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THE SUPERNATURAL MARINE VESSELS OF THE VULGATE CYCLE

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OF THE
VULGATE CYCLE

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to show the literary influences and sources of the supernatural vessels in the Vulgate Cycle with particular concentration on the two religiously oriented and complementary stories, Lestoire del Saint Graal and La Queste del Saint Graal. Among the influences found are fairy and oriental literature, and Greek and Roman mythology which appear to be as prominent as the Biblical material on which the works are based.

In addition, based on the use of the supernatural vessel as a motif, an attempt has been made to determine whether the three stories of the Vulgate Cycle in which these vessels appear, La Mort le Roi Artu, the Estoire and the Queste, are due to a single author, independent authors, or an 'architect' with multiple authors. With reference particularly to the latter two, the evidence, based mostly on the common material of the Solomon's ship episode, seems to indicate that two authors of differing ability were responsible.

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ABBREVIATIONS.

Texts

- TrPr Curtis, Renée L., ed. Le Roman de Tristan en Prose.
2 vols. Warsaw: Verlag, 1963 and Leiden: Brill, 1976.
- Mort Artu Frappier, Jean, ed. La Mort le roi Artu, roman du
XIII^e siècle. Third edition: Paris-Genève: Droz,
1964.
- QSG Pauphilet, Albert, ed. La Queste del Saint Graal.
Paris: Honoré Champion, 1923.
- ESG Sommer, H. Oskar, ed. The Vulgate Version of the
Arthurian Romances. Vol. I. Lestoire del Saint
Gaal. Washington: The Carnegie Institute, 1909.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth Thorpe, Lewis, ed. Geoffrey of
Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain.
Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1966.
- Gerald of Wales Thorpe, Lewis, ed. Gerald of Wales: The
Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales.
Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1978.

Critical Works

- Etude MA Frappier, Jean. Etude sur La Mort Artu. Genève-
Paris: Droz, 1961.
- Boethius Green, Richard, trans. Boethius: The Consolation
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Ages: a Collaborative History. Oxford: 1959.
- Etude LP Lot, Ferdinand. Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose.
Paris: Honoré Champion, 1954.
- Matarasso Matarasso, Pauline, trans. The Quest of the
Holy Grail. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969.

- Morse Morse, Charlotte C. The Pattern of Judgment in the "Queste" and "Cleanness". Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978.
- Goddess Fortuna Patch, H. R. The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927.
- "Mediaeval Descriptions" Patch, H. R. "Some Elements in Mediaeval Descriptions of the Otherworld", PMLA XXXIII (1918), 601-43.
- Fairy Mythology Paton, Lucy Allen. Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romances. New York: Burt Franklin, 1903. Reprinted 1960.
- Etude QSG Pauphilet, Albert. Etude sur la Queste del Saint Graal. Paris: Edouard Champion, 1921.
- Quinn Quinn, Esther Casier. "The Queste of Seth, Solomon's Ship and the Grail", Traditio XXI (1965), 185-222.
- "Setting Adrift" Reinard, J. R. "Setting Adrift in Mediaeval Law and Literature", PMLA 56 (1941), 33-69.
- Prose Index West, G. D. An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Prose Romances. Toronto: U of T Press, 1978.
- Verse Index ----- . An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances 1150-1300. Toronto: U of T Press, 1969.

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INTRODUCTION

The basic forms of transportation in the Middle Ages were the human feet, an animal such as a horse or mule which was ridden or used to pull a cart or carriage, and a boat or ship which was the means of conveyance to traverse water. Certain horses in French Arthurian literature had names, like "Le Gringalet", Gauvain's horse in the Roman de Perceval by Chrétien de Troyes, and in other romances. Of the water-borne vessels in the literature, only one, Solomon's ship of the Estoire del Saint Graal and the Queste del Saint Graal has attracted any sort of study. Other vessels are used to transport people and goods from one place to another, even from one world to another, but these have been largely unnoticed, or dismissed as the author's desire to "compound with the deepest theological and mystical conceptions of his time stories of piracy, of 'voyages imaginaires' and even, perhaps, of farce." Bruce was referring to the Vulgate Cycle of French Arthurian literature when he wrote the above, but his statement appears to reflect modern

1

For a complete list, see G. D. West, An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances 1150-1300 (Toronto, 1969), pp. 79-80, and An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Prose Romances (Toronto, 1978), p. 146. Hereafter cited as Verse Index and Prose Index respectively.

2

J. D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, (Gloucester, 1928), I, 391.

literary opinion about the marine vessels in French Arthurian literature. Studies of the supernatural elements have been undertaken with fairly brief references to the supernatural waterborne vessels³, and one study has been devoted to Solomon's ship in connection with the theological aspects⁴, which would seem to support the statement of Albert Pauphilet in his introduction to La Queste del Saint Graal:

Dès longtemps les écrivains religieux et particulièrement les commentateurs de la Bible, avaient créé une sorte de vaste répertoire de correspondances entre les choses spirituelles et les apparences concrètes des phénomènes. Les formes et les couleurs, les pierres précieuses et les bêtes sauvages, tout avait un sens caché, tout était symbole et équivalent mystique.⁵

The present study is an attempt to determine the influences and sources of the vessels. The ships and boats to be studied are primarily those of the Vulgate Cycle with reference to others in French Arthurian literature, and more specifically, those not controlled by the occupant. For the purpose of this work, the term "supernatural" is used to refer to Divine Providence, Fate or fairy magic.

³
L. A. Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (New York, 1903), p. 16, n.1. Hereafter cited as Fairy Mythology.

⁴
E. Casier Quinn, "The Quest of Seth, Solomon's ship and the Grail", Traditio XXI (1965), pp. 185-222. Cited hereafter as Quinn.

⁵
A. Pauphilet, ed., La Queste del Saint Graal (Paris, 1923), p. xii. Hereafter cited as QSG.

As mentioned, the Vulgate Cycle is the basis of the study, and the order of the cycle will be observed to preserve the internal history. In the case of the Estoire del Saint Graal⁶ and the Queste del Saint Graal which share large portions of the story with slight variations, the vessels will be considered together where necessary. The Celtic element has been omitted because it is felt to be beyond the scope of this study.

6
Lestoire del Saint Graal, ed. H. Oskar Sommer,
The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Edited from
Manuscripts in the British Museum (Washington, 1909).
 Cited hereafter as ESG. Entries refer to page and line
 numbers.

I

EXILES, SHIPWRECKS AND DRIFTERS

The first vessel encountered in the Vulgate Cycle is the exile boat in the Estoire del Saint Graal. In the course of the Cycle, there are three sub-categories of this: the castaways, the shipwrecks, and the voyages of healing or "naves amoris". In each case, the traveller is removed from his normal milieu in a vessel over which he has no control. The vessel may be rudderless or controlled by the elements, usually the wind. The destination is left to fate

a) Exiles

J. R. Reinhard, whose main concern is with vessels in Middle English literature, quotes historical precedents for the exile boats from Greek and Roman works: Arion, who chose to jump into the sea rather than commit suicide, was carried home on the back of a dolphin, and Apollonius of Tyre and his wife, who were shipwrecked and carried safely to shore.⁷ Reinhard lists three main groups of people subjected to this form of ostracism or punishment:
"I. Non-criminals; II. Persons unwanted in the

⁷
J. R. Reinhard, "Setting Adrift in Mediaeval Law and Literature", PMLA 56 (1941), 36. Hereafter cited as "Setting Adrift".

community; III. Criminals or presumed criminals." A fourth category is "Aberrant circumstances".⁸ Each of the exiles will be discussed with reference to these classifications.

The first exile boat appears early in the Estoire and is that of a criminal, Caiaphas, sentenced to be set adrift for his part in the execution of Christ and the imprisonment of Joseph of Arimathea, who spent forty-three years in prison and was remembered only because of his healing powers when the Emperor Vespasian was stricken with leprosy (ESG 15/21-3). Caiaphas reveals the place of imprisonment on condition that he be neither burned nor hanged:

Et Caiaphas dist quil li ensengeroit par tel
couvent quil nen soit ne ars ne pendus (ESG 17/15-6).

Miraculously, despite his long imprisonment with no food or water, Joseph's appearance is unchanged: he has been fed by the Holy Grail. Vespasian's decision is to punish Caiaphas, but he must observe the conditions above. The solution is to set him adrift in a boat "ou aventure le mena et ensi len auint ." (ESG 19/1-2). In The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature, Patch discusses the various themes of Fortune, remarking that:

"Ventura", or "Aventure", is a name that at one time threatened to replace the name Fortuna. . . . Like Fortuna, she turns a wheel, and exalts and debases;

she guides; and she is confused with Fate or Destiny.⁹ Among her other functions, she is also concerned with marine adventures. With reference to the punishment itself, Reinhard states:

If setting adrift was an expedient which could be used for disposing of noncriminals who were obnoxious to the community, it could also be applied to persons who were guilty or suspected of crime. In other words, setting adrift was adopted into the customary laws of maritime and lacustrine peoples.¹⁰

In the Bible, Caiaphas was the high priest to whom Christ was delivered (Matthew 26:3ff). He declared that Christ had blasphemed, for which the punishment was death, and this was the recommendation when Christ was delivered to Pilate. Caiaphas had previously conspired against Christ (John 11:49-53), and issued a decree "that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (John 18:14). There is no Biblical reference to Caiaphas' pretended ignorance of Christ's punishment, nor of his own fate. In the Post-Vulgate Queste, he is found on a small island two hundred years later.

9

H. R. Patch, The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), p. 39. Hereafter cited as Goddess Fortuna.

10

Reinhard, "Setting Adrift", p. 47.

11

F. Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail (Manchester, 1966), p. 162 (the reference is to MSS B.N. fr. 112 and 772). Also in C. E. Pickford, L'Evolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du moyen âge (Paris, 1960), pp. 89, 319.

In the Estoire, the author evidently wished to show some true Christian mercy and charity on the part of Joseph of Arimathea who was partly responsible for the decree by asking that Caiaphas be put "en tel lieu ou il ne mure que il puist amender sa vie" (ESG 18/35-6). There is a suggestion of a reversal of the Biblical text along the "biter bitten" principle since Caiaphas is the one to be punished for the many who were responsible for Christ's death.

The "ship of state" imagery often found in Classical Greek literature is also present. The word "govern" has its origin in French in "gouvernail", the rudder or tiller which controls the direction of the vessel. When Caiaphas is set adrift, he is cut off from society by the governing body to which he once belonged, and by the highest representative of the government, the Emperor. Consequently, he literally and figuratively no longer has control over the "ship of state", or over the vessel in which he is set adrift.

Along with the separation from society, the medium on which this takes place, the sea, also has several possible interpretations. Initially the primitive fear of large bodies of water makes being left to the caprices of tide and weather a fearful punishment. The Greeks considered the sea an arbiter in deciding guilt or innocence, and there were specific times set down by Hesiod in his Works and Days that were safe to go to sea, if one had to go at all:

Fifty days after the solstice, i.e. July-August when the season of wearisome heat is come to an end, is the right time for men to go sailing. Then you will not wreck your ship, nor will the sea destroy the sailors, unless Poseidon the Earth-Shaker be set upon it, or Zeus, the king of the deathless gods, wish to slay them; for the issues of good and evil are alike with them. ¹²

As a pagan, Caiaphas was considered left to the caprices of two highly volatile gods, Zeus the Shapeshifter, and Poseidon his equally changeable brother, and not the Christian god.

A point on which Christians and pagans agreed was that death at sea meant being deprived of what is a "Christian burial". Within the fifty years preceding the birth of Christ, the Roman poet, Propertius, said in his elegy on the death of Paetus, that he laments the fact that Paetus' mother will not be able to bury her son properly, because his grave is the whole Carpathian sea. ¹³ Whatever the outcome for Caiaphas, the Christians were absolved of direct responsibility for his death, relying on the sea to determine his guilt or innocence, in the Greek tradition, as outlined by Reinhard.

12

Hesiod, Works and Days, trans. H. G. Evelyn White (Cambridge, 1914), p. 51.

13

Propertius, Elegies Book Three, ed. W. A. Camps (Cambridge, 1966), p. 22, lines 11-18.

14

Reinhard, "Setting Adrift", p. 35.

Although Caiaphas's fate is not revealed in the Estoire, the Christian child exiled in the same way is saved by divine intervention. The nobleman, Calofer, condemns the child to be thrown from a tower, because his father, Nascien has escaped. Celidoine is saved from the fall by nine hands (a curious number for hands, but here symbolising the perfection of the Trinity), and is transported to an island. A child is a symbol of purity and innocence, and this child is second in the Grail line, and later is a founder of Christianity in Britain.

Initially the child Celidoine is rescued from the island by real ships navigated by real people who serve the pagan Persian king, Label. The king laughs in disbelief when Celidoine explains that his religion saved him. Label thinks the child precocious:

par foi signor merueilles seit ia chis enfes
de mentir . (ESG 143/38-9).

Label's plan to convert the boy to the pagan religion is changed when the child whose name is explained as "celidoines vaut autant comme dounes al ciel" (ESG 107/35-6), is found to interpret dreams in an attempt at a parallel between Celidoine's converting the pagan king and his people, and Christ teaching the elders in the temple (Luke 2:46-52). Another male child with the inherent ability to interpret and prophesy is Merlin, who may possibly be compared here and whose name, according to Gerald of Wales, is

Merlin 'qui et Celidonius dictus est'¹⁵, who also found himself in danger, and saved himself with his ability to prophesy, as Geoffrey of Monmouth relates.¹⁶

After their king's death, predicted and interpreted by Celidoine, the people punish him as the Christians punish Caiaphas. The child is unwanted in the community, and although he is not a criminal, he is a potential danger to them. Label's people put Celidoine in a boat "sans airon et sans autre cose" (ESG 159/1), and they also put in the boat a lion caught the day before, expecting the animal to despatch the child shortly; they do not know the lion is a symbol of Christ: "Behold the lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). Mme. Lot-Borodine observes that "le lion partout dans le Lancelot-Graal est considéré comme le symbole de Dieu".¹⁷ Later, one of the many didactic helpful hermits will explain the symbolism of the animal.¹⁸

15

Gerald of Wales, The Journey through Wales/The Description of Wales, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1978), p. 280. Cited hereafter as Gerald of Wales.

16

Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 168-9. Hereafter cited as Geoffrey of Monmouth.

17

Ferdinand Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose (Paris, 1954), p. 446, n. Cited hereafter as Etude LP.

18

See Angus J. Kennedy, "The Hermit's Role in French Arthurian Romance", Romania 95 (1974), 54-83.

The child is carried safely for three days with the lion in the exile boat which paradoxically becomes, or always was, a rescue vessel. On the fourth day, child and lion meet Solomon's ship (ESG 159/26-40), fulfilling the first vessel's true function as a messenger or satellite ship, which has a parallel in the Queste in the white samite-covered vessel. The rescue boat disappears while Celidoine is aboard Solomon's ship, and this latter conveys him to the "Turning Island" and reunion with his father Nascien who has already learned the purpose and beauty of the vessel.

A contrast seems to be intended between the exile of the old man, Caiaphas, a criminal, and the child, Celidoine set adrift with a lion by pagans who feared his power. The contrast is the imagery of the "Old Law, New Law" from Psalms and the Book of Isaiah:

Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise
~~from the end of the earth, ye that go down to~~
 the sea, and all that is therein; the isles,
 and the inhabitants thereof. (Isaiah 42:10)

Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with
 a loud noise. (Psalms 33:3)

Caiaphas represents the Old Law which must be replaced by the New, embodied in Celidoine, the child, symbol of innocence and purity, the New Man singing the New Song. Although set adrift with a supposedly fierce beast, the lion symbolises the boy's mission in life and underlines the parallel with Christ. The exiles are very different for a good reason, but

their proximity has not gone unnoticed by Reinhard who blames the "compiler who liked the device so well that he used it again."¹⁹

The exile vessels appear only in the Estoire, and the pagans set adrift are never heard of again. On reaching Britain, Celidoine repeats his triumph of interpretation of visions and conversion with Duke Ganor, the rule of the area (ESG 224/14-20). Such is the child's success that the duke orders those who refuse baptism to be exiled in the same way that Caiaphas and Celidoine had been. These were people no longer wanted in the community, who possibly fall into the category of "Aberrant circumstances". In this case, the society "had recourse to a means of riddance which not only salved the conscience of the judges, but allowed a chance of escape to the unwanted person."²⁰ The fate of the one hundred and fifty exiles is unknown, but they are replaced by the equal number of Christians transported on Josephe's shirt (ESG 215/3-39, 225/5; see below p. 60). The duke was a zealous convert, and it seems inconsistent that Celidoine failed to show Christian mercy, by not interceding for them as Joseph of Arimathea had done for Caiaphas.

¹⁹
"Setting Adrift", p. 61.

²⁰
Ibid., p. 39

The author apparently intended a parallel between the pagans who perish and the fact that the traditionally rudderless exile vessel cannot be steered: the pagan faith meant aimlessness and final death; Celidoine's Christian faith protected him in the most hopeless seeming circumstances. A Boethian interpretation is placed on the pagan belief which leaves man to the whim of blind, capricious Fortune, in contrast to the enduring protection of the Christian faith.²¹

Other French Arthurian literature has an equivalent to Celidoine's exile vessel in the Suite du Merlin,²² where the villain is Arthur himself in a mixture of the Perseus legend and the "Slaughter of the Innocents" from the Book of Matthew. Where Herod wanted to kill the infant Jesus, Arthur would dispose of Mordred, the child of his unwitting incest with his sister, the wife of King Loth of Orkanie. There is a difference between Mordred and Perseus: Mordred is evil and kills his father deliberately, where Perseus killed Acrisius by accident.

Merlin warns Arthur of the disaster to come, and Arthur requests all new parents to send their infants to him

21

Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. R. Green (Indianapolis, 1962), p. 3.

22

La Suite du Merlin, ed. Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, Merlin, roman en prose du XIII^e siècle, publié ... d'après le manuscrit appartenant à M. Alfred Huth (Paris, 1886) 2 vols. I, 204-212.

in order that he may kill them. The plan changes when a vision counsels him to cast them adrift instead, as Moses in the Old Testament (Exodus 2:2-6). Seven hundred children are cast adrift, but they arrive in Amalfi, the sea having determined their innocence. Mordred is not among them: he is the sole survivor of a shipwreck and is carried in his cradle, an unusual vessel, until found by some fishermen.

b) Shipwrecks

After children, damsels in distress rank high among pitiful subjects in crewless, rudderless vessels which frequently are shipwrecked. In the Estoire and the Tristan en Prose²³ there are two such shipwreck victims, but there is a great contrast between their lives after the shipwreck.

King Label's recently converted daughter in the Estoire fled with some of her father's loyal subjects when their country was attacked by an enemy. During a sea-battle, only she was spared:²⁴

Et moi meisme eussent ochise mais pour che que
puchele me uirent et foible cose me uoldrent
touchier . ains me laissierent ychi aueques mes
parens et cels de nostre part quil auoient ochis
ensi que vous poes veoir . (ESG 166/26-29).

23

Le Roman de Tristan en Prose, ed. Renée L. Curtis, (München, 1963-76), I/4-13. Hereafter cited as TrPr. The entries refer to volume and paragraph and line.

24

There is a discrepancy about King Label's death: He died after Celidoine's prediction (ESG 158/18) and his daughter says he died in the seabattle (ESG 166/26).

She is discovered by the messengers sent by Nascien's wife to search for her husband. The messengers show Christian mercy in burying the dead pagans. They then take over the ship, and get supplies of food and water, but cannot find a captain or pilot. The group sleeps on board, forgetting to take down the sails, and a storm blows up during the night. In the first storm, the girl was separated from her past and pagan people, and in the second, she is left with good Christians. The destination is left to fate, a common theme, but in fact, it is no more than an awkward authorial ploy to confirm the girl in Christianity so she will be a suitable spiritual bride for Celidoine when the time comes.

The ship sails around the Mediterranean, stopping at the Island of Hippocrates where the great intellectual leader fell prey to pride and women, as did Pompey in Mordrain's digression (ESG 89/5-93/7), and Solomon. The moral is that no one is immune to pride, often depicted as a woman. Hippocrates' downfall parallels the story of Samson led astray by Delilah, and Solomon, as above. The splendour suggests Sheba who visited Solomon, represented in the Estoire as the woman from Gaul who visited Hippocrates, Solomon's pre-Christian equivalent. Cleopatra in her barge is another temptress suggested.

The Biblical inspiration for sea journeys around the Mediterranean appears to be the Acts of the Apostles, or as

Frappier and others suggest, the apocryphal books of the Acts of St. Simon and St. Jude, although Frappier concedes that Bruce threw doubts on this theory.²⁵ Whatever the precedent, the purpose of the digression is to show that Celidoine's future wife was converted to Christianity, persuaded by intellectual reasoning and not emotional appeals. She is a Virgin figure as compared to the "Eve pécheresse" view of woman in the digression. Her Christian name, Sarracinte, is the name of Mordrain's queen, and a reminder of the Holy City of the Vulgate Cycle, Sarras. Like the Virgin Mary, she represents the transition point between the "Old Law" and "New Law" and her shipwreck pinpoints the transition.

If Sarracinte presents the "Cult of the Virgin" view of women so popular in the middle ages, Chelinde in the Tristan en Prose is an example of the "Eve pécheresse", since she progresses relentlessly down hill from the time of her shipwreck. She has in common with Sarracinte her gender, a father who is a king, and the shipwreck with nominal conversion and baptism in the Christian faith. There the resemblance ends. Her subsequent life can only be described as a mediaeval soap opera with marriage to her rescuer who commits fratricide, and attempted flight by sea interrupted by a storm which the crew interpret as a sign that a criminal is aboard. Her

husband, the "criminal" is thrown overboard, and swims to an island where he remains for some time.

Her melodramatic life results ultimately in a variation of the Phaedra theme combined with the "choice of Paris" from Greek mythology: her own son, Apollo, unaware of their relationship, chooses her for his wife. They live happily until the mediaeval misogynist St. Augustine reveals the truth. Chelinde demands immediate death for her son, but is struck by lightning and burnt alive, indicating her responsibility for the error, regardless of the circumstances.

Sarracinte and Chelinde travelled in ordinary vessels which became self-propelled because of the storms. In secular mediaeval literature, the storm is often the result of a fairy's anger with her lover, but in the Christian context, it is a sign of God's displeasure. Sarracinte, the Christian is in the hands of Divine Providence, but Chelinde, the pagan is at the mercy of Fate, or Blind Fortune at the wheel.²⁶ In her note on the word "aventure" in the Queste, Matarasso perhaps explains the difference in the two women's fates:

To the faithful it implies submission to God's providence . . . Providence is 'safe' only to those whose wills are aligned with the divine purpose.²⁷

26

Patch, Goddess Fortuna , p. 12, 44.

27

P. Matarasso, The Quest of the Holy Grail (Harmondsworth, 1969) p. 294, n.44. Cited hereafter as Matarasso.

Curiously, Chelinde is censured for her sins committed unknowingly, but the author condones the love of Tristan and Iseut even after her marriage to King Mark. In some versions, a token morality is imposed when the two lovers die simultaneously because of the wickedness of Tristan's wife, also named Iseut. In the Estoire, the "Eve pécheresse" image is limited to the phantom women on the black ships, and to the digressions.

The Tristan en Prose also has men shipwrecked in much the same way as the women: the circumstances are similar, but the results are different. Lamorat de Gales is aboard a ship returning to Britain, after sending a cuckold's horn to Mark in Cornwall, possibly for vengeance on Tristan for defeating him in battle. A storm shipwrecks the vessel, leaving him a prisoner in the Païs de Serviage, where the rocks around the island make escape impossible. This seems to be a form of divine punishment for his desire for vengeance. Shortly after, Tristan with his wife and brother-in-law also experience a shipwreck at night while they are sleeping: "... li batiax s'esquipa de terre, je ne sai mie par quele achoison ..." (TrPr II, 590/27-28). Tristan, unlike Lamorat is able to escape and free the people because he is not hampered by indolence and despair.

Although the supernatural is suggested in both shipwrecks, it seems a convenient device to put the character

into a situation to fulfill the author's plot and moral requirements. The Giant Nabon, a monstrous creature, may be a variation on Cerberus, the three-headed dog guarding the gates to the lower world in Greek mythology. The crossing of water, one of the requirements for passage to the other-world,²⁸ leads to the *Païs de Serviage*, perhaps a euphemism for purgatory. Both men arrive unarmed, that is, without the Pauline armour of Ephesians 6:11-17, the 'helmet of salvation', the 'breastplate of righteousness' and the 'sword of the spirit'.

c) Voyages of healing or "naves amoris"

After women and children, a wounded hero set adrift by his own request in a rudderless, crewless ship is a favourite motif. As with Label's daughter in the *Estoire*, the hero often meets the woman he is meant to love, but in this case, the lady is waiting at the end of the voyage, and her first function is that of nurse rather than lover. This has been aptly called the "Voyage of healing" by Gertrude Schoepperle with reference to Tristan.²⁹

28

H. R. Patch, "Some Elements in Mediaeval Descriptions of the Otherworld", *PMLA* XXXIII (1918), p. 627. Cited hereafter as "Mediaeval Descriptions".

29

G. Schoepperle, Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance (New York, 1960), I, 15.

The earliest of the wounded heroes would seem to be Guigemar, the hero of the lay of the same name by Marie de France which was written around 1175, although the Tristan legend is probably much older. Sommer places the entire Vulgate Cycle toward the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries (ESG vii), whereas Frappier proposes the dates of 1215-³⁰. Renée Curtis places her based manuscript, Ms. C in the second half of the thirteenth century. (TrPr I/8, 23).

Tristan is the most famous of the drifting wounded heroes, and according to Frappier, "is doubtless the source of the voyage of the wounded Pierre to Orcanie where he is healed by the king's daughter."³¹ Pierre is wounded by his cousin Symeu (ESG 264/5-9) with the encouragement of Chanaan, both of whom the Grail refused to nourish because they would not repent their sins. As with Tristan, Pierre's wound worsens because of the poison on the sword and finally he begs to be taken to the sea in the usual pattern of the voyage of healing. Pierre and Pharain find a small ship with the sails set which Pierre is convinced was sent for him by God:

Car bien pensa que nostre sires ne lauoit la
enuoie se pour lui non . & lors dist a pharain
biaus amis descendes moi si me metes en cele
nacele si men irai par mer en tel lieu se dieu

30

Frappier, ALMA, p. 295.

31

Ibid., p. 314.

plaist ou ie trouerai aide & garison de ma
maladie . (ESG 269/11-14)

The indication that the boat was intended for Pierre is that it sails away and disappears the moment Pharain leaves it. In a variant quoted by Sommer, [F ³⁰³ (413-424)], the boat is moved by a familiar element.

. . . & maintenant que pharainz fu issus de la
nacele et il regardoit encore perron . li vens
se feri en la nacele si quil la fist partir de
la riue . & lempaint en mer de terre . si que
pharans ne vit ne la nacele ne perron . . .
(ESG 269 n.11).

The wind may be interpreted as "life's token" in these voyages of healing, and especially in the religiously oriented Estoire and Queste.

Like Tristan, Pierre travels for days, with the difference that Pierre has no food or water. On the fourth day, he falls asleep and arrives at a city on the island belonging to King Orcans, " . j . des mieudres cheualiers del monde mais il ne creoit pas en dieu" (ESG 270/8-9). The king's daughter is responsible for his healing although it is done by a Christian prisoner, in imitation of Joseph of Arimathea; his reward for healing will be his freedom. The prisoner diagnoses poison, and predicts and effects a cure in one month. Pierre then does battle on behalf of the king, and his success results in king and country being converted to Christianity which continues to spread through Britain from its origins with Mordrain, Nascien and Celidoine.

His fate would appear to bear out Reinhard's statement:

The belief in the arbitrament of the sea survived into Christian times, and the Christian god replaced the pagan divinity of the sea.³²

The nature of each "voyage of healing" vessel is different. In the case of Pierre, Divine Providence provides the vessel, and aided by the prevailing tide or current, guides it to the destination, whereas Tristan, wounded in the battle with Morholt, gives the specifications for his boat, and takes musical instruments with him (TrPr I/308). In his debilitated state, he would probably not have been able to navigate any vessel across the rough channel from Cornwall to Ireland, but he arrives after two weeks, unfortunately at the castle of Morholt's brother-in-law, which necessitates concealing his identity.

His arrival has a fairy appearance. The boat is "coverte d'un drap de soie pour moi deffendre de la pluie et dou vent et du chaut" (TrPr I/308, 14-15). He is playing his harp, placed with his rote, and the music pleases the king who finds it "trop douz a oïr et trop delitable", and when he sees the vessel, "il cuide que ce soit faarie" and calls the queen (TrPr I/311, 8-12). The boat is not a fairy vessel but must be considered so for its choice of destination when the hero's weakened condition precluded his control.

32

"Setting Adrift", p. 36.

33

The lay of "Guigemar" by Marie de France follows two patterns: the Tristan legend and the "fairy induction" of the hart and the hunt which:

. . . leads him to the bank of a stream, where he sees awaiting him a magic boat, marvellously beautiful and swift, pilotless and rudderless, sent by the fay to convey him, in obedience to her magic guidance, to the other world.³⁴

The difference here is that Guigemar arrives at a real castle albeit with supernatural speed³⁴, where a real 'mal-mariée' tends his wounds. They are separated when the husband learns of the affair, but later reunited by the same vessel. This ship has in common with Solomon's ship its description and a preternatural knowledge of being needed as in the Estoire where Nascien is informed that the ship will wait until the last of the line is to be returned to Sarras (ESG 202/34-6).

Among the foregoing vessels, it is seen that the motif of the voyage is frequently used, and possibly overused by the author of the Estoire. Pairs are used for comparison and contrast as in the Caiaphas and Celidoine episodes to present the "in malo" and "in bono" interpretation. The digressions, such as Pompey's Island and Hippocrates'

³³ Marie de France, Lais, ed. A. Ewert (Oxford, 1944), pp. 3-25.

³⁴ Patch, "Mediaeval Descriptions", p. 629, and The Otherworld, chapters 2 and 7 for discussion of supernatural time lapses. In addition, E. S. Hartland, The Science of Fairy Tales (London, 1925), chapter 7 deals with the Celtic tradition of time lapses.

Island, are heavily moralising and awkward. The episodes involving "voyages of healing" are probably all based on the Tristan legend, but in the Estoire, as one may expect from its religious nature, the controlling agent is Divine Providence rather than Fate as is the case with Tristan and Guigemar.

II

ALTERNATING SHIPS

TESTING AND PROOF

Although it is not immediately apparent, the exiled states of the members of the Grail line are a means of putting them into a situation where they may be tested for the strength of their Christian faith, or to have their right to the line proven. Those to be tested are not all transported by supernatural vessels to their testing place, but the testing place is usually an island. Patch cites the classical tradition:

The water barrier is familiar also among the Greeks, for perhaps the commonest location of the Other World with them is on a blessed island or group of islands. Such seems to be the idea implicit in the Odyssey's account of the Elysian Fields.³⁵

The island also figures prominently in the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament where the disciples travel frequently across water to various islands, and the author of the Estoire seems to have been inspired by these voyages and based many of his works on them.

Mordrain is the first to be tested; he has been transported by the Holy Ghost to the island where he is to be tested (ESG 86/25), based possibly on Acts 8:39-40 where

³⁵

Patch, The Other World, (Cambridge, 1950, p. 16.

Philip is taken away by "the Spirit of the Lord" and later found at Azotus, or Revelations 21:10 where St. John the Divine is carried away "in the spirit" to see Jerusalem. These passages must be considered in connection with the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

There are certain fairy elements to be considered such as the telescoping of time: Mordrain is actually seventeen days' journey from his home, as he is informed first by the man in the ship with the white sail and red cross, and then by the lady in the ship draped in black, but he has been transported in the space of nine hours:

il fu prins el palais a eure de prime et
quant le sains esprits le mist ius si fu
pres de noune (ESG 86/26-7)

The island is neither the "Fortunate Isles" nor the "Blessed Isles" of the Greek and Roman, or Celtic mythology, but a deserted place with a menacing landscape, symbolic of the moral dangers to come. On exploring the island, Mordrain finds a path leading to a cave "si le vit si noire et si hideuse quil ni entrast por nule rien du monde" (ESG 93/12-14). He learns that the island is called "Pompey's Island", and there follows an awkward digression like the one involving Hippocrates' Island, inserted to illustrate the sin of pride and the results thereof for the pre-Christian and therefore pagan Pompey.

As in the temptation of Christ, Mordrain is prepared for what is to come by the arrival of a white-masted ship with a red cross (ESG 93/17), the traditional colour symbolism of Christ, and he perceives "que toutes les boines odeurs del monde fuissent amassees en cele neif" (ESG 93/21-2), the inspiration for which may be the Song of Solomon 3:6, 4:6, 14. Its occupant is a beautiful man, another traditional metaphor: physical beauty represents spiritual beauty. His name is "tout en tout" (ESG 93/34-5), or Christ. The beautiful man warns and prepares Mordrain for the trials to come and how to save himself:

si garde bien que tu ne tiegnes compaignie a
 homme nul qui ne porte tel signe . car il nest
 pas de dieu qui o lui ne le porte . (ESG 94/4-5).

A sermon on faith follows to prepare Mordrain further, which includes some advice from Solomon to his son and the need to believe in God's omnipotence. The boat and occupant then disappear without Mordrain's being aware of it.

Following this vessel is a ship draped in black with black sails, a standard symbol for evil and death, occupied by a very beautiful woman presenting the "Eve pécheresse" concept of women favoured in the middle ages. The woman calls Mordrain by his pre-Christian name, Evalac, to confirm for the mediaeval reader her evil intent, and flatters Mordrain, attempting to seduce him on the basis of his former weakness: idolatry and women, the sins to which Solomon

succumbed in his later years. She promises to take him to "el plus delitable lieu ou tu onques entrases" (ESG 95/8-9), and to make him "signeur de quanques iou ai" (ESG 95/14), and attacks his new religion. She then threatens him with death by starvation on the island, completing the three temptations of Christ by the devil in Matthew 4:1: "concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum and superbia vitae".

Her next attack is on the occupant of the white ship:

Et saces que cil qui te dist quil feroit de
noir blanc et de maluais boin . saces de voir
quil est vns ochierres de gent & si natent ne
ne bee fors qua toi tuer . (ESG 95/34-6).

Her history which follows is the story of Lucifer which is seen again in the Queste del Saint Graal when Perceval is tempted in the same circumstances (QSG 104-110). Her departure is that of the "angry fée" : there is a terrifying storm which leaves her boat untouched:

Et la neif sen aloit parmi la tormente comme
se ce fust vn sousflement de vent (ESG 96/18-9).

The storm continues, and Mordrain would take cover in the cave but it is "si noire & si obscure" (ESG 96/22-3) that he faints, regaining consciousness in complete darkness, a warning of death of the soul. After fainting again, he wakes in daylight.

In the morning, a symbol of renewal, Mordrain prays and then sees the first ship returning from the east, the spiritual home of Christianity and the direction of the rising sun. Patch observes that in connection with Egyptian death vessels, and in the eleventh book of The Odyssey, as well as in oriental literature, notably The Thousand and One Nights with its voyages of Sinbad, that the "journey thus taken seems to be westward for any voyager in the Mediterranean."³⁷

The white vessel is laden with "toutes les plentes de viandes con peust deviser" (ESG 97/27-8). Further instruction follows with a reproach for his lack of faith. The black ship and its occupant are also explained, and Mordrain is told he will not understand his dream of the lion and the wolf (ESG 84/4-85/4), until he has driven the wolf away, and the devil has taken him by the left hand. Only then will he leave the rock. He explains Mordrain's presence on the rock: "por tant que tu le soffrisses por ton salveor" (ESG 97 n.16), the process of refining a Christian through punishment as seen in the Book of Job.

When offered the food that is on the ship, Mordrain refuses because he has been fortified by the words of his

³⁷

Patch, The Other World, p. 8 n.4, 20.

visitor, an echo of Christ's reply to Satan who tempts Him to make bread of stones to assuage his hunger:

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
(Matthew 4:4, Luke 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3)

Another obvious source in in the Gospel according to St. John (6:35) in Christ's statement: "I am the bread of life."

When the white ship disappears, the black vessel returns from the west, a direction associated, along with the north with Lucifer, the fallen angel who says in Isaiah 13-5 that he will sit ". . . in the sides of the north", or the opposite to God. The woman in the boat says that she has been to Sarras and seen Nascien dead. She also predicts that Mordrain will never see his wife again, and then promises great wealth which Mordrain refuses. She claims that the white ship comes "de male part" which like her previous attack is true of herself. The woman and her ship depart again with even more severe storm activity, including a bolt of lightning which destroys half the rock.

The battle for Mordrain's soul continues for six days with daily visits from the alternating black and white vessels. On the seventh day, the man informs him he will be tested again, and he will be delivered if he can resist:

se tu te ses garder del engin al anemi tu seras
tost deliures
se tu te pues cest ior garder de courecier ton
creator tu seras deliures de tous tes paours &
de tous maus terriens qui te sont auenu se tu

te gardes de croire le conseil au diable .
(ESG 103/32-6)

In the episode that follows, a very beautiful ship appears, accompanied by a terrible storm and then intense heat. Mordrain resists the temptation to take shelter on the ship. In the evening, another very beautiful vessel arrives with what appears to be the truth of the second visit from the black ship: that Nascien is dead. The vessel bears his own and Nascien's shields, and he recognises a horse he took from Tholomer, a vanquished enemy; the traveller appears to be the brother of Mordrain's late seneschal. On boarding, he finds a bier with Nascien's body, which causes him to faint. On regaining consciousness, he finds the ship far from shore, and makes the sign of the cross upon which all vanishes, bier and occupant (ESG 105/21-2). Contrary to Sommer's gloss, the vessel does not disappear with its contents, and Mordrain remains aboard.

The disappearance of evil objects when the sign of the cross is made dates back to the origins of Christianity, and this motif is repeated in the Queste as a device which saves Perceval from the temptations of the flesh (QSG 110/8-10). In Mordrain's episode is a mixture of fairy and land of the dead elements in the shape-shifting of the devil to appear to be the dead seneschal's brother, and the sudden disappearance at the sign of the cross. Travelling time is abbreviated when the black ship returns to report Nascien's

death, when it is already established that Mordrain is seventeen days' journey from home. Brown cites Greek and Roman precedents to support the location of the "land of the dead" on an island, such as Avalon, and suggests that another indication is the death-horse.³⁸

In Mordrain's and Perceval's cases, the return of the white ship after the illusion indicates that their sin has not been sufficient to disqualify them for a part in the Grail adventure. The author of the Estoire shows a practical turn of mind when he retains the ship for Mordrain, since Mordrain is well out at sea. By contrast, Perceval is never allowed on his temptress's vessel because he is wearing the sign of the cross on the sword, and when it reminds him to cross himself, the tent and bed disappear (QSG 110/7-10). The lady's ship remains visible, and she departs in it, hurling epithets at Perceval, creating a great storm, a feature seen more often in the Estoire than the Queste.

Mordrain's destiny in the Grail line is further indicated by the apparition of Salustes, the very saintly hermit in whose honour Mordrain had founded a church in Sarras. The apparition walks on water, purifies the vessel, and brings a message from Christ before interpreting Mordrain's

vision of the lion and the wolf. Mordrain is told that his daily visitor in the white ship was Christ, which would have been evident to the mediaeval reader or audience from the description of the ship, and the lineage of the Grail family is provided down to Galahad. The line will continue through Celidoine who is Mordrain's nephew and the son of Nascien.

Salustes is an imitation of Christ, evidenced by his walking on water as in John 6:17ff. Where Christ comforted his disciples throughout the storm, Salustes comforts Mordrain and disappears, leaving him in the purified and consecrated vessel, having been tested and found worthy. Mordrain may then proceed to the next step: reunion with Nascien and Celidoine, (to be discussed below, p.51):

Mordrain's counterpart in the Queste del Saint Graal is Perceval, who is transported to his island by a supernatural black horse, a sign of evil which becomes evident the moment Perceval makes the sign of the cross in fear for his life. The horse plunges into the water with the result that:

Si avint maintenant que l'eve esprise en plusors
leus de feu et de flamme clere, si qu'il sembloit
que l'eve arsisit (QSG 92/24-6).

In the morning, Perceval finds himself in a classic Other world setting:

. . . lors resgarde Perceval tot entor soi et
voit qu'il est en une montaigne grant et mer-
veilleuse et sauvage durement, qui estoit close
de mer tout entor, si largement qu'il ne voit
de nule part terre se trop loign non. Et lors

s'aperçoit qu'il est portez en une isle, mes il ne set en quele isle (QSG 93/12-17).

This landscape is compatible with Patch's observations:

The Otherworld realm is usually quite easy to identify. Its situation is various: on a mountain perhaps, or on an island, or cut off from the every-day world by some sort of water barrier.³⁹

The author of the Queste showed more imagination in the testing of Perceval than is seen in the testing of Mor-drain. In the first test, Perceval faces a moral dilemma as does Bohort: Perceval must decide whether he will take the side of the serpent or the lion cub in the allegory of the "Old Law, New Law". After hearing their arguments, he chooses correctly, and proceeds to the next stage with the lion, again the symbol of Christ, as moral protection and company. The second test is a dream or vision of the female owners of the lion and serpent; each demands his loyalty, which he accords to the young woman riding the lion. Both Perceval and Bohort must choose between the chivalric code which is often worldly, and true Christianity.

After his prayers the following morning, Perceval sees a white ship coming very quickly toward him. He hurries to meet it when it arrives "au pié de la roche" (QSG 99/5), thinking because of its speed that many people will be aboard. The vessel has some features of the one in the Estoire, it is

³⁹

Patch, "Mediaeval Descriptions", p. 604.

covered with white samite (QSG 99/10-11), the colour symbol of Christ, and a very rich silk material imported from the Orient and often mentioned in the romances to express fairy involvement. The sole occupant is a man dressed as a priest, wearing a crown of white silk on which is written Christ's name. He informs Perceval that he is on the island to be tested, and explains the vision of the serpent and the lion as the struggle between the Old Law and the New, before he departs. The lion then returns so that iconographically, Perceval is always protected by the Christian faith. In the afternoon, another vessel arrives:

il voit venir une nef autresi fendant come se
toz li venez dou monde la chaçassent; et devant venoit
uns estorbeillons qui fesoit la mer mover et les
ondes saillir de toutes parz car li estorbeillons
li toloit la veue de la nef. (QSG 104/28-32).

As in Mordrain's temptation, the ship is draped in black, and a very beautiful and well dressed woman is the occupant. Akin to Mordrain's temptress, she attempts to discourage him by saying that "Le Bon Chevalier" or Galahad is dead (QSG 110/10-11). She refuses to answer any questions about the gospel, changing the subject, and attempting to discredit the man in the white ship, calling him "uns enchanterres" (QSG 107/1), who did not provide food for Perceval. Her story is that of Lucifer also (see above, p. 30):

Et je fui si bele et si clere qu'il n'est nus qui
de ma biauté ne se poist merveillier: car je fui
bele sor toute rien. Et en cele biauté sanz faille

m'enorgueilli un poi plus que je ne deusse, et
dis une parole qui ne li plot pas. (QSG 107/23-6)

There is great heat associated with lechery or hell and the lady generously has a tent set up on the shore to protect Perceval. Symbolically, he is on the brink of disaster. He has not yet entered the ship since he is armed and wearing full Christian armour, including the cross on his sword, which is removed before he enters the tent, or the Pauline armour of Ephesians 6:11-17. The woman plays upon Perceval's inability to discern between the duties of a worldly knight and a "miles Christi", insisting that he pledge allegiance to her because it is the duty of a knight to help maidens in distress.

The real test comes in the evening when Perceval awakens. She tempts him with pleasures of the flesh to which he consents. She is put to bed, and he is about to join her when he sees the cross on his sword hilt and makes the sign of the cross. Tent and bed disappear most dramatically:

maintenant vit le paveillon verser, et une fumee
et une nublece fu entor lui, si grant que il ne
pot veoir gouste; et il senti si grant puor de
totes parz qu'il li fu avis que il fust en enfer.
(QSG 110/8-11).

Like Mordrain's temptress, this lady departs with a violent storm, and the sea in flame.

Perceval's reclothing of himself is a symbolic rearming of his Christian spirit. His solution to atone for the sin he has committed is to wound himself severely in the

left thigh, (QSG 110/29-31), sometimes a euphemism for castration, although this is an unlikely interpretation here since members of the Grail company were required to be whole. In connection with this, Roach says:

. . . for it had been prophesied in the Joseph (vs. 3052) that the members of the Grail company could not be 'de leur membres méheignié.'⁴⁰

Perceval is left alone without any obvious Christian protection such as the lion or the ship until dawn when the white vessel returns to explain what should have been obvious to Perceval: that the lady was evil, if he did not recognise her as a female incarnation of Lucifer. Nevertheless, he is still worthy to be a member of the Grail party. He is instructed to enter the white ship with the promise that he will see Bohort and Galahad in time.

The third person to undergo such elaborate testing is not a knight, but the daughter of King Label, who later marries Celidoine (see above, p. 16). Her episode is very similar to Mordrain's, although she has been left on the island accompanied by the messengers. The name of the island is Hippocrates' Island, and the point of the digression associated with him is to show the "Eve pécheresse" inherent nature of women. The first ship arrives at night, a time associated with moral danger and the devil, along with a

⁴⁰
The Didot Perceval, ed. W. Roach (Philadelphia, 1941), p. 87.

great flame which stirs up the sea and causes storms in the area, and seems ". . . que tuit cil dinfer y fuissent." (ESG 184/1-2).

The vessel which follows is "grant & uielle et gaste" (ESG 184/16), and occupied by a terrifying black giant with red eyes who demands their homage, in return for removing them from the island. His name is the "Wise Serpent" (ESG 185/5), and his power and preternatural knowledge are considerable. In spite of his warning that he alone would rescue them, they refuse, thinking him evil. His departure, like those of the temptresses is accompanied by a storm and flames with the added touch of horrifying noises "commes seles ississent dez bouches as maistres dinfer" (ESG 186/18-9).

Obviously the form of the temptation was altered for the female, since women were considered more likely to be terrified than seduced. The giant is probably a combination of Poseidon the earth-shaker and Zeus the shapeshifter, with borrowings from Revelations 6:8:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.

Later in Revelations, the "old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan" is bound by the angel of the bottomless pit (20:2). The storm was also probably inspired by Revelations 6:12: with the opening of the sixth seal:

. . . and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and

the moon became as blood.

The opening of the bottomless pit was undoubtedly another source of inspiration for the author or authors of the Estoire and the Queste when they looked for ways to describe evil:

And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.
(Revelations 9:2)

Sommer's gloss and page heading imply that the messengers are the ones being tested, but it seems much more likely that the object of attention is the girl who probably is a nominal Christian after her father's conversion, but whose faith must be tested for her to be truly worthy to be the wife of Celidoine, and an ancestress of the Grail knight. The messengers virtually disappear from the main action after the incident is over, whereas the girl plays an important and prominent role.

Unlike Mordrain and Perceval, Label's daughter has no preparation for her trial in the form of a white ship, but she does have the two messengers, who might be interpreted as angels since "angelos" in Greek means messenger. If this were the author's intention, he has not made it clear, or played down any such qualities, because they ask very ordinary questions of the old man who arrives in the boat the next day, although this may be a device to get information to the reader. The old man who arrives in the morning in the

small vessel, which, for a change, is not white, explains the vision of the night before and reveals that the ship in which the demon travelled was also a fiend which would have drowned them. Oddly, Label's daughter, and not the established Christian messenger, comes to a conclusion about the identity of the old man: he was Christ. The textual evidence is that the vessel suddenly vanished, there is an odour of "toutes lez espices du monde" (ESG 188/19) also mentioned in Song of Songs 3:6, 4:6,14), and the girl feels "rasasije et raemplie" (ESG 188/23), although she has had no food.

The second test is more subtle: the time is again night, and the girl hears a terrible cry near her. She, not the messengers, discovers the vessel:

une nef moult bele & moult cointe par samblant
 auironnee de cierges & de tortis ardans . et
 estoit plaine de toutes les rikeches terriennes
 que on porroit deuiser . et au bord de la nef
 tout droit . estoit vne damoisele . la plus bele
 et la plus cointe que vous onques ueissies et
 uestue si richement . . . (ESG 189/16-20).

She is here the converse of Christ who said:

I must work the works of him that sent me while
 it is day: the night cometh when no man can work.
 (John 9:4).

Although the "enemy" is unable to function during the day, he attempts to trick with light, to make them believe that there is no danger. Where the giant had been ugly, a very beautiful woman claims to have taken pity on them. She tells her history, saying that she is of Athens, and owns the city,

country and people around it, and she is the richest woman in the world. Like the giant, there is nothing that happens which she does not know the moment it occurs.

The story indicates that she is the goddess Athena after whom the city was named. Her request before allowing them to board is that they pay homage to her, another repetition of the giant's appearance. If she were a Christian, the castaways would accept her offer; when she reveals she is not, they refuse despite her threat that death awaits them on the island. Her next tactic, appropriately for Athena, is to try to reason with them, to prove that Christianity has caused them pain and suffering. Their continued refusal angers her and she departs surprisingly without the usual storm.

The castaways' continued faith is rewarded the next morning, "a eure de prime" (ESG 191/7); after prayer, they see a vessel coming from the west, normally the wrong direction for a holy ship, but here coming from Celidoine in the Western Sea to collect this group. In the vessel is an old man and a lion, indicating probably that this is the exile vessel for Celidoine, now on Solomon's ship. The old man offers to stay behind so that the three may take the boat and lion.

The appearance of the boat with the lion is an effort to tie matters up, to link with previous events, and bring the characters together so the plot may proceed. In three

days, all are brought together on the purified vessel which had been the scene of Mordrain's last test. Mordrain and the wounded Nascien are aboard with Celidoine, although this is not clear from the text which Sommer has used.

When the group arrives in Beirut, another apparition occurs: this time, it is Hermones, the holy hermit buried with Salustes, who walks on water. Clearly the author wished to give equal time to both hermits, and indulge in yet another repetition of a motif. Hermones has come to heal Nascien's wound received on Solomon's ship for his presumption in using the sword, and to bring news of Joseph and his son, Josephe, who would reach Britain that night:

tout aussi com il sont orendroit outre la mer
sans nef et sans auiron arriueront tout droit
en la grant bretagne . (ESG 194/19-20).

Another vessel arrives miraculously beside theirs, and Celidoine is ordered to board. He will not see his father again until they are reunited in the "promised land" which is Britain.

These are the testing vessels and the people tested by them. They are connected with the Grail line, but not directly in it. In each case, the person is warned and prepared as in the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4:1-11, with the exception of Label's daughter. The pattern requires that the person to be tested must first be exiled. This is usually achieved by supernatural means, often a vessel.

The testing follows and the reward for success is reunion, again by a supernatural marine vessel, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Although some exiles undergo elaborate testing, others do so to a lesser degree, and only two are spared. Of the second group, Nascien is the first. His adventure begins when Mordrain, his brother-in-law, is transported from his side by the Holy Spirit, which Nascien is unable to explain. A nobleman, Calafar, orders Nascien imprisoned, but he is freed by a detached red hand. Calafar follows but the pursuit ends when Nascien is enveloped by a cloud, an associate part of the red hand, which frightens Calafar's horse and he is thrown to the ground.

Nascien is transported by this supernatural means to the "Turning Island" in the western sea, where he has neither food nor water, but experiences highly allegorical dreams. In the morning, facing east to pray for deliverance, he looks out to sea where there is an object "qui ne sambloit pas plus grant dun chisne" (ESG 120/22-3). This may be read "in malo" or "in bono". In the former interpretation, the swan is evil, a hypocrite, being white without and black within. A mythological interpretation is that swans pull the sun-bark across the water at night as in Greek mythology where Helios is the sun-god; the swan in this instance is "in bono".

As the vessel draws nearer, Nascien sees that it is a very beautiful and richly decorated ship. On the side is an inscription:

Di va qui veuz dedens moi entrer garde que tu soies plains de foi car ie sui teus quil na en moi se foi non & creance ne tant ne quant iou guenchirai en tel maniere que tu nauras de moi soustenance ne tant ne quant anchois te faurai in quelconques lieu que tu seras aconseus en mescreance de quel eure que ce soit .
(ESG 121/7-12).

Nascien performs the ritual of crossing himself before entering as if in church, having decided the vessel has been sent by God. This is Solomon's ship which will be discussed in detail below. Nascien sees the wonders of the ship, but forgets the warning and thinks the bed is made to deceive him. For this moment of doubt, he is unceremoniously dropped into the sea as if through a trap door. He realises that he sinned by doubting and swims back to the island.

The next vessel Nascien sees comes the next morning after his morning prayers, from the east. In spite of his exploration of Solomon's ship, Nascien thinks this little vessel with the aged man inside must be the richest in the world:

Car ele estoit defors toute auirounee de pieres precieuses dont il en i auoit si grant plente que nasciens disoit a soi misme que li plus riches prinches del monde a son auis nen peust mie le moitie acater . (ESG 138/8-11).

From the description, this vessel would appear to represent the apostles, possibly deriving from the "fishers of men"

imagery, for the decoration is rich and highly impractical for a marine vessel:

. . . el bort de la neif dune part & dautres
 auoit saietes trusqua .xij . qui toutes estoient
 dargent ne mais que les pointes qui toutes estoient
 del plus fin or esmere que on peust trouver . &
 estoient par deuant si agues & si trenchans que
 a paines en peust on trouver nule si bien aguisie .
 (ESG 138/12-15).

Each of the arrows seems to represent a disciple, and the materials their qualities.

The old man informs Nascien of Calofer's death and instructs him to believe the news. When Nascien asks if he will see Solomon's ship again, the voyager says he will and explains the vessel on the "ecclesia est navis", or in this case, "navis est ecclesia" basis. The man's great age is probably a metaphor for wisdom (since the author seems quite fond of the obvious), and he too has travelled from Nascien's homeland in a supernatural or superhuman period of time. Combined with his age, the absence of other occupants and the grossly impractical decoration of the vessel, along with the telescoped travel time, one must assume that this is a supernatural or pilotless ship.

This is Nascien's preparation for the test which comes after he has been reunited with his son, Celidoine, who is not tested before or after boarding Solomon's ship, on which father and son are reunited, and travel to an island with a beautiful castle. Here they are threatened by a giant with

death for trespassing. Faced with this problem, Nascien seizes David's sword, but the blade breaks off near the handle, indicating that Nascien is not the destined possessor. He is guilty of the sin of presumption for which he is punished later. One of the divine voices informs him of the reason for his punishment. After David's sword breaks, another miraculously appears to deal with the giant, clearly an evil figure.

The child Celidoine is not tested at all. His exile vessel is a means of rescue, and he proceeds directly to Solomon's ship and later to another supernatural vessel which will take him to Britain where his performance of conversion is repeated with Duke Ganor. As a child, he is a symbol of purity, and a juvenile Christ figure in view of his actions. The adult Christ figure is Galahad in the Queste; he obviously needs no testing, having proven himself daily. Perceval's nameless sister, the "eternal nun", a Virgin and a Christ figure who sacrifices her life for another, also needs no testing: she has the knowledge of the ship which she conveys to Galahad, Perceval and Bohort. This group, the "Grail company" travels in another vessel, covered with white samite to reach Solomon's ship, but this must be considered as a messenger vessel, a stage as in religious rituals or vocations, or a form of anteroom to the "ecclesia".

From the foregoing, it would seem that those not directly in the Grail line undergo the most severe testing, particularly in the Estoire where the recently converted Christians are most thoroughly tested. The alternation of vessels, with the white usually preceding the evil or black vessel, is another feature of the tests which are conducted on the pattern of the temptation of Christ. This leads to the assumption that evil is part of God's plan as proposed by Boethius in Prose 12 where he and Lady Philosophy discuss God's almighty power and come to the conclusion that:

"Then evil is nothing, since God, who can do all things, cannot do evil."

and further:

. . . that God rules the universe by the exercise of his goodness, that all things willingly obey Him, and that there is no evil in nature.⁴¹

Although Solomon's ship is the final stage, it can reject a passenger for the slightest sin, as with Nascien, and with reference to those permitted to board, Esther Casier Quinn notes a similarity between the Lanzelet and Solomon's ship:

only certain people are destined to enter the tent, and the inscriptions convey the impression that to enter is a sign of moral superiority.⁴²

It will be seen later that Solomon's ship rejects evil and permits no confirmed sinner aboard.

41
Boethius, p. 72-3.

42
Quinn, p. 200.

Another interesting aspect of the testing vessels is that the white ships or boats are usually occupied by elderly, beautiful men, while beautiful women are aboard the black, illustrating the "Eve pécheresse" attitude so popular with St. Augustine the misogynist. The exception to this is the hideous giant sent to terrify Label's daughter, and Athena, the pagan goddess of wisdom sent with light to trick by reasoning or apparent reasoning.

The testing vessels have been much more effectively used in the Queste because Perceval alone is tested by means of vessels, and there is variety because Bohort is tested on land and on an intellectual as opposed to sensual basis: he must choose between the worldly chivalric code and Christian duty, and he must not kill his own brother regardless of the circumstances. With respect to the testing vessels and the proliferation of vessels generally in the Estoire, the inclination is to agree with Frappier that they are "due to a continuator whose talent was not equal to his pious intentions."

In other French Arthurian literature, Arthur's sister, Morgan, creates a proof ship for her adopted son Floriant in the thirteenth-century romance of Floriant et Florete.⁴³ The

⁴³ Floriant et Florete, ed. H. Williams (Michigan, 1947).

vessel has much in common with Solomon's ship in terms of description which will be discussed in chapter six; the aspect of interest here is the proof of Floriant, achieved by the vessel which is self-propelled and carries Floriant where he is needed, and to prove his chivalric skill.

The first adventure of the four may be compared to the Theseus legend, or the Christian David and Goliath, with the very young hero defeating the enemy and liberating people. The second depends on his being able to discern an "in malo" or "in bono" presentation of a traditional Christ symbol, the pelican, in an incident which has overtones of Theseus slaying the Minotaur. The third journey involves vegetation myths, such as Persephone or Demeter, with Floriant freeing maidens in the grip of two giants at Pentecost. His fourth exploit recalls Perceval's sister in the Queste being required to give her blood to save the leper, and also King Rion of Norgales in the Suite du Merlin⁴⁴ who wanted the beards of eleven kings to trim his cloak. The fifth voyage takes him to Arthur where the departure of the vessel indicates that he has reached his professional and geographical destination.⁴⁵

44

Suite du Merlin, op. cit., I, 202ff.

45

Floriant et Florete, ll. 2079-83.

Lucy Allen Paton notes many similarities between this story and the Lancelot story,⁴⁶ such as the arming of the hero by a woman, which also takes place in the Queste. Many of the adventures take place in "other world" settings and often appear to be fairy interpretations of the Grail pursuits.

In the Vulgate stories, the testing seems to follow the Christian ritual observed in church of facing east to pray, and making the sign of the cross before entering and on occasion after entry. The holy vessels come usually from the east to dispense information and prepare for the test to come. The vessels which test are black-draped with female occupants who reveal themselves to be Lucifer through their stories; their departures are often accompanied by violent storms indicating satanic rage. Testing is carried out only on those not directly in the Grail line, although they are closely associated.

The proof vessels are in the Solomon's ship mold, richly decorated and self-propelled by a supernatural force, whether fairy or divine. Success in the testing, and proof allows the candidates to proceed to the next step: reunion with their fellows, and ultimately with the creator, or Creator of the ship.

46

Fairy Mythology, p. 189-91.

III

REUNION VESSELS

The first reunion ship is in the Estoire and is the ship containing the apparition of the horse and Nascien's body which was the third temptation or testing vessel to come to Mordrain. The malevolent forces seem to have won since the ship moves off, but when Mordrain makes the sign of the cross and prays, the contents vanish, and he is left alone in the vessel. Inherent in the episode may be the testing of Job in the Old Testament where gratuitous punishment is a refining and purification process. Shortly afterward, Mordrain sees an apparition of Salustes, the holy hermit buried at Sarras, who purifies the ship. Like Christ, Salustes walks on water.

The actual order of reunion in the Estoire is extremely complicated on first reading, but is as follows: the child Celidoine in the boat with the lion meets Solomon's ship which he boards, and travels to the Turning Island where he is reunited with his father, and they in turn meet Mordrain on the newly purified vessel. He boards Solomon's ship briefly, and when the three are ordered to leave the vessel, they retire to the newly purified ship. Celidoine's rescue

vessel with the lion has collected a helpful hermit and gone to Hippocrates' Island to bring King Label's daughter and the messengers to the Western Sea where they meet Mordrain, Nascien and Celidoine on the purified ship. The group then travels together on this vessel for three days until they arrive at Baruth (modern Beirut), where another apparition, this time Hermones, the holy hermit buried with Salustes, also walks on water to heal Nascien's wound and inform them that Joseph of Arimathea and his son will travel that night to Britain "sans nef et sans airon" (ESG 194/19-20). While he speaks, yet another vessel arrives into which Celidoine is ordered. This is a separation, but the hermit promises that father and son will be reunited in Britain.

The reunion for Mordrain and Nascien with their families is short-lived; Nascien is ordered to set out for the sea, and finds Solomon's ship again (ESG 201/21-3). On the vessel is the scroll outlining the lineage of the Grail family, and he has a vision or dream of a man in red who informs him of the unorthodox crossing of Joseph of Arimathea and his group. Next day, his vessel meets another containing an old man sleeping, and instead of a beatific helpful hermit, an irascible old man vocally resents the intrusion on his sleep, which is the sole attempt at characterisation and humour in the Estoire. After interpreting the scroll, the hermit vanishes, leaving Nascien in the hermit's vessel to

collect the members of Joseph's company who could not travel on Joseph's shirt (see chapter 4 below). The period of time between the hermit's disappearance and Nascien's meeting the group is six months, or Easter, which has Biblical significance of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, but also has reference to the vegetation myth of Persephone; spring, like the Resurrection is a period of renewal of life. The period of time also corresponds to Lancelot's period of spiritual recovery and penance for his sin in the Queste. Divine Providence guides Nascien throughout that time and also is responsible for the reunion of the Christians in Britain. Mordrain has transported a group from Sarras, including his and Nascien's wife and Sarracinte, who will be Celidoine's wife, and all are reunited again in Britain.

As is clear from this long recitation of the supernatural reunion vessels, the motif has been handled rather indiscriminately in the Estoire. The purpose of the exile, proof and reunion initially is to form a circle, the symbol of perfection, in that the members of the Grail line return to their spiritual and geographical home, but with increased knowledge of their purpose and destiny. After the great reunion in Sarras with their families, the shape of the story becomes an omega read from right to left, or east to west in geographical terms. Within the Vulgate Cycle, the circle that begins in Sarras in the Estoire is completed in the Queste as

the last of the Grail line, Galahad, returns to the spiritual home for his highly symbolic death.

In the Queste, the motif of the supernatural reunion vessel has been much more carefully controlled. The white samite-covered vessel used for the preparation of Perceval for his test becomes the one in which he is removed from the rock; the same vessel collects Bohort after his failure and later Perceval's sister with Galahad whom she has brought. The moment they are aboard, the ship moves quickly "car li venz se feroit enz granz" (QSG 200/1). Very precise supernatural navigation is seen when they arrive at their interim destination:

Et lors arivent entre deus roches en une isle
sauvage, si reposte que ce estoit merveille,
et sanz faille ce ert uns regort de mer (QSG 200/26-8).

Perceval's sister then reveals more of her preternatural knowledge:

"Biau seignor, fet la damoisele, en cele nef
la est l'aventure por coi Nostre Sires vos a
mis ensemble: . . . " (QSG 200/31-2).

This is Solomon's ship whose location was predicted to Nascien in the Estoire:

"et pres diluec sera ceste nef . dusques a chele
heure que li daarains hom de ton linage i entera
pour reuenir a sarras auoec le saint uaisel que
len apele graal ." (ESG 202/33-6).

After ascertaining the history and purpose of Solomon's ship, the group returns to the white samite-covered vessel, the satellite and messenger of Solomon's ship. The next stop is

39

at Carcelois , where the group is reduced by the death of Perceval's sister, which introduces the third vessel in the story: the "nef" in which her body is laid to arrive at Sarras at the same time as Perceval, Bohort and Galahad.

Although this is a death ship, it is much more important as a metaphor for the purpose and aftermath of the Crucifixion: Lancelot undergoes his spiritual renewal on this vessel, spending a total of eight months or more before arriving at Corbenic, the Grail castle. The ubiquitous helpful hermits give him much instruction from the shore, and after one month, he is joined by his son, Galahad, and they spend six months together, occasionally going ashore.

Before boarding this vessel, Lancelot had to acknowledge his sin with Guinevere and determine to change his life. To this end, he realises his lack of grace, and atones, receiving religious instruction from a hermit, and wearing a hairshirt which he vows never to remove. He must renounce Guinevere in spite of his debt to her for arming him when Arthur forgot. This provides a contrast between the "Eve pécheresse" who armed the father, and the Virgin type who arms the son, which underlines the contrast between "Old Law, New Law", of which Christ, or Galahad is the transition point.

47

For the symbolism of this, see E. Mâle, The Gothic Image trans. D. Nussey (New York, 1958), p. 170, illustration.

Lancelot is the example of the "courtly love" code of chivalry of which the Church disapproved. In the Queste, it represents the "old order" to be overcome by the new form of chivalry personified by Galahad, the "miles Christi", which was the original intention of chivalry. Lancelot, like Gauvain, is guilty of what Matarasso calls "bankruptcy in the spiritual order"⁴⁸ and they are prime examples of what she considers to be the purpose of the Queste story:

The Quest sets out to reveal the inadequacies and dangers of the courtly ideal. By allowing his heroes to retain their traditional roles and character, the author is able to show how their much-vaunted attributes lead them to the outcome one would least have looked for; . . .⁴⁹

When Lancelot eventually arrives at "l'eve de Marcoise" (OSG 246/7-8), he must truly choose: iconographically as Matarasso indicates, "his arrival at the river marks a crucial stage in Lancelot's pilgrimage. Like Perceval, he has come to the end of his own possibilities."⁵⁰ He stays there and during his sleep, a voice "appears" telling him to put on his armour, undoubtedly the Pauline armour of Ephesians 6:11-17. A sign of his spiritual regeneration is that the vessel comes to him, and Galahad's joining him is an even greater indication of his sincere desire to repent: he has reached a point in his renewal where he is worthy of

⁴⁸ Matarasso, p. 19. ⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 15. ⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 293, n.3.

Galahad's company. Lancelot's character presented a problem to the author which Frappier notes:

In the portrayal of Lancelot, the author of the Queste was confronted with a problem. As the ideal of worldly chivalry and romantic passion, Lancelot must be condemned, but as the father of the messianic Galaad, he must be treated with sympathy. The contradiction is solved by making him a sincerely repentant sinner.⁵¹

The final reunion is of the three Grail knights and takes place on Solomon's ship. There is a gap of five years during which Perceval and Galahad travel together with many adventures until they meet Bohort. The three go to Corbenic where the liturgy of the Grail is read. They are then ordered to leave and go "tout ensi come aventure vous conduira" (QSG 272/13). This takes them to the sea and Solomon's ship in which they travel to Sarras where Galahad is permitted to see the mysteries of the Grail. He and Perceval die there, leaving Bohort to report back to Arthur. It is unusual that the three are permitted aboard Solomon's ship without the preliminary of the white ship as before, but probably represents their increased spirituality and worthiness, improved by their stay at Corbenic. It is also further evidence of the author's economy and discrimination.

51
ALMA, p. 305.

52
See Matarasso, p. 293, n.44 for a discussion of the word "adventure", especially the need to have the will "aligned with the divine purpose".

In each reunion in both the Estoire and the Queste, usually a lesser holy figure is transported, often in the vessel covered with white samite, or its many equivalents in the Estoire. This person is taken to the very holy, or Christ figure on Solomon's ship. True to its message, Solomon's ship rejects those unconfirmed in their faith, or who do not have true faith. Sarracinte, in the Estoire, and the messengers do not board Solomon's ship, but are reunited with the members of the Grail line in a sort of ante-chamber, the purified ship. Anyone boarding Solomon's ship must previously have satisfied what Morse considers a precondition of holiness: spiritual cleanness.⁵³ This does not preclude previous sin, but requires penance to have been paid. Lancelot cannot board Solomon's ship because he has not made sufficient spiritual progress, but he redeems himself to the point where he is admitted to the Grail castle and allowed to see some of its mysteries. His reunion with Galahad is itself a form of communion and recognition of his redemption, and Galahad is a reward and spiritual protection for his father during their six months together. Their separation comes, significantly, at Easter, when Galahad announces that they will not meet again "devant le grant jor espoantable

53

G. Morse, The Pattern of Judgment in the "Queste" and "Cleanness" (Columbia, 1978), p. 41.

54

Ibid, p. 119.

que Nostrès Sires rendra a chascun ce qu'il avra deservi: et ce sera au jor del Juise." (QSG 252/19-20).

Another form of reunion or communion is between Perceval and his sister whose death ship arrives at Sarras the day he does, exactly as she had prophesied, thus completing the Grail fellowship. In life and in death, she is responsible for every reunion, except that from the Grail castle to Sarras. Curiously, her counterpart is the Estoire, Sarracinte, another Virgin figure, never boards Solomon's ship. With the arrival of the two ships on the same day at Sarras, the circle of the Vulgate Cycle is completed and the Christ figure who left, the child Celidoine, returns as Galahad, the perfect "miles Christi".

Throughout the Vulgate Cycle, the pattern for members of the Grail line or company is separation, usually by supernatural means in the Estoire, testing or proof, and reunion which is the reward for success.

Other reunion vessels are usually found in love stories, courtly or otherwise. The non-Arthurian Partenopeu de Blois⁵⁵ is very close to "Guigemar" by Marie de France, to the extent that some critics have been misled to confuse the human or fairy quality of the two mistresses. As in the

55

Partenopeu de Blois, ed. J. Gildea (Villanova, 1967)
Vol. I.

Vulgate Cycle, the reunion is the reward for faith, although it is amorous fidelity which is recompensed. The return of the vessel for the separation of the lovers, and for the lady's escape is an approval of what is basically adulterous love.⁵⁶ The presence of the ship suggests the preternatural knowledge and purpose of Solomon's in the Vulgate Cycle which would appear to have been composed after the "lais", but where the latter has a very holy purpose, Guigemar's richly decorated fairy vessel waits to rescue either Guigemar or his lady.

56

For a discussion of the theme of courtly love in its historical context, see C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), chapter 1, notably pp. 9-18.

IV

UNUSUAL SHIPS

Reference has been made previously to the fact that Josephe, the son of Joseph of Arimathea in the Vulgate Cycle, would cross to Britain "sans nef et sans airon" (ESG 202/28). The actual vessel is Josephe's shirt which miraculously accommodates the truly faithful one hundred and fifty, and rejects those who are somewhat lacking. Rejecting evil, or the less than completely faithful Christians is a human characteristic it shares with Solomon's ship (see below p. 90).

The event occurs in highly symbolic circumstances. The sea is calm, the night very clear. It is the "samedi deuant la resurection nostre signour" (ESG 210/36). Faced with the seemingly impossible task of crossing the body of water, Josephe is instructed by one of the omnipresent divine voices:

iosephe ni entre pas ensi . anchois met deuant cels
qui portent le saint graal . & puis oste le chemise
de ton dos & puis di a ton pere quil mete le pie
sour le giron & quant il li aura mis . si apele
tous cels qui tu as baisies & fait autretel faire
a chascun . & sil ont bien garde ce quil promist-
rent a lor salueur il poront bien tout estre sour
le giron . & quant il i auront mis le pie il poront
bien tuit passer . Et si dist que cil qui naura
bien tenu sa promesse ni pora remanoir & chis
giron lor sera nef & galie . & les portera ains
quil soit aiourne outre ceste mer par dela a
lautre riue qui est en la terre qui vostre sera .
(ESG 211/3-11).

Josephe follows the instructions and the shirt extends to permit all to "board".

Among those left behind are Symeu who later wounds Pierre (see above "voyages of healing" p. 20), and Symeu's son, who are collected later by Nascien in a more traditionally shaped vessel, although this is also controlled by supernatural forces. Josephe's shirt has its direction controlled after a fashion: Josephe holds the shirt by the sleeve and walks before, pulling the vessel behind him. Like the holy hermits, Salustes and Hermones, Josephe's walking on water is another imitation of Christ (Matthew 14:25-32).

The time required for the journey is extremely abbreviated: the vessel arrives in Britain before daybreak. Other divinely abbreviated time spans occur in the Estoire first when Mordrain is literally spirited in nine hours to the rock where he is tested, normally a journey of seventeen days (ESG 96/7), and again when Nascien is removed from prison by the red hand to the Turning Island (ESG 114/33).

Oriental literature with its tales of magic carpets and possibly the "Voyages of Sindbad" in The Thousand and One Nights⁵⁷ were undoubtedly the inspiration for the shirt which becomes a boat. Lot argues for an oriental source for

a great deal of what appears in the Estoire:

D'origine orientale, à coup sûr, sont l'"Histoire d'Hippocrate", la "Femme de Salomon", la "Nef de Salomon", etc.

...
Quantité de traits dérivent de sources orientales, mais sans qu'on puisse déterminer si la transmission est orale ou écrite.⁵⁸

This argument is supported by evidence of Pierre Gallais which places Robert de Boron, on whose story of Joseph the Estoire is based, in the Orient around 1206-1210.⁵⁹

Among the Biblical sources which may have inspired the incident are the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus (14:21-31) to allow Moses, on whom the character of Joseph seems loosely to be based, to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. As previously mentioned, the walking on water is drawn from the New Testament. The germ of the idea for the shirt itself may be from Acts 11:5:

. . . and in a trance I saw a vision. A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners.

Outside the Vulgate Cycle, unusual vessels include Mordred's cradle in the Suite du Merlin (I:205). This in turn seems to come from the story of the infant Moses in

58

F. Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose (Paris, 1954), pp. 208-10. Hereafter cited as Etude LP.

59

P. Gallais, "Robert de Boron en Orient" in Mélanges de langue et de littérature du moyen âge et de la Renaissance offerts à Jean Frappier (Genève, 1970), pp. 310-19.

the ark of bulrushes in Exodus 2:3 in the Old Testament version of the "Slaughter of the Innocents". The Perseus legend also is involved with a certain irony since Mordred's attempts on his father's life are deliberate.

Apart from shirts and cradles, in the non-Vulgate Cycle material, swans are occasionally found pulling vessels. ⁶⁰
Le Chevalier au Cygne has a mixture of folklore, superstition and Northern mythology, in the form of a variation on the Lohengrin theme. The folklore and superstition elements are the seven children born simultaneously to a woman who, contrary to superstition, has not committed multiple adultery. The children are born with gold collars, and are sent by a wicked grandmother to be killed, but are found and brought up by a kindly monk. The collars are removed from all but one child who retains human form while the others become swans, and when the collars are replaced all regain human form, save one child whose collar was melted down by the grandmother. It is this swan-child who draws the boat in which his brother, Elyas, travels. Elyas marries on condition that his wife promise never to question him about himself; when the promise is broken he leaves in the swan-drawn boat.

60

La Chanson du Chevalier au Cygne et de Godefroid de Bouillon, ed. C. Hippeau (Paris, 1852-77), vol. I. (Reprinted Genève, 1969).

The story of Guerrehés in The Continuation of the Old French Perceval⁶¹ provides another swan-drawn boat. The swan is linked with its normal symbolism of death, for in the boat is a body in which a lance is lodged. A note with it demands vengeance for the murder by the person who draws the lance from the body.

The author, or authors of the Vulgate Cycle have been somewhat uninventive with their unusual marine vessels, compared with Celtic literature where a seal is a form of transportation⁶². Lucy Allen Paton provides a fairly long list of supernatural marine vessels, including a horse, and a little lead boat⁶³. The author of the Estoire which has the only extraordinary supernatural vessel, seems to prefer supernatural air transport for the members of the Grail line when they escape from their enemy Calafer. This mode of transport undoubtedly stems from oriental sources and the Old Testament.

⁶¹
The Continuation of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes, ed. W. Roach (Philadelphia, 1949), I, 385-8.

⁶²
 A. C. L. Brown, The Origin of the Grail Legend, op. cit., p. 322.

⁶³
Fairy Mythology, p. 16-17.

DEATH/DEPARTURE, OTHERWORLD VOYAGES AND
VENGEANCE VESSELS

Among the supernatural death or departure vessels, possibly the most famous is that in which Arthur is taken away after the battle of Salisbury. The vessel appears near the end of La Mort le Roi Artu⁶⁴, marking the end of an era and the end of the Vulgate Cycle. Despite its literary position at the end, the last shall be first because it is the vessel which conveys Arthur from this world to another, and also because the person of Arthur and his passing from this world have been a source and topic of heated discussion from mediaeval times to the modern day.

The earliest known mention of Arthur, according to Fletcher⁶⁵, is in the Historia Britonum of Nennius, on which Geoffrey of Monmouth based his Historia Regum Britanniae, although Lewis Thorpe says that Geoffrey of Monmouth himself is a further subject of discussion, and that:

⁶⁴ La Mort le Roi Artu, roman du XIII^e siècle, ed. J. Frappier (Collection des Textes littéraires français, 1958). Hereafter cited as Mort Artu. The entries refer to paragraphs and line numbers.

⁶⁵ R. H. Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles (New York, 1906).

Whether the author of the Historia Regum Britanniae was Geoffrey of Monmouth himself, or some curious pseudo-Geoffrey, it remains true that much, if not most of his material is unacceptable as history; and yet history keeps peeping through the fiction. (Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 19)

Whoever the author, the final sighting of Arthur in his work is as follows:

Arthur himself, our renowned King, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to. He handed the crown of Britain over to his cousin Constantine, the son of Cadur Duke of Cornwall: this in the year 542 after our Lord's Incarnation. (Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 261).

The personage of Arthur himself, whether he was a king or an outstanding commander has aroused much curiosity, and from the above account, another question arises: the location of Avalon, unspecified in Geoffrey's account, and variously located as Glastonbury by Gerald of Wales (Gerald of Wales, p. 286), Richmond Castle in Yorkshire where Arthur sits spellbound⁶⁶, the Tigris⁶⁷, and Sena, an island⁶⁸ also associated with Merlin off the coast of Brittany.

Further mystery arises about the person with whom Arthur went. Geoffrey is silent, but Gerald of Wales does identify a person:

66

E. S. Hartland, The Science of Fairy Tales (London 1890, 1925), p. 211.

67

R. S. Loomis, ALMA, p. 64-71.

68

Idem, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance, p. 191.

After the Battle of Camlann ... killed his uncle... Arthur: the sequel was that the body of Arthur, who had been mortally wounded, was carried off by a certain noble matron called Morgan, who was his cousin, to the Isle of Avalon, which is now known as Glastonbury. Under Morgan's supervision, the corpse was buried in the churchyard there. (Gerald of Wales, p. 286).

Gerald displays some Welsh chauvinism when he blames the "credulous Britons and their bards" for inventing the legend of Morgan as a sorceress who:

. . . had removed Arthur's body to the Isle of Avalon so that she might cure his wounds there. According to them, once he has recovered from his wounds this strong and all-powerful King will return to rule over the Britons in the normal way. (Gerald of Wales, p. 286).

These are the more or less historical, or rather "chronicle" sources which gave rise to the vast quantity of literature about Arthur, who may or may not have been a king, have been Celtic, British or Breton, or may never have existed at all.

The 'Twilight of the Gods' as Frappier calls it ⁶⁹, is contained in the story of La Mort le Roi Artu. Arthur, wounded by Mordred at the Battle of Salisbury, orders Girflet to throw his sword, Excalibur, into the lake where it is seized by a detached arm, presumably belonging to the Lady of the Lake. Arthur then commands Girflet to leave, and as he departs, a rain "moult grant et moult merveilleuse" (Mort Artu 193/32-3) begins to fall, causing Girflet to pause and look back to see a ship full of women, one of whom is Morgan

⁶⁹
ALMA, p. 313.

here called "la sereur le roi Artu" (Mort Artu 193/42,44). Arthur enters the vessel with his horse and arms. Three days later, Girflet reports to the "Noire Chapele" where he finds a tomb on which is written:

CI GIST LI ROIS ARTUS QUI PAR SA VALEUR MIST EN
SA SUBJECTION . XII . ROIAUMES (Mort Artu 194/23-5).

To this point, technically Arthur is a wounded hero who has a supernatural destination. He has foreknowledge of the ritual to be followed: he must return Excalibur to the lake, although Girflet needs three attempts to part with it, and then Morgan will arrive. Supernatural communication operates between brother and sister, since Morgan could not have known of the wound or the location. Only Arthur, Girflet and Lucan had survived the battle (Mort Artu 191/9), and gone with him to the Noire Chapele. Moreover, Girflet did not know where they were going when they went to the sea. Arthur had information about the final battle from Merlin:

Celui jor chevalcha li rois vers les plains de
Salesbieres au plus droit que il pot onques, comme
cil qui bien savoit que en cele plaigne seroit la
grant bataille mortex dont Merlins et li autre
devineor avoient assez parlé. (Mort Artu 178/1-5).

Arthur also knew that Morgan would be in Avalon as she had informed him at "Le Château merveilleux" when she refused to go to Camelot with him:

. . . quant ge me partirai de ci, ge irai en l'ille
d'Avalon ou les dames conversent qui sevent toz les
enchantemenz del siecle. (Mort Artu 51/76-8).

Her presence to collect Arthur indicates preternatural knowledge of his destiny, in keeping with her literary personality and the 'Breton hope' attributed to Wace by L. A. Paton.⁷⁰

The double departure of Arthur in Morgan's boat and then in the tomb is considered a compromise between the fairy aspect and the claims of Glastonbury, of which Gerald says:

In our own lifetime Arthur's body was discovered at Glastonbury, although the legends had always encouraged us to believe that there was something otherworldly about his ending, that he had resisted death and had been spirited away to some far-distant spot. (Gerald of Wales, p. 281).

In his excellent study, Frappier attributes Arthur's end as follows:

Artus repose donc lui aussi en terre chrétienne: il a été restitué au christianisme par le monde de la féerie qui n'a pu le guérir et qui s'incline mystérieusement devant la religion.⁷¹

Elsewhere Frappier praises the author:

. . . for thus preserving and embellishing the ancient myth of Arthur's departure to Avalon for healing, although he has adopted a compromise, for instead of reaching Avalon, Arthur is entombed by the fays in the Noire Chapelle -- a concession to the discovery of Arthur's body at Glastonbury in 1191.⁷²

70

Fairy Mythology, p. 25.

71

J. Frappier, Etude sur "La Mort le Roi Artu" (Genève-Paris, 1961), p. 251. Hereafter cited as Etude MA.

72

ALMA, p. 310-11.

The idea of an island otherworld is attributed by Patch to the Greeks, and to The Odyssey in particular with its Elysian Fields and ever pleasant weather⁷³. He cites instances of mediaeval maps which give the location of Paradise as being in the east, possibly India or Asia⁷⁴, and also mentions the Greek garden of Hesperides where "the apples there guarded by a dragon represent the Otherworld fruit"⁷⁵. Avalon is often associated with apples, and another name for it is "Insula Pomorum ... a place where life lasts for a delightfully indefinite period and where the inhabitants are women whose sway is complete."⁷⁶ This concept is much more attractive and in keeping with the legend of Arthur than Brown's strange explanation for Arthur's inactivity in the works of Chrétien de Troyes:

That Arthur is leading an enchanted life somewhere on the borders of the land of the dead is the situation, I think, in all of Chrétien's romances.

My hypothesis that Camlan is in the past and that Arthur is leading an enchanted life in some castle belonging to the land of the dead explains his inactivity in all of Chrétien's romances, as for example at the beginning of Erec and of Yvain. In two of the romances, Lancelot and Perceval, this inactivity becomes inability.⁷¹

73

The Other World, p. 16-18.

74

Ibid, p. 134.

75

Ibid, p. 17.

76

A. C. L. Brown, The Origin of the Grail Legend (op. cit.), p. 106-8.

Whether Arthur and Avalon are here or in an "Otherworld" remains a great mystery. Various claims have been made for him as a descendant of Irish mythology, or Germanic, and of course, Celtic as above. The legend of Arthur and Avalon lives and transcends all theories. Adler states the prevailing literary attitude most eloquently:

. . . Artus' final departure to a blissful Otherworld strikes the note, not of death, but of a serene persistence of life.⁷⁷

For those aware, the preferred image is of Arthur as the once and future king who lives in Avalon with his sister Morgan in a setting which recalls the "Ille de Joie" fairy-like place where Lancelot retired with Pelles's daughter to convalesce:

fors seulement pour la damoisele qui estoit fille
au roy pelles & pour les autres qui avec lui
estoient qui faisoient la greignor ioie que nulles
femmes feissent onques . Ne ia si grant yuer ne
feist que elles ne venissent chascun iour caroler
au pin entour lescu qui y pendoit.⁷⁸

A similar death or departure can be found in the
⁷⁹
Perlesvaus where Perceval first simulates death, and later
departs. The simulated death (I, 4080-4128) is rather

77

A. Adler, "Aesthetic vs. Historical Criticism in La Mort le Roi Artu", PMLA LXV (1950), 939.

78

The Agravain, ed. H. O. Sommer, The Vulgate Version
... (op. cit.)V, p. 402/37-41.

79

Le Haut Livre du Graal: Perlesvaus. ed. W. Nitze,
T. Jenkins, et al. (Chicago, 1932-7). Entries refer to lines.

similar to that of Galahad on Solomon's ship returning to Sarras (QSG 275/5-10). The departure of Perceval comparable to that of Arthur is found when he visits the Isle of Elders. Like Arthur, he is given knowledge about his end. He is told that when he returns, he will have the crown of gold and be king of an island nearby which is "molt plenteürose de toz biens" (I/9624); the signal for his return will be the sound of the horn which comes when he is in the Grail chapel. Perceval returns to the isle with the body of the Fisher King and his mother's, after which he is never seen again.

Josephes nos recorde que Perlesvaus s'en parti en tel maniere, ne onques puis ne sot nus hom terriens que il devint, ne li estoires n'en parole plus.
(Perlesvaus I/10162-4)

Another otherworld voyage is that of Gauvain in
 Le Roman de Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal⁸⁰ by Chrétien de Troyes which seems to be a variation on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, combined with Odysseus's visit to the land of the dead.⁸¹ Gauvain must cross a river with a ferryman who is obviously Charon and the river is the Styx (7372-7472). He meets Arthur's mother, Ygerne, who apparently has been dead for many years. Surprisingly, he obtains permission to

80

Chrétien de Troyes, Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal, ed. W. Roach. (Paris-Genève, 1959). Hereafter cited as Perceval. The entries refer to line numbers.

81

Homer, The Odyssey, trans. W. H. Rouse. (New York, 1937), Book XI, pp. 124-37.

return to the real world, but on the condition that he be back at the "Roche de Canguin", Ygerne's castle, that night.

The journey by Gauvain is generally accepted as an otherworld voyage, but R. M. Spensley argues the contrary, that "if the romance had been completed, the castle and the ladies would have become a part of the Arthurian world, not vice-versa."⁸² As the story stands incomplete, the inclination is to accept the otherworld interpretation of the incident.

A true death ship is that of Perceval's sister who gives her life for the leper woman in the Queste. By this act, she is simultaneously the Virgin and the Christ. As she is dying, she gives instructions to Perceval, revealing her supernatural knowledge of what is to come, a talent she had shown before when she led Galahad to the ship to explain the meaning of it. She asks Perceval to place her body in a ship:

". . . si tost come je seré deviee, metez moi en une nacele au plus prochain port que vos troveroiz pres de ci: si me lessiez aler ainsi come aventure me voldra mener. Et je vos di que ja si tost ne vendroiz a la cité de Sarras, ou il vos convendra aler après le Saint Graal, que vos me troveroiz arivee desoz la tor. Si fetes tant por moi et por honor que vos mon cors façoiz enterrer ou palés esperitel. Et savez vos por quoi je le vos requier? Por ce que Galaad i girra et vos o lui." (QSG 241/16-24).

When Perceval's sister speaks of being set adrift to go "come aventure me voldra mener", she does not mean chance. Frappier points out the different concepts of Fortune in the middle ages, and says of the Queste:

Il est hors de doute enfin que l'auteur de La Queste del Saint Graal voit uniquement dans la Fortune, que d'ailleurs il ne personnifie jamais, l'action de la divine Providence. Le mot 'fortune' et son synonyme 'aventure', employés tous deux comme noms communs, signifient dans La Queste: hasard conforme à la volonté de Dieu.⁸³

The three knights have a boat built and covered with a rich silken cloth or awning and a beautiful bed is placed as in Solomon's ship, in the middle of the vessel; the practical reason may have been for balance of a small boat. This incident foreshadows Galahad's sleeping on the bed in an imitation of death on Solomon's ship before arriving at Sarras.

Among the contents of the vessel is a letter placed by the girl's head stating her ancestry and the circumstances of her death and the deeds in which she took part. This is very similar to the letter left under the crown in Solomon's ship. The boat containing the body of Perceval's sister is then pushed out to sea, after which the knights prepare to leave, refusing to re-enter the castle. Suddenly a terrible storm destroys the castle, indicative of divine rage, and an equivalent to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the

book of Genesis (19:24-5).

From this point, the vessel containing the girl's body is both a healing and reunion boat. Lancelot is the knight who experiences a spiritual "voyage of healing". He is joined after a month by Galahad who remains with him for six months. The episode of Lancelot's spiritual renewal is an example of the "life in death" paradox of Matthew 10:39 and Luke 17:33, in which the bed on the vessel becomes the cross of the Crucifixion, in the traditional metaphor.⁸⁴

In common with many other holy vessels, particularly in the Estoire, there are sweet smells emanating which strike Lancelot as he boards:

Et si tost come il i est, si li est avis qu'il sente toutes les bones odors dou monde et que il soit raempliz de toutes les bones viandes que onques goustast hom. (QSG 247:1-4).

The source and inspiration for the odours may well be the Song of Solomon with its frequent references to spikenard, myrrh, frankincense, fruit and flowers (1:12-3, 3:6, 4:13-4 among others).

The boat is self-propelled, or rather is transported by the wind. Arrivals take place in the middle of the night; Lancelot is commanded to arm and "entre en la premiere nef que tu troveras." (QSG 246/23-4). Galahad boards at that time (QSG 250/5), and Lancelot arrives at the Grail Castle

(QSG 253/3). When the passenger is aboard, or when the ship decides to depart, the signal is often the phrase, "einsi se feri li venz en la nef et la fist partir ..." (QSG 249/11-12), which seems to be an attempted explanation for the force behind the navigation. In this respect, Patch identifies various 'Fortunas', among which are 'Fortuna the Guide' who often conducts navigation, and a close relation, 'Fortune of the Sea', who also directs vessels by controlling the winds⁸⁵. Possibly the authors of the Estoire and the Queste used this as a solution to explain rationally a supernatural event, and yet retain the mystery.

The vessel miraculously does arrive at Sarras the same day as Perceval, Galahad and Bohort, completing the circle of the Vulgate Cycle, in the manner of Solomon's ship. This is a form of reunion of the Grail company of which the girl is a part. Esther Casier Quinn relates Perceval's sister and her sacrifice to the Maimed King and Galahad, that the three "reenact symbolically a part of the agony, death and resurrection of Christ", and says with reference to the bed on the vessel that "the conception of it as the cross -- has influenced the conception of these other beds", (i.e. the beds in the romances)⁸⁶.

85

The Goddess Fortuna, pp. 99-103.

86

Quinn, p. 204.

The death barque of the Queste has its parallel in the Mort Artu in the "in malo" death vessel of the Demoiselle d'Escalot who has virtually committed suicide dying of love for Lancelot, a quasi-suicide which Frappier explains as a form of "accidie":

. . . si elle ne se tue pas, elle se laisse glisser vers la mort avec un goût obstiné du néant.⁸⁷

He also identifies the arrival of her death ship as the fifth and final act of the drama of her love for Lancelot⁸⁸.

She, like Perceval's sister, and the bed on Solomon's ship, has a letter placed in the vessel with her condemning Lancelot for his failure to love her which Frappier thinks was inspired by the Queste⁸⁹, while the "aumônière" in which the letter is found was borrowed from Solomon's ship.⁹⁰

While the vessels of the Queste and the Mort Artu must be considered in opposition to each other: the death vessel of Perceval's sister "in bono" and the Demoiselle d'Escalot's "in malo", they share much in the way of description and appurtenances, including Lancelot, the most important

87 Etude MA, p. 272. 88 Ibid., p. 267-72.

89 Ibid., p. 212-14. 90 Ibid., p. 213, n.4.

common factor, who is spiritually elevated and renewed in the Queste: the death vessel of the Mort Artu is another step downward in the 'Twilight of the Gods' of Frappier⁹¹ who also remarks on the contrast in atmosphere of the two stories typified by the vessels:

Dans La Mort Artu, l'arrivée de la nef funèbre s'accorde avec l'atmosphère de tristesse qui enveloppe la cour depuis l'incident du fruit empoisonné et l'accusation lancée contre la reine par Mador de la Porte; l'épisode de La Queste est au contraire pénétré d'une joie mystique.⁹²

Lot compares the Demoiselle d'Escalot to another female involved with Lancelot in the Agravain who offers a love "chaste et fidèle" to which the Demoiselle d'Escalot "en est une réplique tragique".⁹³

If the vessel of the Mort Artu has links with the death barque of Perceval's sister, it also looks forward to the end of the Mort Artu, and the passing of Arthur himself, about which Frappier says:

En même temps que la demoiselle d'Escalot, la nacelle mystérieuse emporte pathétiquement le mirage "breton". Il reparait vers la fin du roman pour s'évanouir bientôt avec la nef de Morgain et des 'dames', les fées celtiques. S'il cède à la discipline du christianisme, l'auteur n'a pas brisé l'arc-en-ciel de la féerie.⁹⁴

⁹¹ ALMA, p. 313.

⁹² Etude MA, p. 246.

⁹³ A. Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste del Saint Graal, (Paris, 1921). p. 92.

⁹⁴ Etude MA, p. 261.

The importance of the young girl's death vessel in the Mort Artu is that it marks Lancelot's failure to maintain his spiritual progress. Morse says that "his spiritual progress is not sufficient to allow him to participate in the adventure of Solomon's ship"⁹⁵, and his relapse in the Mort Artu has proven an enigma, in view of the optimistic progress, albeit insufficient, in the Queste where Whitehead suggests that Lancelot be accepted:

. . . not as a warning, but as an encouragement, demonstrating that, low as human nature may descend, a restoration is always possible through the way of humility and love.⁹⁶

The hope of the religious Queste quickly gives way to the reality of the secular Mort Artu because the death and the circumstances of the maiden's death alienates many of the knights since she imputes her death to Lancelot, "le plus preudome del monde et ... le plus vilain" (Mort Artu 71/17-8). The letter is in effect a call for vengeance and the complete antithesis of the letter placed with Perceval's sister, or the one on Solomon's ship.

The combination of death vessel, and letter demanding vengeance is a device that is not confined to the Vulgate Cycle. It appears in La Vengeance Raguidel where another floating

95

Morse, p. 119.

96

F. Whitehead, "Lancelot's Redemption" in Mélanges ... Delbouille (Gembloux, 1964), p. 739.

coffin arrives in much the same circumstances as the one in the Mort Artu⁹⁷. Both depend on the wind and tide to arrive at their destinations, and Arthur is the first to see them in each case. As in the vessels previously mentioned, this too has a bed on which lies a corpse, and a purse attached to the belt of the dead knight contains the letter setting out the conditions for vengeance. This is ultimately achieved by Gauvain who withdraws the truncheon from the body, and Yder who removes the five rings from the fingers of the corpse. Although it is a vengeance story, it veers heavily to the romantic with Gauvain renouncing the "amie" of the dead knight in favour of Yder.

Yet another such vessel is found in The First Continuation of the Old French Perceval by Chrétien de Troyes⁹⁸, with the difference that this vessel is drawn by a swan (see above p. 64), associated as it normally is with death. In the body is a lance and a letter asking that the body be left in the hall of the castle for a year and a day, and setting out virtually the same conditions for vengeance as in the Vengeance Raguidel. By chance, Guerrehés removes the fragment, and unknowingly avenges the death, and is returned to Arthur the next morning in the swan-drawn boat. His place in the

97

Raoul de Houdenc, La Vengeance Raguidel, ed. Mathias Friedwagner, in Sämtliche Werke (Halle, 1897-1909), vol. 2.

98

The First Continuation of the Perceval, op. cit.

vessel is resumed by the body of the dead knight, to be accompanied by the damsel who returned with Guerrehés. She serves as a female helpful hermit, giving the background of the dead knight, which helps to clarify that the vessel, although drawn by a swan, was fairy-sent because the knight was the son of a fairy and a mortal.

The preceding discussion on the death or departure, otherworld and vengeance vessels indicates that all, including the death ship of the religiously oriented Queste, seem to borrow from the traditional fairy descriptions and patterns. Inherent in a waterborne vessel is the idea of a water barrier and the navigation is supernaturally controlled, as Patch remarks:

... God is ultimately in charge of the wanderings of the boat; but in other stories another supernatural agent, perhaps Morgain or the fairy mistress herself, is responsible for sending the vessel.⁹⁹

~~Arthur is removed by a ship full of women, and takes~~ his horse and arms, which may go back to Egyptian burials, or to Northern burials such as in Beowulf, where he would be prepared for the next world, or his re-entry to this one. His counterpart Perceval in Perlesvaus goes to another world where the fairy signs are the old men who look incredibly young, and the island of plenty of which he will be king.

The Queste, Mort Artu, Vengeance Raguidel and the Guerrehés story in the First Continuation of the Perceval are richly outfitted with a bed in the same position in each, which recalls the position of the bed on Solomon's ship, first seen in the Estoire. Despite the fact that this ship is intended to represent the highest state of the Catholic church, it is the richest in fairy tradition and description, crossing not only the water barrier, but also the time barrier to link Solomon to Galahad.

VI

SOLOMON'S SHIP

The last supernatural marine vessel of the Vulgate Cycle is Solomon's ship, the Cycle's equivalent of the temple built by Solomon to house the Ark of the Covenant (Kings 5-8). The ship has had an enormous literary exposure, inspiring and being inspired by other works. Aspects of it have been found in many of the prose and verse romances of the period. The vessel in "Guigemar", written about 1175 by Marie de France appears to be the first beautifully decorated and outfitted ship "a l'ovre Salemun"¹. This vessel has in common with Solomon's ship of the Cycle its predestined passenger or passengers, and preternatural knowledge, being present when needed and reuniting the lovers in the best fairy tradition.

Although Solomon's ship is intended as an allegory of the Church, it shares with many French Arthurian verse and prose romances two aspects which have entirely different connotations: the bed and the canopy over it. The beds in the romances, as on Solomon's ship, are usually made of very rich materials and decorated with expensive fabrics, then imported from the Orient. Silk is the most commonly used, with samite, a richer type of silk, making a frequent appearance, usually in white. Apart from Solomon's ship, the most

⁹⁹ See G. D. West, Verse Index, p. 144 (Salemon)

elaborately described bed is in the non-Arthurian "Guigemar" (170-84), where the materials mentioned are cypress, ivory, silk with gold thread, and "purpre" another variety of silk. Among the canopies, Morgan's vessel for Floriant in Floriant et Florete features a splendid "cortine" depicting astronomy, the story of Genesis, the story of Troy and Love, probably borrowed from Ovid's Ars Amoris (842-921).

Occasionally, the motif of the message has been borrowed, and the closest to the Estoire's punishment for ignoring a message on the side of a vessel is in Claris et Laris¹⁰⁰ where Lidaine, the wife of Claris, forgets the warning in the message about the vessel's intolerance of "tricherie, ne traison ne loberie" (16126-7). She is plunged into the water to her chest for her prideful boast, and is rescued by her husband.

Apart from those previously mentioned, other vessels which appear to be the equivalent of Solomon's ship are "La Nef de Joie" of Løseth's Tristan en Prose which would be destroyed after the battle of Salisbury plain¹⁰¹, "La Nef enchantée" of another version of the Tristan story,

100
Claris et Laris, ed. Johann Alton (Amsterdam, 1966). The entries refer to line numbers.

101
Le Roman en prose de Tristan, le roman de Palamède, et la complication de Rusticien de Pise, ed. E. Løseth, (Paris, 1890, rep. New York, 1970). The entries refer to paragraphs, 323ff.

"Les Deux Captivités"¹⁰², and "La belle nef" of the Suite du Merlin (I/175-181).

From the above, it is clear that there are many common elements of description in the literature of the period, and particularly in the French Arthurian. The works mentioned by no means constitute a complete list; to do so would be far beyond the scope of this paper.

The vessel is never directly called "Solomon's ship" in the Vulgate Cycle; the name is merely a means of identification. In the Estoire, it is referred to as:

la nef ou il ot la lance & lespee ueue . & le
lit ou .iij . fuisel estoient . (ESG 201/23-4).

The ship is common to both the Estoire and the Queste and elsewhere in the Vulgate Cycle, it is seen by a very holy man, Heliser, in Agravain¹⁰³. Little information is given then except that the history of it will be told in the "grans auentures du saint Graal..." (Ag.234/22), which tends to support Frappier's theory of an 'architect' for the Cycle¹⁰⁴. The ship only permits members of the Grail line in the Estoire, or members of the Grail company in the Queste to board. The description of the vessel and its contents

¹⁰²

Le Roman de Tristan en Prose: Les Deux Captivités.
ed. Joël Blanchard (Paris, 1976), paragraphs 208-11.

¹⁰³

Agravain, The Vulgate Version..., op. cit., vol. V.
Cited hereafter as Ag. Entries refer to page and line numbers.

¹⁰⁴

ALMA, p. 316.

appear to have been transferred from one story to the other, giving rise to much discussion of the anteriority of one story to the other; this point will be taken up in the conclusion.

The progression of the description in each case is very similar, seen from the point of view of the observer or observers in the story. The description of the first sighting of the vessel in both stories is very brief, referring to the beauty of it. The person, or persons must go on foot to reach it, even in the Queste where the Grail company arrives at the little island or rock in the white samite or messenger ship. In both stories, the vessel is first seen at "none" and in the same type of rocky landscape. A message on the side warns that only the absolutely faithful believer may board the vessel with impunity. The message is longer in the Queste and is reinforced by Perceval's sister. The ritual before boarding is that of entering a church: they all cross themselves. The bed which is to play such an important role is found "el cors de la neif" (ESG 121/28). There is a canopy over the bed, and spindles in the form of a cross. On the bed, a golden crown is at the head and a sword at the foot. The sword is partially drawn from its scabbard and both are constructed of highly symbolic and rare materials, and equally symbolic colours; the sword blade and scabbard bear messages of warning.

In the Estoire, Nascien discovers the items which are later interpreted by a passing hermit, one of Lot's "kyrielle d'ermite"¹⁰⁵. This function is performed by Perceval's sister in the Queste. The descriptive tours of the ship follow the same pattern in both stories, except that the account in the Queste is longer to allow for the inclusion of the Varlans story (QSG 204/5-205/4), to bring in the theme of the Waste Land, and the story of Nascien's battle with the giant to provide history (QSG 206/32-209/4). The child Celidoine, second in the Grail line leading to Galahad, is omitted from this account, possibly because the author, a member of a religious order, such as the Cistercians¹⁰⁶, did not want a connection between Galahad and a sorcerer named Merlin whose surname is sometimes 'Celidonius' in Gerald of Wales (192-3, 280, n.626), although the child's name in the Estoire is interpreted as meaning:

celidoines vaut autant comme dounes al ciel.
 car il auoit mise toute sentente a seruir ihesu
 crist (ESG 107/35-6)

This is an instance where the Queste may be thought to have been written first because of the omission, and the child created by the very zealous author of the Estoire in an effort to "improve" the material.

105
Etude LP, p. 100.

106
Matarasso, p. 20.

Lot considers that the sword which fails Nascien was borrowed from Perceval ou Le Conte del Graal by Chrétien de Troyes¹⁰⁷ : Perceval is given a sword made by Trebuchet in the Grail castle which fails him in time of need. This theory seems quite valid, given the coincidental circumstances in which the sword is used. In the Vulgate Cycle, the sword belongs to David, the father of Solomon, who was not allowed to build the temple because he was a warring king (Kings 5:1). The weapon bears messages warning that no one except the predestined person may draw it. Perceval's sister relates the history of previous, unauthorised uses of the sword and replaces the hempen hangings with her own hair, in imitation of the initiation rite of a nun. The Estoire predicted that the hangings would be replaced:

ains couient queles soient ostees de par main de
feme & de fille de roi & de roine . & si en fera
tel cange quele i metra tel cose du sien quele
~~aura plus chiere & si les metra en lieu de ches .~~
(ESG 123/9-11).

After noting the presence of the crown and letter, the author of the Estoire immediately launches into a discussion of the significance of the spindles, claiming for his source "Chi endroit dist li contres ..." (ESG 124/4); the same device is used in the Queste (210/29). The story of Genesis and the tree of life follows to explain the spindles.

In the Estoire, the white symbolises the purity and innocence of Adam and Eve, the green for Eve's fertility when she conceived, and the red for the blood shed when Cain slew Abel. The colour symbolism is interpreted according to the New Testament in the Queste: the white is for Christ's chastity, green for patience and red for suffering. When Galahad sleeps on the bed under the spindles, it is a prefiguration of his death which will occur at Sarras, and not in the ship of Solomon which represents the spiritual, not the physical aspect of life. The branch forms a link between Eve and the Virgin, because the branch which Eve planted becomes part of the cross on which Christ died. The importance of this according to the Estoire is: "... que par feme estoit vie perdue et que par feme seroit vie restoree" (ESG 126/5-6). Morse appropriately proposes another approach to the colour symbolism:

The end of history, if we read the three colors in reverse order, is associated with the color white, which frequently symbolizes Galahad, Perceval and Bors (as in Gawain's dream of the bulls).¹⁰⁸

According to Pauphilèt, there is a standard tradition for the three trees of the cross:

En outre, dans la tradition ordinaire, les trois arbres de la Croix sont d'"essence" différente (cèdre, cyprès, pin), et par un symbolisme assez laborieux, ils représentent les trois personnes

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Morse, p. 112.

de la Trinité. La Queste leur donne seulement des couleurs différentes qui, selon les habitudes de la mystique, ont une signification morale.¹⁰⁹

The spindles are given enormous importance in both stories, in a seeming effort to impress indelibly their religious significance in relation to the Old Testament in the Estoire and the New Testament in the Queste. Within the Cycle, there is a link between Eve, the Virgin and Perceval's sister, also a Virgin figure "who completes the chain by explaining to Galahad the meaning of the ship, with the bed and canopy, crown and sword."¹¹⁰ As Quinn points out, Solomon's wife is a very important figure, "an intermediary¹¹¹ between Eve... and Perceval's sister ...", and the woman who conceived the idea of the vessel.

The initiation rite on Galahad's first visit to the ship is a replica of his first visit to Arthur's castle. In the latter, he had to withdraw the sword from the stone, proving himself the equal of Arthur, and sit in the "siège perilleux", forbidden to Arthur. On the ship, Morse notes: "that Galahad gets a new sword suggests that he has now surpassed Arthur, who also drew his sword from a rock."¹¹² Galahad must also lie on the bed on his journey to Sarras.

¹¹⁰ Quinn, p. 198.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹¹² Morse, p. 109.

Speyer suggests a strong similarity between the rituals of the Queste and those of the tenth-century Irish saga, The Second Battle of Moytura: that a seat with a name on it, reserved for a specific person for future use is a tombstone.¹¹³ Galahad's confirmation as the Grail knight begins with the perilous seat at Arthur's castle and proceeds to the bed on Solomon's ship. Quinn quotes other examples of perilous beds and seats, and finds:

... most of these beds carry strong associations of romance and or peril. Of these, the perilous beds are more clearly connected with the bed on Solomon's ship, but the bed as the scene for the consummation of love is not without relevance, if only for ironic contrast.¹¹⁴

Galahad's sleeping on the bed is not only a prefiguration of his own, and a reminder of Christ's death, it also recalls Perceval's sister who died giving life to the leper, and continues to give life to Lancelot in the form of spiritual renewal, augmented by Galahad who joins his father. Quinn also interprets Galahad's sleeping on the ship to the "night sea-journey of the sun-god"¹¹⁵, and further parallels Lug, the Irish sun-god, and earlier sources in Greek and Egyptian mythology.

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M. Speyer, "The Cemetery Incident in Chrétien", Romanic Review XXVIII (1937), 202-203.

114

Quinn, p. 202.

115

Quinn, p. 215.

The vessel itself is based on the principle "Ecclesia est navis", and in one of the 'flashbacks' of the Estoire, Solomon is taught the importance:

Ceste neif sest senefiance de ma nouuele maison .
(ESG 136/4)

The exotic influence of the Song of Songs and the orient is present in the description of the vessel linking the Old Testament 'history' of the Estoire and the New Testament story through the line of David, an ancestor of the Virgin and Christ in the Bible, and Galahad in the Vulgate Cycle which was intended as a secular analogy to St. Jerome's Vulgate Bible.

The inspiration for building the ship differs from the Scriptural reason for the temple to house the Ark. Where Solomon himself decided to build (II Chronicles 2:1), the Vulgate stories credit Solomon's wife with the proposal as ~~a means to let the future Grail knight know his history~~ (QSG 222/19-21). In choosing the wife of Solomon, the author, or authors, of the Grail stories attempted to vindicate women, from Eve to the "strange wives" (I Kings 11:8) responsible for Solomon's downfall. Her proposal is her redeeming feature, and she displays true humility, acknowledging the fault of Eve by placing the hempen hangings on the sword to be replaced by Perceval's sister.

Solomon's wife seems intended to represent Eve of the Old Testament and a partial prefiguration of Perceval's sister in the New, although Perceval's sister is also a Christ figure with her sacrifice. Quinn suggests that Solomon's wife is a combination of sibyl and queen, or sibyl and fairy mistress, a gifted woman to whom Solomon plays a secondary role in the "fusion of romantic and religious tradition."¹¹⁶ . As a "fairy mistress", she prepares the ship in anticipation of the saviour to be, Galahad, with the difference that:

... in place of the fairy mistress presiding over another world sending out the ship to bring her lover to her, is Solomon's wife, presiding not so much in another world as another time, and sending forth a ship which conveys symbolically her intuitive anticipation of the redemption. Solomon's wife sends to ship to the hero, not to bring him to her, but to link her time with his, to convey to him a message of doctrine, not of love. The ship links not so much worlds as eras; it spans the gap between the Old Testament and Arthurian periods.¹¹⁷

Perceval's sister, the anonymous girl who gives her brother most of his importance in the story has a role more important than his in the quest. In fact, she almost overshadows the three knights with her supernatural knowledge in the best fairy tradition. Although she does not control the vessel, she performs the fairy induction in leading the three

¹¹⁶
Quinn, p. 196.

¹¹⁷
Ibid., p. 197-8.

118
to the ship. The vessel itself is controlled and navigated by the highest of all supernatural powers. Perceval's sister has qualities which may be interpreted as fairy, according to Paton's description:

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 has complete foreknowledge, and often, as we shall see later, has guarded from infancy the mortal whom she finally takes to the other world as her beloved. However unexpectedly she comes to the hero she appears before him, she comes always in quest of him, and for the purpose of carrying out a long-formed design of claiming his love. 119

While the claim of Perceval's sister on Galahad is hardly romantic, they do share what M. Dominica Legge considers to be a form of marriage, when Perceval's sister exchanges the sword hangings.¹²⁰ The love Perceval's sister claims is not for herself as is evident, but she does direct him to another world.

Solomon's ship itself behaves in the fairy mistress tradition, bringing the destined hero to it by means of one of the numerous "messenger" vessels of the Estoire, such as the small boat covered with precious stones (ESG 138/5-15), or the one in which Celidoine is transported with the lion.

118

Fairy Mythology, p. 15-17.

119

Ibid., p. 5.

120

Romania 77 (1956), 88-93, especially p. 90.

In the Queste, the small vessel covered with white samite replaces the many vessels of the Estoire.

The ship has human characteristics which are seen only in the Estoire: it punishes Nascien for forgetting the message on the side of the ship when he has a doubt about the bed. He is plunged unceremoniously into the water :

Et la nef ouuroit en cel endroit ou il estoit
(ESG 137/4-5).

He is later punished on the vessel for having used David's sword when he was not worthy.

Punishment and rejection by the ship is not limited to members of the Grail line, for when Nascien is about to board the ship after his brief reunion with his wife, a beautiful woman asks him to help her board. As he lifts her, the ship moves away, causing him to put her down and make the sign of the cross, which reveals her as the "evil one" in ~~disguise.~~ Unfortunately, the author did not limit this quality to Solomon's ship: he used it again for the vessel in which Mordrain takes a group to England. Again the devil is revealed by the purification of the ship, another repetition, seen before when Salustes as an apparition walking on water purified the vessel for Mordrain (ESG 106/10-11).

With all the self-propelled vessels, the agent of motion is usually the wind, probably the Goddess Fortuna either as Guide or Fortune of the Sea. Undoubtedly this is the reason for the storms which occur when a devil is aboard

as in the case of Mordrain above, and during the testing
 121
 periods of the Grail line and company.

There is unity between the Estoire and the Queste in terms of the direction of Solomon's ship: in the former, as Patch observes,¹²² the direction is from west to east, to the promised land of Britain where the ship will remain "dusques a chele heure que li daarrains hom de ton linage i entera pour reuenir a sarras auoec le saint uaissel que len apele graal ." (ESG 202/34-6). In the Queste, with the arrival of Galahad, the journey is eastward back to the Holy City of the Vulgate Cycle, completing the circle, a symbol of perfection. The Queste itself is a story of perfection: only the pure, the virgin knights and the eternal nun may be admitted to Solomon's ship on their quest for the Holy Grail, itself a search for spiritual perfection.

121

See The Goddess Fortuna, p. 100-105 for the sudden storms.

122

The Other World, p. 8, n.4, p. 20.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is clear that the sources for the supernatural vessels of the Vulgate Cycle are in the fairy tradition, which in turn often owes much to oriental literature. Other sources are mythology, principally Greek and Roman, and the Bible, itself considered to be a Christianisation of Greek and Roman myths. The fairy influence appears to dominate, even, or particularly in the very religiously oriented Estoire and to a lesser extent, in the Queste del Saint Graal. This also holds true of vessels which are real conveyances, as the one which transports Lancelot to the "Isle de Joie" for his voyage of psychological healing in the Agravain. Although Lancelot is raised by a water spirit, he is not associated with supernatural voyages or vessels in the Vulgate Cycle, with the exception of his second "voyage of healing" which brings him spiritual renewal.

Apart from the fairy influence, the religious aspect is seen in the Christian rituals performed. In the Estoire and the Queste, the intention of the authors was primarily to provide an allegory of the life of Christ, with the 'nef de Salomon' an allegory of the Church, bringing all the heritage of the Old Testament through the ages to the new

Christ figure of the Galahad, representing 'le verbe incarné'¹²³. Of the testing vessels, the white samite-covered vessel of the Queste and those of the Estoire must be considered a stage in preparation and religious instruction or initiation. It must be noted that the "messenger" or white ships are improbably outfitted, particularly in the Estoire where they are decorated with precious stones, or covered with white samite, a luxurious silk material introduced from the orient¹²⁴. Solomon's ship, more than any other, belongs to the fairy tradition, except that God, not a fairy mistress, sends the vessel to bring the 'elect' to himself. Admission to the vessel depends on total faith, and is restricted to the members of the Grail line and company: the ship is a symbol of perfection, typifying as it does the line and life of Christ, and only the perfect or virginal in the Queste are admitted. The prevailing atmosphere in the Estoire is that of aiming for a better world, if necessary away from the homeland, like the children of Israël. The better world has been achieved in part in the Queste, and the cycle has completed itself.

123

M. Lot-Borodine, "Le Symbolisme du Graal dans L'Estoire del Saint Graal", Neophilologus XXXIV (1950), 71.

124

Much valuable information on fabrics and decoration of the period may be found in F. Boucher, A History of Costume in the West (Holland, 1967).

In contrast to this is the Mort Artu, in which Frappier notes the dominance of "l'esprit courtois" as opposed to "l'esprit mystique" of the Grail stories ¹²⁵.

The Mort Artu is an "end of an era" story in which the departure and burial in the Noire Chapele is an attempt to compromise between the fairy theory of Arthur, who is also a Christ or, more likely, a vegetation figure, waiting to return one day, and the claims of Glastonbury. Certainly his departure meets Patch's observations on the other world: there is the marine vessel, the maidenland suggested by the ladies in the boat with Morgan, the island, and of course the water barrier.

The vessels of the Vulgate Cycle also have another importance which is particularly evident between the Estoire and the Queste: they help to clarify the question of authorship. It is extremely unlikely that the author of the former also wrote the Queste in view of the indiscriminate use of the motif of the vessels in the Estoire. Frappier attributes this, along with Pauphilet, to "a continuator whose talent was not equal to his pious intentions." ¹²⁶, and he cites the

125
Etude MA, p. 41.

126
ALMA, p. 313.

many "Mediterranean voyages, tempests, disappearances, searches, dreams, temptations, pirates, angels and demons"¹²⁷. In his opinion, the Estoire is a "retrospective sequel" and was the last of the Vulgate Cycle to be written.

The basis for many of the arguments about the order of authorship must be the story of Solomon's ship which is common to both works. It is possible that the Queste was written first, but Frappier's theory is offset by Fanni Bogdanow who suggests that it is possible that what is considered a "clumsy imitation" may not be so, and bases her theory on Vinaver's work. The theory is as follows:

Successive writers, far from mutilating their themes or adding episodes haphazardly, strove to elaborate and expand their material in a consistent manner so as to eliminate incoherencies and produce spacious and harmonious compositions.¹²⁸

Whether the Estoire antedates or postdates the Queste, there seems little doubt that the author of the Estoire was not the author of the Queste, in terms of the motif of the supernatural marine vessels, obviously intended as an imitation of the peregrinations of the Acts of the Apostles. He was definitely not the author of the Mort Artu, although one person could have written the Mort Artu and the Queste. The

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ALMA, p. 313.

128

F. Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail (Manchester, 1966), p. 15.

strongest likelihood is the 'architect' proposed by Frappier:

He was probably the author of the Lancelot proper or at least the greater part of it. Two other authors then wrote the Queste and the Mort Artu, but in spite of their distinct personalities, they conformed to the original plan. The Estoire was a later addition which supplied a portico for the edifice.¹²⁹

Frappier further considers that the architect conceived the work as "a cathedral, of which the Queste is the spire". To continue his image, the Estoire is a very weak structure.

The question raised in the introduction remains: whether Bruce with his 'voyages imaginaires' or Pauphilet's statement 'tout est symbole' is correct. The answer may be found in Emile Mâle's excellent study, Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century where he illustrates the detailed symbolism of the period:

Such a conception of art implies a profoundly idealistic view of the scheme of the universe, and the conviction that both history and nature must be regarded as vast symbols. ¹³⁰

Given this concept, the fact remains that the author of the Estoire overburdened his work with symbolic motifs, especially the marine vessels, to the extent that his work was lost in allegorical confusion. The Queste fared much better with its more skilled and discriminating author.

129
ALMA, p. 317.

130
Mâle, op. cit., p. 15.

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