

## Guinevere as Venus

This offering has appeared as if of its own volition, and makes some strange sense to me. It may make far less sense to others. Astrology has been important to me for forty years now and been constantly useful to me as my life has unfolded. Not surprisingly, given that Venus is the focus here, the natal position of Venus in my birth chart is, and has been for a while, very stressed by transiting Uranus and Saturn, (whilst already being in square to natal Pluto and trine to natal Uranus, among other things, for those who may be familiar with Astrology). However, in spite of, or because of, the stress, this has also been a very productive time.

I had come across Arielle Guttman's book: *Venus Star Rising – A New Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* at some point after the world disappeared into lockdown in 2020. I was immediately engaged by the Introductory Chapters: *The Astronomy and Geometry of the Venus Star and the Mythology and astrology of Venus*. (Arielle Guttman born 1949 is a practising astrologer involved in astrological research, writing, lecturing and counselling since 1975. She is based in Santa Fe, NM in the USA)

Within the following year I also found myself looking at Esme Vincent's 'Diary of the Skies'. Being interested in both astrology and Druidry, I was captivated by the apparent connection of Venus with Guinevere and was drawn into finding out more.

What I present here is the pursuit of a thought process, looking for Guinevere and finding how she may relate to Venus, specifically as Morning Star and Evening Star. I do not consider myself to be a scholar and I do not have any extensive knowledge about astronomy/astrology or Druidry. I looked for her in various sources and referred what I found to *Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory.

Although I am writing this as part of my Druid journey, I am not sufficiently familiar with the Celtic pantheon or Druid astrology to write in those terms. My background and familiar territory is with Western Astrology which uses the Greek or Roman pantheon and zodiac. (Please feel free to substitute alternatives to suit your own perspective.)

### Venus: Goddesses

Though the Greeks of the Archaic Period (800-500BC) imagined their gods as real entities living on a real mountain top, the sophisticated intellectuals of the Hellenistic (c300BC – 01AD) and Roman (01AD – 400AD) periods regarded the gods and planets primarily as psychological entities. Plato called the gods archetypes, and he meant exactly what Carl Jung meant when he too used that term. The gods, according to Plato, were primordial ideals which existed in a plane or in a dimension somewhat removed from our ordinary consciousness, and which we might perceive as being 'above' that ordinary consciousness. These primordial ideas were common to all human beings, and were reflected in all of us like images in a mirror – as above, so below. The heavens are the macrocosm; humankind is the microcosm.

Seen from this point of view, we may also suspect that the planets constitute a journey in consciousness. The Greek and the Roman astrologers understood this. .... But a careful reading of Plato – and especially of his followers, the Neoplatonists – reveals that the ancients actually regarded the planets as archetypes, symbols for internal psychological processes.

To the Gnostic philosophers of the early Christian centuries, the journey through the planets was a meditative process similar to the shaman's journey to the otherworld. The Gnostics admittedly had a somewhat negative view of astrology; to them, the planets represented the harsh regime of human destiny .... But the Gnostics knew that one could never be free of a planetary affliction or psychological complex until one had mastered it on the inner, psycho-spiritual level. ... to harmonise the influence of each planet, and by so doing to rise above it to a higher state of awareness. ....

One of the tenets of astrological philosophy is that the discovery of a new planet signals the development of a new stage in humankind's conscious evolution. Jung believes that the collective unconscious would constellate new symbols or archetypes whenever humanity needed them. These new archetypes – which are more often dramatic restatements of old archetypes – emerge into our consciousness at sensitive points in history, during times when the paradigms of reality are undergoing a radical shift.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps we could look at a clearer understanding of the place of Venus in our personal as well as public universes as bringing a much needed conciliatory, wise and loving approach to the embattled state of life in its various manifestations at this time.

Venus the Goddess: 'In the beginning the world was ruled by Uranus, the Sky Father and Gaia, the Earth Mother, the primordial pair. Uranus became a tyrant and was overthrown by his son Saturn (Cronos), who lay in wait for his father then leapt up and castrated him with a sickle. The creative seed of the primal sky god as scattered throughout heaven and earth. Some of it fell into the ocean and gave birth to Venus, whom the Greeks knew as Aphrodite, the goddess of love. She rose full-grown from the sea-foam, billowed up by the waves and riding on a sea shell. When she stepped ashore on the island of Cyprus, grass and flowers sprang up at her feet, and the Seasons, daughters of Themis, clothed her nakedness.

Venus was always one of the most popular of all goddesses, worshipped throughout the ancient Mediterranean. Even in medieval Europe, when Christianity had officially banished the ancient gods and goddesses, she lived on in the poetry of the Troubadours and wandering scholars.'<sup>2</sup>

Robert Graves drew an analogy between Venus and Eurynome (the wandering one, the moon), born from primal chaos and dancing on the waters, as Venus later rose from the waves. Eurynome transformed the north wind into a serpent called Ophion who coiled around her seven times, keeping her chained. He impregnated her and she gave birth to the cosmic egg. The egg spilt in two and hatched out all creation. (This myth was found through archaeology among the Neolithic cultures of Balkan Europe). 'The symbols which make up this ancient story survived, in some form, until comparatively recent times. In the figure of the 'lady soul' or *anima mundi* who dances encircled by a wreath on the World card of the Tarot we may recognise Eurynome dancing on the waves, encircled by Orphion. And the alchemical symbol of the Ouroboros, the serpent biting its own tail, is reminiscent of Orphion wrapped around the cosmic egg. ... In the Old Testament, the primal serpent may be both the tempter, and in Kabbalistic thought, the redeemer.'

'Psychologically, we may say that the desire for love, sex and relationship is one of the first human functions – or perhaps the first – to emerge from that ocean of unconsciousness symbolised by Pisces. (Venus is said to be exalted in Pisces, and Pisces is a symbol of the great ocean) It is Venus, the goddess of love, who dances on the waters of the collective mind or world soul. She emerges from that ocean still clothed in golden light, smiling with the knowledge of

other realms; she is a mediatrix or guide to the deepest layers of the unconscious.' She does have a murky underside which suggests that what is seen or shown is not always the 'truth'.

In mythology Venus is married to Vulcan (Hephaestus), god of the forge, but she had a long-running love affair with Mars, god of war, whose children she bore.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps there is a parallel here with Guinevere and Lancelot?

Venus rules the two astrological signs of Taurus and Libra. In Taurus she is about sensuality, the abundant earthiness of the body and nature. She is concerned with values and self-worth. In Libra she is concerned with the interplay of opposites that exist within nature and how much value others place on her. <sup>4</sup> In Libra she also represents ideas of beauty in balance, and in fairness.

Venus the goddess does have a very dark, vindictive side, especially when she feels that she is being overlooked or surpassed in beauty and attractiveness, when she feels insufficiently adored. We could imagine this to be the flip side of Athena in her natural place in Taurus, appearing in the opposite sign of Scorpio, which is ruled by Pluto and Mars. Mars can suggest aggression and fighting battles, but Pluto implies total upheaval. This could represent the undertow in the story of Arthur and the Round Table and the outcome of Guinevere's affair with Lancelot. It is also possible to imagine that Guinevere's attention was distracted from Arthur because he was not giving her enough attention and validation, personally or maybe intimately. Neglect would have irritated the goddess Venus.

In considering archetypes that may relate to Venus, I have taken Venus Aphrodite, goddess of love, to represent the Evening Star, Pallas Athena to represent the Morning Star and Hestia (Vesta) when she 'disappears' or goes retrograde. Arielle Guttman refers to Aphrodite Pandemos (warrior goddess) and Aphrodite Urania (love goddess). I have the utmost respect for Arielle's work. She has a far greater knowledge and familiarity with astrology and mythology than I could ever begin to dream of. I have not directly followed Arielle's views and have taken a different approach in organising my own ideas with respect to Guinevere. I chose goddesses I feel I recognise. Her work is also focused on Morning Star and Evening Star, whereas I feel there is another aspect which I have assigned to Hestia. I have no particular evidence to support this, but as I mentioned above, I am simply following a line of thought. Even if Guinevere had spent private time in contemplation, it would likely have gone unreported.

It is possible that times of retreat could have been connected with her monthly cycles and possibly that the women closest to her may have shared a similar cycle. A group of women could even have withdrawn temporarily from court life. It is clearly a hypothesis. I have not come across any information, even in Christine Fell's extensive research, that mentions how women behaved around their monthly cycles, but it is fact that close groups of women, like nuns, have a tendency to synchronise. I doubt that men writing the stories would have reported on such matters. Women's cycles were 'mysterious' and possibly un-mentionable given anti-feminist Christian attitudes.

In *Asteroid Goddesses* by Demetra George she tells us that in his 'Symposium', Plato 'makes a clear distinction between the 'common love' of Aphrodite Pandemos and the idealised spiritual or platonic love of Aphrodite Ourania (literally 'heavenly love'). Apostrophia, the third form, translates as 'she who turns away.' Demetra herself finds Venus reflected in four goddesses: Ceres, Pallas Athene, Juno and Vesta.

As Athena, (Libra) Guinevere wears a public personality of knowledge, power and authority. Her love is expressed in a 'formal' way or more detached way, taking responsibility, and showing concern for, others. She is also a warrior concerned with bringing justice and peace. Her affinity with Libra. Asks 'what role do I play in my own relationships and in the relationships of others, how can I help bring peace and agreement through diplomacy and negotiation? How do I bring love into this situation? It could be fair to say that her 'victory' is in negotiating peace, not in overcoming an enemy. She is keenly aware of how others see her. As Aphrodite (Taurus) she expresses sensual as well as sexual love. She promotes beauty, grace and elegance. She brings culture and creativity. She is concerned with her own value and worth.

Venus is about relationships: romantic or confrontational. Everything we do, our thoughts are made 'in relationship' about either or, old or new, like or dislike, whether it's going to work, the weather, what we eat. As soon as there is an option, I believe Venus is there because, either we do things automatically, (and we all do a great deal of that), or we look at options and make choices consciously. Venus plays a big part in our sense of value, what is of worth and why, and therefore also our beliefs. We need Venus first because Mars, planet of action, comes next. Venus is between us and the Sun and Mercury, (exchange of information). Mars is further from the Sun than Earth. We can clearly see how much damage Mars can do when poorly advised or allowed to run on automatic, and equally, how heroic acts can bring positive outcomes.

If we can consider a third aspect of Venus, as being a Hestia archetype, she tends the hearth and the eternal, sacred flame so that it doesn't go out, when we cannot see her or when she is in the retrograde part of her cycle. Hestia has priority over all other gods or goddesses in ceremony and sacrifice in the home, the community and the state. She is not necessarily seen, but she is at the foundation of the society. She is in direct contact with the Source. She is a receiver and transmitter of the Source. As Hestia, she is reclusive, priestess in her shrine or temple, at home, tending the flame of the sacred hearth at the centre of all homes, all families, all communities, all nations. Hestia has priority over all other gods or goddesses in ceremony and sacrifice in the home, the community and the state.

Guinevere is difficult to place, suspended as she is in myth and understatement, but hopefully through looking at her as archetypal characteristics reflected in goddesses, it will be possible to get a better idea of what she represents not only in the stories, but in our own lives, with respect to the bright and beautiful planet that continues her passage so clearly through the heavens.

### **Venus: the Planet**

'The glyph for Venus is the circle of Spirit over the Cross of matter. The glyph of Venus understood in this way is a constant reminder that Spirit is amidst us in the cosmic order, harmony, and beauty of this world and in our aesthetic capacities to appreciate these and to participate in them.

'He who does not join the dance, mistakes the occasion,' says the Gospel of John. Dance is ruled by Venus.'<sup>117</sup>

Esme Vincent is a calligrapher and illustrator, (crowned an Honorary Bard in 2008) who wrote. *Diary of the Skies* (Illustrated by Arthur Billington)

Under 'Wild Shower Moon: March/April .. she presents the three female principles in the Arthurian legends:

Igrainne - the Sun, Light of Day

Guinevere - the Evening Star and Morning Star; The Light of the Shore

Morgan - the Moon, Light of the Sea

Language ref: Grainne-the, Irish Sun Goddess, Venus - Gwener - Guener, Fair - gwyn

hence Guinevere: fair, bright Venus ...

Reading this page is what brought the desire to look deeper into Venus with respect to Guinevere.

In both our night skies and in astrology, the domain of love belongs to Venus. The position of the planet Venus in a person's birth chart tells us a great deal about how successful that person will be in matters of love and relationships throughout life'.<sup>5</sup>

Venus is, by far, the brightest object in the sky after the Sun and Moon. This dazzling brilliance contributes to the power and intensity this planet possesses. By scientific definition, Venus is not a star but a planet, a celestial orbiting body that shines by the reflected light of the Sun. However, in relationship to Earth, Venus produces a pentagram, the five pointed geometrical shape we refer to as a star. The ancient sky watchers referred to Venus as a star, more specifically the Morning Star or Evening Star, depending on what point of the night she was visible. These two faces of Venus were seen as embodying different characters: the Morning Star was likened to the warrior, and the Evening Star was viewed as the lover, ....'<sup>6</sup>

'The Venus Star, a pentagonal pattern that Venus weaves as it moves about in its orbit through the heavens every eight years, is of special significance. Venus has been repeating this Star, affecting human consciousness and historical events for many centuries. But of particular significance for our times is that Venus will rise in a specific area of the heavens in the next ten to thirty years, sweeping like a vast wave over all humanity. Venus, the planet in our sky that represents love, will bring this much-needed energy to earth and its inhabitants in these coming years. Preceding that event, we are witnessing the difficult and sometimes painful birthing .... The Venus Star, simply stated, functions as a celestial heartbeat for Earth and the human race, even though most people are unaware.'<sup>7</sup>

Venus describes a five pointed star with particular significance, but other planets also describe, from the perspective of Earth, six, seven and eight-pointed geometric shapes. The number five and the five pointed star have special relevance to Druidry and paganism, but the ratio of the star's structure reflects what is known as the 'Golden Mean or Ratio' a geometric ratio of 1:1.6180339887. By definition: 'The golden ratio is a special ratio between two quantities in which the ratio between the two quantities is equal to the ratio of their sum to the larger of the two quantities'. This ratio is expressed in the five-pointed star that we are so familiar with and this ratio is repeated in all of the geometric relationships found in a drawing.

(The Venus Star Point is where Venus is conjunct the Sun, which happens every nine and a half months. Curiously similar to the conception to birth time of a human child).

Venus has a 40 day retrograde phase (that is, from Earth it looks like she is going backwards). Her orbit is never reaches more than 48° from the sun. The period of forty days figures prominently in many religious and mythological traditions as well as fairy tales and legends. Forty is a number with particular significance in Christianity, Islam and Judaism.<sup>8</sup>

I have included this information because it is so very interesting, although the book offers far more complexity than I will be bringing. This overview confirms an energetic connection between Earth and Venus that is based on astronomy and science.

'The Venus Star is a fascinating mechanism with the precision of a giant celestial clock, illustrating the continual dance between Earth and Venus as they orbit around the Sun. Pictured against the backdrop of the twelve constellations of the zodiac, the Venus Star advances through time in a clockwise direction, retrograde from Earth's point of view. In this rendezvous, as Venus moves clockwise around the zodiac, the Sun moves counter-clockwise. At the appointed moment of their encounter, they kiss or embrace, punctuating one point of what will ultimately culminate in five such encounters, becoming the five-pointed star. Venus and the Sun repeat this same encounter over an eight year period just one or two degrees clockwise from its previous degree, continuing around the zodiac until the whole star replicates itself 1,250 years later. Every 1,250 years, which constitutes one complete revolution, the Venus Star returns to the exact same alignment. We could call this a major Venus Age, just like we have the Precessional Age of 26,000 years.'<sup>9</sup>

I am only looking for connections between Venus and Guinevere, but there is an enormous amount of information and insight to be gleaned from considering Arielle's approach to Venus with respect to goddesses, and investigating both the eight year cycle and the much longer 1,250 cycle. I would recommend to anyone who is interested in Venus to acquire Arielle's book. I have barely scratched the surface of the content she presents.

My starting point was the simple question about either being Morning Star or Evening Star Venus kind of person and looking for the associations with Guinevere.

The answer confirms why Venus is not always 'soft and cuddly' or peace-loving. In a birth chart, the Zodiac sign she appears in, her House placement together with other inter-planetary aspects will obviously colour the way she functions, but knowing whether she is Evening Star or Morning Star can bring a lot of insight where relationships are concerned. It may be that Venus isn't actually 'soft and cuddly' at all. My view of Venus, as with Guinevere is that both are limited in their portrayal and that the energies they represent are far more profound than usually described. As with much of our history, our human story, there may well be a distortion and bias towards the 'heroic masculine' which is not bad in itself, but lacking the important counter-balance or the 'heroic feminine' which doesn't usually involve so much chopping off body parts, but is nonetheless very potent. None of what I am writing has anything to do with men or women or sexuality in particular. Venus and Mars are in everyone's personal heavenly configuration, whoever and wherever they are.

I would suggest that we can have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with Venus as she manifests in our natal chart and therefore our personality and life experience, bringing a further opportunity for further personal insight and self-discovery.

I think it is helpful to mention Mars here, because Venus and Mars tend to be a double act. Mars comes closer to Earth more than any other planet except Venus, at its nearest—56 million km. The closest Venus comes to Earth is 40 million km. Unlike Venus, Mars does not follow a beautiful, neat pattern through the heavens with respect to Earth. Over 16 years it makes seven loops caused by apparent retrograde motion but only retrogresses (appears to move backwards against the backdrop of the stars once) in its 2 year path around the zodiac. Venus makes five loops caused by apparent retrograde motion, in exactly eight years, causing the 'rose'

pattern in the heavens with respect to Earth. <sup>10</sup> Venus orbits between Earth and the Sun. Earth is next planet out, followed by Mars.

Mars represents the other side of the story. Mars isn't just fighting for the sake of it. Mars has ideas about being a hero. His battles are about defending the security of the land, being heroic and pursuing ideals and fulfilling quests. Perhaps, from our different, modern perspective, it is unfortunate that the stories of the Round Table read rather like an account of a continual bloodbath. In the times in which the stories are set, just as in other ancient myths and legends which had a tendency to be bloody, terrifying and brutal, physical combat and stories surrounding it, were commonplace, or to be expected. We are currently shocked by stabbings, for instance, from a national perspective. This violence is not commonplace for most of us. It is not happening frequently in the market place or between our neighbours. Most of our menfolk are not trained to arms, or required to take up arms because they owe loyalty to the local lord or baron, thankfully.

Venus orbits between Earth and Mercury, (which is closest to the Sun), and is a very similar size to Earth. Mars, the fourth, and last rocky planet, is smaller than both Venus and Earth and orbits beyond planet Earth. The next planet, an extremely long way out, is the gas giant Jupiter, the largest, by far, of all the planets in our Solar System. Perhaps the Round Table reflects a dance between Venusian and Martian energies. It would be easy to see Guinevere/Venus/Round table as the centre with Mars responding or reacting as the knights.

If we come back to consider Guinevere and whether she had children or not, she appears to be separated from the essential role of mother, but then that is the place of the Moon; the next strongest heavenly body after the sun, and far stronger in her presence, than Venus. Venus is open to creating relationships beyond her immediate family, which as a Queen, she undoubtedly would do, but without the inevitable limitations and interruptions of pregnancy and childbirth, or child-death, or death in childbirth. We may consider these aspects to be the territory of the Moon. I would see Guinevere's role as defining herself as an individual with respect to others, particularly men, and of defining herself within relationships, whilst realising a fundamental responsibility for 'her people', with a sense of fairness and justice, cultivating peace. At the centre of Court, she would have had many relationships with men and women, her servants, her personal ladies, with visitors and would no doubt have made arrangements and organised entertainments.

The Moon, our second brightest Light after the Sun is our counter-balance. We look out to her on a clear dark night and she sits in beauty in the heavens, with her cycles of change. Earth is in a binary planetary system with the Moon. There is a powerful gravitational interaction that causes the seas to rise and fall, distorting the shape of the planet at the Equator. The Moon is just over a quarter of the size of Earth. It is the largest satellite in the solar system relative to its planet and is also larger than any of the dwarf planets. The Moon makes Earth a more liveable planet by moderating the Earth's wobble about its axis, leading to a relatively stable climate. 'The gravitational pull of the Moon causes the water on the nearest side of Earth to bulge outwards, resulting in a high tide. Curiously, it also causes the water on the other side of the Earth to bulge outwards... This is why we experience two high tides and two low tides per day.' (Natural History Museum)

There is endless information available about the Moon, and so many myths, legends, goddesses and gods. I would see her as quite separate from Venus, and of course, she is a Triple Goddess. It's interesting to consider that the Moon and her tides, emotions and intuitions can be considered by some to be 'wobbly' and yet she is actually our stabiliser. Considering Venus to be another 'Triple Goddess' can be another way of looking at Venus. She complements the Moon. It's clear they don't always see 'eye to eye'. If they were more in agreement then perhaps there would be greater peace. They are very different from each other. Perhaps Mars gets caught between the two?

Venus, as with all other planetary influences, affects our emotions, bringing the potential for 'balance' or of holding a reliable course. Of course, the other very important thing that Venus can bring to all and every decision is one of love. As Athena, her love is through wisdom and the influence of authority and she is prepared to fight for her cause using her sharp mind. She is aware of her own worth and value. As Aphrodite, her love is more human, immediate, personal and potentially volatile. Hestia as 'sacred love' is always in the room, but like the records and stories, although central, is under-reported, maybe under-appreciated, especially in modern times. We don't need a naked flame now, for ceremony, ritual, cooking or anything else. We can flick a switch. Perhaps that sense of home and hearth and the fundamental sacredness of where we find ourselves has been neglected for too long. Most people would be devastated to lose their home. That's where Hestia dwells, bringing warmth, light and the reassurance of safety and continuity. Hestia is that sense of 'home' where we are safe and welcome.

The next planet out after Mars is the gas giant Jupiter, largest planet in our solar system and very much further out from the Sun, hence the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars are the 'personal' planets. I believe this is worthy of comment. There were, possibly still are, systems of belief in spiritual development through working with the planets, especially the personal ones, working out from the centre, the Sun. I believe that this idea is still relevant. We can know ourselves better through the planetary connections and features of our Birth Charts, transits and other considerations and we can also engage with the energies of the planets directly.

It is usual to start with the Sun, Moon and Ascendant, but I believe that Venus plays a far greater role than may usually be considered. She's a pretty planet, but that doesn't make her a lightweight. She is right next to us in cosmic terms.

### **Venus, Guinevere and The Round Table**

*If Venus is warrior (Athena), lover (Aphrodite) and Keeper of the Sacred Flame as Hestia (Vesta), then so is Guinevere.*

'Medieval Christianity and its focus on the search for the Holy Grail is a period in history in which a rare interest in Venus turns up. Some intriguing connections exist between ideas associated with both the planet and the goddess Venus and iconic religious symbols.

First, the symbol of the rose is linked to both Venus and Christianity in a number of ways. ...the orbit of Venus (in relation to Earth) likens her to a flower, particularly a rose. In Rome, the goddess Venus was known by her flower, the rose, which was the emblem of the sacred



priestesses in her temples. Later, with the emergence in the Medieval era of the great Gothic cathedrals, especially in France, roses and rose windows became a central focus.

Although these windows were created to honour Mary, who had by then become the main icon of the feminine principle, ancient Venus cult-worship linked the symbol of the rose with the Mary - worship of Medieval Christianity. Interestingly, these windows faced west, the direction in which Venus appears in the night sky as the Evening Star, associated with love.

In addition, the troubadours of southern France, who were known for their songs extolling love, took the rose as their symbol. The word *rose* is an anagram of *Eros*, the god of erotic love, and the son of Venus in later myths.<sup>11</sup>

*If Venus is warrior (Athena), lover (Aphrodite) and Keeper of the Sacred Flame as Hestia (Vesta), then so is Guinevere.*

Stories of adventure, of magic and romance are the stuff of the Arthurian Tradition, which draws its energy from many sources ..... From the complex ethic of Courtly Love, defined like a religious code, came a new attitude to women, who were no longer seen solely as chattels to be bought and sold in the matrimonial market place of Feudal Europe, but as potential goddesses. ... This gave rise to unforgettable women such as Guinevere, Isolde, Elaine of Astolat and Dintrane, and to the legion of ladies wooed and won, rescued and championed by the knights who loved them.'<sup>12</sup>

The first writer consciously to draw on the still largely oral sources pertaining to Arthur was a 12<sup>th</sup> century pseudo-historian called Geoffrey of Monmouth' whose *History of the Kings of Britain* was more than half given to stories of Arthur and Merlin, whilst including some semi-historical figures. 'Geoffrey's book became a best-seller of its time..... Geoffrey's work was taken up and translated from the original Latin into both Norman French and Anglo Saxon. One of these translators, an Anglo Saxon named Wace, added the idea of the Round Table, at which all men sat in equality. A veritable avalanche of Arthurian romances followed...' Chrétien de Troyes ... gave us the stories of Arthur's greatest knights, the love affair of Lancelot with Arthur's Queen and the Quest for the Grail' which had existed earlier in oral form. ...<sup>13</sup>

Malory's book retold the story of Arthur from birth to death, in prose that has seldom been equalled. It was a threnody for the dying age of Chivalry, which Arthur and his knights above all represented. It has ensured that the stories of the noble Fellowship of the Round Table have not been forgotten ...'.<sup>14</sup>

It could be interpreted from the tragic end of Arthur's Round Table ideal and empire, that just as in the Garden where Eve had betrayed Adam leading to the 'Fall', so had Guinevere through her betrayal of her husband and king, brought about the Fall all over again. We could ask whether it was a 'Fall', a breakthrough, or a convenient interpretation? We could also ask who betrayed whom? Had Arthur developed a more meaningful relationship with his wife i.e. engaged more with Venus qualities, she may not have been tempted away, and simply maintained the Courtly ideal. Perhaps we can see Lancelot having betrayed both his lord and King by engaging beyond the limits of courtly Love, and also having betrayed Guinevere by breaking the boundaries of Courtly Love which he had promised to her? The Greatest Knight in the field of arms sought to be the Greatest Knight in his expression of courtly love, so he was going to aim for the highest target, the queen. It would appear that Lancelot had enjoyed the king's total trust

until Guinevere was openly accused of treason for her affair with him. It became impossible to conceal or ignore.

Alternatively, we could see the outcome in the light of two people who engaged more fully with Venus archetypes to fulfil a 'Spiritual Ideal' but were ultimately too human. Perhaps the pursuit of a spiritual ideal could be seen as a test of its value. Lancelot was probably pure in his intent. He was the Greatest Knight after all, but I would imagine he had underestimated the magnetism of Venus Aphrodite that drew him, in spite of his logical, spiritually engaged self, into the desire to share experience. Without deep human interaction and relationship there is no way of knowing what is ideal and what is not. If an emotional experience is sufficiently intense, it changes us forever.

Once the wars that attended Arthur's ascent to the throne were over, he decided to take a wife, and despite Merlin's warnings that she would one day betray him, he selected Guinevere, the daughter of King Leodegrance of Camelot. With her came as dowry, a great round table, made by Merlin at the bidding of Arthur's father Uther Pendragon. A table 'round in the likeness of the world', at which one hundred and fifty knights could sit, and none seem higher in favour than the rest. And on the day of his marriage Arthur required of Merlin that he should find sufficient knights 'which be of most prowess and worship' to fill at least fifty of the seats.

This Merlin did, and fifty more came from Leodegrance, so that a hundred sat down together at the table on that first day..... . Thus the fellowship of the round Table met for the first time on the day of the King's wedding to Guinevere.<sup>15</sup>

(I wonder how it could be, that following so many battles to achieve his final victory, Arthur did not have many brave and worthy knights to call to his table to share in the new order. Surely any lord or king would have made promises to the men who fought for him?)

As for the Round Table, to quote Malory following the vow to pursue the quest for the Sangreal: 'Also Merlin made the Round Table in tokening the roundness of the world, for by the Round Table is the world signified by right, for all the world, Christian, heathen, repair unto the Round Table; and when they are chosen to be of the fellowship of the Round Table they think them more blessed and more in worship than if they had gotten half the world ....'<sup>16</sup> This would appear to confirm that the Round Table isn't anywhere in particular, that it is flexible and wide-reaching in its potential, and that Arthur may be there in essence if not in person. This section is odd because when these honourable, high-minded Christian knights asked how to achieve the Sangreal, an overtly pagan symbol adopted by Christianity. Merlin tells them to look for three white bulls, which sounds distinctly pagan. The quest for the Grail was 'too sacred' in Christian terms, for women to accompany their menfolk. This single observation defines the place of women. It also highlights hypocrisy in contradiction of the 'worship' of women'. The adoration and battles for the honour of women were for the benefit of the knights' reputations.

The balance of opposites was played out more overtly in the challenges between Arthur and Morgan, not between Arthur and Guinevere. (Or could we suggest that it was an undercurrent that went unrecorded, because the balance of opposites was more harmonious until the passion shared between Lancelot and Guinevere upset that balance and harmony). Perhaps for Guinevere, there was always another woman in the background?

Arthur conforms in every detail to the mythic archetype. Strangely born his end is mysterious. His relationship with the land and her avatars is established early. He summons a great

fellowship of heroes to sit at his circular table, which echoes, as Merlin says, 'the roundness of the world'. He is placed in polarised balance by the presence of Morgan le Fay, who acts always against him until the end, then appears as his Guardian and protectress. He possesses magical weapons....'<sup>17</sup>

Guinevere, the daughter of King Leodegrance; 'Her affair with Lancelot brings down the kingdom, and she ends her days in the monastery of Amesbury, where she is finally buried after taking a last leave of Lancelot. Her original role was as the Flower Bride, an ancient aspect of the Goddess whose function was to be fought over by the contending powers of Summer and Winter. At one time Arthur and Lancelot must have taken these roles.'<sup>18</sup>

It is curious how, having been the source of this wondrous table, Guinevere does not appear to be given much further credit and the story focuses largely on the heroic acts of the knights. I believe she 'was' the table, with her came the concepts that were the foundation of the fellowship, so it is hard to imagine she had no role. There isn't any particular focus on her until there is some spicy drama. Her quiet consistency, loyalty and wisdom are probably not newsworthy enough. She does not appear to have caused anyone's death, or plotted and schemed. She appears to have been either in the background or overlooked, until the inevitable final section. It could be suggested that the impact of Guinevere's 'betrayal' is given even greater emphasis because she has been such a 'good' queen.

### **Guinevere and the Position of Women**

There is no doubt that the 'Romances' or stories amongst which King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table played a prominent role, did bring a different appreciation of women from what had gone before, but they were still objectified. By way of comparison, and bringing context, I refer quite substantially to Christine Fell's 'Women in Anglo Saxon England and the Impact of 1066'.

It is very difficult to imagine the experience of being a woman in such distant times. The roles and place of everyone in society as clearly defined. Most people would have been peasants 'belonging' to their lord with very few rights or freedoms and probably no education except the stories and songs that circulated, some folklore and what they were told by the Church.

In this light, with her rights as Queen, Guinevere registers as a woman with a lot of personal influence and charisma. Women had their place but they were not 'known' or 'understood' by men in a general sense and certainly not by the Church which established ideals of what was acceptable female behaviour. The arrival of Christianity, for all that it brought with it certain 'civilising' influences and the gift of reading, writing and other administrative approaches, was not an upgrade of every aspect of pre-Christian life in Britain. Indeed, women in particular were 'disinherited' by Christianity. They lost rights previously enjoyed. Women's lives were became very restricted. Their place was in home and family as in Roman and Greek cultures which so strongly influenced the application of 'Christian' values.

Inside Cover of Christine Fell's book: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066:

'A mere chattel, inferior to men or their social equal ... for many women Anglo Saxon England was a golden age of power and wealth, culture and education. From her primary sources .. Professor

Fell argues that, in court, convent or manor house, Anglo Saxon women exploited to the full the resources and opportunities available to them...

The picture can only be completed by looking at what came after ... Within a century the tide had turned : in literature the image of women lost touch with reality, and in reality women lost the status which they had so long enjoyed.'

'The daily life of any woman in Anglo-Saxon England would largely be dictated by the class of society into which she was born, though some women may have married or have been sold into other classes....Regional and period differences may also have had a bearing on women's activities, and the cosmopolitan society of tenth and eleventh century Northumbria was probably less stable in its class distinctions, than eighth-century Kent. ... It is not difficult to get some idea of the public activities of wealthy and high-ranking women, though even there, whether in convent or in court, it is not always easy to get a picture of the day-to-day routine patterns of existence. With women of the lower classes the routine patterns are all we can hope to glimpse, but since they are not the stuff of chronicles, legend or public record, evidence is hard to come by'.<sup>19</sup>

However women worked in the cloth industry as weavers, fullers and dyers, seamstresses and embroiderers. Some affluent women, as 'mistress of the house' could supervise as well as engage in this work.' <sup>8</sup> C. Fell p41 'Grinding of meal in a secular society appears to have been the work of female slaves. The early laws of Æðelbert of Kent make it clear that the king's grinding slave is not among those least valued. If a man lies with a virgin who is the king's property, compensation is fifty shillings; if she is a grinding slave it is twenty five shillings; if she is of the third class (whatever that is) it is twelve shillings'.....' in a text that specifies the rights and duties of estate workers, there is only one woman named among the male workers, ..., and she is the cheesemaker'. She was entitled to a hundred cheeses and all of the buttermilk except the herdsman's share' in return for making cheese and butter for the lord's table. Women were also the brewers.<sup>20</sup>

Almost from the time the Angles and Saxons arrived in England in the fifth century there is clear and sensible legislation for the rights of women in their society...' As far as marriage is concerned the financial aspects are made quite clear in law and charter. The money that the prospective husband must pay... could be a very substantial amount in money and land, and it is paid not to the father, or kin, but to the woman herself. She then has personal control over it, to give away, to sell or bequeath as she chooses....one of the earliest 'morgengifu' on record is Bamburgh in Northumberland.. It claims that the seventh century king Æðelfrið gave the place to his wife, Bebbe, from whom it has since been named.

The *morgengifu* was not the only property the wife had right to, but different laws divide the matrimonial estate in different ways. They do, however, make it clear that within a marriage the finances are held to be the property of the husband and wife, not of husband only'. 'According to the laws of Æðelbert a woman had the right to walk out of a marriage that didn't please her ....if she took the children with her, she was also entitled to take half the property, she seems to have had reasonable independence and security.... Marriage agreements were drawn up between kin but this does not imply that the girl had no rights or say in the matter.....' <sup>21</sup>

The provisions regarding inheritance are particularly interesting, since once again they show a good deal of concern for the economic status of a widow. There is no question in Anglo-Saxon law

of estate and property passing automatically to an eldest son, with the widowed mother left dependent on his provision.’<sup>22</sup>

The detail I have included makes for interesting reading, because when England was lost to the French in 1066, all of these laws were upended and women basically became material assets of the man who owned them, whether father, husband or male relative. She did not have independent property rights although high born or noble women had far greater relative independence and influence, as did those who gave up the secular life for a life in holy orders. Becoming a nun brought the benefit of education otherwise not available to all but a few, women.<sup>23</sup>

Most women of the time (post Conquest) must have envisaged marriage as a job, a distasteful one possibly, but for all that, essential to any tolerable way of life. Rank and riches were no protection, rather the reverse. Heiresses’ marriages, with their tenurial consequences, were saleable commodities, to be purchased by the highest bidder or granted by the king as favour or reward, to a courtier or captain.

‘Children of both sexes, whether orphaned or not, were married off at the tenderest of ages: the ‘Register’ notes one ‘widow’ aged ten and her brother’s ‘wife’ aged five, as already living with her mother-in-law’.<sup>24</sup>

Guinevere appears to have married by choice but she is handed over with land as well as the table. Arthur is said to be very happy to have the table, but it may be fair to consider that it was not just his and that Guinevere may have retained some share in it, or possibly it was actually hers, more in keeping with Anglo Saxon practices. That would perhaps explain why, if there was actual furniture involved, it came with her.

‘The Canon Law of Marriage ... despite Christian protestations that all human souls are equal, anti-feminist attitudes inherited from Graeco-Roman society had early come to dominate the church ... and it depicted her (Eve) as readier than Adam to succumb to temptation and therefore unless strictly disciplined, a moral danger to law as instigator of the Fall. She was justly (it was claimed) been set under Adam’s authority. Such a view of women, as inferior to men in morals and in intellect, underlay the Pauline Pronouncements on Marriage.’<sup>25</sup>

..‘the Fall nonetheless continued to dominate theological concepts of women and hence marriage, while the horror of the flesh felt by so many male clerics inspired condemnation of sexuality and subsequent restrictions upon the role of women’.<sup>26</sup>

Paul’s view of marriage was to compare it ‘as with Christ’s marriage with his church, so was man’s position towards his wife: the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church. This idea had generated an ideal of spiritual love to be as little as possible contaminated by fleshly passions – ought to subsist between spouses.’<sup>27</sup>

Theology alleged women to be essentially inferior to men and in need of constant male tutelage. (Gratian saw servitude as their proper condition). The tighter the grip of canon law grew on secular affairs, the further women’s already limited rights were eroded, always under the pretext of affording their weakness a necessary protection.’<sup>28</sup>

Wives given in marriage as tokens of land-transfer and maidens knowing themselves destined for a like fate heard not only preachers commending a spiritual life like Christ’s for his Church but also minstrels singing of earthier loves between women like themselves and men (not quite) like

their husbands. ... Although royalty is never typical, its well-publicised adventures illustrate some possible freedoms. Henry I, for instance, acknowledged over a score of bastards, by a dozen or so mistresses; the offspring grew up to enjoy appropriate ranks and make advantageous marriages. Nor were the women social outcasts. <sup>29</sup> (I rather doubt that Queens would be free to bear bastards. The law was patrilinear.)

Widows enjoyed the greatest freedom. With a marriage portion of her own, plus a third of her late husband's property, a widowed noblewoman needed only to pay her overlord the requisite fee for self-determination (sometimes backed by a vow of chastity). Women, certainly some of them, would have very much enjoyed the freedoms of single life and a vow of chastity would have released her from the burden and risks of childbearing. Indeed, a choice for a single celibate life did offer a reasonable alternative.' ... ' Not every nun is fired by devotion. Some resorted for lack of an earthly bridegroom, some because widowed, some (especially in the aftermath of the Conquest) to seek refuge from the war-torn countryside. Some were placed in nunneries by their families. Nunneries were not always an easy option. Every nunnery was dependent on a male chaplain to administer sacraments and hear confession. The male Order's members feared and often openly 'repudiated possible moral dangers to themselves'. <sup>30</sup>

'In official life.. women figured little. Those in control of property had the same powers as men of making grants by charter, and had their personal seals. But, because a wife's property passed wholly to her husband's care, virtually the only women land-holders or taxpayers were widows, and records .. under ten percent . A married woman could not act independently to sell, give away or bequeath her 'own' property.' <sup>31</sup>

It is very difficult to fully comprehend the nature of the position of women in Europe from this distance in time. But I do think it is helpful to bring this context to Guinevere because it places her against the backdrop of the society she is described as living in, which greatly impacted on the limited and perhaps distorted way she was depicted, as were the whole female cast. Not surprisingly, there was also a dress code and a woman would dress according to her social position and in a way that conveyed modesty. The term 'straight laced' comes from Medieval times, indicating a modest woman, whereas 'cross-laced' women were prostitutes or not modest. Lacing being the style for fastening dresses in the absence of zips. Appropriate head coverings were also required.

Considering the legal status of women in the distant past does not reflect an intention to open an argument about 'women's rights', but to bring some context to the myth/story from which Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table emerges and the important changes that came about, influenced by Courtly Love and the elevation of women. Repression or liberation of actual women would be reflected in repression or liberation the feminine aspect of men.

"The medieval background of *Faust* has a quite special significance because there actually was a medieval element that presided over the birth of modern individualism. It began, it seems to me, with the worship of woman, which strengthened the man's souls considerably as a psychological factor, since the worship of woman, meant worship of the soul ....' <sup>32</sup>

'.. I wanted to elucidate the psychological relations between the worship of woman and the legend of the Grail, which was so essentially characteristic of the early Middle Ages. The central religious idea in this legend, of which there are numerous variants, is the holy vessel, which, it must be obvious to everyone, is a thoroughly non-Christian image, whose origin is to be sought in extra-canonical sources.... The survival or unconscious revivification of the vessel symbol is

indicative of a strengthening of the feminine principle in the masculine psychology of that time. Its symbolisation in an enigmatic image must be interpreted as a spiritualisation of the eroticism aroused by the worship of woman. But spiritualisation always means the retention of a certain amount of libido, which could otherwise be squandered in sexuality. Experience shows that when the libido is retained, one part of it flows into spiritualised expression, while the remainder sinks into the unconscious and activates images that correspond to it, in this case, the vessel symbol. The symbol lives through the restraint imposed upon certain forms of libido, and in turn serves to restrain these forms. The dissolution of the symbol means a streaming off of libido along the direct path, or at least an almost irresistible urge for its direct application. But the living symbol exorcises this danger. A symbol loses its magical or, if you prefer, its redeeming power as soon as its liability to dissolve is recognised. To be unassailable a symbol must be by its very nature unassailable. ....<sup>33</sup> 'In Jungian terms the vessel is seen as the womb of life, the container where the constant cycle of death and rebirth takes place.'<sup>34</sup>

### History, Chivalry and Myth

After 800, Charlemagne implemented his religious reform programme, which stressed the need for new modes of public conduct. His efforts to adjust traditional Frankish ideas of leadership and public good made a crucial difference in European history. ... His cultural renaissance provided the basic tools, schools, curriculum, textbooks, libraries and teaching techniques upon which later cultural revivals would be based. (Britannia.com)

The Crusades (1095 – 1291) brought new influences from the Middle East and from across Europe, back to Britain and it may well have been that the Medieval Romances grew out of this brutal time and played a part in reconciling the extremes of those long years.

Historically ideas of chivalry and a chivalric code, probably derived from the horsemen of Charlemagne's army (The Carolingian Empire arising around 732AD. Cheval = horse). Charlemagne was king of the Franks from 768 and king of the Lombards from 774 and was the first Holy Roman Emperor from 800AD. After 800, Charlemagne implemented his religious reform programme, which stressed the need for new modes of public conduct. His efforts to adjust traditional Frankish ideas of leadership and public good made a crucial difference in European history. ... His cultural renaissance provided the basic tools, schools, curriculum, textbooks, libraries and teaching techniques upon which later cultural revivals would be based. (Britannia.com)

There were songs; there were stories that would have travelled across Europe and into Britain. There was a melding of cultures, the Celtic with the Anglo Saxon and Norman. Celtic beliefs and deities were absorbed and re-labelled. Following the Conquest, the official language was French and all English/British aristocracy replaced by Norman lords. It was a time of total upheaval.

The first noted support for chivalric vocation, or the establishment of knightly class to ensure the sanctity and legitimacy of Christianity, was written in 930 by Odo, abbot of Cluny, in the Vita of St. Gerald of Aurillac, which argued that the sanctity of Christ and Christian doctrine can be demonstrated through the legitimate unsheathing of the "sword against the enemy". In the 11th century the concept of a "knight of Christ" (miles Christi) gained currency in France, Spain and Italy. In the era of the Crusades, these concepts of "religious chivalry" found the Crusades often being seen as a chivalrous enterprise

'Arthur himself, demi-god, demi-king, whose historical prototype possibly lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, displays various attributes and succumbs to several adventures resembling those of Gwydion, the son of Don. He is surrounded by characters who are strikingly similar to those in Gwydion's entourage in the fourth branch of the Mabinogion. His wife Gwenehwyar (Guinevere) is the daughter of the giant Ogryvan, protector and initiator of Bardism; in the early texts she was Arthur's sister before she became his wife.

Their two sons (or nephews?), Gwalchmai and Medrawt (one good, the other bad) correspond to the two deities of Light (Lleu) and Darkness (Dylan). Gwalchmai 'Falcon of May', is Sir Gauvain and Medrawt, Sir Modr. A third brother Gwalchaved, 'Falcon of Summer' becomes Galahad. Brandegore is undoubtedly 'Bran de Gwales', recalling the Christian Bran who brought the Holy Grail to Britain.

At least as important as the king is the powerful Myrddin, who is our enchanter Merlin, the holder of all knowledge, possessor of all wealth and lord of Fairyland. Uther Pengragon, or Urien, may well represent Uthr Ben, the miraculous head of Bran which lived for 87 years after it was severed from his body. Lastly Balan would be Balin, the Welsh and British god Belinus.

The mythical cycle of King Marc'h (Mark), Queen Essylt (Yseult) and their nephew Drystan (Tristan) is likewise connected with 'Arthurian material'. A whole host of secondary characters lose their individuality and melt into the anonymous host of korred (dwarfs), korriganes (fairies) and morganes (female water spirits) found in Breton folklore from the Amorica peninsula.

Even the most seemingly Christian element in Arthurian legend, the mystic quest of the Holy Grail, has its source in Celtic mythology. Originally it was a magic cauldron of which all the gods were envious, and they tried to steal it from one another. An old Welsh poem from the Book of Taliesin (The Sack of Annwn) tells how Arthur seized the magic cauldron, but lost all but seven men in the expedition, although on setting out, he had 'three times as many as would fill his ship'. The pagan cauldron changed very little when it became the Holy Grail that Joseph of Arimathaea filled with Christ's blood.

'The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth was completed about 1136. The heroic legends of 'Britain the Great' were turned into Arthurian Romances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. About 1470 Sir Thomas Malory composed his *Morte d'Arthur*, translated from or inspired by French sources. The Red Book of Hergest (fourteenth century manuscript) also includes some Mabinogion relating to Arthur's exploits.'<sup>35</sup>

It would appear that the beginnings of the Arthur and the Round Table stories began in Wales in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Almost all of the characters, gods and heroes, of Celtic mythology - more especially the Welsh versions - appear highly Euhemerised. In this pre-Norman conquest period, the position of women would have been remarkably different from post-Conquest. The foundations of the Arthurian stories are found in the tales from the medieval cycle of King Arthur, which constitutes the bulk of the *matière de Bretagne*. (Matter of Britain) compiled by Geoffrey of Monmouth, emerged in the mid 12<sup>th</sup> Century. This cycle began to take shape at the time of the Saxon invasion (450-510) and was enriched as tales from the Continent provided further inspiration including the Matter of France (The Carolingian Cycle). There were many sources including ancient Celtic, Anglo Saxon, Roman and Norse myths and the songs of troubadours travelling across Europe. The Crusades were also influential and knights and their entourages, came across different cultural influences as they travelled East bringing more ideas to Chivalry, including a shift in attitude towards women.



As with any war, a knight returning from the Crusades may well have felt misplaced and had difficulty in readjusting to conventional social life. It is clear from documents and archaeology that warfare was a very physical bloody business that men trained for from a young age. Writing during the wars of the Roses, Geoffrey of Monmouth was unavoidably aware of the butchery of man by man and the abuse of women that this unrelenting conflict caused. We might ask ourselves: 'Who would not want to escape into a different place where outcomes were possibly less bloody, where there was mystery and unexpected assistance from mythical or magical sources?' The romances, chivalric stories making their way all around Europe were particularly popular with women for whom these tales represented ideas of a different life, one less restrained and more open for relationship and creativity, at a time when they were not only living a restricted lifestyle, but likely to have lost many male family members and live in fear of the loss of more, and hence the risk to their own security.

With respect to changing attitudes to women and perhaps a greater or different awareness of goddesses, it has to be considered that not only did the Crusading Knights find middle eastern culture, but on their progress there, through 'classical Europe' will have seen images, statues, shrines and temples, as ruins. Perhaps they travelled the course of Roman roads, just as later civilisations did here in Britain following the departure of the Romans.

'.. Galahad is far from being an ordinary man – indeed he hardly seems like a human being at all, so total is his spirituality ..... Lancelot, his father, is the Best Knight in the World, the perfect representation of the chivalric ideal; yet Lancelot is flawed, because he loves his lord's wife. He is the product of *Amour Courtois* – Courtly Love.

Courtly Love has its place in the history of the Grail for several reasons. As a civilising force, it drew inspiration from women, hitherto virtually ignored in the culture of the Middle Ages. Drawing freely on the sentiments expressed in Arabic poetry and song, as well as the teachings of the Sufi mystics whose beliefs included idealised earthly love as a means to spiritual perfection, Courtly Love placed woman on a pedestal for the first time in that age, worshipped her as a goddess, revered her as an almost sacred object of devotion – and in so doing touched off a spark in the poetic consciousness which resulted in a flood of lyricism and song.

'Out of these close ties between England and France, which began with the conquest of England by William of Normandy, arose a new culture and a new style, the Anglo-Norman, which found its expression in the *Contes Bretons*. ... This however, was not the only reason for the new fashion. A further and more important one of a more psychological nature may be sought in another phenomenon of the age, that is, in the service of woman, then at the peak of its development. Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie de Champagne, are said to have presided at one of the Courts of Love which instituted a code of behaviours in affairs of Love, much as did Arthur's Round Table in matters of Knightly virtue.

Although it is to be doubted that the Courts of Love were serious institutions and that the rules laid down in writing by one Andreas Cappellanus, in the service of Marie de Champagne, were very strictly adhered to, it is none the less an established fact that woman in that age exercised an extraordinarily powerful influence on manners and culture and that the formation and validity of the courtly ideal is to be attributed largely to this influence. It is obvious that where woman plays such a considerable role, this must also find expression in the literature of the age. For the poets of that time, especially, woman means much more than simply a patroness, listener or reader; through her the poet is inspired, to her he turns, by her he desires

to be admired and loved, and it is his wish to understand her. This had its most perfect form in the *Minne* (love) poetry, then in its golden age, which had as its subject matter the emotions, the sorrows and joys of the lover, and love itself, whether as a simple human emotion or as a mystical experience.' <sup>114</sup>

'At the time of the Crusades, the Christian Crusader knights came into close contact with the mysterious traditions of the East, and the solution of the problem of *Minne* as presented in the primitive institution of the harem must have made a deep impression on them, since in the *Minnedienst* (homage rendered by a knight to his lady) they were too seeking a solution of the anima problem that should transcend Christian conventions. The harem, however convenient in many respects, is none the less far too primitive a solution. Certainly sexuality is not repressed, but beyond that there is no individual psychic relationship between man and woman, therefore its adoption by the knights subject to the *Minnedienst* would have meant a regression.' <sup>115</sup>

The Troubadours, singers and poets who celebrated the art of Courtly Love in all its aspects, became a dominant force in western culture. Love became a Faith to live by, a code only second to that of chivalry, with which it was closely linked. A complex set of laws ruled every act of courtship made by the knight for the love of his lady, who was always portrayed as aloof, cold of heart and lacking in charity, and who humbled her worshipper with cruel words, only spurring him on to greater efforts to please her.'

Though never classed as heresy, Courtly Love was clearly frowned upon by the Church, especially because of the rule contained in it that decreed that the most perfect relationship between a knight and a lady was when the lady was already married. Chrétien de Troyes' most famous work before the *Conte del Graal* was a long poem called *The Knight of the Cart*, which introduced Lancelot as a major figure in the Arthurian Cycle and made him the lover of Queen Guinevere – not only the wife of Arthur, but a perfect type of Courtly lady.' <sup>36</sup>

There was a great deal of war and carnage going on in the Middle Ages. 1337-1453 was the Hundred Years War between England and France, from which France emerged victorious, weakening the English monarchy and leading to the civil war, the War of the Roses, 1455 - 1487. Geoffrey of Monmouth (1095 - 1155) who wrote his 'History of the Kings of Britain', played a major part in developing the tales of King Arthur. His parents may even have been among the Bretons who took part in William I's conquest. He settled in Wales initially. (It would appear that the name Arthur or Galfridus were far more common Breton names than Welsh).

Thomas Malory 1415 - 1471 who consolidated the Arthurian stories into a best-seller of his time, lived through the period of the Wars of the Roses. The bloody battles and conflicts he wrote about were set against a particularly violent time in England, where the enemy was not even a foreigner. Geoffrey of Monmouth was born at the very beginning of the period of the Crusades. For him, the battles may have been more 'heroic', or glamorous, because the violence of the Christian cause was geographically remote and even sanctified by the Pope. The backdrop to both storytellers' lifetimes, was about waging war. Geoffrey spent some time in a Benedictine monastery then moved to the Oxford area where he was a canon, later being ordained as a priest then consecrated Bishop of St Asaph in Lambeth in 1152. As a cleric, it is important to consider, he would probably have little or no experience of women, and (probably) not have married. He lived through the period when the argument for and against marriage finally confirmed celibacy in 1139 at the Second Lateran Council by Pope Gregory VII, the first Pope to have absolute power over all the churches in Christendom. This would

doubtless have included various, probably non-too-flattering discussions about the nature of women, and was top of the clerical agenda. It was ok to worship the Virgin Mary. She didn't do sex. Mortal women were a threat.

Perhaps Geoffrey's telling of the Arthurian Tales, the trials and tribulations of Arthur and his court with Guinevere's ultimate 'betrayal' served, rather reassuringly, to confirm that women cannot be trusted. It was the 'Fall' from the ideal of the Round Table rather than the 'Fall' from the Garden of Eden'. Based on French Romances, Malory's version emphasises the brotherhood of the knights rather than Courtly Love, and focuses on the conflicts of loyalty (brought about by the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere), that finally destroy the fellowship. (Britannica.com).

It is also salutary to remember that as Malory's best seller was firmly established, witchcraft was deemed a heresy, and in 1484, not long after Malory's death, that it was denounced as such by Pope Innocent VIII. Up until 1750 some 200,000 witches was tortured and put to death. Women were living on even thinner ice than before, since it was predominantly women who were persecuted. From the extremes of Courtly Love to the possibility of accusations of Witchcraft within a short historical period is worth noting. Whatever the value of the Arthurian stories, the real world for women was a completely different matter.

## Guinevere

Guinevere is inseparable from the Round Table, she is the context, the fabric upon which the stories are embroidered or written. We are not under the impression that at the beginning of the story of Arthur and the Round Table that there is more than one of them, so it was a very special thing that Merlin caused to be made for Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon.

It is widely noted that Guinevere did not appear to have children. She did not produce an heir for Arthur. Perhaps that is because Guinevere equates with Venus. Venus is about love and creativity. She relates to all and everyone in the context of King Arthur and the Round Table. Her role as feminine principle is about establishing a 'conversation' or interaction with the masculine principle, perhaps expressed through Mars. The God of War would be a very fitting deity for all of the battles and bloodshed. Guinevere is in the shadow of a male world concerned with conflict and battle, victory and defeat. Men also want to own her. She is immensely desirable and powerful in her own right and men wanted to possess and control her. Women were, after all, dangerous, and needed to be under the control of a man. (The male Order's members feared and often openly 'repudiated possible moral dangers to themselves'.<sup>19</sup> 'the Fall nonetheless continued to dominate theological concepts of women and hence marriage, while the horror of the flesh felt by so many male clerics inspired condemnation of sexuality and subsequent restrictions upon the role of women'.<sup>37</sup>)

I have included many quotations from *Le Morte d'Arthur* in considering Guinevere and the nature of her relationships. I may have included too much background narration of the story, for which I will apologise to those who are very much more familiar with the text than I am. I have taken the approach that the best way to make some sense of her character is to consider her to be human even though she is a living archetype, because we are human and can best relate to her through human traits. There do not appear to be direct references to Guinevere enchanting anyone, although at one point she does remark that ladies do sometimes entrap men

using sorcery, but this does appear necessary for her. I would consider that she emanates a kind of magnetism which at times, or for some, is irresistible, but she does also appear to be fair, to seek peace rather than war, to negotiate. She is clearly a loving, caring person/being albeit sometimes at the mercy of irrepressible emotions, which only serve to make her more human to us. She would appear to be very different from Morgan.

Looking for Venus, I found 'Guinevere and the Round Table' by Wendy Berg. In it, she asserts that Guinevere is from the fairy realm. Guinevere is even more vague in terms of history than Arthur. Wendy's view of the five kingdoms and the pentacle are an interesting reflection of the five pointed Venus Star described in the heavens.<sup>38</sup>

I am aware that Guinevere has associations with the faery realms. She appears to be impossible to place properly in a historic context, but I believe that what she represents as an archetype remains largely undiscovered. Her story comes from Medieval-early Christian times when myth, legend and storytelling were 'alive' and vibrant. We live in far more mundane times where myths are destroyed on social media or by science, which is why concepts of archetypes deep within us and connecting with them, may be of even greater value.

'... Gwenevere is a comparatively shadowy figure who fails to make a distinctive impression on us. She seems to lack purpose, and emerges as little more than a product of the conventions of the time. She is described as beautiful, kind and graceful, but so are most of the women who appear alongside her. The Arthurian legends are essentially stories of action: they describe men of courage who that arise in their defence of Arthur's kingdom confront the challenges that arise in their defence of Arthur's kingdom and their quest for the Mysteries of the worlds where dragons, wild beasts and strange happenings are daily occurrences. Gwenevere naturally enough plays little part in the knights' heroic deeds in the land of adventure, but she does not appear to provide a feminine complement to the otherwise predominantly masculine energy of the stories. ... we get little sense that she made any real contribution to the business of running the court or kingdom with her husband King Arthur'<sup>39</sup>

'In our search for Gwenevere's meaning and purpose there appears to be something we have overlooked. ... And here is the key to the mystery, because Gwenevere's name mean's 'White Shadow'. The element 'wen', or 'gwen' means 'white', 'dazzling', 'holy' and can be found in many early Welsh names. The same element is found in Irish Gaelic, where finn or fionn means 'white', 'fair'. It is frequently given to Faery beings for the simple reason that they can appear to us as dazzling white, shining and fair.'<sup>40</sup>

Without wishing to take anything from the Faery implications, the use of the word could also be used to describe the Moon, or Venus being dazzling, white and shining. Maybe both, it doesn't have to be either or. The faery realms are closely associated to the moon. Both Moon and Venus (or any other planet also goes into 'shadow').

In considering archetypes it is hard to resist looking at Jung's description of the 'Shadow' and wonder if there were unconscious currents directing that ancient name towards our current times, and perhaps even more pertinently, directing us towards the bright shadow of Venus. A shadow that casts light, rather than absorbing it perhaps. If we consider time to be part of the Great Illusion, then the quotation for Jung would appear to have great relevance when observing a dance between Venus and Mars energies. I am definitely not qualified to say more than that. I offer it as 'food for thought'.

'The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognising the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period' <sup>41</sup>

'.. it is more accurate to speak of *Gwenivere* in the present tense: as one of the Faery race she is immortal, and although she has returned to the world of Faery she is as alive and real for us as she was a thousand years ago ....' <sup>42</sup> As a Goddess or even 'triple Goddess', she is archetypal and exists outside of time, whether she is located in the Faery realms or not.

'It is generally accepted that the Round Table was central to King Arthur's court and kingdom, and if nothing else, it is certainly a memorable symbol of equality. It was *Gwenivere's* dowry, the traditional gift of money or property bestowed upon the husband by the bride's father. (Unless she was of the Anglo-Saxon era) But there also exists a faint but persistent belief that the Round Table was *Gwenivere's*, as if she was associated with it at a level deeper than that of a simple marriage gift. She may be considered to be at the centre of concepts of equality and magnanimity, including the realm of women as well as men.

Malory writes: ' and there he showed to the army how he purposed to conquer the empire which he ought to have by right. And there he ordained two governors of his realm, that is to say, Sir Baudwin of Britain, for to counsel to the best, and Sir Constantine, Son to Sir Cador of Cornwall, which after the death of Arthur was king of this realm. And in the presence of all his lords he resigned the rule of the realm and *Guenever* his Queen to them, ... Then the Queen *Guenever* made great sorrow for the departing of her lord and other, and swooned in such wise that the ladies bare her into her chamber.' <sup>43</sup>

Arthur did not leave his kingdom in the care of his Queen, although many queens took control of their husbands' castles while they were away on Crusades or otherwise engaged in battle. *Guinevere* was obviously distressed at the departure of her husband the king, which would suggest that he meant a great deal to her. He also left her well-guarded. '.. given that she was the Queen of ancient Britain alongside the renowned King Arthur, we might reasonably expect the legends to furnish her with an appropriately noble parentage and perhaps take the opportunity to offer us a description of the land of her birth. But her family is rarely mentioned '(her brother *Gotegrin* and sisters *Lenomie* and *Flore*)' and her mother's existence is barely acknowledged. We are told a little more about her father, who is generally named as *Leodegrance*, ruler of the remote kingdom of *Lyonesse*. But he plays a minor role in the legends and once his daughter has been wedded to King Arthur, he quickly fades from the scene. All this stands in distinct contrast to the well-documented family history of King Arthur, whose parents *Uther Pendragon* and *Ygrainne* were famously assisted by *Merlin* in the magical mating at *Tintagel* that led to Arthur's conception. <sup>44</sup>

This same strange absence of information also veils the circumstances surrounding King Arthur's courtship of *Gwenivere*'. We are told in *Morte d'Arthur* that Arthur had loved *Guinevere* for many years and he summoned an army that obviously suffered great loss, to defend King *Leodegrance*, her father, from King *Rience* of Wales, because when he received the wedding Gift of the Round Table, there appears to have been a general shortage of knights. King *Leodegrance* was overjoyed that his daughter should be chosen by Arthur for his wife, and was

more than happy to give him the Round Table, although we do not know the circumstances by which he had it from Uther Pendragon.

'It would seem that Guenevere was unable to bear children ... This lack of progeny obviously had serious implications for the future of Arthur's line and we might reasonably expect it to be referred to at some point within the stories, but they are curiously and unanimously silent over the matter'.<sup>40</sup> The lack of a line of accession may not have been crucial to the story, although Arthur did make arrangements early on, for the security of Guinevere and his lands in his absence, naming the two knights Sir Baudwin of Britain, for to counsel to the best, and Sir Constantine, son to Sir Cadour of Cornwall, which after the death of Arthur was king of this realm'.<sup>45</sup> He did not give control or inheritance to Guinevere in the event of his death (and no explanation is given, perhaps the need for an explanation was not considered necessary).

So we can confirm that Guinevere is of noble birth, she is royalty and as a princess she is privileged and was educated: 'And in this meanwhile La Beale Isoud made a letter unto Queen Guenever, complaining her of the untruth of Sir Tristram, and how he had wedded the king's daughter of Brittany. Queen Guenever sent her another letter, and bade her be of good cheer, for she should have joy after sorrow, for Sir Tristram was so noble a knight called, that by crafts of sorcery ladies could make such noble men to wed them. But in the end, Queen Guenever said, it shall be thus, that he shall hate her, and love you better than he did heretofore.'<sup>46</sup> These sound like informal letters between women and that Guinevere is being advisor and 'Agony Aunt'.

She would have been brought up with knowledge of manners and etiquette befitting her station and suitably clothed and decorated, with creative skills that will have made her even more attractive, since her purpose will have been to marry well. In 'her time' she would not have an obvious option to marriage, unless choosing to be a nun. She is already familiar with living at court and the expectations associated with it with regard to entertaining visitors. She would also have learnt from entertainments, stories and song:

'And so thus every knight made him ready to that tournament. And King Arthur was come two days to-fore the Assumption of our Lady. And there was all manner of royalty of all minstrelsy that might be found. Also there came Queen Guenever and the Queen of Orkney ...'<sup>47</sup>

She appears to have been loyal and emotionally close to her husband, Arthur, and he enjoyed her support: 'And as King Arthur rode to Camelot, and held there a great feast with mirth and joy, so soon after he returned to Cardoile, and there cam unto Arthur tidings that the king of Denmark, and the king of Ireland that was his brother, (five kings in all) ...with a great host were entered into the land of King Arthur ... yet had I never rest one month since I was crowned king ... Then the king came to Queen Guenever, and said, Lady, make you ready, for ye shall go with me, for I may not long miss you; ye shall cause me to be the more hardy, what adventure so befall me; I will not wit my lady to be in no jeopardy. Sir, said she, I am at your commandment, and shall be ready what time so ye be ready. So on the morn the king and queen departed with such fellowship as they had, and came unto the north .....'<sup>48</sup>

She was fully at ease with commanding her knights and she had her own personal bodyguard of knights.<sup>49</sup> 'And this young man the Sir Kay names La Cote Male Taile was there left behind with Queen Guenever; and by sudden adventure there was an horrible lion kept in a strong tower of stone, and it happened that he at that time brake loose, and came hurtling afore the queen and her knights. And when the Queen saw the lion she cried and fled, and prayed her knights to

rescue her... Then La Cote Male Taile .. therewithal drew his sword and dressed him afore the lion. And that lion gaped wide and came upon him ramping to have slain him. And he then smote him in the midst of the head such a might stroke ... La Cote Male Taile had slain the lion. With that the king came home. And when the queen told him of that adventure, he was well pleased...' <sup>50</sup> She was able to read, maybe to write, since she exchanged letters (although she may have had a scribe), she may even have had knowledge of other languages like Latin and Greek, although a girl's education would usually have been limited. We are led to believe she is cultured, graceful and dignified. She is described as valiant which doesn't sound like a usual quality to be on a girl or woman's list of charms, as well as the fairest. I believe that, like Venus in the sky, it would be impossible not to notice her.

She also appeared to have her own authority in the court. She was not just a decoration: 'Then shall ye, said Sir Lancelot, on Whitsunday next coming, go unto the court of King Arthur, and there shall ye yield you unto Queen Guenever, and put you all three in her grace and mercy, and say that Sir Kay sent you thither to be her prisoners. Sir, they said, it shall be done ...' <sup>51</sup> According to the following account it would appear that Queen Guinevere was known of, or at least had the respect of the Pope:

Lancelot pursued a knight to prevent him from killing his wife. 'He had not ridden but a while, but the knight bade Sir Launcelot turn him and look behind him, and said, Sir, yonder come men of arms after us riding. And so Sir Lancelot turned him and thought no treason, and therewith was the knight and the lady on one side, and suddenly he swapped off his lady's head. And when Sir Launcelot had espied him what he had done, he said, and called him, Traitor. Thou hast shamed me for ever. And suddenly Sir Launcelot alighted off his horse, and pulled out his sword to slay him, and therewithal he fell flat to the earth, and gripped Sir Launcelot by the thighs, and cried mercy. Fie on thee, said Sir Launcelot, thou shameful knight, thou mayest have no mercy, and therefore arise and fight with me. Nay, said the knight .... Well, said Sir Launcelot, take this lady and the head, and bear it upon thee, and here shalt thou swear upon my sword, to bear it always upon thy back and never to rest till thou come to Queen Guenever. Sir, that will I do....

He departed.. and found the queen with King Arthur at Winchester, and there he told all the truth. Sir knight, said the queen, this is an horrible deed and a shameful, and a great rebuke unto Sir Launcelot: ... but this shall I give you in penance, make ye as good shift as ye can, ye shall bear this lady with you on horseback unto the Pope of Rome, and of him receive your penance for your foul deeds; and ye shall never rest one night whereas ye do another; an ye go to any bed the dead body shall lie with you. This oath he made, and so departed. And as it telleth in the French book, when he came to Rome, the Pope bad him go again unto Queen Guenever, and in Rome was this lady buried by the Pope's commandment. And after this Sir Pevidere fell to great goodness, and was an holy man and an hermit.' <sup>52</sup>

She was obviously present at many tournaments and played an important role.

'So the Queen the haut prince and Launcelot, they were set upon scaffolds to give the judgement of these two knights ... Then Queen Guenever commended him, and so did all other good knights make much of him ... Then Queen Guenever said unto Sir Launcelot: Sir, I require you that an ye joust any more, that ye joust with none of the blood of my lord Arthur. So he promised he would not as at that time.' <sup>53</sup>

She played a formal role and had the respect and recognition of the lords, and was concerned for the safety of her husband's family, since Lancelot was such a fearsome opponent. She was an

integral part of the events and on this occasion as for others, apparently in the absence of King Arthur.<sup>54</sup>

Men fought for her and over her: 'And then asked him (Sir Meliagaunce) why he loved Queen Guenever as he did: ..... I love Queen Guenever, what will ye with it? I will prove and make good that she is the fairest lady and of the most beauty in the world. As to that, said Sir Lamorak, I say nay thereto, for Queen Morgawse of Orkney, mother to Sir Gawaine, and his mother is the fairest queen and lady that beareth the life. That is not so, said Sir Maligaunce, and that will I prove with my hands upon thy body... And then Sir Lancelot rode betwixt them, and asked them for what cause they fought so together: And ye are both knights of King Arthur!... For this quarrel make ye ready, for I will prove upon thee that Queen Guenever is the fairest lady and the most of bounty in the world ... Sir, said Sir Lamorak, I am oath to have ado with you in this quarrel, for every man thinketh his own lady fairest'.<sup>55</sup>

Guenever was very much present at a tournament and obviously having a very good time laughing and talking with the knights. She would have been attended by ladies no doubt, but they were probably not important, or sufficiently important to include in the story. We see her as a Queen taking her position of authority, but also seeing a queen socialising and enjoying good company: 'And when ye have done so (knocked down Sir Dinadan) bring him afore me and the noble Queen Guenever. The Sir Lancelot did as he was required ... and so brought him to the queen and the haut prince, and they laughed at Dinadan so sore that they might not stand. Well, said Dinadan, yet have I no shame, for the old shrew Sir Lancelot, smote me down. So they went to dinner, [and] all the court had good sport at Dinadan'.<sup>56</sup> Guenever, continues without Arthur, to have fun and a good laugh with the knights. It sounds very friendly and informal.

Lancelot and Dinadan continue to joke with one another 'Well, said Launcelot, make good watch ever: God forbid that ever we meet but if it be at a dish of meat. Then laughed the queen and the haut prince, that they might not sit at their table; thus made great joy till on the morn, and then they heard mass, and blew to the field. And Queen Guenever and all the estates were set, and judges armed clean with their shields to keep the right.'<sup>57</sup> Guenever was very much present at a tournament and obviously having a very good time laughing and talking with the knights. She would have been attended by ladies no doubt, but they were probably not important, or important to the story. We see her as a Queen taking her position of authority, but also seeing a queen socialising and enjoying good company.

We can regard the concept of the Round Table on either a literal or a symbolic level, although if we approach it literally it is hard to make sense of it. Perhaps there was a table that was central to an idealised concept. The idea of a great wooden table being transported ... somehow managed to accommodate upwards of a hundred knights... We do better if we look for the symbolic meaning of the Round Table, and viewed in this light it soon speaks to us as a symbol of unity, fellowship in action, and as a representation of shared purpose ... But above all, as we look closely at Guenevere's role within the court of the Round Table, she is revealed as an intelligent, wise, authoritative figure of considerable power ... '<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps it was this very personal power that caused Merlin to warn Arthur against taking Guenevere as a wife, because she was not 'biddable', she had her own mind. It looks like Merlin said to Arthur, 'Yes, yes, she's gorgeous but she's dangerous and if I thought I could change your mind I would find someone more suitable, who would be guided and behave herself. But Arthur said, 'My mind's made up, and that's that', at which point Merlin changes the subject of



the conversation.. p52 ...'but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damosel of beauty and of goodness that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set; but there a man's heart is set, he will be loath to return. That is truth said King Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him again;...' <sup>59</sup>

As for the Round Table or the Table Round, it was 'round in the likeness of the world', which sounds conceptual rather than actual depending on how 'the world' was seen, in the round'. The concept of the Round table was transmitted far and wide and has had profound influence. We still talk about 'Coming to the table' to discuss or negotiate. It was confirmed or consecrated on the day of Arthur and Guinevere's wedding which alone would suggest that Guinevere was pivotal to both events. Although Merlin had caused the Table to be made, it is reasonable to assume that Uther was guided or directed by Merlin to leave it with Leodegrance. It is also perhaps inevitable, in those distant times as much as possibly now, that anyone might wish to recover something of value considered to be their inheritance. The whole story depends on Arthur acquiring the Round Table, his inheritance from his father, but that Guinevere was essential, was key, to the whole plan. It could also be considered that the Round Table involved aspects of 'goodwill' or peace-treaties transferring or expanding from one territory to another. The table was round like the world suggests not only those who live on your doorstep, but those at a distance.

'It is clear that after the death of Uther Pendragon, not only the Round Table but the whole magical system connected with it had been given to Leodegrance. So, in turn Arthur not only inherited the outer symbol of the Round Table but also a group of knights who had been initiated into its Mysteries, and the body of teaching that went with it. No wonder he was pleased'. <sup>60</sup>

Perhaps King Arthur is insincere, or just pre-Courtly Love, or just not stunned by Cupid's arrow, but he appears to have loved quite freely: 'So in the meanwhile there came a damosel that was an earl's daughter: his name was Sanam, and her name was Lionors, a passing fair damosel; and so she came thither for to do homage, as other lords did after battle. And King Arthur set his love greatly upon her, and so did she upon him, and the king had ado with her, and gat on her a child: his name was Borre, that was after a good knoght, and of the Table Round. Then there came word that the King Rience of North Wales made great war on King Leodegrance of Caeliard, for the which thing Arthur was wroth, for he loved him well, and hated King Rience, for he was always against him.....'

.. within six days came into the country of Cameliard, and there rescued King Leodegrance, ... and there had Arthur the first sight of Guenever, the king's daughter of Cameliard, and ever after he loved her. After they were wedded, as it telleth in the book.' <sup>61</sup>

This episode could suggest 'love at first sight' since there is no mention of a dowry or any financial or political aspect. It was only a few days since he had 'ado' with the damsel Lionors. It begs the question how 'love' figures in his relationships, since his interaction with Lionors would appear to have been brief but consensual. A little while after he met Guenever and 'ever after loved her', on the next page, Arthur rode to Carlion. King Lot of Orkney's wife also arrived to spy on him, 'richly be seen' with her four sons. 'For she was a passing fair lady, therefore the king cast great love unto her, and desired to lie by her; so they were agreed, and he begat upon her Mordred, and she was his sister, on his mother's side, Igraine. So there she rested her a

month, and at the last departed. ... But all this time Arthur knew not that King Lot's wife was his sister.' <sup>62</sup>

Within the space of three pages Arthur has ado with Lionors, apparently fallen for Guenever and chosen her to be his wife and fathered a child with King Lot's wife (who turns out to be his half-sister Morgause). Interestingly we are given the king's name and the names of all her sons, but not the lady's. Even by modern standards Arthur's behaviour would appear faithless and selfish, maybe reflecting the rights and expectations of a king, but perhaps it is setting the scene for the transformation which follows the arrival of the Round Table and a new attitude towards women.

(Shortly after these episodes he met his mother Igraine and was told of the magical events that caused him to be conceived by King Uther... 'And therewith King Arthur took his mother, Queen Igraine, in his arms and kissed her, and either wept upon other. And then the king let make a feast that lasted eight days'.) Following this came the magical interlude with the Lady of the Lake, involving Merlin where Arthur was offered the sword Excalibur. <sup>63</sup>)

'How King Arthur took a wife, and wedded Guenever, daughter to Leodegrance, King of the land of Cameliard, with whom he had the Round Table'... 'And then had these three kings great cheer of King Leodegrance, that thanked them of their great goodness, that they would revenge him of his enemies; and there had Arthur first sight of Guenever, the king's daughter of Cameliard, and ever after he loved her. After they were wedded, as it telleth in the book' <sup>64</sup>

I have included this section about Arthur's marriage to Guenever because it is the foundation of the whole story unfolding

'In the beginning of Arthur, after he was chosen king by adventure and by grace; for the most part the barons knew not that he was Uther Pendragon's son, but as Merlin made it openly known ... for the most part the days of his life he was ruled much by the counsel of Merlin. So it fell upon a time King Arthur said unto Merlin, My barons will let me have no rest, but needs I must take a wife, and I will none take but by thy counsel and by thine advice. It is well done, said Merlin, that ye take a wife, for a man of your bounty and noblesse should not be without a wife. Now is there any that ye love more than another? Yea, said King Arthur, I love the King's daughter, Leodegrance of the land of Cameliard, the which holdeth in his house the Table Round that ye told he had of my father Uther. **And this damosel is the most valiant and fairest lady that I know living, or yet ever I could find.** Sir, said Merlin, as of her beauty and Fairness she is one of the fairest alive, ...' <sup>65</sup>

It is particularly interesting that Arthur is determined to have Guenever against Merlin's advice. Perhaps Merlin is double-checking with Arthur as if to confirm that he realises what path he might be choosing and that perhaps there is a different option. 'I know you are sure, but are you really, really sure? Because there will be no turning back.

'Valiant' is not perhaps the usual kind of description of a fair maiden, but totally apt when we consider Guinevere reflects both Athena and Aphrodite. Valiant suggests that Guinevere is brave and courageous, a warrior, one who takes up a challenge and is prepared to fight: Athena. Fairest lady, a much used but appreciative description of the female cast, being one who is aesthetically pleasing and as a matter of record, having qualities which Arthur finds sexually attractive (Lionors and King Lot's wife to name but two): Aphrodite. In this one line I find the basis of my discussion about Guinevere as Venus exhibiting archetypal qualities of the goddess

Athena and the goddess Aphrodite, both of whom can be very persuasive as well as being overtly magnetic and alluring. She was Arthur's choice, and given the magical assistance of Merlin, Arthur would have otherwise been spoilt for choice.

'... but, an ye loved her not so well as ye do, I should find you a damosel of beauty and of goodness that should like you and please you, an your heart were not set; but there a man's heart is set, he will be loath to return. That is truth said King Arthur. But Merlin warned the king covertly that Guenever was not wholesome for him to take to wife, for he warned him that Launcelot should love her, and she him again; and so he turned his tale to the adventures of the Sangreal.'

66

Then Merlin desired of the king to have men with him that should enquire of Guenever, and so the king granted him, and Merlin went forth unto King Leodegrance of Camelard, and told him of the desires of the king that he would have unto his wife Guenever his daughter. That is to me, said King Leodegrance the best tidings that I ever heard, that so worthy a king of prowess and noblesse will wed my daughter. And as for my lands, I will give him, wist I it might please him, but he has lands enow, him needeth none; but I shall send him a gift shall please him much more, for I shall give him the Table Round, the which Uther Pendragon gave me, and when it is full complete, there is an hundred knights and fifty. And as for an hundred good knights I have myself, but I have fifty, for so many have been slain in my days. And so Leodegrance delivered his daughter Guenever unto Merlin, and the Table Round with the hundred knights, and so they rode freshly, with great royalty, what by water and what by land till that they came nigh unto London.

When Arthur heard of the coming of Guenever and the hundred knights with the Table Round, then King Arthur made great joy for her coming, and that rich present, and said openly, This fair lady is passing welcome unto me, for I have loved her long, and therefore there is nothing so life to me. And these knights with the Round Table please me more than right great riches. And in all haste the king let ordain for the marriage and the coronation in the most honourable wise that could be devised.'

Arthur was a very happy king, but still short of knights, so Merlin was sent to rustle up a few more. (Again, I wonder why, following all of his successful exploits and battles, having gained wealth and territory, that he was short of knights. Also in this paragraph there is a change from the table round to the Round Table.)<sup>67</sup>

It would appear that Morgan le Fay didn't take her little brother's wife very seriously, or that perhaps Guinevere thought better of picking an argument with her: 'Then she went unto Queen Guenever, and asked her leave to ride into the country. 'Ye may abide, said Queen Guenever, til your brother the king come home. I may not said, said Morgan le Fay, for I have such hasty tidings, that I may not tarry. Well, said Guenever, ye may depart when ye will',<sup>69</sup> and so Morgan set off to steal Arthur's magical scabbard.

It is early, in Book VI when Lancelot was quite new to the Round Table, that he had the attention of Guinevere: 'so Sir Lancelot increased so marvellously in worship, and in honour, ... Wherefore Queen Gunever had him in great favour above all other knights, and in certain he loved the queen again above all other ladies and damosels of his life, for her he did many deeds of arms, and saved her from the fire through his noble chivalry.'<sup>70</sup>

When Lancelot was tricked and taken prisoner using enchantment by four queens, including Morgan le Fay, forcing him to choose one of them as paramour: ‘..we know well there can be no lady have thy love but one, and that is Queen Guenever, and now thou shalt lose her for ever, and she thee, and therefore thee behoveth now to choose one of us four ... I will none of you, for ye be false enchantrresses, and as for my lady, Dame Guenever, were I at my liberty as I was, I would prove it on you or on yours, that she is the truest lady unto her lord living.’<sup>71</sup> Lancelot makes it clear that the relationship he has with Guinevere is one of Courtly Love and honour, but we the reader, are aware of a relationship is potentially more than that.

Sir Lancelot was tricked through enchantment into the bed of Elaine of Corbenic, who later bore his son Galahad. When Guinevere sent a maidservant to find him, she found his bed empty: ‘Alas, said the queen, where is that false knight become? Then the queen was nigh out of her wit, and then she writhed and weltered as a mad woman, and might not sleep a four or five hours...’ Seems Lancelot talked about his love for Guinevere in his sleep and he was talking so loudly from Elaine’s bed that Guinevere heard him. As she coughed to disturb him he suddenly realised he was in the wrong bed, jumped up and met her face to face: ‘and thus she said: False traitor knight that though art, look though never abide in my court, and avoid my chamber, and not so hardy, thou false traitor knight that though art, that ever thou come in my sight’. Lancelot collapses in shock, but as he recovers his senses he jumped out a window into thorns that were in the garden, got very badly scratched and ran wildly, like a wild man, for two years.’<sup>72</sup> ‘Nobody saw him. His brother Sir Ector de Maris searched and searched but could not find him,<sup>73</sup> but he eventually found himself with Dame Elaine where under the protection of her father King Pelles, he was taken to a tower and healed by the power of the Sangreal.<sup>74</sup> He was persuaded to return to Camelot ‘that is called in English, Winchester’) by his brother Sir Ector. His story was told of how he went out of his mind and now called himself ‘Le Chevaler Mal Fet’, the knight that had trespassed. ‘Queen Guinevere wept as she should have died. Then the queen made great cheer. O Jesu, said King Arthur, I marvel for cause ye, Sir Lancelot went out of your mind ... But all Sir Lancelot’s kin knew for whom he went out of his mind. And then there were great feasts made and great joy ...’<sup>75</sup>

Guinever had been beside herself with rage and jealousy, and Aphrodite can be very vindictive if betrayed. Athena is more likely to plan a response than react in an immediate impassioned outburst. Aphrodite could be seen to be more invested in her emotions whereas Athena is strongly intellectual, using her mental skill to plan revenge perhaps, but also cultivate peaceful agreements. We get the impression that Guinevere and Lancelot can both be at the mercy of emotions that refuse to be mastered, but Arthur on the other hand, although expressing emotion and being driven to tears particularly with respect to the knights going on their quest for the Sangreal, appears to be far more measured in his expression. He drew his own conclusion that Elaine was somehow the cause and chose to let it rest. So it was, that Lancelot who had run completely wild in his shirt with a sword in his hand for a couple of years, was welcomed back with great joy and open arms. It is clear that throughout the history of Guinevere with Lancelot, there is an irresistible attraction running between the two of them. (I wonder if the time Lancelot was absent could coincide with Venus making a full circuit through the heavens, which is just under two years.)

Later in the book Guinever needs to see Galahad’s face and remarks on his likeness to his father Lancelot (the mother was Elaine of Corbenic) and reassures him of how proud he should be of his father. She shows no sign of jealousy because Lancelot has fathered a child with Elaine,

quite the reverse.<sup>76</sup> Shortly after, the knights embarked on their mission for the Sangreal, Lancelot was at the chamber door of the Sangreal and saw a wonderful vision, but a voice ordered him not to enter the chamber. He entered the chamber he believed to be of assistance, but was taken down as if he had breathed fire, and was as if dead. He had a religious experience, but his son Galahad achieved the quest. When all of the knights that were left alive returned, there was great joy in the court: ' .. and in especial King Arthur and Queen Guenever made great joy of the remnant that were come home, and passing glad was the king and the queen of Sir Lancelot and of Sir Bors.'<sup>77</sup> It appears that both king and queen are both genuinely very happy to see Sir Lancelot and Sir Bors safely returned, but we soon see, Sir Lancelot and not been sufficiently changed by the spiritual experience and vows of his mission, and lost himself. It is presented as Lancelot returning to the queen, not that she had enticed him. It is possible that she believed he would be changed by his experience and respected that (however difficult it may have been).

'Then as the book saith, Sir Launcelot began to resort unto Queen Guenever again, and forgot the promise and the perfection that he made in the quest. For as the book saith, had not Sir Lancelot been in his privy thoughts and in his mind so set inwardly to the queen as he was outward seeming to God, there had no knight passed him on the quest of the Sangreal: but ever his thoughts were privily on the queen, and they loved together hotter than they did to-forehand, and had such privy draughts together, that many in the court spake of it, and in especial Sir Agravaire, Sir Gawaine's brother, for he was ever open-mouthed.

So befell that Sir Lancelot had many resorts of ladies and damosels that daily resorted unto him, that besought him to be their champion, and all such matters of right Sir Launcelot applied himself daily to do for the pleasure of Our Lord Jesu Christ. And ever as much he might he withdrew him from the company and fellowship of Queen Guenever, for to eschew the slander and noise; wherefore the queen waxed wroth with Sir Lancelot. And upon a day she called Sir Launcelot unto her chamber, and said thus: Sir Launcelot, I see and feel daily that thy love beginneth to slake, for thou has no joy to be in my presence, but ever thou art out of this court, and quarrels and matters thou hast nowadays for ladies and gentlewomen more than ever thou wert wont to have aforehand.

Ah madam, said Launcelot, in this ye must hold me excused for divers causes, one is, I was but late in the quest of the Sangreal; and I thank God of his great mercy, and never of my desert, that I saw in that my quest as much as saw any sinful man, and so it was told me. And if I had not had my privy thoughts to return your love again as I do ... Also, madam, with ye well that there be many man speak of our love in this court, and have you and me greatly in await ... wit ye well I dread them more for your sake than any fear I have of them myself, for I may happen to escape ... where ye must abide all that will be said unto you ... and wit ye well, madam, the boldness of you and me will bring us to great shame and slander; and that were me loth to see you dishonoured. And that is the cause I take upon me more for to do for damosels and maidens than ever I did to-fore, that men should understand my joy and my delight is my pleasure to have ado for damosels and maidens.'<sup>78</sup>

It would appear that his new appetite attracted greater popularity with the ladies and he made the most of the opportunity to look as if distracted away from Guinevere. No wonder the other knights were angry. The women were supposed to be attracted to virtuous knights not promiscuous ones. We all know about 'Bunny boilers' popularised by the film *Fatal Attraction* with Glen Close. That is the dark, very dark side of Aphrodite. She is a goddess after all and she

doesn't like being deceived. Again, it is important to remember that this aspect, just as the warm loving aspect of Aphrodite is part of a man's psychological make-up too. A woman and a man may express themselves differently but the source will be similar.

It's interesting that Guinevere does not interrupt his explanation, and waits to hear it all. (Athena makes the space for the evidence to be given to either rectify or fail to rectify, the situation) but the explanation has come too late, too much insult and damage has been caused, she absorbs the shock and then she explodes (betrayed and insulted Aphrodite and Athena):

'All this while the queen stood still and let Sir Launcelot say what he would. And when he had all said she brast out a-weeping, and so she sobbed and wept a great while. And when she might speak she said: Launcelot, now I well understand that thou art a false recreant knight and a common lecher, and lovest and holdest other ladies, and by me thou hast disdain and scorn. For wit thou well, she said, now I understand thy falsehood, and therefore shall I never love thee no more. And never be thou so hardy to come into my sight; and right here I discharge thee this court, that thou never come within it; and I forefend my fellowship, and on pain of thy head that thou see me no more. Right so Sir Launcelot departed with great heaviness, that unnethe he might sustain himself for great dole-making'.<sup>79</sup> Lancelot then informed Sir Bors, Sir Ector de Maris and Sir Lionel that the queen had banned him from the court. Sir Ector suggested he go to a certain hermitage and await better news, which he did.

'So when Sir Launcelot was departed, the queen outward made no manner of sorrow in showing to none of his blood nor to non other. But wit ye well, inwardly, as the book saith, she took great thought, but she bare it out with a proud countenance as though she felt nothing nor danger'.<sup>80</sup>

Following these events, the queen organised a feast for the knights of the Round Table, paying attention to Sir Gawain's liking for apples and pears. Sir Pinel poisoned some of the apples because he hated Gawain and took the opportunity to be rid of him. Unfortunately for Sir Pinel, Gawain did not eat the fruit, but Sir Patrise did, and fell down dead. Every knight jumped to his feet out of their minds with rage: 'For they wist not what to say; considering Queen Guenever made the feast and dinner, they all had suspicion unto her and Gawain realised he had just avoided death. Sir Mador de Porte on the other hand was enraged to have lost a good knight and accused Guinevere of his death. She was completely taken aback by the situation.

This episode shows the level of disapproval these knights had for the queen, that if she was guilty of disloyalty to the King with Lancelot that somehow made her a murderer also. Sir Pinel could have spoken out on the queen's behalf, even if not to acknowledge his part, but he didn't. He was treacherous and didn't care that the queen was falsely accused, knowing also that it was she who had taken the trouble to organise the feast especially and taken extra care with what food and 'dainties' were presented. Perhaps he was planning to 'kill two birds with one stone', we don't know. It was also perhaps a little too easy to say that the queen somehow prepared the food. How many queens busy themselves with the preparation of food? How often was Guinevere in the kitchen, and how conspicuous would it have been for her to have interfered with the food? Royalty have servants. It would appear that because of their disapproval of Guinevere's exploits with Lancelot, they were far too ready to accuse her of a terrible crime.

Sir Mador addressed Arthur and accused the queen of treason who appears to be equally shocked but also out of touch with the mood of his knights with respect to Guinevere. Because he had to remain neutral and be judge, he assumed that one of his knights would stand in his place to

defend his queen, who he had no doubt was innocent, but nobody was jumping to do that. All of the twenty four knights at the feast were suspicious of Guinevere. The intensity of their response appears completely misplaced and disproportionate and can only reflect their lack of sympathy, or true love, for their lord's wife, the queen, who in every other way had not been a cause for trouble. Arthur later asked her in private what had happened to which she replied: 'So God help me, I wot not how or in what manner.'<sup>81</sup>

Arthur asked where Lancelot was because he would have been the obvious person to jump to her defence, to which she replied that she did not know. Arthur asked Sir Bors to defend the queen but to her face he refused, saying he was as suspicious as the other knights and feared their reaction if he should defend her. He also accused her of driving Lancelot from the court and the company of knights who admired him so much, serving to reinforce the idea that the knight was of far greater importance than the queen. ' .. therefore madam, I marvel how ye dare for shame require me to do anything for you, in so much as you have chased him out of your country .... Alas, fair knight, said the queen, I put me wholly in your grace, and all that is done amiss I will amend as ye will counsel me. And therewith she kneeled down on both her knees, and besought Sir Bors to have mercy on her: Outher I shall have a shameful death, and thereto I never offended'.

The situation had suddenly become very precarious for Guinevere, but she was not too proud to beg, on her knees, in the knowledge that she was not guilty. It is disappointing how little faith this knight had in his queen, and how the ideal of Courtly Love had vanished. Arthur enters and also begs Sir Bors, but not on his knees, to defend his queen whom he is totally convinced is innocent. Arthur stands by his queen. It doesn't look like he is looking to punish her for anything or consider her guilty of bad conduct, probably because to date he has not found her to be wanting as his queen. His knights were not sharing his belief and openly denounced her to Sir Bors: 'As for our most noble King Arthur, we love him and honour him as ye do, but as for Queen Guenever we love her not, because she is a destroyer of good knights'. Surely if they had truly loved and honoured their king they would have taken his opinion more seriously and given Guinevere at least the benefit of the doubt, but not so.<sup>82</sup>

Fortunately Sir Bors later responded to Guinevere and found Lancelot at the hermitage and he was able to return to defend his queen's honour, saving her from a very nasty fate. (It would seem that Bors was afraid to stand up for the queen in front of his fellow knights given their prejudice. The round Table appears to have lost a leg or two.) Justice by combat does appear to be out of place somehow in the context of the Round Table, where all men are equal (well, some particular men, but obviously not women). I had found Queen Guinevere to be one who sought peaceable solutions, or 'proper' justice, as when the knight who beheaded his wife was sent to the Pope to receive 'justice', rather than fall into the pattern of combat and revenge by combat.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that later in a joust Lancelot wore the colours of the Fair Maiden of Astolat. Having just been rescued from being burnt, Guinevere's emotions were clearly still very high and 'she was nigh out of her mind for wrath'<sup>84</sup>. There follows a straight exchange of views and opinions between Guinevere and Sir Bors that also has them speaking more like equals, suggesting that Bors is ready to be civil, be reasonable and on good terms with her following the feast debacle. 'Ah Sir Bors, have ye heard say how falsely Sir Launcelot hath betrayed me? Alas madam, said Sir Bors, I am afeard he hath betrayed himself and us all ... but I daresay he did it for none evil intent ... Fie on him, said the queen, yet for all his pride and

bobounce there you proved yourself his better. Nay madam, say ye never more so, for he beat me and my fellows, and might have slain us, an he would.' Here we have an interesting challenge to the meaning of honour i.e. honour in terms of combat, honour in verbal integrity, honour in personal interactions ... Guinevere even compliments Bors as being Lancelot's 'better' in how he has reacted and behaved. Everyone was afraid of upsetting Lancelot and it was important to keep him 'onside' as it were. Perhaps diplomatically, Sir Bors says: 'as for my lord, Sir Launcelot, that he loveth no lady, gentlewoman, nor maid, but all he loveth in like much.' but I am not sure that was exactly helpful, but it was an attempt to dilute any apparent error or omission on Lancelot's part. Bors appears to have some of the diplomatic skills we might have hoped to see in the context of the Round Table.<sup>84</sup>

There is a delightful, if somewhat out of place and rather poetic Chapter, at the end of Book XVIII entitled; *How true love is likened to summer*. It speaks of how in the old days people remained faithful and loving for many years, whereas in current times love does not endure: 'But the old love was not so; men and women could love together seven years and no licours lusts between them, and then was love, truth and faithfulness: and lo in like wise was used love in King Arthur's days ... therefore all ye that may be lovers call unto your remembrance the month of May, like as did Queen Guenever, for whom here I make a little mention, that while she lived she was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end'.<sup>85</sup> It is like an observation made by 'the Narrator'. That chapter is just beautiful, and in the context of the whole story, gives weight to the idea of Guinevere as a good and just queen, a good friend and perhaps confidant (as in the letters between queens) and a loving woman, who in retrospect perhaps transcends the norm.

Queen Guinevere went a-Maying into the woods and fields around Westminster with ten knights and their ladies dressed in green (how delightfully pagan!) intending to meet Arthur by ten of the clock. Everyone was having a very enjoyable time. Sir Meliagrance had been looking for an opportunity to 'steal' the queen, but he knew he would never get past Lancelot or her own personal men of arms, the Queen's Knights. On this day she was not surrounded by her knights and Lancelot was not with her either. So there she was with her merry little company dressed in green and bedecked with flowers and greenery when Meliagrance attacked her party. She was not afraid to speak her mind, again we see the 'valiant' queen using strong words obviously aware that she was vulnerable, since Meliagrance appeared suddenly with 'eightyscore men well harnessed': 'Traitor knight, said Queen Guenever, what cast thou for to do? wilt thou shame thyself? Bethink thee how thou art a king's son, and knight of the Round Table, and thou be about to dishonour the noble king that made thee knight; thou shamest all knighthood and thyself, and ma, I let thee wit, shalt thou never shame, for I had liefer cut my own throat in twain rather than thou shouldst dishonour me. As for all this language, said Sir Meliagrance, be it as it may, for wit you well, madam, I have loved you many a year, and never or now could I get you at such an advantage as I do now, and therefore I will take you as I find you'.<sup>86</sup>

All ten knights then spoke at once reinforcing the queen's words and accusing Meliagrance of treachery. Her knights fought fearsomely but were outnumbered and overwhelmed and Guinevere could not allow them all to be killed and agreed to go with Meliagrance if her remaining knights could come also. She appears to keep her wits about her and considered more than her own personal safety, but she is very well aware that Meliagrance fears Lancelot and secretly despatches a servant with one of her rings to find Lancelot 'Go thou, when thou seest thy time, and bear this ring unto Sir Lancelot du Lac, and pray him as he loveth me that he will see me and rescue me, if ever he will have joy of me; and spare not thy horse, ..'. Realising



Guinevere had tricked him, Meliagrance left archers to wait for Lancelot. <sup>87</sup> This was a woman taking control in difficult circumstances and keeping her head, making her own plan, not accepting that she was as powerless as circumstances may have implied. Again we see the warrior queen, fighting back with her intellect.

Lancelot managed to get to Guinevere and in a panic Meliagrance rushed to get her forgiveness and effectively promised to be her servant henceforth, to which she replied: 'Ye say well, said the queen, and better is peace ever than war, and the noise the more is my worship'. <sup>88</sup> It would have been very good to have seen more of Guinevere's dialogue earlier in the book, but here again, she shows us the warrior queen who 'fights for peace' (Athena and Aphrodite combined).

Lancelot was pacing with frustration and anger on the other side of the door, but Guinevere came to him and told him that there had been a peaceful solution, to which Lancelot replied that if he had realised it would all be settled so easily he wouldn't have taken the trouble to come. (A sulky Lancelot? Did he just miss an opportunity to display his prowess?) She reassured him that his trouble had not been in vain. With other knights Lancelot explained that he was honouring Guinevere's truce but looked forward to an opportunity to sink his sword into Meliagrance for the dishonour and damage he had done. Guinevere knew she had to appease Lancelot and so arranged to meet him when everyone was asleep. She was not so preoccupied with Lancelot that she forgot her wounded knights, but saw to it that they were all well taken care of: 'Then when the season was, they went to their chambers, but in no wise the queen would not suffer the wounded knights to be from her, but they were laid within draughts by her chamber, upon beds and pillows, that she herself might see to them, that they wanted nothing.' <sup>89</sup> Guinevere is astute as well as caring. Even as a captive she is concerned for the knights, who we may also consider to have been among her 'friends' since she had been out A-Maying with a select group of them and their ladies, but she is also aware that it is important to keep Lancelot happy. That is not to suggest that she was not looking forward to their time together, so much as it seems she was giving a priority to her actions irrespective of the intensity of her emotions.

Her strong, good character continues to be established. This episode also suggests that she may have had knowledge of healing; not have unreasonable when considering the many injuries caused not only through battle but at the tournaments. She would have been close to many knights. At this time in history even a small injury could lead to death. Death would have been a far more familiar and frequent experience in the Middle Ages. Life expectancy would generally have been far shorter than we have come to expect. Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere appear to have lived very eventful but not very long, lives.

Lancelot went secretly to her chamber and 'took his pleasaunce and his liking until it was in the dawning of the day'.<sup>90</sup> She was late rising so Meliagrance came to wake her and finding blood in her bed believed 'that some of the wounded knights had lain by her all that night'. And decided he would accuse her of treason to her lord, the king. Lancelot having challenged Meliagrance ended up being trapped and captured, but he was found and nursed back to health just in time to save Guinevere from the flames, a second time, since Meliagrance was confident that Lancelot would not be there. Lancelot had the opportunity to fight Meliagrance, and even offered himself at a disadvantage but Meliagrance was killed and 'the king and queen made more of Sir Lancelot du Lake, and more he was cherished, than ever he was aforehand.' <sup>91</sup> (It seems

somewhat ridiculous that the knight who had just abducted Guinevere was taken seriously in accusing Guinevere of treason.

All previous problems appear to be left in the past at this point and Guinevere has managed to both keep the peace and give Lancelot what he wanted (her person and Meliagrance in revenge). Morgan has the reputation for trickery, but here with Guinevere we find a strategist with a heart. She has managed to reconcile a very difficult situation following her abduction, bringing back a sense of wellbeing to the king and the court. It would appear that her diplomatic skills and charm were essential to keeping 'the peace' in court. Lancelot is a gallant and heroic warrior but a bit of a hot head (we could even suggest an archetypal Mars figure), Meligiance is treacherous and self-interested, and Bors can do a bit of 'fence-sitting' but appears to have his eyes on what is going on. As knights of the Round Table it is clear they represent a whole spectrum of personalities, some of whom could be generally relied upon and some who could not, irrespective of their promise or oath to King Arthur.

As book XX begins, the beginning of the end is clearly written. Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred 'had ever had a privy hate unto the Dame Guenever and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Launcelot'. Sir Agravaire decided to speak openly among the knights gathered in Arthur's chamber: 'I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the queen, and all we know it so; and it is shamefully suffered by us all, that we all should suffer so noble a king as Arthur is so to be shamed'.<sup>92</sup>

What we have to take from this treachery, is the knowledge also that Arthur is not sharing a bed with Guinevere, certainly not all the time and maybe not with any frequency. We can also wonder how Arthur did not know about the affair, or whether he did and it wasn't a major issue, possibly because he needed Lancelot on his team, (more than he needed his wife, as it later becomes clear) and had almost completely lost him once when 'he went mad'. Arthur has a kingdom to run and probably had to be a pragmatist, weighing up when and whether to take action, because taking action involved the spilling of blood and the possible loss of some knights.

Sir Agravaire's sentiments were opposed by Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, but supported by Sir Mordred. Gawaine goes on to remind him of just how serious the repercussions will be if the accusation is made, and how many times Lancelot had saved the king and queen, had saved Gawaine himself and even Agravaire and Mordred; 'Methinketh brother such kind deeds and kindness should be remembered. Do as ye list, said Sir Agravaire, for I will lain it no longer. ...' The noise of these exchanges attracted Arthur's attention and Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred openly accuse Lancelot of bedding the queen and how he is therefore a traitor. Arthur remains remarkably cool-headed in the face of the accusations. Perhaps he knew that one day something would happen. It's difficult to imagine that he really had no idea of what went on between Lancelot and Guinevere in such a close community as his court. He is under no illusion that whoever makes the accusation will bring a challenge from Lancelot who, as the greatest knight is never beaten.<sup>93</sup>

It is possible Arthur may also have decided not to challenge Lancelot with respect to his wife in order to avoid being killed in combat himself. He 'had a deeming, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Launcelot had done so much for him and the queen so many times...' <sup>75</sup> Following the uproar, Sir Bors tried to prevent him seeing Guinevere that night in particular because Arthur had made a point of saying he would be out all night and that Agravaire had been watching Lancelot continually. (Bors appears again as trying to keep the peace. He has been watching events

unfold and concerned that there could be a disastrous outcome should Lancelot be found with the Queen.) Lancelot said he was only going to speak with the queen. Agravaine, Mordred and twelve knights of the Round Table discovered Lancelot with the queen and accused him of being a traitor. Lancelot was convinced he would be slain and asked Guinevere to pray for his soul and promised that Sir Bors, his nephew and other relatives, would save her from the fire: 'Truly, said the queen, I would an it please God that they would take me and slay me, and suffer you to escape. That shall never be, said Sir Lancelot...' <sup>95</sup> Lancelot took on Agravaine and killed him, the twelve knights and wounded Mordred, who ran away, then returned to the queen: 'Madam, now wit you well all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe; and therefore madam, an it like you that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventures dangerous. That is not best, said the queen; meseemeth now ye ave done so much harm, it will be best ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as to-morn they will put me unto the death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best. I will well, said Sir Launcelot, for have ye no doubt, while I am living I shall rescue you. And then he kissed her, and either gave other a ring; and so there he left the queen, and went to his lodging.' <sup>96</sup> So Lancelot gathered his knights around him and explained the situation and that he had met Guinevere to talk and that a trap had be laid with Arthur's knowledge: 'And therefore the king will in his heat and malice judge the queen to the fire, and that I may not suffer, that she should be brent for my sake, for an I may be heard and suffered and so taken, I will fight for the queen, that she is a true lady unto her lord; but the king in is heat I dread me will not take me as I ought to be taken..' <sup>97</sup> The inevitable has happened. Now their affair is completely exposed, whether they were actually just having a chat or being more intimate.

Passions were now running high in all quarters and it would appear that calm reason was strongest around Guinevere who is thinking through the best way to save Lancelot first and herself second. She makes no mention here of Arthur and even Lancelot is not expecting any mercy from him by this point. She appears to be very clear headed in the face of terrible danger to her person. Perhaps this moment is one that she may have been expecting to happen at some point. Aphrodite looks to prioritise Lancelot and Athena considers the best possible plan in the circumstances.

Mordred was not to be deterred and reported to Arthur the death of thirteen knights of the Round Table, as well as being badly wounded himself. Arthur took his report as proof of Guinevere's infidelity but Gawaine spoke up suggesting that Lancelot being a long time protector, may have been with her for no suspicious reason: 'For I dare say, said Gawaine, my lady, your queen, is to you both good and true; and as for Sir Launcelot, said Sir Gawaine, I dare say he will make it good upon any knight living that will put upon himself villainy or shame, and in like wise he will make good for my lady, Dame Guenever.' <sup>98</sup> At this point Gawaine, who is particularly dear to Arthur, defends the queen and plays peacemaker.

Either Arthur is truly beside himself or in those times an accusation without trial was deemed good enough reason to burn a queen, (which would suggest that women were burnt with little evidence). Arthur appears to have totally hardened against both Lancelot and Guinevere, although he does promise that she will face the law. Lancelot will have a shameful death if he can get his hands on him. Perhaps Arthur means all of these threats, but perhaps Arthur also realises that he has to take a stand now that the affair is unavoidably public in order to retain his own position. Losing Lancelot from his company of knights will be a great loss. He appears to be avoiding having a conversation with his wife, even though he is king and he has ultimate

authority. Would Guinevere be able to influence his opinion I wonder. She can obviously be very cool-headed and very persuasive.

Guinevere is deemed guilty and sentenced to be burnt, but Gawaine refuses to accept the judgement and refuses to deliver her to her death. When she stood ready for her sentence to be carried out, Lancelot and his knights rushed in to save her, carrying her away to Joyous Gard. There can be little doubt of the devotion of these lovers.

It appears that Arthur suddenly realised that he had lost forty knights, the fellowship of Sir Lancelot and his blood and particularly Gawaine's brothers Gareth and Gaheris: 'Alas, that ever I bare crown upon my head!' ... 'And wit you well my heart was never so heavy than it is now, and much more I am sorrier for my good knights' loss than for the loss of my fair queen; for queens I might have enow, but such fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company'<sup>99</sup> and he wept and swooned at the treachery of Agravaine and Mordred. It is clear that his heart was hardened against Guinevere, but Arthur appears to be struggling with the end of the fellowship. If the fellowship were true to him and their mutual oaths, this situation would never have arisen. It would appear that Arthur had at last clearly seen the signs that the magnificent times of the Knights of the Round Table were faltering could no longer be denied or reversed. He was a great leader, it is impossible to imagine that a great leader who anticipates the actions of an adversary, would have missed signs of discontent among his knights.

The ease with which he appears to consider Guinevere disposable is totally chilling. He likely loved his wife. He does not appear to have registered any complaints against her throughout the bulk of the book, but he loved his knights so much more and she, he now believed, had become the reason that he lost his greatest love, the Fellowship, making her his enemy. Arthur is a man in extreme distress; everything he has fought for, everything he has achieved is just slipping through his fingers.

Gawaine swore to pursue Lancelot until one or the other of them were killed, because of the death of his brothers at Lancelot's hand. Arthur and his knights went with him to lay siege to Joyous Gard where Arthur challenged him man to man but Lancelot refused to fight his noble king: 'I am thy mortal foe ... thou hast lain with my queen ... and like a traitor taken her from me by force.' ... '.. my lady, Queen Guenever, is a true lady unto your personas any living is unto her lord ... Howbeit it hath liked her good grace to have me in chiete, and to cherish me more than any other knight;...' <sup>100</sup> The battle lines were drawn and they began their fight, but news of it travelled throughout Christendom so that the Pope came to intervene and an agreement made for Lancelot to return Quenevere to Arthur: 'and then the tears brast out of the king's eyen.' <sup>101</sup>

The conflict and the fury were subdued and peace recovered by the intervention of the Pope and Guinevere's return was a beautiful, formal event. Lancelot formally brought Guinevere to Arthur and made a full account of the plot to deceive the king, re-stating the depth of his devotion to both Arthur and Guenivere, and reiterating that Guinevere was 'clean and true'. †

<sup>102</sup> Lancelot's response is a promise to travel barefoot on Pilgrimage from Sandwich to Carlisle as penance for the death of Gareth and Gaheris. 'All the knights and ladies wept' However Arthur decides, Gawain vows that he will never forgive Lancelot. <sup>103</sup> If it were not for the Pope's intervention, Gawaine would challenge Lancelot. Now Lancelot is heartbroken that he cannot

make peace with Gawaine and Arthur: 'Truly me repenteth that ever I came in this realm, that should be thus shamefully banished, undeserved and causeless' <sup>104</sup>

So Lancelot leaves the court still determined to exonerate the queen, he 'kissed the queen; and then he said all openly, Now let see what he be in this place that dare say the queen is not true unto my lord Arthur.' 'and there was neither king, duke, nor earl, baron nor knight, lady nor gentlewoman. But all they wept as people out of their mind, except Sir Gawaine.' <sup>105</sup>

Lancelot swears that Guinevere has not betrayed Arthur, but we know that they have shared a lot of passionate nights over the years. Is their passion of the Courtly Love kind? It certainly doesn't sound like it, so Lancelot is lying, but lying to defend and protect the queen, so perhaps that makes it honourable? He obviously cannot bear the thought of her being burnt and goes to extreme lengths to save her, more than once. Their passion brings them together, drives them apart and fixes their determination to protect each other. Guinevere is definitely a very strong woman. She is co conspirator and nemesis of the Greatest Knight, she is his counterpart, and his fate. Arthur loves his knights, loves Lancelot more than his wife and queen. Lancelot loves Guinevere more than his king.

Like Arthur, given his fame and prowess, Lancelot could have just about any woman he chose and it appears that women were throwing themselves at him. He was a 'celebrity'. whatever caused the attraction between Guinevere and these two powerful men, she has to have been an equally strong woman. As Athena, Aphrodite and wise Vesta (Hestia) she was a match for both the king and Lancelot, and all with the desire for peace and harmony that reflected her Round Table.

She brought love to both of these men in a way that they would recognise it. Arthur's love for Guinevere doesn't appear to have the same overt sexual passion. It appears to be more about how she graced his court creating beauty and harmony. She made his court more attractive, built its reputation, particularly with respect to Courtly Love, wise counsel and healing, it would appear. The knights were doing their chivalrous deeds, but the court overseen by Guinevere, is where those opportunities arose or were created. He married her to be his queen, probably not specifically to have her as a lover. Their relationship ran on different criteria. Being a different relationship does not make it less meaningful. It had a different value. Guinevere was genuinely an 'Asset', but an asset he was determined to have because he loved her. Guinevere doubtless had personal magnetism.

It was a different kind of love from the one shared by Lancelot and Guinevere. Arthur could indulge his physical passions elsewhere if he chose. He was king after all. She appears to have been a good and valued queen. We are left wondering what constitutes betrayal, what is honour?. They appear to be somewhat variable depending on circumstance.

Lancelot left King Arthur's court and crossed the sea with some of his knights who were well-rewarded. Arthur and Gawain followed to wage a war which lasted half a year and a great many died. <sup>106</sup>

In Arthur's absence, with reports suggesting the war was not going well, Mordred took the opportunity to spread the rumour that Arthur had died and pronounce himself king, to which end, he was crowned. He decided that he would marry Guenevere, his uncle's (or as is sometimes said, his father's) wife in spite of the disapproval of the bishop of Canterbury. Showing her cool-headedness again, she made as if to agree, then tricked Mordred and escaped to the Tower of

London with plenty of supplies. She must still have had her beauty to be the object of desire, she was still a valuable 'asset' for this younger man, who like Arthur and Lancelot before him, would have been free to choose from a great many fair ladies. The bishop was not alone in disapproving the marriage. She 'answered him shortly, openly and privily, that she had liefer slay herself than be married with him'.<sup>107</sup> Again she is fearless in making her opinion clear to Mordred, but was not so foolish as to leave herself vulnerable to his response.

Before he could get her out of the Tower, news came that Arthur was returning with a great company to be avenged on Mordred. So began another round of misinformation, denouncing Arthur as a bad king only interested in war and strife. Mordred met Arthur as he landed at Dover and Gawain was mortally wounded, writing to Lancelot to return before he died. Arthur and Mordred agreed a day and time to meet on the battlefield where Mordred was killed and Arthur badly wounded. Before he boarded a barge with many fair ladies and a queen in black hoods weeping and wailing, he instructed Sir Bedivere to cast Excalibur into the water, then they rowed him away out to sea.<sup>108</sup>

Arthur was gone. And yet there are those who say he is not dead: 'and men say he shall come again, and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say: here in this world he changed his life ... And when Queen Guenever understood that King Arthur was slain, and all the noble knights, Sir Mordred and all the remnant, then the queen stole away, and five ladies with her, and so she went to Almesbury; and there she let make herself a nun, and ware white clothes and black, and penance she took, as ever did sinful lady in this land, and never creature could make her merry; but lived in fasting, prayers and almsdeeds, that all manner of people marvelled how virtuously she was changed.'<sup>109</sup> There she stayed to become Abbess.

Meanwhile it seems Lancelot has heard Mordred has usurped the throne and had besieged Guinevere in the Tower. He was very angry. He organised masses and ritual for the loss of Gawaine and then set his sights on Guinevere, believing her to be in great distress: 'for as I hear say she hath had great pain and much disease; and I heard say that she is fled into the west.'<sup>110</sup> He found her at a nunnery in Almesbury and when she saw him 'swooned' three times and told the ladies present: 'Through this man and me hath all this war been wrought, and the death of the most noblest knights of the world; for through our love that we have loved together is my most noble lord slain. Therefore Sir Launcelot, with thou well I am set in such a plight to get my soul-heal; and yet I trust through God's grace that after my death to have a sight of the blessed face of Christ, and at domesday to sit on his right side, for as sinful as ever I was are saints in heaven. Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I require thee and beseech thee heartily, for all the love that ever was betwixt us, that thou never see me more in the visage; and I command thee, on God's behalf, that thou forsake my company, and to thy kingdom thou turn again, and keep well thy realm from war and wrack; for as well as I have loved thee, mine heart will not serve me to see thee, fro through thee and me is the flower of kings and knights destroyed; therefore Sir Launcelot, go to thy realm, and there take thee a wife, and live with her with joy and bliss; and I pray thee heartily, pray for me to our Lord that I may amend my misliving. ...

Nay, madam, wit you well that shall I never do, for I shall never be so false to you of that I have promised... and God defend but I should forsake the world as ye have done ... and therefore, lady, sithen ye have taken you to perfection, I must needs take me to perfection of right ... But sithen I find you thus disposed, I ensure you faithfully, I will ever take me to penance, and pray while my life lasteth ...'<sup>111</sup> Heartbroken to hear of the loss of Arthur, Lancelot

continued with his promise to become a monk, in which he was joined by eight of his knights. All forewent worldly riches and Lancelot became a priest. He had a vision that Guinever was close to death and to ensure that upon her death she would be buried beside Arthur. He arrived at the nunnery with his knights now monks to find that she has died only shortly before their arrival. She had told her ladies the same message as in Lancelot's vision and so she was taken to Glastonbury to be buried beside Arthur with great ceremony.

Lancelot was overwhelmed and said to his 'hermit' who criticised him for his extreme emotional display: 'Truly, said Sir Launcelot, I trust I do not displease God, for He knoweth my intent. For my sorrow was not, nor is not for any rejoicing of sin, but my sorrow may never have end. For when I remember of her beauty, and of her noblesse, that was both with her king and with her, so when I saw his corpse and her corpse so lie together, truly mine heart would not serve to sustain my careful body. Also when I remember me how by my default, mine orgule and my pride, that they were both laid full low, that were peerless that ever was living of Christian people, wit you well, said Sir Launcelot, this remembered, of their kindness and my unkindness, sank so to mine heart, that I might not sustain myself.' <sup>112</sup> Following this intense emotional episode, Launcelot wasted away until he died, refusing to eat and drink and was buried with 'great devotion.' Sir Ector gave a eulogy: 'There thou liest, that thou were never matched by earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courteoust knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrad horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman. And thou were the kindest man that ever struck with sword. And thou were the goodliest person that ever came among press of knights. And thou was the meekest man and the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest. Then there was weeping and dolour out of measure.' <sup>113</sup>

The devotion in life was expressed just as clearly as death drew near. Both Lancelot and Guinevere sought the greatest peace and ease for each other until the very end.

## Epilogue

There is so much research and interpretation of the Arthurian myths and the Grail stories, that the ideas voiced here may well appear misplaced. I would only say that this little piece of work has been meaningful for me even though within the greater scope of the subject it is likely to present as very under-informed and naïve, if not actually ignorant, for which I sincerely apologise. I personally have found a closer relationship with ideas around Venus by looking for Guinevere.

I understand and appreciate that Morgan le Fay, rather than Guinevere, is considered Arthur's 'other half'. She is in his life whether he likes it or not as his older half-sister. She is family. They share roots which is very much the territory of the Moon. He also has family ties via Mordred to his mother Morgause, Morgan's sister and his own half-sister. These family tensions run throughout the story and Mordred becomes Arthur's nemesis, not Guinevere. She may have hurt him, but she did not kill him. It would have been possible for Guinevere and Lancelot to plot and scheme to overthrow Arthur, but they both loved and respected him too much and kept their liaison reasonably secret. I would imagine that was difficult living in such a close community

as the court. Arthur was killed by history that returned, having begun before he even met Guinevere, and following the collapse of the fellowship of the Round Table due to Gawaine's vow.

Guinevere represents a choice. Arthur very specifically chooses Guinevere. He has already met her and apparently experienced 'love at first sight'. In theory he could have said to Merlin: 'I see your point, yes, she is a strong-willed woman. She could be trouble. I trust your judgement. Your wisdom has served me well in the past and I will heed it now. The taking of a wife, especially for a king, requires some objectivity'. But no, he says nothing of the kind. Effectively he says to Merlin: 'Guinevere's the one I want and there is no way you are going to change my mind.' Arthur is adamant.

He has no outside pressures apart from the need for a wife. His status and attractive qualities put him in a position where he probably had a vast choice. *Le Morte d'Arthur* appears to be full of very fair ladies. He has made a distinct choice. I would say this is about Venus. It may be that her strength of character appealed to him. This is a man who likes a challenge. It would also appear that, apart from the affair with Lancelot, she is nothing but a loyal and supportive queen. There are no intrigues about her trying to undermine the king or spread rumour and gossip.

I have found her to be a queen with independent authority with the respect of the court, as Athena. I have found her to be also very human in her expression as both an approachable woman (she fell about laughing with some knights at a joust and they continued in that manner all night) and of course as a lover, both in her attraction and apparent lack of resistance to Lancelot's approaches, but also in her rage and jealousy. Here is Aphrodite. It makes for a good story and heralds the breaking of the fellowship, which turns out to be more of an issue to Arthur than the loss or betrayal of his wife.

When Guinevere is accused of poisoning a knight at a feast, Arthur pleads with Sir Bors to defend her. He does not question her innocence. This is not a king looking for an excuse to rid himself of a troublesome wife, even though we are led to believe the rumour about her involvement with Lancelot is well established in the court, which is why the group of knights is so ready to accuse her of poisoning one of them. A wanton wife is inevitably also readily considered to be a murderer it seems, in spite of her good history with knights. Arthur seeks to protect her. He is also probably protecting Lancelot, his Greatest Knight. He may just have wanted to protect her because she was his wife and he loved her whether she was involved with Lancelot or not. Had Arthur wanted to replace Guinevere, I doubt it would have been that difficult, but I do believe she had the respect of the court and was on genuinely good terms with many or most of them.

Knights, ladies and damosels appear to be doing much 'laying with' throughout the book when the knights are not busy trying to chop each other up. (Obviously they had to keep their fighting wits sharp. These were undoubtedly uncertain times and history shows how wars and fighting had become the backdrop to the stories. These were also times when the idea of a long life were not the usual or assumed outcome. Figures may be unreliable, but the usual lifespan in the earlier versions of the stories may have been an average of about 35 years old with infant death running at 30%. By the end of the period in which the stories are set, life expectancy may have been up to 40 years old as an average. That is not to say nobody grew old, yes they did and 50 to 55 would have been a good age. This story may have begun with the main characters in their teens, with women bearing children in their early rather than late teens.



Men trained to arms as children and they could all have been gone before reaching forty, possibly sooner.).

It is hardly surprising that the Courtly Love ideal would fail. It was an ideal after all. Ideals represent a direction not necessarily an outcome. Like the Round Table itself. That was an ideal, but the knights, whilst joining together to support Arthur, had fights among themselves. If we were to consider from our own experience, that if someone pledged to honour you, defend you and give you the purest spiritual love for months and years, looking into your eyes (assuming that was allowed!) and speaking of their love for you, of doing noble deeds, winning favours for you at the joust.... It is unrealistic to imagine that this could not go very badly awry. It may be reasonable to consider that when on p367 in *Le Morte d'Arthur* following Gawaine's vow to 'labour in the quest of the Sangreal, that I shall hold me out a twelvemonth and a day, or more if it need be, and never shall I return again unto the court until I have seen it more openly than it hath been seen here...' and all the knights stood and vowed to do the same, that was a devastating blow to Arthur. A bit of hanky panky going on with his wife possibly registered nothing like the sense of betrayal he appeared to feel, when all of his Knights of the Round Table decided to go on a quest together in that spontaneous way. It might suggest that they were restless and ready for the invitation to go on an adventure, and what better adventure than to find the Sangreal.

There wasn't going to be any acceptable opposition to that quest. Guinevere was used as a focus for the ultimate failure of the fellowship, but maybe the fellowship didn't fail, it just went into a different phase. Perhaps these knights, these men trained for battle, had grown weary of a life of Courtly Love. 'Love became a faith to live by' <sup>36</sup> and having enjoyed more settled times, these fighting men were restless and hankered after some action. As Gawain made his vow, Arthur was no longer the main focus of his knights. It's hard to begin to imagine suddenly how vulnerable that would have made Arthur feel. In times where territory and status was won and maintained by physical battle, effectively the most powerful part of his army said: 'we off on a different mission' without any consultation, using a public vow made at a large gathering. Everyone had come home to Camelot and celebrated evensong at the great minster. The occasion sounds quite euphoric and quite likely enhanced with wine. The ideals around both love between man and woman and man for man fell apart. Arthur was devastated: 'ye have nigh slain me with the vow and promise that ye have made... .. And therewith the tears fell in his eyes. And then he said: Gawaine, Gawaine, ye have set me in great sorrow, for I have great doubt that my true fellowship shall never meet here more again... When the queen, ladies, and gentlewomen, wist these tidings, they had such sorrow and heaviness that there might be no tongue tell it ...' T. Malory p368 None of the womenfolk were to be allowed to accompany their knights on this cause, as they had previously on different missions.

One way of looking at the unfolding story is that men, honourable men in the shape of knights guided by their king, moved through an awareness of women that may initially have been the most base experience of Aphrodite, the sex object, into the idea that there was more to womankind and that their quest was to experience that different more beautiful or rarified cerebral/spiritual love with women, then to reach a point where there was a desire for the greatest expression of ideal love of the feminine in the quest for the Grail, the ultimate female symbol, (but she was still objectified albeit in a far more respectful way) albeit as a remote beauty to adore. This woman was not earthy, but was 'worshipped' through poetry, song and deeds of gallantry: Athena. The Queen was out of reach, beyond usual familiarities and at the

centre of the court. At that level, the Fellowship of the Round Table could be considered a success, but perhaps it went beyond the scope of Arthur's original vision.

Whatever the spiritual or psychological interpretations or ramifications, I believe it is worth recalling the words of Christine Fell: ... Within a century (of the Norman Conquest) the tide had turned: in literature the image of women lost touch with reality, and in reality women lost the status which they had so long enjoyed.'

In looking for *Guinevere*, I believe I found a strong woman, a passionate woman, an intelligent woman who used her influence to promote harmony and beauty. She was a strong queen as Arthur's wife: Athena, and as Lancelot's lover and muse: Aphrodite perhaps. She was at the centre of both men's lives and as the flame at the centre of the Round Table, whole court and community, the goddess Hestia. The fellowship of knights and the court revolved around her. They returned to her and the court. She was at the centre of court etiquette and observer of behaviour towards ladies. She was a mediator. I believe she may not have been the cause of much drama because she was doing a good job as queen and calming the waters rather than stirring them, maintaining the status quo especially when Arthur was absent. She was valued and honoured by the knights and the court it would appear, until Agravaine and Mordred began to stir up the troubles that ultimately lead to the collapse of the Round Table. *Guinevere* was treasured. She was guarded and even had her own knights to keep her safe. She was a jewel in her own right: she was valuable.

I would maintain that Hestia/Vesta was there. She was his home focus, even though there were no children. She is the one Arthur returns to, she empowers him, gives him strength by just being with him, probably using her wisdom as well as her human touch, but they also spend time apart. She was his hearth. There are various points at which 'Arthur returned' and *Guinevere* was there at the centre of his court.' I believe she was the centre. It was her Table, her territory: equality, honour and the care of, and concern for, women.

She was a shrewd negotiator and mentally sharp, but she was also approachable and caring (the knights kept close that she could care for them when she was abducted by Meliagrance, for instance) possibly a healer one with knowledge of healing. (On page 469 Book XIX chapter X: 'How Sir Urre came into Arthur's court for to be healed of his wounds...' Sir Urre is said to have come from Hungary and his mother brought him a very long distance to Arthur's court for healing. Arthur himself began the process of the healing which was ultimately achieved by Sir Lancelot. Healing was clearly an accepted aspect of court life).

So *Guinevere* does not have a very strong presence until the end. I believe that what we have in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is a fabulous collection of stories. It is a great literary achievement, but it seems that many captivating, magical and engaging tales having been passed by word of mouth, have been edited and diluted through the lens of Medieval Christianity and superimposed on a backdrop of warfare, thereby losing some of their original vibrancy. Perhaps the whole piece became more 'military' in its focus, losing the richness of the parts played by the female characters, or indeed male characters who were not Merlin, knight or king. However, I believe I have found enough references to give *Guinevere* an image. Ideas of the goddess archetypes may help to sift through those pieces of information about *Guinevere* showing that she is regal, she has the qualities and power and influence of a queen, she is also a caring individual, a friend and someone who can join in with a joke, she is sociable, advocates peace rather than war, cares for the wounded and is indeed valiant.

This woman is not the walk-over that the lack of presence in the book might suggest. She stands her ground with words, not a sword. She is passionate, and where Lancelot is concerned, that passion is hard, if not impossible, to control. The most she manages is damage limitation, but even here, her priority is what is best for Lancelot, not herself. I believe many can identify with her qualities. She has a cool head under pressure. All this is great news for us, because she is reflected in that bright star that is the planet Venus, in her continuing passage through the heavens and reflected in our lives.

In Emma Jung's book, she has reproduced in her section on the adventures of Gauvain a passage in which Gauvain extolls the virtues of Queen Guinevere, (translated from French). She points out that 'it is significant concerning the role and influence of women in those days.'

'As a wise master'  
teaches small children,  
so My Lady the Queen  
teaches and instructs everyone.  
All good comes from and moves through her.  
No one goes uncomforted  
from My Lady's presence.  
She well knows the worth of each  
and what to do for each  
in order that she may please him.  
No man does good or honour  
to whom My Lady has not taught it,  
and none is so discontented  
that he may part from My Lady in anger.' <sup>116</sup>

It occurred to me that Guinevere is like one of those impossibly beautiful pieces of Saxon jewellery finely fashioned in gold and set with precious red garnet, that has been buried in the ground for over a millennium, which, once the mud has been washed off, is every bit as bright and beautiful as the day it was lost from sight. (Judy Hall in her *Crystal Bible* notes that Red Garnet represents love. Attuned to the heart energy, it revitalises feelings and enhances sexuality. Red garnet controls anger, especially toward the self.)

So Guinevere as an image remains a regal, heartwarming and heartbreaking, stunningly beautiful and mesmerising woman, 'being', archetype, goddess, guardian and keeper, however we may perceive her and that she is forever reflected as the sparkling planet Venus moving constantly through the heavens.

Ella Moonbridge

30 September 2022

*Guinevere as Venus: sources:*

Wendy **Berg**: Guinevere and the Round Table

Christine **Fell**: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066

Arielle **Guttman**: Venus Star Rising – A new cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Arielle **Guttman** and Kenneth **Johnson**: Mythic Astrology

Alice O. **Howell**: Jungian Symbolism in Astrology

Carl G **Jung**: Aspects of the Feminine

Emma **Jung** and Marie Louise von Franz: The Grail Legend

**Larousse** : World Mythology

Sir Thomas **Malory**: Le Morte d'Arthur

John **Matthews**: The Arthurian Tradition

John **Matthews**: the Grail: Quest for the Eternal

*Guinevere as Venus references:*

<sup>1</sup> Arielle Guttman and Kenneth Johnson: Mythic Astrology pp11/12

<sup>2</sup> Arielle Guttman and Kenneth Johnson: Mythic Astrology p41

<sup>3</sup> Arielle Guttman and Kenneth Johnson: Mythic Astrology pp42/4

<sup>4</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century p46

<sup>5</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century p14

<sup>7</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century p46 Introduction X

<sup>8</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century p57

<sup>9</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century pp22/3

<sup>10</sup> Roy Gillett: The Secret Language of Astrology p36

<sup>11</sup> Arielle Guttman: Venus Star Rising – A new Cosmology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century p47

<sup>12</sup> John Matthews: The Arthurian Tradition p5

<sup>13</sup> John Matthews: The Arthurian Tradition pp11 & 13

<sup>14</sup> John Matthews: The Arthurian Tradition pp16

<sup>15</sup> John Matthews: The Arthurian Tradition pp39/40

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur pp381/2

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p19

- <sup>18</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p122
- <sup>19</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p39
- <sup>20</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 pp47/9
- <sup>21</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 pp56/7
- <sup>22</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p61
- <sup>23</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p150
- <sup>24</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p149
- <sup>25</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p152
- <sup>26</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p152
- <sup>27</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p153
- <sup>28</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p154
- <sup>29</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p157
- <sup>30</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 p161
- <sup>31</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 pp163/4
- <sup>32</sup> C.J. Jung: Aspects of the Feminine p35
- <sup>33</sup> C.J. Jung: Aspects of the Feminine pp20/21
- <sup>34</sup> John Matthews: The Grail: Quest for the Eternal p73
- <sup>35</sup> Larrouse World Mythology: p351
- <sup>36</sup> John Matthews: The Grail: Quest for the Eternal pp12/13
- <sup>37</sup> Christine Fell: Women in Anglo Saxon England and the impact of 1066 pp142
- <sup>38</sup> Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p5
- <sup>39</sup> Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p5
- <sup>40</sup> Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p7
- <sup>41</sup> C.J. Jung: Aspects of the Feminine p165
- <sup>42</sup> Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p8
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p91
- <sup>44</sup> Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p6
- <sup>45</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p91
- <sup>46</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p192
- <sup>47</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p149

- 48 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p64
- 49 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p460
- 50 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p198
- 51 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p114
- 52 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur pp119/20
- 53 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p285
- 54 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur pp119/20
- 55 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p209
- 56 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p288
- 57 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p289
- 58 Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p9
- 59 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p52
- 60 Wendy Berg: Gwenevere and The Round Table p26
- 61 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p27
- 62 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p28
- 63 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur pp30/31
- 64 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p27
- 65 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p51
- 66 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p52
- 67 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p52
- 68 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p122
- 69 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p74
- 70 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p103
- 71 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p105
- 72 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p344
- 73 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p350
- 74 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p354
- 75 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p358
- 76 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p368
- 76 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p368

- <sup>76</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p368
- <sup>76</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p368
- <sup>77</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p422
- <sup>78</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur pp431/2
- <sup>79</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p432
- <sup>80</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p432
- <sup>81</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p433/4
- <sup>82</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p435
- <sup>83</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p446
- <sup>84</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p447
- <sup>85</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p459
- <sup>86</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p460
- <sup>87</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p461
- <sup>88</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p463
- <sup>89</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p465
- <sup>90</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p465
- <sup>91</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p469
- <sup>92</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p474
- <sup>93</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p475
- <sup>94</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p475
- <sup>95</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p477
- <sup>96</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p478
- <sup>97</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p479
- <sup>98</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p481
- <sup>99</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p483
- <sup>100</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p485
- <sup>101</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p489
- <sup>102</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p490
- <sup>103</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p491
- <sup>104</sup> Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p492

- 105 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p493
- 106 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p496
- 107 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p500
- 108 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p506
- 109 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p507
- 110 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p508
- 111 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p509
- 112 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p511
- 113 Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur p513
- 114 Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz: TheGrail Legend p21
- 115 Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz: TheGrail Legend p232
- 116 Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz: TheGrail Legend p234
- 117 Alice O. Howell: Jungian Symbolism in Astrology p139