the rest of *Le Morte,* in that 'King Arthur and all the court made great dole and had the shame of the death of the Lady of the Lake. Then the King buried her richly'[442] as readers are led to mourning her. Upon Sir Bedivere's return of Excalibur, we are emotionally reunited with her as she raises a 'hand above the water and met it (Excalibur) and caught it.'[443] However, Sir Balin does make some good points in his verbal attack on The Lady of the Lake. Josh Mangle argues that 'if negative magic is defined as sorcery, then the magical women in Le Morte Darthur are practising negative magic,'[444] as Sir Balin explains in the tale that all magic is evil. Potentially Arthur should never have become involved with it, as St.Augustine states: 'to try and understand magic is an idea in itself.'

Furthermore, although I agree with the premise, I disagree with Mangle's suggestion. The Lady of the Lake assumed she was allowed to avenge some deaths because she supported King Arthur and Malory writes it as such: 'What cause soever ye had, said Arthur, ye should have forborne her.'[445] Her magic is not deemed poison 'for this was a lady that I [Arthur] was beholden to'[446] , and her partnership contributed to the building of Camelot. In a hypocritical stance, Arthur rejects Sir Balin: 'withdraw you out of my court in all haste ye may'[447] and, from a contemporary view, we see how Christianity and corruption begin to entwine.

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[442] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.
[443] Malory, *Le Morte,* XXI. V.
[444] Josh Mangle, *Echoes of Legend: Magic as the Bridge Between a Pagan Past and a Christian Future in Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte Darthur* (Rock Hill, Winthrop University, 2018), p. 25.
[445] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.
[446] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.
[447] Malory, *Le Morte,* II. III.

According to Loomis, the Lady of the Lake and Morgan are ‘originally the same person.’[448] This confirms Morgan’s Celtic origins and the claim that multiple goddesses' attributes, as I argued in my first chapter, became amalgamated into a composite figure. Moreover, they were ultimately transferred onto a Christian ‘goddess’ who ended up ‘taming’ the Pagan – becoming saints, like Saint Brigid as mentioned in chapter one and confirmed by Barabra Newman in that ‘the same theological status was readily extended to other goddess figures.’[449] This idea is opposed by Richard Barber, who claims:

> [in] some rather earlier stories Morgan appears as one of a group of three fays – obviously a case of mythic triadisation; this phenomenon may have contributed not only to the occurrence of more than one manifestation of it within one and the same work…e.g- in Malory where with three other queens she make advances to Lancelot…her fellow queens on the barge that carries off the wounded Arthur.[450]

Barber appears to describe how one goddess frequently becomes three (‘triadisation’). It represents the need to split all aspects of womanhood. One woman cannot be multiple things; she must be one or the other. Gerder Lemer presents this best in her example of a Mother-Goddess, the Virgin Mary, becoming the ‘mediator between God and humans…within a holy trinity.’[451] Furthermore, Julia Kristeva supported that ‘Christianity is no doubt the most

[448] Loomis, p. 193.
[449] Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, p.40.
[450] Richard Barber, *Arthurian Literature*, ed. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1985), p. 32.
[451] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 123.

sophisticated symbolic construct in which femininity…is confined.'[452] Considering Morgan's origins as discussed at the start of this chapter, as the Welsh Goddess Modron and the Irish Morrigon, it has to be taken seriously that her son, Mabon, is named the son of the Lady of the Lake in the German medieval romance *Lanzelet*.[453]

> This malevolent coward was the child of the water fairy who had taken our hero on his journey to the beautiful land where he grew up…it had been prophesised to this queen…that he would always be a coward; for this reason, she spared no effort over this marvellous castle, do it would protect him…her son…who was called Mabuz.[454]

This description of Morgan and her son is much more in keeping with the relationship between Modron and her son Mabon, as overprotective due to Mabon's kidnapping as a young baby, as explored at the beginning of this chapter. It also links closely with *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* where the goddess Rhiannon, a mother goddess, had her baby kidnapped.[455] Rhiannon is tricked into believing she had killed her baby when it had been stolen under servant observation. Rhiannon suffers brutal punishment for several years until the young boy is finally returned to her.[456] The description of 'his mother, the wise

[452] Julia Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater', *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 133–152, (p. 133).
[453] A German medieval Arthurian romance written in 1194. It is important to note that, according to Laura Purdie Salas in her book *Germany* (Oxford: Capstone, 2001), p. 19, 'The Celts were the first people to create settlements in Germany and became a powerful force in Germany by 500 BC'. This would mean they had significant influence in culture, history, and future literature through oral tradition, as explained in chapter one.
[454]Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, *Lanzelet*, ed. by Kenneth G.T. Webster and Roger Sherman Loomis, trans. by Thomas Kerth (Ithaca: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 69.
[455] *The Mabinogion*, trans. by Jeffrey Gantz (London: Penguin, 2003).
[456] Sue Jennings, *Goddesses* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2005).

mermaid'[457] suggests that Morgan and the Lady of the Lake are the same people. This matches the projects earlier discussion that Morgan is the same woman as Modron. This would make Morgan (and the Lady of the Lake) a river goddess – a natural shapeshifter.

Furthermore, like a river Goddess, she can choose what to feed, nourish, what to drown, and what to abandon. As shown in the first chapter of this project, in medieval lore, women were associated with water (cold and wet), and therefore in both traditions, seas, rivers and streams can be read as coded feminine. They flow in and through landscapes, suggesting that they were influenced by and responsive to the feminine. Hence the male needs to conquer, dominate and shape land and landscapes – a visual ideology as 'it uncritically shows only the relationship of the powerful to their environment.'[458] We saw this with Count Robert II of Artois and his development and expansion of Hesdin park in the previous chapter. Morgan, in all interpretations, rebels against this manipulation and embraces the natural magic of the wilderness and earth by rebelling against those she feels betray this way of life – until the end of Malory's text when she changes.

Malory's Morgan combining Paganism and Christianity

Zoë Enstone argues that Malory reduces Morgan's role and development of characterisation. He either removes or limits her traditions of healing and prophecy by making her eviler just as he makes Merlin better and strips the influence of the natural world from her.[459] He diminishes Morgan's conflict with Guinevere. I have already discussed how Morgan and Guinevere's conflict's roots were based on Guinevere's destruction of Morgan's affair with

[457] Zatzikhoven, p. 69.
[458] Rose, p. 87.
[459] Zoë Eve Enstone, *'Wichecraft & Vilaine': Morgan le Fay in Medieval Arthurian Literature* (Leicester: University of Leicester, 2011).

her nephew, as seen in *The Vulgate*. Now in *Le Morte*, her lover is Accolon. Malory does not clarify Morgan's motivations for her behaviour and attitude against Arthur. Elizabeth Sklar describes Morgan as having an 'essentially sociopathic personality, respecting no boundaries and acknowledging no rules save those dictated by her ambitions, envy, and lust.'[460] It is too apparent that this is deliberate by Malory considering his attempts to justify the Lady of the Lake's behaviour, as explained earlier, while consistently damning Morgan. Until the war and the rebellion of Mordred, Morgan 'who is false,'[461] and who remains the primary and constant source of direct and indirect threat to the realm. As noted by Mary Lynn Saul: 'Curiously, despite all her powers, Morgan is rarely successful in any of her plots.'[462]

Nevertheless, 'she remains a medieval symbol of the potential danger of uncontrolled female power.'[463] However, without magic, the concept of Christianity would be less successful. As Josh Mangle explains:

> These two opposing forces must both be present in medieval romance for either to work. A medieval romance with only magic and no Christian underlying principle would be considered blasphemous – dangerous and morally corrupt. Likewise, a romance with strong Christian anecdotes and no mention of magic would be ineffective. There would be no devil to fight – no Pagan thought to overcome and triumph against.[464]

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[460] Elizabeth Sklar, 'Thoroughly Modern Morgan: Morgan le Fey in the Twentieth-Century', in *Popular Arthurian Traditions*, ed. by Sally K Slocum (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1992), pp. 24–35.

[461] Malory, *Knights of the Round Table,* p. 800.

[462] MaryLynn Saul, 'Malory's Morgan le Fay: The Danger of Unrestrained Feminine Power', *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality,* 46.2 (2010), 85–99, p. 85.

[463] Saul, p. 85.

[464] Mangle, p. 1.

Moreover, this is also supported by Beatrice Grove's statement that texts were 'often read as a narrative celebrating the military and ideological triumph of Christianity'.[465] This ideology of triumph is what Europe - especially England - built its growth and expansion on.[466] Richard Kieckhefer deliberates Celtic Paganism's survival and integration into Christian theology and how this Pagan religion contained descriptions of magic practices. The majority of what scholars know of these Pagan practices are entwined and therefore presented in Christian theology. Kieckhefer argues that this is because much of the written work that survives Celtic traditions comes from Christian written sources.[467]

Christianity's attempts to suppress and defeat the old Pagan ways did help to keep them alive. For example, at the end of *Le Morte*, Arthur, upon his mortal wounding at Camlann, must return his sword, Excalibur, to the Lady of the Lake. This takes Sir Bedivere three attempts, with Arthur accompanying him on the third to ensure he does it. The number three is a consistent symbol in Celtic mythology, as we have seen in the case of the triadisation of the goddess. Although slightly different in their usage, the triskele[468] and triquetra[469] represent the three realms of earth, sea, and sky with the three aspects of the Triple Goddess, Maiden, Mother, and Crone. The idea is that they are woven together in a web of life, unable to be separated and are thought to date back as early as 500 BC,[470] along with frequent artwork of triangles in many different variations.[471] We have the Triple Goddess herself with many other gods and goddesses connected to three things.[472] This idea

[465] Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 16.
[466] Robert E. Stillman, *The New Philosophy and Universal Languages in Seventeenth-century England* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995), p. 204.
[467] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[468] A triskele is a motif consisting of a triple spiral exhibiting rotational symmetry.
[469] A triquetra is a symmetrical triangular ornament of three interlaced arcs.
[470] Rik Potter, *Walking a Magic Path* (Morrisville: Lulu, 2015), pp. 101–102.
[471] Duncan Garrow, *Rethinking Celtic Art* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2008).
[472] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, ed. by Grevel Lindop (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

was also adopted into Christianity, and Andrea Pető explains 'that the image of Mary is based on the archaic mother…this thus provides the triple function of the Virgin Mary as mother, wife and daughter covering the whole female lifecycle.'[473] Because of this, Druids were very superstitious in regards to number three. They would often only erect altars or build worship circles based on multiples of three, lay them out in circles or triangles of three groups, or only allow multiples of three people to attend worship.[474] There are also the three great gates central to Druid rites and the Celtic way of life; the well, the fire, and the tree.[475] These can be considered literally and loosely; for example, a well can be used literally to enter the otherworld but so can water. Malory describes the scene described earlier when Arthur's body is removed after the battle of Camlann:

> Now more of the deth of Kynge Arthur coude I never fynde, but that thes ladyes brought hym to hys grave and such one was entyred there, which the ermyte bare wytness that sometime was Bysshop of Caunturbyry; but yet the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that he was verily the body of Kynge Arthur.[476]

The passage shows the connection Arthur has to the Christian realm after his death, despite being taken to a Pagan-like underworld and travelling there via a very Pagan funeral. Here, Malory is overlaying the Pagan with the Christian in order to push it away. We see this ambivalent stance again – Pagan help is acceptable because it is King Arthur using it.

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[473] Andrea Pető, 'Anti-Modernist Utopia in 'New Europe': Protest, Gender and Well-Being', in *Transforming Gendered Well-Being in Europe: The Impact of Social Movements*, ed. by Mr Jean-Michel Bonvin, Professor Alison E Woodward Mercè Renom (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2013), 83-85, p. 91.
[474] Godfrey Higgins, *The Celtic Druids* (New York: Cosimo, 2007).
[475] Linda Demissy, *Sacred Space: An Exploration of the Triple Centre* (2019), <https://www.adf.org/articles/cosmology/sacred-space.html> [accessed 7 November 2019] (para. 1,2,3 of 4).
[476] Thomas Malroy, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by P. J. C. Field (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017).

Morgan, Morrigan, Brigid and Lilith

At the end of *Le Morte,* Arthur, upon his mortal wounding at Camlann, Arthur must return his sword, Excalibur, to the Lady of the Lake. It is her choice to whom the sword is presented, and Arthur acknowledges and respects that. Jean Markale highlights that if the mother goddess gives whom she loves sovereign power, she also offers them the opportunity to be reborn as her sons.[477] This would explain Morgan's sudden change of heart and desire to love and heal her brother. Unfortunately, this is not how *Le Morte* reads, nor does it seem it ever was meant to. There is still this strong idea of two opposing women, one good one bad, like two opposing faiths. It is still stuck within binary opposition. As such, Morgan 'remains even into the fifteenth century an enigmatic character replete with paradoxical actions and motivations.'[478] The impulse to always give Morgan a female adversary appears to stem from women's original competition and the tension between Eve and Lilith within the Christian tradition. An empowered woman associated with the 'bad' section of history for not utilising her empowerment for the use of the male species.

In the *Alphabet of Sirach* (c. 700–1000 CE),[479] Lilith appears as Adam's first wife, who was created concurrently with Adam and from the same clay as Adam.

> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.[480]

[477] Markale, p. 139.
[478] Leila K. Norako, *Morgan le Fay* (1997), < https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/theme/morgan> [accessed 21 November 2019].
[479] An anonymous text from the Middle Ages comprising a compilation of two lists of proverbs, 22 in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic and 22 in Mishnaic Hebrew, both arranged as alphabetic acrostics.
[480] Holy Bible, Genesis 1:27

This contrast with Eve, who was created from one of Adam's ribs, highlights the difference in women: 'And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.'[481] The legend of Lilith developed extensively during the Middle Ages, in the tradition of Aggadah,[482] and the Zohar.[483] For example, in the writings of Isaac Alfasi (d. 1103),[484] Lilith left Adam and the garden to serve her calling after she refused to become subservient to him,[485] believing them 'both equal, because we are both created from the earth,' which Adam disagrees with.[486] Lilith leaves the garden and lives in the Red Sea, despite the pleas from three angels for her to return. The topic of Lilith is an entire research project in itself, with the details of her still being studied to this day and the comparisons between Morgan and Lilith in this project are pertinent to this project.

Although recently, the myth of Lilith has been reborn, and she is held as a feminist hero,[487] it is essential to note that Lilith did not just leave Adam because he commanded her to. Lilith is typically known as a dangerous demon of the night which is sexually perverted and steals babies in the darkness.[488] She frightens expectant mothers with fear that she will take their new-born babies and plagues those she does not steal with the disease; 'God created me only to afflict babies with the fatal disease when they are eight days old.'[489] A theory is supported and expanded by many scholars such as Mark Biggs and Joel Soza that Lilith tempts Adam and Eve to eat from the tree. Many medieval images depict the serpent in

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[481] Holy Bible, Genesis 2:22.
[482] The study of classical rabbinic Jewish literature.
[483] It is a group of books including commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah and contains discussions of the nature of God, the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, redemption, and the relationship between the universe and man. Also known as Kabbalah.
[484] Isaac Alfasi was a rabbi and decider of Jewish law. He is best known for his collective works of both oral and written Jewish law. This is considered the first fundamental work in halakhic literature.
[485] Raphael Patai, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 333–335.
[486] Siegmund Hurwitz, *Lilith – The First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine* (Zurich: Daimon, 2007), p. 120.
[487] Markale, p. 78.
[488] Rabai Jill Hammer, *Lilith: Lady Flying in Darkness* (2019), <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/lilith-lady-flying-in-darkness> [accessed 7 November 2019]
[489] *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, ed. by Linda S. Schearing, Valarie H. Ziegler, and Kristen E. Kvam (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 204.

Eden as female-bodied or female-faced.[490] Encouraging the ideology that women are not to be trusted when empowered. Despite this corrupt female ontology, only after God creates Eve does he prevent the consumption from the tree of knowledge.[491] According to Biggs, 'Lilith's rebellion explains why God suddenly rescinded permission to eat of every tree.'[492] He also points out:

> Genesis 3:1 states that the serpent 'became crafty' above all beasts of the field. This means the Serpent had to have human intellect. The Hebrew word for 'crafty' literally means 'naked'. It can also mean crafty because a 'naked' mind is exposed to devious thoughts…only Lilith can explain this to the human.[493]

This would mean that Lilith, a woman, educated Adam, a man as opposed to Eve who represents women as seen, educated and formed by men. This independent, intelligent woman can be seen as being portrayed once more in the figure of Morgan. As shown above, she runs away from those who create her, teaches her and then judge her to live how she deems fit after using that education and intelligence. It is necessary to take a close look at Lilith at this point alongside Morgan as I want to put it into complete and effective context what I am arguing about Morgan - that she is subject to the 'good woman/bad woman' binary that defined both Eve and Lilith. Like Lilith, Morgan does not appreciate stupidity and does her best to educate those who appear so, such as Arthur, regarding the queen's affair. This

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[490] John K. Bonnell, 'The Serpent with a Human Head in Art and in Mystery Play', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 21 (1917), 255–291.
[491] Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Medieval Anchoritisms: Gender, Space and the Solitary Life* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011).
[492]Mark Biggs, *The Case for Lilith* (Morrisville: Lulu, 2010), p. 20.
[493] Biggs, p. 21.

appears to be based on a pan-cultural fear of the unruly woman, causing Lilith's aspects to creep into representations of Morgan through Christianity’s creative narratives. The fact that the Eden serpent is often represented as a female in iconography and texts such as *Ancrene Wisse*, (as discussed in chapter one),[494] shows us that she was always lurking at the back of the Christian mind in its representation of the Pagan.

Lilith encompasses all we know to be linked with the ultimate mother goddess. According to Judy Plaskow, there are absolutely no moral or social boundaries for Lilith.[495] In the *Alphabet of Sira* she shows no fear not just for nature but specifically for male designed nature in the form of a garden, discussed in the previous chapter.[496] As she ate from the tree of knowledge, she becomes wise and takes up occupancy in the ocean.[497] We know from earlier chapters the importance and what power comes off the ocean and water infiltrating and fertilising the land. This, in turn, makes Lilith a mother goddess, like Modron and the Morrigan.

According to John Sawyer, in the Book of Isaiah (ninth century), Lilith is referred to as lamia.[498] Angelique-Gulermovich Epstein defines this further by explaining that ‘lamia’ means ‘a monster in female form, that is, a morrígan.’[499] She uses this example as part of her definition. As we know from chapter one, the Morrigan was mainly associated
with war and fate. It was often associated with a foretelling of doom and death, which tended to be with her enemy in Irish mythology. She also represented the goddess's role as

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[494] A monastic rulebook for female anchorites.
[495] Judith Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972–2003*, ed. by Donna Berman (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), p. 168.
[496] Schearing, Ziegler, and Kvam, p. 204.
[497] Schearing, Ziegler, and Kvam, p. 424.
[498] John Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 216.
[499] Angelique-Gulermovich Epstein, *War Goddess: The Morrígan and her Germano-Celtic Counterparts* (California: University of California, 1998), pp. 45–51.

a guardian of the territory and its people. Again, here we have a powerful woman with no boundaries linked to Lilith via linguistics.

Earlier in this chapter, I linked Morgan to Brigit and Brigit's evolution from a Celtic Goddess to a Christian Saint Brigid is associated with serpents, an ancient symbol of the healing powers of the Earth Goddess, and her festival of Imbolc (for more details, see chapter one) is often depicted in a threefold aspect. Brigit is associated and represented often by fire, wells, healing, serpents, anvil and hammer and dandelions.[500] The connection of Brigid, Morrigan, and Lilith link to one of the Druid great gates: the tree which in the older Arthurian legends, as discussed at the start of this chapter, is where Morgan hails from.[501]

These attributes, with the three other women, are manifested as common character traits in Morgan. It can be agreed that whatever gender, the harmful behaviour by Lilith is shocking and terrifying. Nevertheless, for this to be assigned to a woman creates the initial hatred and fear of independently-thinking females. Women are the bearers of children and not the destroyers. According to Sara Ruddick, this maternal side forms its reasoning, way of thinking and behaving.[502] Even today, they invest their health, youth, and life to bring them safely into and through the world. Lilith coincides with the Celtic mother goddess of Modron and the Morrigan and Malory's Morgan, an intelligent woman making decisions based on her intellect – of which none are deemed suitable.

The idea of a woman behaving so evilly is unforgivable and intolerable – unless she commits to the patriarchal society, in which case she can be redeemed. According to Marianne Hester, this male control over women is never more evident than 'within the constructs of male and female sexualities' as we can 'observe the central dynamic of male

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[500] Brian Wright, *Brigid: Goddess, Druidess and Saint* (Cheltenham: History Press, 2011), p. 194.
[501] Wright, p. 197.
[502] Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

domination,'[503] as we see between Lilith and Adam. Morgan appears to be Lilith's contemporary representation. However, she is redeemed when he helps Arthur, like Mary Magdalene and her supportive relationship with Christ; she is forgiven, but her past never honestly forgotten.

> Men have to actively maintain and perpetuate their power over women. This takes place, as in the maintenance of social order, by pressure to consent. But the system of male domination over women is uniquely different from other systems of power because it relies on the eroticisation of inequality between men and women, and enforces control of women by the use, as well as threat, of male sexual violence against women.[504]

Conclusion

This explains how Morgan's very visual decline from a respected woman in *Vita Merlini*, to a slight outcast treated with respectful trepidation in Chrétien de Troyes' texts to finally Malory's *Morte* where she is moulded and manipulated with flawed character development, is not a coincidence with the subtle process of Christianity being fed into the Celtic lands. She was attractive, exciting and respected because of her natural connections and empowered intelligence. She becomes something evil that must be repressed: a mirror of the relationship between Paganism and Christianity. The main pattern is that because she is a woman, she must be controlled. She is trapped within the binary of good and evil, just as Christian

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[503] Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.
[504] Hester, pp. 1–2.

humanity is trapped within heaven and hell. In Malory's texts, there is no consideration that she, or anyone for that matter, can be both and commit both good and bad deeds.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I aimed to investigate four key points:

1) How previous philosophers discussed Pagan and Christian faiths, women and the natural world separately and together.
2) How are women and the natural world presented in popular Medieval texts, such as those by Marie de France?
3) If the previous questions can be seen influencing popular Medieval female characters, such as Morgan le Fay and Guinevere.
4) Are these women empowered at all? If so, how.

My thesis was composed of three chapters focusing on different themes.

Chapter one investigated the historical development of attitudes towards the natural world in the Middle Ages. The purpose of looking at these outlooks to the natural world was to build background knowledge of the history, theory and theology and, therefore, influences in terms of proto-ecofeminism in medieval literature. The purpose of looking at previous philosophers discussed Pagan and Christian faiths, women and the natural world separately and together these four approaches to the natural world (Celtic beliefs, Aristotle, St. Augustine and Hildegard of Bingen) was to build background knowledge of history and theory and, therefore, influence people regard to considering ecofeminism in medieval literature in the future chapters. The Celts unquestionable living and breathing with the natural world along with a gender balance, Aristotle as the influential foundation figure, St. Augustine as the stepping stone of classical philosophy to the formalised Christian theology and Hildegard as the living product of all three with her own philosophical intervention. Paganism's survival through medieval literature and the empowerment of women reflected via depictions of the natural

world in medieval literary texts. These three key people where fundamental in their influences on philosophy and society impacting the views of society by society.

Chapter two saw the analysis of three of Marie de France's Lai's: *Lai Lanval, Lai Equitan,* and *Lai Guigemar*. As an author, Marie often allows characters to make choices based on empowerment via ecofeminism that she bestows upon them, presenting empowerment as something we all have if we channel it correctly. Women and the natural world presented in Medieval texts by Marie de France predominantly via water. By placing water at the forefront as a productive hermeneutic, we can recognise and identify water bodies as a highly significant element in facilitating the development and achievement of an empowering love. Marie opens multiple perspectives of women's lives; she addresses the issue head-on by presenting a collection of remarkable female characters who live their own lives and try to make their own decisions. Marie is careful not to criticise her society's patriarchal structure (St. Augustine) but carefully places her individuality and independence within a male-dominated world. Marie did it by weaving her feminism with romantic Celtic symbolism within the natural world and with the chivalric code in the hope it would reach her audience in a way that empowered the female readers and change the minds of the males who dominated society.

Finally, in chapter three, I focused on if the previous questions (and therefore evidence) can be seen influencing popular Medieval female characters, such as Morgan le Fay and others. By looking at a combination of the themes present in both chapters one and two; women, the natural world, and control influenced by Aristotle, St. Augustine and Hildegard's teachings can all be seen through Morgan le Fay's character. We witnessed, in all three prominent portrayals, a gradual decline of reputation and role. As a female character who has deep roots within Celtic mythology, she suffers to a great extent. The main pattern is that she must be controlled, trapped within the binary of good and evil because she is an

empowered woman. This explains how Morgan's very visual decline from a respected woman in *Vita Merlini*, to a slight outcast treated with respectful trepidation in Chrétien de Troyes' texts to finally Malory's *Morte* where she is moulded and manipulated with flawed character development, is not a coincidence with the subtle process of Christianity being fed into the Celtic lands. She was attractive, exciting and respected because of her natural connections and empowered intelligence. She becomes something evil that must be repressed: a mirror of the relationship between Paganism, and Christianity. The main pattern is that because she is a woman, she must be controlled. In Malory's texts, there is no consideration that she, or anyone for that matter, can be both and commit both good and bad deeds, which is the ultimate joy (or dismay of being human).

The final questioning of if these women are empowered, has been proven to be a simple yes with a complicated how. These women are using their circumstances to their advantage, despite mimesis. They are making choices – they may not be our choices, but they feel empowered enough to make a choice that is there's.

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