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MORGAIN LA FEE

THE REPRESENTATION
OF
MORGAIN LA FÉE
IN
THE VULGATE CYCLE ROMANCES

by
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ABSTRACT

In reading the romances of the Vulgate Cycle, one becomes accustomed to the role of Morgain la Fée, Arthur's sister, as a major villainess, usually plotting revenge against Lancelot and Guenevere. Therefore, this reversal of her role at the end of La Mort le Roi Artu, wherein she comes to take her wounded brother Arthur to Avalon, can seem out of keeping with the rest of her portrayal. In reality, though, this latter representation is the original one in Celtic legend. Theories as to how she could have evolved into two such different personalities have given rise to three schools of thought on the matter. One group, the folklorists, traces the roots of Morgain's personality back to the Celtic goddesses, especially to the Morrigan. Another group believes her representation is due entirely to authors' imagination and that each romancer contributed with time perhaps one incident or episode, or perhaps merely a detail, that was enlarged upon by his successors, or even omitted, as they saw fit for their story. The third group, the moderates, compromises between these first two by acknowledging that the frontiers of tradition and imagination are difficult, if not impossible, to delineate. Their theory is that the romancers probably used both tradition and imagination

as they created and that the ratio occurring in any one romance, besides being difficult to measure, is a matter of the individual author's taste. The theory of the moderates seems the most tenable and is the one to which this study will adhere, all the while, of course, never dismissing the importance of the contributions of the other two groups. While considering the ideas of these groups, this study will attempt to evaluate all their suggestions as to influences on the portrayal of Morgain la Fée in the Vulgate. Among these influences are Celtic and Latin traditions, the Christian religion, and the imaginations of the romancers already more sophisticated than the creators of the original legend of the fay of Avalon. It is hoped that a systematic study of these influences will then demonstrate that the development of Morgain's character in the Vulgate was a logical rather than a haphazard process.

I should like here to express my sincere thanks to Dr. G. D. West, who has been kind enough to serve as my advisor this past year on this study. It was through his enthusiasm for Arthurian romance that my interest in it was first kindled. His readiness to be of assistance and his suggestions as the work progressed have been invaluable and immeasurable.

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INTRODUCTION

The characterization of Morgain la Fée in the Vulgate Cycle romances is a study in contradictions. Her personality appears schizophrenic, depicted as evil by some authors and kindly by others. Some of the authors see her as merely a vengeful mortal who has learned the art of sorcery and who uses it in her schemes, while others see her as a supernatural fay. Obviously many factors must have influenced these various writers to portray the same character so differently. Among these factors the most important would be general Celtic fairy-lore, the specific traditions concerning Morgain la Fée, the evolution of Arthurian romance and, last but certainly not least, the imaginations of the romancers themselves. A consideration of these factors and their influence upon Morgain's portrayal in the Vulgate Cycle is the subject for discussion in this study. Before discussing the final cumulative effect of all these factors upon Morgain in the Vulgate Cycle, it is best to treat each one separately and then to see how all gradually combined in influencing her personality. Since the oldest of these factors is probably the body of general Celtic fairy-lore, its usage by Arthurian romancers will be discussed first.

Chapter One
A Survey of the Role of the Fay
in Arthurian Romance

Some general principles of Celtic fairy-lore apart from the Arthurian story give the reader insight into one branch of Morgain's family tree, namely that of the fays. Much concerning the origin of fays is uncertain and hard to pinpoint, but many scholars would agree with W. Y. Evans-Wentz that the notion of fays is a very old and universal one.¹ Many scholars would also agree with the theory of J. A. MacCulloch that fays are the descendants of the ancient pagan goddesses. In the forms of fays, these goddesses, whether Roman, Teutonic, or Celtic, survived in the minds of newly-converted Christians who could not quite surrender their old beliefs.² To apply this theory to Celtic legend, one need only recall Diana, the Roman huntress-goddess who was queen of the forest.³ In Britain Diana may

¹ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries (University Books, Inc., 1966), p. xxx.

² J. A. MacCulloch, Medieval Faith and Fable (London: George G. Harrap and Company Ltd., 1932), pp. 12 - 13.

³ Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion (1922; abr. London: The Mac-Millan Press Ltd., 1976), p. 216.

well have left her legacy as queen of the woodlands to those Celtic fays who wandered the deep medieval forests of Arthurian romance. Thus, perhaps through the memory of Diana, Brocéliande became celebrated in Arthurian romance as a forest inhabited by fays and magicians. Another reason for the haunting of Brocéliande in Arthurian legend is suggested by Alfred Maury in an older but still interesting study on medieval fays. Maury states that this forest had at one time been a hallowed spot for druidic ceremonies and that Christianity had never been able to erase the people's superstitious awe of the place.⁴ Whether or not this particular forest had been sacred to the druids, woodlands generally retained a superstitious hold on the people, at least in story. Medieval legends of spirits wailing in remote forests and valleys are interpreted by MacCulloch as the people's vaguely remembering that these places had been the abodes of the old deities.⁵

This kinship of fays with the old deities did not win them sympathy from Church theologians, who quite simply taught that fays were demons in the form of beautiful women.⁶ An allusion to this belief can be found in the Vul-

⁴ Alfred Maury, Croyance et Légendes du Moyen Age (Paris, 1843; rpt. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), p. 14.

⁵ MacCulloch, p. 27.

⁶ MacCulloch, p. 40.

gate Cycle:

A chelui tens estoient apelees fees
toutes icheles qui sauoient denchen-
tement. . . Et tout fu establi au
tans merlin le prophete as engois
qui sot toute la sapience qui des
dyables puet deschendre. δ por che
fu il tant redoutes des bretons δ
tant honores que tout lapeloient lor
saint prophete. Et tout la menue
gent lapeloient lor dieu.

(Sommer, III, i, 19, lines 19 - 27)

From this passage one infers that, if Merlin learned his art from the Devil and if all fays learned theirs from Merlin, then all were considered in league with Lucifer. The disapproval of the Church, however, as we shall see later, was either heeded or ignored as seen fit by romancers who portrayed fays.

This theory on the genesis of fays in the old religions is reinforced by characteristics they have in common with the ancient goddesses. For example, MacCulloch feels that Latin legends influenced fays frequently banding together in groups of three, seven, nine and thirteen. Specifically he attributes the frequency with which they appear in threesomes to the trio of Roman goddesses known as the Parcae.⁷ This number three, the others mentioned above, and also the number twelve which occurs often in the romances all have mystical backgrounds of one form or another.

⁷ MacCulloch, pp. 38 - 39.

Since antiquity three has always been considered a special number, expressive of beginning, middle and end, therefore perfect. In Christianity, this symbol of perfection has been equated with the concept of the Supreme Deity in the mystery of the Trinity.⁸ Seven, considered since time immemorial a lucky number, has also possessed a sacred aura. In the religion of the ancient Hebrews, for example, every seventh year was Sabbatical; in Genesis, God took seven days to create the world.⁹ Nine, being composed of a trinity of trinities, also had significance to the ancients. In the old Latin legends there were nine Muses, and there were nine rivers of Hell.¹⁰ Thirteen's reputation as an unlucky number apparently began in Teutonic myth. The story is told how Loki, the god of strife and evil, once intruded at a banquet in Valhalla to total thirteen guests, and during this feast Balder, the son of Odin and the god of light, was slain. In a Christian parallel to this story, the memory of Christ and the Twelve Apostles at the Last Supper no doubt confirmed thirteen's status as an unlucky number.¹¹ The memory of the Twelve Apostles probably aids in the frequent occurrence of the number twelve in the

⁸ Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, ed. Ivor H. Evans (1870; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 1077.

⁹ Brewer's Dictionary, p. 984.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 758.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1075.

romances with supernatural portent. To this might be added the Latin tradition of the twelve sibyls of antiquity.¹²

To return to the Parcae, they were, of course, only three among many deities transplanted in Britain by the Romans with potential influence upon the native Celtic mythology and thus, in turn, fairy-lore. The influence of at least the Parcae on fays is seen in the derivation of the word "fay" itself. The other name for the Parcae was Fata, or Fates. From fata, or its singular fatum, originated the French word fée and the English "fay". In his study Maury is quick to point out this relationship between fata and its derivations to show the kinship between the fays and the goddesses.¹³

One must also avow that domestic Celtic Maidenland traditions probably influenced the idea that fays grouped together. Legend described the Maidenland as an earthly Paradise blessed with eternal spring and an abundance of fruits and flowers and peopled by beautiful damsels.¹⁴ This Maidenland was the Celtic Other World, and, as fays were supernatural or Other World beings, they might have been associated with Maidenland lore in this fashion. All the

¹² Brewer's Dictionary, p. 999.

¹³ Maury, p. 16.

¹⁴ Howard Rollin Patch, The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 287.

trappings of the Other World would eventually have been associated with fays. Included with this lore were the forms the Other World itself could take and therefore what form the fays' home could take. In its most common form the Other World was an island or isles, a land beyond the mist.¹⁵ It followed that if the Other World were a far-off isle, than a boat was necessary to convey the dead souls there. An interesting note on such beliefs is made by G. S. Loomis. She states that the notion of souls' crossing waters to the Other World is widespread, not only in classical literatures but also in the beliefs of many primitive tribes.¹⁶ Thus one finds two universal concepts, that of fays and that of a fantastic Other World beyond the waters, merging in Celtic legend. Once again, though, Latin legends might have influenced the indigenous traditions, here that of a lush island Paradise. Edmond Faral finds in descriptions of marvelous gardens fertile with magical fruit inducing forgetfulness in whomever eats of it a memory of the Paradise in Genesis.¹⁷ This association of fruit with the concept of

¹⁵ Patch, p. 28.

¹⁶ Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis, "Arthur in Avalon and the Banshee," in Vassar Mediaeval Studies, ed. Christabel F. Fiske (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 17.

¹⁷ Edmond Faral, Recherches sur les Sources Latines et Romains Courtois du Moyen Age (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1913), pp. 371 - 372.

Paradise might well explain how the Celtic Other World received its name of "Avalon", for, as Krappe says, "Avalon" derives from the Celtic word "aballos", meaning apples.¹⁸ To modern readers, this stress on gardens bursting with luscious fruit as indicative of the Other World might seem curious. However, one must remember, as A. H. Krappe says in his article "Avallon", that fresh fruit was not as accessible to people of those times and climes as it is to us today and would indeed have been special had it been available all year round.¹⁹ Still, the island or garden rich with fruit is not the only Celtic Other World motif. Other notions are the mountain, the stream, and the dark and wild valley.²⁰ The splendid castle also occurs frequently.²¹

The Celtic fay, associated with all these traditions through her possible ancestry as a goddess and then through her sojourn in Maidenland, is heiress to a rich lore, and when she appears in Arthurian romances, she brings her inheritance along with her. Her role in the romances is excellently defined by Lucy Allen Paton:

A Breton lay or an Arthurian romance consists essentially of the glorification of a single hero. . . For the purposes of ro-

¹⁸ A. H. Krappe, "Avallon," Speculum, 18 (1943), 316.- 317.

¹⁹ Krappe, p. 303.

²⁰ Patch, p. 314.

²¹ Patch, p. 324.

mance the fay exists that she may set a seal upon the hero's valor and beauty by granting him her favor, or that she may afford an opportunity for him to display his courage by demanding of him an apparently impossible adventure. Hence, although the fay's place in the narrative is really secondary to the hero's, she is a highly important element in the structure of Arthurian romance.²²

. . . the fay of Arthurian romance is essentially a supernatural woman, always more beautiful than the imagination can possibly fancy her, untouched by time, unhampered by lack of resources for the accomplishment of her pleasure, superior to human blemish, contingency, or necessity, in short, altogether unlimited in her power. Insistent love is a fundamental part of her nature, but she holds aloof from ordinary mortals and gives her favor only to the best and most valorous of knights. She. . . often. . . has guarded from infancy the mortal whom she finally takes to the other world as her beloved. However unexpectedly to the hero she appears before him, and for the purpose of carrying out a long-formed design of claiming his love. . . When the inevitable result ensues, and he obeys her summons to the other world, his bewilderment becomes complete oblivion, and he dwells in utter forgetfulness of all things mortal, conscious only of the delights that the fay offers him.²³

In the above passages Paton outlines the usual capacity of the fay in Arthurian romance. Various romancers, as they

²² Lucy Allen Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance, 2nd. ed. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960), p. 1.

²³ Paton, pp. 4 - 5.

wrote, used these general characteristics of the fay as suited their particular tale. Thus, the reader might find in any one romance all of these elements, various combinations of them, or perhaps only one. Sometimes the reader finds one or more of these supernatural characteristics applied to a very mortal female personage in a real-world episode. A brief look at several Arthurian romances which include all or some of these elements will best demonstrate how the authors made use of these techniques. An understanding of how these elements were generally applied to fays in the romances helps to clarify Morgain's role in the Vulgate Cycle.

One of the best examples of a fay who appears to the unsuspecting hero to claim his love is to be found in Marie de France's lay Lanval, for this fay fulfills almost all of the elements summarized by Paton. The fay introduces herself to Lanval dramatically, first sending two of her damsels to fetch him to her. The two damsels approach Lanval while he is letting his horse rest after riding out of the town:

La u il gist en teu maniere,
 Garda aval lez la riviere,
 [Si] vit venir deus dameiseles,
 Unc n'en ot veü[es] plus beles,
 (Lanval, lines 53 - 56)²⁴

Celes l'unt primes salué,
 Lur message li unt cunté:

²⁴ Lanval in Marie de France: Lais, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1944).

'Sire Lanval, ma dameisele,
 Que tant est pruz e sage e bele,
 Ele nus enveie pur vus;
 Kar i venez ensemble od nus!
 (Lanval, lines 69 - 74)

Once Lanval meets their lady, he finds that she is very forthright in stating her purpose:

'Lanval,' fet ele, 'beus amis,
 Pur vus vienc jeo fors de ma tere;
 De luinz vus sui venu[e] quere.
 Se vus estes pruz e curteis,
 Emperere ne quens ne reis
 N'ot unkes joie ne bien;
 Kar je vus aim sur tute rien.'
 (Lanval, lines 110 - 116)

Young Lanval is understandably flattered, for this lady's beauty can only be described in superlatives:

Dedenz cel tref fu la pucele;
 Flur de lis [e] rose nuvele,
 Quant ele pert al tens d'esté,
 Trespassot ele de beauté.
 (Lanval, lines 93 - 96)

That a fay of such extraordinary beauty should seek out Lanval from so far is the author's way of indicating to the reader that the hero is a special knight.

In the Celtic romance Pwyll Lord of Dyved Rhiannon uses a much more dramatic ploy to meet the hero. In this episode the reader is forewarned of the supernatural by one of Pwyll's men. In the course of a feast this man points out a certain hill to his lord Pwyll and tells him that, if a man of royal blood sits there, he either receives wounds or sees a wonder. Pwyll, optimistically anticipating a won-

der, sits on the hill with his men.

As they were sitting they saw a woman dressed in shining gold brocade and riding a great pale horse approaching on the highway which ran past the hill, and anyone who saw the horse would have said it was moving at a slow steady pace as it drew level with the hill. 'Men,' said Pwyll, 'does anyone know that horsewoman?' 'No, lord,' they answered. 'Then let someone go find out who she is.' A man rose, but by the time he reached the highway she had already gone past. He followed on foot as best he could, but the greater his speed the farther ahead she drew, and when he saw that his pursuit was in vain he returned and told Pwyll, 'Lord, it is pointless for anyone to follow her on foot.' 'All right,' said Pwyll, 'go to the court and take the fastest horse you know and go after her.' The man fetched the horse and set out; he reached open country and showed his mount the spurs, but the more he pricked it on the farther ahead she drew, all the while going at the same pace as before. His horse tired, and when it slowed to a walk he brought it back to where Pwyll was waiting, and said, 'Lord, it is useless for anyone to follow that lady. I know of no horse in the entire kingdom faster than this one, and I could not overtake her.' 'All right,' said Pwyll, 'but there is some hidden meaning here. Let us return to the court.' ²⁵

The reader would not know the "hidden meaning" of this incident, either, but would deduce that the lady is an Other-World being. The mystery thickens the next day when Pwyll returns to the hill. This time he asks a lad to be ready

²⁵ Pwyll Lord of Dyved in The Mabinogion, trans. Jeffrey Gantz (Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1977), p. 52.

with the fastest horse available to give pursuit should the lady reappear. Before long she does, riding the same horse.

The horsewoman drew opposite; the lad mounted his horse, but before he could settle into the saddle she had gone past and put a clear distance between them, all the while travelling at the same pace as the day before. He put his horse to a walk, thinking that as slow as he went he would still overtake her, but he did not. He gave the horse its head, but even then he was no nearer to her, and the more he urged his horse the farther ahead she drew. When he perceived that pursuit was useless he turned back to where Pwyll was waiting. 'Lord, the horse can do no better than you have seen.' 'I have seen it is useless for anyone to pursue her,' said Pwyll, 'but between me and God she had an errand for someone on this plain, had her obstinacy not prevented her declaring it. Let us return to the court.'

(Pwyll, p. 53)

What the mysterious lady's purpose in all this is comes to light the next day when Pwyll himself takes action and attempts pursuit:

Giving his spirited prancing mount its head he turned to follow, supposing he would overtake her at the second or third bound; yet he drew no closer than before. He pushed his horse to its utmost speed, until he saw that pursuit was fruitless.

Pwyll then called out, 'Lady, for the sake of the man you love best, stop for me!' 'I will, gladly,' said she, 'and it would have been better for your horse had you asked me that earlier.' The lady then reined in and halted, and drew up the part of

her veil which covered her face; she fixed her gaze on him and they began to talk. 'Lady,' said Pwyll, 'where do you come from, and where are you going?' 'I am doing my errands,' she said, 'and I am glad to see you.' 'I welcome you,' said Pwyll, for it seemed to him that the beauty of every girl and woman he had ever seen was nothing compared to the face of this lady. 'Lady, will you tell me anything of your errands?' 'Between me and God I will. My most important errand was to try to see you.'

(Pwyll, p. 54)

In her own fashion then, Rhiannon comes to claim the love of the hero Pwyll, and her unorthodox entry into the story coupled with her great beauty indicates that she is a supernatural being. Adding to Rhiannon's Other-World aura is the fact that her horseback appearances have been three, that favorite number of the supernatural.

Gantz explains Rhiannon's remarkable white horse as a vestige of her background, which, he says, was that of a horse-goddess.²⁶ This theory becomes a bit more plausible later on in the story when Rhiannon, as punishment for murdering her infant son, a crime of which she is innocent, must carry on her back all visitors to hers and Pwyll's castle.

She had to remain for seven years at the court of Arberth, where she was to sit every day by the mounting-block near the gate and tell her story to anyone who might not already know it;

²⁶ Gantz, The Mabinogion, p. 18.

she was also to offer to carry guests and strangers to the court on her back, though it was seldom that anyone let himself be so transported. Rhiannon spent part of a year thus.

(Pwyll, p. 61)

This feat of strength would most likely be impossible for most women but would not be difficult for a horse-goddess.

Whatever Rhiannon's own background, her wonderful steed in itself indicates the Other World, for extraordinary animals always have supernatural portent in Arthurian romance. In Marie de France's Guigemar, for example, the wounding of the androgynous hind with antlers thrusts the hero of the lay into supernatural adventure (Guigemar, lines 76 - 122). Quite often in the romances it is the quarry of a hunt that exhibits unusual characteristics, a condition that prepares the reader for preternatural events.²⁷

To return to the discussion of the introduction of the fay to the hero, one finds a mutated version of such a meeting in the episode in the Vulgate Cycle treating Camille the Saxon enchantress. The text states that Camille is a sorceress, but her great beauty, her extraordinary talent for necromancy, and her residence in the impregnable La Roche as Sesnes also hint at fairy-lore:

⁊ estoit la roche si fors que nule
riens ne doutoit fors estre affamee. . .

²⁷ Marcelle Thiébaux, The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 56 - 57.

[Camille] sauoit plus dencantemens
 que damoisele del pais ⁊ moult est
 bele ⁊ estoit del lignage as saïnes.
 Et ele amoit tant le roi artu com ele
 pooit amer home ⁊ li rois nen sauoit
 rien.

(Sommer, III, i, 406, lines 9 - 16)

The hero Camille has chosen is thus Arthur himself. He falls madly in love with Camille, and the text, though never saying so outright, leaves the reader suspecting that she has used her powers to ensnare him:

Et li rois artus parloit tous les
 iors a la damoisele del castel ⁊
 li priot damors ⁊ ele nen auoit
 cure. ⁊ si lauoit tel conree quil
 lamoit outre mesure.

(Sommer, III, i, 407, lines 8 - 10)

In the course of battle, Arthur is inspired by Camille's looking on from the castle walls and seems to forget Guen-euere completely. This also hints at Camille's power over him:

Mais li rois nauoit mie grantement
 de gent si couenoit que il le feïst
 bien. ⁊ si fist il miex que onques
 nauoit fait. ⁊ plus le fist il por
 la pucele qui le regardoit de la
 roche ou ele estoit que por lui.

(Sommer, III, i, lines 17 - 20)

One sees in these romances involving the hero and the fairy-mistress that the fay's Other-World characteristics can all differ according to the author's needs. In some relationships between a fay and the hero, the love-motif can be entirely omitted, and the romancer portrays

her as the hero's kindly fairy-godmother. Quite often, as Paton says, she rears the hero from infancy. The most famous example of a fay in this capacity is no doubt the Lady of the Lake, Lancelot's foster-mother. It is she who literally abducts the infant Lancelot right after his mother has found the body of the dead King Ban.

§ quant ele aproche des cheuax qui
 estoient desus le lach si voit son
 fil hor del bercheul tout deslije
 § voit une damoisele qui le tenoit
 tout nu en giron § lestraint § serre
 moult durement entre ses mameles.
 Et li baise les iex § la bouce
 menuelement § ele nauoit mie tort. . .

Et quant ele le voit [la mere]
 aprochier si se lieue a tout lenfant
 quele tenoit entre ses bras. § si
 sen reuait durement au lac. si
 ioint les pies § saut ens.

(Sommer, III, i, 14, lines 29 - 41)

This lady, sometimes called Niniane, is obviously possessed of magical powers, and she has learned them, like many another fay, from Merlin. (Sommer, III, i, 21, lines 4 - 39). It is Niniane who rears Lancelot:

§ quant ele len ot porte il ne fait
 pas a demander sele le tint chier.
 Car ele le gardoit plus doucement
 que nule autre feme ne poeit faire
 qui porte ne leust en son uentre.
 (Sommer, III, i, 22, lines 2 - 4)

Adhering closely to the fairy-godmother theme of the Prose Lancelot is the tale Floriant et Florete. In this romance it is Morgain as the fay of Mongibel who is

the kindly fairy-godmother. Similarities between how Floriant and Lancelot are reared by their respective foster-mothers abound, and R. S. Loomis, who has studied Morgain's Celtic background extensively, feels it quite possible that both Morgain and Niniane evolved from the same original stereotype, although not necessarily the same character.²⁸ Also, Harry F. Williams, the editor of the version of Floriant et Florete being considered here, finds that the unknown author of this work simply borrowed from well-known romances and made very few personal innovations.²⁹ Therefore, it is likely that, having heard tales of fairy-godmothers, the respective creators of Morgain of Mongivel and the Lady of the Lake described their fays in a strikingly similar fashion.

The first major similarity between Morgain the fairy-godmother of Floriant and her counterpart Niniane occurs in how each first encounters the respective infant hero. Morgain, like Niniane, finds the newborn hero in the forest. Floriant's queen-mother is sleeping, having fled, like Lancelot's mother, enemies who have slain her husband:

Un poi devant la mie nuit
S'en revenoient de deduit
.III. fees de la mer salee;
La mestresse d'aux ert nommee

²⁸ Roger Sherman Loomis, Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p. 48.

²⁹ Harry F. Williams, ed., Floriant et Florete (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947), p. 26.

Morgain, la suer le roi Artu.
 <Compaignez, fet ele, entendez:
 Cist enfes que vous ci veez
 Sera encor bons chevaliers
 Li plus hardis et li plus fiers,
 Li plus sages, li mius apris.
 Certes, il ert de si grant pris
 Q'en toute l'empire de Rome
 Ne trouvera on si preudome.>
 (Floriant et Florete, lines 549 - 562)

After Morgain has predicted the infant's future prowess for the reader, the other fays suggest they adopt Floriant.

Morgain sanz plus de demoree
 L'a pris. A itant s'en tornerent,
 Vers Mongibel s'acheminèrent,
 Quar s'estoit lor mestre chastel,
 Molt sunt lies au damoiseil.
 A tant l'emportent au moustier
 Sel font lever et baptiser;
 Floriant le font apeler,
 Bien le font norrir et garder.
 (Floriant, lines 566 - 574)

Thus Morgain's taking of Floriant resembles Niniane's kidnapping of the newborn Lancelot.

Both boys receive educations befitting knights as they grow into young men, and both fays stress the Christian religion in the upbringing of their wards. Perhaps this stress is due to the authors' being mindful of the Church's condemnation of fays as demons, and they wished to avoid their fays being categorized so. More likely, however, this religious aspect is due to the sophisticated influence of ideal knightly training, a subject thoroughly discussed in Madeleine Cosman's book, The Education of the Hero in Arthurian Romance, specifically treating Perceval's educa-

tion. Especially in the case of Niniane is this duty to religion emphasized. Niniane very piously describes to Lancelot as he prepares to set out for Arthur's court a knight's obligations to the Church. "Ains doit plus douter honteuse cose que mort a souffrir. cheualiers fu establis outrement por sainte eglise garandir (Sommer, III, i, 114, lines 12 - 13)." She explains why a knight must not shirk his religious duties:

Il doit estre tout premierement
hounis au siecle & apres a dame
dieu. Car le iour quil rechoit
lordre de cheualier le fait li
deuise. Qui miez le seit deuiser
fait la dame que ie nai fait si
le fache. & puis quil est pariures
vers dame dieu nostre signor. Dont
a il perdue par droit tant donor com
il atendoit a auoir en la grant ioie.
Et au siecle est il hounis tout par
droiture.

(Sommer, III, i, 116, lines 17 - 23)

By the time the fay is done with these religious stipulations, the reader should be convinced that she is a good force upon the hero and is not aligned with the Devil.

Invariably in tales involving a fay with the hero, whether she is his mistress or fairy-godmother, she will present him with a special gift or gifts. Niniane is lavish in presenting Lancelot with all his knightly accoutrements:

Car ele li auoit porquis grant pieche
auoit. tout che que mestiers estoit
a cheualier. hauberc blanc & legier

§ fort. Et hiaume sorargente moult
 riche § de moult grant biaute. §
 escu tout blanc comme noif a boucle
 dargent moult bele. Et por che quele
 ne voloit quil ni eust riens qui ne
 fust blanche. § si li ot appareillie
 vne espee qui en maint lieu auoit este
 bien a[s]saie deuant quil leust. Et
 puis quil lot le rasaia il bien. Si
 estoit grans a mesure § trenchans a
 grant merueille § poi pesans. Et li
 fu aprestes li glaiues a vne hanste
 blanche qui corte § grosse § roide
 estoit. § li fers blans § trenchans
 § bien agus. Auoc tout che li ot
 la dame appareillie cheual grant § fort
 § isnel § bien esproue de grant vis-
 teche § de hardement. § fu tous blans
 autresi comme noif negie § si li ot
 appareillie a sa chevalerie robe
 dun blanc samit cote § mantel.

(Sommer, III, i, 118, lines 16 - 27)

The reader notes the importance of the fine horse that
 Niniane presents to Lancelot. According to Loomis, this
 giving of a fine horse by the fay to the hero is a very
 early and commonly-used motif of Arthurian conteurs.³⁰
 It is also employed by the author of Floriant et Florete,
 for Morgain tells the hero that on the day of his dubbing
 she will equip him richly:

Demain vous ferai chevalier,
 Çaiens a le plus biau destrier
 Qui soit el mont, sel donrai.
 Richement vous adouberei. . . .
 (Floriant, lines 785 - 788)

³⁰ Roger Sherman Loomis, Wales and the Arthurian
 Legend (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1956), p. 113.

The giving of such a coveted gift to the hero by the fay can also be translated into real-world episodes. Elements of the fay's caring for the hero and giving him gifts have filtered into more prosaic events which have but an echo of what might have been supernatural origin. This can be detected, for example, in Owein, or The Countess of the Fountain, another of the tales in The Mabinogion. Owein, by the way, is considered the Welsh predecessor of Chrétien's Yvain, for Yvain's experiences mirror Owein's.³¹ Both heroes are blessed with the friendship of a lion and cursed with a bout of madness after losing their respective ladies. In his madness Owein finally descends into a valley after he can no longer keep up with the wild animals he has been accompanying. In this valley is a park, ". . . the loveliest one in the world, and it was owned by a widowed countess" (Owein, p. 209). This superlatively beautiful park may well have been borrowed from Other-World notions of marvelous gardens and valleys or may even have originated there. If this were the case, the now very human countess may once also have been a fay. A vestige of such an ancestry remains in the fact that she later gives the cured Owein gifts similar to those of fays like Morgain and Niniane:

³¹ G. D. West, An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Prose Romances (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 309.

'Between me and God, I will give
him a horse and armour as a gift,
and he has never had a better
horse nor better armour. . .'

A handsome black Gascony
horse was brought, with a
beechen saddle, and armour
for both man and horse. . . .
(Owein, p. 211)

Thus, by using this story of Owein as one example, one finds that some authors may wish to make Other-World characters and situations more realistic in their stories while still retaining some of the supernatural motifs or that some authors apply elements of faerie to mortal characters in real-world situations.

In this area of gift-giving, the fay is never limited to bestowing only horse and armour upon the hero. Morgain gives Floriant a magic ship to convey him to Arthur's court:

Dedens une nef enterrez
Que je vous ferai amener,
Mes ne vous estuet riens douter
Vent ne tempeste ne orage
Car ele est de si bone ovrage
Quar ele ne puet empirier,
Verser, fendre ne despecier,
Quar ele est toute d'ybenus. . . .
(Floriant, lines 790 - 797)

La nef est fete en tel maniere
Que avant, en coste et arriere,
Ensi com vous commanderez,
S'en ira la ou vous voirez.
(Floriant, lines 801 - 804)

Morgain's magic ship is also a common enough device of

Other-World lore. Marie de France used a magic ship in the lay Guigemar (lines 151 - 208). In La Mort le Roi Artu a splendid barge without the benefit of crew conveys the dead damoiselle d'Escalot to Camelot.³² The idea of such magic ships in the romances may have originated with the conception of the Celtic Other World being an island and therefore accessible to departed souls only by ship.

The generosity of the fairy-mistress is also described by Marie de France in Lanval:

Mut est Lanval bien herbergez:
Cum plus despendra richement,
[E] plus avrat or e argent.
(Lanval, lines 140 - 142)

He is not given the stock wondrous steed by his mistress but instead finds his own mount richly equipped:

Quant del manger furent levé,
Sun cheval li unt amené;
Bien li ourent la sele mise;
Mut ad trové riche servise.
(Lanval, lines 189 - 192)

Another characteristic common to fairy-lore that Morgain, Niniane, and Lanval's mistress share is the bevy of damsels who accompany and assist the principal fay. Lanval's fairy-mistress has her damsels bring the young knight to her tent. These damsels also assist the fay in making her grand entrance at Lanval's trial. Before she herself

³² La Mort le Roi Artu, ed. Jean Frappier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1964), para. 70.

enters the judgment hall at Arthur's court, she twice sends inside pairs of her damsels ahead of her. Their beauty stuns Arthur's barons and disrupts the proceedings. When Arthur demands his barons' decision, they reply:

'Sire,' funt il, 'nus departimes.
 Pur les dames que nus veïmes
 Nus n'i avum nul esgart fait.
 Or recumencerum le plait.
 (Lanval, lines 503 - 506)

The grand entrance, the third one, belongs to the fay herself (lines 547 - 592), a sequence reminiscent of Rhiannon's three startling appearances on horseback in Pwyll. We have already seen that Morgain in Florian et Florete is accompanied by two lesser fays so that they number the traditional threesome of fairy-lore. In the Vulgate Cycle Nianiane has to assist her the trusty Saraide, the most important among the Dame du Lac's many damsels. Saraide is herself capable of magic and uses her powers to aid Lancelot's cousins, Lionel and Bohort, escape the wicked Claudas:

Mais neporquant del commandement sa
 damoisele li souient. si iete son
 enchantement. Ø fait resambler les
 .ij. enfans as .ij. leuriers. Ø li
 doi leurier orent la semblance as
 .ij. enfans.
 (Sommer, III, i, 55, lines 40 - 42)

Beyond all her Other-World trappings, the fay exists in a romance, as Paton states, to demand an apparently impossible task of the hero and therefore to establish his

knightly prowess. Morgain satisfies this requirement in Floriant et Florete when she sends one of her maidens with a message to Floriant at Camelot. The purpose of her letter to her protégé is to tell him finally of his real parents and to appoint him the task of relieving his mother from the siege of the villainous seneschal Maragoz:

Or si te couvient porchacier
Com ton pere puisses vengier
Et delivrer puisses ta mere. . . .
(Floriant, lines 2557 - 2559)

A remnant of the task set by the fay for the hero might be found in more realistic terms in Owein. Owein is given the armor and the fine Gascony horse because he wants to help the widowed countess fight her neighbor, the earl, who is about to overrun her lands (Owein, p. 211).

After the hero has been involved with a fay, the "inevitable result", according to Paton, is his being summoned by her to the Other World. This is what happens to Lanval:

Od li s'en vait en Avalun,
Ceo nus recuntent li Bretun,
En un isle que mut est beaus;
La fu ravi li dameiseaus.
(Lanval, lines 641 - 644)

Lanval's summons is very simple compared to Floriant's. His comes when, while hunting, he sights a white stag, the animal which practically always foretells Other-World adventure:

En une espesçe d'un aunoï
 Leur saut .I. sers qui molt
 iert grans
 Et ausi blans com vis argens.
 (Floriant, lines 8184 - 8186)

That the stag should leap out from the covering of an alder, or elder tree, is noteworthy, for associated with this tree were many superstitions, no doubt stemming from the legend that the Cross had been fashioned from alder wood and that Judas had hung himself on such a tree. The unfortunate tree was therefore often called the Judas tree.³³

Once flushed, Floriant's stag leads him on a chase up a mountain to a beautiful palace, where the animal disappears. Soon the hero finds his foster-mother, Morgain, who is expecting him. She admits she had sent the white stag:

Li cers que vous chacié avez,
 pour quoi çaiens estes entrez,
 Fu par moi de la fors tramis. . . .
 (Floriant, lines 8231 - 8233)

Typical, then, of a fay she has used a supernatural messenger to bring the hero to her in the Other World:

. . . <Biaus amis chiers,
 Certes, molt vous voi volentiers,
 Ja mes de moi ne partirez.>
 (Floriant, lines 8223 - 8225)

Amis, vous deviez mourir
 Et de cest siecle departir.
 (Floriant, lines 8237 - 8238)

³³ Phrase and Fable, p. 368.

This case, however, differs from Lanval's in that Morgain is Floriant's fairy-godmother, not his mistress, and therefore can have no amorous designs in summoning him to her in the Other World. This fact is emphasized when, out of pity for her former charge, she has his beloved Florete brought to the palace to be with the hero forever:

<Sire, fet ele, ne plourez,
 Bien sai de quoi vous dementez.
 C'est por Florete, jel sai bien,
 Mes ne vous esmaiez de rien,
 Anuit la vous ferai avoir.>
 Lors apela par estouvoir
 .III. fees que devant li vit.
 <Alez, fet ele, sanz respit,
 Por Florete si l'aportez.>
 (Floriant, lines 8257 - 8265)

A garbled fairy-retention of the hero in the Other World is seen by Paton in the Vulgate Cycle episode where Camille finally tricks Arthur into La Roche to have him taken prisoner.³⁴ We have already seen that La Roche is certainly described with Other-World tones and that Arthur is blindly enamored of the sorceress:

li rois se couch en .j. moult
 biau lit auoec samie. ¶ guerre-
 hes iut auoec la bele damoisele
 en vn autre lit. Et quant li
 rois ot ieu auoec samie vne
 grant piece ¶ fait de li sa vo-
 lente. si vienent laiens cheua-
 plus de .xl. tot arme. ¶ tiennent
 les espees nues. si o[r]urent luis
 de la cambre tot a force.
 (Sommer, III, i, 410, lines 19 - 23)

³⁴ Paton, p. 97.

Another attempt at a fairy-retention involving Arthur is in the Livre d'Artus. Here the Other World is represented as a magical apple orchard surrounded by mist, all concepts hearkening back, no doubt, to the idea of Avalon as the island of apples. The author of the Livre d'Artus says that it is "... le uergier que la femme au roi de Danemarche auoit ferme par nigramance de lair entorne ni auoit que une entree & une eissue" (Sommer, VII, 268, lines 40 - 41). Any place with this quality, the inability of one to leave it once inside, gives it away, says Freymond, as the Land of the Dead, or the Other World.³⁵ In the Livre d'Artus, however, our Other World has paled into an apple orchard owned, not by a fay, but by a very human queen. One of this queen's damsels tries to entice Sagremor with some of the fruit, and then the reader sees all the Other-World undertones of the orchard:

... si uint une damoisele a
Sagremor la ou il conioissoit
ses compaignons & tenoit une
pome en sa main toute uermeille
que ele coilli u pomier tot uoiant
luj & li dist. sire cheualiers
tenez de ce fruit que madame uos
enuoie se en mengiez por amor de
li que ele le uos mande. & Sa-
gremor la regarde & demande a
ses compaignons se il mengie en
ont. & il dient qui oil. & lors
lor demande se il ont nul talent
de hors issir ne daler en lor

³⁵ E. Freymond, "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der alt-französischen Artusromane in Prosa," Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur, 17, 1895, 16 - 17.

queste ne en lor pais. § il dien t
que nenil que toz li deduiz de monde
est ceianz que uos porriez penser ne
deuiser.

(Sommer, VII, 312, lines 31 - 37)

Later Sagremor prevents Arthur from eating one of these
enchanted apples and being imprisoned in the orchard:

. . . uint un damoisele deuant els
§ tint une pome uermeille en sa
main § dist au roi. sire madame
de Danemarche uos mande que uos
pregniez ceste pome § en mengiez
por amor de li. § li rois prist
la pome quil uit molt bele § la
regarda tot enuiron § dest. granz
merciz damoisele certes ele est
molt bele. sire fait ele or en
mengiez car molt est sade. § le
rois dist uolentiers damoisele.
lors uolst mordre en la pome
quant Sagremors saut sus § le
fiert en la main si durement que
la pome li fait uoler la ius en
mille iardin § dist au roi. que
est ce sire. uolez ceianz rema-
noir a toz les iors de uostre
uie. certes bien sachiez que se
uos en mengiez que iamaiz nauroiz
uolente de ceianz issir.

(Sommer, VII, 316, lines 9 - 17)

This brief survey of the fay in Arthurian ro-
mance outlines her usual basic portrayal, variations of it,
and common Other-World themes attributed to her. This sur-
vey helps one better to understand how the romancers then
dealt with Morgain's portrayal. With general fairy-lore
thus having been treated, the next step in this discussion
is now to consider Morgain la Fée's background and tradi-
tions limited to her alone.

Chapter Two

Morgain's Background:

The Fay of Avalon and Arthur's Sister

The tradition that sets Morgain apart from all other fays is the one wherein, as Arthur's sister, she comes after the Battle of Salesbieres to convey the mortally wounded king in a boat off to Avalon for healing. Since the legend promises Arthur's eventual return to lead his people to victory over the invading Saxons, Morgain's part in it as the king's benefactress is special, a trust not to be given lightly to just anyone. The beautiful, kindly fay who is moreover kin to Arthur would naturally merit this trust. This same Morgain, however, has a cunning, vindictive side which is the antithesis of the healing mistress of Avalon. Morgain's split personality is the Gordian knot of any study of her characterization in the romances, and, before we consider her portrayal in the Vulgate, it is wise to review the theories on her two-faceted evolution.

Her polarized portrayals in the romances have spawned several schools of thought on her genesis and evolution. One group of scholars firmly believes that Morgain is the daughter of everyone's imagination. Adamantly opposed to them are the folklorists, a group designated

also as Celtisants by Urban T. Holmes.¹ The Celtisants have traced Morgain's origins back to goddesses and fairy-women in Celtic myth and legend and attribute apparent inconsistencies in her nature to borrowings from these diverse divinities. These folklorists affirm that, when one traces and analyzes Morgain's Celtic origins, one realizes that her personality has developed actually quite logically rather than inconsistently with the passage of time. Moderating between these two determined camps is a third group which theorizes that the fay is the product of both poetic license and poetic legend. In this chapter we shall now consider what these three groups postulate about Morgain's background to analyze what effect, if any, it had on her portrayal in the Vulgate Cycle.

Sifting fact from fancy begins with Geoffrey of Monmouth, whom some credit as the inventor of the Morgain legend. Geoffrey, in his Historia Regum Britanniae, says merely that the wounded Arthur is taken to Avalon to be healed after his last battle but never mentions Morgain in any capacity (Historia Regum Britanniae, hereafter cited HRB, par. 178, lines 56 - 60).² Faral, whose editions of the Latin texts are being used in this study, dates the His-

¹ Urban T. Holmes, Chrétien de Troyes (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 20.

² Edmond Faral, La Légende Arthurienne: Etudes et Documents: Première Partie: Les Plus Anciens Textes, III (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, Éditeur, 1929).

toria in three different versions from 1136 to 1148 and Geoffrey's Vita Merlini at 1148.³ It is in this latter work that Morgain with her healing powers first appears in reference to Arthur and Avalon. The passage in which she appears is important because, as Bogdanow states, it is the fay's introduction into literature, nothing definite about her previous to the Vita being known.⁴ In the verses where Morgain appears (Vita Merlini, lines 908 - 940), the reader learns that she lives with her eight sisters on the Insula Pomorum, or Isle of Apples, sometimes called the Fortunate Isles. One notes that all told the sisters total nine, a number popular with legend and perhaps borrowed here from the nine Muses. The sisters live on a lovely, fertile island evocative of Avalon through its association with apples. The inhabitants of this island live an unusually long time, certainly an Other-World characteristic. Geoffrey describes Morgain herself as a "mathematicam" which can mean either a mathematician or an astrologer, and all things considered, one is inclined to believe Geoffrey intended the latter definition to apply. Geoffrey emphasizes Morgain's talents in the art of healing, a field in which she is supreme even to her sisters. Among her other talents are shape-shifting and the ability to fly. However, Geoffrey does not refer

³ Faral, La Légende Arthurienne, III, 334 - 335.

⁴ Fanni Bogdanow, "Morgain's Role in the Thirteenth-Century Prose Romances of the Arthurian Cycle," Medium Aevum, XXXVIII, No. 2 (1969), 123.

to Morgain as being related to Arthur or associated with him in any way previous to this episode. He describes her only as the one who will tend Arthur's wounds on this pleasant island.

Geoffrey does allot Arthur a sister in the Historia. Her name is Anna; their father is Utherpendragon, Igerne their mother (HRB, par. 138, lines 25 - 28). About this Anna there is nothing extraordinary or supernatural. Little about her is said except to mention her marriage to Loth, King of Loenois or Orcanie (HRB, par. 139, lines 10 - 14). Much the same story of Arthur's only sister is recounted in Wace's Brut. This would only follow, since Wace is rendering Geoffrey's extremely popular Historia into Old French verse.⁵ He narrates the births of Arthur and Anna thus:

La nuit ot un fil conceü
Et au terme a un fil eü.
Artus ot non; de sa bonté
A grant parole puis esté.
Enprés Artur fu Enna nee,
Une fille, qui fu donee
A un preu baron et certois
Loth avoit non, de Loenois.
(Brut, lines 275 - 282)

In describing Arthur's translation to Avalon, Wace adheres to Geoffrey's narration in the Historia and mentions neither Morgain nor her sisters:

⁵ I. D. O. Arnold et M. M. Pelan, eds., La Partie Arthurienne du Roman de Brut (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1962), p. 18.

Artus, se la geste n'en mant,
 Fu el cors navrez mortelment;
 An Avalon s'an fist porter
 Por ses plaies mediciner.
 Ancor i est, Breton l'atandent,
 Si com il dient et antandent;
 De la vanra, ancor puet vivre.
 Mestres Wace, qui fist cest livre,
 Ne volt plus dire de sa fin
 Que fist le profetes Mellin;
 Mellins dist d'Artur, si ot droit,
 Que de sa mort dote feroit.
 Li profete dist verité;
 Toz tans an a l'an puis doté,
 Et dotera, ce croi, toz dis,
 Se il est morz ou il est vis.
 Porter se fist an, Avalon,
 Por voir, puis l'Incarnation
 Cinc cenx et quarante deus anz.
 (Brut, lines 4705 - 4723)

Therefore, these earliest legends of Arthur's demise neither establish nor clarify Morgain's relationship to him.

Since so much about the fay is left unsaid with her debut into literature through Geoffrey's offices, the first controversies over her origins begin. The folklorists believe that Geoffrey's mentioning her at all indicates pre-existing legends about her, Arthur, and Avalon. The opposite camp interprets Geoffrey's not originally including her in the Historia as proof that he invented the whole episode of Morgain and her sisters for the Vita Merlini.

On the former side of this argument G. S. Loomis, in her article "Arthur and the Banshee", postulates that there had been a Celtic tradition on the Passing of Arthur in which Morgain's role was crucial and that this tradition was known to Geoffrey and incorporated by him in the Vita

Merlini.⁶ In this article, however, Loomis is assuming Morgain's already-established capacity as a fay and her blood relationship to Arthur to prove divine origins for him.⁷ This leads into an entirely separate study not pertinent to this discussion.

In accord with the theory that Morgain and the Avalon legend were well known before Geoffrey, there is also R. S. Loomis's article on "Morgain la Fée in Oral Tradition". Here R. S. Loomis puts forth the possibility that much information about Morgain was circulated by French-speaking Breton conteurs from Scotland to Sicily before anyone ever wrote it all down. He feels that the diversity of legends about Morgain in the romances has resulted from this wide distribution of story-tellers.⁸ He also believes that in these tales Morgain began her career as a water divinity. Among his several proofs for this belief is verse 1124 in the Vita Merlini, where Geoffrey refers to Morgain and her sisters as "nymphae". He corroborates this reference with verse 1163 of Etienne de Rouen's Draco Normannicus where Morgain is described as "nymphae perennis".⁹ To this he adds the fact that some

⁶ G. S. Loomis, p. 16.

⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁸ R. S. Loomis, "Morgain la Fée in Oral Tradition," Romania, LXXX, (1959), 341.

⁹ Ibid., p. 344.

scholars consider not only the heroes Owein and Yvain as the same personage, as we have seen in Chapter One, but also, parallel to this, believe their respective mothers, Modron and Morgain, to be essentially the same character. It is in the Huth Merlin that Morgain is the wife of King Urien and the mother of Yvain. She also appears as Yvain's mother in the Lai de Tyolet.¹⁰ Her more purely Celtic counterpart, Modron, derived her name, Loomis states, from the Celtic goddess Matrona, who gave her name to the river Marne.¹¹ This, then, would coincide with Morgain's being a former water divinity. In this vein we might now recall that the author of Floriant et Florete refers to Morgain as a "fee de la mer" (line 551). However, Fanni Bogdanow, one of the partisans of the imagination-only group, entirely dismisses Loomis's Morgain-Modron link and believes there to be no connection between these two female personages.¹² Still, another possible link between Morgain and Urien and his son is suggested in G. D. West's Prose Index, in which he says that the historical Urien was murdered by a certain Morcant, a man. Between the names Morcant and Morgain there is a similarity, and West suggests that the blame for the

¹⁰ G. D. West, An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances: 1150 - 1300 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 119.

¹¹ R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," p. 345.

¹² Bogdanow, footnote 36, p. 132.

murder was transferred to Morgain and preserved in the form of an unsuccessful attempt in the Huth Merlin.¹³

R. S. Loomis, as another of his proofs that traditions concerning Morgain existed long before the Vita, expands upon her flying ability mentioned by Geoffrey in the same work. He lists several sources in which she is described as able to fly and states that the respective authors of these works had to be acquainted with traditions attributing flight in the shape of birds to the fays of Avalon, particularly to Morgain.¹⁴ One of the sources that Loomis includes is the Didot-Perceval. In this story we meet fairy-women taking the form of birds to help the knight Urbain, whom Perceval has bested in combat. Unaware that the birds are transformed fays, Perceval draws his sword against them:

Et quant Percevaus le vit si en
ot molt grant iror, et tint l'espee
el puing destre et fiert un oisel
qui plus cort le tenoit tres parmi
liu del cors si qu'il le fist salir
le bouelee, et caï a le terre. Et
au caïr que il fist si devint une
feme morte, et ert de le plus bele
fature que il onques main veïst.
Et quant Percevaus le vit si en ot
molt grant duel de çou que il le
vit morte, et li oisel qui entor
lui estoient se traisent arriere
et corurent vers le cors et l'em-

¹³ West, Prose Index, p. 298.

¹⁴ R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," p. 346.

portent en air.

(Didot-Perceval, lines 1082 - 1089)¹⁵

Urbain explains to Perceval that the bird-women were his amie and companion fays trying to help him escape Perceval.

Urbain assures him not to worry about the slain fay:

Et cele que tu navras, ele fu
suer a m'amie, mais ele n'avra
garde, car or ces eures est ele
en Avalon. Mais por Diu te vuel
je proier que tu m'en laisses
aler a me demisele qui encor
m'atent.

(Didot-Perceval, lines 1102 - 1105)

Urbain's bird-woman amie in Avalon sounds curiously similar to Morgain herself since she will apparently be able to bring back to life her slain sister, a resemblance to Morgain's tending her wounded brother Arthur. That the sister of the slain bird-woman is none other than Morgain, here anonymous, is what Loomis had already postulated from this episode in his work Wales and the Arthurian Legend.¹⁶ In this same study he made another connection between Morgain and birds, for he found in a fourteenth-century manuscript a reference to the Celtic war-goddess, the Morrigan, appearing at times in the form of a crow.¹⁷ For Loomis, finally,

¹⁵ The Didot-Perceval: According to the Manuscripts of Modena and Paris, ed. William Roach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941).

¹⁶ R. S. Loomis, Wales, p. 118.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

the import of all this is that the previously-mentioned Modron is the intermediate figure between the legends of this Morrigan and the myths of the fays of Avalon.¹⁸

Through Modron, who would have appropriated traits from all of these supernatural beings, Morgain would have inherited many of the powers and legends associated with both types of divinities.

The Celtic origins of this episode of the bird-women in the Didot-Perceval are regarded with more reservation by Roach, the editor of this specific version. He does not dismiss all claims that the transformation episode is of Celtic origin; he merely says that he does not find enough evidence to substantiate it completely.¹⁹

On Morgain's Celtic origins, the most exhaustive study has been done by Lucy Allen Paton. She traces Morgain's background directly to the Morrigan's and feels that it is the war-goddess's traits which influence the cruel, scheming aspects of the fay's character.²⁰ One of the habits of the Morrigan appropriated by the fay is shape-shifting, and Paton parallels Loomis's theory on the war-goddess as a crow when she states that the Morrigan's favorite form is that of a bird or, especially, that of a crow or raven.²¹

¹⁸ R. S. Loomis, Wales, p. 119.

¹⁹ Roach, p. 73.

²⁰ Paton, p. 163.

²¹ Paton, p. 149.

She finds Morgain's shape-shifting in the Huth Merlin a throwback to the Morrigan myth and uses this episode from the war-goddess's career as her correlation:

The Tain Bo Regamna describes a meeting between the Morrigan and Cuchulinn that should be noted in connection with this story of Morgain's shapeshifting. . . .

. . . The Morrigan is carrying away property (a cow) that Cuchulinn claims as his. . . Cuchulinn is about to attack the Morrigan when she and the cow vanish from sight, and she reappears in a changed form. . . The Morrigan reminds Cuchulinn that she can transform herself at her pleasure, and threatens him with destruction. . . .²²

In the episode from the Huth Merlin which compares to the above passage, Morgain, pursued by Arthur after she has stolen Excalibor's magic scabbard, realizes while in flight that her only hope of escape is to use her sorcery on herself and her company:

Lors gieta son enchantement
et les fait tous muer en pierre,
damoiseles et chevaliers et che-
vaus. . . Et aussi fu Morgue a-
tornee, mais non mie que elle ne
peuust desfaire son enchantement
toutes les eures que elle vausist.
(Huth Merlin, II, 223)²³

²² Paton, pp. 23 - 24.

²³ Merlin: Roman en Prose du XIII^e Siècle, II, eds. Gaston Paris et Jacob Ulrich (Paris: Librairie de Firmin et C^{ie}, 1886).

As the Morrigan taunts Cuchulinn, so Morgain taunts her brother through a messenger:

. . . jou oi pooir de ma
maïsnie muer en pierre, si
qu'il meïsmes le vit. Et
encore li poés dire que plus
euusse je fait de lui, se ne
fust la damoisele cacheresse
qui l'a garandi encontre moi
que je ne li plus nuire par
enchantement.

(Huth Merlin, II, 227)

For Paton, then, this shape-shifting instance of Morgain's in the Huth Merlin is very close to early Celtic material.²⁴

To this similarity between the careers of Morgain and the Morrigan she adds another story of the war-goddess, the Aided Cuchulinn or The Death of Cuchulinn. She states that this episode concerning Cuchulinn and the war-goddess would have been grafted on to the first story and would thus have reinforced the later legend of Morgain coming for the wounded Arthur.

During the final battle, though powerless to aid Cuchulinn, in distress she hovers above him in the form of a crow, and after he has received his death-wound, she perches on a stone near him. When his enemies advance and slay him, the Morrigan, seeing that her mission is ended, flies away from the scene.²⁵

²⁴ Paton, p. 23.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

For the most part, then, Paton traces Morgain's character back to the Morrigan's. However, the Morgain who is the mistress of Avalon and the healer of Arthur's wounds is the antithesis of the ill-humored war-goddess. Paton explains this part of Morgain's character by the basic fairy-mistress story. As in the fairy-mistress stories discussed in Chapter One, a great hero is needed, in this case Arthur, and a beautiful fay for his amie, none other than Morgain. Paton finds the roots of this story in the Celtic legend Serglige Conchulaind:

Two beautiful birds alight one day on a lake near which the Ultonians are assembled, and sing a low melody that lulls the hearers to sleep. Cuchulinn makes an attempt to slay them, but his efforts are in vain, and he goes apart from his comrades, melancholy and aware that drowsiness is stealing upon him. Two strange women draw near him smiling, and in turn they stroke him with switches that they carry. When his strength fails, they leave him, and he lies in a long trance, after awaking from which he remains for a year without uttering a word. Then a stranger comes to him, and sings of two women who can give him back his strength; they are Liban. . . who dwells in the Plain of Delight, and her sister Fand, who is filled with love for Cuchulinn.

. . . the stranger departs. He is soon followed by another messenger from Fand, her sister Liban. . . If Cuchulinn will come with her to the Plain of Delight, and fight against the enemies of Labraid (her husband) his reward shall be nothing less than Fand's love. The

weakness. . . need be no obstacle. . .
 for he shall be healed of his disease. . .
 he sails with her to the Plain of Delight.
 Here he overcomes Labraid's enemies and
 passes a month of happiness in the love
 of Fand. When he must leave her. . . for
 Ireland, they arrange a tryst. . . Emer,
 Cuchulinn's wife, hears of the proposed
 meeting, and hastens to the appointed
 place. . . with the intention of killing
 Fand. Cuchulinn protects Fand from E-
 mer's violence, but his wife's chidings
 and grief stir his pity, and he avows
 his loyalty to her. Fand acknowledges
 Emer's prior claims, and realizes that
 she must relinquish Cuchulinn; but she
 declares that by his desertion of her,
 he loses her love.²⁶

Paton believes the basic elements of this legend to be very similar to that of the wounded Arthur being summoned to the Other World by Morgain.²⁷ She thus believes that, in the original traditions before the Vita Merlini, Morgain must have been Arthur's fairy-mistress. This clarifies why she specifically would come for him at the end of his earthly sojourn and also, if one substitutes Guenevere in the role of Emer, explains the enmity between Morgain and her sister-in-law. However, the difference between this fairy-mistress story as it has filtered down to La Mort le Roi Artu and others is that the romance between Morgain and Arthur has been completely eliminated. Paton feels this is due to the unique role that Arthur played in the Celtic hopes of someday overthrowing their conquerors.

²⁶ Paton, pp. 29 - 30.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

History, myth, and romance mingled; Arthur's being wounded, the belief that someday he would return to lead his oppressed nation, and his love for a fairy-mistress combined into the Arthur-Avalon legend. Not his love for a fay but the cure of his wounds became the important part of the legend, and the fay, instead of curing the wounds she herself had caused the hero, heals those he has received in battle from human foes.²⁸ Besides these incidents presumably borrowed from Celtic myth, Paton also allows that Morgain's coming for Arthur after Salesbieres is evocative of the Valkyries and might be a memory of their office.²⁹

G. S. Loomis's article, previously discussed here, also considers the healing of Arthur's wounds and his eventual return from Avalon. G. S. Loomis acknowledges, too, that Arthur's wounds, the work of human enemies, differentiate him from other heroes who are wounded through love for a fay. Also looking back to Celtic folklore, she believes the Old Irish legend of the hero Fraech to be the model for Arthur. Fraech, too, has supernatural kin, a water-goddess for an aunt. Fraech's supernatural family comes to his aid after he has been wounded battling a water monster. Wailing fairy-women convey him to the fairy mound of Cruachan. The next morning he returns completely

²⁸ Paton, p. 33.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 33 - 34.

healed to human kind.³⁰ Thus Fraech and Arthur are similar in that both are seriously wounded, but not through the agency of a fairy-mistress. Fraech returns cured from the fairy-world, as it is promised that Arthur will some day. Fraech's water-goddess aunt recalls R. S. Loomis's equating Morgain with Modron and tracing her back to Matrona. If Fraech were a model for Arthur, perhaps his supernatural aunt also foretells Morgain's appearance in the Avalon legend.

Paton discerns the remnants of the original Fand-Cuchulinn/Morgain-Arthur fairy-retentions in the Huth Merlin in the Accalon episode. With typical supernatural undertones, Morgain's ami Accalon, her husband Urien, and her brother Arthur pursue in the course of a hunt a ". . . ciers. . . fors et legiers. . . (II, 174)" and leave their companions far behind. The stag leads them a good chase, but they manage to dispatch the beast at a riverbank. There a gorgeous ship, a symbol of faerie, glides unto the scene. Abcard are "douze damoisieles (II, 176)", another indication of the supernatural. The twelve maidens treat the knights to a repast so sumptuous that ". . . disoient que ceste trop grant largueche lour sambloit faire outrage (II, 177)". After the meal, the three knights then sleep soundly after a hard day's hunting. However, the reader suspects, upon learning where each hunter awak-

³⁰ G. S. Loomis, pp. 19 - 21.

ens the next morning, that their sleep has been induced by enchantment.

Le rois Uriiens se trouva a
Camalaoth couchié entre les
bras Morgain sa feme. Li rois
se trouva en une chambre oscure
et noire dallés un palais. . .
Accalon se trouva en un praiel
plein d'herbes et d'envoiseures
si près d'une fontaine qu'il
n'avoit pas un piet entre lui
et la fontaine. . . .

(Huth Merlin, II, 178)

Paton detects in this entire episode the core of the original fairy-induction of Arthur by his supernatural mistress, Morgain. She allows that the episode has been greatly distorted from the original form and states that the author, taking great liberties with his material, divided one basic adventure into three separate ones for three separate heroes. Unfortunately, even after all their strife, at the end of the tale none of the three knights is actually borne away to the love of the original fay.³¹

Paton marks the emphasis on the description of the silken hangings on the ship in the Huth Merlin: ". . . une nef couverte de drap de soie aussi vermeil coume une escrete (II, 175)". Apparently the author cannot say enough about the ship's hangings, for he returns to the subject a bit later: ". . . si biele et si cointe et si paree de drap de soie qu'il ne virent onques si biel lieu ne si envoisié

³¹ Paton, pp. 17 - 18.

que cil lour samble (II, 176)". Paton believes that a similar stress on the hangings of the magic ship in Floriant et Florete (lines 842 - 921) indicates that both authors were using material from the original Morgain-Arthur traditions.³² An example of these lines reads as follows:

Mes or voil dire, a mon avis,
Com la nef iert encortinee
D'une cortine; au mius ovree
Ne fu, par la mien escient.
(Floriant, lines 842 - 845)

In regard to these passages, one must also remember that lavish descriptions were a common enough technique, especially of verse romancers, and the attention given to the ships' hangings in both of these works could derive quite easily from authors' whim.

It is evident that Paton and other folklorists have done much useful work in relation to Morgain's background, even though much of it might be hypothetical, and much of the valuable information these scholars contribute would clarify many aspects of her behavior. However, to those scholars adhering to the imagination-only theory, too much of the folklorists' credo is supposition. Fanni Bogdanow, for example, holds that there is no concrete evidence to prove that Morgain equals the Morrigan and that without any written text representing Morgain as Arthur's

³² Paton, pp. 17 - 18.

fairy-mistress, too much of Paton's theory is based on assumption. Bogdanow categorically states that Morgain's character developed with each romance and was determined by the content of each one.³³ J. D. Bruce adheres to this viewpoint, also, stating that Paton's hypothesis is based on the error of assuming that the romancers always used popular legends about Morgain. He minimizes the influence of Celtic folklore and believes that the romancers mostly used their imaginations instead.³⁴ Another proponent of this theory is Edmond Faral, who emphatically dismisses all arguments which, without the aid of a written source anterior to the Vita, attempt to prove the existence of a Morgain-Arthur-Avalon legend before Geoffrey's endeavor.³⁵ Faral gives any laborious working out of resemblances between the Morrigan's and Morgain's names short shrift and believes that the names of all nine nymphs inhabiting Avalon were invented by Geoffrey because of the poetic arrangement to their names. These names, he states, can be arranged into three groups of three, each group categorized by the syllable beginning each member name:

Morgen, Moronoe, Mazoe,
Gliten, Glitonea, Gliton,

³³ Bogdanow, p. 124.

³⁴ James Douglas Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to the Year 1300 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 80.

³⁵ Faral, Légende Arthurienne, II, 301.

Thiten, Tyronoe, Thiten.³⁶

After considering this apparent predilection of Geoffrey's for inventing names, Faral is tempted to believe that he did likewise even for the name of Avalon.³⁷

After all the discussions about Morgain's very nature, the next thorny problem is how she came to be Arthur's sister. As we have seen, Geoffrey names only Anna as Arthur's kin. How, then, did Morgain come to be his sister, too? We have already noted that G. S. Loomis believes that Arthur and Morgain had been related in Celtic legend long before Geoffrey's time. Paton feels that their kinship is simply the result of confusion between Anna's name and Morgain's, leading to the fay's appropriating the legitimate place of Anna in the royal family.³⁸ Confusion between the names could have arisen due to variants and case changes in Morgain's name in different works. Among these variants, for example, occur "Morgant", "Morgans", "Morganz", and "Morguain", to name only a few.³⁹ Another contributing factor to a mix-up could have been the name "Morc(h)adés", or "Morgadés", and their variations. In his Verse Index West names Morchadés as the daughter of

³⁶ Edmond Faral, "L'Ile d'Avallion et la Fée Morgain," in Mélanges Linguistiques et de Littérature offerts à Alfred Jeanroy (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1972), p. 251.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

³⁸ Paton, p. 144.

³⁹ West, Verse Index, p. 119.

Uterpendragon and Igerne.⁴⁰ He also states that in some texts she appears as the mother of Mordred and wife of Lot.⁴¹ In the Brut, as we shall discuss later in Chapter Three, Mordred's parents are not named, but the important point here is that Morchadés has stolen away the husband of Anna, or Enna, in the Brut. Eventually, in this round-about fashion, Morgain, because of the resemblance of her name to that of Morc(h)adés, might have herself become Arthur's sister.

Faral, in a long study on Glastonbury, part of La Légende Arthurienne, proposes author's whim as being responsible for Morgain's kinship to Arthur. It all started, Faral says, because the monks of Glastonbury sought to protect their abbey and its holdings from being depleted by the conquering Normans.⁴² For this purpose, they tried to make a sort of shrine out of the abbey by associating Arthur with it. William of Malmesbury, in his De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae, dated at approximately 1135, associates Glastonbury through local legend with Avalon and therefore Arthur's burial-place. Faral devotes several pages to this text.⁴³ He finds one fatal flaw refuting William's proofs for claiming the abbey to be Avalon.

⁴⁰ West, Verse Index, p. 118.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴² Faral, Légende Arthurienne, II, 403.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 421 - 429.

Faral believes that the name Avalon itself is derived from "l'ile d'Avallo" and that Avallo had been some kind of personage, perhaps a former Celtic divinity. He says, though, that the monks' mistake was to give the name of the so-called island a very personal interpretation, "l'ile d'Avallonie", or "l'ile des Pommes". This latter appellation refers, Faral says, to the crops produced in the area around the abbey and thus gives the monks' invention away.⁴⁴ For Faral, this definite fabrication also renders spurious the passage in Giraldus Cambrensis's De principio instructione in which he refers to Morgain, a "nobilis matrona", as the kinswoman of Arthur who brings him after the Battle to Glastonbury to be tended. For the same reasons he rejects a similar passage in Giraldus's Speculum ecclesiae, a later work.⁴⁵ One must note, however, that other scholars, such as Bruce, will disagree with the basis of Faral's argument that "Avalon" is derived from the name of a Celtic divinity.⁴⁶ However, Paton accepts that there was a myth associating Arthur and Morgain with Glastonbury, or at least its vicinity, but that, for the sake of propriety Morgain the fairy-maiden was rationalized by the monk into a dignified kinswoman.⁴⁷ On the same tack, R. S. Loomis

⁴⁴ Faral, Légende, II, 430.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 439 - 440.

⁴⁶ Bruce, p. 81.

⁴⁷ Paton, pp. 35 - 36.

uses these same texts written by William of Malmesbury and Giraldus Cambrensis to verify that oral tradition about Morgain and Arthur being related existed long before the romancers ever mentioned it.⁴⁸ Delbouille feels that Giraldus borrowed the idea of Morgain being related to Arthur from Etienne de Rouen's Draco Normannicus.⁴⁹ He dates this work between 1167 - 1170.⁵⁰ The specific verses that he claims establish Morgain's kinship with Arthur are 1161 - 1164 and refer to Arthur's being wounded after that battle with Mordred and then being tended by Morgain.⁵¹ Delbouille, too, believes that this legend had long been in existence but that Morgain's function as the healer of the king's wounds was downplayed by the monks of Glastonbury in an effort to give sole pre-eminence to the abbey as Arthur's resting-place.⁵²

Madeleine Blaess contributes a very practical explanation as to how Morgain came to be Arthur's sister. She says that in the early sources, the most important characters were the king and his warriors and that little

⁴⁸ R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," pp. 341 - 342.

⁴⁹ Maurice Delbouille, "Le Draco Normannicus, Source d'Erec et Enide," in Mélanges de Langue et de Littérature Médiévales offerts à Pierre le Gentil (Paris: S. E. D. E. S., 1973), p. 197.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 186.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 187.

⁵² Ibid., p. 189.

attention was paid to family.⁵³ With time, more importance was given to characters other than warriors. Many of these personages, simply by long association with Arthur's saga, were absorbed into the royal family, and Blaess feels that this is what happened to Morgain.⁵⁴

Now that the views of both the folklore and imagination camps regarding Morgain's background, both as a fay and as Arthur's sister, have been considered, we will summarize the position of the moderates with the forthright statement of Eugène Vinaver that Morgain is simply the result of tradition and invention.⁵⁵ This moderate viewpoint, since it takes into account that tradition and imagination can overlap and very subtly at times, seems the most tenable of the three and is the one to which we shall give the most weight as we now consider Morgain's actual portrayal in the Vulgate Cycle.

⁵³ Madeleine Blaess, "Arthur's Sister," BBSIA, 8, (1956), 69.

⁵⁴ Blaess, p. 74.

⁵⁵ Eugène Vinaver, "From Motive to Ornament," Medieval Literature and Folklore Stories, eds. Jerome Mandel and Bruce A. Rosenberg (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p. 148.

Chapter Three

Morgain la Fée in the Vulgate Cycle

Tradition and invention are constantly woven together, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes seamlessly, by the romancers as Morgain of Avalon more and more evolves in the Vulgate into a medieval lady still possessed of enough supernatural powers to retain her fay's mystique. Such an evolution would seem to coincide naturally with the increased sophistication of both romancers and readers. Neither would actually wish to strike such a character entirely from the pages of romance, for a beautiful fay or even sorceress, no matter how shorn of her powers, always remains a fascinating personage. Morgain's personality would appeal to storytellers even in an age when most of the fairy belief would have disappeared. Her basic story is a type of folk tale, and, according to the principle set by Northrop Frye, one finds the very elementary storytelling techniques in folk tales. The basic characterizations found in folk tales are difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate from literature. The storyteller's challenge is to render the folk tale more sophisticated while preserving its essential charm and beauty and to adapt more primitive charac-

terizations to contemporary tastes.¹

In Morgain's case, the romancers have made much of the basic legend. She eventually appears in her most famous role harking back to Geoffrey as the mistress of Avalon, but in the meantime the romancers have recounted her biography for us, from her sojourn at Court as a lady-in-waiting, through several love affairs, and through her schemes of vengeance against Lancelot and Guenevere. Since there is not a hint of any of this history in the Vita, one assumes that the romancers, using traditional fairy-lore as their base, gradually invented and enlarged upon this network of tales concerning Morgain. Wais's statement that Morgain's role as the fay of Avalon is her original guise and that all other representations of her in the Vulgate evolved later seems entirely plausible.² How and why these episodes would have developed around Morgain from such scant detail in the Vita is simply explained by Vinaver as a technique of adding interest to the story. He acknowledges that what probably bothers most modern readers of the romances is that they detect how Morgain's intrigues, while never really influencing the outcome of the

¹ Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), p. 27.

² Kurt Wais, "Morgain Amante d'Accalon et Rivale de Guenièvre," BBSIA, 18, (1966), 137.

story, outgrow their relationship to it.³ One learns to overlook this annoyance, Vinaver says, if one remembers that concepts of writing techniques have always differed from age to age and that the ideal of brevity in literature is modern.⁴ The same scholar reminds the reader that to the medieval romancer, expliquer and amplifier may have been synonymous but their meaning was not necessarily "rendre plus clair". These terms actually signified the romancer's method of making a story more interesting.⁵

Apparently this is what happens to Morgain throughout the Vulgate. A colorful character in herself, she makes a story more interesting, but the enrichment of her saga is not completely haphazard. Apart from her ultimate role as the fay who comes to transport Arthur to Avalon, another branch of her story, replete with carefully interlocking themes, has been accumulated by the various romancers. In this outgrowth of her legend, her plots and intrigues are calculated to demonstrate Lancelot's fidelity to Guenevere. Her hatred for Guenevere, her affairs with knights, her bespelling of the Val Sanz Retor are all planned and elaborated upon to prove this one point. This is an aspect of Morgain's characterization entirely remote

³ Vinaver, "Motive to Ornament," pp. 151 - 152.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 147 - 148.

⁵ Eugène Vinaver, "La Fée Morgain et les Aventures de Bretagne," in Mélanges de Langue et de Littérature, offerts à Jean Frappier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970), II, 1083.

from Geoffrey's original *fay*, and we shall now consider how the romancers most likely accomplished it.

First should be noted the chronology of the romances in the Vulgate that are pertinent to this study, for certain aspects of Morgain's character were emphasized or even deleted with the passage of time. Frappier dates the *Prose Lancelot* as after 1220 up to 1230 and puts *La Mort le Roi Artu* between 1230 - 1235.⁶ Bruce estimates the *Lestoire de Merlin* to have been created afterwards.⁷ Even after the *Lestoire de Merlin* comes the *Livre d'Artus*, the most recent work in the chain, according to Freymond.⁸

In the Vulgate romances Morgain begins her career at Court. Physically she can be beautiful or ugly, but the romancers always stress her native cleverness, an important asset for a powerful sorceress. The author of the *Prose Lancelot* version of her introduction to the reader dismisses her looks very briefly: ". . . elle fu laide & chaude de luxure" (IV, ii, 124, lines 25 - 26; hereafter cited as *Char* from *Le Conte de la Charrette*). Perhaps feeling that to describe ugliness is a waste of time, he tells us nothing more of her appearance. In this brief phrase, however, we see the mention of her lasciviousness,

⁶ Jean Frappier, *Etude sur la Mort le Roi Artu* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1961), p. 20.

⁷ Bruce, p. 68.

⁸ Freymond, p. 6.

a major component of her reputation throughout the Vulgate.

In spite of this frank appraisal of her unattractiveness, the author of the Lestoire de Merlin decides to be kinder to Morgain and depicts her as comely:

Icele morgain iert icuene damoisele
 ⁊ gaie durement ⁊ moult enuoisie.
 mais moult estoit brune de vis ⁊
 dune roonde charneure ne trop
 maigre ne trop crase. mais moult
 estoit aperte ⁊ auenans de cors ⁊
 membres si estoit droite ⁊ plisans.
 a merueilles ⁊ bien chantans.

(II, 338, lines 5 - 9)

He does not forget, however, that démasure works against Morgain and continues the tradition of her scandalous nature already noted by his predecessor: "Mais ele estoit la plus chaude feme de toute la grant bertaigne ⁊ la plus luxurieuse" (II, 338, lines 9 - 10). This démasure probably influences the entire malevolent side of her character: "Mais quant ele se courechoit enuers aucun homme noiant estoit del acorder" (II, 338, lines 21 - 22). . . . Here, then, is the author preparing the groundwork for her later desire for vengeance against Lancelot and Guenevere, one of the prime motives of all her actions. When this side of her nature is not aroused, Morgain is probably a pleasant enough person, for in her favor are all the graces of a well-bred, courtly lady: "Car ele auoit vne loquense douce ⁊ souef. ⁊ parlant bien ⁊ atrait ⁊ deboinaire estoit elle sor toute rien com ele estoit en sen boin sens"

(II, 338, lines 19 - 21). This physical and emotional description of Morgain corresponds rather closely to that in the Livre d'Artus:

Ø sanz faille Morganz fu une des plus
chaudes fames qui fust en toute la
Grant Bretaigne. mes ele estoit brune
en uis Ø un poi uermellete. Ø auoit
molt biau chief Ø blonde Ø la char
soauete come larz. mes blanche es-
toit desoüiz ses dras a grant mer-
ueille. Ø granz Ø longue en son es-
tant. Ø aperte de cors sor tote rien.
Ø de tel charneure que ele nestoit ne
trop grasse ne trop maigre. Ø cest
une charneure que len dit os genz
alise.

(VII, 135, lines 2 - 7)

These inconsistencies in the Vulgate as to Morgain's ugliness or attractiveness do not trouble Paton, who attributes them to the romancers' whims.⁹ Bogdanow point out that in later texts romancers attempt to reconcile these descriptions by stating that Morgain at first was beautiful but that, through her practice of sorcery, in other words, consorting with the Devil, she became ugly.¹⁰ Perhaps these reconciliations, therefore, demonstrate the dilemma of the Vulgate romancers: was Morgain, originally a lovely fay, to remain beautiful, or was she to become ugly, as one who practices black magic?

In the Vulgate Morgain begins her career not as

⁹ Paton, p. 63.

¹⁰ Bogdanow, p. 130.

a fay or even a sorceress, but as a lady-in-waiting in Arthur's court, a marvelous example of rationalization on the part of the romancers. It is the author of the Merlin who describes Morgain's arrival at Court with her sister, remaining anonymous throughout this episode, and an entourage of nephews and other relatives. The occasion is that Gawain, his brothers, cousins, and assorted friends have come to Court to be dubbed by Arthur. Arthur, impressed by the young would-be knights, is willing to dub them immediately but, not knowing who they are, asks Gawain their names. Gawain replies: ". . . on mapele par mon droit non Gauaine si fui fiex au roy loth de loenos & dorcanie" (II, 252, lines 27 - 28). Gawain informs Arthur that he and his brothers are the king's nephews: "Et nostre mere nous a enformee & fait entendant quele est suer le roy artu de par sa mere" (II, 252, lines 30 - 31).

His mother might be Morchadés, Lot's wife in some texts as mentioned already in Chapter Two, or she might be Anna, as she is in Wace's Brut where Gawain is mentioned as her son and Loth's when Arthur is distributing fiefs to his barons:

A Loth, qui avoit sa seror
Et tenue il avoit maint jor,
Randi li rois tot Loenois
Et dona autres fiez an crois.
Ancor estoit Galveins, ses fiz,

Juesnes dameislaus et petiz.
 (Brut, lines 1095 - 1100)

Already quoted in Chapter Two, lines 279 - 282 of the Brut indicate Anna to be Lot's wife. Gawain's mother, whoever she may be here, is Arthur's half-sister, as the phrase "par sa mere" (lines 30 - 31) indicates. This differentiation of kinship also crops up with Urien's sons, both named Yvain, who are also present to be dubbed:

Ø cis autres iouenes bachelers
 si est filz au roy urien. Ø a anon
 yuones. Ø cis autres damoisiaus
 que yuoniaus tient si est son frere
 de par son pere si a anon yuones
 ausi.

(II, 252, lines 34 - 36)

This is the Urien whom, as we have seen in Chapter Two, Morgain marries in the Huth Merlin. Throughout the Vulgate, however, she remains unattached, and Urien's wife or wives, whoever they may be, do not concern us in this study.

How relatives could come and go according to authors' whims or perhaps to their inability to straighten out the relationships can also be deduced from the Brut. Wace speaks of a certain Hoel who, as Arthur's nephew, becomes a sort of right-hand man for the King:

Artus de ce se consella
 Que par Hoel anvoiera,
 Son neveu, fil de sa seror,
 Roi de Bretagne la menor;

La sont si parant, si cosin,
 Et la mellor gent de son lin.
 (Brut, lines 599 - 604)

Pelan and Arnold believe this nephew cannot be the son of Anna, Loth's wife, for they point out that Hoel in Geofrey's Historia Regum Britanniae is mentioned as "... filius sororis Arturi ex Eudicio, rege Armoricanorum Britonum generatus", and Armorica is defined as somewhat equivalent to Brittany.¹¹ Loth's kingdom of Loencis is said to have been situated in the south of Scotland.¹² Orkanie has been identified as the Orkeny Isles to the north of Scotland.¹³ Geography thus eliminates Anna as Hoel's mother. Hoel himself either disappears in the Vulgate or survives, as has been suggested, under the name of Lionel, not to be confused with Lancelot's cousin of the same name.¹⁴ Apparently another unacknowledged sister of Arthur's conceals herself in the Brut, for Arnold and Pelan note that Mordred is also mentioned as his nephew by a sister. They believe that chronology eliminates Anna as Mordred's mother.¹⁵

Perhaps whoever penned the Merlin felt that matters

¹¹ Arnold et Pelan, p. 59

¹² West, Prose Index, pp. 195 - 196.

¹³ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 194 - 195.

¹⁵ Arnold et Pelan, p. 51.

would be less confusing if Gawain's mother remained anonymous meeting Arthur. Besides, it is her sister Morgain whom he intends to figure prominently later in the story.

This is how he introduces the women:

Quant li rois artus entra en la
cyte si li uint sa seur al en-
contre la mere Gauaine si uint
auoec lui morgain que sa suer
estoit qui moult estoit boine
clergesse.

(II, 253, lines 18 - 20)

Here we see the author stressing Morgain's aptitude for learning and cleverness, the talents for which Geoffrey praises her in the Vita and which differentiate her from her sister and most other female personages in the romances. This passage, however, does not clarify Morgain's exact kinship to Arthur. Conceivably, from the wording of the sentence, Morgain need not be a blood relation to him at all, but one assumes that she is his half-sister, also. Blaess notes in her article that Arthur has no full sisters at all in the Vulgate romances.¹⁶

The meeting between the family members is very amicable, with all parties on mutually good terms:

Ø quant li rois les connut si lor
fist tres grant ioie se sentre-
conioient moult car piecha ne
sestoient entreueu. si baisa li
vns l'autre comme frere Ø seror. . . .

(II, 253, lines 20 - 22)

¹⁶ Blaess, p. 74.

In the first episodes concerning Morgain on through to the end, one notes that there is never any hostility between brother and sister. Certainly the author here stresses that they are on very friendly terms.

Up to now Morgain seems a courtly enough personage, but, since the essence of her character is that of a sorceress, the romancer must find some reason to install her in a more Other-World abode. The reason invented for her departure from Court is the queen's interference in Morgain's love-affair with a young knight, cousin to Guenevere. Not entirely invention, though, says Paton, who finds in these circumstances a variation of the Morgain/Arthur fairy retention. Since Morgain and Arthur are now siblings, another knight, usually Guimar, is substituted for the king. Guenevere still interferes in the romance, no longer as a jealous wife but as a protective cousin of the knight.¹⁷ Whether the romancers in any way employed this scenario as consciously borrowed from fairy-lore tradition is difficult to prove, but the ploy works splendidly for them. The angry Morgain splits with the Court to become the resident sorceress of the Arthurian world and from then on intrigues against the queen and any knight she might love. The story is succinctly summarized in the Lancelot:

¹⁷ Paton, p. 64.

si ama vn cheualier par amors si estoit cousins a la royne genieure. Et la royne en castioit souuent et lun ⁊ lautre Et il le notoient ambes .ij. Tant ca vn ior lez prist proues ⁊ elle dist a son cousin quil sen alast ou elle le feroit destruire. Et cil li cria merci ⁊ li creanta que iamais en cel forfait ne kerroit. Quant morgue uit que il lot laissie. si en ot tel doel que elle senfui. et emporta tant de richoise comme elle pot auoir Et tant cheualcha amont et aual quele troua merlin que elle amoit par amors. Et il li moustra quanque elle sauoit dencantement. Et de la mut la grant hayne que elle ot tout iors enuers la royne.

(Char, 124, lines 25 - 35)

Morgain's learning sorcery from Merlin as indicated in the above passage is, Lot says, rationalization on the part of the romancer due to simple fear of the supernatural.¹⁸

With this gambit he attempts to keep Morgain's character as realistic as possible without sacrificing any of her mystique.

An important point in this incident is that Arthur apparently remains ignorant of what has transpired between his wife and sister. He has had no hand in Morgain's split with Court; she has no reason to hate him. Indeed it seems no one ever tells him what has happened to her, and this situation follows through up to the scene of the Chambre aux Images in La Mort le Roi Artu. This situation is the opposite of that in the Huth Merlin, where Morgain seems

¹⁸ Ferdinand Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1918), p. 273.

to have been born with a hatred for her brother:

Morgue. . . haoit le roi Artu[s]
son frere [et] seur tous houmes, non
mie pour chou qu'il li euust de riens
mesfait, mais pour chou qu'il est us
et coustume que les desloiaus gens et
les mauvaises heent toutdis les preu-
domes et ont vers eus rancune qui tous-
jours dure.

(HM, II, pp. 188 - 189)

It is this hatred that leads Morgain in the Huth Merlin to attempt to murder her brother.

To return to Morgain's ill-fated affair at Court, one finds it also in the Livre d'Artus, a later work than the Lancelot. Time and the author elaborate upon the story and even name the faint-hearted ami Guiomar.. How he is drawn into the drama is suggested by Freymond as due to the verses from Chrétien's Erec wherein the hero's wedding feast is described. One of Erec's guests is a certain Guingamor:

De l'Isle d'Avalon fu sire;
De cestui avons oï dire
Qu'il fu amis Morgain la fee,
Et ce fu veritez provee.
(Erec, lines 1955 - 2958)

Freymond believes that Guiomar is actually this Guingamor transplanted by the romancer into Arthur's court.¹⁹ As in the Lancelot version, Guenevere discovers the lovers and threatens Guiomar that she will tell Arthur if he does

¹⁹ Freymond, pp. 17 - 18.

not stop seeing Morgain. This the frightened young man promises to do, to Morgain's dismay:

¶ quant Morganz uit que la roine li
ot tolu son ami si en fu tant dolente
que plus ne pot. si [sen] uint le
soir meismes sanz plus de respit. si
prist cofres que ele auoit iusque a
dis que .v. somiers portoient quant
ele cheuauchoit en aucun leu. si
les emplī de uaisselement ¶ de ioiaus
¶ de deniers ¶ dor ¶ dargent. ¶ sen
ala par nuit oscure tant loing come
ele pot que onques ne prist congīe a
home ne a femme nule. ¶ erra tant
que ele uint en la grant forest de
Sarpenic. ilec se remest ¶ pria
nostre segnor quil li enuoīast Mer-
lin si se conseilloyeroit a lui.

(VII, 135, lines 23 - 29_

Again when she departs in the version Arthur is ignorant of the whole affair. However, the author of this version has embellished his predecessor's attempt with a few extra touches. He inserts supernatural undertones into the story simply by having Morgain halt in the forest of Sarpenic, and deep, dark forests, as noted in the first chapter, are favorite haunts of a variety of supernatural beings. Another interesting point is that Morgain, in need of sympathy as well as a teacher of sorcery, the latter for the author's purposes, prays to "nostre segnor" to send Merlin to her. In an age when paganism was believed to have been eradicated, perhaps the author could not surrender his villainess completely to the old ways. Thus even the powerful Merlin is manipulated by the Christian deity, for

he comes to Morgain in answer to her prayer:

Ø ele en fist molt grant ioie Ø de-
mora o luj long tans. Ø u secor
que il fist avec luj il aprist tant
de ce que ele li demanda quil nes-
toit femme nee que plus en seust,
neis Niniane samie ne sot gaires
plus.

(VII, 135, lines 30 - 33)

Therefore, Morgain's pre-eminence as a sorceress is established as equaled only by the Lady of the Lake's power.

This Guiomar episode is partially treated in the Merlin. Although the author promises to do so, he never completes it. Where this version differs in what does appear in the romance is that Morgain already can lay claim to being a sorceress of sorts even before her self-imposed exile from Court in that she has already learned some of Merlin's art from him. This harkens back to the time when Morgain, her sister, Gawain, etc., first arrive at Court for Gawain's dubbing: " . . . sacointa morgain de merlin qui moult estoit boine clergesse Ø ele li fu si priuee Ø tant li ala anuiron quele sot quil fu. Ø que maintes merueilles li aprinst dastrenomie Ø dingremance Ø ele les detint moult bien" (II, 254, lines 21 - 24). When the author treats Morgain later in the Guiomar episode, he again emphasizes her cleverness and talents and stresses how well she has absorbed Merlin's lessons:

. . . si estoit a merueilles boine
cleriesse. Ø dastrenomie sauoit ele

asses car merlins len auoit aprinse.
 ⁊ puis len aprinst asses si comme le
 contes vous deuisera cha auant ⁊ ele
 i mist moult sa cure. ⁊ tant aprinst
 qui puis fu ele des gens del pais ⁊
 de la terre appelee morgain la fee la
 seror le roy artu por les merueilles
 que ele fist puis el pais. ⁊ ouuriere
 fu ele des mains la milloure que on
 seust en nule terre.

(II, 338, lines 10 - 16)

This astronomy which she has so well learned from Merlin is most likely today's astrology, and her skills in this pseudo-science which earn her the epithet "fay" from the country folk is another example of rationalization on the author's part. In the above passage, this author also refers quite specifically to Morgain's skill at needlework, which could be a natural blessing or again a craft which she enhances by sorcery. The author does not elaborate upon this, but the allusion is tempting. Morgain is busy at her needlework when Guiomar is first attracted to her and stays to speak with her ". . . en vne garde roebe desous le palais ou ele deswidcit fil dor car ele uoloit faire vne coefe por sa seror le feme le roy loth" (II, 338, lines 4 - 5). The needlework serves as a starting point for small talk between the young people: ". . . il en uint uers li ⁊ sasist dales lui ⁊ cmmencha le fil dor a manoier que ele manioia. ⁊ il li demanda quele uoloit ouurer" (II, 338, lines 28 - 30). Since needlework was a major pastime of medieval noblewomen, incorporating it in this scene as a special skill of Morgain's

might just be a realistic touch of the author's. Still, if one keeps in mind the influence of Latin legends on the Celtic fays, one should recall that the goddess Minerva was renowned for her embroidery expertise and that the Parcae were weavers. Faral notes that these Latin deities had an influence on Old French verse in that fays and sorceresses were often depicted as skilled needlework artists.²⁰ At any rate, Morgain and Guiomar fall in love, but since the author interrupts the episode before Guenevere ever finds them out and never returns to it, we do not know with what other changes or additions he might have treated the incident.

In the Vulgate romances, therefore, it is always Merlin to whom Morgain owes her knowledge of sorcery. In the Prose Merlin, however, in a parallel passage describing how Morgain earned her epithet of "fay", Merlin is not credited at all as being her instructor in the art:

Les noeces du roi e d'Igraine furent
 au .xiiij. sime jour qu'il avoit geü a li
 en sa chambre. E de la fille qu'il dona
 le roi Loth issi Mordrés e misire Gawains
 e Gueriers e Gaheriés. E rois Neutres
 de Garot out l'autre fille bastarde que
 avoit nom Morgue. Par le conseil de tuz
 les amis ensemble li fist li rois a-
 prendre letres en une maison de religion.
 E cele aprist tant e si bien qu'ele
 aprist des ars e si sout merveilles d'une
 art que home apella astronomie e ele en
 honora mult tuz jours e sout mult de

²⁰ Faral, Sources latines, p. 309.

fisike e par (por?) cele clergie fu
 ele apellé Morgue la Fee.
 (Cambridge Add. Ms. 7071 f 195a
 passage made available through
 courtesy of G. D. West.)

Also in this passage one sees again occurring the confusion as to Morgain's exact genealogy, for it is unclear from the wording as to who was her father. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that one other text claims Igerne to have had two husbands, with children by both of them, previous to Utherpendragon.²¹

However, to return to Morgain's education, in the Huth Merlin it is again the sorcerer who teaches his art to her. In this work, though, the author portrays Morgain as completely ruthless and conniving. Everything she does is slanted towards some wicked ulterior motive, which appears in the author's descriptions of her and her actions. With her wiles she overwhelms a completely outmatched Merlin, who succumbs to her beauty, and she wheedles the lessons out of him:

Se li aprist tant en poi de terme, a
 chou que elle estoit soutive et en-
 gingnouse et curieuse d'aprendre,
 que elle sot grant partie de chou
 que elle desirroît, et moult li
 plot la sciencie d'ingromanchie
 et l'art.

(HM, I, 266)

In this work, once Morgain has learned all she can

²¹ West, Prose Index, p. 307.

from the sorcerer, she drives him away:

. . . elle cacha d'entour lui Merlin,
pour chou que elle s'aperchut bien
que il l'amoit de fole amour, et il
dist que elle le feroit honnir se
repaïroit plus entour li.
(HM, I, 266)

From these passages one sees that the conception of Morgain as a fay had all but disappeared for these romancers.

In the Vulgate Cycle, once Morgain does split from Court, the romancers must find her a suitable home. The author of the Livre d'Artus establishes her, as we have seen, in the forest of Sarpenic. With the sorcery she has learned from Merlin, Morgain, like other fays, can acquire unlimited wealth to lavish on her home. Her methods of acquiring riches are entirely supernatural, it seems: "Ø riche estoit ele trop car il nestoit nus si granz auoirs souz ciel que ele ne feist apporter deuant lui en un seul soir" (VII, 135, lines 37 - 39). However, the supernatural mixes with reality as she has her luxurious residence built by the labor of workers:

. . . ele fist faire sales por ester
les plus beles du monde en maint leus.
Ø quant eles estoient assouies Ø li
ourier sen estoient ale si gitoit
[ele] son enchantement itel que iamais
nus tant i eust este as[is]ener ni
pooit ne nule nen ueist.
(VII, 135, lines 39 - 42)

Her rendering this abode invisible recalls the Lady of the

Lake's similar enchantment of her castle, built in the middle of an illusory lake that she herself had created:

Si estoit chis herbergemens si
cheles que nus ne le peust trouver.
Car la samblanche del lac le cou-
roit. si que veus ne pooit estre.
(III, i, 22, lines 20 - 22)

The similarity of the spells on the respective castles indicates that Morgain's magic is not uniquely her own. Both Morgain and Niniane have learned their art from Merlin, and their powers would understandably overlap. This R. S. Loomis points out, carefully stipulating, however, that the two fays are quite distinct personalities in that Morgain is always represented as being supreme above all other fays in the knowledge of curative herbs while Niniane rarely is if at all.²²

Adding to the supernatural color of Morgain's new life-style is the beautiful valley she finds nearby and claims as her own:

ainz dist que Morganz sen ala en
un grant ual parfont en loreille
de la forest de Sarpenic por ce
que estoit li plus delitables
leus qui fust en toute la con-
tree dilec entor.
(VII, 136, lines 1 - 3)

In the middle of this Other-World atmosphere, the sorceress, acting like a devout medieval lady, makes another

²² R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 179.

concession to the Church and has a chapel built for her valley. She attends the chapel faithfully, but hints of the old religion linger subtly even in the chapel's location:

. . . ⁊ ele uit le pais si bel ⁊ si
delitable. si fist faire une chapele
sor les chemins u quarrefor des uoies
a l'entree du ual. ilec oi chascun ior
le seruise de nostre segnor ⁊ i fist
faire deus huis un par deuers le ual
⁊ autre par deuers le tertre.

(VII, 136, lines 6 - 9)

The crossroads, the hillock, and the valley combined seem to indicate an extremely obvious landmark, not easily overlooked because of this position and terrain.. Its superstitious aura is increased when Morgain erects a cross of stone on the hillock: ". . . ilec demora Morgant molt longuement ⁊ puis mist une croiz u tertre amont" (VII, 136, lines 20 - 21) An interesting note can be gleaned from Julian Harris's introduction to André Mary's translation of Le Chevalier au Lion and applied to Morgain's chapel. Harris states that the Christian church, in order to combat the old pagan superstitions, customarily had shrines built at the sites where pagan rites had been formerly practised.²³ Maury more specifically mentions

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Julian Harris, "Introduction," in Yvain, ou Le Chevalier au Lion, ed. Germaine Brée (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1963), p. 33.

in Croyance et Légendes du Moyen Age crosses as being erected on these sites.²⁴ Therefore, even surrounded by these Christian symbols, Morgain, whether intentionally or not, does not appear remote from the shrines of the old belief.

Her reason for erecting this cross is explained after she enchants the valley out of a desire for vengeance and begins her eternal feud with the queen in earnest:

un ior se porpensa Morganz que ele
corroceroit la roine & la Table
Roonde & feroit tant quele rauroit
son ami Guiomar en sa baillie tout
mau gre suen. & sil auoit cheualier
nul en la cort que ele amast ele li
toudroit en tel maniere que iamais
nu reuerroit.

(VII, 135, lines 42 - 45)

In enchanting this valley she establishes for herself a purely Other-World abode, a version of her island of Avalon:

. . . si gita Morganz son enchante-
ment res a res des murs de la chapele
u ual grant & merueilleus que ot tel
force que tuit le cheualier & toutes
les dames qui eussent fausse en lor
amors cest a dire qui bone foi ne se
fussient porte de tox charnals couines.
ne sen issent iames sil i entrassent
tant que cil i uenist qui onques nul
ior neust fausse en amor. mais se il
auenist chose que pucele ou dame ou
damoisele ou escuiers ou cheualiers

²⁴ Maury, pp. 13 - 14.

qui onques neussent ame [i uenissent].
aler & entrer & eissir sen peussent
deliurement mais por ce nestoient mie
li autre deliure car il couenoit que
ame eussient cil qui u ual demoroient
puis que il eussent de lor amor.

(VII, 136, lines 13 - 20)

The valley's similarity to the apple-orchard of the Queen of Danemarche, also in the Livre d'Artus, indicates that it, too, is in reality a Land of the Dead. R. S. Loomis, noting these similarities between the two Other-World abodes, believes that the Queen of Danemarche is actually a disguised Morgain.²⁵

The cross of stones which Morgain has erected on the hillock bears in gold letters the message for all errant knights searching adventure that they may choose whichever of the roads before them they please:

se tu uels les forz aventures eschiuer
si ua a destre car le chemins a destre
te merra en Sorelois & li moiteins a
la Dolereuse Tor & cil a senestre u
Val Sans Retor dont nus faus amanz ne
retorne puis que il ait en amor fausse
ne tant ne quant.

(VII, 136, lines 23 - 26)

That the road to the Val Sans Retor should be the one to the left is perhaps noteworthy in that the left in Western cultures has usually denoted bad luck, a belief traced as far back as the ancient Greek augurs.²⁶

²⁵ R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 113.

²⁶ Phrase and Fable, p. 1005.

Morgain's valley with all its attractions and pitfalls is a very prominent episode in the Lancelot, for Lancelot's adventures there are intended to demonstrate to the reader his virtue and valor. In the Lancelot Morgain creates the valley through jealousy of an unfaithful lover, apparently not Guiomar as in the Livre d'Artus. Since this romancer does treat her affair with Guiomar (p. 124) as we have already seen, one wonders if perhaps the knight in this ill-fated romance was originally intended to be Guiomar. Either the author of the Lancelot has split the original story of Morgain's affair with Guiomar and her creation of the valley into two separate episodes or the author of the Livre d'Artus has condensed two unconnected incidents into one. As it stands in the Lancelot, the Guiomar episode is the cause for Morgain's hatred of Guenevere and the unfaithful anonymous lover the reason for Morgain's creation of the Val Sans Retor:

Et ele amoit vn cheualier tant que
plus ne le pot amer. mais li cheua-
liers amoit vne autre damoisele de
moult grant biaute.

(Char, 116, lines 40 - 42)

Morgain surprises the lovers in a valley:

Tant les gaita et nuit 8 iour.
que elle lez trouua ensan[b]le
gisant en vn val. . . Et pour
le grant duel quele en ot. si
destina au val sa destinee.

(Char, 117, lines 2 - 4)

Kurt Wais, reviewing reasons for Morgain's flight from Court, states that Morgain, in creating the Val Sans Retor or the Val des faux amants out of jealousy over a lover, exhibits very definite traits of the Morrigan, whom he considers to be her predecessor.²⁷

The supernatural elements of the Valley are presented to the reader as the knight Galeschin rides into it, encounters the adventures devised by Morgain, and ultimately fails in the quest, for the breaking of Morgain's spell over the Valley is to be achieved eventually only by Lancelot. Galeschin encounters a mix of supernatural traps that Morgain may well have borrowed from other magicians' repertoires. This is not pilfering but natural evolution, says Paton, for once Morgain came to be identified as a fay or sorceress, all the activities of the type would be attributed to her by the romancers.²⁸

The first characteristic of the Valley that Galeschin notes as he rides into it is that air completely encloses it: "Quar le vals nestoit enclos se de lair non" (Char, 116, lines 37 - 38). Bespelling by air is a typical Celtic device, one also used by Niniane to imprison Merlin. In this incident, Gawain, the last person who ever speaks to Merlin, comes upon the magician's prison in the forest of Broceliande. He hears a voice which he later recog-

²⁷ Wais, p. 139.

²⁸ Paton, p. 147.

nizes as Merlin's but cannot see him:

si oy vne uois vn poi loing de luj
 ⁊ il torne cele part ou il ot oie
 cele uois. si regarde sus ⁊ ius
 mais riens ni uoit fors vne fumee
 tout autressi comme air. ne outre
 ne pooit pusser.

(II, 461, lines 6 - 8)

This, therefore, is another example of the magic of the two fays overlapping.

The Valley is beautiful but has the major drawback of its facsimile in the Livre d'Artus: ". . . a nul ior nen isteroit sez amis ne cheualiers qui y entrast aussi. por tant quil eust vers amors fausse" (Char, 117, lines 5 - 6). In this version, therefore, the true love stipulation affects only knights: "mais autre gent y pooient bien entrer ⁊ issir a lor plaisir. fust ualles ou dame ou damoisele" (Char, 117, lines 13 - 15). Life there for the knights, although deprived of their liberty to leave the Valley, does not appear unpleasant:

Et de tels y aucit qui y orent
 lor amies par amors avec euls ⁊
 lor ualles qui de lor terres lor
 apportoient lor relies ⁊ lor reubes
 ⁊ lor cisiaus ⁊ qui lor atornoient
 lor viandes. Et neporquant il auoient
 quant que a cors domme puet appartenir.

(Char, 117, lines 16 - 19)

Therefore, the knights' imprisonment is far from a harsh one, for even their amies, who are free to come and go

from the Valley as they please, choose to accompany them. Morgain's Valley seems to be a carbon copy of Avalon, and the presence of the amies with their knights certainly is evocative of the Celtic Maidenland tradition. R. S. Loomis suggests that such an association of Morgain with nothing less than an earthly Paradise derives from German traditions. German story-tellers, he states, spread the legend that the Grail was an eternal preservative of youth and a source also of "paradisaal abundance". Morgain for them came to be associated with the Grail through her office of tending Arthur in Avalon. Loomis then finds it inevitable that she would also be associated with any corresponding Paradise myths.²⁹ The statement is made in the text that Morgain's Valley had been in existence by now for twenty years (Char, 117, line 7), but the author does not elaborate if the people in this little society have remained physically the same or if they have aged at all.

In the midst of this description of an earthly garden of delights, one notes that again the author does not surrender his characters completely to a pagan conception of Paradise. Morgain has also seen to the spiritual needs of the Valley's occupants: " Ø moult y auoit de beles mesons Ø capeles a grant plente ou il ooient messe chascun ior (Char, 117, lines 19 - 20). . . . It seems, therefore, that even a villainess can have religion.

²⁹ R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," p. 358.

The Valley itself is attractive; however, Galeschin encounters unpleasant beings and sights as he wends his way into the adventure. His failure at the test which deprives him of his liberty to leave the Valley is a typical Other-World scenario:

Atant se vint le dus (Galeshin) tout
droit a vne planche quil voit deuant
lui. et la planche estoit sor vne
aigue grande & parfonde. et de lautre
part auoit .ij. cheualiers. . . Et la
planche nauoit pas vn pie de le.
(Char, 118, lines 5 - 9)

This motif of the narrow bridge spanning hazardous waters is a typical component of the Celtic Other-World crossing. Galeschin fails at this test, is overcome by Morgain's knights, and becomes a prisoner in the Valley. Achieving this trial and the others in the Valley is only for Lancelot, true in his love for Guenevere. Since this is what finally happens and what has been the intention of the romancer all along, one sees then how everything in Morgain's story from her split with Court to her bespelling of the Valley has been carefully plotted to culminate thus. In addition, Lancelot's success at breaking the spell now gives Morgain a reason to hate him as well as the queen and supplies more fuel for the romancer in later episodes.

Angry that Lancelot has destroyed her Valley, Morgain curses him and his lady:

. . . honnis soit li heure et li

iors que onques si grant loiautes
 fu en vous mise. Et vous soies
 maleois quant vous onques en cest
 pais uenistes. Et honnie soit la
 dame desloiaus qui de vous est
 tant amee. $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ si loiaument. . . .
 (Char, 122, lines 30 - 32)

To make the breaking of the spell official, one of Morgain's messengers then enters the scene and announces that the knights have been released and are free to come and go as they please. Even Morgain's faithless ami joyfully appears to greet and praise Lancelot (Char, 123, lines 2 - 5).

Even though her Valley is gone, Morgain is relentless, and Lancelot's loyalty to the queen is still to be tested. That night Morgain drugs Lancelot as he sleeps and carts him off in a litter to her castle in the forest.

Et quand ce vint endroit le premier
 somme si sen vint morgue au lit
 lancelot entre li et ses menistres
 si le conroient tel quil not pooir
 de soi leuer. Si le fait tantost
 morgue leuer en vne litiere. . . .
 (Char, 123, lines 29 - 31)

. . . Et morgain enmaine lancelot en
 prison en vne prcfonde lande en la
 forest ou elle converssoit souuent.
 (Char, 124, lines 3 - 4)

The fay has the hero in her power in an Other-World setting, although Morgain's methods, what with drugs and litters, are more conventionally under-handed than glamorously supernatural.

The episode that follows is again calculated to show Lancelot's fidelity to Guenevere and also to indicate to what lengths the vengeful Morgain will go to reveal their illicit affair to Arthur. After arousing Lancelot, Morgain informs him that he will not be freed until he relinquishes to her his ring, a gift given him by the queen. This Lancelot adamantly refuses to do (Char, 124, lines 5 - 15). Seeing that cajolery and threats are futile, Morgain again drugs him and exchanges his ring for a similar one of hers which had also been a gift from the queen (Char, 140, lines 1 - 9). She sends this ring to Court in the care of one of her damsels who, after accusing the lovers in the presence of Arthur, Guenevere, and all assembled, flings the tattle-tale ring into Guenevere's lap. The queen very cleverly manages to talk her way out of the predicament by praising Lancelot who had not only nobly served her but also the glory of Arthur. The queen's speech satisfies Arthur, who categorically announces that he does not believe the damsel's accusations (Char, 141 - 142).

Undaunted by the failure of this ruse, Morgain tries to induce Lancelot to believe that the queen is deceiving him. She employs another drug endowed with keen psychological effects:

Une nuit li dona tant a boiure ꝯ
teu chose quil perdi tut son escient

§ le trobla li cerueaus si sendormi
 tantost § comenca fort a songer §
 li fui auis quil trouoit la roine
 sa dame en .j. pauillon en .i. bele
 praerie. § oueqes li gisoit uns
 cheualiers § coroit a .i. espee qui
 a lestache del pauillon estoit pen-
 due si uoloit ocirre lo cheualer.
 § la roine li disoit. Que est icc
 lancelot que uulez fere. uus ne
 scez si hardiz que uus iames ueingnoiz
 en leu ou io soie. que a moi ne plest
 uostre compaignie des ore mes.

Ensint songe cele nuit lancelot.
 § Morgain out si gete son enchante-
 ment quil se troua al matin el pauil-
 lon § uit .i. lit tel cum il auoit
 songe § troua lespee en sa main. §
 lors quida il ben § crei que ce fu
 uoirs.

(Char, 151, lines 24 - 36)

Here, of course, the cruel and clever Morgain is preying
 on Lancelot's greatest fear, that the queen might no longer
 love him. Due to the apparent reality of the queen's decep-
 tion, Lancelot finally accepts Morgain's offer that she will
 release him if he promises not to return to Court before
 Christmas (Char, 152, lines 6 - 10). He makes a courtly
 promise that he will do so, and Morgain reciprocates in
 the bargain by freeing him and presenting him, as many
 another Athurian fay does for the hero, with a horse and
 arms: "si prist de lui lo seremant § li fist auoir
 cheual § armes si len lessa aler" (Char, 152, lines 12 - 13).

To this imprisonment of Lancelot one might apply
 Paton's theory of the fairy-retention of the hero by Mor-
 gain, with Lancelot substituted for Arthur. Again it is

Guenevere who comes between the fay and the hero, even if only in spirit. The fay must relinquish the hero, and Lancelot leaves the Other-World, Morgain's prison in the forest. One might even take this fairy-retention theme further and apply it to the imprisonment of Morgain's nameless ami in the Val Sans Retor.

With Lancelot's detention, however, Morgain has accomplished nothing. She has neither betrayed the lovers to Arthur nor shaken Lancelot's fidelity to Guenevere. Lancelot's adamant rejection of Morgain recalls an interesting point made by Joan Ferrante in her work, Woman as Image in Medieval Literature. In this work Ferrante says that the sorceress of Arthurian romance can only work her wiles on susceptible or morally weak knights, but never on such paragons of virtue as Lancelot.³⁰

The same themes evident in this episode occur in two later retentions of Lancelot by Morgain. So many elements overlap in these three retentions that one wonders if one basic story has been split three ways. Indeed, Lot states that these three imprisonments are repetitious and could easily have been pared down to a maximum of two.³¹ Lancelot's second retention is brief, another mix

³⁰ Joan M. Ferrante, Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 121.

of the supernatural and the rational. Lancelot and Lionel stop in the course of their traveling to rest. Lionel, not really tired, soon gallops off on an adventure and leaves his fatigued cousin slumbering under an apple tree. Since Lancelot is very soon to be imprisoned by three sorceresses, might the apple tree be all that remains in this story of the Other-World location, Avalon, the island of apples?

Se se colcherent sor l'erbe deso[u]z
 lumbre dun pommier. Et lance lot
 nauoit onques dormi la nuit deuant. . . .
 Si li auint ensi quil sendormi. . . .
 (V, iii, 88, lines 9 - 11;
 hereafter cited Ag from Agravain)

Morgain and two of her cohorts, Sebile and the Queen of Sorestan, together making up the traditional threesome popular with fays, discover the sleeping knight. Of Morgain and Sebile the author states: ". . . ce estoient les .ij. femmes del monde qui plus sauoient denchantemens sans la dame del lac" (Ag, 91, lines 32 - 33). Thus they are not fays but again in reality merely medieval ladies who are skilled in necromancy, and any real supernatural mystery about them is effectively deleted by the author from the story. Morgain's companion Sebile is very possibly the direct descendant of the prophetess of Apollo.³¹ If not herself this prophetess so renowned in antiquity,

³¹ Phrase and Fable, p. 999; p. 1054.

this Sebile has at least borrowed her name and with it some of her predecessor's aura. R. S. Loomis has traced Morgain's association with the Sibyl in literature and finds Morgain sometimes depicted as the oracle's successor, sometimes as her doublet, and sometimes, as in this episode, as her associate.³²

These three ladies squabble over who is the most suitable to be this handsome knight's amie. Only later is the reader informed that Morgain does not recognize Lancelot because of his recently cut hair (Ag, 93, lines 28 - 29). From the bickering about who is of nobler birth and who is younger and prettier and therefore a better choice for the fortunate knight, it is obvious that, unlike eternally beautiful fays, these ladies are subject to the whims of age and apparently cannot even use their magic to enhance their looks (Ag, 92, lines 1 - 10). They decide to convey Lancelot in a litter to the "chastel de la charete" where he can choose among them (Ag, 92, lines 10 - 13). The knights in their entourage make up a litter for Lancelot while the ladies enchant him: " Et les dames si orent tost lancelot si enchante quil na pooir de soi leuer" (Ag, 92, lines 15 - 16). This maneuver so far repeats Morgain's tactics from Lancelot's first imprisonment and is one of the details leading one to wonder if the two retentions

³² R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," pp. 342 - 356.

could not have been combined.

The next day the three ladies in all their finery accost Lancelot and inform him that, as soon as he chooses one of them, he will be released. Ever true to Guenevere, he leaves no doubt that he will have none of them:

Ia dieus ne mait fet il. se iou
ne seroie eincois en prison tous
lez iors de ma vie. que iou ia
de nulle de vous trois feisse
marie. quar trop seroie abaissies.
(Ag, 93, lines 18 - 20)

Having been so unequivocally rejected, the three sorceresses storm out of the chamber and bitterly promise that he will never leave their prison (Ag, 93, lines 26 - 28). He very soon does escape, however, with the aid of one of Morgain's damsels who has been looking after him in prison. Lancelot promises to help her escape marriage to the Queen of Soresstan's brother and to retrieve the lands stolen from her in return for his freedom. Thus, in another familiar scenario, she helps him escape:

. . . elle l'enmaine en vne autre cambre
de laiens qui estoit deles .j. uergier
et le fait mangier .j. petit. puis li
baille bones armes & bon cheual.
(Ag, 95, lines 21 - 23)

The motif of a damsel helping the hero, whoever he might be, escape from Morgain's clutches is another tradition, says R. S. Loomis, who has found this idea repeated not

only in variations throughout the Lancelot but also in other Arthurian works where Morgain appears.³³

The third time that Lancelot falls into Morgain's power is a pivotal episode, for its consequences are felt in La Mort le Roi Artu. This time Morgain is actively seeking out Lancelot to set into motion a grand scheme for vengeance and has sent out the traditional number of twelve of her damsels to bring him to her by deception. One of these damsels meets Lancelot and, upon learning who he is, informs him that she knows of an adventure at which only he can succeed (Ag, 215, lines 3 - 21). He thus agrees to follow her to the castle which, of course unknown to him, Morgain has especially built to imprison him:

. . . la damoisele le trai. se len-
mena en la prison morgain qui ses-
toit herbergie en la forest. et y
auoit fait faire le plus fort manoir
del monde. quar elle y quidoit bien
lancelot tenir a tous iors. . . .
(Ag, 215, lines 15 - 18)

Once the unsuspecting Lancelot is ensconced for the night in the castle, Morgain resorts to what seems her favorite trick and has the damsel drug him. As he sleeps soundly under the effect of the drug, Morgain then enters his chamber to use a special powder here described quite fully by the author:

³³ R. S. Loomis, "Oral Tradition," p. 350.

Lors vient morgue a la cambre cu
 ancelot estoit couchies. et
 prent vne boiste plaine de poudre.
 que elle auoit faite pourancelot.
 Si vint a lui la cu il se gisoit
 si endormis que a paines le peust
 on esueillier. Et elle emple de
 le poudre qui estoit en la boiste
 tout plain vn tuiel dargent si le
 met el nesancelot & li souffle
 el ceruel.

(Ag, 216, lines 16 - 20)

Morgain, having used a similarly potent drug on Lancelot in his first imprisonment, seems to specialize in these recipes which attack the brain. Her adroitness in this peculiar branch of pharmacy, so to speak, lends her an air more sinister than that of any ordinary magician. In this case, reality has a subtle advantage over the supernatural, and the romancer, undoubtedly sensing this, plays it to the hilt. He has Morgain explain the effect of this potent powder to her accomplice, the damsel:

Et quant morgue ot tout ce fait
 Si dist a cele qui avec li estoit
 que cre sest elle bien uengie
 de lui. Car iou croi fait
 elle quil ne reuenra ia mes en
 son droit sens tant comme li
 poudre li soit el ceruel. . . .

(Ag, 216, lines 26 - 28)

In reply to the damsel's question as to what the point of all this is, Morgain explains that it is part of her whole scheme for vengeance:

Il est voirs que quant li compaignon

de la table roonde ne sa[u]ront
 noueles de lancelot que il le
 querront par toutes terres. Et
 il a .ij. cousins germaines moult
 boins chevaliers dont li vns a
 anon lyon[iaus] et li autres
 bchors. ¶ iou les he tant pour
 lamor de lui que sil venoient
 chi par auenture iou men uengeroie
 a ma uolente. Et pour chou estuie
 iou ceste poudre.

(Ag, 216, lines 31 - 35)

Morgain's desire for revenge has therefore become an obsession. She has built a castle specifically to imprison Lancelot and now is waiting with the trap set for his kin like a spider for so many flies.

From September until after Christmas, Lancelot remains in Morgain's prison. Seeing from his window a man painting scenes of Aeneas's adventures, Lancelot asks him for colours and begins to paint important events of his life on the walls of his room. Morgain discovers these paintings when she comes to his room at night while he sleeps, which she does every night, for she now loves the hero, a necessary component of practically every fairy-retention:

A mienuit vint morgue laiens comme
 chele qui toute lez nuis y uencit.
 si tost comme il estoit endormis.
 Car elle lamoit tant comme femme
 pooit plus amer homme. pour la
 grant biaute de lui. Si estoit
 moult dolente de ce quil ne le
 uoloit amer par amors. quar elle
 len auoit mainte fois proiet. mais
 il ne len uoloit oir.

(Ag, 218, lines 10 - 14)

With these paintings, Morgain tells the damsel, she will eventually be able to obtain complete revenge:

Car iou sai bien quil y paindera
toutes lez oeures de lui ♂ de la
rocyne. Et se il auoit tout paint.
lors si feroie iou tant que li
roys artus y uendroit. et puis si
li feroie connoistre lez fais ♂ la
uerite de lancelot ♂ de la rocyne.
(Ag, 218, lines 27 - 30)

Lancelot remains in Morgain's prison two winters and one summer. Finally, the delicate coloring of a rose in the garden beneath his window reminds him enough of Guenevere to supply him with the superhuman strength needed to break the iron bars caging off his window. He escapes, procuring the best horse and arms he can find. Before galloping off, he first leaves a menacing message for Morgain with her porter:

Et bien sace elle que se che ne
fust pour lamour del roy artu.
iou feisse de lui ce que on doit
faire de femme desloial ♂ traître.
(Ag, 223, lines 23 - 25)

Lancelot's sudden appearance had startled this porter for the simple reason that he was a knight:

Quant lancelot vint a la porte si
trouua celui qui moult sesmeruella
de lui quant il le uit uemir comme
cils qui ne quidoit pas quil eust
laiens nul chevalier.
(Ag, 223, lines 14 - 16)

With this detail and also with the prominence afforded Morgain's damsels in the castle, one guesses that, except for those in menial jobs like this porter, no men lived in Morgain's castle, a fact reminiscent of the Maidenland myth.

Lancelot's paintings are Morgain's trump card, which she plays in La Mort le Roi Artu in the scene of the Chambre aux Images. In this episode Morgain has a dual role, that of revealing the accusing paintings to Arthur and also that of forewarning the reader of the king's eventual translation to Avalon. Frappier finds that Morgain in the Chambre aux Images is less a fay than she has been in any other of her episodes. He describes her here as a real character, psychologically and humanly portrayed by the author.³⁴ Any magic she uses is presented very subtly, even inconspicuously, by the author.³⁵ Lot's opinion on Morgain's representation coincides with Frappier's. He, too, finds that Morgain is not here a carbon copy of the typical fay but a personage developed strictly by author's imagination.³⁶ Concessions made to the supernatural are merely hints embellishing the background to allow the focus to be the study of the charac-

³⁴ Frappier, p. 86.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 289.

³⁶ Lot, p. 203.

ters themselves.

One such concession, for example, is Morgain's castle, the same one in which Lancelot had previously been imprisoned. Its situation in a forest thick and dark enough for Arthur and his knights to lose their bearings indicates Other-World terrain:

. . . si forvoierent tant qu'il
perdirent lor droit chemin del
tout en tout; en tel maniere
alerent tant que la nuiz vint
oscure.

(La Mort le Roi Artu, par. 48, lines
14 - 17; hereafter cited as Mort)

Sagramor, unaware whose castle it is that they stumble upon in the forest, asks the porter, no doubt the same fellow whom Lancelot startled out of his wits a while back, if their entourage can stay the night. The porter's response that he must speak to his lady surprises Sagramor. "Comment, fet Sagremors, n'i a il point de seigneur? - - Nenil, fet cil" (Mort, par.48, lines 49 - 51).

Upon learning who these unexpected guests are, the joyful Morgain realizes that this is her long-awaited chance to betray the lovers to Arthur. Wily and prudent, she decides to butter the king up first before she reveals her identity to him and makes any accusations. Therefore, in what is probably a hint from the author that the hostess is employing her sorcery, the king and his

entourage find the castle magnificently prepared for them as they enter:

si entrerent enz et voient le
leu si bel et si delitable et
si riche et si bien herbergié
que il n'orent onques veü en
leur aage si bel ostel ne si
bien seant. . . .

(Mort, par. 48, lines 71 - 74)

Many a fay uses her powers to accumulate wealth, and Morgain has lavishly furnished her castle, no doubt through sorcery, with silken hangings and illuminated it with candles:

Et il avoit leanz si grant plenté
de cierges, dont li luminaires es-
toit si granz, que il se merveil-
lierent tuit que ce pooit estre,
ne il n'avoit leanz ne mur ne pa-
roit qui touz ne fust couverz de
dras de soie.

(Mort, par. 48, lines 75 - 79)

Upon entering, the guests also note that the people of Morgain's household, women and knights, are richly clothed:

. . . quant il entrerent en la grant
sale, si encontrerent Morgain et avec
lui bien cent que dames que chevaliers
qui le fesoient compaignie, et estoient
tuit et toutes vestues si richement que
onques a feste qu'il eüst tenue jour de
sa vie n'avoit li rois Artus veüs gens
si richement acesmés come il estoient
communalement par la sale.

(Mort, par. 48, lines 89 - 96)

Morgain's retainers then treat the royal company to a sumptuousness they have never before enjoyed:

Et lors commencerent damoiseles a
aporter mes, comme s'il fussent bien
porveü de la venue le roi et de touz
ses compaignons un mois devant, ne
li rois n'avoit onques veü en sa vie
nule table se plenteive de riche
vesselmente d'or et d'argent comme
cele estoit. . . .

(Mort, par. 49, lines 5 - 10)

Loomis notes that, all things considered, the women in Morgain's household seem to be in greater evidence than the knights, a fact first brought to our attention when her porter was startled by the escaping Lancelot, and believes this to indicate Morgain's residence is a true Castle of Maidens.³⁷

Another part of Morgain's magic, says Frappier, is the exquisite music played while the king dines:

. . . li rois escoute et ot en une
chambre qui estoit encoste de lui
touz les divers estrumenz dont il
eüst onques oï parler en sa vie;
si soncient tout ensamble li un
avec les autres si tres doucement
qu'il n'avoit onques oïe melodie
qui tant li fust douce ne plesanz
a oïr.

(Mort, par. 50, lines 2 - 7)

Frappier notes that this lovely music would render Arthur more sensitive to the cruel revelation his sister,

³⁷ R. S. Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 113.

the master psychologist, has in store for him.³⁸

After the meal, two lovely damsels come to the king and very courteously ask him if he is tired: ". . . car il est grant piece de la nuit alee et vos avez tant chevauchié que vost estes moult traveilliez, si com nos cuidons" (*Mort*, par. 50, lines 14 - 16). Their concern for the poor tired king becomes a bit thin when they put Arthur up in the same room where Lancelot's paintings still adorn the walls. As Frappier notes, this extreme hospitality of Morgain augments the cruelty of her plan as it unfolds.³⁹

Morgain is in a dilemma, in spite of the golden opportunity for vengeance that has just been tossed into her lap. No doubt remembering Lancelot's parting message to her as he escaped her prison, she also fears for her life:

. . . d'autre part ele se doute que,
s'ele li descuevre la verité et Lan-
celos en ot parler que li rois l'ait
seü par li, touz li monz ne la garan-
tiroit que il ne l'ocest.
(*Mort*, par. 50, lines 30 - 33)

Her fears here reveal her as essentially human, certainly not an omnipotent fay or powerful sorceress whose powers protect her from all danger. Realizing, however, that

³⁸ Frappier, p. 318.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*

she may never again be so blessed by fate, she takes the plunge: ". . . ele n'en vendra jamés en si bon point comme ele est orendroit de dire lui" (Mort, par. 50, lines 36 - 38). At daybreak she goes to Arthur's room to speak with him. To gain his confidence, she disguises her intentions with sisterly affection:

«Sire, fet ele, vos estes en la meson
del siecle ou l'en vos desirroit plus
a vecir; et sachiez que il n'a feme
el monde qui plus vos aint que ge
faz. . . je sui vostre plus charnel
amie et si ai non Morgain et sui
vostre suer. . . .

(Mort, par. 50, lines 52 - 59)

Clearly Morgain has avoided her family since fleeing Court, for Arthur has thought his sister to be dead and never recognizes her until this announcement: "Car ge vos di, bele suer, fet li rois, que ge cuidoie que vos fussiez morte et trespassee de cest siecle" (Mort, par. 50, lines 64 - 66). . . . Poor Arthur is apparently ignorant of Morgain's career since she has left his court and does not seem aware of Guenevere's hand in his sister's departure. He invites her to return to Court with him:

. . . je vos enmenrai avec moi a
Kamaalot. . . et feroiz compaignie
a la reine Guenievre ma feme; et ge
sei moult bien qu'ele en avra moult
grant joie et moult en sera liee,
quant ele savra la verité de vos.

(Mort, par. 50, lines 68 - 73)

That Arthur would make such an overture to Morgain indicates that there is no hostility between them. Any schemes of hers from previous episodes have not affected him directly. As for Morgain, one senses that she is lukewarm towards Arthur. She does not love him, for she does not care how he will be hurt upon learning of his wife's infidelity with Lancelot, but neither does she hate him. He is simply a tool in her quest for vengeance.

Of the enmity between the sisters-in-law, however, the reader is fully aware, and one notes how Morgain diplomatically maneuvers out of the invitation to Court. Frappier praises how the author cleverly weaves the Celtic legend into Morgain's response:

Biaus frere, fet ele, de ce ne me
requerez mie; que ge vos creant
loiaument que jamés n'irai a cort,
mes sanz faille, quant ge me par-
tira de ci, ge irai en l'ille d'Ava-
lon ou les dames conversent qui
sevent toz les enchantemenz del
siecle.)

(Mort, par. 50, lines 73 - 78)

Frappier states that with this sentence the author justifies Morgain's presence on the mysterious ship that comes for Arthur after the battle of Salesbieres.⁴⁰ This blending of faerie into reality serves the author splendidly, but Lot also sees it signifying an important

⁴⁰ Frappier, p. 172.

task ahead for Morgain. She has to learn even more about her art to save a very precious life, namely Arthur's.⁴¹

Her excuse satisfies Arthur, who registers no surprise at his sister's vocation of sorceress. He switches the conversation to chit-chat and asks Morgain how she has been. In accord with her shifty nature, Morgain "... l'en dist partie et partie l'en ceile" (Mort, par. 50, line 82).

Morgain bides her time and makes no accusations of her own until the daylight streaming into the chamber reveals Lancelot's paintings to Arthur. When the king is finally able to make out what the paintings signify, he demands of his sister that she tell him all she knows about them. Before she does, though, she extracts the promise from Arthur that he will never reveal her as being the source of this information. Thus assured that Lancelot would never be able to trace the accusation back to her, she relates to Arthur her version of the lovers' story (Mort, pars. 52 - 53). Frappier remarks that, as the reader would notice, Morgain's version is condensed and simplified but that she is not striving for accuracy, only to arouse Arthur's

⁴¹ Lot, p. 204.

wrath.⁴² Dissembling her desire for personal vengeance beneath a pretense of concern for her brother's honor, she presses the king to punish the lovers: ". . . car il n'est pas rois ne hom qui tel honte suefre que l'en li face" (Mort, par. 53, lines 67 - 68).

No doubt shaken by the revelation, Arthur remains hunting at Morgain's castle for a week before returning to Camelot. At every opportunity during his stay, the relentless Morgain goads him on to vengeance:

. . . ele haoit Lancelot plus que
 nul home por ce qu'ele savoit que
 la reine l'amoit. Si ne fina on-
 ques tant com li rois fu avec lui
 de li amonester qu'il venchast sa
 honte quant il vendroit a Kamaalot,
 se il pooit venir en leu.
 (Mort, par. 54, lines 2 - 7)

One might interpret Arthur's extended stay at Morgain's castle quite simply as his reluctance to face Camelot and his disloyal wife and best friend. Frappier, however, taking a psychological tack, feels that Arthur, by spending all of his time hunting, is preparing himself for a blood-bath of vengeance at Camelot.⁴³ His sister, for her part, has throughout this episode entirely shed her aura as a fay and also much of her mystique as a sorceress. An obsessed, devious woman, she resorts to human subterfuge

⁴² Frappier, p. 29.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 304.

instead of magic in her schemes and incites a mortal, her brother, to obtain vengeance for her. The author has painted in so much realism and psychology in the Chambre aux Images that he has almost completely blotted out any supernatural atmosphere in it.

It is at the end of this romance that we find the original fay of Avalon as Morgain does a complete about-face and reverts to her uncontaminated personality. The author of this romance, in spite of his realistic bent, could not delete the legendary Morgain of Avalon from Arthur's story. In portraying the king after Salesbieres, the author faced a difficult technical task in the scene, that of believably blending faerie into realism and perhaps even scepticism. He succeeds admirably, for the episode wherein Arthur awaits his end on the shore is beautifully simple and powerful. One accepts the author's rendition of the legend, although some confusion arises as both poetry and reality merge.

Arthur instinctively senses his end is near, which is why he has Girflet cast Excalibor into the lake. This done, Girflet returns to the king's side and recounts how the hand emerged from the lake and drew the sword back down into the waters with it. Arthur recognizes in this an unmistakable portent:

«Par Dieu, fet le rois, ce pensoie ge bien que ma fins aprou-

choit durement. Lors commence a
 penser, et en ce pensé li viennent
 les lerne as euz; et quant il a
 esté grant piece en ce pensé, si
 dist a Girflet: <Il vos en couvient
 aler de ci et partir de moi a tel
 eür que, jamés que vos vivoiz, ne
 me verroiz.

(Mort, par. 193, lines 7 - 13)

Arthur does not explain to Girflet what is about to pass but obviously knows himself what to expect. After ordering the unwilling Girflet to leave him, Arthur goes alone down to the shore. Girflet complies but watches the drama unfold from an overlooking hill. In the space of a few lines Arthur is whisked out of sight of the sorrowing knight and away from all mortals' eyes:

. . . et quant il (Girflet) fu
 venuz au tertre, il s'arresta
 descouz un arbre tant que la pluie
 fu passee et commença a regarder
 cele part ou il avoit lessié le
 roi; si vit venir parmi la mer
 une nef qui estoit toute pleine
 de dames; et quant la nef vint a
 la rive il oec endroit ou li rois
 estoit, si vindrent au bord de la
 nef; et la dame d'eles tenoit Morgain, la sereur le roi Artu, par la main et commença a apeler le roi qu'il entrast en la nef; et li rois, si tost comme il vit Morgain sa sereur, se leva erramment en estant de la terre ou il se secit, et entra en la nef, et trest son cheval après lui, et prist ses armes. Quant Girflet, qui estoit el tertre, ot tout ce regardé, il retorna arrieres quant qu'il pot del cheval trere, et tant fet qu'il vient a la rive; et quant il i fu venuz, il voit le roi Artu entre les dames et

connoist bien Morgain la fee, car
meintes foiz l'avoit veüe; et la
nef se fu eslongniee de la rive
en pou d'eure plus qu'une arba-
leste ne poist trere a uit foiz;
et quant Girflet voit qu'il a
einsi perdu le roi, il descent
seur la rive, et fet le greigneur
duel del monde, et demore illuec
tout le jor et toute la nuit que
onques ne but ne ne menja, ne
n'avoit fet le jour devant.

(Mort, par. 193, lines 35 - 58)

All the necessary Other-World touches are present; the storm, the magic ship, and aboard it the supernatural women, including Morgain, who, however, is apparently not the grand lady of the group. This "dame d'eles", whoever she is, remains anonymous.

If one recalls the scene of the Chambre aux Images, one remembers that Arthur did not recognize his sister at first and in fact had believed her dead. Yet here he tells Girflet that he knows his end is imminent and apparently anticipates the ship, although we never know if he is actually expecting Morgain to be aboard. Whether Arthur is surprised by his sister's presence on the ship or if he had foreseen it remains a mystery. In addition, neither Girflet nor the reader is ever told in this scene exactly where Arthur is going when the heart-broken knight asks his king: "Et quel part cuidiez vos aler, biaux sire? - - Ce ne vos dirai ge mie,) fet li rcis" (Mort, par. 193, lines 28 - 30). Perhaps the author

assumes that the reader will make the connection with Avalon by remembering the conversation in the Chambre aux Images where Morgain told her brother that she was going to the island soon. The ambiguity of this author is contrasted with the more forthright Passage of Arthur in the Brut where, although Morgain is not mentioned, Arthur is definitely taken to Avalon:

Artus, se la geste n'en mant,
Fu el cors navrez mortelmant;
An Avalon s'an fist porter
Por ses plaies medeciner.
Ancor i est, Breton l'atandent,
Si com il dient et antandent;
De la vanra, ancor puet vivre.
(Brut, lines 4705 - 4711)

An intermediate conception of Arthur's Passage is found in the Didot-Perceval, although its manuscripts are estimated to be of a later date than the Mort. The E, or Modena, manuscript is judged to be of the second half of the thirteenth century⁴⁴; the D, or Paris, at 1301.⁴⁵ Since both versions are fairly similar, we will only quote here from the E manuscript:

Et Artus lor dist: <Laissiés
ester le duel, car je ne mor-
rai pas. Je me ferai porter
en Avalon por mes plaies me-
ciner a Morghain, me sercr.>
(Didot-Perceval, lines 2644 - 2646)

⁴⁴ Rcach, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

This rendering, says Roach, is merely an imitation of Geoffrey's conception.⁴⁶ Still, in it one sees the transition from the Erut with its extreme simplicity to the more sophisticated version in the Mort. Here in the Didot-Perceval Arthur knows that he must not simply go to Avalon; he realizes that it is his sister he must find there, too. In the Mort, the final phase, it is Morgain herself who physically comes to transport Arthur to the Other World.

Different scholars have felt that the ambiguity about Arthur's destination in the text of the Mort is due to the Christian religion influencing the Celtic legend and obliging the author to lay the king to rest in hallowed ground. To be sure, three days after the episode on the shore, Girflet finds Arthur's tomb at the Noire Chapele. The tomb's inscription reads: "CI GIST LI ROIS ARTUS QUI PAR SA VALEUR MIST EN SA SUBJECTION .XII. ROIAUMES" (Mort, par. 194, lines 23 - 24). The grief-stricken Girflet asks the resident preudome if this is really Arthur's tomb:

<Sire, est il voirs que ci gist
li rois Artus? - - Oil, biax amis,
il i gist voirement, ci l'aportèrent
ne sai quex dames.> Et Girflet
s'apense maintenant que ce sont celes
qui le mistrent en la nef; si dist,
puis que ses sires est partiz de cest

⁴⁶ Roach, p. 72.

siecle, il n'i demorra plus. . . .
 (Mort, par. 194, lines 31 - 36)

How the romancer handles Arthur's end troubles some scholars. Bruce, for example, finds this mix of faerie and reality awkward.⁴⁷ Lot believes that the romancer flinched from whole-heartedly employing the supernatural by having Arthur finally buried in the Noire Chapele. He points out, too, that since Arthur does receive a Christian burial, then the fairy ship and women have no real purpose in the story.⁴⁸ A bit milder is Frappier's appraisal, stating that the author is doing his best to compromise Celtic legend with Christianity by interring Arthur in hallowed ground.⁴⁹ Also less critical of the author is Paton, who feels that he attempts to incorporate Giraldus Cambrensis's version of Arthur's burial at Glastonbury into the legend.⁵⁰

In spite of the mixed feelings about this author's treatment of Arthur's end, at least we know where Arthur rests. Of Morgain's fate the romancer tells us nothing, and she exits from Arthurian romance as mysteriously as she enters it.

⁴⁷ Bruce, p. 431.

⁴⁸ Lot, p. 273.

⁴⁹ Frappier, p. 181.

⁵⁰ Paton, p. 38.

CONCLUSION

By the time Morgain comes for Arthur after the Last Battle, it is difficult to speak of her as a true fay, for the author of La Mort le Roi Artu has completely humanized her. This is not entirely his handiwork; the process begins with previous romancers on the day when Morgain first sets foot in Arthur's court as a lady-in-waiting. To explain any incongruities in Morgain's nature between this prosaic position and her more glamorous office as mistress of Avalon, a complex biography is invented. In this are elements often difficult to pinpoint. There are aspects of her characterization in the Vulgate that can be traced back to the Vita Merlini: for example, her cleverness, always mentioned by the romancers; her knowledge of curative herbs upon which, of course, hinges her importance to Arthur and which has also been twisted in the Vulgate sometimes for malevolent purposes, as in Lancelot's imprisonments; and her paradisal home, Avalon.

To portray Morgain more fully, the romancers add to the information in the Vita Merlini and as often as not borrow elements from general fairy-lore to apply them to her. Thus we see her involved in romances with several knights, for all fays choose handsome knights to be their

ami. More specifically, we see her in the Vulgate three times imprisoning the best of all knights, Lancelot, in what are commonly interpreted as Other-World retentions, certainly plays not unique to Morgain. The folklorists, adhering to Celtic legends, see Morgain as the descendant of the Morrigan because of the lascivious aspects of both personages' natures and their terrible thirst for vengeance if angered, among other things. Also, the Val Sans Retor that Morgain creates is probably a version of her own Avalon but in the Vulgate borrows from the earthly paradises of other fays.

Finally, the reader must always keep in mind that the authors themselves contribute much to Morgain's story. Often with incredible finesse, they polish up the legends into little jewels of sophisticated realism, as the author of La Mort le Roi Artu does so well. These romancers, while rationalizing the supernatural and therefore the fay, also choose which human qualities they will emphasize in Morgain, and more often than not they treat their imaginations to portraying her shrewish qualities. Their reasons for this choice are difficult for us today to prove. One can only guess that they saw a good story in such a character, and that is probably why their Morgain bears so little resemblance to the original fay.

Fortunately for Morgain, the original fay is as strong and persistent as the later evolution, and at the

end of La Mort le Roi Artu, the author wisely employs some of this mystery by leaving Morgain's destiny to the reader's imagination.

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