

The Character Model in *Le Morte Darthur*

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Resumen

Los personajes de *La muerte de Arturo*, de Sir Thomas Malory, no se ajustan a la definición estándar típica de los personajes del *romance*. De hecho, pueden ser ubicados en una especie de estado transitorio que ha sido denominado *modelo de personaje*. Tras dilucidar la naturaleza de tal concepto, este artículo procede a investigar dos modelos relativos a mujeres en *La Muerte de Arturo*: «La Dama» y «La Mujer con Poderes Mágicos».

Abstract

The characters in Sir Thomas Malory's *La Morte D'arthur* do not conform to the standard definition of Romance personae. In fact, they can be placed in a kind of transitional stage which has been called a *Character's Model*. After elucidating the nature of such a concept, this paper goes on to investigate two Character's Models of women in the *Le Morte Darthur*: «The Lady» and «The Woman with Magical Powers».

Palabras clave

La muerte de Arturo
Malory
Caracterización
Tipo
Modelo de personaje
La dama
La mujer con poderes mágicos

Key words

Le Morte Darthur
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*In the memory of my beloved
teacher Prof. Ruth Reichelberg,
who taught me what it means
to be an academic person
and a true Character*

Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte* is a mixture of at least two genres, Romance and Chronicle (Pochoda 1971). As McCarthy writes, his style is not of one piece: «Malory's *matière* is the *matière* of romance, but the *sens*, the 'feeling', is perhaps not» (1988: 148). Hence, his characters do not follow the usual pattern of characterization in Romances that is as *types*. But neither have they developed into characters with

psychological depth, as, for example, F. Ackerman claims in her article on Malory's characterization (2001). The formation of the *Morte's* characters is probably affected by the combination of two different genres: the romance, whose characters are mainly referred to as *types*, and the chronicle, whose characters are more realistic and mimetic. In this article, I try a new approach to Malory's characterization and show that it is a combination of two character formats: the *type* and the *character*. I call this special combination a *character model*.

The character model is a transition between true type and true character. It is a development of the type into the character and it embodies several common, typical criteria. The character model accommodates several completely different personae in a given work under one name. At times both author and readers are ambivalent toward these personae. The character model personae embody contradictions: they are neither one-dimensional like the type, but they have not yet attained in their development the more rounded and complex nature of characters. I focus on two such female character models: the *Lady* and the *Woman with Magical Powers*, and use these models as examples of Malory's characterization in general.

THE CHARACTER MODEL

Frye places the essential difference between *novel* and *romance* in the conception of characterization: in the novel, the characters are mimetic and realistic; in the romance, they are individuals who act *in vacuo*. The romance, whose characters are heroes, is an intermediate-genre between the novel, whose characters are human, and the myth, whose characters are the gods (1973: 304-306). Stevens also tries to separate characters in novels, with their psychological depth and mimesis, from romance characters that he defines as types:

The enrichment which is most liable to misunderstanding is the enrichment of 'character'. If the word 'character' could be avoided, I would avoid it, because it resounds with all the presuppositions of realistic fiction. However, 'persons' would raise other objections, and 'dramatis personae' others again. By the term 'characters' I mean simply and neutrally the walkers and talkers who people the imaginary world. The 'characters' of romance are white and black, good men and bad men, saints and devils. Wickedness is idealized as well as goodness; there is very little

room in romance for comfortable, smudgy greys of ordinary life, of *l'homme moyen sensuel* –no, nor woman neither... (1973: 169-170)

From Stevens's use of the term *type*, it is impossible to understand its accurate meaning. Wellek divides the type into two different meanings:

«Type» as a term has a complex history which I can trace here only very briefly. In Germany, Schelling used it in the sense of a great universal figure of mythical proportion: Hamlet, Falstaff, Don Quixote, Faust are types. In this sense the term was imported into France by Charles Nodier in an essay, «Des Types en littérature» (1832) and it is used pervasively in Hugo's strange rhapsody on Shakespeare (1864). Don Juan, Shylock, Achilles, Iago, Prometheus, and Hamlet are his examples of «types», Adams –archetypal patterns we might say today. But parallel with this development the term «type» emerges as meaning «social type.» (1963: 242-243)

In its second meaning, *type* refers to a common social quality (such as profession, age, or ethnic identity) being used to characterize a person (Wellek 1963: 246). In both meanings, the focus is on a specific feature. I believe that the second meaning is more common when referring to characters in romances, where types such as «the villain» or «the lady in distress» are common.

If we generalize characters in a romance as types we find that Malory's *Morte* doesn't fit the type. As types, Malory's characters would have to be one-dimensional, but they are more than that. For example, we cannot assume that King Arthur is a typical «powerful king» because he has his weak moments as well. Similarly, Queen Gwenyvere could be considered as «a lady in distress» at the end of the story, when she is being harassed by Mordred, but she manages to escape on her own and save herself. Clearly, Malory's characters are not classic types. They are better separated as individuals than characters that can be grouped under the types definition. Bertagniolli (1984: 186) writes:

But Malory modifies the romance genre as well –not, as Aristo does, by openly playing with and mocking some of its conventions, but by creating a world that eludes traditional characterization. No invocations or introductory comments guide us, and the figures presented throughout the text are not primarily one-dimensional, analogous to the «black and white chess pieces» Northrop Frye compares romance

figures to in order to emphasize their moral opposition. Instead, they are recognizably human, conventional heroes and heroines.

Nevertheless, Malory's characters cannot be considered as fully developed characters because they lack psychological depth and are not mimetic. If the *Morte's* characters can be defined neither as types nor as fully developed characters, a new definition is needed. On the one hand this new definition should group certain characters together as a type, but on the other hand enable greater individuality within this type. In this way, each persona can have more freedom, more than one dimension, and even ambivalence.

I call this characterization a *character model*. Shanin notes that one way of explaining the term *model* is «as a preconception, colouring cognition and comprehension of reality, an archetype, a pattern of thought» (1972: 8). Shanin's basic approach is that all humans think in models: beyond every cognitive perception there is a model of thought. When trying to categorize Malory's characters in certain groups, each containing several characters who share several features, it is possible to refer to these groups as «models».

In this paper I describe two instances of the character model: «the lady» and «the woman with magical powers». For the lady I focus on two characters: queen Gwenyvere and La Beale Isode. For the woman with magical powers, I concentrate on Morgan le Fey and the Lady of Lake.

THE CHARACTER MODEL OF THE LADY

The character model of the lady has six attributes:

1. The lady is the wife or the widow of a king.
2. She also has her own position at court. In some cases she is a judge, especially when considering knights who harassed or hurt women. She also judges in tournaments.
3. She has magical or healing powers.
4. She has a lover who has a significant place at court and who has a close relationship with her husband. She is jealous of her lover.

5. She is in danger but her lover rescues her.
6. She lives with her lover for a certain time.

The lady is part of a triangle each of which is ambivalent toward the others. The king is married to the lady and has the lover as his knight; the lady is married to the king and the knight is her lover; the lover's is torn between his master and his mistress in his fidelity. This problematic situation is the basis of the plot.

I focus on Gwenyvere and La Beale Isode to show how the character model of the lady works. Both exhibit most of the six attributes of the model. They do not answer all the attributes because the character model is more flexible and grants greater individuality to its participants than the basic type.

Gwenyvere

1. *The lady is the wife or widow of a king.* Gwenyvere is first mentioned in the *Morte* when King Arthur sees her for the first time and falls in love with her (26)¹. Later he decides to marry her despite Merlyn's warning about the future Lancelot-Gwenyvere affair (59). It is clear that when Gwenyvere approaches the court for the first time, Arthur is happier to see her than to obtain her dowry, the Round Table and its knights (60). Arthur's feelings toward Gwenyvere do not change until the end, when her relationship with Lancelot becomes public. Only then do priorities change: «And much more I am sorryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre quene; for quenys I myght have inow, but such a felyship of good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company» (685). Nevertheless, some critics, for example Dobbin (1987), claim that Arthur's reaction comes not from his change of feelings but from the fact that as king he must consider the affair as a treacherous act. Thus, he must act first of all as a king, which means that his knights and kingdom are more important to him than his private feelings towards his queen. Dobbin stresses that Arthur's reaction to the affair is not that of a jealous husband but of a king who must deal with high treason, which is why Gwenyvere is sentenced to death (Dobbin 1987: 129-130).

¹ All quotations and pages numbers are from Malory (1971²).

Gwenyvere herself treats Arthur as a devoted wife until her relationship with Lancelot begins. On Arthur's request she joins him in several campaigns and shows a great deal of courage. When Arthur is leaving for the campaign to Rome she acts as a woman in love and nearly faints: «Than quene Gwenyver made grete sorow that the kyng and all the lordys sholde be departed, and there she fell doune on a swone, and hir ladyes bare hir to her chambir» (118). On his return, she leads the women of London to meet him and his men (146).

Thus, Gwenyvere meets the first criterion completely. Even her name indicates her role as lady of the realm, as Greenwood (1992: 167-177) writes. Several critics have pointed out that Arthur needs Gwenyvere at his side at court because she was born at a king's court whereas he grew up at the court of a vassal. As Hart (1995: 7) notes:

Malory's interpretation of the Arthurian legend accentuates Guenevere's *largesse*, the most important aristocratic virtue in the Middle Ages. Under her direction, Arthur's court becomes the cultural center of civilization.

2. *The lady also has her own position at court. In some cases she serves as a judge, especially when considering knights who harassed or hurt women. She also judges in tournaments.* Gwenyvere in the *Morte* acts as a judge in several cases in which knights are accused of unfair behavior toward women. She also acts as head of several tournaments, and she chooses the courts' participants in these events. She even has her own knights at court, as it is obvious in the May episode when she tells them to wear green. Nevertheless, it is clear that Gwenyvere's position at court lacks political power. As Tolhurst-Neuendorf (1995) notes, when Arthur goes to fight Emperor Lucius he leaves the country in the hands of Gwenyvere and two other knights (Sir Baudwen of Bretayne and Sir Cador of Cornwall). However, Malory stresses the fact that it was actually left in the hands of the knights (Tolhurst-Neuendorf 1995: 376-377). Hill sums up Gwenyvere's position at court by saying: «Because Arthur is her husband, Guenevere, like other queens, does wield a certain amount of power, although her power is circumscribed by what Arthur allows to her» (1996: 272).

3. *The Lady has magical or healing powers.* Queen Gwenyvere is not considered a sorceress or a healer in the *Morte*. But as Hoffman (1990: 31) points out, «Two

passages in Malory... hint that Guenevere retains at least a trace of the magical power she might once have possessed as the Giant's Daughter». In one of the passages, a maiden saved by Lancelot claims: «But it is noysed that ye love quene Gwenyvere, and that she hath ordeyned by enchauntemente that ye shall never love none other but hir, nother none other damesell ne lady shall rejoyce you» (160). What the maiden is actually saying is that Lancelot's love for Gwenyvere was achieved by magic. Nevertheless, Gwenyvere cannot be treated as a woman with magical power merely on the strength of this accusation.

4. *The lady has a lover who has a significant position at court and a close relationship with the king. She is jealous of her lover.* The true nature of the Gwenyvere-Lancelot relationship is apparent already from Merlyn's warning to King Arthur when he considers the possibility of marrying Gwenyvere. The text says: «For he warned hym that Launcelot scholde love hir, and sche hym agayne» (59). At the beginning, when Lancelot arrives at court, Gwenyvere's feelings toward him seem only natural: the queen favors her husband's best knight. Soon rumors begin to circulate about the nature of the relations. As the maiden who was saved by Lancelot claims: «But hit is noysed» (160), that is, everyone knows about it. Others in the *Morte* indicate that the affair is well known, but the most convincing statement about the nature of the relationship can be found in the words of La Beale Isode conversing with Palomides: «And there recommaunde me unto Quene Gwenyvere and tell her that I sende her worde that there be within this londe but four lovers, and that is Sir Launcelot and Dame Gwenyver, and Sir Trystrames and Quene Isode» (267). When La Beale Isode parallels the relationship between Lancelot and Gwenyvere with that between Trystram and herself, we can draw only one conclusion: that they were known to be lovers.

Although the relationship can be described as an affair, Malory is careful to do no more than hint about its sexual aspect. Koplowitz-Breier points out that «when the story suggests Gwenyvere and Lancelot's relationship to be more than platonic, Malory is deliberately vague about the possibility of a sexual liaison, stressing instead the innocent nature of love in King Arthur's days» (2005: 10). Koplowitz-Breier also suggests an explanation for this:

It seems that Malory's ambiguity concerning the possibility of any sexual contact between Lancelot and Gwenyvere is the consequence of the fact that Gwenyvere is a married woman when their love affair begins. Malory's vagueness is understandable. As he could not ignore his well-known sources, and considering the clearly adulterous situation between Lancelot and Gwenyvere, Malory blurs any traces of sexuality and suggests a more platonic relationship to minimize the moral problem. ([2005: 17](#))

Another point to consider is Gwenyvere's jealousy. Lancelot's love can almost be measured by his actions and Gwenyvere's by her jealousy. It is understandable that Gwenyvere is jealous when she hears about Lancelot begetting a son by Elaine and later when she hears Lancelot making love with Elaine in the room next to hers, which results in Lancelot's period of madness following his expulsion from the court by the queen. Gwenyvere's jealousy is not as reasonable when Lancelot leaves on the quest for the Grail, and even less so when upon his return their relationship becomes «hotter», as the texts openly states: «and so they loved togydirs more hotter than they dud toforehonde» (611), and Gwenyvere's jealousy is getting stronger. Again, the result is Lancelot exile from court.

We conclude that the Gwenyvere-Lancelot relationship is that of lovers, forming a traditional love-triangle (Duby 1992: 250-266). Morgan le Fey's shield, with «a kynge and a queen therein paynted, and a knight stondynge aboven them with hys one foote standynge upon the kynges hede and the other upon the quenys hede» (340), symbolizes the triangular relationship vaguely enough for King Arthur not to understand it, but at the same time stresses the point that this is a traditional love triangle.

5. *The lady is in danger and her lover rescues her.* Lancelot rescues Queen Gwenyvere from being burned on the pyre for high treason. He also rescues her from the hands of Mellyagaunte, her abductor. The first time he saves her after she has been blamed of poisoning an apple intended for Sir Gawain. She is accused of murder and of attempted murder, and sentenced to death at the stake as a traitor. Lancelot proves her innocence by fighting for her. The second time Lancelot saves the queen, her life is not endangered but her honor is. When Mellyagaunte kidnaps her and means to force himself upon her, Lancelot coming to her rescue is the solution to the problem. Lancelot does not need to fight Mellyagaunte; his arrival is sufficient. On

the third and fourth occasions, Lancelot saves the queen from death for treason. She is accused of unfaithfulness by Mellyagaunte, who claims she has slept with one of the wounded knights, and she is accused by King Arthur after Lancelot is caught in her chamber. The King accuses her not of adultery but of treason, claiming she helped Lancelot kill his knights that night in her chamber (Kelly 1995: 11-141). On both occasions Lancelot stands at the core of the accusations and on both occasions he saves her from the death penalty. In Mellyagaunte's case Lancelot's oath and willingness to vouch for the queen and to fight for her saves her life and honor. In King Arthur's case Lancelot saves her life by taking her away, preventing the immediate execution of the death sentence. Only later, when Arthur takes Gwenyvere back, is her honor restored.

6. *The lady lives with her lover for a certain time.* After Lancelot and queen Gwenyvere fall into the trap that was set for them in the queen's chamber, Lancelot understands that he must take the queen away to save her. His friends tell him he should keep the queen at Joyous Garde, where Tristram had kept La Beale Isode. They also mention that this arrangement is temporary: «And in Joyous Garde ye may kepe her longe inowe untyll the hete be paste of the kynge, and than hit may fortune you to brynge the queen agayne to the kynge with grete worshyp» (681). Nevertheless, it is important to point out the difference between the couples that stayed in Joyous Garde. The text describes the relationship of Tristram and La Beale Isode as that of a loving couple: «Now turne we unto sir Trystram and to La Beall Isode, how they made joy togydrys dayly with all maner of myrthis that they coude devyse» (416). But the *Morte* states clearly that the nature of the relationship between Lancelot and Gwenyvere is that of a queen and her knight: «and there he kepte her as a noble knight shulde» (684). The queen's honor is the main issue, and when Lancelot returns queen Gwenyvere after the Pope orders King Arthur to take her back, he is certain that he will not be forgiven, although he might have hoped differently. When Gawain tells him after returning the queen that he is not welcome, Lancelot claims that if he had known how he would be received he would have considered not returning the queen. Lancelot's concern for the queen's honor is important to him but not as his own acceptance back into the company of the Knights of the Round Table. Perhaps that is why when queen Gwenyvere is in real danger again, when Mordred tries to force himself upon her, she does not wait for Lancelot's

help, but locks herself in the Tower of London, and later leaves London and retires to a nunnery.

In conclusion, Gwenyvere's character meets almost all the criteria of the character model of the lady: on the one hand, she is described as a loving caring wife and a very strong queen; on the other hand, she is described as an adulterer who depends on her lover. Malory's treatment of her is ambivalent: she appears to be one of the supporting pillars of the Arthurian Kingdom supporting pillars and at the same time one of its main destroyers. Malory's description of her is not one-dimensional but that of a multi-faced character, although she still cannot be considered as a full mimetic character.

La Beale Isode

1. *The lady is the wife or widow of a king.* La Beale Isode is King Mark's wife, but this marriage is problematic from the beginning. It seems that the only reason King Mark decides to send Tristram to ask La Beale Isode's hand is to put him in jeopardy. Nevertheless, it seems that Tristram does everything in his power to accomplish his mission, and in the end King Mark marries La Beale Isode. However, when considering all the details of the relationship between La Beale Isode and Tristram, it appears that Malory wants to convey that they are actually married before La Beale Isode meets King Mark for the first time ([Koplowitz-Breier 2005](#)).

Even if we do not accept the theory of an earlier marriage between La Beale Isode and Tristram, it is apparent that the relationship between King Mark and La Beale Isode is not a good one, and King Mark is always suspicious of La Beale Isode's behavior.

2. *The lady also has her own position at court. In some cases she serves as a judge, especially when considering knights who harassed or hurt women. She also judges in tournaments.* La Beale Isode does not have an independent role at court, probably because of King Mark's attitude toward her, which affects that of his courtiers. Nevertheless she fulfills the traditional role (Duby 1992: 250-252) of «courtly lady»: her presence encourage knights who adore her, like Palomides, to fight better. When fighting Sir Elias, the wounded Tristram recovers because he

remembers that La Beale Isode is watching him: «... sir Trystram remembird hym of his lady, La Beale Isode, that loked uppon hym, and how he was never lykly to com in hir presence. Than he pulled up his shyldes that before hynges full lowe...» (387).

3. *The Lady has magical or healing powers.* The first appearance of La Beale Isode is as Tristram's healer, when he reaches the shores of Ireland, wounded. La Beale Isode treats him not knowing his true identity:

Than the kyng for grete favour made Tramtryste to be put in his doughtyrs awarde and keypyng, because she was a noble surgeon. And whan she had serched hym she founde in the bottom of his wounde that therein was poyson, and so she healed hym in a whyle. (238)

La Beale Isode is known for her healing skills, and she cures the dying Tristram. Labarge (1986: 170) writes:

It was an accepted part of a noble lady's education to know how to deal with the wounds, broken or dislocated bones, and severe bruises that her menfolk might bring home from wars, tournaments, or vigorous hunting expeditions. The romances suggest the suitability of women being skilled in bandaging, ointments, and the cleaning of wounds, having acquired these skills as part of their education.

4. *The lady has a lover who has a significant position at court and a close relationship with the king. She is jealous of her lover.* The relationship between La Beale Isode and Tristram in the *Morte* that of a conventional love triangle (Dobbin 1987: 99-101). La Beale Isode is King Mark's lawful wife; Tristram is his knight, nay his nephew and only heir; La Beale Isode and Tristram are lovers. Their love story is not only well known in the Arthurian realm but also accepted there. The main difference between Malory's version and previous versions is the beginning of the story. In the *Morte* the mutual love story starts in Ireland when Tristram is there for the first time. Tristram's departure scene appears to seal some treaty between the lovers, reinforced by an exchange of rings. It resembles a private wedding ceremony, validated on the ship after drinking the magic potion (Koplowitz-Breier 2005). Whether or not the pre-marriage theory is accepted, the mutual love of Tristram and La Beale Isode is well known in the Arthurian realm.

As opposed to queen Gwenyvere's unilateral jealousy of Lancelot, the jealousy of La Beale Isode and Tristram is mutual. There are two instances of jealousy in their love story. The first instance is La Beale Isode's jealousy after Tristram marries Isole le Blaunche Maynes, when La Beale Isode complains in a letter to queen Gwenyvere about Tristram's unfaithfulness. La Beale Isode's reaction is more sadness than pure jealousy. The second instance is Tristram's jealousy when he finds out about Keyhydins' letters to La Beale Isode. Tristram actually blames La Beale Isode of unfaithfulness, threatens Keyhydins, and later runs into the forest and loses his mind. Tristram's jealousy drives him to insanity, just as queen Gwenyvere's jealousy drove Lancelot to it.

We can sum up this point by stressing that this love triangle is so obvious that in contrast to King Arthur's deliberate disregard of queen Gwenyvere's affair with Lancelot, king Mark is aware of the relationship between La Beale Isode and Tristram as he states clearly: «... 'but I may nat love sir Trystram, bycause he lovyth my quene, La Beall Isode'» (414).

5. *The lady is in danger and her lover rescues her.* La Beale Isode is rescued twice by Tristram, but it is her honor rather than her life that is saved. The first time Tristram is missing when Palomydes takes La Beale Isode from king Mark. When he hears about it, she has already been saved by Sir Adtherpe. Tristram's mission is to fight Palomydes to restore La Beale Isode's honor. The second time Tristram saves La Beale Isode after they are caught in bed together, and she is sent to the lepers' hut. Although she is not in physical danger, her honor is endangered because lepers were considered sinners and treated as «living dead» (Shahar 1995: 68-74).

6. *The lady lives with her lover for a certain time.* La Beale Isode lives twice with Tristram. The first time, after he rescues her from the lepers hut, they live in the forest in a «fayre maner» (272) until King Mark takes La Beale Isode back to court. The second time, after King Mark imprisons him, Tristram suggests to La Beale Isode they escape together to Logrys and she accepts. They live in Lancelot's castle, Joyous Garde. The text states plainly that they lived there as a couple: «Now turne we unto sir Trystram and to La Beall Isode, how they made joy togydryes dayly with all maner of myrthis that they coude devyse» (416).

We conclude that La Beale Isode's character meets almost all the criteria of the character model of the Lady. Although she is not as ambivalent as queen Gwenyvere, she cannot be described as one dimensional, and corresponds to the model.

The character model is not definitive and allows for some diversity. Queen Gwenyvere and La Beale Isode are not identical and each one meets better various criteria of the model. Beside them other characters in the *Morte* can be considered to be part of the model, like for example queen Margawse. R. Morse (1992) calls queen Gwenyvere and La Beale Isode «doubles», both having good lovers (Lancelot and Trystram and bad lovers (Mellyyagaunte and Palomydes). She adds Margawse as a third «double» (Morse 1992: 47):

Like the other queens, Morgause has a good lover, Lamorak, who is murdered by her sons (as she herself is murdered by Gaheris). She also has Arthur, although Malory tells us that neither knew who the other was. Does that make Arthur a dark lover? Perhaps, given his attempt to murder all the children who might be his son, it does.

Thus, most of the ladies in the *Morte* can be considered as part of the Lady's Character's model as long as the basic criteria are met and the lady is a part of a love triangle.

THE CHARACTER MODEL OF THE WOMAN WITH MAGICAL POWERS (WMP)

WMPs have two basic characteristics: they are human beings and they have magical powers like fairies. These two characteristics are integrated in the *Morte* so much that we can consider women as «human fairies». Briggs writes: «In the later Romance it is clear that most of the fairy ladies belong to the human race, and owe their great powers to the knowledge of magic»(1978: 4).

The character model of the WMP has six attributes:

1. Acquired their magical power by learning.
2. Has both positive and negative characteristics.
3. Has sexual appetite and tries to fulfill her desire.
4. Uses her powers in her relations with a powerful man.

I apply the WMP Character's model to two characters: Morgan le Fey and the Lady of the Lake. At a first glance these two characters seem very different, their only similarity being that they both have magical power. Nevertheless, some of the research on the Arthurian tradition regards them as one character, a goddess or a fay that has been split into two characters. Fries claims: «Obviously the Lady has been retailored to represent the (mostly) nurturing side of the split mother-image, as Morgan has become the (mostly) devouring side» (1992: 14). In the *Morte* they are two separate characters and they even oppose each other many times. Despite the differences between them, they are both part of the WMP character model.

Morgan le Fey

1. *The WMP acquired their magical power by learning.* Morgan le Fey is mentioned for the first time in the *Morte* as one of Igrayne's daughters from her first husband. According to the text after Igrayne was married to Uther Pendragon her two big daughters were married and Morgan le Fey was sent to a nunnery: «And the third syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nunnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye» (5). Morgan le Fey is described as having two important features: she is an educated woman and she is skillful in what Malory calls «nygromancye». King James I's book *Daemonologie* contains a definition of necromancy as opposed to witchcraft: «the Witches ar servantes onelie, and slaues to the Devil; but the Necromanciers are his maisters and commanders» (1924: 9). According to King James, necromancy is related to government and control. It is also associated with political power as Holmes describes the «attempts at foretelling or bringing about the death of the monarch and others» (1974: 15). Both features identify Morgan le Fey as a unique and powerful woman, who is a threat to the entire Arthurian society and especially to King Arthur. Morgan le Fey answers to the first criterion because she was not naturally born with magical powers but acquired them through schooling.

2. *The WMP has both positive and negative characteristics.* The Fairy is an ambivalent character. Kickhefer (1989: 108) states:

The ambivalence regarding fairies sometimes found in Irish literature can be seen in the romances as well: they have both good and evil sides, and while they can represent primal paganism they can also be spoken of as «good Christians.» They can bestow favors or destruction, according to their individual character, whim, or purpose as well, but one of their main functions is to keep the romances well stocked with magical paraphernalia.

Although it seems that Morgan le Fey has lost her ambivalence in the *Morte* and retains only negative traits, Malory gives her a place among King Arthur's last escorts. The text mentions that after King Arthur was placed in the boat for his last journey, four ladies escorted him. One of them says: «A, my dere brother! Why have ye taryed so longe frome me? Alas, thys wounde on your hede hath caught overmuch coude!» (716). Later the text states that one of the queens on the boat was Morgan le Fey, and we can assume she is the one who speaks earlier. The fact that the speaker checks his wound also points to Morgan le Fey, as in earlier texts one of her characteristics is that of being a healer (Capps 1981). Malory's insistence of including Morgan le Fey in King Arthur's last escort indicates that he does not want to depict her as entirely evil.

Nevertheless, Morgan le Fey is clearly portrayed mostly as a negative person in the *Morte*. Her negative acts can be divided into two groups:

A. Acts meant to taunt and hurt King Arthur out of Morgan le Fey's desire for power to rule (discussed later under the fourth criterion of the character model).

B. Acts caused by Morgan le Fey's personal motives. These can be separated into two groups: acts motivated by her sexual appetite (discussed under the third criterion of the character model), and acts motivated by hatred or jealousy.

The most palpable of the acts motivated by hatred or jealousy, is the story of the damsel who was immersed in boiling water because she was considered the most beautiful woman in the country. This act of pure jealousy is one of Morgan le Fey's cruelest acts. Another act that can be considered as being caused by personal reasons is Morgan le Fey's attempt to murder her husband, King Uryens. This attempt takes place when she thinks that her lover killed King Arthur. Morgan le Fey wants to seize the opportunity and take hold on both King Arthur's and her husband's kingdoms. Her acts are described in details, revealing her actions as self-controlled

and cold hearted. She does not hesitate at all, and only her son's intervention prevents the murder. There is no doubt that the only reason for her action is her yearning for power and control.

In sum, Morgan le Fey's most notable characteristics are negative. But because Malory includes her with King Arthur's last companions and stresses her sisterhood, he enriches our impression of Morgan le Fey by hinting that she is not only evil but there is a positive side to her as well. As Edwards (1996: 43) claims:

Ambivalence, then, characterizes the feminine in the sphere of Arthurian adventure. Women are divided into an aspect of malevolence and ill-will characterized by a threatening sexual voracity most associated with Morgan, and another aspect of mediation and guiding, and sometimes of healing. It is this last aspect that apparently prevails among the ladies on the barge, surprisingly including Morgan le Fay herself, who mysteriously arrive to take away the grievously wounded Arthur.

3. *The WMP has sexual appetite and tries to fulfill her desire.* One of Morgan le Fey's main traits is her sexual appetite. Although she is a married woman the *Morte* mentions two of her lovers: Accolon and Hemyson. Regardless of whether or not Malory uses the term *lover* explicitly (McCarthy 1991), the text is open about her affairs.

There is no doubt about Accolon being Morgan le Fey's lover. The text clearly states that she loved him more than she did her husband:

And she loved another knyght bettir than hir husbande, kynge Uriens, othir Arthure. And she wolde have had Arthure hir brother slyne, and therefore she lete make anothis scawberd for Excaliber lyke it by enchauntement, and gaf the scawberd Excaliber to her lover. And the knyghtes name was called Accolon... (49).

Accolon himself states that she loved him «oute of mesure as paramour, and I hie agayne» (88). When hearing about his death, Morgan le Fey's reaction is that of a mourning lover: «she was so sorowfull that nye hir herte to-braste» (91), but being a married woman she must conceal her sorrow.

Hemyson's position is not so apparent. Before Hemyson's name is mentioned for the first time, the text states that Morgan le Fey placed Tristram at one of her

sides and her lover at the other side, and that the lover is jealous of Tristram. When Tristram leaves, Hemyson is mentioned by name as the knight who «hylde Morgan le Fay» (341). This wording and the fact that Hemyson out of jealousy decides to fight the anonymous knight (who Morgan le Fey knows for a fact is Tristram), adds to our conviction that Hemyson is the unnamed lover mentioned earlier. In addition, Morgan le Fey's reaction to his death reminds us of her reaction to Accolon's death: «Whan Morgan le Fay saw hym dede she made grete sorow oute of reson» (341).

Beside these two lovers, at least Morgan le Fey's sexual desire is mentioned on two more occasions. The first is when she is part of the four queens who confine Lancelot for him to choose one of them as a paramour. Lancelot answers he would rather die in jail than agree to their demand. Hoffman writes: «Kidnapped by the queens, Lancelot defends both his virginity and his innocent love for Guinevere» (1986: 20). What the four queens want is not love but pure sexual pleasure, as they make it clear that they know of Lancelot's love for queen Gwenyvere.

Another case in which Morgan le Fey's motive is said to be only her sexual desire is her imprisonment of Alysaudir le Orphelyne. In the beginning, her motivation is her desire to help King Mark. Eventually, after she cures him and makes him swear to stay in her castle twelve months and a day, her cousin tells Alysaudir le Orphelyne that Morgan le Fey's reason for doing so is her desire to use him for her pleasure. Alysaudir le Orphelyne's reaction makes it clear that the pleasure is of sexual nature: «'A, Jesu defende me,' seyde sir Alisaundir, 'frome suche pleasure! For I had levir kut away my hangers than I wolde do het ony suche pleasure!'"» (395). Alysaudir le Orphelyne is willing to castrate himself rather than become a tool for pleasure in the hands of Morgan le Fey.

Here again, Morgan le Fey is acting out of pure sexual lust.

4. *The WMP uses her powers in her relations with a powerful man.* Morgan le Fey's most famous relationship is with her brother, King Arthur. Initially, their relationship is based on trust and honor, at least on King Arthur part. He willingly entrusts his scabbard to her: «So aftir for grete truste Arthure betoke the scawberde unto Morgan le Fay, hys sister» (49). Even after the combat with Accolon, King Arthur states: «God knowyth I have honoured hir and worshipped hir more than all my kyn, and more have I trusted hir than my wyff and all my kyn aftir» (88). Nevertheless,

Morgan le Fey does not try to conceal her hatred of him. As Accolon explains during the battle with King Arthur:

... for ye shall undirstonde that kynge Arthur ys the man in the worlde that she hatyth moste, because he is moste of worship and prouesse of ony of hir bloode... And if she myght bryng hit aboute to sle Arthure by hir craftis, she wolde sle hir husbonde kynge Uryence lyghtly. And than had she devysed to have me kynge in this londe and so to reigne, and she be my quene. (88)

The reason for Morgan le Fey's emotions is palpable: she hates him because of his power and because she wants to take it from him.

Morgan le Fey makes three types of attempts to hurt King Arthur:

1. Actual attempts of murder: the first by Accolon, the second with the poisoned mantle.

2. Attempts of damaging King Arthur's married life: first with the magical horn that she sends to court; second with the allegorical shield she gives Tristram; and third, her warning to King Arthur about queen Gwenyvere and Lancelot's affair. King Arthur is reminded of it after he receives the letter from King Mark: «Whan kynge Arthure undirstode the lettir, he mused of many thynges, and thought of his systyre wordys, quene Morgan le Fay, that she had seyde betwyxte quene Gwenyver and sir Launcelot» (381).

3. Attempts of hurting the Knights of the Round Table. At least three times we read about Morgan le Fey's attempts to abuse the Knights of the Round Table. When passing her castle, Palomydes says that she wants to destroy King Arthur and his knights (367); Morgan le Fey, with thirty knights, tries to ambush first Sir Lancelot and later Sir Lancelot or Sir Tristram; Sir Bors mentions that Lancelot has been her prisoner for half a year (482).

The purpose of all these attempts is to hurt King Arthur and the social sphere of the Round Table in order to take his place as a powerful leader.

In sum, Morgan le Fey's characteristics are those of a WMP. Although she is depicted more as a negative character than an ambivalent one, by including her among King Arthur's final companions Malory is perhaps hinting at her positive traits as well.

The Lady of the Lake

There are two ways of treating the different characters named the Lady of the Lake or the Damsel of the Lake in the *Morte*. According to Olstead (1967), the different names refer to a single character. In Holbrook's opinion (1978), however, the ladies should be divided into two characters: (one that hands King Arthur his sword and is later killed at court, and on other one named Nymue, who learned her magic skills from Merlyn. I find this division more logical and will consider only the second lady to be part of the WMP Character model.

1. *The WMP acquired their magical power by learning.* The Lady of the Lake is mentioned in this context for the first time when she comes to court in the company of King Pellynore. The text mentions Merlyn's attraction to her and her using it to learn from him: «And ever she made Merlion good chere tyll sche had lerned of hym all maner of thynges that sche desyred; and he was assoted uppon hir, that he myght nat be from hir» (76). It is not yet clear what it is that she is learning from him. When they leave the court together, she makes him swear not to use his magic power on her. After they leave King Ban's country, we are told that Merlyn showed her many wonders. The *Morte* does not openly state that she is studying magic from Merlyn, only that he shows magic to her. However, when Merlyn's intention of taking her maidenhood becomes clear we learn that she intends to get rid of him. She later imprisons him under the enchanted rock, using the knowledge she acquired from him against him:

And so one a tyme Merlion ded shew hir in a roche whereas was a grete wondir and wrought by enchauntemente that went undir a grete stone. So by hir subtile worchyng she made Merlyon to go undir that stone to latte hit wete of the mervayles there, but she wrought so there for hym that he come never oute for all the craufte he coude do, ans so she departed and leffte Merlyon. (77)

This act indicates that the Lady of the Lake learned her magical crafts from Merlyn and that she is very good at it, considering that she can prevent him from using his powers to release himself. After this act, she takes his place as the protector of King Arthur.

2. *The WMP has both positive and negative characteristics.* Most of the traits of the Lady of the Lake are positive. As Fries writes: «Obviously the Lady, like Morgan, has been retailored, but in her case to become the (mostly) nurturing side of the female counter-hero archetype» (1994: 8). Nevertheless, she has negative sides as well. Her treatment of Merlyn, for example, may be considered negative: after learning all she can from him, she disposes of him using the knowledge acquired from him against him. Although the motivation for this act stems from Merlyn's intention of taking her maidenhood, the act is clearly vicious.

Another act that can be considered negative is her exchanging Ettarde's and Pelleas's feelings. Initially, Pelleas is in love with Ettarde and she despises him publicly. The Lady of the Lake changes the situation by reversing their feelings so that Ettarde is deeply in love with Pelleas and he hates her. By her action, she punishes Ettarde for her proud behavior. The act is negative, because the Lady of the Lake could have changed the situation differently, for example, by turning both emotions into love. By acting as a love goddess (she herself calls it «the ryghteouse jugemente of God» (104), she assumes cupid's naughty aspects and gains Pelleas for herself.

Nevertheless, most of actions of the Lady of the Lake are positive. Her relationship with King Arthur and the people related to him are positive. The text states:

And so hit befelle that the Damesell of the Lake that hyght Nynyve, whych wedded the good knyght sir Pelleas, and so she cam to the courte, for ever she ded grete goodnes unto kynge Arthure and to all hys knyghtes thorow her sorsery and enchauntementes. (620-621)

3. *The WMP has sexual appetite and tries to fulfill her desire.* The Lady of the Lake is unlike Morgan le Fey, who has two lovers and attempts to fulfill her desire by force. Nevertheless, common to both is that they choose their objects of desire themselves. Heng observes: «Each selects whom she will love, rather than being herself selected, and is not above a degree of coercion in the exercise of choice» (1990: 292).

The only man the Lady of the Lake desires is Pelleas. Her decision to punish Ettarde is mentioned even before she lays eyes on Pelleas, so it is not her desire for Pelleas that controls her acts (Holbrook 1978: 772), but the first time she sees

Pelleas, she likes him: «Anone that knyght broute hir unto hym, and whan she sye hym lye on his bedde she thought she sawe never so lykly a knight» (104). Later, when her magic exchanges the feelings of Ettarde and Pelleas, the Lady of the Lake asks Pelleas to follow her, promising him that he will love a lady who will love him. Her unequivocal words can only mean that she will use her magical power to make him love her. The *Morte* clearly states that their love was mutual: «and the Damesel of the Lake rejoysed sir Pelleas, and loved togedyrs duryng their lyfe» (104). They were married, and the *Morte* mentions that she always protected him from competing against sir Lancelot (109) and from being killed in a combat (667).

The Lady of the Lake protects her beloved-husband in contrast to Morgan le Fey's behavior toward her lovers, who are killed in her service (Accolon) or because of her (Hemyson). Although the Lady of the Lake uses magic to achieve her desire, the resulting relationship is respectable and ends in marriage and mutual love. Morgan le Fey's desire is out of wedlocks, and in some cases forced by acts of violence.

4. *The WMP uses her powers in her relations with a powerful man.* The Lady of the Lake is as benevolent toward King Arthur as Morgan le Fey is malevolent toward him. Her acts can be divided into three categories:

- A. Acts that mirror Morgan le Fey's acts.
- B. Saving King Arthur from forces other than Morgan le Fey.
- C. Saving Queen Gwenyvere.

A. *Acts that mirror Morgan le Fey's acts.* Both times when Morgan le Fey tries to kill King Arthur, the Lady of the Lake prevents it. In the combat against Accolon, the Lady of the Lake comes to save his life. She knows of Morgan le Fey's intrigue to kill him on that day and she stays by him. King Arthur is fights with all his might, but because he does not have Excalibur or its scabbard, his chances are diminished. The Lady of the Lake uses her magical powers to make Accolon lose his grip on Excalibur. She does not interfere in the battle itself and she lets King Arthur win it on his own. Her only action counteracts Morgan le Fey's mischief and returns getting the sword back to its rightful owner.

The second time she saves King Arthur from Morgan le Fey, when she prevents him from wearing the poisonous mantle. By advising King Arthur to make the damsel

who brought it wear it before he or one of his knights do so, she saves him from burning. In this instance she does not use magic but her ability to read the situation correctly.

On both situations, the Lady of the Lake's ability to understand Morgan le Fey's acts saves King Arthur from certain death.

B. *Saving King Arthur from forces other than Morgan le Fey.* The Lady of the Lake saves King Arthur from death at the hands of Aunowre, a lady with magical powers. After King Arthur refuses Aunowre's seductions, she decides to kill him. The Lady of the Lake discovers Aunowre plans by her crafts:

Than the Lady of the Lake, that was allwayes fryndely to kynge Arthure, she undirstood by hir suttyle craufftes that kynge Arthure was lykely to be destroyed. And therefore thys Lady of the Lake, that hyght Nynyve, she cam into that foreyste to seke aftir sir Launcelot du Lake othir ellis sir Trystramys for to helpe kynge Arthure, for as that same day she knew well that kynge Arthur sholde be slayne onles that he had helpe of one of thes two knyghtes. (301)

The Lady of the Lake learns of Aunowre's intentions and seeks help from Lancelot or Tristram. When she and Tristram arrive they see that King Arthur is almost decapitated by Aunowre after two knights have defeated him. Tristram kills the knights and King Arthur decapitates Aunowre. The Lady of the Lake takes the head as a trophy, symbol of the benevolent prevailing over the malevolent.

C. *Saving Queen Gwennyvere.* The Lady of the Lake queen Gwennyvere when she is accused of poisoning the apple that killed Sir Patryse. Although she does so only after Lancelot prevents the queen's execution, her words grant the queen her final acquittal and identify the real culprit. The truth is written on Sir Patryse tombstone to be remembered forever. Using her ability to see the invisible, the Lady of the Lake saves the queen and thereby supports King Arthur's reign.

Finally, together with Morgan le Fey, the Lady of the Lake is also one of King Arthur's final companions.

The Lady of the Lake meets the WMP criteria of the character model criteria as well as does Morgan le Fey. She also has a dual aspect of malevolence-benevolence, but in her case the benevolent part is the dominant one. This dual aspect has two

historical roots. The first is her ancestry as a fay; the second is the fact that she and Morgan le Fey were once one person, which is what makes the two characters eligible for the character model.

There are other characters in the *Morte* that could be included in the WMP character model, but most of them do not answer all the criteria of the model because their part in the story is too small. One example is dame Brusen, Elaine's lady-in-waiting, of whom the text says: «was one of the grettyst enchaunters that was that tyme in the worlde» (479). Another one is Lyonett, Lyonesse's sister, who uses «subtyle craufftes» (205) to protect her sister's innocence. Both are depicted as having magical powers and can be considered as benevolent toward one person (Elayne, Lyonesse) and malevolent toward others (Lancelot, Gareth, and perhaps even Lyonesse). Their part in the story is not broad enough however to meet the other criteria of the character model.

CONCLUSION

We have shown that both character models allow their participants to be included in one group despite their many differences. The model is flexible and allows even actors that are in contrast to one another to be part of it. They are not *types*, because a type is too simplistic and one-dimensional in its essence. At the same time, they are not sufficiently developed to be considered *characters*. Like the *Morte's* style, which combines two different genres (romance and chronicle), its characters are a combination of two characteristics: they are more than types and less than characters. Therefore, we can categorize them as character models, which is a combination of the two. The character model is thus a transitional stage between the two character formations.

Just as Malory's *Morte* is written in a transitional stage between the twilight of the Middle Ages and the rise of the English Renaissance, so his text is a transitional one that combines more than one genre, perhaps as a forerunner of the novel, and the characters begin to point toward the more developed characterization in the novel.

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