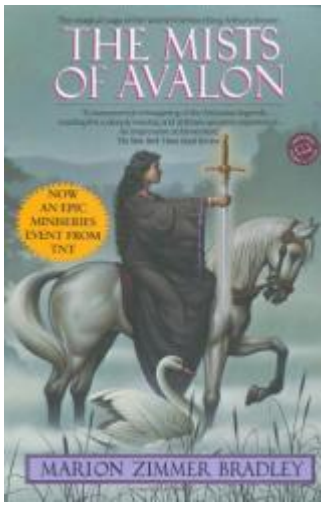
The Mists of Avalon

by Marion Zimmer Bradley



About the Book

There is Morgaine, an intense women gifted with the Sight, who has sworn to keep the old religion alive against the growing tide of Christianity that threatens her way of life--even if it means fighting a deadly battle against her beloved brother. And the devout Gwenhwyfar, married to Arthur out of a sense of duty, determined to bring Britain into the light of her God.

From their childhoods through the ultimate fulfillment of their destinies, Morgaine and Gwenhwyfar live again as the great Arthurian epic unfolds around them. As the two women struggle for control over the fate of Arthur's kingdom, as the Knights of the Round Table take on their infamous quest, as Merlin and Viviane wield their magics for the future of Old Britain, the Isle of Avalon slips further into the impenetrable mists of memory, until the fissure between old and new worlds--and old and new religions--claims its most famous victim.

THE MISTS OF AVALON is a rich, masterful, and spellbinding modern classic in which myth and magic, power and spirituality, struggle and triumph illuminate the legend anew.

Discussion Guide

1. *The Mists of Avalon* revolves around a number of dualities: male/female, Christianity/druidism, duty/desire. How are these dualities represented in the book? Can you think of others that were presented?

2. How does the book strive to challenge common stereotypes? How does it reinforce them?

3. Is Gwenhwyfar a sympathetic character? In your opinion, does Marion Zimmer Bradley treat physical beauty in a positive, negative, or neutral manner? Explain.

4. How responsible is Arthur for allowing the spread of Christianity and ultimate disappearance of Avalon? Was he simply being an honorable husband to Gwenhwyfar? Did you find the Arthur, Lancelet, Gwenhwyfar tryst disturbing? Although Arthur was an indisputably potent leader, can he, in the end, be deemed an effective one?

5. It seemed in several instances that Morgaine disappeared when she was most needed. Was she ultimately successful in representing the Goddess? Would you say that she was a victim to her fate or that she ultimately rose to meet it? What parallels can you draw between Morgaine's life and Igraine's? Between Morgaine and Viviane?

6. The Merlin seems to play an ambiguous role in the story. Do you agree with this statement? In your opinion, was he motivated more by his faith, or by pride and ambition?

7. Throughout history, did the spread of Christianity really lead to a diminishing of tolerance? Does the Goddess have a place in today's world? Do you think that Christianity ever held woman as the principal of evil?

8. What symbolism, if any, would you apply to the dragon slain by Lancelet? What is the symbolism behind Excalibur? The Grail? The Holy Thorn?

9. At the end of Mists, did you feel that the Goddess had truly been absorbed into Christianity?

10. How has Mists changed your perception or understanding of the Arthurian legend? How has it changed your perception of women's roles in the making (and telling) of history?

Author Bio

Marion Zimmer was born in Albany, NY, on June 3, 1930, and married Robert Alden Bradley in 1949. Mrs. Bradley received her B.A. in 1964 from Hardin Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, then did graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, from 1965-67.

She was a science fiction/fantasy fan from her middle teens, and made her first sale as an adjunct to an amateur fiction contest in FANTASTIC/AMAZING STORIES in 1949. She had written as long as she could remember, but wrote only for school magazines and fanzines until 1952, when she sold her first professional short story to VORTEX SCIENCE FICTION. She wrote everything from science fiction to Gothics, but is probably best known for her Darkover novels.

In addition to her novels, Mrs. Bradley edited many magazines, amateur and professional, including Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine, which she started in 1988. She also edited an annual anthology called SWORD AND SORCERESS for DAW Books.

Over the years she turned more to fantasy; THE HOUSE BETWEEN THE WORLDS, although a selection of the Science Fiction Book Club, was "fantasy undiluted". She wrote a novel of the women in the Arthurian legends -- Morgan Le Fay, the Lady of the Lake, and others -- entitled MISTS OF AVALON, which made the NY Times best seller list both in hardcover and trade paperback, and she also wrote THE FIREBRAND, a novel about the women of the Trojan War. Her historical fantasy novels, THE FOREST HOUSE and LADY OF AVALON are prequels to MISTS OF AVALON.

She died in Berkeley, California on September 25, 1999, four days after suffering a major heart attack. She was survived by her brother, Leslie Zimmer; her sons, David Bradley and Mark Greyland; her daughter, Moira Greyland; and her grandchildren.

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