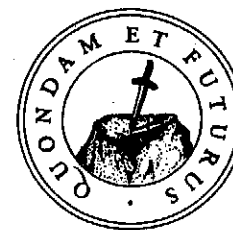


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Plate 3. Edward Burne-Jones. Study for *King Mark and La Beale Isoude*, design for Harden Grange Windows. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, and Company, 1862. Courtesy of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

The Public Life and Private Desires of Women in William Morris's 'Defence of Guenevere'

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Morris's poem illustrates how Victorian conceptions of public and private spheres restricted women, and it also indicates how women could manipulate these discourses to overcome those restrictions. (LS)

Annually there are produced, to the great benefit of paper-makers and printers, at least fifty little volumes of English poetry. They are curiously alike. They are all little thin volumes of about 200 pages. Every volume contains from twenty to a hundred little pieces, all about nothing in particular.¹

With this comment on the plight of English poetry, the *Saturday Review* began its critique of William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, and Morris's slim volume was not considered an exception to this state of affairs. The *Defence* received little attention from literary journals, and although a handful of reviews were favorable, the rest were harsh enough to ensure the volume's lack of success. Fewer than 300 copies were sold, and Morris would wait nine years to publish another collection of poetry. Morris's 'thin volume' was criticized for a focus on the past that seemed to deny contemporary concerns. The *Saturday Review* argued that Morris neglects 'the living world of men and never thinks of depicting man or life later than the Crusades' (507). Morris's careful portrayal of medieval life was perceived by nineteenth-century critics and readers as a form of escapism, and *The Defence* was charged with all the faults of the Pre-Raphaelites: too much attention to minute detail, obscurity, affectation, and an obsession with a distant past that precluded any relevance to his own society.

However, the critical reputations of both Morris and *The Defence* have greatly improved since 1858. Morris is no longer marginalized, and recent scholarship has indicated how, contrary to being about 'nothing in particular,' his poetry engages with nineteenth-century culture. I want to look specifically at how 'The Defence of Guenevere' (the title poem from the 1858 volume) adapts medieval legend in order to examine Victorian anxieties about gender and the law. I believe the social issues in the 'Defence' can be illuminated by comparison with Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Tennyson's 'Guinevere' idyll contrasts well with Morris's poem since it was published only a year later and addresses many of the same issues: the queen's marriage, her position in her society, her sexuality, and her punishment. *Idylls* was also an immediate popular and critical success, selling over 40,000 copies. This success was due in part to the common perception that Tennyson related medieval life and legends to Victorian society. *Bentley's Quarterly Review* argued that Tennyson 'will bring his subject to us, not require us to go back through all the ages to a world of legend' (162).

The reception of Tennyson's poem stands in stark contrast to that of Morris's and the relation between these two authors and their medieval poetry was often seen as one of radical difference—Morris was concerned with medieval history and Tennyson with Victorian society. I hope to show that, far from being poles apart, the Arthurian poetry of both Tennyson and Morris is deeply involved in the Victorian debate over the public and private roles of women. Examining Morris's focus on women's issues not only illuminates his relationship to Tennyson, but it also reveals the strategies available to nineteenth-century women who wished to reject the social attitudes which constrained them.

In the latter half of the nineteenth-century, anxiety about the presence of women in public increased as debates over the 'woman question' intensified. The issues of the day—female suffrage, education, divorce, entrance to the professions—all entailed women leaving the privacy of the home for the public sphere.² While a few radicals like Frances Power Cobbe or Ursella Mellor Bright advocated women embracing a public role equal to that of men, most Victorian social critics thought the public life of women was an oxymoron. In John Ruskin's extremely popular and influential lecture on female education, 'Of Queen's Gardens,' he explains that women must confine themselves to the home and domestic concerns. The home is 'woman's true place and power' (75) because there she is protected from danger and temptation, unlike men whose 'rough work in the open world must encounter all peril and trial' (74). Ruskin explains that a true wife's home is 'always around her' (74), and women

can best influence their nation's public affairs through their management of private, domestic life, as opposed to direct involvement in politics. Ruskin's view was a popular one (it is echoed by figures as diverse as William Gladstone and Coventry Patmore) and relies on the idea that a woman's superiority in the domestic sphere depends upon her separation from the temptations and hazards of the public sphere. A woman's entry into the public is often perceived as a contaminating, degrading action that places her moral character in question. Whether in the newspapers, on the streets, in a courtroom, in business or politics, or even through the medium of local gossip, a woman's public appearance was a scandal.³

Given the popularity of such conservative attitudes, it seems surprising that nineteenth-century women were able to secure entry to the professions and reform the marriage and property laws. However, works by Mary Ryan and Barbara Leah Harman indicate that women were either able to work with or around these attitudes in order to secure a wider role for themselves in society. In *Women in Public*, Ryan explains how women were able to use their reputation for domestic virtue to enter political culture through the alternative avenues of women's clubs and volunteer associations. Women were also able to use the perception of their inherent domesticity (Ruskin's idea that wherever a 'true' woman goes, her home is always with her) to engage in charity work, social investigation, and social reform—causes that took them far outside their home. Harman argues that in addition to feminizing 'the public realm by extending domestic life outward, or [purifying] public life of its taint by conserving private principles as a sustaining resource' (373), it was possible for a woman to recognize the danger of public life and still demand to be included in it. The historical work of these critics suggests that the vision of Victorian women enshrined (or imprisoned) in the home is not completely accurate and the debate over women's roles is not as one-sided as it may appear.

These issues are important to the Arthurian works of Tennyson and Morris because each poet represents a moral and social order that revolves around the public and private roles of women. In order to portray his particularly Victorian vision of Camelot, Tennyson radically departs from Malory's account, the only version of Arthurian legend for most nineteenth-century readers. In the 'Guinevere' idyll, Tennyson completely omits the queen's sentence to death at the stake. Instead, after being surprised with Lancelot in her chambers, the queen flees to Almesbury where Arthur follows and forgives her. Arthur's accusations, speech of forgiveness, and Guinevere's confession are Tennyson's invention and serve to replace Malory's sentencing scene. Tennyson's decision to eliminate this scene appears unusual considering the emphasis he places on

the consequences of Guinevere's adultery. Not only does her liaison result in civil war and the destruction of the Round Table, but it also corrupts the morals of the court. Tristram and Isolt cite Guinevere's relationship with Lancelot as a defense of their own adultery, and 'then others, following these my mightiest knights,/And drawing foul ensample from fair names,/Sinn'd also' (ll. 486-88).

Guinevere's behavior has disastrous consequences, but one reason for the lack of a trial or any kind of judicial sentence may lie in the way her offense is perceived by Arthur and the community. Although the queen's adultery is repeatedly referred to as her 'sin' or 'crime,' it is also depicted as a contaminating disease. An apparently private act, Guinevere's infidelity turns out to have public dimensions, which Arthur clearly outlines. An adulterous wife is

"like a new disease, unknown to men
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young" (ll. 515-19).

Arthur uses the language of moral pollution to describe how Guinevere has threatened the community's moral health. Her morals as well as her body are corrupted, and the queen herself accepts this representation of her behavior, despairing that 'the shadow of another cleaves to me,/And makes me one pollution' (ll. 613-14).

Because Guinevere's crime is also her disease, a death sentence or a trial are not the most effective remedies. Instead, Arthur must publicize her guilt and banish her from his home; he must 'leave thee, woman, to thy shame' (l. 508). The defense against moral and physical contamination is to expose and reveal it.⁴ Guinevere's contagion must be opened to the public, or aired, in order to 'cure' it, and she must be banished from Arthur's home in order to preserve its sanctity. Guinevere's sentence in the *Idylls*—the exposure of her guilt and her exile from the home—is more appropriate to Victorian sensibilities than being burned at the stake.⁵

Guinevere's punishment entails publicizing her private acts, and her error lies not only her decision to have an illicit sexual affair, but also in her delusion that she can lead a public, civic life completely separated from her private, sexual one.⁶ Guinevere goes through the motions of married life—presiding over Arthur's table and tournaments—and she respects her husband for his innate goodness, but she finds him 'cold/High, self-contained, and passionless' (ll. 402-03). She is able to function as his queen but not his lover, as she explains: 'I thought I could not breathe in that fine air/That pure severity of

perfect light—/I yearn'd for warmth and color which I found/In Lancelot' (ll. 640-43).

It is not possible for the queen to keep her private life completely private for long. The danger female sexual transgression poses to the community justifies the invasion of Guinevere's privacy, which is continually threatened throughout the poem. Vivien eavesdrops on her conversations, and the queen is watched closely by Modred, who seeks 'to spy some secret scandal if he might' (l. 26). The final incursion into Guinevere's chambers by Modred and his followers symbolizes the complete lack of privacy accorded to the queen by the community.

Despite the horrible consequences female sexual transgression has for both the community and the individual, neither the state nor the law is required to police sexuality in the *Idylls* because guilt is self-revealing and self-punishing, as James Adams explains in his excellent study of the poem.⁷ Guinevere is never proven guilty, her adultery is merely asserted by rumor, but she still cannot stop herself from confessing. Her 'own too-fearful guilt/Simpler than any child, betrays itself' (ll. 368-69). Like murder, adultery will 'out' and it provides its own remedy through publicity—'outing.' Arthur discards the legal punishment for treason (execution) in order to leave his wife to the shame of exile from his home. Guinevere recognizes the punitive aspect of this policy when she says that she cannot 'kill my shame/No nor by living, can I live it down...mine will ever be a name of scorn' (ll. 617-22). Because adultery is ultimately self-identifying and self-punishing, there is no need for the state or the law to police the home and intrude into sexual relations.

The moral order depicted in the *Idylls* avoids the recognition of any kind of social control or coercion. The self-revealing and self-punishing nature of Guinevere's situation not only makes institutional intervention unnecessary, it also obscures the role Arthur and the community have in enforcing morality. Arthur's rejection of legal recourse in favor of passively 'leaving' his wife to the shame of public notoriety suggests that she is the only person responsible for her punishment. But despite this appearance, Arthur actively punishes his wife and publicizes her guilt; he exiles Guinevere from his home and vows never to see her again.

Tennyson's departures from Malory allow him to represent a social and moral order which obscures the manner in which social control is achieved. Morris adapts Malory as well, but with an entirely different effect. His changes emphasize Guinevere's relation to her society and accusers rather than her guilty conscience or the horrific consequences of her liaison. The 'Defence' is a dramatization of an event that doesn't appear in Malory: Guinevere's lengthy

speech in her defense before her execution. Morris uses the dramatic monologue to focus attention on the queen's perspective and her version of events, a viewpoint unexplored by other authors. Her assertion of innocence is a significant innovation, and Morris endows Guenevere with prolix and elegant rhetoric; something usually denied the heroines of romance. Guenevere uses a number of tactics to defend her actions, and she rejects her accusers' unspecified charges in a denial sustained throughout the poem: 'Nevertheless you, O Sir Gauwaine, lie/Whatever may have happened through these years,/ God knows I speak the truth, saying that you lie' (CW 1. 46-48). Disregarding the question of whether Guenevere is sufficiently able to prove her innocence, her assertion of it is important because it shifts the ground of argument to her accusers and the process which has condemned her.

Tennyson's heroine learns to accept her society's condemnation of her behavior, but in the 'Defence' Guenevere indicts her situation, which she finds alienating and stultifying. She

"was bought
By Arthur's great name and his little love;
Must I give up for ever then, I thought,
That which I deemed would ever round me move
Glorifying all things; for a little word,
Scarce ever meant at all, must I now prove
Stone-cold forever?" (CW 1. 82-88)

Guenevere finds herself in a loveless relationship due to the realities of military alliances and arranged marriages, and she defends her desire to reject this constricting life. Her declaration that she was 'bought' by Arthur indicates her marriage was facilitated by his rank and military reputation: his 'great name.' Her use of the passive voice also suggests that she had little choice in this matter. She is an object traded from one man to another, from her father to her husband. Guenevere must 'prove/Stone-cold forever' to preserve her virtue in the eyes of the world because her society's morality forbids her to search for love outside of her marriage. Guenevere argues that she is not to blame for the failure of her marriage; her allusion to Arthur's 'little love' suggests that he too, may not be fulfilled by their relationship, as well as implying his incapacity to maintain it.

Guenevere uses her desire to have a fulfilling romantic (and presumably sexual) life—the desire to have a *private* life—to justify her behavior. These private concerns are the very ones Tennyson's queen must learn to reject; but Morris's heroine argues that she should not have to renounce personal fulfillment for the preservation of a social bond that has become meaningless

to her. The problem is not her understanding of marriage, as in the *Idylls*, but society's restrictive attitudes about the marriage bond. Guenevere's speech is radical because it places a woman's desires before her husband's and before society's interest in enforcing morality.

Guenevere is restricted both by social expectations that she 'prove/Stone-cold forever' and by the law. The law confines her physically (she is about to be burned at the stake), and it constrains her unjustly because it is open to manipulation. Guenevere specifically cites Mellyagraunce's attack on her as an example of how the law's focus on female sexuality can be used to achieve political and personal ends. In the episode in Malory to which Guenevere refers, Mellyagraunce desired her and kidnapped her while she was a-Maying, wounding many of Arthur's knights in the process. Mellyagraunce tried to rape the queen and in order to remove attention from his own forbidden sexual desire and his crime against Arthur, he accused her (somewhat incorrectly)⁸ of committing adultery with a wounded knight. 'Mellyagaunte was passyng glad that he had the quene at suche avauntayge, for he demed by that to hyde hys owne treson' (Malory 658). Mellyagraunce then ambushed Launcelot and imprisoned him in order to prevent him from defending the queen against the charges of adultery. In the 'Defence,' Mellyagraunce is referred to as a 'slayer of unarmed men' (CW 1. 189) and a 'stripper of ladies' (CW 1. 192), linking his persecution of women with his treachery and lack of honor towards Arthur and Launcelot in the masculine arena of combat. Guenevere alludes to this incident because it resonates strongly with her current situation: her accusers are using the charge of adultery to create unrest in the kingdom.

In the 'Defence,' concerns about female sexuality can be manipulated to achieve political goals, and this is a more realistic view of the impact female sexual transgression has upon society than the one Tennyson presents in the *Idylls*, where it is the sole cause of the kingdom's downfall and the community's moral impurity. This is further emphasized by Tennyson's elimination of male sexual transgression, namely Arthur's incestuous relationship with his sister. In Malory, Merlin explains that Arthur's incest will result in his ruin: 'ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of youre realme' (29). However, Tennyson's Arthur declares that Modred is 'no kin of mine' (l. 570), thus making the queen's adultery the sole cause of the country's destruction. Morris's poem indicates that female sexual transgression is not the only, or even the most important, problem in Camelot. The reference to the Mellyagraunce episode indicates that male sexual desire can also be a source of conflict and that political machinations are

actually responsible for many of the kingdom's ills. Camelot is threatened by more than adultery, and the manipulation of the law's concern with female sexuality is exposed and criticized rather than elided. Because the law can be used to achieve ulterior goals and even political conflict, Morris's poem questions the community's ability to enforce its laws justly, as well as the motivation underlying its preoccupation with female sexual transgression.

Guenevere defends her actions in her speech, and her speech is also her defense on a different level. Her lengthy and often convoluted rhetoric allows Launcelot to come 'at good need' (CW 1. 295). In this way, her speech permits her to reject the fiery and imminent physical judgment to be enacted upon her as well as society's judgment of her as a fallen woman. Guenevere's silence on key issues, her inability to remember crucial facts ('just that which would save me; these things flit' [CW 1. 282]), and the suggestion that she has been keeping a deeper secret have allowed critics to paint her as a deceitful rhetorician who has been stringing her accusers along, so to speak, until Launcelot can save her. Morris leaves the reader in suspense as to the extent of Guenevere's knowledge about her rescue and the truth regarding the charges of adultery, however I believe that the issue of her guilt is irrelevant. There are a number of critical arguments about the degree and nature of Guenevere's guilt, but I am not interested in ascertaining whether her speech 'really' acquits her.⁹ Instead, I want to examine how it functions. Guenevere's speech is a powerful performance. By constructing a drama and, like the genre of romance itself, continually deferring narrative closure, Guenevere is able to stall her accusers long enough for Launcelot to rescue her. This public performance frees Guenevere from the public forum she has been forced into and it also allows her to evade the judgment of the law.

Guenevere avoids execution and circumvents the expectations surrounding her position as a fallen woman by exploiting the construction of certain gender roles. She begins her defense by appearing to recognize and affirm society's judgment of her and its expectations for her behavior. She knows that she 'ought to say, / I have done ill, / And pray you all forgiveness heartily! / Because you must be right, such great lords, *still*' (emphasis mine; CW 1. 13-15). The proper behavior for a fallen woman would be to confess and repent her adultery, to ask forgiveness from her husband, the community, and God for the 'ill' she has done. Guenevere realizes her accusers expect her to act as Tennyson's queen does; they expect her to confess and beg forgiveness. But that 'still' and her refusal ever to confess fully indicate her rejection of the role her accusers want her to play.

However, Guenevere is able to use their expectations to her advantage. She never explicitly refuses to confess until the very end of the poem. She skirts around the issue, appearing to begin to confess or divulge important details, such as her first kiss with Launcelot, but she never actually reveals anything damning. When she discusses the night she was surprised in her chamber, she initially refuses to say anything more, then claims that everyone already knows 'quite well the story of that fray' (CW 1. 279) and finally argues that she cannot remember evidence that would acquit her: 'just that which would save me; these things flit' (CW 1. 282). Guenevere's deferral keeps her accusers from executing her immediately. Because it appears she might confess any minute, her confusing and convoluted defense is enough to stall her accusers. Guenevere only *appears* to act as a fallen woman should, and this illusion is successful enough to delude her accusers and allow her to escape.

This strategy also takes advantage of her society's preoccupation with the confession of female sexual transgression.¹⁰ Guenevere recognizes that her accusers already 'know quite well the story' (CW 1. 279) of her infidelity with Launcelot; her affair is the worst-kept secret in Camelot. What keeps her audience's attention is the desire to hear the details of her sin and her request for forgiveness. The poem begins after all, with Guenevere knowing her accusers 'would have her speak' (CW 1. 1), and she knows what they want to hear. Guenevere uses their desire to hear the revelation of her adultery in order to obscure the more important secret of Launcelot's impending rescue. Her society's preoccupation with female sexuality allows her to extend the promise of that revelation as something sufficiently compelling to defer her execution. Thus, her lengthy recollection of her first kiss with Launcelot becomes more than a powerful expression of their passion; it is also a way to hold the audience's attention and a promise of things to come, presumably a more detailed description of their adultery. Of course, this promise is never fulfilled. Guenevere takes advantage of her society's desire to hear her confess her sexual secret in order to further her own ends, and she escapes her legal punishment, an act that is perhaps ultimately more threatening to the social order than her adultery.

Guenevere secures her freedom by manipulating the values and expectations of her society, and she also manages to protect her secrets while appearing to reveal them. Unlike Tennyson's guilty wife, Guenevere speaks out in order to declare that she will not speak any more. The queen uses her public speech to demand her privacy, and she ultimately rejects her society, accusers, and her participation in their process by refusing to talk. Even though she recognizes that now her accusers will 'judge anyway [they] will' (CW 1. 278), she 'will

not tell [them] more today' (CW 1. 277). Of course, what she refuses to divulge are the details of her adultery. Guenevere refuses to publicize her private acts and values her privacy so highly that even this crucial moment will not induce her to violate it. Unlike Tennyson's Guinevere, who achieves a kind of social and spiritual redemption by confessing her sins and renouncing her private desires, Morris's queen escapes her punishment by refusing to do either.

Morris's heroine succeeds at securing her privacy and her freedom, indicating why the private acts of Tennyson's Guinevere must be relentlessly publicized. In the 'Defence,' the queen's rescue is facilitated by her silence on that subject; privacy accommodates the possibility of transgression, which is recognized as a reason for its restriction in the *Idylls*. Places traditionally considered private like the bedroom and the home affect the civic life of the country, and publicity infiltrates these areas in order to control them. The harassing and punishing nature of publicity and the inability of the individual to escape it make adherence to community standards necessary. The only place where Guinevere can escape the threat of publicity, the voices 'crying "shame"' (l. 666), is the grave. Guinevere publicly espouses and represents the community's values, but she deviates from them in private and this is presented as a reason for her punishment. Since such private sins are ultimately self-revealing and self-punishing, the only way to escape punishment is to absorb the public ethos into one's private life.

Publicity and public opinion become an alternative to the law as a means of social control in *Idylls of the King*. The power of public opinion to punish those who violate it prompts people to internalize society's morality.¹¹ Private desires, emotions, and acts must be monitored in order to preserve the sanctity of the home and the good of the nation. The most private acts and emotions—Guinevere's adultery, her guilt, her shame—are made public while the most public and direct method of social control, the law, is rejected in favor of a moral order that effaces the community's participation in Guinevere's punishment.

Tennyson's poem focuses on the impact women have on the public sphere, but it does not support a wider role for women. Instead, the queen's public and private lives are severely restricted. The relation that Ruskin identifies between a woman's management of the home and the affairs of the nation requires that the sanctity and moral purity of the home be vigilantly protected. Tennyson portrays the disaster that results when a woman neglects her wifely duties for the pursuit of a private passion and he illustrates the need to regulate female privacy. Guinevere's distress and shame at being in the public sphere and the punishing nature of publicity are used to ensure that others will lead their private lives according to public morality.

Morris presents a more balanced and forward-looking view of the relation between the public and private spheres in the 'Defence.' The strength of his vision is that it values both the private sphere and the public one. The queen's effort to preserve her privacy is portrayed as a legitimate act in the 'Defence,' while her accusers' attempts to violate it are certainly suspect. Not only is the queen's privacy protected, but her desire to have a private life—her pursuit of a romantic relationship with Launcelot—is also defended. Guenevere's defense of her private actions does not entail a complete rejection of the public, however. The pain of a woman's participation in the public sphere is never denied, but it is also not employed as a deterrent. At the beginning of her speech, the queen feels 'it shameful to feel ought but shame/All through her heart' (CW 1. 5-6). But as she defends herself, she lifted her downcast head, raised her voice, stood up straight, and 'spoke out at last with no more trace of shame' (CW 1. 59). During the course of her speech, the queen gains the confidence she needs to reject her society and accusers. Guenevere's sentence and execution may be public, but publicity is not her sentence as it is in the *Idylls*. Morris's poem indicates that the queen must embrace both the public sphere and the private in order to achieve her purpose. Although she is forced to speak in front of her accusers and asked to reveal her secrets, Guenevere is able to use this public moment of social control to achieve her freedom. The queen does more than merely elude the law; she also denounces its potential for manipulation. Guenevere uses her public speech in order to criticize her society and demand her privacy.

Tennyson and Morris differ in their attitude toward the position of women, not in the relation of their works to nineteenth-century society. Tennyson's more popular poem portrays a woman who must reject private fulfillment, adhere to social expectations, and accept her society's moral order in order to be spiritually and socially redeemed. Guinevere's punishment is subjection to the pain of publicity and public opinion. Morris presents a queen who manipulates the very things that appear to oppress and punish her—the law, public opinion, gender roles—in order to win her freedom. Guenevere indicts her society instead of accepting their judgment of her, and her defense reveals her accusers' abuse of the law rather than obscuring the recognition of social control itself.

Tennyson and Morris offer different representations of women in society, and although Tennyson's portrayal of a guilty wife's punishment and salvation was widely embraced by many Victorians, it was not accepted by all. It is important to recognize Morris as a voice in the debate over the 'woman question' because his poem at once illustrates the manner in which social

attitudes and conventions restrict women and proposes a strategy for circumventing them. Morris suggests, along with historians like Mary Ryan, that it was possible for women to appropriate and adapt these discourses to their own ends, and his work indicates that there were other visions of the public and private in the nineteenth-century. Like Guenevere, some Victorian women found it possible to use a public role to protect and secure their private desires.

PRINCETON UNIVERISTY

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NOTES

Portions of this paper were delivered in a different form at the New York University graduate student conference, 'Victoria's Secrets,' in 1994.

1. *Saturday Review* 506. Subsequent references appear in text.
2. In discussing the public and private spheres, I am drawing on a feminist model that 'opposes a privacy defined largely as the domestic or familial to a publicness defined largely as the economy of wage earners' (Robbins xiii). However, Victorian society identifies the public with more than the market economy. State apparatuses, community standards, publicity, public opinion, and civic responsibilities are all elements of public life for the Victorians. The private sphere encompasses sexual activity, emotion, thought, and the interior life of the mind. Nevertheless, feminist scholars have noted that being relegated to the private sphere of a large Victorian household does not necessarily entail a great deal of privacy for women.
3. These strictures about female behavior are only addressed to certain classes of women. Working-class women often had to venture outside the home and were present in factories, the market, and the streets.
4. The idea that the way to remove contamination is to expose it is a concept that would be employed in the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869. These acts attempted to reduce venereal disease in the armed forces by enabling police officers to subject suspected prostitutes to medical examinations and hospitalization.
5. Tennyson's rejection of medieval execution in favor of the more modern punishment of scrutiny and surveillance is in keeping with the nineteenth-century's changing attitudes toward punishment. In his historical account of the prison system, Michel Foucault argues that at the end of the eighteenth century punishment changed from being a public spectacle of physical torture to a supposedly corrective form of surveillance that punished an offender by restricting his rights. 'The expiation

that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations,' (*Discipline and Punish* 16) and this new form of control obscures its punishing nature.

6. Guenevere's status as queen may lend more importance to her civic role, but her public wifely duties are really only larger functions of hospitality that any middle-class Victorian wife might perform. Likewise, Arthur's speech about the dangers of an adulterous wife indicates that the course of action he takes is appropriate for any man, not just the monarch.
7. I am indebted to Adams's work for the idea that Tennyson represents adultery as a self-revealing and self-punishing act (435). While Adams focuses on the way this moral order allows Arthur to publicize Guenevere's actions without scandal-mongering, I wish to indicate how the law is made unnecessary. Adams also examines issues of moral pollution, but he addresses the manner in which the public becomes aware of Guenevere's adultery and I want to explore the fact that she must accept the community's representation of her actions.
8. In 'The Knight and the Cart,' Mellyagaunte sees blood on the queen's bedclothes and assumes she has lain with one of the wounded knights. In fact, Launcelot had cut his hand entering the queen's chamber and the sheets are 'bebled of the bloode of sir Launcelot and of hys hurte honde' (Malory 658). Guenevere is technically innocent of Mellyagaunte's charges.
9. The queen's guilt has been the subject of much of the critical work on the 'Defence.' Angela Carson argues that Guenevere commits adultery, but may be technically innocent of Gauwaine's accusations (133). Carole Silver agrees that the queen might be innocent of the unspecified charges against her, but she explains that the queen's speech indirectly provides the proof of her adultery with Launcelot (700). Even though I believe Guenevere hides her knowledge of Launcelot's rescue, I do not think that this in any way invalidates her defense of her actions. Guenevere deludes her accusers and may be guilty of committing adultery, but it does not necessarily follow that her entire speech must be discounted as mere 'rhetoric.'
10. The desire to hear the confession of a sexual secret is also explored by Michel Foucault in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*. Foucault notes that 'sex in our society, on a scale of several centuries, was something that was placed within an unrelenting system of confession' (61). Nineteenth-century society combined the confession with institutional procedures (such as legal testimony, medical examination, and hypnosis) which increased the individual's inducement to speak the truth about sex. (*History of Sexuality*, 1.65). Morris's heroine recognizes and manipulates these social pressures to confess.
11. This corresponds to Foucault's critique of the changing attitudes toward punishment in the nineteenth century—individuals must become their own policeman and internalize society's efforts to discipline them.

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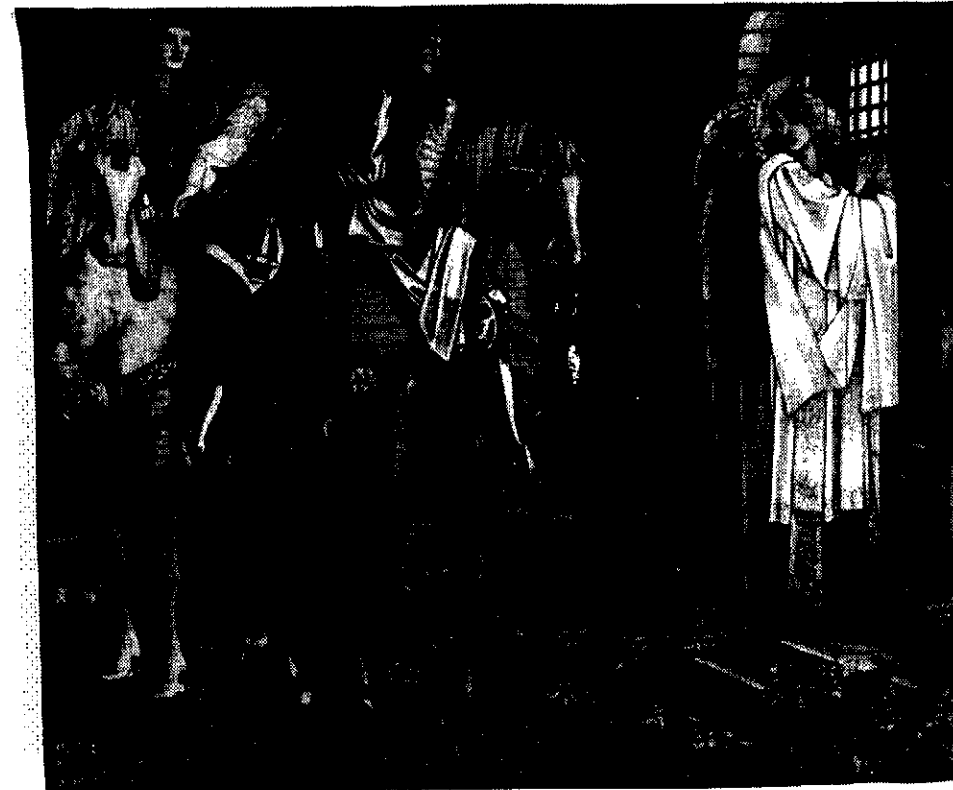


Plate 4. Edward Burne-Jones. *Gawain's Failure*, from *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. Merton Abbey Tapestry Works, 1891-94. Courtesy of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.