Multiplicity and gendering the Holy Grail in The Da Vinci Code and the Mists of Avalon

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MULTIPICLITY AND GENDERING THE HOLY

GRAIL IN THE DA VINCI CODE AND

THE MISTS OF AVALON

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by

Victoria Anne Villasenor-Oldham

September 2007
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ABSTRACT

Both *The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley (1983) and *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (2003) famously attempt to reinvent gender roles. While the texts' popular appeal may support the success of the attempts, some compelling criticism has also shown the ways in which these novels re-inscribe the very gender roles they attempt to reinvent. However, even this criticism has not focused on one particularly problematic, and uniquely gendered, trope shared by both novels: the holy grail. This thesis will explore how both texts write femininity onto the holy grail in seemingly problematic ways, and the ways in which women's voices, through the feminization of the grail, are often silenced. Three postmodern theorists, Deleuze, Guattari, and Irigaray, contribute theoretical lenses that illuminate the complicated relationship between the grail, silence, the maternal, and indeed, the grail of gender. That is, reading these theorists alongside these novels illuminates gender not as (to use Delueze and Guattari's terminology) a "root," but rather, a "rhizome." The rhizome suggests that gender within these texts cannot be placed into a dichotomous binary (male/female), but rather occupies several categories at once, a "multiplicity."
This less rigid conception allows the rhizome of gender representations to explode in new directions, providing larger possibilities for change. Further, as both novels seek to rewrite, reinterpret and revalue the gender roles of mythological women, (Morgan le Fey and Mary Magdalene) an intertextual analysis allows a deeper understanding of the implications of gender roles within two popular texts in the contemporary literary cannon.
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To Sam
You are my muse.
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CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS

And only the limiting effect
of time can make us stop
speaking to each other.

—Irigaray, This Sex 217

In 1983, Marion Zimmer Bradley published The Mists of Avalon, a watershed novel reinterpreting the Arthurian legends from a female perspective. Twenty years later, in 2003, Dan Brown published The Da Vinci Code, a fictional reinterpretation of biblical mythologies concerning the “sacred feminine.” These texts share in common an interest in reevaluating mythological female characters and their prescribed gender roles. In particular, these texts seek to reinterpret and recontextualize the mythological “holy grail” through themes of matrilineage and silence. Despite worthwhile elements of their revisionist attempts an unfortunate consequence is the texts’ reinsertion of the feminine as quest.

This thesis will explore how both texts write femininity onto the Holy grail in problematic ways, and I will argue that while these texts attempt revisionist
gender roles, instead, through the use of the themes of silence and matrilineage, they end up reinscribing "normative" gender roles, problematizing the actual revisionist ideals intended by the authors, while at the same time allowing the complex "voice" of matrilineage and a feminine grail to survive through the theme of silence.

Two postmodern theories, the rhizome theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Luce Irigaray's feminist concepts of multiplicity and silence, contribute lenses that illuminate the complicated relationship between the grail and gender and indeed, the grail of gender. That is, reading these theorists alongside these novels illuminates gender not as (to use Delueze and Guattari's famous terminology) a "root," but rather a "rhizome." The rhizome suggests that gender within these texts cannot be placed into a dichotomous binary (male/female), but rather occupies several categories at once. This less rigid conception allows the rhizome of gender representations to explode in new directions, providing larger possibilities for change. Likewise, Irigaray posits the idea that binaries of gender create misunderstanding and chaos, while the understanding of a multiplicity, of both genders relating through language and neither submitting to the
other, could propagate healthier relationships among 
*humans*, regardless of gender. Therefore, theories of the 
rhizome and gender multiplicity work in conjunction to 
explain new possibilities within complex gender functions. 
and, as both *The Mists* and *The Code* seek to rewrite, 
reinterpret and revalue the gender roles of mythological 
women, (primarily Mary Magdalene and Morgan Le Fey), an 
intertextual analysis of gender representation using these 
theories enables a deeper understanding of the production 
and consumption of gender roles within two phenomenally 
popular texts in the contemporary literary canon.

Brief summaries of the texts as well as the 
scholarship dedicated to them reveal their shared 
revisionist goals and facilitate the development of the 
vocabulary of silence and matrilineage useful for my 
analysis. I will start with the older novel, *The Mists of 
Avalon* (hereafter *Mists*) as it was one of the first texts 
to use a reinterpretation of gender roles to develop new 
possibilities of women’s voice within the Arthurian myth.¹

¹*The Mists of Avalon*, as an extensive, complex, and long 
novel, will require a more lengthy summary than will Dan 
Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, since it is substantially 
shorter, although still complex in its gender depictions. 
Moreover, the way in which the grail, matrilineage and 
silence weave together through *The Mists’* multiple plots
The Mists is a revisionist story of the legend of Avalon and Camelot, told from the female characters' perspectives. The premise is that Avalon is beginning to recede from the world due to a lack of believers/followers of the matriarchal, goddess-worshiping faith they follow on the island. In order to prevent this from happening, the Lady of Avalon, Viviane, bestows on King Arthur the Sword of the Holy Regalia, in return for his vows to rule beside, not over, those people of Avalon. Surrounding the overlying issue of Arthurian rule is that of a newly emerging patriarchal religion, a matrilineal religion in decline, and the silencing of women that forms from the division. In ways that will become clear, these themes of matrilineage and silence ultimately "gender the grail."

Bradley tells the story of Morgaine, (or Morgan Le Faye in Mallory's version), and how she came to be the Priestess of Avalon who eventually feels it necessary to wrest control of the British kingdom from her half-brother, Arthur. Bradley's Arthur has turned his back on the vows he made to the "ancient Isle of Avalon" upon being made king. Entwined in this narrative are the stories of Morgaine's demands more detailed summary than does the more singular plot of The Code.
grandmother, (Viviane) mother, (Igraine) and aunt (Morgause). Viviane is the Lady of the Lake, the high priestess of Avalon who attempts to prevent the island from disappearing from the world. Igraine and Morgause, sisters, find that their primary tie to Avalon over the years becomes Morgaine, who leaves the island after being manipulated by Viviane into sleeping with her half brother. The women are constantly attempting to connect with one another through stilted communication, but are increasingly unheard in an increasingly patriarchal realm. Issues of matrilineage are vital in this text, as the movement from a matriarchal, goddess worshipping culture transitions to a patriarchal, Christian culture. This forces the characters to reevaluate their positions in the world and in relation to one another and often works to divide them.

The issues of divisive or celebratory silence among the women of Bradley’s text are intricately intertwined with those complexities of the holy regalia and the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. So much work has been done regarding the holy grail over time, however, that I will not augment it, except as it focuses on Bradley’s version of the holy grail. Intriguingly, little work has been done in relation to the many ways in which this text
genders the grail, not only because Morgaine holds the chalice to the lips of the people in Arthur’s court, as an embodiment of the Goddess, but also because the grail itself arises from matriarchal Avalon. Thus, the grail constitutes a feminist revision of the traditional Christ’s cup legend as it is conceived in Mallory’s Le Morte de Arthur which is considered the “original” story of Arthur and Avalon. Although Bradley’s reinterpretation of the grail does get mentioned periodically as a side note in a few essays, it has not been a primary topic of investigation. Brief literature reviews will follow the plot summaries of previous work, and help provide a context for the analysis developed in subsequent chapters of this work.

One such article, written by feminist scholar Van Dyke, is “Revisioning Celtic Traditions: Starhawk, Priestess of the Goddess, and Marion Zimmer Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon,” which, while examining primarily the underlying lesbian aspects of the novel, does glance at Bradley’s grail revision, explaining,

In early Celtic myth, the Cauldron of the goddess restored slain warriors to life. It was stolen away to the underworld, and the heroes who
warred for its return were the original of King Arthur and his knights, who quested for its later incarnation, the Holy grail. (80)

According to Van Dyke, the Cauldron of Celtic mythology was transformed, (much as it is in The Mists), into the holy grail, or chalice, which became the object of the quest (and so, by proxy, it is the feminine, or woman, who also became the quest). Several other essays examine the lesbian undertones in this text as well, although few mention the grail in any greater depth than does Van Dyke.

Other essays and articles examine the neo-pagan aspects of the text, as they posit that Bradley’s book brought about goddess worshiping into modern cultural practices. Women’s studies professor and author Cynthia Eller of the book The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory—Why an Invented Past Wont Give Women a Future claims that books like Bradley’s create false hope, and there is little, if any, scientific evidence suggesting any kind of matrilineal pre-history. She asserts,

This theory about prehistory relies very heavily on tired, stereotypical understandings of woman’s nature, ones that I don’t think have served women well in the past. It’s a very
A reductive notion of femaleness. (Reiss interview, 1)

It is, in fact, this concept of "reductive" feminist understandings that I will examine in the text in order to analyze their productive feminist bearings.

Two other articles explore the various permutations which Morgaine/Morgan Le Fey has gone through in time, and how those permutations speak to us as a culture. "Goddess Dethroned: The Evolution of Morgan Le Fay," by Dax Carver, traces the personas of the "witch" through various Arthurian versions. In "Goddess Dethroned," Carver states,

By unraveling Morgan's transformation and the reasons for such change, it is revealed that medieval demonizing of old pagan deities was not limited to male deities. Instead, the most ancient deity of all, the Great Mother Goddess slowly became one of the most infamous characters in literature, Morgan le Fay. (1)

Carver, like many other authors on this subject, mentions the grail only tangentially, and not as it relates to gender, but as it relates to the confluence of the cauldron and the chalice. Author Theresa Crater also follows this line of cauldron/chalice research in her article "The
Resurrection of Morgan le Fey: Fallen Woman to Triple Goddess” (Femspec). Crater explains that “these revisions are a window into our general feelings about modern problems and indicate how we wish to construct the future” (1). Again, her interest is in following the line of permutations of the character of Morgan le Fey, and not on the gendering of silence, the grail, or matrilineage as they occur in Bradley’s text. In her short mention of the grail, Crater states,

[... ] we have granted that Morgan le Fay is the Grail Bearer. We have given her yet another role in the Arthurian cycle. She becomes the ideal goal of life. Indeed, what is a more appropriate role for the Great Mother? (4)

In this statement, Crater makes clear a previous notion of Morgan le Fey as “grail bearer,” allowing Bradley’s version to write not only the gendered grail story, but that of woman as quest.

What, indeed, is a better purpose than that of woman as quest: Woman as pursued, as lost, as needing to be saved? Indeed, Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code (hereafter Code) exemplifies woman as quest. In Brown’s novel, we meet symbologist Robert Langdon, who, upon being summoned to the
gruesome death of the curator of the Louvre, meets Sophie Neveu, an intelligent cryptologist working with the French equivalent of the FBI, and also, as she soon reveals, the granddaughter of the dead curator. Together, they follow the clues left by Sophie’s murdered grandfather in order to solve the mystery of his death. Soon, they are fleeing an albino monk, with Langdon providing Sophie with the vast amount of material she needs to know about the “history” of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, as does the eccentric old historian, Leigh Teabing. Through various trials and tribulations, the reader comes to find out that the holy grail is not the “chalice” of grail legends, but rather a woman, Sophie herself, as one of two last living descendants of Mary Magdalene and Jesus.

The Code develops, much as does The Mists, the ideas of matrilineage, silence, and the gendering of the grail. The holy grail in this text is explained as the female descendant of Mary Magdalene rather than as the traditional cup of Christ. In this way, the novel traces the female, matrilineal line of the descendants of Jesus, tracing a hidden matriarchal line within a ruling patriarchal regime. The grail and its matrilineal nature are therefore inextricably intertwined in this text, and so the silence
which forms around these two issues is crucial to understanding how gendering the grail, that is, focusing on its matrilineal nature - causes the primary female character, Sophie, into a submissive role.

While there is a vast amount of controversy surrounding this text, little academic work has been done on The Code. Numerous websites focus on the “debunking” of the re-visioning of Jesus’ genealogy, as well as the concept of the grail as a human female which contributes in turn to the idea of a surviving matrilineal line. Web sites ranging from www.Opusdei.com to www.vatican.va allow web-surfers to find information on the “disturbing” allegations made by the fictional text (OpusDei.com).

Articles such as “Breaking the Da Vinci Code” by Collin Hansen and “Dismantling the Da Vinci Code” by Sandra Miesel both investigate Brown’s reinterpretation of accepted biblical dogma and refute it by using other biblical concepts. Miesel states, “[...] his book is more than just the story of a quest for the Grail – he wholly reinterprets the Grail legend” (Crisis Magazine 2) and Hansen argues, “The Da Vinci Code proves that some misguided theories never entirely fade away. They just
reappear periodically in a different disguise” (Christianity Today 2).

One recent academic argument, however, does examine The Code’s version of feminism. In her article “The Da Vinci Code as Myth” Diane Morris argues that, “The Da Vinci Code is a re-mythologizing of Christianity” (Stimulus 2). Her article postulates that the popularity of The Code arises from its use of myth, which resonates for the common person because of “the cry of mythical emotion.” She claims, “matriarchal prehistory and its violent overthrow have provided feminism with a myth of origins” (2), and it is these origins The Code itself makes possible (as does The Mists). But, as she also argues,

It is fairly clear what the reduction of Mary Magdalene to a receptacle for the sacred sperm means for women in general. From my reading of The Code, the role of women in this brave new world of feminized religion doesn’t seem to have moved on from barefoot, pregnant, and horizontal. (2)

While this assessment of The Code is certainly valid, there remain the themes of silence, lack, and the gendering of the grail (as woman becomes quest) which need reflection
and analysis as well, as they articulate a problematic ideology of gender construction. My concern is less with the verifiability of the issues in The Code, as in the gender constructions contained therein.

Gender constructions in both novels are most clearly delimited in their feminizing of the holy grail. Silence and matrilineage, instead of being solely paragons of revisionist gender roles, become problematic in their ultimate reinscriptions of normative gender roles by silencing, through the matrilineage used by them, the women who are declared as voiceless. Avalon fades into The Mists, along with the women who acted as the voice of the matriarchal goddess. Sophie chooses silence behind convent walls with her grandmother, (much as the nuns do in The Mists), once again silencing women through the theme of the disappearance of the matriarchy. Therefore, the silence surrounding the feminizing of the holy grail, of the feminine as quest, becomes problematic, as it becomes clear that these enormously popular novels attempts at revising normative gender roles ultimately fail to fully actualize the women’s voices. In this way, they ultimately reinforce the very gender roles they seek to reinvent. Yet, while both texts fail at their ostensible revisionist goals, they
succeed in more interesting and more fundamental ways. Understanding, indeed, even identifying, these complicated and qualified successes requires critical vocabularies—“multiplicity” and “the rhizome”—introduced by theorists Luce Irigaray, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Utilizing these terms can illuminate the work done in Bradley’s The Mists. Theorists Irigaray, Deleuze and Guattari have developed theories involving the breaking down of binaries, as well as how women’s voices are constructed through the ideas of multiplicities, which can be applied to an analysis of The Mists and The Code. I will begin by providing a background of Luce Irigaray’s theories of women and voice, as well as her conceptions of multiplicities.

French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray was a former student of Jacques Lacan, and much of her work responds to his statements “of woman,” as Lacan’s statements respond to those made by Freud regarding the development “of woman.” Both Freud and Lacan postulate various theories of “woman” in which woman is articulated as a lesser, penis envying, illogical and more emotional being than her male counterpart. Lacan himself states, “Women don’t know what they are saying, that’s the whole difference between them
and me” (qtd. in Irigaray, This Sex 86). Lacan’s notion of the phallus is usually accorded to those in power, which in Western culture tends to be the men, and which Irigaray calls “phallocentrism.” While Freud found women lacking because of the lack of a penis, Lacan found them lacking because they often lacked the phallus, or the one with power.

According to Irigaray, however, women are born not as one, but as more than one, a multiplicity of becomings with no end in sight. She asserts, “We haven’t been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity” (This Sex 210). And so, because women “haven’t been taught” they must find their voices, embrace the silence and lack which have been ascribed to women, and develop their own “language” and words to express their multiplicitous lives; “We must learn to speak to each other so that we can embrace from afar” (215). This is a direct response to Lacan’s statement, A man seeks a woman [. . .] owing to something that is located only in discourse, since, if what I am suggesting is true, namely that woman is not-all, there is always something in her that escapes discourse. (Irigaray, This Sex 89)
If woman “escapes discourse,” then a new discourse must be developed in order to allow women into the conversation. She clarifies,

I am trying [. . .] to go back through the masculine imaginary, to interpret the way it has reduced us to silence, to muteness or mimicry, and I am attempting, from that starting point and at the same time, to (re)discover a possible space for the feminine imaginary. (This Sex 164)

For Irigaray, women have been reduced to the “other” that is both lacking and silent in a patriarchal culture that demeans them:

Even though everything is in place and operating as if there could be nothing but the desire for ‘sameness’ why would there be no desire for ‘otherness’? No desire for a difference that would not be repeatedly and eternally co-opted and trapped within and economy of ‘sameness?’ (130)

Being an “other” is not bad, it is the treatment that “other” is less than, and the voice of the “other” is less valuable, that is at issue. Irigaray’s hope is that, at some point, men and women should be able to live together
in a type of unification, of multiplicitous vocality, and/or silence, if not equality. “The practice of speech makes no allowance for the relation between the sexes, even though it is only from that starting point that what fills in for that relation can be articulated” (Irigaray, *Speculum* 91). In this way, an absence of discourse from women, in “women’s” words, is detrimental to both genders and their relations.

In response to Freud and Lacan’s ideas of woman, Irigaray argues,

One might begin by being surprised, being suspicious, that it should be necessary to ‘become’ a woman — and a ‘normal woman’ to boot — and that this evolution should be ‘more difficult and more complicated’ than becoming a man. . . .

this arises out of an economy of representation.

(*Speculum* 22)

This “economy of representation” illuminates both *Mists* and *Code*, as both texts develop “economies” of women’s voices, and “representations” of their silence. Irigaray contends that women’s voices have been silenced culturally, suggesting, “This position is explained by the difficulties women encounter when they try to make their voices heard in
places already fixed within and by a society that has simultaneously used and excluded them" (This Sex 127).

At issue in The Mists and The Code are women’s voices. We see their voices used in different ways throughout as we meander through themes of silence, matrilineage and gendering of the grail. According to Irigaray, however, silence can be celebratory as well as destructive. Choosing silence allows a person to listen, whereas when speaking, he or she is unable to hear. Enforced silence, though, is destructive, as it takes away a person’s ability to vocalize needs and desires, as we see when Irigaray claims, "This accounts for the desire or the necessity of sexual non-integration: the dominant language is so powerful that women do not dare to speak (as) women outside the context of non-integration" (135). A woman can speak only to women, as the discourse of men has not allowed her a voice. But, "It is the difference between the sexes that I am trying to bring back into play, without subordinating one to the other" (146). How women’s voices in these texts are used is just as important as what they say, both to the men in their lives, as well as to the women in their matriarchal lines.
Matrilineal movements are important in Irigarian theory as well, as she states, 

We must add here that the woman’s happiness is complete only if the newborn child is a boy, bearer of the longed for penis. In this way the woman is compensated, through the child she brings into the world, for the narcissistic humiliation inevitably associated with the feminine condition. (This Sex 42)

This reference is obviously in response to Freud and his thoughts that woman must necessarily want/need a boy child in order to complete her transition into motherhood. In these texts, motherhood and matrilineal lines are important, as concepts of mothering get tangled in men’s desires and developing patriarchies. “The woman, for her part, owing to her seclusion in the “home,” the place of private property, has long been nothing but a mother” (This Sex 83). These texts limit women to silent mothers, daughters, or goddess figures; they become woman as quest, without the ability to voice their own lives beyond those of maternity, thereby reinforcing “traditional” binaries. And yet, again, there is a celebratory nature in this silence, allowing the ideologies of the feminized grail and
matrilineage to survive through the very silence that surrounds the woman as quest.

The rhizome theory of Deleuze and Guattari correlates to the survival of these matrilineal ideologies and woman as quest, which in turn correlates to their ideas of multiplicities instead of binaries. Irigaray and Deleuze share a concern about binary natures. Both believe in the possibility of multiplicity, a spectrum of development allowing for a wide range of dynamic interactions. If looked at through the concepts of multiplicity or binary, if “man seeks her out, since he has inscribed her in discourse, but as lack, as fault or flaw,” (This Sex 89) then how do we connect Code and Mists and their gender implications, their “discourse” on women? One way to make such a connection is through Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome theory, articulated in their book, A Thousand Plateaus. This theory (henceforth “Deleuzian rhizome” or simply “rhizome”) postulates that there is no center. There is just an ever expanding network of intangible thoughts/theories/texts that work together throughout time and space, allowing new ideas to come forth from old ideas, but always with a trace of the old buried within it. An analogy would be lily pads: once they have begun to grow,
there is no telling where the "original" plant began, or
where the next shoot will come up. They are everywhere and
in every direction.

Deleuze and Guattari state, "A rhizome ceaselessly
establishes connections between semiotic chains,
organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the
arts, sciences, and social struggles" (7). The social
struggles of gender roles and relations in The Code and
Mists complicate the rhizomic theory in both texts,
creating between them connections and a consistent "line of
flight" or direction of thought as it moved down the
rhizome. Although both Brown and Bradley attempted
something "new" within the popular literary canon, so too
did they use the thoughts of those who came before them,
allowing for new "shoots" to develop after them. They
suggest, "There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever
segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the
line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always
tie back to one another" (9). Just as these tales of the
gendered grail and matrilineage continually tie back to one
another, so too do The Mists and The Code in their
correlationally intertwined stories.
In this way, the lines of flight help us develop "multiplicities" or ways of thinking beyond simple binary ideas of mother/father, male/female, etc. Allowing a synergistic spectrum instead of concrete binaries allows for the possibilities of movement, of voicing things that perhaps were left unsaid or intentionally silenced in an "arborified" or "rooted" system where roles are fixed in stone. Multiplicity also allows for the possibility of "celebratory" silence instead of just destructive silence, and even for the possibility of both at once.

"Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudomultiplicities for what they are" (8). "Pseudomultiplicities" are those which suggest possibilities of a spectrum, but are rather problematically "rooted" so that there are no new directions possible, but rather nothing more than an arborified binary. In literature, we can see multiplicities within texts, even as binaries are often reinscribed in those same multiplicitous texts.

Irigaray, Deleuze and Guattari have all developed theories of multiplicity, both in gender and in the complex nature of the rhizome. These theories allow for an in depth examination of The Mists and The Code and their uses of
silence, matrilineage, and the feminizing of the holy grail. These multiplicities of gender construction and of rhizomic movement between The Code and The Mists must be considered. How do we see silence being treated in both texts? Are all women in them lacking, or only ones who use their voices in particular ways? The gendered Grail has enormous implications when looked at through these theorists’ lenses, as the woman is consistently the quest, the one chased, sought, “saved” and captured, or doubting, silenced and fading away. Deleuze and Guattari contend, “The book imitates the world, as art imitates nature: by procedures specific to it that accomplish what nature cannot or can no longer do. The law of the book is the law of reflection, the One that becomes Two” (5). If the book is the law of reflection, what reflection are we looking at when we read these incredibly popular texts? Are we accepting an “arborified” version of gender that is linear, refusing to allow for new “shoots” or possibilities? Or, alternatively, are silence, matrilineage, and the gendering of the grail in some sense a celebratory multiplicity, connecting texts through time, and allowing for revision of women’s voices in mythology?
The Deleuzian rhizome and Irigaray’s theories of silence and multiplicities operate together effortlessly in analyzing Brown’s and Bradley’s texts. Irigaray states,

But you can’t anticipate it, foresee it, program it. Our all cannot be projected, or mastered. Our whole body is moved. No surface holds. No figure, line, or point remains. No ground subsists. But no abyss, either. Depth, for us, is not a chasm. Without a solid crust, there is no precipice.

(This Sex 213)

And Deleuze and Guattari state,

There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad. (Plateaus 9)

Clearly, both texts take issue with binaries and dichotomies, preferring the concept of the multiple, of possibilities that go far beyond that of dualism to rhizomic movements allowing for ultimate possibilities. In
The rhizome, on the other hand, is a liberation of sexuality not only from reproduction but also from genitality. Here in the West, the tree has implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes. We have lost the rhizome, or the grass. (Plateaus 18)

Irigaray, too, believes that the sex/gender dichotomy has been “lost” because of a demand from those in power for the “others” silence. In her book, Experiments in Visceral Philosophy, Tamsin Lorraine states,

Irigaray insists on the receptivity to the divine of a living subject in continual contact with embodied other in a sensual world; Deleuze and Guattari lay out approaches to the virtual that may provide new perspectives on such living. (19)

This complementarity follows clear lines of flight through both Irigarian and Deleuzian theory, allowing for a rich analysis of gender in both Brown and Bradley’s texts.

In analyzing this movement, I will begin with The Mists, developing themes of silence and matrilineage through the themes of gender roles and depictions,
matrilineal lines of flight, the gendered Grail, and archetypes as they contribute to the female characters' silence in both celebratory and destructive ways, while being both relegated to the periphery and brought to the forefront, existing in tension together. I will examine Morgaine and her actions involving the Grail, and in relation to Kevin the Merlin, as well as her relationships with Igraine, Viviane, Morgause and her son Mordred.

I will then proceed to The Code, analyzing the rhizomic movements so blatant in the text, as well as the lack of voice and action in the character of Sophie. I will apply Irigarian theories of silence, matrilineage, and multiplicity to this text as we see Sophie and the "sacred feminine" relegated to progenitors of the race and not much more, but I will also research whether there can be any kind of "celebratory" silence involved in Sophie's choices and actions in throughout the text. Once again, there exists a tension between celebratory and destructive silence; although Sophie is problematically silenced and infantilized through much of the text, I posit that, in fact, the female voice survives in part because of Sophie's silence (and her matrilineal grandmother's), allowing the
eternal quest for the ethereal grail, thereby maintaining the feminine voice in the world.

Finally, I will link the *The Mists* and *The Code* together, using their themes of silence, matrilineage, and the gendering of the grail to analyze them simultaneously through the rhizome and Irigarian theory. I believe that both texts are problematic in their depictions of women's voices and silences, as well as their occasional "Eve-like" lack of usefulness to a society that considers marketability as all important. Deleuze and Guattari state, "In other cases, on the contrary, one will bolster oneself directly on a line of flight enabling one to blow apart strata, cut roots, and make new connections" (15) and I intend to show that new connections along the lines of flight of gender construction are not only possible, but necessary when looked at through the lens of a possibly "arborified" societal gender construction.
CHAPTER TWO

FADING INTO THE MISTS

But let us say that in the beginning was the end of her story, and that from now on she will have one dictated to her: by the man-father

—Irigaray, Speculum 43

The problematic themes of silence, matrilineage, and the gendering of the holy grail are superbly exemplified in Marion Zimmer Bradley’s watershed novel *The Mists of Avalon*, written in 1983. I examine how, in this text, concepts of silence and matrilineage intertwine with the gender multiplicities and interactions of the characters, and in the gendering of the Holy grail to reinscribe normative gender roles even as Bradley attempts to overturn those norms. Throughout, where applicable, I will use Deleuzian and Irigarian theories to illustrate my assertions about these multiplicities, and how silence and lack function within and outside of them. I will attempt to follow the rhizomic shoots as they transition through
multiple layers of the text, because, as Deleuze and Guattari theorize,

Strike the pose or follow the axis, genetic stage or structural destiny — one way or the other, your rhizome will be broken. You will be allowed to live and speak, but only after every outlet has been obstructed. Once a rhizome has been obstructed, arborified, it's all over, no desire stirs; for it is always by rhizome that desire moves and produces. (Plateaus 14)

Analyzing the gender rhizome of this text prevents gender concepts in fiction from becoming “arborified” or “rooted”, so that it continues to “move and produce” allowing women to speak, or stay silent if they so choose, rather than become “obstructed” with no other way to speak than through a hegemonic hierarchy that speaks for, or at least about, them.

Beginning with the theme of the gendered holy grail, by which I mean the Grail of legend as it is feminized by the women of Avalon and the dichotomous frictions of matriarchal/patriarchal structures in Bradley’s novel, I will analyze just how the grail is re-conceptualized as a feminine religious device, and how this reflects a thematic
division involving silence while also focusing on gender binaries. How these binaries are depicted ultimately effects how the text is read, as we see women silenced even in a revisionist novel. Next, my investigation will focus on the different maternal aspects of the text as exemplified by Morgaine (synechdotal for Avalon) and Gwen (synechdotal for a Christian Court) and how both of them signify in their separate worlds silence, matrilineage, and gender division developed in Avalonian and Arthurian societies. The movement from circular, cyclical relationships between nature and the female characters (a rhizome) turns to a linear, rooted form, in Arthur's court, denying any other shoots, which in turn "arborifies" the relations between the genders, and the ways in which they both can "properly" conduct themselves in relation to one another.

The Silence of the Feminine Holy Grail

Bradley develops the Holy Regalia, (including the Grail) as originating on the Isle of Avalon, made by and for the pagan goddess worshiping culture. It includes the sword, Excalibur, as well as the sacred chalice. The scabbard, too, becomes intertwined with the destiny of the
sacred items, made by a female hand. In this way, Bradley's chalice and other regalia is moved from "historically" patriarchal use (Jesus and his twelve disciples, who are listed primarily as men) to that of a matriarchal, goddess worshiping culture, (Avalon) asserting the grail itself an aspect of femininity. It is, ultimately, the holy regalia which creates the chaos that ensues at the end of the text, leading to the defeat of Avalon.

This revision of the grail myth is an excellent example of the Deleuzian rhizome. The tale itself has been told many times, in many ways, and in many different places. It is a rhizomic text, and Bradley's revision of it is yet another shoot of that text. According to Carl Jung in his book, *Psychological Types*,

> These [mythical narratives] are archaic forms of expression which become symbols, and these appear in their turn as equivalents of the devalued objects. This process is as old as mankind, for symbols may be found among the relics of prehistoric man as well as among the most primitive human types living today. (238)

Much like the Deleuzian rhizome, Jung posits that the quest for the grail, or what it symbolizes, is like the search
for various symbols throughout time, (such as the search
for the Arc of the Covenant, or the quest for the dragon). One such connection links *The Mists* and *The Da Vinci Code*, especially since both gender the grail through themes of matrilineage and silence.

Jung also says of the grail, "it began, it seems to me with the worship of woman, which strengthened the man's soul very considerably as a psychological factor, since the worship of woman meant worship of her soul" (221). The holy regalia, and specifically the chalice that comes to represent the ultimate "soul" of the divine, begins with woman as the Chalice of Avalon, into which the priestesses gaze to penetrate the psychic realms. Arthur's Christian court, too, attempt to find the chalice in order to drink from it once again, but find only madness, despair, or, perhaps worse, nothing at all. They fail to see that woman is the quest, and they have relegated her to the background, demanding silence from her. Sadly, this twisted worship of the feminine leads to destruction, a rhizomic shoot that was unforeseen.

In an incredible scene of destructive silencing and maternal loss, Viviane approaches Arthur to demand the Holy Regalia be returned to the women of Avalon since he has
broken his pledge to rule under the symbol of Avalon. The
Lady of Avalon is murdered by the foster brother, 'Balan,' of
her own (fostered) son, Balin, whose mother she had helped
pass out of the suffering of life and into death. In front
of the king's throne, Viviane, matriarch of Avalon, is
forever silenced in a bloody massacre. The woman lies at
the man's feet, slain in her attempt to voice her demands.
Her words were left unsaid, literally cut off the moment
she began to speak. This calls to mind Irigaray's
explanation that, "At last, she has been authorized to
remain silent, hidden from prying eyes in the intimacy of
this exchange where she sees what she will be unable to
express. Where she sees nothing and where she sees
everything" (Speculum 200). Viviane can now "remain silent"
as she moves into the ethereal realms, where she is
voiceless in the world of men. She is the mother of several
women in the text, and the symbol of the divine mother of
them all, and yet is left forever silent, unable to demand
the regalia made my female hands be returned to those
female hands.

Morgaine feels it is her duty to carry out the
unspoken demands of Viviane, to return the holy regalia to
Avalon and punish those associated with its introduction to
Arthur's increasingly Christian court. Morgaine's mourning for Viviane fuels a revenge narrative that belies Morgaine's ostensible reasons for punishing both Kevin and Arthur. Upon Viviane's death, Morgaine screams at Kevin, "Your allegiance is not to Arthur nor to Britain, but only to the Goddess and to your vows!" (505) to which Kevin angrily replies, "Woman, you do not command me! You who have renounced Avalon, by what right do you presume to give order to the Merlin? Rather you should kneel before me!" (505).

Eventually, after so many harsh and ugly words between them, (again, the destructive nature of not being silent – had Morgaine calmly argued with Kevin, perhaps some kind of consensus could have developed. Instead, however, there is only room for anger. In this sense, silence could have been celebratory and allowed for vastly different results.) Morgaine, as the new matriarch and high priestess of Avalon, sentences Kevin to death, and he is cursed with being a traitor and forever imprisoned in the sacred tree. Morgaine declares, "A hundred lifetimes shall you return, Kevin Harper, always seeking the Goddess and never finding her" (801). Kevin is silenced just as surely as the women usually are, by a woman who uses words to condemn his soul,
the very soul "men worship." This revision of the myth portrays Morgaine in a harsh light; she is unforgiving and vengeful. For a text touted as a highly feminist work, this remains problematic – how can we see the strong, powerful woman in a positive light when she becomes vengeful and destructive? Through the lens of multiplicity, Morgaine's behavior is along a spectrum, and therefore not so unusual. People will behave according to the situation, and not necessarily always in a celebratory manner.

When Morgaine regains the chalice, the holy grail of legend and the symbol of the feminine divine, Bradley's revision takes another interesting turn. In a scene laden with spiritual lyricism, Morgaine appears to the Knights of the roundtable as a divine being, holding a cup to their lips and encouraging them to drink from it, whispering, "Drink. This is the Holy Presence" (771). The moment Morgaine's divine image disappears, they go on a "quest" to find the grail, the very grail held by a woman and offered as a blessing. But, from the Knights' perspective, the grail disappears, to be quested after for all eternity. Morgaine muses, "The final irony was this: that her holiest of visions should inspire the most passionate legend of Christian worship" (810).
It is, paradoxically, the feminine aspect of the grail that disappears with Morgaine and Avalon into The Mists, even as the one character who celebrates silence, Raven, dies amidst the court as the grail forever leaves the world. Raven chose her silence, giving her voice to the goddess all her life. She breaks her silence to join Morgaine in retrieving the regalia for Avalon, and in doing so loses her life:

[S]he had held firm, buoyed by the Great Magic, until the Grail had gone away to Avalon, all her own strength poured out selflessly to strengthen Morgaine in the work of the Goddess; and then, that strength withdrawn, her life had gone with it. (773)

Raven, whose voice belonged to the female divine, loses not only her life, but also her voice in the Arthurian court, removing the feminine grail from the patriarchal religion. French feminist Luce Irigaray illustrates the beauty of Raven’s sacrifice with her statement, “This would be the final meaning of the obedience demanded of woman. She is merely the passage that serves to transform the inessential whims of a still sensible and material nature into universal will” (Speculum 225). The “universal will” is to
find the gendered grail, the ultimate pathway to the
divine, and so, equally, to hear the feminine voice, which
Raven obediently gives up to the goddess until the time
when she must speak. But her silence comes at a cost: “I
kept silence even when I feared this would come [. . .] but
now, perhaps, I must go forth and break silence
forevermore. . .and I am afraid. . . .” (760).

The grail is gone, as is the sacred feminine in her
“originary” form. But, as with any rhizomic entity, she
remains, too, in the form of the Virgin Mary, whom the nuns
worship at the convent of women. This convent is nothing
but women’s voices and their meditations, a strange mirror
image of Avalon. Those that seek shall find, and several
women find comfort among the women who, as did the women of
Avalon, keep to themselves and their own meditations, even
though they remain also under the “guidance” of the
priests. As Kevin the Merlin claims to Morgaine,

Avalon will always be there for all men to find
if they can seek the way thither, throughout all
the ages past the ages. If they cannot find the
way to Avalon, it is a sign, perhaps, that they
are not ready. (471)
Here, Kevin argues that faith itself matters more than the kind of faith, and that one’s “readiness” is individually, rather than denominationally determined. For Kevin, therefore, the silence of Avalon is only intangible to those who are not “ready.” For those who are prepared, Avalon will “speak” to them. As a revisionist statement, this indicates that should we, as readers, be open to searching for the feminine, even as she is silenced, in our literature, we are bound to find her. Morgaine, and Avalon, await in the silent shadows for those who are “ready” and prepared to celebrate the range of silence and voice in all its aspects, rather than inscribing these simply as negatively feminine.

Morgaine, as the living symbol of Bradley’s Avalon, develops strength from a spiritual and meditative silence in many ways; “All that day, in silence, [Morgaine] worked, gazing into the chalice, letting the images rise; now and then stopping to wait for inspiration in the meditative flow” (198). Morgaine creates the scabbard for the sword of the Holy Regalia, (Excaliber) weaving into it her own spells of safety. It is in a celebratory, meditative, and noticeably feminine, silence that Morgaine works with the Holy Regalia, which will keep Arthur safe from his enemies,
and ultimately, leads to the total silencing of the mystical women of Avalon when Arthur breaks his vows to Avalon and the Pendragon, declaring Christianity as the only religion allowed in his realm. Avalon fades into The Mists as it is forgotten by the people of Camelot, silencing the goddess’ voice as it was heard by the people of Avalon. However, it lives on in its new guise, that of the Virgin Mary, and Morgaine keeps silent on the matter, allowing the goddesses voice, through Morgaine’s silence, to remain in the world. Once again, the expressions of silence and the ethereal feminine voice are multiple.

The ethereal female voice is “alien” to the patriarchal religion of Arthur’s court, and thus the love that could come from the equality of viewpoints suffers grievously once it is entrenched. Irigaray asks, “But what if the “object” started to speak?” (Speculum 135) Morgaine, too, wonders this in a conversation with a knight of the round table, hearing that “the Romans had made this the common law, that women were the chattels of their menfolk” (312). They become “objects” or commodities to be traded among men, from father to husband or brother. Silence and obedience were expected of the “chattel.” If they start to speak, however, and deny the “mutism” forced upon them as
objects, then what are the consequences? If Gwen is considered as the reality, then the consequences of her voice are indeed destructive, at least to the women of Avalon.

The “object” or “other” for Irigaray is the woman, whom she considers an often silent commodity among a patriarchal system. It is, in fact, when Gwenyvere, who was “given” to her husband, argues with Arthur about their not having conceived, and breaks her obligatory female silence as “object.” The world they have together created begins to crumble, as her own allegiance to the patriarchal religion overshadows Arthur’s allegiance to the matriarchal religion which he was pledged to follow. This paradox underscores Irigaray’s theory that silence can be celebratory, because when the silence is broken in an outpouring of anger and delusion, destruction can follow.

Arthur, in an attempt to create harmony between his wife and best friend, Lancelet, (who is in love with Gwen) erroneously breaks his own silence and orchestrates a romantic interlude between himself and both of them. In this way, the silence of Gwen’s and Lancelet’s feelings become voiced, and yet, the consequences of this development are far-reaching. In this erotic scene in which
Gwenyvere, Arthur and Lancelot share a bed together, Gwen yells at Arthur,

I saw it then, you touched him with more love than ever you have given the woman my father forced on you — when you led me into this sin, can you swear it was not your own sin, and all your fine talk no more than a cover for that very sin that brought down fire from Heaven on the city of Sodom? (Bradley 547)

Gwen is upset because it is not she whom Arthur loves, but rather because, as she asked Arthur, “can you not say that it is Lancelet you love best?” Gwen speaks of being a commodity “her father forced” on Arthur, and now that the “object” speaks, we see that breaking her silence only brings grief. The reversal of silence and lack applied by Gwen break down the normative gender binaries of love and relationships, adding yet more complexity to the spectrum of human relations. The relationship between Arthur and Lancelet, too, speaks of a multiplicitous spectrum of sexuality, rather than one of simple binaries. Likewise, whereas Christian women in Arthur’s Camelot are supposed to be docile and silent, Gwen reacts more like a woman of Avalon, voicing her displeasure and frustration in such a
way that she creates feelings of lack in Arthur, her male counterpart in the kingdom, showing in her own way the varying possibilities of voice and silence actually available to her.

Gwen’s refusal to stay silent reflects that she is, in fact, connected to the women of Avalon, in that she doesn’t fully internalize the gender roles set before her. Irigaray explains “if the place is plowed over again in this way, it is always in search of the lost roots of sameness” (Speculum 228), which connects to the Deluezian concept of the rhizome, suggesting that within this reversal we find once again the “roots of sameness” between the female characters, even as they separate into binary belief systems. Unlike the relationships in Avalon, which often cross gender lines, such as the relationships between Morgaine and Raven, and Morgaine and the Fairy folk, the relationships in Arthur’s Christian court become injurious because of entrenched taboos. The love between Arthur and Lancelet is nothing like that between Gwen and her Arthur, but the suggestion is that love between them all is a complex web with no true “root,” which both Irigaray and Deleuze suggest as a positive concept rather than a negative one. The “roots of sameness” apply to human
emotions regardless of gender. Deleuze and Guattari give a compelling articulation of this concept: “Knowing how to love does not mean remaining a man or a woman; it means extracting from one’s sex the particles, the speeds and slownesses, [sic] the flows, the n sexes that constitute the girl of that sexuality” (277).

Gwen was “given” to her husband along with horses, just another piece of chattel, and she is also unable to receive “true” love (as she views it, silently) from either of the men she loves. As Irigaray suggests, “If commodities could speak, they might possibly give an opinion about their price, abut whether they consider their status just, or abut the dealings of their owners” (This Sex 118), and as a “commodity” we see Gwen speak. She is clearly feeling “lack” here, (or a sense that she is worth less than a woman who can bear children, illustrating the power of the maternal) and by not maintaining silence she casts shame and degradation on Arthur and Lancelet, a reversal because those traits are usually ascribed to the female gender. Paradoxically, she is silenced by the very religion in which she so willingly participates, and when she speaks, it is the words of patriarchy she uses, not those of
equality (i.e. matriarchy) and shared passion belonging to those who celebrate the Beltane fires she wants destroyed.

Irigaray states, “history” has manipulated the desire of woman - who is forced to function as an object, or more rarely as a subject - so as to perpetuate the existence of God” (This Sex 231) and in The Mists we see that not only Morgaine, but Gwenyvere too, function as feminine “objects” through which the male characters attempt to get closer to god, even though they come from two different sides of the binary in their religious affiliations. After Morgaine manages to remove the grail from Arthur’s Christian court, she too leaves for Avalon. While neither woman remains silent throughout, Gwenyvere’s voice eventually wins out over Morgaine’s, even as Morgaine takes the Holy Regalia into The Mists with her, silenced forever, with mankind forever questing after the lack provided by her (its) disappearance, just as the Knights of the Round Table take oaths to follow the legend of the grail until their own demise.

Paradoxically, in this way, it is also not silent. While Morgaine and Avalon recede into The Mists, their legend stays alive, as does the ideology behind the grail. This mythology has provided offshoots, a literary
reproductive offspring that continues to tell the story of Morgaine, of the Grail, of Avalon and of the eternal maternal. So, while they may be quiet, perhaps they are not completely silent after all.

The Silent and Eternal Grail of the Maternal and the Rhizome.

Regardless of the female characters' faults, the one issue Bradley's women must contend with is that of motherhood and mother-relations. Often, the way in which the voice of women can be heard, at least minimally, is through their children. Viviane, Igraine, Morgaine, and Morgouse are all mothers. Each of them has a distinct and difficult relationship with their children. Morgaine, through her son Mordred, brings the kingdom of Camelot to destruction. This increasingly complex relationship between the women and their offspring develops, once again, a chasm of silence, as they feel so distanced from one another they can no longer hear one another. Mordred can not fathom his mothers position, and feels adrift because of their incomplete connection. According to Irigaray, "as mother, woman remains on the side of (re)productive nature and, because of this, man can never fully transcend his relation
to the natural” (This Sex 185), and, clearly, Morgaine is the “reproductive nature” just as Mordred is unable to “fully transcend” his relationship to his parents.

The only female in the text that relates only to the maternal only in the negative is Gwen, who cannot have children, and predicates her entire worth on not being able to give Arthur an heir for the throne. This leads to her eventual wrath against both Arthur and Morgaine, especially when she finds out that they have had a child together. This relates to the Lacanian notion that woman is only truly inculcated into the feminine imaginary when she has a child—prior to that, or lacking that, she is “less than.”

The complexity surrounding the maternal and feelings of “less than” are abundant in this text. For instance, Igraine sends her daughter Morgaine away so that she will not fall into the “black priest’s hands,” and also so that when her husband comes home all of her time and energy can be concentrated on him. Viviane, acting as Lady of the Lake, is at once mother to them all, and mother to none, cultivating relationships between the women so as to keep Avalon, and its faith, from fading into obscurity. Similarly, Morgaine is eventually duped into marrying the King of North Wales. He needs a “companion” and mother to
his young children, and so asks Arthur to "give" him a woman for his household. Gwenyvere, angry with Morgaine, sets her up for an unhappy marriage to the elderly king by suggesting it to Arthur. But there is also an acceptance within the relationship between the old king and Morgaine that women are not property, and that they can manage to have their own standing in the community without having to be attached to a man (or god). Important as well is the fact that Morgaine, at her "advanced" age, will not be expected to have children "for" her new husband. She is exempt from Irigaray's position that, "mothers, reproductive instruments marked with the name of the father and enclosed in his house, must be private property, excluded from exchange" (This Sex 185). Morgaine is expected to provide companionship to the elderly man, even as she takes a young lover and pagan consort in his son. She wonders about her own son, Mordred, but feels no particular kinship with him, since Morgause, in her plans for Queenship, made sure that Morgaine would feel little motherly instinct.

The Lady of Avalon also exemplifies simultaneously both matrilineal views of egalitarian sensual/sexual relations and the lack of maternal relations within Avalon.
She has various men in her bed throughout the years, and bears several children, but never is she forced to give up her independence to marriage or childrearing, which mirrors Lacan's concept that in the period of the "real" there is no difference or inequality, just "need," which in a matrilineal culture can be filled through relationships that do not attribute lack to one gender or the other, or require silence due to biology. "By her failure to be defined or predicated, she serves as in(de)finite basis for the ontological promotion of each living thing" (Speculum 162). And it is the "ontological promotion" that causes Viviane's lack of maternal affection for her children, coming from the "duty-first" concept of ruling a faith based culture. While there is nothing shameful in fulfilling ones physical desires, there is also little time for children contained in the ultimate plans of the Lady of the Lake, although she too, like Arthur, must have an heir to continue the ways of Avalon. The lack of an heir eventually leads to total silencing of Avalon.

In Bradley's Camelot, there not only must be an heir to the throne, (hence Gwen's despair), but the heir must be male. The male in patriarchal Arthurian court is the one with the Lacanian "phallic power," and yet, we see that
women in this text can also exert a type of this power. This is what Irigaray refers to as "phallic currency" and both Morgaine and Viviane use this currency in their attempt to keep their voices in the world, even as they are continually being silenced by the new regime, and failing to establish maternal relationships with the children in their lives, which in turn creates a type of silence and lack between all them. This developing silence and lack draws together the impossibility of healthy family relations, as each member must do as she feels is "right" according to the faith she believes in.

Viviane is, in Irigaray's words, "the reserve of 'sensuality' for the elevation of intelligence, she is the matter used for the imprint of forms, the gage of possible" (Speculum 141). Viviane is the gage of what is possible, what can become of Avalon and Camelot both, and, ultimately, what pagan women are to Christian men. Young-Eisandreth says, "A beautiful woman is a metaphor, in our culture, for certain kinds of power, but that power also has other meanings and consequences" (8). The Lady of Avalon has power, and by the end of the book that power is taken over by the reigning patriarchal system, showing that a woman with matriarchal power and without maternal
feelings, is unacceptable not only in our current “forward” thinking culture, but also within a fantastical literary framework as well.

She remains outside the circularity of a thought that, in its telos, turns to his ends the cause of his desire: She is the unconscious basis of that attempt to find metaphor for an originary matrix in the sphere of intimacy within self, of nearness to self, of a ‘soul’ or mind. (Irigaray, Speculum 240)

Morgaine often questions her “unconscious basis”, trying to determine whether her motives are truly given by the goddess, (her “originary matrix”) or if they are no better than the motives of foster-mother Viviane, who, in her desire to keep Avalon from fading away, manipulates the lives of those around her to do the “goddesses will,” including allowing Morgaine and Arthur, half-siblings, to create a child in the name of the divine maternal. Morgaine later reflects on her own motherhood upon meeting with her son as an adult in Avalon;

[T]his was not her son; Uwaine, perhaps, was her son, but not Gwydion. This dark, handsome young man so like the Lancelet she had loved as a girl,
he was not her son looking for the first time on
the mother who had abandoned him before he was
weaned; he was priest and she priestess of the
Great Goddess, and if they were no more to each
other than that, at least they were no less.(645)
The bond between mother and son is silent, just as the bond
between men and women too lacks words within the new
Arthurian patriarchal system. Neither is willing to give
voice to this feeling of lack, however, and eventually it
causes destruction as they cease to be able to communicate
in an honest, forthright fashion about their needs,
demands, and desires.

Another connection between silence and matriarchal
culture is revealed by Morgaine and her relationship with
her son. Morgaine keeps silent about her own son, Mordred,
by her half-brother Arthur, primarily because of the taboo
the Christian court places on the concept of brother/sister
relations. Morgaine’s silence on the matter contributes to
the hatred the boy feels toward both of his parents, which
produces further complexities around the issues of maternal
gender functioning in this text. Other women, likewise,
either keep silent when they should not, or voice emotions
in anger/frustration when they should keep silent. The
priestess Raven, who has taken a lifelong vow of silence, for instance, reflects, “I have been silent too long...I kept silence even when I feared this would come” (760). Raven chooses her lifetime of silence, giving her voice to the goddess, but breaks that vow when the Holy Regalia of Avalon would be lost to Arthur’s Christian court. Her voice, in the end, is also denied, as the vow she makes to the goddess claims her in death after she assists Morgaine with the removal of the Regalia from Arthur’s court.

The maternal dictates a woman’s place in the patriarchal world, and this develops yet another dichotomy within the text: if women in patriarchal Camelot do not have children, or have limited relationships with them, does that make them less “female” and, transversely, if the women of Avalon allow their children to be reared far from Avalon and by other women, does it make them unnatural? Bradley’s text raises complex issues surrounding the theme of the maternal, which are not easily answered.

The Living Grail of Gender

While the issues surrounding the maternal are abundant in this text, it is impossible to separate them from those of gender as a whole, or the “grail of gender,” by which I
mean those normative codes of behavior ascribed to each gender. For instance, Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* reinterprets the shift from pre-Christian, goddess worshiping cultures into the patriarchal monotheistic culture of Arthurian legend. From female, goddess worshiping, egalitarian concepts of balance, the move is made to male hierarchical, monotheistic, concepts of men as objective, and women subjective because of the "fall." Christianity posits that the first woman, Eve, eats a forbidden apple, thereby forcing all of humanity to suffer until their return to God upon death. Bradley's revision of the Arthurian legend of Morgaine, or Morgan le Fey, allows for the feminine voice of that legend to be heard, whereas it has been relegated to the periphery in older versions, such as Mallory's. Morgaine has been a witch, a villain, a sorceress, always spoken of, but never speaking. At the same time, *The Mists* is also strongly emblematic of both the Deleuzian rhizome and Irigarian theories of gender binaries. The rhizome, as an ever expanding movement without a center, includes all stories that branch out from a similar story before it, just as *The Mists* takes previous accounts of Morgan le Fey and adds her own feminist revision in a rhizomic move. Likewise, Irigaray states,
"Woman's only relation to origin is one dictated by man's" (Speculum 33). This novel gives women an "origin" separate from that of "man's" even as we watch the relational chasm between the genders unfold.

In Bradley's text we see the genders depicted as having possibilities beyond those of "arborified" stereotypical feminine/masculine roles; the women like Morgaine, Igraine, and Viviane are strong and independent, yet remain capable of healthy emotion and intellect with the men around them. Men like Arthur and Lancelet are strong, yet also remain open to emotion and discourse on feelings between them, as exampled during the conversation between Morgaine and Lancelet when he reveals to her that he wonders if his feelings for Gwen are only so strong because of his deeper love for Arthur. It is not just the characters at odds, nor the transitioning of landscapes as Avalon recedes and the Christian world becomes dominant, but of the relationship between the genders - what here, I will call the "grail of gender" - they represent. There is a rhizomic, mutually dependant movement existing between these two worlds as they relate specifically to gender; one recedes into silence, and the other dominates, even as both continue to exist in some manner. The silent world remains
a latent, potent force, one to be awakened through the continual quest for the feminine and the maternal.

These possibilities of gender construction do not make life any less complex for the characters. Rather, they underscore that relationships can be difficult to navigate in any time period, and especially when two competing ideologies, such as those of Arthurian and Avalonian cultures, find it necessary to merge. This concept is articulated well by Irigarian theories of gender dualities: "Everyone, in effect, is pulled up by the roots, deprived of the body's first resources, of the endless possibilities of being in space" (Speculum 164). By dividing the genders and subjugating one to the other, both are deprived of "endless possibilities" of being. While the matriarchal culture of Avalon sees these possibilities as necessary to the balance of life, the Christian Arthurian court subjugates the women to the men, thereby creating an arborified culture which denies possibility.

The celebration of gender differences and of the balance both male and female bring to the world vanishes in the shift from Bradley's matriarchal Avalon to Arthur's patriarchal Christian court. Instead, in this text, women who find silence comforting and spiritual in the
matrilineal Avalonian culture become forcibly silenced within a patriarchal Christian, Arthurian structure.

Two female characters in particular are emblematic of the destructive possibilities of voice and silence, both of which develop elements of lack. Bradley's novel's central implicit claim is that Avalon recedes into The Mists in direct proportion to Camelot's departure from previously followed traditions of matrilineal/pagan/Goddess worship and embraces patriarchal Christianity in the Arthurian court. Morgaine, a synecdoche for Avalon, uses her voice in an attempt to prevent Avalon from fading into The Mists. Following the voice of her spiritual predecessor, Viviane, Morgaine argues vehemently with Arthur, his priests, and Gwen, who shift steadily toward a patriarchal culture of subjugation and arborified gender roles. Meanwhile, Gwen, a female synecdoche for Arthur's Christian court, uses her voice to further push Arthur's court toward a paradigm that paradoxically prefers the silence of women, as she consistently berates Arthur for his allowance of pagan rituals on pagan holidays. Gwen's voice, as that closest to Arthur, eventually silences Morgaine's voice, driving Avalon into The Mists even as Gwen's voice too loses its persuasiveness within the patriarchal system she champions.
The Mists also illustrates that the genders are quite capable of handling themselves outside of relationships, even though those relationships are often the very reasons they make decisions which go against their better judgment. The use of judgment often follows the decision to be vocal or silent, active or passive. In this text, the women are often silent, and their silence depends on whether they are silent in order to achieve their own means, or they are being silenced by the patriarchal system around them, that this silence can be considered celebratory or destructive. For instance, Morgaine’s aunt Morgause keeps silent only when she can see possible personal benefit from doing so, just as she keeps the secret of Mordred’s parentage until the opportune moment. Morgaine, too, stays silent about the charm she gives Elaine in order to trap Lancelet into marriage. Although this is not personal gain for her in any way, she feels she does what she must in order to save Arthur’s kingdom. The characters complexity creates a dichotomy: a celebratory silence can have destructive consequences, just as devious silence can develop positive results.

The whole of the opposing religions have been gendered: matriarchal Avalon vs. patriarchal Camelot, male
vs. female, hysteria vs. logic. While these binaries are not necessarily negative in their totality, according to Irigaray, they create destruction when one is subjugated to another. Intriguingly, both sets of religious advocates in this text, as they try to subjugate one another, can be fanatical in their own ways. The Christian priests of Arthur’s court are staunch advocates of their own patriarchal faith that condemns women, just as the female priestess’ of Avalon are holding fast to theirs, which does not deny women’s agency in the world. These dueling belief systems of Avalon and Camelot correlate to the Deleuzian rhizome:

The same applies to the group map: show at what point in the rhizome there form phenomena of massification, bureaucracy, leadership, fascization, etc., which lines nevertheless survive, if only underground, continuing to make rhizome in the shadows. (15)

The beginnings of patriarchal structure in Camelot create a “massification” of belief, yet, Avalon and its beliefs continue on in the “shadows” or mists. Avalon, with its premise of equality and balance, is theoretically more utopic than that of Bradley’s Camelot, which is created
with one gender subjugated and silenced by the other. They are both, however, arborified in their belief systems.

In another example of this "massification" of patriarchal dogma, Morgaine's mother Igraine argues with her husband, and prior to his death, Gorlois, Igraine's first husband, tells her, "A holy man told me once that women bear the blood of their mothers, and so it has been since the days of Eve, that what is within women, who are filled with sin, cannot be overcome by a woman-child..." (86). Women exist in both worlds, but as the change comes in the form of religion, so the female characters must learn new ways of asserting themselves in a culture that deems them unworthy.

In response to this characterization of women as sinful, Igraine, on her own death bed, tells Gwen,

I sent [Morgaine] from me because I felt it better, if it came to be a choice of evils, that she should be in Avalon and in the hands of the goddess, than in the hands of the black priests who would teach her to think that she was evil because she was a woman. (359)

It is interesting that Igraine stays silent on the matter in front of her Christian husband, but, "in the shadows,"
sends Morgaine to a matrilineal culture which would encourage a celebration of silence that would not produce a sense of lack, thereby continuing the rhizome itself. Had Morgaine not been sent to Avalon, the issues surrounding Arthur's court would never have come to pass. Therefore, by choosing to submit herself to the Christian court, but also to allow her daughter to be raised in matrilineal Avalon, a connection remains between both Camelot and Avalon, forging ties through the rhizome. Igraine informs Gwen, her daughter in-law, that she is glad she sent Morgaine, her biological daughter, to be raised by women who did not diminish her value because of her womanhood. So, while often silenced, women's voices seemingly fade, and yet, complexly, they remain on the periphery, in a kind of "shadows" that defies complete abandonment, just as Igraine continues to live in the world of patriarchy, keeping her voice at the forefront, even as her daughter's voice remains in the shadows of the maternal.

The patrilineal belief system of Arthur's court polarizes the genders into a hierarchy, whereas the matrilineal Avalon culture sees them as balancing one another. At issue is not necessarily that there are two different genders, but that the subordination of one to the
other creates lack, not only in women, but between women and men, just as the genders fail in their communication with one another in the shift from Avalon to Camelot.

Irigaray states,

By submitting women’s bodies to a general equivalent, to a transcendent, super-natural value, men have drawn the social structure into an ever greater process of abstraction, to the point where they themselves are produced in it as pure concepts. (This Sex 190)

The end of the novel portrays a world impoverished as women are silenced. As even Gwen realizes despite her obsessive Christianity,

She had thought, if ever she bore Arthur’s son, then he must give her place and show her great respect, not treat her still as that useless woman he had been forced to take a part of a dowry of horse! Yet, here she was, packed off into a corner again because he could not be rid of her. . . (390)

Earlier Gwen thinks, “Once again I must do as I am bid, like any woman, no matter what I want” (382). She is effectively silenced, even as she continues to push Arthur
to accept the patriarchal religion that demands her silence due to her own lack. However, as Irigaray states, "A lack is turned into an excess of power, into an all-powerful matrix that will make him lucidly reconsider to what and to whom he owed his life" (Speculum 185) and this excess of power leads Gwen to get Arthur to reconsider the vows he made to Avalon, creating dissention in Britain.

According to the Deluezeian rhizome, these religious viewpoints are interconnected and interwoven as part of the rhizome of literature, and Irigaray asserts,

As on so many other [occasions], particularly when it is a question of women, the text will have surreptitiously broken the thread of its reasoning, its logic. Striking off on another path that will no doubt intersect with the previous one, will in some way take up where it left off, but in a zigzag fashion that defies all resumption of a linear discourse. (Speculum 17)

The text develops many "zigzags," or rhizomic turns throughout the story, giving it the Deleuzian aspect that Irigaray here intimates as a way of discourse applicable to The Mists. Just as Irigaray posits the concept of multiplicity among genders, so too does the Deleuzian
rhizome suggest a multiplicity of possibilities within literature. The various tales of Morgaine which come together in this text as well as the portrayals of multiple character relationships exemplify the rhizome in its entirety.

Conclusion

The Mists examines an originary attempt at rejecting an impending patriarchy through speech and silence. Eventually, Avalon’s women fade into legend, unable to successfully fight against the patriarchal culture that increasingly dominates Bradley’s Britain. However, as Morgaine discovers, the goddess survives as the image of the Virgin Mary. When Morgaine visits the Lady of the Lake in the Glastonbury Cemetery, a young nun approaches her and explains that she prefers to go to the “inner court” where they pray to the Virgin Mary, as the statue of the father god scares her. Morgaine realizes, “Exile her as they may, she will prevail. The Goddess will never withdraw herself from mankind” (875). Morgaine does not share her realization with the surrounding nuns, but rather remains (celebratorily) silent, realizing that she has not failed in her vows to keep the goddess alive in the world. Rather,
the goddess exists in a different, rhizomic, form in the world of men.

Here, Morgaine’s silence suggests that rather than being arborescent, (or “rooted”) the rhizome of the goddess mutates so that what was once the “only” image of the goddess has now become another, but equally divine, image. Although Morgaine has lost the battle for Avalon, Avalon remains alive in the world even as it fades into The Mists. The rhizome of the “original” Avalon and its egalitarian views of women may be “in the shadows,” but it continues to exist nonetheless. Ultimately, for Bradley, silence is both destructive and celebratory, and lack is defined only by those who would undermine the egalitarian, contributory nature of the genders in relation to one another. In this way, Bradley portrays gender relations as they are; women as capable of both voice and silence, of good and evil, of demand and desire.

While Morgaine’s behavior seems problematic when she uses treachery to regain the regalia, it can be seen as well that she is trying to keep the female voice in the world through whatever means necessary. While she fails to prevent Avalon from receding, she also succeeds in keeping the goddess in the world, in the form of the Virgin Mary.
Morgaine’s silence enables that image of the goddess to stay in the world. Perhaps, had Morgaine told the women of the convent just who they were praying to, they would have cast the image out entirely, thereby forcing the goddess as a whole into The Mists forever. But, in this way, the Virgin Mary remains rhizomically connected (albeit “in the shadows”) to Avalon forever, creating, also, a rhizome between women of both Avalon’s matriarchy and Camelot’s patriarchy.
CHAPTER THREE
CODES WRAPPED IN SILENCE

Providing symbolic support for contemporary femininity would enable women as women to resist the role of feminine other and demand masculine subjects to acknowledge the constitutive aspect of the role played by feminine others.

--Lorraine 136

Like Bradley’s The Mists, Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code also attempts a revision. This text, however, focuses on the mythical story of Mary Magdalene, imagining a traceable lineage of her children, as well as the rhizomic connections between the goddesses of matrilineal worship and the Mary of the Christian Bible. The Code is also strongly emblematic of the rhizomic nature within texts themselves. The main characters, Richard Langdon and Sophie Neveu, enter the maze of Da Vinci’s codes together, (i.e. the secret images he encoded in his inventions and
paintings) which eventually unravel the secret of her genealogy.

Theoretically, this revisioning of the mythical story of Mary Magdalene allows a new “voice” to enter the legendary conversation, one that is female and rebels against the enforced silencing and perceived lack of women in history. In the Bible, Mary Magdalene is mentioned during the resurrection of Jesus, making her an important but peripheral voice. In Brown’s reinterpretation of the biblical story, Mary Magdalene has a much more important, and actually more active, role in history. According to Brown, she is Jesus’ wife and mother to his children. Brown, then, accords Magdalene a new “voice” or place in mythical history that allows the reader a vision of Magdalene as a real woman instead of just a peripheral figure.

Bringing the matriarchal aspect of the Magdalene to the forefront creates an intriguing examination of women’s voice, a theme throughout Brown’s novel. The novel deals with silence and matrilineage by discussing the beneficial binary nature of relationships between men and women. Langdon refers to the “sacred marriage” practiced by modern followers of the goddess/god duality, in which woman and
man enact a sexual ritual to give homage to the greater deities, creating a "balance" between the genders. The premise of Brown's book is that women have been silenced throughout history by Christianity's notion of "original sin." Given that women's silence and the need to recentralize women's position in society is a primary issue of the book, the actual use of voice and silence in this text must be examined, researching the actual agency vs. the ideal agency of women's roles Brown presents. Again, in a text expressing a reinterpretation of women's voice, analysis shows that instead of reinventing positive gender multiplicities, Brown instead reinscribes normative and silent roles for women, thereby failing in a "true" revision.

A Web of Literary Shoots

Examining how the rhizome and multiplicity function within this text helps illustrate the problematic interrelation between the holy grail, matrilineage, and silence. As Deleuze and Guattari posit, "A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Plateaus 7).
In this way, *The Code* is an exemplary model of the rhizome. While many texts fail to acknowledge the work that has come before, this text actually mentions several texts which have also researched the very concepts that Brown recreates, showing multiplicity not only in process, but also *The Code* itself as a work connected to many before it. The semiotic lines of flight, however, began long before *The Code* and the books it references were written, and long before the Bible was written as well, (another text deeply important to the premises of *The Code*).

Ancient writing from as early as 2nd Century BCE tells stories of mythical characters following paths of destiny and fortune, pantheon given as well as mortal driven. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is on a “hero quest” but the pantheon has their own plans for him. In *Oedipus Rex*, no gods are involved, but human folly creates Oedipus’ destiny. Both of these stories lead to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which blends all the myths together in a perfectly textual web. And, just as the Deleuzian rhizome demonstrates, we have no way to tell where the beginning of these mythological sources come from, nor do we even have a physical locus. Deleuze and Guattari claim, “A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different
dates and speeds” (Plateaus 3). As such, we can see how the
treatment of silence, gender, and gendering of the grail
are connected through a complex system of rhizomic links,
developing a sense of “gender in the shadows.”

There are, however, creation myths in every culture
around the globe, as well as myths of virgin births and
ascensions (for instance that of the god Osiris, the birth
of Hercules from Zeus’ thigh, the pregnancy of Diana after
a “shower of gold rained down on her, etc), which at the
very least suggests a culturally interesting rhizomic
linking. The goddesses of old mythology morph into new
goddesses (or, at least, literary entities) depending on
the culture within which they are being used, thereby
creating new divine images. This rhizomic use, of course,
correlates to how their voices and virtues (or lack
thereof) are perceived as well. Jung says, “[. . .] archaic
residues which have preserved from time immemorial the
imprint of vivid impressions of the nature of woman – woman
as mother and woman as desirable maid” (226). It is these
rhizomic impressions The Da Vinci Code delves into with
enthusiasm, allowing the reader to gaze into a large
network where women have been written about, especially in
the context of silence, the maternal, and in relation to the holy grail.

The text’s main character, Robert Langdon, explains the movement of the rhizome of cultural mythologies this way:

A newly emerging power will take over the existing symbols and degrade them over time in an attempt to erase their meaning. In the battle between the pagan symbols and Christian symbols, the pagans lost; Poseidon’s trident became the devil’s pitchfork, the wise crone’s pointed hat became the symbol of the witch, and Venus’s pentacle became a sign of the devil. (Brown 37)

Here, the rhizome manifests as “historical,” created through the imagining of symbols blending to create new ideologies and also the ways in which women were created as “lacking” in virtue, with the wise crone/witch and Venus symbol/devil symbol conflations. The conflations of good/evil overflow onto the gendered position of women, in that the gender once believed virtuous becomes the reason for all suffering. The rhizomic turn moves from divinity to human folly, forgetting the divinity in place of the new rhizomic shoot. This places women, once again, in the
silent shadows, acting as mothers with little else to offer. This text’s primary focus is of woman (Mary) as Mother, and Sophie, (as daughter.) They are less entities in their own right than they are progenitors of a species.

In yet another internal example of multiplicity within the text, expert historian Sir Leigh Teabing, a character whose primary interest is the holy grail, explains the rhizome of Christianity to Sophie: “The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions” (231).

Sophie, the text’s heroine and FBI cryptologist, sits silently, taking in the information she is lacking from the two male experts who know so much more than she does, in an example of Irigaray’s claim that, “Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men, including the competition for mother earth” (This Sex 32).

It is interesting in this scene that Sophie sits, literally, between the two men as they “compete” to give her the “real” version of the Grail story. In a sense, it is also “mother earth” they are competing for, as they develop the rhizomic web of mythology which leads to the
bible and ultimately to the story they sit there telling her, positing that the maternal ideal has developed into a denial of the feminine principle in total. We can see in this conversation the concept of Sophie as a receptacle for men’s knowledge, once again reducing her to nothing more than a maternal figure with no prior knowledge other than that given to her by men.

Irigaray refers to the idea of men having primary societal power as “phallomorphism.” In this case, it is clearly the men whose phallic voices we hear telling the story of woman, as Langdon and Teabing regale Sophie with their vast knowledge, of which her grandfather was also an expert. In fact, during the first conversation, in which Sophie learns about the mortal femininity of the Grail, over nine pages, she asks fourteen questions, and makes ten statements, which on the surface does not sound terribly unbalanced. Yet, when compared to the men, who take up most of the rest of those nine pages with their dueling explanations, it is clear that Sophie’s voice is more often silent than her counterparts.

The silencing of women in this text is rhizomic; just as Langdon and Teabing (two “expert” men) speak of women throughout history being silenced, so too is the main
character often silent in the face of men's voices. Irigaray explains,

So, the best plan is to abstain from all discourse, to keep quiet, or else utter only a sound so inarticulate that it barely forms [. . .] while all the while keeping an attentive ear open for any hint or tremor coming back. (Speculum 193)

In this way, Sophie remains a silent, non-thinking aspect of the gendered grail. Again, this aspect of the gender binary of thinking is rhizomic, and even Carl Jung states, "thinking tends more often to be a dominant function in men than in women. When thinking dominates in a woman it is usually associated with a predominantly intuitive cast of mind" (351). The movement of silence is such that in texts from Jung to Brown, woman is locked into an "intuitive" role. While searching out their clues, Langdon most often figures out the anagrams and codes, while Sophie most often "intuitively" finds them places to hide. She even just "knows" that Langdon is claustrophobic, and, placing her hands on his head (certainly a divine image), "heals" him of his fear. This "intuitive" healing correlates to Jung's archetype of woman locked into a particular role.
Brown took other texts, ideas, and historical documents, as well as specific archetypes, (those of Pandora and mother/divinity) all of which developed over time and through multiple versions, functioning in such a way as to question the role unquestioned dogma plays in society. The ideas were not original nor were they his own. He was even sued by another author, Steven Berry, over a "replication" of ideas Berry himself had used in his book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. Given, however, that literature is so clearly rhizomic in nature, as illustrated by the Deleuzian rhizome, Brown is obviously what Levi-Strauss calls a bricoleur, or someone "'who uses the means at hand.' That is, Brown uses those instruments which already exist in some form, and translates them to his own purposes. (Berry's book happened to fall within the "means at hand" category.) The ideas for *The Code* came from various extended rhizomic pieces that stemmed from similar notions, all of which began before history changed to the A.D. (or C.E.) nominate. Jung, as well, is aware of the very rhizome Brown weaves, as he explains:

It is not inconceivable that we have in the symbolism of the vessel a pagan relic that proved adaptable to Christianity, and this is all the
more likely as the worship of Mary was itself a vestige of paganism which secured for the Christian Church the heritage of the Magna Mater, Isis, and other mother goddesses. The image of the vas Sapientiae, vessel of wisdom, likewise recalls its Gnostic prototype, Sophia. (235)

In this way, Jung is shown as yet another shoot of the Da Vinci-intertextual rhizomic entity.

Brown repeatedly acknowledges the place intertextual mythology plays within the development of Christian doctrine (although at times insubstantially), bringing in worship of Isis and the miracle birth of her son Horus, whom she conceived through her post-mortem god-husband. Brown’s (male) main character explains that the secret society, that of the Priory of Scion, has a “fascination for goddess iconology, paganism, feminine deities, and contempt for the church” (The Da Vinci Code 113). Sophie, in her role as mortal-divine, is passive, yet, the matrilineal nature of the rhizome dictates that she, too, is a part of the web. “Since the feminine other cannot have the phallus, she becomes it. That is, she becomes the object of desire of an active (masculine) subject — that which fills in the “lack” of a subject who would be whole”
(Lorraine 29). In this sense, Sophie "becomes" the phallus by becoming the object of the quest, reversing the sense of lack attributed to her by being the only one who can fill the void. She is the feminized grail, the one which all search for but never find; she is silent, mysterious, and inconceivable because of her very femininity.

In a sense, this aspect of her silence is celebratory, in that she becomes the very entity all search for, and only she can make the world a "better place." As Jung states, "Regression is converted into progression, the blockage starts to flow again, and the lure of the maternal abyss is broken" (263), so we see that when we progress through the spectrum, perhaps find the holy grail, the rhizome will yet grow shoots which allow for a "true" cultural reinterpretation of gender binaries. There will no longer be a need to "regress" to old social binaries which keep the genders in fixed and "arborified" roles, but rather allow a "progression" which allows rhizomic entities of gender to flourish, creating instead a vast array of difference and possibility.

Yet, paradoxically, because there is no "true" center to a spectral multiplicity, there can be no true center of meaning behind momentary cultural explosions of theory. An
author, a bricoleur, must use the sources available to create a new rhizomic "truth," which can, in turn, lead to new theoretical formattings of gender relations. These new formattings, however, can both recreate and reinscribe the gender roles the text intends to subvert through the use of previous literary shoots. There are ways to re-interpret an author’s sources, as Sandra Miesel does when she says, "Brown’s claim that educated women, priestesses and midwives were singled out by witch-hunters is not only false, it betrays his goddess-friendly sources" (Dismantling 2). This is in response to Langdon’s assertion that,

Malleus Maleficarum — or The Witches Hammer — indoctrinated the clergy how to locate, torture, and destroy them. Those deemed 'witches' by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world.’ (125)

This statement reinforces my position that women have been silenced, although it is in Brown’s text, where he himself refers to this silencing as a negative, in which I find the silencing occurring. For a text that is supposedly
a revisionist ideal, it is gravely problematic that Brown
cites sources of gendered silencing even as he silences his
own female character, while at the same time using sources
that develop similar notions of "new" female voices.

Is Sophie "attuned" to the natural world? It seems
possible, as she places her hands on Langdon's forehead and
"heals" him of his claustrophobia. Again, she is relegated
to the divine, and to the maternal healer. Yet, once more,
she does not know how she does it, just that she does.
There is no "truth" to be found, and only in silence does
Sophie heal Langdon, suggesting, perhaps, that her silence
is more a salutary, healing, and celebratory one than
initially envisaged. When she questions the validity of the
information provided by the men, Langdon says,

Sophie, every faith in the world is based on
fabrications. That is the definition of faith —
acceptance of that which we imagine to be true,
that which we cannot prove. Every religion
describes God through metaphor, allegory, and
exaggeration, from the early Egyptians through
modern Sunday school. (341)

It is a world-wide rhizome with center, no truth. Just a
destabilizing notion of women's place in the universe.
Philosopher Levi-Strauss writes,

There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable and nonexistent in the first place. The discourse on the acentric structure that myth itself is, cannot itself have an absolute subject or an absolute center. It must avoid the violence that consists in centering a language which describes an acentric structure if it is not to shortchange the form and movement of myth. (qtd. in Derrida 286).

To not see the multiple nature that forms literature, and specifically the ideas behind *The Da Vinci Code*, is to "shortchange the form and movement of myth." And while there is no linear unity, there remain moments where the ideas unify, if only briefly, at new rhizomic points, allowing for a momentary decentering of any organizing principle into a new rhizome shoot. It is in the multiplicitous nature of literary gender depictions, however, that we see how the aspects of silence, the grail, and gender combine to create a "revisionist" text, even if that text is not fully successful.
The Grail of Gender

While the beneficial binary nature of relationships is often the focus in this text, in an analysis of *The Code* there is no question that the female character, Sophie, is substantially quieter than the male characters. This leads to another noticeable issue in this text: although one of the two main characters, Langdon, continually talks about the importance of the "sacred feminine," the entire story is told from his, (a male) viewpoint. Irigaray asserts, "[. . .] curiously enough, [women's] nature has always been defined by men, and men alone" (*This Sex* 203), and because of this we must step back and see how the maternal-divine and Sophie are portrayed through the voice of a man in order to decipher how the Grail is seen through a gendered lens.

When we do hear from Sophie, it is primarily through flashbacks or her own thoughts rather than dialogue. Jung asks about the "passive" woman: "Why is she restful and soothing? Because she usually keeps her feelings to herself, expressing them in her thoughts instead of unloading them on others" (154). Sophie's thoughts, as the passive woman, are open to the reader, but her actual words are rarely "unloaded," so as not to "burden" those around
her with thoughts better left to men. Ironically, though, she is the main source of the matrilineal mystery, the one of two final links in the Jesus/Mary genealogy. Yet, we hear her actual voice very little, except when she is asking questions about issues that it seems everyone else knows all about. For instance, Langdon says of the Priory, "In fact, they are one of the oldest surviving secret societies on earth." Although Sophie's actual voice is silent, we, as readers are told, "Sophie had never heard of them" (113). We do, periodically, read flashbacks from Sophie about her life growing up, and although she is hesitant, initially, to tell Langdon about the sexual ritual she saw her grandfather performing, she does eventually do so. It is in dialogue that her voice is noticeably missing.

Her silence and lack of knowledge illuminates Sophie's ignorance in two areas: one is that although she is shown as an insatiably curious child, she still remained unaware of her grandfather's life's work, and two, that she is ignorant of the symbolic natures of evidently every building and icon around her in her country of origin, even though she is a cryptologist and trained in codes. Sophie's grandfather intentionally kept many secrets from her,
keeping her in the proverbial dark. However, it is also mentioned that Sophie, as a child, comes across an article her grandfather wrote about “Jesus having a girlfriend.” Her grandfather asks her if that would be so bad, and she replies, “I wouldn’t mind.” So, in light of this, it is odd that she still must be informed of this fact by later (male) experts.

In fact, we see again that she is “lesser than” when Langdon manages to decode three of the four codes left by Sophie’s grandfather, even though he raised her with anagrams. She says to Langdon, “I missed the first two, I wasn’t about to miss the third one,” and yet, she misses the fourth one, and can’t figure out The Code to The Codex that, again, she spent her childhood figuring out. Irigaray asks, “Why speak about “her” since the only currency she provides or enjoys is her silence?” (Speculum 234). Sophie stays silent, not needing to offer input, since Langdon often solves the puzzles Sophie cannot, even though at one point he claims Sophie is “a hell of a lot smarter than he was” (87). Her currency is that of the maternal, not of the intellect. Indeed, why speak of “Her” at all, when she remains so stoically silent?
Sophie, the biological link to the “sacred feminine,” the Magdalene, is set on the Grail quest by her grandfather, yet, at every turn, she asks Langdon what the next step should be. This shows the cultural presumption that women are incapable of making important decisions without male input, especially since he always seems to have an answer. Presumably, her grandfather thought her at least somewhat capable of handling his quest, yet, he also tells her to “find Langdon,” knowing that she would need help in decoding the symbols of which Langdon is an expert, and of which he evidently intentionally kept from Sophie’s knowledge. This concept does keep with the idea of the necessity of a binary balance between the genders, yet, it remains an unequal assertion of voice and power in the realm of knowledge.

Problematic is Sophie’s inability to make any real connections or have any real understanding of the “sacred” symbolism, causing her to be relegated to the background, exactly where Langdon and expert Teabing say the “sacred feminine” should not be. Irigaray states, “Moreover, she doesn’t know where she is going, and will have to wander randomly and in darkness. And her eye has become accustomed to obvious “truths” that actually hide what she is seeking”
(Speculum 193). Paradoxically, Sophie is seeking herself, even as her “eye has become accustomed” to those things her grandfather taught her. And in the end, although ultimately it is her decision whether or not to release the information to the world, (to stay silent or raise her voice) yet again she says to Langdon, “What would you do?” Her will to move through the maze created by her grandfather exists only in counterpart to Langdon’s voiced decisions, even though what he is seeking, the Holy grail, sits beside him, silent and questioning.

In response to Sophie’s questions about the grail (i.e. herself), Langdon explains, “Legends of chivalric quests for the lost Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine” (238). This quote again illustrates the concept of the rhizome, especially as it applies to the symbols of previous cultures being merged with newer cultures. Eventually, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to know where the “original” symbols came from. It seems possible that, when the beginnings of symbols are lost, the voices of those cultures they belonged to are “silenced.” Eloise Buker argues in her article, “Sex, Sign and Symbol: Politics and Feminist Semiotics,”
'Woman' is constantly fleeing, and 'man' is continually attempting to capture her... This representation of woman as the absent object of man's desire, the quest object, blocks women and our/their diversity from view. (15)

In this text the woman is the quest, even if she is expendable as an authentic voice within the text. The ultimate goal is to kneel in reverence at the bones of the Magdalene, and yet we can ignore the living, breathing and silent woman at the side of the hero. She is what Buker refers to as an "empty mirror," a woman who has no desires of her own but rather waits for a man's desires to be projected onto her (17). In this way, not only is Sophie silent, but she is also lacking in such a way that man must once again act as the repository of any important knowledge. He is active, she is passive, or, in Irigarian terms,

Although the feminine other turns out to conform to no one determinate form, its relation to the masculine subject in the specular economy of a masculinist culture is seen to be that of a supportive other to an 'active' subject.

(Lorraine 22)
Sophie is the "other" to Langdon's "active subject."

Deleuze acknowledges this chasm between active and passive subjects in the introduction to A Thousand Plateaus:

The enigma that is woman will therefore constitute the target, the object, the stake, of a masculine discourse, of a debate among men, which would not consult her, would not concern her. Which, ultimately, she is not supposed to know anything about. (13)

In fact, we see that in Brown's text, she does not know, and this creates her as a passive, receptive being. She must turn and ask at every given moment, (although often her questions are implied rather than voiced) because although she is a cryptologist for the equivalent of the FBI, she is completely lacking in knowledge of the symbols which surrounded her in her childhood. Her grandfather, in an effort to keep her safe, kept from her his knowledge of the "true" grail, developing once again the dichotomy of male as keeper of knowledge and woman as silent receptacle. And again, it has already been established that she was aware of a portion of her grandfather's research, (finding the newspaper article of his work and "Jesus' girlfriend")
although, perhaps, not all of it. She also spent a great amount of time at the Louvre, surrounded by symbols that her symbologist grandfather did speak with her about, especially those of painter Da Vinci, and the "secrets" he occasionally encrypted into his work.

In this way, Sophie is again silenced, a repository for the knowledge of men (when they confer it) and how they frame the argument of woman. Irigaray posits that men and women, while different in nature, are both necessary to a balanced society. It is the sublimation of one to the other, as in the case of Sophie and the men who surround her, which creates destruction and chaos. In this respect both genders are an intricate part of the concept of multiplicity instead of binary, and until we reinterpret both roles, especially in regards to issues of silencing and active phallic repositories of knowledge, as well as woman as quest, we will remain forever searching for her, the holy grail, even as she rides the rhizome right next to us, the archetype of the passive, silent female, one of many archetypes in this text.

This is yet another aspect of silent woman in Brown's quest; the archetype of the Pandora myth. According to Young-Eisendrath, "[The Pandora myth] is the story of the
first woman in Greek mythology and it shows us a lot about how 'woman' was constructed in ancient times and how she continues to be known" (3). Pandora is a kind of predecessor to Eve, as she allows the first "evils" into the world after she opens a box/jar she was told to keep closed. Rhizomically, it is again the idea of woman as the harbinger of pain and destruction. As a child Sophie searches the house and finds a key, of which her grandfather explains, "It opens a box... where I keep many secrets" (Brown 111). And, just as Pandora was forbidden to open her box, so too is Sophie reprimanded by her grandfather (as patriarchal male) for expressing too much interest in his "box of secrets." As an adult, Sophie is the recipient of a literal box of secrets, described as; "The polished wooden box was about the size of a shoebox and had ornate hinges. The wood was a lustrous deep purple with a strong grain. The lid bore a beautiful inlaid design of a rose" (Brown 190). It sounds like something archetypal Pandora (and, thereby, Sophie as her personification) may have opened indeed. In reference to archetypes, Jung says, "The archetype is a symbolic formula which always begins to function when there are no conscious ideas present, or when conscious ideas are inhibited for internal or external
reasons” (377). It is this symbolic archetype, functioning on a seemingly subconscious level, which Sophie so well embodies in this rhizomic connection between Pandora and her own character, even if it was not Brown’s intention to portray Sophie in such a light.

In her personification of Pandora, Sophie discusses with Langdon whether they should tell the world (i.e. open the box) about the gendered grail, to which Langdon, the “voice of reason” answers,

The Bible represents a fundamental guidepost for millions of people on the planet, in much the same way the Koran, Torah, and Pali-Canon offer guidance to people of other religions. If you and I could dig up documentation that contradicted the holy stories of Islamic belief, Judaic belief, Buddhist belief, pagan belief, should we do that? (342)

As the ever unsure and silent female, Sophie does not respond, but rather sits quietly and thinks about it. Langdon has the phallus, just as he has throughout the narrative. But if we see Sophie as the Pandora archetype we can see that, “Pandora’s beauty is a power commodity among males. It is attractive, but empty. She is dangerous. What
she brings to mankind is the ultimate defeat, death itself" (Young-Eisendrath 4). Should Sophie develop a phallus, or become the ultimate person with power, it could be destructive.

Her ultimate silence keeps the world from "death" and "defeat." As Irigaray explains, "At last, she has been authorized to remain silent, hidden from prying eyes in the intimacy of this exchange where she sees (herself as) what she will be unable to express. Where she sees nothing and where she see everything" (Speculum 200). Sophie's silence is sanctioned by the idea that opening Pandora's Box, allowing the world to hear the divine female voice, would be a crushing blow to all of humanity, "leaving only ashes there, only a hole: fathomless in her incendiary blaze" (Speculum 197). Therefore, the female voice must be relegated to no more than a rooted tracing, performing gender in creative ways while remaining in the background.

The Matrilineal Nature of Multiplicity and the Rhizome

This text recreates matrilineal possibilities of "true" Christianity, the truth of which would cause, "ultimate defeat" to the ruling dogma. It is the
mythological personification of the "Wise woman" or "ancient crone," Sophie's grandmother, who tells Langdon that there was never a plan to tell the world about the sacred feminine, that there is no reason to force the world's belief system to change. She says,

> It is the mystery and wonderment that serve our souls, not the Grail itself. The beauty of the Grail lies in her ethereal nature. For some, the Grail is a chalice that will bring them everlasting life. For others, it is the quest for lost documents and secret history. And for most, I suspect the Holy grail is simply a grand idea. . . . (444)

For this particular "wise woman," there is no question that Pandora's box must remain closed. Irigaray says, "For to dodge this time of interpretation is to risk its freezing over, losing hold, cutting back. All over again" (Speculum 142). By staying silent about the ethereal nature of the grail, of its femininity, we risk "freezing over" or "arborifiying" the female voice in its entirety. While this silence, theoretically, could be considered celebratory in that it keeps millions happily ensconced in their traditional belief systems, yet it still relegates the
feminine voice to a periphery of lack, of devaluation. In order to be celebratory, woman must choose silence, and she must be willing to stay silent in order to hear more clearly the voices of those around her, adding her voice only when she is ready. Sophie chooses silence not because she wants to, but because to use her voice would cause chaos and destruction.

Looked at from a mythological gender perspective there are grave problems with this irony. The entire point of the text is that women have been subjugated, pushed into the background and forced into submission by the patriarchy because this secret has been kept so long. "The Priory believes that Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever" (Brown 124).

Women are, each and every one, a Pandora, an Eve who caused the fall and disgrace of all mankind. Even the old "goddess worshiping tribes" were subjugated by the Constantinian Empire and called heretical for their belief in the "sacred feminine." But with the "Wise woman" asserting in the text that there is no reason to identify
the "sacred feminine" of the "quest," the status quo remains as it is, with women in their "rightful" place. And although she tells Langdon to finish his manuscript, to tell the world "Her" story, it is made clear that the "truth" of women's spiritual embodiment in Catholicism will never be told to the masses, so as not to disturb their sense of identity and worship. Irigaray states,

What is more, it is for/by woman that man dares to enter the place, to descend into it, condescend to it, even if he gets burned in the attempt. It is in order to speak woman, write to women, act as preacher and confessor to women, that man usually has gone to such excesses.

(Speculum 192)

Langdon will tell "her" story, but as confessor, entering a place in which yet again, his is the only voice heard.

There are complex ironies at work here. The gender construction is that once again woman has the opportunity to bring grief to mankind, but this time she chooses the "right" path and stays silent. Is this a celebratory silence? There is no static answer. The woman is portrayed as silent, proud, resilient, and, as usual, practical. Had Sophie voiced the secret, she would have brought
destruction to the world’s three largest religions. Her silence allows peace. Her silence also allows both the safety of herself and her grandmother, again creating a positive from a theoretical negative. Her silence also prevents the voices of women as a whole from being seen as equal. As Langdon states, “Genesis tells us that Eve was created from Adam’s rib. Woman became an offshoot of man. And a sinful one at that” (Code 239). Woman herself has become a rhizomic shoot, one that, once leaving the “original” man, becomes rooted in her gender roles and incapability, even as she continues to be phenomenally important as the matrilineal connection to the world, silent often in voice but not in action.

In Brown’s book, there is talk about the “sacred feminine” from a male viewpoint, (woman as rhizome). The “sacred feminine” is a great, loving, and kind entity, but always is she also a consort to her binary counterpart. “The Priory of Scion to this day, still worships Mary Magdalene as the Goddess, the Holy grail, the Rose, and the Divine Mother” (255). She is mother, divine feminine, the aspect of love, and the womb. She is not a speaking creature, or an intellectual one, but rather one that embodies the body. Irigaray asks, “And when will they cease
to equate woman’s sexuality with her reproductive organs, to claim that her sexuality has value only insofar as it gathers the heritage of her maternity?" (Speculum 146) According to this text, even women will not voice a denial of the concept of woman as the ultimate breeding offshoot of man’s ribcage.

Conclusion

Lance Morrow, in “Folklore in a Box” argues, “What is occurring today is a war of American myths, a struggle of contending stories. And pop culture is the arena in which is it being fought” (1). The Da Vinci Code is a pop culture text with enormous capability to induce serious discourse worldwide. If the revelation, by a woman, of a “divine” blood line could heal this fissure, thereby creating the idea that men and women are, in fact, equal, that boys and their phallus’ are not dominant in actuality, why not reveal it? Both Irigaray and Deleuze posit that there is no necessary hierarchy other than the one currently holding sway in a patriarchal society. Therefore, it stands to reason that allowing women a voice, especially in a text about women’s voices being silenced, makes sociological sense. But, it is possible to see that Brown manages to
keep the status quo gender roles in place, even while attempting to subvert them with a creation of a "sacred feminine," and with the concept of duality and binary necessity. Although this binary, in Irigarian theory, is not a negative, it is its incarnation of voiceless women and voluble men which is problematic, even if women's voices do continue to exist in the shadows.
CHAPTER FOUR

IN THE END IS THE BEGINNING

But one opens up to a new kind of possibility: the possibility that all socially significant possibilities cannot contain one, that one is perhaps not containable, that one indeed touches upon the divine. --Lorraine 39

Women’s voices can be silent, they can be loud, they can be degraded, and they can be celebrated. In The Mists of Avalon, women’s voices are paradoxically both pushed aside and brought to the forefront. Silence can be celebratory, and it can be destructive. The priestesses can be devoted and honest, or they can be detached and devious. In The Da Vinci Code, women’s voices are noticeably silent, or simply absent, while remaining a topic of “research.” While the argument could be made that there is a celebratory aspect in Brown’s attempt to create a balance between the genders, and in pointing out that women’s voices have been silenced, it seems that the scales weigh
heavily against the actuality of equality between gendered voices, what Irigaray posits as the most favorable result of analyzing gendered relationships.

While Brown’s novel fails in many ways, Bradley’s novel clearly succeeds in a reinterpretation of the Arthurian legend, as she shows women using their voices in ways both celebratory and destructive, even with the movement away from the paradisiacal, mother-centered religions of the pagans. Her characters are, perhaps, closest to Irigaray’s explanation that “...[woman’s] relationship to (self)knowledge provides access to a whole of what might be known or of what she might know — that is to God” (Speculum 231). Through the themes of the maternal and the gendering of the grail, we see women portrayed in stereotypically archetypal ways: as both mother and path to God. Paradoxically, these archetypes that could be seen as “normative” feminine gendering are also a way to maintain the feminine voice in the world, complicating the issue of women’s silence dramatically.

This complexity is also shown in chapter two, as feminine voices are silenced and Avalon recedes into The Mists. Bradley also demonstrates that silence can be more powerful than wrongful speech, as in the conversations
between Morgaine and Kevin, as well as those between Gwen and Arthur. The women of Bradley’s novel are strong, independent and capable of great goodness and great evil. They are human in every way, even as they, particularly Morgaine as The Lady of the Lake, are associated with the female divine. Irigaray explains the end result of the destruction caused by rigid binaries:

Woman does not take an active part in the development of history for she is never anything but the still undifferentiated opaqueness of sensible matter, the store of substance for the sublation of self. (This Sex 224)

Given this claim that “woman does not take an active part,” is Bradley reasserting women’s voice in this text, or is she proving that once again, they will fade, silently taking their voices with them? Morgaine, in her place as synecdoche for Avalon, fades, taking the Grail of legend, and her voice, with her. Yet, the goddess remains in the world in the form of the Virgin Mary, which suggests that the rhizome continues “in the shadows.” Morgaine’s physical form fades, but the worshiped aspect of the goddess remains, although in a different position within the religious spectrum. This suggests that the grail and the
maternal, through their envisionings in this text, can be celebrated for what they do accomplish; which creates yet another offshoot of a tale of woman as quest which in turn allows the women of mythological literature a voice in the popular canon, keeping their voices and stories in the world.

Therefore, perhaps their success or failure is a combination, a "neither" and "both," just as Irigaray and Deleuze would claim. The sublation of self that a strictly feminist reading of mythological revisions can fight against, can just as easily create a dichotomous binary that simply recreates "normative," "rooted" roles. In Bradley's Avalon, a goddess-worshiping culture of women, there is no "sin" or "evil," but rather just the voices of those who wish to speak or choose not to. As Irigaray explains of women's position, "She is patient in her reserve, her modesty, her silence, even when the moment comes to endure violent consummation, to be torn apart, drawn and quartered" (227) suggesting that the lack perceived in women by Arthur's patriarchal court will serve only to silence the female characters. It is in matrilineal silence, though, that some of the female characters find their innermost strength. Both Raven and Morgaine weave
their most potent magic in silence, Morgaine when she is weaving the scabbard for the sword, and Raven when she is working as priestess in Avalon. When Igraine moves to the convent where she can be surrounded by other women, again in silence, she is asserting her right to use her voice only when she so chooses.

The women of The Mists are strong, independent, opinionated and clear about their desires, asserting their choices throughout the text. Even Gwen, who follows a path of dogma that is ultimately destructive to Avalon, and constantly uses her voice in an attempt to persuade Arthur to leave behind the older, pro-feminine religion, eventually ends up in a convent, surrounded by other women, after deciding (again, in an example of independence) that she will not run away with Lancelet. In reference to women’s silence, Irigaray asks, “Would it not involve a new prison, a new cloister, built of their own accord?” A place, “to discover the love of other women while sheltered from men’s imperious choices[. . .] (This Sex 33). Such a place is, in fact, where both Gwen and Igraine choose to end their days, among other women who will not deny them a spiritual voice.
Morgaine eventually understands that the goddess lives on among the cloistered women of the convent, even though they are often silent. Morgaine, upon visiting the grave of Viviane at the Glastonbury cemetery, speaks with a young nun who brings Morgaine into the inner sanctum of the convent. The young nun explains to Morgaine that the male statue of Christ makes her uneasy and unable to speak, whereas the statue of the Virgin goddess brings her a sense of spiritual peace. Morgaine leaves in silence, unwilling to open Pandora’s box and reveal to the Christian sisters the incarnation of the goddess they worship. Her restraint brings to light a celebratory aspect of silence. That is, in allowing the image of Mary to remain as the worshipped aspect of the goddess, her silence allows that divine feminine voice to remain in the world. Here, vocalizing the “truth” would have been ultimately destructive to the female voice, but instead, woman as quest remains in the world instead of being forever relegated into The Mists.

In fact, the woman as quest reappears in the form of The Da Vinci Code, as discussed in Chapter Three. The Da Vinci Code demonstrates that Sophie, rather than being given a voice (as Brown might hope) is continually silenced and seen as a repository for male knowledge. She’s also
infantilized by both the relationship of perpetual child to her grandfather and in Langdon’s treatment of her as ignorant of her past and of symbolism. However, the end of the novel does give a reason for her silence—the survival of Sophie and her Grandmother depend on their silence, as do the world’s Christian religions. Sophie, too, (much like Gwen and Igraine) goes to live with her grandmother and brother behind a church, sealed away and protected from those who would harm her, keeping her voice silent, but alive. The maternal too continues to exist through this silence, as the two women live together within the gendering of the grail. Again, woman as quest remains in the world through the very silence that keeps her shrouded in mystery.

On the surface, Gwen, Morgaine, and Sophie are all silenced: Gwen is in a convent, Morgaine drifts into The Mists, and Sophie is kept behind church walls so as not to be found out. They, and their voices, are effectively removed from a society that finds women’s voices, especially in sociopolitical aspects, dangerous. Brown shows us that without both male and female, but female in her rightful, silent place, we can not know the “truth” of religious doctrine. Bradley shows us that not only is a
balance of genders possible, but also that one subjugated to the other diminishes both. She also shows us, as does Brown, just how complicated human emotions and relationships can be, especially when politics and religion become involved. While the silencing of her characters might ultimately be problematic, it is also symbolic of the rhizome: just as Morgaine’s voice fades into *The Mists*, with women living out their days in a convent, so too does Sophie, in a novel twenty years later, remove herself to a convent-like state in order to remain, paradoxically, in the world in the form of the eternally sought holy grail.

The holy grail is depicted by/as women in different ways in both texts. In *The Mists*, it is a chalice as it exists in legend, but, unlike previous legends like Mallory’s, it is one made by female hands and held by a woman to the Arthurian court’s lips. In this way, it is a gendered grail, an aspect of woman men quest for but never actually find. In *The Code*, the quest, the grail, is a woman, and the hero quests after her even as she stands next to him. As Irigaray states, “Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself” (*This Sex* 117). In these texts,
the women live not only in relation to men, but in the shadows of the masculine voice. When a woman wields power on her own, she often has an untimely death, but if she remains in the shadows proper, she is allowed to live, "divine" in her silence and lack of active knowledge. Jung explains:

For a certain time the Grail symbol clearly fulfilled these requirements, and to this fact it owed its vitality, which [. . .] is still not exhausted today, even though our age and our psychology strive unceasingly for its dissolution. (237)

And in the sense of its "vitality" not being exhausted, we can clearly see this as the case, as texts are still being written about the legend of woman as quest and her relation to the divine maternal. So, although these female characters have, in problematic ways, been silenced, the manner of their silencing allows the possibility of their voices to remain in the world.

Bradley uses themes of silence and voice to depict the genders as equally confused and emotional, lacking and silent in their own ways, allowing both genders to be the phallus at different moments, showing the multiplicitious
spectrum available in human relations. Brown maintains the
gendered models and archetypes firmly in place, with
Langdon as phallus and Sophie as incidental. Yet, simply by
telling the story of the maternal, and allowing Sophie to
remain as the grail of gender and the gendered grail, Brown
successfully keeps the feminine voice alive. According to
Jung,

The erotic impression has evidently become united
in the collective unconscious with archaic
residues which have persevered from time
immemorial the imprint of vivid impressions of
the nature of woman—woman as mother and woman as
desirable maid. Such impressions have immense
power, as they release forces, both in the child
and in the adult man, which fully merit the
attribute 'divine' i.e. something irresistible
and absolutely compelling, (226)

and we can see in Brown's text that the maternal divine is,
in fact, a "compelling" story to be revisited and
reinterpreted, allowing the "immense power" of the feminine
voice to survive, even if in subtle ways.

We do see, in both Brown and Bradley's texts, that
women continue to play specific roles in literature,
especially those of mother and vixen. Motherhood is an important aspect in *The Mists*, but it is the central aspect in *The Code*, suggesting the idea that women have become, within the literary rhizome, less complex and vocal than they were twenty years ago. Desire, and the ways in which it is plied, are central in *The Mists*, and exist only in relation to binary relations in *The Code*. Bradley, however, enlarges women's roles, their voices, and their demands so that they are fully fleshed creatures. Their movement into the shadows is symbolic of the lack ascribed to them by the patriarchal culture Brown suggests fails women, keeping them silent. At the end of the text, though, we see that women's voices remain in the quest for the feminine grail and in the divine aspect of the Virgin Mary, who appears in Brown's text as ... the divine gendered grail of legendary quest. Yet, Brown's female character is nearly as silent as the women who have entered *The Mists*, and although her silence allows a version of the woman as quest to remain in the world, there remains the problem of her total lack of vocality while traveling through the narrative itself.
In Brown’s text,

Women are not presented as persons who make ethical choices, but as mere symbols who only represent good or ill who are already coded by their natures, fully determined either good or ill by their essential qualities. (Buker 15)

And yet this is the most recent book in our culture that has had a worldwide audience since its debut in 2003, much as The Mists garnered upon its release in 1983. Twenty years later, and women remain in the misty shadows of the rhizome.

With the advent of the internet in the decades between The Mists and The Code, the “misty shadows” are available in a moments notice. When The Da Vinci Code is typed in to a Google search, more than 600,000 pages are listed. The Mists of Avalon is allocated 381,000 search pages. There have been recent documentaries on both the Discover Channel as well as on the History Channel delving into the ideas behind The Code. A movie was made re-creating The Mists of Avalon for all to see. It is a quickly spreading, growing and mutating rhizome that has come out of The Mists of Avalon, which in turn gave rise to The Da Vinci Code. These two intertextual pieces of literature draw on hundreds of
years of rhizomic oral and written literature before them. As Teabing says in The Code, "In the end, which side of the story you believe become a matter of faith and personal exploration, but at least the information has survived" (256). Women's voices remain alive through the reinterpretation of their stories throughout the ages, making their silence in these texts more complex than it would initially seem. Gendering of the grail suggests the grail as, at once, literary icon and offspring of silence and matrilineage. This continuation of women's voices and stories suggests a reason to celebrate, though a different reason than that with which the texts are credited as revisionist texts. Woman's voice, then, remains in the world, albeit in the shadows of the rhizome, where she can always be found, if only quested for.
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31.


