ABSTRACT

REBECCA LAWSON BRODNEY. “Guinevere: An Exploration of Queenship and Authority in Arthurian Legend.” (Under the direction of Professor Jim Knowles.)

One of the most intriguing and polarizing figures in the Arthurian canon is the character of Guinevere. Often, Arthurian characters have one distinct characterization that varies little from one tale to another. For example, King Arthur is often a powerful and fair ruler who prefers to send one of his knights on a quest rather than face the challenge himself. Similarly, Morgan le Faye is consistently portrayed as a catalyst for trouble and destruction in King Arthur’s court. In Middle English literature, Guinevere absorbs a multitude of roles, such as the loving wife of King Arthur, hospitable lady, and the adulterous lover of Lancelot. I plan to display and to examine these different roles as they appear in Le Morte Darthur by Thomas Malory, the alliterative Morte Darthur, and Chestre’s Launfal.

After examining these works originating in England, I plan to expand my analysis to the Middle French tales such Marie de France’s Lanval and Chretien de Troyes’s Lancelot. Finally, I would like to incorporate some more modern interpretations of Guinevere at the conclusion of my essay, such as William Morris’s poem, The Defense of Guenevere as well as the BBC television show “Merlin.” Through my examination of these works I plan to argue Guinevere consistently emerges to be the true ruler of Camelot as her actions can either preserve or destroy the legendary kingdom, ultimately demonstrating that the fate of Camelot rests not in the hands of its king, but rather its queen.