THE CHASTITY TEST IN THE *LAI DU COR* AND THE *CONTE DU MANTEL*

THE CHASTITY TEST IN THE *LAI DU COR* AND THE *CONTE DU MANTEL*

by

Diane Greatbanks, B.A., Nottingham

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October 1968

MASTER OF ARTS (1968) MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
(Romance Languages) Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: The Chastity Test in the Lai du Cor and the Conte du Mantel.

AUTHOR: Diane Greatbanks, B.A., Nottingham

SUPERVISOR: Dr. G. D. West

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 98

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The purpose of this paper will be firstly to indicate the popularity of the chastity-testing theme in European medieval literature. This will be followed by an examination of the characters portrayed in two such texts, the Lai du Cor of Robert Biket and the anonymous Conte du Mantel. On the basis of this study, it will then be possible to ascertain at what stage in the development of the Arthurian romance these two poems were composed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I should like to express my sincere and grateful thanks to Dr. G. D. West for his unceasing encouragement and guidance during the writing of this thesis. My thanks are also due to Dr. G. A. Warner and Professor W. N. Jeeves, for their invaluable suggestions and to all those whose help has made possible the completion of the work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the study of European medieval literature, two of the greatest themes, the Grail Cycle and the Tristan legend, have almost dominated the interests of scholars of many generations. In comparison with the assiduous and devoted attention which these fascinating legends have demanded, other literary themes have been somewhat overshadowed.

Such a motif which has met with relative neglect is that of the magic testing object. Despite the frequent appearance of these phenomena in medieval literature, many scholars have been rather reluctant to undertake a study of the different romances incorporating such tests, preferring, perhaps not unnaturally, to direct their attentions to other, perhaps more illustrious themes.

A study of two early manifestations of the theme of the discriminating article--the Lai du Cor and the Conte du Mantel--will form the basis of this paper, in which an attempt will be made to assess the contemporary literary atmosphere surrounding the composition of both poems.

Since, in the majority of Arthurian romances, the date of composition often influences an author's treatment of the characters he portrays and may also condition the very number and choice of figures included, a detailed examination

of the people involved in these two poems will be invaluable for any attempt at dating, however approximate. Analysis of the characters included in the two works cannot be the sole basis on which to determine definitively the position of the poems in relation to other Arthurian texts; yet it is, nonetheless, of paramount importance.

If any conclusions are suggested by an examination of these characters, then this is further justification for a study which is already valid in its own right. Such an investigation can prove a fascinating and rewarding one in itself. For it is by considering the attitude of the medieval author to his various characters, both his inclusion and especially his portrayal of them, that one can come to a fuller assessment of that poet's artistic originality and from there, to a deeper appreciation of the literary merits of his whole work.

CHAPTER I

THE POPULARITY OF THE CHASTITY-TESTING THEME

From early times, garments and articles invested with supernatural powers have enjoyed a recurrent and important popularity in folk mythology and legend. Story-tellers and myth-makers of different epochs and different nations have, seemingly quite independently of each other, bestowed miraculous qualities onto objects which are quite often anything but extraordinary. Even after allowance is made for the possible influence of one national literature on another, the universality of this theme would appear to be geographically as well as temporally wide-spread.

As might be expected, classical literature furnishes many examples of the varying types of objects endowed with such strange and wonderful properties. The ring of Gyges, for instance, can be included in that category of articles which give the possessor or wearer a certain power or quality, in this case, that of invisibility. The robe sent to Jason's bride, Creusa, by the jealous Medea is an example of those garments which are capable of the destruction of the wearer. Similarly, Malory tells of a coat which was sent to King Arthur by Morgain la Fée in order to bring about his death.[1] In

---

[1](Ed.) Eugène Vinaver, The Works of Sir Thomas Malory (3 vols.; Oxford, 1948), I, 157-58.

contrast, there also exist objects which have favourable properties, bringing gifts, happiness or restored health to the lucky owner. In the Celtic poem "The Children of Tuirenn" there is mention of Lug's magic pig's skin which heals all wounds.

A fourth category is comprised of discriminating articles which can detect in a person the absence or presence of a particular quality. Here, a mysterious power serves to reveal the guilt or innocence of a certain individual by causing a change in the testing object's normal state or its usual function. Many varying objects are used in the different versions of these trials, sometimes a glove, a ring or a vessel, sometimes a statue, a sword or other weapon and often, a garment. These may test a character's truthfulness, valour, chastity or matrimonial fidelity. The cup of Manannan mac Lir, for example, is shattered by three false statements and only three true declarations will repair it.[2] The author of Huon de Bordeaux[3] tells of Auberon's magic drinking bowl which had similar powers of detection. The bowl was so enchanted that:

---

[2]L. A. Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (Burt Franklin Bibliographical Series XVIII, New York, 1960), p. 112.

[3](Ed.) P. Ruelle, Huon de Bordeaux (Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1960).

Nus n'i puet boire s'il n'est preudom, par Dé,
Et nés et purs et sans pecié mortel.
(vv.3692-93).

In some instances, noble virtues can be assessed even without the testing object's being touched. In the First Continuation of the Perceval,[4] we read of the tent of Alardin du Lac, which is guarded by two statues, one silver and one golden. One of these figures hurls a dart at any unworthy man (vilain) who tries to enter the tent, while the other carries a harp and serves to reveal the misdemeanours of unchaste women:

Pucelle ne s'i puet celer,
Qui ainsins se face apeler
Puis qu'elle soit despucellee;
Puis que elle vient a l'antree,
La harpe sone la descorde,
De la harpe ront une corde.
(vv.7965-70).

Of all the graces, in fact, chastity and fidelity are probably these qualities which are the most often subject to such tests, and the literature of Europe describes several of them, in varying degrees of detail. In the Second Continuation of the Perceval,[5] for instance, the Petit Chevalier owns a

---

[4](Ed.) William Roach, The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1949 -). The quotation is taken from the Long Redaction (Vol. II) and there is a similar passage in the Mixed Redaction (Vol. I), vv. 4116-4126). No equivalent passage appears in the Short Redaction (Vol. III, Pt. 1).

[5](Ed.) Ch. Potvin, Perceval le Gallois ou le Conte du Graal (Publications de la Société des Bibliophiles belges; 6 vols., Mons, 1865-71). The text of the Second Continuation appears at vv. 21917-34934.

wonderful silver shield which can be carried only by a knight who is noble and virtuous himself and who has a

> . . .bele amie
> Qui soit loiaus sans trecerie
> Et ki tant l'aime com sen cuer
> Qu'ele ne vosist à nul fuer
> Mal avoir nient plus que sor li
> Ne joie avoir ne autre ami.
> (vv. 31809-31814).

The variety of discriminating objects has already been noted and among those, the most frequently mentioned are the enchanted horn or drinking-vessel, and the manteau mautaillié. The earliest literary work extant embodying the theme of the chastity-testing horn is the Lai du Cor, by the Anglo-Norman poet Robert Biket, of which the original manuscript has been alllocated to the third quarter of the twelfth century.[6] The charm of this lai rests in the almost primitive simplicity of the telling of the story. Since the work will be studied later and in considerable detail, only a short summary of the action is necessary at this point, and that only for purposes of brief comparison with the events described in other versions.

The incident takes place at a magnificent Pentecostal feast at Arthur's court. Amid the revelry, a fair youth

---

[6](Ed) H. Dörner, Robert Biquet's "Lai du Cor" mit einer Einleitung über Sprache und Abfassungszeit (Strassburg diss., 1907), p. 45.

enters the hall, carrying a magic ivory horn whose melodious decorative bells have a soothing, even bewitching effect on the listeners. This horn he presents to Arthur as a gift from Mangon, King of Moraine, and subsequently leaves the court. Arthur learns from an inscription on the vessel that it has been so enchanted by a fairy that no man whose wife has been unfaithful to him, whether in deed or thought, may drink from it, without spilling the wine with which it has been filled. Arthur tests the horn but is soaked by the spilt wine. Enraged and humiliated, he tries to stab his unfaithful queen, but is prevented by Gawain, Cadain and Iwain. The queen declares her innocence and is prepared to submit to the ordeal by fire, but Arthur, who is determined that he will not be alone in his shame, insists that everyone must take the test. His good humour is restored and the queen is pardoned when no-one succeeds in drinking from the horn, no-one, that is, except Caradoc who is given the lordship of Cirencester--and the horn--as a reward.

Apart from the poet's name and the testimony of the Anglo-Norman dialect in which he writes, no more definite evidence concerning the authorship of the work is known. Biket professes to have heard the tale from an abbot:

> Par le dit d'un abé
> a cest conte trové
> (vv. 591-2).

This attempt to provide some aura of authenticity, however,

may be nothing more than a literary convention. There is little concern for characterization on the part of the author, who prefers instead to tell his story with the minimum amount of elaboration.

The next version of the test to appear in Old French literature is found towards the end of the Livre de Caradoc, which forms part of the First Continuation of Chrétien's Perceval.[7] Here, the incident is related in a shorter, more condensed form than in Biket's poem, and there are slight omissions in the story as well as minor additions to the original tale: neither the origin of the horn nor its sender are mentioned, and Caradoc's wife, unnamed in the Lai, is now called Guignier. As well as proving the chastity of women, the horn[8] can also turn water into wine. The account given in the Livre de Caradoc is altogether more elegant than that found in the Lai du Cor. The attack on the queen, for instance, has disappeared and Arthur is much more leniently disposed towards her. The incident does, however, cause enmity on the part of the queen towards Guignier; in fact, Caradoc

---

[7] Roach, op. cit., Vol. I, vv. 8493-8734; Vol. II, vv. 12271-12506; Vol. III, Pt. 1, MS.L, vv. 3106-3271, MSS.ASPU, vv. 3092-3254.

[8] This too is named: Boënet (Mixed Redaction, v. 8543), Beneoiz (Long Redaction, v. 12315), Bonec (Short Redaction, MS.L, v. 3155), Bonoëc (Short Redaction, MS.A, v. 3141). There are variants in other MSS.

considers it expedient to remove his wife from Arthur's court to escape any possible schemes of revenge which the queen might plan.

In comparison with these two versions of the horn-test other Old French narratives containing the theme are relatively less important. In the Prose Tristan,[9] Morgain la Fée sends the horn with the malicious intent of revealing the queen's love for Lancelot, and hence her disgrace to Arthur. En route to Arthur's court, however, Morgain's messenger is overpowered by the knights Driant and Lamorat, and the latter compels him to deliver the horn to King Mark's court, instead of to its original destination. Iseult and all the court ladies try to drink from the vessel and all but four fail the test. Fortunately for the majority of their wives, the barons and even Mark himself refuse to attach any importance to the outcome and the unpleasant affair is smoothed over.

This redaction was no doubt the one from which Malory was working when he included the episode in his version of the Arthurian legend.[10] The accounts are almost identical, the

---

[9](Ed.) E. Löseth, Le roman en prose de Tristan, le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise: analyse critique d'après les manuscrits de Paris (Bibliothèque de L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Paris, 1890),

[10]Vinaver, op. cit., I, 429-432. The incident is recorded in The Book of Sir Tristam de Lyones, in the section entitled Isode the Fair.

men of Mark's court denying the validity of the test on the grounds that the horn was the creation of some malevolent sorceress, the traditional enemy of lovers.

A reference to the test also appears in Renart le Contrefait, where the episode is apparently based directly on the story recounted in the Livre de Caradoc.[11] The only innovation introduced by the author is the representation of the horn as a cup, from which Quarados Brunbras can drink.

A cup is also one of the means by which Arthur's wife's fidelity is tested, according to the story related in Heinrich von dem Türlin's Diu Crône,[12] in which a glove performs a similar function. This poem marks the first appearance in German literature of the chastity-testing horn, and was written during the first quarter of the thirteenth century.[13] The test is conducted in such a way that both men and women must try to drink from the goblet which has been sent by a sea-king. Only the king, at whose court the action takes place, and the dwarf, as big as a child of six years, who has brought the

---

[11](Ed.) F. Wolf, "Le Roman de Renart le Contrefait", Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie (Philos.-Hist. Klasse), XII (Vienna, 1861), 71-86. The incident is recorded on p. 78.

[12](Ed.) G. H. F. Scholl, Diu Crône (Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart XXVII, Stuttgart, 1852), vv. 917-3131.

[13]J. Schwietering, Die Deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters. Handbuch der Litteraturwissenschaft (Darmstadt, 1957), p. 284.

cup, are able to drink properly, and Caradoc plays no part in the episode. After the humiliation of the whole court, Kei engages the messenger in combat, only to be ignominiously defeated.

Another, later German version, a Meisterlied of the fifteenth century, reverts back to the use of the horn, and is considered by Warnatsch to have been an indirect translation of the Lai du Cor.[14] There are, indeed, marked similarities between the two tales. The entrancing musicality of the horn is emphasized and the vessel carries the same inscription which is read by a reluctant courtier. After the shameful discovery of the queen's transgressions, Arthur attacks her: "wolt die künigin da an dem tisch geschlagen han: das unterstuend ein ritter junk, der selb hiesz Yban;"[15]

Here, the successful drinker is the King of Spain, as in the fifteenth century Fastnachtspiel, which also shares many similarities with the Lai du Cor and hence with the Meisterlied.[16] The attack on the queen, for example, is included in the narrative, this attempt on her life being prevented by

---

[14] O. Warnatsch, Der Mantel (Breslau, 1883), p. 66.

[15] Warnatsch, loc. cit.; cf. Lai du Cor, vv. 298-306.

[16] Ibid., pp. 66-7.

Weigion. Now, however, the sender of the horn is the Queen of Cyprus who is annoyed at not having been invited to the banquet at Arthur's court. Her aim is to create anger and envy among the guests.

This play is followed by two more chastity-testing episodes, in which the trials are carried out firstly by means of a mantle, and then by a crown which, when worn by a cuckold, at once causes antlers to grow on his head.

The least refined version of the tale is to be found in the middle English poem, the "Cokwold's Daunce,[17] where the horn test is described in a coarse and rather cruel fashion. This time, the horn (bugyll horn) is not delivered to Arthur; he already has it in his possession. It is used as a means of entertainment when the court is bored, and none of the men present can drink from it. When Arthur also fails the whole court rejoices and Arthur exhibits no sense of shame or fury at the queen's infidelity. He even declares himself grateful to his wife's lover, and would gladly reward him:

> For he me helpyd, when I was forth,
> To chere my wyfe and make here myrth.
> (vv. 224-5).

The author of "The Boy and the Mantle"[18] combines three

---

[17](Ed.) Ch. Hartshorne, Ancient Metrical Tales (London, 1829).

[18](Ed.) T. Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (3 vols.; London, 1884), III, 38-48.

different accounts of the chastity-trial. The virtue of the women is tested firstly by means of a mantle, then by a wild boar's head, which can be carried only by a man who has not been deceived by his wife, and finally by a drinking horn. To Arthur's court at Carlisle comes Craddocke, a "kind curteous child"(v. 3), mature enough, however, to have a "ladye" of his own. The mantle is drawn from between two nutshells and changes colour as well as shape when donned by a disloyal wife. The whole court is humiliated by the test and Guinevere's shame prompts her to vilify Craddocke's wife, the only woman whom the mantle will fit, whereupon Craddocke advises Arthur to punish the queen. Craddocke is the only successful participant in the next two tests, after which the poem ends rather abruptly.[19]

"The Boy and the Mantle" is perhaps the most recent literary manifestation of the chastity-test by means of a cloak. One of the earliest is the Conte du Mantel,[20] which Wulff suggests was written during the last quarter or towards the end of the twelfth century.[21] The style and artistry of this

---

[19]For the sake of completeness, two Italian versions of the horn-test should also be mentioned. These are found in Il Tristano Ricardiano, (ed.) E. G. Parodi (Bologna, 1896), pp. 324 ff. and La Tavola Ritonda, o, l'Istoria di Tristano, (ed.) F. L. Polidori (2 vols.; Bologna, 1863), I, 157 ff.

[20](Ed.) F. A. Wulff, "Le Conte du Mantel", Romania XIV (1885), 343-380.

[21]Ibid., p. 357.

poem are more polished than that of the Lai du Cor and much more characterization is introduced.

The magnificence of Arthur's plenary court is described in some detail and the reader's attention is held by the promise of some "aventure novele" (v. 93) which must arrive at the court before the Easter Monday festal celebrations can commence. A fair youth presents himself to Arthur, saying that he has been sent by a fairy from a far-distant land. He brings with him an exquisite and costly mantle which will fit only a perfectly faithful wife. Having confided the secret of the garment to the knights assembled in the banqueting hall, the youth persuades Arthur to order the trial of the mantle by all the women of the court. The queen and her ladies are summoned from their quarters, many fail the test and the remaining, apprehensive ones, who by now know the full significance of the mantle's strange behaviour, would gladly abandon the issue. Arthur, however, insists that everyone must undergo the ordeal, with the result that no-one is successful and the prevalent atmosphere is one of anger and humiliation. At the youth's suggestion, the whole castle is searched in the event that some lady might have been overlooked. Girflet finds the wife of Carados Briebraz alone in her room. She dresses, joins the company and, although her husband is unwilling for her to undergo the test, preferring comfortable ignorance to the possible unpleasant discovery of her shortcomings, she confidently reassures him and tries on the mantle.

As the garment fits her perfectly, Arthur bestows it upon her as a gift. The mantle is now in a Welsh Abbey, reports the author, having lost none of its wonderful properties.

From this version of the chastity-test have disappeared the rough, primitive elements found in Biket's poem. The theme is neatly introduced and adeptly expanded by the author, whose language is more polished and whose literary skills are more immediately manifest than those of the Anglo-Norman. Elements of traditional representation now intrude: Keu, for example, here plays the rôle with which he later comes to be inevitably associated, that of the malevolent, spiteful observer of others' misfortune. In comparison with the Lai, the Mantel is so sophisticated that Warnatsch was led to term the style "artificial".[22]

The first extant German redaction containing the mantle test is the Lanzelet of Ulrich von Zatzikhoven, dated by Wallner at 1194.[23] The romance shares some of the naïveté of the Lai du Cor, a factor which encouraged Warnatsch to declare the German work anterior to Biket's poem.[24] The magic mantle

---

[22] Op. cit., p. 60.

[23] Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum, LIX (1935), p. 171 ff.

[24] Op. cit., p. 69. A more recent study of the vocabulary and style of the poem, however, has proved that Ulrich definitely knew Chrétien's Erec. See W. Richter, Der Lanzelet des Ulrich von Zatzikhoven. (Frankfurt, 1934). That Biket also knew Erec is yet to be irrefutably established.

is sent to Arthur's court by Lanzelet's former mentor and guardian, the wîse merminne, the Queen of Meydelant.[25] Arthur is surprisingly unaffected by his wife's failure to pass the test and the female messenger remarks upon each case of inconstancy as it is proven. Iblis, Queen of Pluris, beloved of the absent Lanzelet is the only successful participant and she is consequently allowed to keep the mantle. In Ulrich's poem, the cloak has another attribute: it will protect the wearer from melancholy and will ensure his or her success in love.

An incomplete account of the same test, published by Warnatsch,[26] is attributed to Heinrich von dem Türlin.

Like the horn test, the mantle test is also found in the same late Middle High German Meisterlied and Fastnachtspiel mentioned above in connection with the horn test.[27] In the former, Arthur's niece, Lanet, brings the talismanic cloak to court. She is actuated by feelings of enmity towards the queen, and the only woman to prove herself faithful is an anonymous young lady, greatly admired by all.

---

[25] Identified by Loomis as Morgain; see Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes (New York, 1949), pp. 88-9. Hereafter cited as Arthurian Tradition.

[26] Op. cit., pp. 8 ff.

[27] See above p. 11.

The Fastnachtspiel redaction is entitled "Der Luneten Mantel". A message on the buckle of the cloak proclaims its function[28] and Arthur's attempted assault on the queen is another similarity in common with the Old French lai.

The episode is also summarized in the romance Messire Gauvain ou la Vengeance Raguidel, by Raoul de Houdenc who names the hero Caraduel Briefbras.[29] A brief translated version of this French text appears in Book III of the Dutch Lancelot[30] and yet another reference to the motif is found in Sir Thomas Gray's Scala chronicon.[31]

A further manifestation of the theme's popularity has already been noted. The account of the mantle test in "The Boy and the Mantle" is, of the three trials described, the most detailed. Craddocke's wife proves herself the only constant wife although when she first puts on the mantle, it will not fit even her. She admits that she once kissed Craddocke before they were married and the cloak then fits her perfectly.

---

[28] Cf. Lai du Cor, vv. 181 ff.

[29] (Ed.) M. Friedwagner, Raoul von Houdenc: Sämtliche Werke (2 vols.; Halle, 1897-1909), II, vv. 3906-3973. The name appears at v. 3949.

[30] (Ed.) W. J. A. Jonckbloet, Roman van Lancelot (2 parts; The Hague, 1846-9). The mantle test is described in vv. 12505-12527.

[31] The passage is quoted by F. Wolf in Über die Lais, Sequenzen und Leiche (Osnabrück, 1841), pp. 376-7.

For the mantle, Edmund Spenser[32] substitutes a girdle which has similar magical properties and which only Amorat can wear:

> That girdle gave the vertue of chast love,
> And wivehood true, to all that did it beare;
> But whosoever contrarie doth prove,
> Might not the same about her middle weare,
> But it would loose, or else a sunder teare.
> (stanza 3)

Two Nordic versions of the mantle test must also be mentioned here. Möttuls saga[33] (The Tale of the Mantle) was translated from French at the command of King Hákon (1217-1263), and naturally, the Norwegian account very closely resembles its French original. The saga was then very freely adapted into verse in the fifteenth century and the resultant "Skikkju rímur"[34] has an ending peculiar to itself. The embarrassed and furious Arthur drives away from his court all the ladies who have failed the test.

The problem of the origin of the mantle test must be treated with caution and impartial objectivity. Much ingenious scholarship is manifest in the attempts to prove the Celtic

---

[32] Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene, IV, Canto V.

[33] (Ed.) G. Cederschiöld and F. A. Wulff, Versions Nordiques du Fabliau Français "Le Mantel Mautaillié" (Lund, 1887). Warnatsch briefly discusses the text of the saga in op. cit., pp. 72-73.

[34] Cederschiöld and Wulff, op. cit., pp. 51-71.

source for the motif, but conclusions must not be accepted too hastily.

During the brief summary of the various redactions of the talismanic mantle, as of the horn, the name of the hero involved is surprisingly consistent. Caradoc, or different versions of the name, seems to have been associated with the chastity test certainly from its first literary appearance and possibly even previously to that text. In fact, behind the legendary figure, Loomis sees an historic reality.[35] Caradoc Brec[h]bras is named in the Latin Vita of the sixth century St. Paternus, bishop and founder of the church of Llanbadarn Faur, near Aberystwyth. The fact that the wife of this same Caradoc was famous for her chastity and modesty leads Loomis to identify conclusively the historic personage with the literary hero.

In further support of this, Loomis cites the lists of the Thirteen Treasures of the Isle of Britain, where a mantle able to detect the slightest infidelity in a woman is attributed to Tegan Eurvron, the wife of Caradawc Vreichvras[36]

---

[35]R. S. Loomis, "The Strange History of Caradoc of Vannes" in Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun Jr., ed. J. B. Bessinger Jr. and R. P. Creed (New York, 1965), pp. 232-239.

[36]Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 98.

This garment:

> . . .would not serve anyone who had violated her marriage or her virginity. For the woman who remained true to her husband it would reach to the ground, and to the one who had violated her marriage it would not reach to her lap, and for this reason there was envy against Tegan Eurvron.[37]

Since, however, the earliest manuscript containing this evidence does not precede the sixteenth century,[38] Warnatsch's declaration might seem rather hasty:

> Celtischer Boden ist die Heimat beider Arten der Probe. Ihre literarische Gestaltung erlangten sie jedoch erst in der altfranzösischen Poesie, der Erbin celtischer Ueberlieferungen.[39]

According to Loomis, we are again indebted to Wales for the horn motif.[40] He contends that drinking horns were unknown to the French of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and it is only in connection with the Caradoc legend that horns are acknowledged as drinking vessels, the function of the magical horn in Huon de Bordeaux, for example, being effected by its sound:

---

[37] As quoted in Loomis' article in Franciplegius, p. 234.

[38] Loomis, (Arthurian Tradition, p. 98, n. 68) reports that these are in the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. The oldest, Peniarth 51, has been dated c. 1460, but the portion referring to the mantle is a later addition. MSS. Peniarth 60 and 77, which also mention the mantle, date from the sixteenth century.

[39] Op. cit., p. 58.

[40] Arthurian Tradition, p. 172.

> Tu ne seras en tant lointain rené
> Que, se tu cornes ce cor d'ivoire cler,
> Que jou ne l'oie a Monmur ma cité.
> (vv. 3737-39).

On the other hand, the Horn of Bran which is also listed among the Thirteen Treasures, contains any nourishment desired by its possessor.

In addition to Welsh traditions, perhaps one might also bear in mind the possible influence of Germanic drinking customs, since horns as drinking vessels are reported as early as Julius Caesar, who wrote:

> Haec (cornus) studiose conquisita ab labris argento (Germani) circumcludunt atque in amplissimis epulis pro proculis utuntur.[41]

The most one is justified in asserting, then, is that in consideration of all the above evidence, it would seem that the motif probably originated in Wales. But wherever its primary material is to be sought, the theme of the chastity-testing horn and mantle was easily absorbed into the folklore of many peoples and subjectively interpreted by numerous poets.

---

[41] Caesar, De Bello Gallico, VI, 28.

CHAPTER II

THE KING AND QUEEN

The inevitable result of the popularity of the chastity-testing theme is the wealth of personal interpretations to which the fundamental story has been subject. Essential features of the tale are well-established and regularly reappear in the various redactions;[1] but the peculiar merits of each author can produce an effect of individuality even in a motif as familiar as this one.

Robert Biket and the anonymous author of the Conte du Mantel, although treating what is basically the same story, adapt their subject-matter according to their own literary tastes and capabilities, with the result that the style, emphasis and tenor of the two poems are totally different. There is, of course, the phenomenon of the identical first three lines,[2] but after this common textual beginning, the two poems undergo quite dissimilar treatment, and nowhere is this

---

[1]The events usually take place at Arthur's court, at a festal assembly of knights and ladies. A discriminating talisman is delivered (with one exception--"The Cokwold's Daunce"), Arthur insists on the trial and the hero is usually Caradoc, whose wife is rewarded with the testing-object.

[2]Discussed by Warnatsch, op. cit., p. 61.

difference more evident than in the two poets' respective attitude to the characters they present. Even if the names of the more familiar Arthurian personalities appear in both accounts, the poets' representations of these figures are quite unrelated. Of the sixteen named characters in the Cor, only six reappear in the Mantel, and all of these are stock Arthurian characters--Arthur, Kei, Gauvain, Yvain, Girflet and Caradoc. Biket's lai moves quickly towards its conclusion with as little embellishment as possible and is typical of its genre in that the absence of detailed character study is compensated for by the rapid fluidity of the narrative. A decisive feature of the genre can be distinguished here, namely, that the design of the poem is to retell a single noteworthy incident, and not to indulge in lengthy descriptions either of a physical or a psychological nature. These elaborate expositions were the prerogative of subsequent verse and especially prose romances. In effect, the structure of the Cor is a perfect example of that economy which reduces characterization to a minimum. There is no psychological analysis of the kind found, for instance, in the thirteenth-century Roman de Silence of Heldris de Cornuaille.[3] Instead, any traits of character must be deduced from the action of the individual,

---

[3](Ed.) Lewis Thorpe, Nottingham Medieval Studies, (1961-67), V-VIII, X, XI. See particularly Vol. VIII, 36-50, vv. 2257-2872.

rather than from any deliberate comments from Biket.

The author of the Mantel, on the other hand, did not feel himself restricted by the distinguishing features of the genre in which he was writing. The conte expands the succint narrative of the lai and along with the general embellishments, direct or indirect character analysis is introduced. The straightforward exposition of the nouvelles en vers now becomes the material of a poet whose greater stylistic awareness leads to an altogether more sophisticated work. Of course, other factors as well as poetic tastes and abilities are equally pertinent in the question of difference of approach. The comparative simplicity of Biket's Cor might suggest that it was composed at the time when the development of Arthurian romance was in its early stages. However, such conclusions must not be inferred until a thorough examination of the texts has been completed, since identification of the characters portrayed and the manner in which they are represented may well furnish evidence invaluable for the approximate dating of the Cor and for establishing its relation to the Mantel.

As in most Arthurian romances, there are traditional elements in Biket's poem which are offset, for the modern scholar at least, by baffling references to obscure or completely unknown people.

Arthur himself fits neatly into the conventional image of the omnipotent sovereign: his domains are far-reaching and

the whole picture of the powerful monarch corresponds to that painted by Geoffrey of Monmouth and by Robert Wace. His power and fearless courage are celebrated by Geoffrey with patriotic pride:

> At last the fame of Arthur's generosity and bravery spread to the very ends of the earth; and the kings of countries far across the sea trembled at the thought that they might be attacked and invaded by him, and so lose control of the lands under their dominion.[4]

Similarly, Wace represents Arthur as a majestic ruler, a truly dominant personality: "Le bon roi, le fort, le seür".[5]

In the Historia Regum Britanniae, Arthur's realms are even more vast than in the Cor, stretching beyond Britain, beyond Norman acquisitions in Western and Southern Europe, to Iceland, Poland, Byzantium and the fortresses of Outre Mer. According to Biket's portrayal, the king's authority is not quite so extensive: his thirty thousand knights are summoned from Britain, Ireland, Germany, from la cit de Hoillande (v. 9), which may represent Holland, and from Esparlot, a geographical term which has so far defied all attempts at identification.

In accordance with convention, he is the generous lord and provider of sumptuous banquets at Caerleon, his

---

[4]Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, tr. L. Thorpe (Penguin Classics, 1966). Hereafter cited as Historia.

[5](Ed.) I. Arnold and M. Pelan, La Partie Arthurienne du "Roman de Brut" (Paris, 1962), v. 196.

traditional seat;[6] feasts usually described in terms of richness and grandeur. In the presence of such magnificence, therefore, it is not surprising that one of Arthur's main characteristics in the Cor is that of pride. It is partly his sense of dignity and partly his desire to appear in absolute control of any situation which demands that the inscription on the horn should be read out and clearly publicised. Even when his commands are met--as they must be--his pride and honour will not allow his subjects to guess at his inner apprehension. Because of his elevated position, he has to feign pleasure and genuine interest in the revelation and is compelled to hide his annoyance: "Artus fu molt iriez,/ semblant fait qu'il seit liez." (vv. 273-4).

In consideration of this remark, one wonders whether Arthur may already suspect the outcome of the test, and may foresee his subsequent loss of honour, for the discredit attendant upon the queen's impropriety will obviously reflect upon himself. Nevertheless, despite inner consternation, Arthur is obliged to continue the rôle of the fearless monarch and, after only the slightest hesitation, calls for the horn to be filled. When his unspoken fears are confirmed, the violence

---

[6] Caerleon is the site of Arthur's coronation in the Historia and the Brut.

of his temper knows no moderation:

> Un canivet a pris,
> el cuer soz la peitrine
> volt ferir la reïne. . .
> (vv. 290-2).

Clearly, such primitive behaviour has no place in the courtly milieu expounded by later Arthurian writers. The brutal assault betrays rather a lack of any traditional courtoisie, where physical violence would be restrained or perhaps replaced by a malicious verbal attack.

The sudden rapidity of this attempt on the queen's life might strengthen the suggestion that Arthur was correctly anticipating the result of the test. But however quick his action, he is prevented from its complete execution by three of his knights, who are not too surprised at the outburst to restrain their king forcibly. This immediate reaction might indicate that this particular manifestation of uncontrollable temper, culminating in physical violence, was not unprecedented. Furthermore, the chaplain's insistence on the appropriateness of a secret revelation of the message could be similarly explained if the chaplain suspected or had previous experience of the king's wrath. Alternatively, the chaplain may have been acting merely out of respectful deference to the king, and his reluctance to repeat the message could signify an endeavour to guard Arthur's self-respect which he might be in peril of losing before the whole court.

It is to Arthur's credit that he will not grant his

wife's pleas for revenge on the sender of the troublesome horn. He has made a public avowal of friendship and good-will to the young messenger's lord (vv. 133-4) and his sense of honour will not let him break his pledge:

> N'est dreiz que m'en desdie,
> ceo sereit vilenie,
> ne m'agrée nīent
> reis qui tost se desment.
> (vv. 375-8).

His wounded prestige does demand some placatory measure, such as that proposed by Ivain. Arthur derives consolation and a certain satisfaction from the subsequent humiliation of the rest of his court. He recovers his good humour with astonishing alacrity on the realization that no woman proves blameless, and his change of temper is so complete that he can even laugh at the failure of his knights to drink from the horn. The queen is kissed and pardoned for her proven and admitted transgression, her beauty apparently vanquishing any doubts or bitterness which might remain in Arthur's mind. This sudden reversal in the king's mood plus the comparative willingness to believe his wife's explanation of the horn's behaviour surely indicate a personality which is governed by strong yet vacillating emotions.

Towards the only successful participant in the test Arthur behaves with magnaminity, and Caradoc is rewarded for his good fortune in having a chaste and loyal wife. He is allowed to retain the lordship of Cirencester, granted to him, evidently on a temporary basis, some two years previously.

On Caradoc's exemplary wife, Arthur bestows the magic horn.

Biket's representation of Arthur, then, corresponds with the image found in the earlier, traditional portrayals and is devoid of any of the unfavourable nuances of ineffectuality which envelop Arthur in later texts. In the early versions of the Arthurian theme, such as Geoffrey's Historia and Wace's Brut, the panegyric of Arthur is total. He is still a warrior king, surrounded by respectful subordinates. In Chrétien's romans, however, and in later texts, he is no longer a conqueror, notwithstanding the vastness of his territories. Instead, Arthur and his court often provide an attractive, convenient background for the exploits of different heroes, while eulogies of his prowess, wisdom and authority are replaced by tales of adventures undertaken by his subject-knights.

Eventually, the personality of Arthur reached the unfortunate stage of literary development where the king was compelled to surrender his former position of focused attention in favour of the hero of each particular roman, conte or lai. Ultimately, Arthur not only steps back from the centre of the stage; he also steps down in the estimation of poet and audience. Therefore, as literary techniques progressed, the rôle and praises of each hero had to be more magnificent and complete, Arthur's image suffering from the resultant emphasis on each particular knight. For comparison and contrast with the

admirable qualities of the particular hero, Arthur necessarily becomes a roi fainéant. In the development of the Arthurian legend, this unfavourable feature of Arthur's character is one literary step further from the use of his name, and traditions connected with it, to provide a familiar but still agreeable backcloth to other adventures.

As the Arthurian theme progressed, the king's portrayal becomes even less attractive. In Chrétien's Lancelot, ou le Chevalier de la Charette[7] it is not Arthur who avenges Melegant's boastful taunt that he has Arthur's subjects in captivity. Nor does the king take up the challenge to fight for the return of Guinevere. Instead, it is Gauvain, the non-pareil of knightly pursuits and Lancelot, the paragon of courtly devotion, who submit to the dangers and ignominy necessary to recover the queen.

A comparable situation occurs in the Perceval,[8] where the insults of the Red Knight reduce Arthur to a state of ineffectual anguish, whereas a simple youth can kill the challenger with a javelin, an unknightly weapon.

Arthur may be the victim of marital infidelity in the Cor, but the poem is untouched by any tradition of the helpless

---

[7](Ed.) Mario Roques, Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, III: Le Chevalier de la Charette (CFMA 86; Paris, 1958).

[8](Ed.) A. Hilka, Der Percevalroman von Christian von Troyes (Halle, 1932). The incident is found at vv. 860-1119.

roi fainéant. That he is deceived by his wife is no necessary indication of any later unfavourable influence on the literary representation of his character. For already in Geoffrey's Historia, the queen's extra-marital exploits bring trouble to the kingdom and are an indirect cause of Arthur's death, or at least of his exitus dubius from this world.

In the Cor, even though Arthur is shown as a deceived husband, he does play a dominant and positive rôle in the narrative to a greater extent than the figure displayed in the Mantel. Here, the introductory description of the powerful ruler is conventional, although less emphatic than the corresponding impressive beginning of the Cor. Arthur's territories now consist of England and Brittany, although knights from maint lointain païs (v. 10) gather at his Pentecostal plenary court. He is the generous benefactor of his grateful subjects, freely distributing among them expensive clothes, new armour and costly foreign horses. His magnaminity, moreover, seems untainted with any darker, ulterior motive, and he does not bestow his gifts grudgingly:

> Si en ont tuit le rei loé,
> Qui nou fist mie en repentant,
> Ainz fist totes veies semblant
> Que riens ne li griet ne ne coste.
> (vv. 58-61).

A further traditional element is now introduced, namely, that the festivities cannot begin until the arrival at the court of some new adventure. Arthur is quietly resolved not to break his custom, even in spite of requests from Kei

that the banquet should begin immediately. Thus, the king's authority is neatly established, although the issue is relatively insignificant.

The messenger is shown to Arthur,[9] whom he greets as "le meillor rei coroné/ Qui onques fust ne ja mès seit!" (vv. 164-5). It is Gauvain who encourages Arthur to grant the messenger's unknown request and it is perhaps significant that Gauvain also suggests the queen's trial of the garment. At two important stages in the narrative, therefore, Arthur has to be prompted by one of his knights.

His apparent reluctance to propose the first participant, who would naturally be his wife, might imply that Arthur had some presentiment of the unfavourable result of the chastity test. This same hesitancy appears in the Cor, but is offset by Arthur's sham confidence. In total contradistinction to Biket's representation--and this is surely the most startling contrast--Arthur displays no reaction whatsoever to the evidence of the queen's infidelity, and the test continues without his intervention. He does weary of the trial at one point and declares that a pure woman will never be found. Perhaps Arthur wishes to cancel the test in case the loyalty of other men's wives proves too strong a contrast with the impropriety of his own queen. He may even be concerned with dispelling the

---

[9] Notice that the messenger does not recognize Arthur immediately, as he does in the Cor, vv. 102-6.

unpleasant atmosphere produced by the revelations of the test. Yet he will not break his promise that all the ladies will try on the mantle and despite his former apparent endeavours to smooth the matter over and be rid of the embarrassing garment, he honourably agrees to execute his part of the agreement.

His confidence in the loyalty of Yvain's amie and subsequently in Perceval's lady is shattered by the behaviour of the testing mantle and Arthur seems genuinely delighted when the fastenings of the mantle break. When the undaunted messenger miraculously produces replacements, the king's suppressed impatience now erupts and, since Girflet supports his suggestion for the postponement of the test, he is quite ready to defer the humiliating ordeal until after the banquet. Again he is frustrated in his attempts to discard the beautiful yet odious mantle.

For the third time, Arthur endorses Gauvain's proposal and a search commences for any woman who has not yet tried on the mantle. Finally, notwithstanding his own humiliation and the shame of the rest of his court, Arthur generously allows Caradoc's wife to keep the garment, which he (Arthur) is probably not too sorry to relinquish.

The portrait of Arthur as given in the Mantel is decidedly less stark than that found in Biket's lai. The primitive violence of his attack on the queen, followed by an abrupt reversal of mood has disappeared. Instead of

physical manifestations of wrath, the more sophisticated Arthur now represses his fury and impatience with remarkable skill. His silence at the proven and undefended guilt of the queen may perhaps be interpreted as indicative of sullen, tacit anger, but if this is so, then he is capable of concealing his emotions with surprising success. In place of rage, he exhibits a philosophical if rather misogynic attitude towards the fidelity of women (vv. 366-7).

As can be seen from this analysis, Arthur now plays a less decisively effective rôle than in the Cor. On three different occasions, for example, he merely endorses a course of action which Gauvain has instigated or proposed. The overall tone of the portrait, then, would suggest a stage in the literary development of Arthur's character half-way between the positive, even comparatively barbaric monarch of the earlier redactions, including the Cor, and the later ineffectual, and on occasion rather despicable and colourless roi fainéant.

In comparison with the inferences to be drawn from this examination of Arthur's character with regard to the approximate dating of the two texts, a similar study of his wife's rôle is less profitable. Reference has already been made to the long-standing tradition of the Queen's inconstancy,[10] and

---

[10] See above, p. 31

Biket's representation of her as an unfaithful wife is no innovation. Geoffrey of Monmouth names her Guenhuvara (which probably means "white phantom") and despite this Celtic name, states that she was of Roman blood, although brought up in the household of Cador of Cornwall. Wace repeats this information, and stresses the bond of love between Arthur and his Genoivre.[11] Closely following his source, Wace reports the treachery of the queen and henceforth, the tradition seems quite firmly established. As one great medieval poet commented:

> Modesty is a capstone over all virtues. . .
> She who is false shall win false praise.
> How durable is thin ice that gets the hot
> August sun? Just so quickly will her
> renown decay.[12]

The queen's reputation did indeed decay and her appearance as the faithless wife is a common one in medieval literature. A point of interest to remark in both the Cor and the Mantel is the reluctance of each author to name the queen explicitly. A veil of anonymity seems to have been preferable, in order to disguise the unfavourable picture of Arthur's wife, who ought to be a nonpareil of marital fidelity. On the contrary, however, she is the frequent instigator of discord at Arthur's court, brought on by her attempts at amorous intrigues. If her advances are welcomed, then all is

---

[11] Arnold and Pelan, vv. 1105-1116.

[12] Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival, tr. H. M. Mustard and C. E. Passage (New York, 1961), p. 4.

well; if repulsed, then Arthur at least can expect trouble. Marie de France exploits this theme in Lanval,[13] where the queen, rejected by the hero, furiously and vilely insults him.

On the whole, the personality of Chrétien's Guinevere is much more attractive. In Erec,[14] she is a popular and respected queen:

> La reïne grant joie an mainne,
> de joie est tote la corz plainne
> ancontre son avenemant,
> car tuit l'ainment comunemant.
> (vv. 1515-8).

She is kind and generous to Enide whom she willingly declares to be:

> . . . la plus gente
> des puceles qui ceanz sont
> et de celes de tot le mont.
> (vv. 1730-32).

In Cligés,[15] she is gracious and helpful towards the lovers Alexandre and Soredamors, and in Yvain,[16] there is no hint of any immoral or unpleasant behaviour on her part. Even in the Charrette, the poet expresses nothing but admiration for Lancelot's mistress, and although she does not play an

---

[13](Ed.) A. Ewert, Marie de France. Lais (Oxford, 1952), pp. 58-74.

[14]M. Roques, op. cit., I: Erec et Enide (CFMA 80; Paris, 1955).

[15](Ed.) Alexandre Micha, Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, II: Cligés (CFMA 84; Paris, 1957).

[16]M. Roques, op. cit., IV: Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain) (CFMA 89; Paris, 1960).

important rôle in Chrétien's Perceval, she is there described in a glowing eulogy delivered by Gauvain:

> Dame, voir, ele est tant cortoise
> Et tant est bele et tant est sage
> Que Deus ne fist loi ne langage
> Ou l'an trovast si sage dame.
> Des que Deus la premiere fame
> Ot de la coste Adan formee,
> Ne fu dame si renomee,
> Et ele le doit mout bien estre:
> Tot ausi con li sages mestre
> Les petiz anfanz andoctrine,
> Ausi ma dame la reïne
> Tot le monde ansaingne et aprant;
> Que de li toz li biens desçant
> Et de li vient et de li muet. . .
> (vv. 8176-8189).

Although, for the more complete glorification of the hero and heroine, the queen must prove unfaithful, Biket's treatment of Arthur's wife is not unduly harsh. She is immediately apprehensive when the function of the magic horn is proclaimed (vv. 259-60) but sufficiently recovers from the king's assault to explain her proven misdemeanour. Quick-witted and endowed with an eloquent tongue which helps her out of a difficult, even dangerous situation, she emphatically demands to be tried by painful ordeals in order to demonstrate her loyalty to Arthur. She declares that the only conceivable reason for the horn's condemnation of her is that she once gave a ring to a young giant-killer who rescued Gauvain. "M'amor li presentai" she admits (v. 343), but only as an incentive to join Arthur's court. Had the heroic youth become a member of Arthur's retinue, she insists that she would never have loved him. It is strange that this incident

is apparently unknown to the rest of the court and that Gauvain himself neither confirms nor refutes the veracity of the statement. Is this, in effect, tacit denial, or tactful deference to the queen?

The episode to which the queen refers appears in no other extant text. K. G. T. Webster recognizes the unnamed knight as Yder, the son of Nut, but fails to offer sufficient evidence in support of his assumption.[17] Yet French medieval literature does furnish some allusions to the warm affection between Yder and Arthur's wife. There is reference to the relationship enjoyed by Yder and the queen in the Folie Tristan de Berne,[18] where Tristan, in explaining his love for Iseult, proclaims:

> Onques Yder, qui ocist l'ors,
> N'ot tant ne poines ne dolors
> Por Guenievre, la fame Artur. . .
> (vv. 232-34).

In the Roman d'Yder,[19] the hero is cast as the lover of Guenlöie, which may be a disguised version of the name Guinevere. Guinevere does, in fact, confess to Arthur that were she to marry again, she would choose Yder, and this

---

[17] K. G. T. Webster, Guinevere. A Study of her Abductions (Massachusetts, 1951), p. 60, n. 1.

[18] (Ed.) Ernest Hoepffner, La Folie Tristan de Berne (Publications de la Faculté de L'Université de Strasbourg, Textes d'Etude 3; 2nd ed.; Paris, 1949).

[19] (Ed.) Heinrich Gelzer, Der altfranzösische Yderroman (Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur 31; Dresden, 1913).

admission rouses vehement jealousy in her husband, who is now determined to achieve Yder's death. In the roman, Yder successfully fulfils the command of Guenlöie to kill two giants, a feat traditionally associated with his name. As Alexandre Micha has pointed out:

> The fight with the giants finds a cognate version interpolated in William of Malmesbury's De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesiae, where we read that Ider son of Nuth, after being knighted by Arthur at Caerleon, killed three giants near Glastonbury.[20]

It is not Yder, however, but Lancelot who is recorded as Gauvain's rescuer, after the latter had been captured by the giant Carados of the Dolorous Tower. This episode is narrated in the Prose Lancelot[21] which, although compiled circa 1220-1230, may be drawing on tradition which is obscure to modern critics. Further, if Lancelot can replace Yder as the queen's favourite lover, surely it is equally possible that the laudable achievement of Gauvain's delivery might also be transferred and accredited to the new hero. For not until Chrétien does Lancelot appear in any major rôle in French literature, and he was, therefore, a relatively late addition to Guinevere's list of paramours. The problem of this obtruse

---

[20] Alexandre Micha, "Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse", ALMA, p. 376.

[21] (Ed.) H. O. Sommer, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances (7 vols.; Washington, 1908-16). The incident is described in Vol. IV, p. 127 ff.

reference, however, has not yet been solved to the complete and unanimous satisfaction of modern scholars.

To continue with the analysis of Biket's queen: with adept subtlety, she manages to change the tenor of her speech, and declare that only a misogynist could have sent such an obnoxious gift. Righteous indignation now replaces penitent explanations and the queen demands that her shame be avenged. When her pleas are refused, she again practises her eloquence in her ardent avowals of devotion to her husband (vv. 379-98). Arthur, though by no means dominated by his wife, seems relieved to accept the queen's interpretation of the horn's behaviour, and is finally won over by her beauty. Biket once more emphasizes the physical endowments of the queen, for even the heroine of the story is not as beautiful as Arthur's wife. Guinevere's malicious jealousy, which prompts the hero of the Livre de Caradoc to remove his loyal wife to the safety of Vannes, does not appear in the lai.

In her introductory appearance in the Mantel, the queen, again unnamed, is the conventional, gracious consort of Arthur. She generously bestows costly gifts upon her puceles and fits well the rôle of the regal benefactress. Her annoyance at the long delay before the start of the banquet is an example of the observant poet's neat delineation of natural characters. She willingly obeys Arthur's summons and when shown the exquisite mantle, immediately longs to possess it. When the garment does not fit, her initial reaction is one of shame: "Toz

li vis li nercist et teint/ Por la honte que ele en out" (vv. 294-5). Since humiliation is her immediate response, one might reasonably ask whether, in fact, she has already guessed the significance of the miraculous garment. When the function of the mantle is explicitly proclaimed by Kei (who, incidentally, is not reproved for his sophisticated and subtle insolence in interpreting the result of the test, vv. 321-26), the queen simulates anger to conceal her shame and demands that she will not be alone in her painful humiliation. Not unnaturally, her fury is vented on her ladies-in-waiting. This desire for satisfaction only to be acquired through the shared discomfort of others has its direct counterpart in the reaction of Biket's Arthur.

Having failed the test, the queen's part in the narrative is now complete. By implicit contrast with the hero's wife, the queen serves to underline the former's unique virtues and as soon as she has fulfilled this required function, her presence in the narrative becomes gratuitous. Symbolically led away by Kei, she is also dismissed by the poet and with equal finality. In the Mantel, then, Arthur's queen is little more than a literary device to intensify the glorious success of Caradoc's wife.

In comparison with the Mantel, Biket's interest in and detailed description of the king and queen are of significant importance. For the action of this lai is still centred

around Arthur, and his knights have not yet taken over the focused attention of poet and audience.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Concerning the personalities of the two royal figures, the Cor has generally been more informative and expansive than the Mantel. With the remaining characters, however, an entirely different situation presents itself. The three principal figures to be examined here, Kei, Gauvain and Ivain, are, in the Cor, almost nothing more than names used to fill in the general Arthurian background, whereas the author of the Mantel gives the rôle of Kei a vital emphasis and introduces lively dialogue to sketch the personality traits of the other knights.

Biket's portrayal of Kei as Arthur's seneschal corresponds to the part he plays in Geoffrey's Historia, in Wace's Brut and throughout Welsh literature. In these early texts and traditions, he is Arthur's invaluable counsellor, enjoying a unique favouritism over the rest of the king's retinue, and a position of esteem and admiration. With the development of the legend, however, Kei's personality takes on an unpleasant aspect, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes malicious and sinister. Apparently, this new image was the innovation of Chrétien de Troyes, for in none of his romans is Kei a sympathetic character. In Erec, his rude attempts to bring the hero before the king

and queen result in his ignominious fall from his horse (vv. 3937-4053).[1] His rôle in the Lancelot is similarly unimpressive. Meleagant offers to free Arthur's captive subjects if any knight will lead Guinevere out into the nearby wood, where he is to defend her in combat against Meleagant. When Kei cunningly elicits the privilege of escorting the queen, all are apprehensive, and with good reason. For when Arthur, Gauvain and others follow later, the only evidence of the duel is Kei's wounded horse, Guinevere and the seneschal having been led away by Meleagant (vv. 171-267).

Again, in Yvain, Kei's endeavours at knightly pursuits are rendered ludicrous on account of his ineptness (vv. 2170-2475); while the description in the Perceval shows that the tradition of Kei's spiteful, jeering manner was already quite familiar to the medieval audience. Here, Chrétien tells of "ses felons gas, sa langue male" (v. 2810) which encourage cautious people to shun his company.

The influence of Chrétien's work was irrefutably great, yet Biket seems entirely unaffected by the former's portrayal of Kei, which might indicate that the lai was written prior to the composition of Chrétien's romans. In the Cor, the seneschal Kei plays an unusually small part,

---

[1] One might compare a similar situation in Perceval, vv. 4274-4348.

his sole function in the story being to fill the magic horn with wine, for Arthur to make the test.

The Kei of the Mantel, however, fits extremely well his customary later rôle. It is Kei who assumes the right to interpret the quality of the queen's fidelity and to publicise the wonderful powers of the mantle (vv. 321-337). With obvious delight, he increases the dangerous tension of the trial and stresses before the frightened women its resultant unwelcome implications (vv. 345-356). To complement this warning speech, Kei cannot resist a sharp reproach on the facile glibness of women in general. He is confident that he will not be shamed by the conduct of his amie, Androëte, but is affected only by the public nature of the humiliating revelation: "Quar ne se pout mie covrir/ Que de tantes genz ert veü" (vv. 422-3). Evidently, his malicious tongue has been the cause of much dissension amongst the knights, for Kei's resultant shame is the only one which the onlookers rejoice in beholding. Brun sanz pitié openly enjoys the spectacle and Yder makes jeering reference to Kei's customary malevolent speech. He uses mockery, Kei's own weapon, against him and remarks: "Bien deit a eschar revertir/ Qui en toz tens en seut servir" (vv. 425-6).

The seneschal's only retort is that he wants everyone else to share his mortification and the author emphatically records Kei's pleasure at the humiliation of Gauvain and his amie Venelas (vv. 472-3). He thanks heaven that he will not

be the sole victim of mockery and gleefully leads Venelas to the other three wretched women who have failed the test. For Kei, sarcasm alone will not suffice; their humiliation must be finalized by the physical act of setting these women apart from the rest of the assembly. Even this task he performs with a smile (v. 581).

His satisfaction is almost complete when he is faced with the opportunity of avenging Yder's insult, and he joyfully gloats over the failure of the former's amie to wear the mantle properly. Once more, the author explicitly analyzes Kei's sentiments and the reason which prompts them:

> Et Keis qui ne se pout tenir
> Porce qu'Ydiers l'out ramposné
> Li sout maintenant sa bonté.
> (vv. 650-52).

He mocks Yder's conceited confidence in believing the fidelity of his amie, having forgotten his own flamboyant declaration of faith. As he leads away the embarrassed woman, once again his only thought is of a shared humiliation, and he eventually states his attitude: "Ce nos deit mont reconforter/ Li uns ne puet l'autre gaber" (vv. 701-2). Neither Gauvain nor Tor can accept such shallow consolation, but Kei is not concerned with the ethics of fidelity. He even goes on to voice the discomforting thought that the unfaithful women, though still reproachable, did need partners in their crimes. However true, this fact is an unpleasant reminder.

With similar forthright practicality, Kei tries to

persuade Caradoc that solitude is preferable to the shame brought by a disloyal wife, thus again forgetful of his previous statement namely, that a common guilt frees all women from blame (vv. 696-700). Not surprisingly, Kei is unusually silent when Caradoc's wife passes the test and of all the knights who were plein de coroz et d'ire (v. 891), doubtless none were more incensed than Kei.

Kei's representation in the Mantel is the typical portrayal found in later Arthurian romances. He rejoices in the misfortune of others, is famed for his mocking sarcasm and is greatly concerned for his public image, instead of with the finer points of any ethical code. The author of the poem skilfully offers this picture of the unpopular seneschal which, although not original, is nevertheless adeptly handled. Kei's speeches exactly record and re-emphasize varying facets of the unattractive nature of the man and, as we have noted, on two occasions, the author attempts direct analyses of Kei's sentiments and motives.

A perfect foil to Kei is Gauvain, the epitome of knightly virtues. Geoffrey names him as the bravest of all the knights and affords him an important rôle in the Historia. Some confusion in Gauvain's family background leads to his being referred to by Geoffrey alternately as Arthur's cousin and his nephew. He is invariably the son of Lot, or Loth, and his mother's name varies from Anna (in the Historia) to

Morcadés (according to the First Continuation of the Perceval and other texts).[2]

Wace is quite extravagant in his praise of Gauvain:

> Preuz fu et de mout grant mesure,
> D'orguel ne de sorfet n'ot cure.
> Plus volt fere que il ne dist,
> Et plus doner qu'il ne promist.
> (vv. 1317-1320).

In Lanval, he plays a small rôle as the hero's friend and is described as "li francs, li pruz,/ Que tant se fist amer de tuz" (vv. 227-28).

In Chrétien's works, Gauvain's status is even higher and he is represented as the paragon of knights and ranks highest among them,[3] although the narrative of the Lancelot demands that Gauvain play a subsidiary, if not rather ridiculous rôle. Apart from this one exception, however, he is usually associated with courtly charm, tact and wisdom as well as the customary attributes of courage, strength and mastery of fighting techniques. His personality is diametrically opposed to that of Kei and an inevitable result of the contrast was the deliberate juxtaposition of the two knights. In order to

---

[2]Roach, op. cit., III, vv. 6859-6861. Morcadés also figures in the same rôle in Le Chevalier as deus Espees, (ed.) W. Foerster (Halle, 1877), vv. 2942-45; and in the Enfances Gauvain. See Paul Meyer, "Les Enfances Gauvain. Fragments d'un poème perdu", Romania XXXIX (1910), 1-32.

[3]Erec, vv. 1671-72.

stress the irremediable gulf between these two conflicting characters, Gauvain and Kei are frequently placed in the same, or a similar situation. Chrétien, for example, uses the same motif both in Erec (v. 3928-4171), in the Perceval (vv. 4274-4540), and in the First Continuation[4] namely, that first Kei then Gauvain is sent to fetch the hero, or another knight to Arthur's court. The imperious Kei uses violence and is shamefully defeated on each occasion; whereas Gauvain with gracious and courteous appeals, succeeds in his mission.

Although Gauvain usually plays a prominent part in the stories in which he appears, in the Cor, his presence is hardly noticeable. He is highly esteemed by Arthur and his wife and helps to defend the queen from her husband's attack. The only reference to Gauvain's admirable prowess is telling, although indirect. For even Caradoc, the hero of the lai is inferior to the invincible Gauvain:

> car en la cort Artu
> n'aveit meillor escu
> ne plus face a sa main,
> fors mon seignor Galvain
> (vv. 487-90).

As in the case of Kei, it is not explicitly stated that Gauvain took the horn test, even though the line "sor toz est espanduz" (v. 450) might imply this. The name of Yvain is also withheld from the list of unsuccessful participants. The reason for these omissions is obscure but it

---

[4] Roach, op. cit. I, vv. 12707-12877.

may be considered in part to be an attempt by Biket to shield the traditional and fashionable paragons of virtue from any unfavourable comment. Furthermore, it would be difficult to dismiss in a few lines the humiliation of such favourite Arthurian heroes.[5]

In the Mantel, Gauvain assumes his regular importance, even to the point of overshadowing the authority of Arthur. As has been noted,[6] Gauvain repeatedly prompts the king into the next necessary action and the effect of his strong, sympathetic personality is felt throughout the narrative. He is the first to see the approaching messenger, the first to encourage the granting of his request. He suggests the summoning of the queen, to whom he is the first to speak, inventing a very natural and clever excuse for the king's order and one which will easily flatter, and therefore fool the women: "Il veut veeir come sont beles/ Et come eles sont acesmées" (vv. 250-1). With the additional lure of a surpassingly beautiful gown, the women are soon beguiled. Before the test, Venelas, Gauvain's amie is considered the most loyal woman of the court, and her reputation surely

---

[5] In contrast, only Arthur, Kei, Gauvain and Yvain are said to fail the test in the Long Redaction of the First Continuation (Roach, op. cit., II, vv. 12388-12448). In the Short Redaction, only Arthur and Kei take the test as well as the hero (Ibid., III, Pt. 1, MS.L, vv. 3196-3212, MSS. ASPU, 3181-3190).

[6] See above, pp. 33-34.

enhances Gauvain's own fame.

After her failure, Gauvain's reaction is not one of shattered pride. All that the author will say is that the knight's grief reduces him to silence. Naturally, Kei exults in this surprising outcome and later, Caradoc seems equally disturbed by the result of this particular test. His apprehension that his lady should be seated "o l'amie Gauvain est mise" (v. 818) implicitly betrays his opinion that if even Gauvain's amie has proven untrustworthy, then no man can hope to have a pure and loyal wife.

A second direct contrast with Kei is found in their respective attitudes to the ultimate findings of the test. As Kei's primary concern was with his public humiliation, he can derive consolation from the thought that "Li uns ne puet l'autre gaber" (v. 702). Gauvain, on the other hand, is not so easily comforted: shame does not weigh any less heavily upon him because it is shared. Moreover, the very fact of its universal nature worries him. But in spite of his evident consternation, Gauvain is the only knight to congratulate Caradoc's wife graciously, yet at the same time, proves unable to refrain from mentioning the contrasting pain and embarrassment of the rest of the court, who would gladly deny her right to the mantle.

The Gauvain presented by the author of the conte is, therefore, quite close to the conventional image of a courtly,

generous idol esteemed by all his colleagues and held up to the admiration of the medieval audience.

A similar popularity was also enjoyed by Yvain, son of Urien, a literary figure who has claims to historical authenticity.[7] Geoffrey of Monmouth furnishes scant information on Yvain, merely stating that he was brave and that he distinguished himself in several battles. Here, and in the Brut, where his valour is also applauded (vv. 4629-4632), he is the nephew of the Scottish king, Anguiseal. He is named in Erec (v. 1685) with the additional sobriquet "li preuz". The virtues and fine qualities of Yvain are perhaps best expressed in Chrétien's Yvain, ou le Chevalier au Lion, in which the exposition of the hero's personality is thorough and skilfully presented. He is often the close companion of Gauvain, or else his cousin, since Urien and Lot are traditionally represented as the brothers of Anguiseal.

In Biket's lai, Yvain acts in a soothing capacity, to calm and reason with Arthur. He tries to pacify the furious king with the statement that no woman alive could prove completely loyal, especially in her thoughts. He senses that ruined pride causes Arthur's bitterest pain and attempts to reinstate his honour by suggesting that the whole assembly undergo the test. The queen obviously recognizes in Yvain a

---

[7]See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 269.

moderate, rational judge as it is to him she appeals when she makes her declarations of fidelity. As with Gauvain and Kei, Yvain, as a member of the younger generation of magnificent heroes, is not mentioned as trying to drink from the horn.

Of all the knights except Caradoc, Yvain plays the most important and positive rôle, unlike his part in the Mantel where he is somewhat overshadowed, partly by the aura of the unpleasant Kei and partly by the presence of the courteous Gauvain. These three knights are evidently appreciated by Arthur who chooses them to summon the queen and her ladies to the banquet.

As in Chrétien, Yvain, the son of Urien is again afforded the epithet, preuz (v. 498). He is also "le gentil,/ Qui tant ama chiens et oiseaus" (vv. 498-9). The rôle of the lover of nature is an unusual one when applied to Yvain, and would probably be more fitting when associated with a hero such as Tristan.

Upon the queen's donning the mantle, and its subsequent shortening, Yvain notices her discomfort (v. 296-7) and tactfully proposes that the garment should be tried on by a woman whose physical stature is similar to that of the queen. Apparently, he is coming to the aid of the embarrassed queen and to shelter her, offers the delicate excuse that in this way, she will be able to see just how well the mantle fits herself. One has the impression that Yvain might be happily relieved when the mantle becomes even shorter on Tor's amie.

Yvain's own lady inspires great faith in Arthur, who is convinced that she will win the contest. Her failure, however, brings no comment from Yvain, who for the rest of the story now fills an unobtrusive place in the general Arthurian background of the conte.

From this examination of the five principal characters in the Lai du Cor and the Conte du Mantel, one can remark without difficulty the fundamental differences in the presentation of these various personalities. Both groups of characters are portrayed according to the unspoken rules of convention, but the obvious divergence between the stages of that convention is indisputably manifest. Biket presupposes and relies upon the audience's familiarity with the Arthurian setting in order to dispense with unnecessary introductions to the personalities he uses in his poem which, furthermore, is subject to the limitations of the genre. Although his work naturally has definite elements of such traditional representation, such as Gauvain's appearance as the perfect knight, and Kei's rôle as Arthur's seneschal, nevertheless the tradition from which Biket draws is early enough to lack any intimation of Kei's churlish nature or of Arthur's ineffectual personality.

Both these latter traits can be found in the Mantel, where the author deliberately stresses and cultivates the various points of characterization which have been established by convention: Gauvain is gracious and polite, offsetting the odious Kei, and, as we have seen in the previous chapter,

Arthur is a mild, almost nominal head of state, who will carry out the suggestions of his knights without question.

The conte, then, is representative of a further stage in the development of character of the major figures, whose personalities are dictated by a later tradition and expressed by a more sophisticated poet.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUBSIDIARY CHARACTERS

From the information available through the preceding character analyses, one might justifiably infer that Biket relates his portrayals to older literary traditions, which were either replaced or distorted by the time that the author of the Mantel came to develop the personalities he describes in his conte.

So far, this study has been confined to one aspect of character treatment, namely, the ways in which the various major figures are represented according to the conventional images with which each author was familiar. There is also a second pertinent field of investigation which examines the names of all the characters mentioned and thereby attempts to glean from the very inclusion of certain figures further information on the probable literary atmosphere at the time of the poem's composition. In fact, Biket's choice of characters was considered by Gaston Paris to be an important factor in allocating the poem to a stage of Arthurian romance "encore fort peu avancé".[1] In quoting Paris' authority, Dörner also evidently accepts this basis for determining the

---

[1] Romania, XVII (1888), 301, n. 2, as quoted by Dörner, op. cit., p. 44.

date of the Cor.

When they can be positively identified, most of the minor characters in the Lai du Cor belong to the older, i.e. Arthur's generation of knights and kings, as opposed to heroes such as Yvain and Gauvain, whose fathers are nearer Arthur's age-group. It is these older knights who submit to the test, fail and thereby help Arthur to recover some of his lost dignity.

Of the seven characters whose names are linked with the horn-test, three appear in Geoffrey's Historia and in the Brut: Nut, Lot and Anguiseal.

In the romances, Nut's fame rests largely on his being the father of Yder and even in the Roman d'Yder,[2] his unusually prominent rôle as the "duc d'Alemaigne" is due solely to his relationship with the hero of the story.

A similar subordinate rôle was also ascribed to Lot, whose son Gauvain was to outshine almost all of Arthur's other illustrious knights. In the Historia, Lot of Lodonesia, or Lothian, "a valiant soldier, mature both in wisdom and age"[3] still plays a very active part. Furthermore, he is so highly valued by Uther Pendragon that the latter bestows on him his daughter Anna.[4] His career is highlighted by several victories

---

[2]Gelzer, op. cit.

[3]Thorpe, Historia, p. 209.

[4]Loc. cit.

and ultimately he becomes the king of Norway.

Both Geoffrey[5] and Wace[6] name Lot as the brother of Urien, king of Moray and Anguiseal, king of Escoce, all of whom were restored to power by Uther Pendragon. The territory over which Anguiseal is said to govern was known at one time as Albany, according to Geoffrey;[7] and Escoce is now generally recognized as that part of Scotland which lies north of the Firth of Forth. Anguiseal is given the same title in Erec[8] and in many other romances in which he appears.

None of these three kings is described in any detail in the Cor: Biket simply names them when enumerating the participants in the trial.[9] Thus, despite the utter lack of any characterization, these men can be said to play an active rôle in the Cor, a representation which conflicts with the majority of later portrayals in which, in the case of Lot and Nut their names appear only as epithets added to the names of their sons.

---

[5]Thorpe, Historia, p. 221.

[6]Pelan and Arnold, op. cit., vv. 2408-9.

[7]Thorpe, Historia, p. 227.

[8]Roques, Erec, v. 1918.

[9]Cor, "li reis Nuz", v. 411; "Anguiseals d'Escoce", v. 413; "Li reis Loz", v. 427.

As well as Gauvain and Yvain, there is another exception to the apparent preference of Biket's for including mainly the older knights. Giflet is present at the feast[10] but is not directly associated with the test. Again, protection may be the motive behind this omission for Giflet enjoys considerable popularity in several Arthurian romances.

Chrétien names him as "li filz Do" in Erec,[11] the composition of which Loomis places after that of the Cor.[12] He appears in the Perceval[13] and in Renaut de Beaujeu's Bel Inconnu, in which he is defeated by the hero Guinglain in a sparrow-hawk contest.[14]

The remaining characters in the Lai du Cor defy positive identification. Gloviien who appears at v. 423 is completely unknown, as is Cadain (vv. 294, 426). It is possible that Gohors (v. 421) might represent Gornemanz de Gohors, who is placed fourth in Chrétien's list of celebrated knights[15] and also plays a rôle of considerable importance in the Perceval, in which he is the hero's educator in the sphere

---

[10] Cor, vv. 168, 295.

[11] Roques, Erec, vv. 1697, 2174.

[12] Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, p. 162, n. 12.

[13] Hilka, op. cit., vv. 2883, 4721.

[14] (Ed.) G. P. Williams, Renaut de Beaujeu. Le Bel Inconnu (CFMA 38; Paris, 1929). The incident occurs at vv. 1497-1869.

[15] Roques, Erec, v. 1675.

of knightly accomplishments.[16]

The identity of Caratons (v. 430) might also be judged in an equally hypothetical manner. This name bears some resemblance to Corentins, a courtier in Le Bel Inconnu.[17] One physical detail of Caratons as described by Biket probably indicates a strong Anglo-Saxon influence; for the moustaches worn by this character are not a common feature of contemporary French heroes.

Two kings of Ireland (v. 431) and the kings of Cornwall (v. 417) and of Sinadone (v. 407)[18] complete the impressive assembly of unsuccessful participants in the test, thereby proving the inconstancy of their wives or amies, none of whom are named.

The court chaplain also remains anonymous, although there is more to this character than there is to any of these heroes. His tact and concern in stressing the need for a secret translation of the message has already been noticed.[19] He may also be credited with enough insight to suspect the

---

[16] Hilka, op. cit., vv. 1352-1698. Gornemanz is named at vv. 1548 and 1892.

[17] (Ed.) G. P. Williams, op. cit., v. 44.

[18] Sinadone is referred to as "la Cité Gaste" in Le Bel Inconnu, v. 2761 ff., and has been identified by Loomis as Segontium, a derelict Roman camp above Caernarvon. This fort was located at the base of Snowdon and the whole territory around this mountain was frequently named Sinadone. See. R. S. Loomis, Wales and the Arthurian Legend (Cardiff, 1956), pp. 1-18.

[19] See above p. 27.

possible transgressions of the queen and to foresee the subsequent unpleasantness if these are disclosed. This suspicion, however, may not be confined to the queen alone, for according to the pessimistic chaplain:

> Mais ne cuit chevalier
> de ci qu'a Monpellier
> qui femme ait esposée,
> ja en beive denrée,
> se c'est veirs qu'icil dist
> qui cez letres escrist.
> (vv. 249-54).

As in all the French versions of the chastity-testing theme, it is a male messenger who delivers the magic object to Arthur's court. There is no description of the youth, except that he is "molt avenant e bel" (v. 28). Instead, our attention is deliberately directed to the horn itself, of which a detailed picture lasts for some thirty lines (vv. 33-62). Certain elements of conventional description are apparent here: the emphasis on the costly materials, for example, and the short enumeration of jewels are typical of this literary genre. A similar picture in miniature appears in Marie de France's Guigemar, where an abridged and condensed description of a wonderful bed is to be found.[20] The stress on the horn's ancient origin plus the detail of its manufacture by a fairy are both traditional devices used to enhance the attraction of the object described.[21] The emphasis on the musical quality

---

[20] Ewert, op. cit., pp. 3-25. The description occupies vv. 170-182 Note also that the same rhyme "ivoire" and "trifoire" occurs in both poems (Cor, vv. 33 f.; Guigemar, vv. 173 f

of the little bells on the horn and their power of fascination might be interpreted in a similar way.[22] This particular feature may also represent an attempt to exploit the element of the supernatural, since the enchanting bells play no significant part in the story. This aura of mystery is first introduced by the mention of the fairy (v. 47), and is cultivated by the utilization of intriguing references intended to provoke suspense and anticipation within the audience. Biket hints at impending trouble (vv. 25-6 and 207-10) and warns that the fairy was "ramponouse e irée" (v. 222) when she fashioned the testing-horn. As we shall see, the rôle of the messenger adds to the general impression of strange obscurity and tension which is evoked right from the beginning of the lai.

How the horn came to be in the possession of its present owner, Mangon de Moraine, is unexplained. The identity of this character is equally problematical. There is a certain similarity between this name and Amangon, who, as R. Heinzel has remarked, appears in Le Bel Inconnu, Meraugis de Portlesguez, La Vengeance Raguidel, Li Chevaliers as deus Espees and the Elucidation Prologue of the Perceval.[23] The list of

---

[21] In the corresponding anecdote related in the Livre de Caradoc, the horn can change water into wine.

[22] One is reminded here of the magic bell which hangs around Petitcriu's neck and induces forgetfulness. Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan, ed. R. Bechstein (2 vols.; 5th ed; Leipzig, 1930), II, vv. 15860-3.

appearances is augmented by Loomis who, in addition to these five romances, cites Erec and suggests possible connections between Mangon and other characters who occur in Manessier's Continuation, the Didot-Perceval and the Vulgate Merlin.[24] In the Chevaliers as deus Espees, Amangon is the king of Granelande, a supernatural realm from which no-one ever returns, and his daughter is Gauvain's amie.[25] Of those texts where Biket's Mangon can be more readily recognized, i.e. those mentioned by Heinzel, plus Erec, Mangon plays the rôle of an evil character in one poem only, the Elucidation Prologue,[26] where he rapes one of the maidens of the well and steals her golden cup (vv. 63-72).

As for Mangon's territories as named in the Cor, it has been proposed that Moraine is a form of the name Maurienne or, in its earliest form, Morienna, which in the eleventh century was identified with its neighbouring district of Savoie.[27] Alternatively, Moraine may represent Moriane which

---

[23] R. Heinzel, Über die französischen Gralromane, (Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Philos-Hist. Klasse), Vienna, 1891), XL, 78, n. 1.

[24] Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, pp. 244-50.

[25] Foerster, op. cit., vv. 88 ff. and 12121-2.

[26] Hilka, op. cit., pp. 417-429.

[27] Paton, op. cit., p. 110.

can often be identified with Mauretania.[28] Both interpretations, however, are possible explanations of the name, rather than conclusive definitions.

That the owner of the horn should be Mangon de Moraine is a feature peculiar to the Cor alone. In some versions, the sender is Morgain la Fée who is actuated by a malevolent desire to cause trouble at Arthur's court and reveal Guinevere's illicit passion for Lancelot.[29] In other redactions, the owner is not named, as in the Livre de Caradoc and the abridged version found in Renart le Contrefait, while in Diu Crône, the magic horn is sent by a sea-king.[30] Although Mangon's motive in presenting the gift is not stated, he obviously anticipates the unwelcome reception the horn will have, for his messenger is instructed to stress his master's goodwill and to seek a pledge of friendship from Arthur. The messenger also exhibits some apprehension by leaving Caerleon before Arthur can give him the gold he has promised. He politely declines the king's invitation to join the banquet and leaves, for he "crient qu'il

---

[28] L. F. Flutre, Table des Noms Propres avec toutes leurs variantes figurant dans les Romans du Moyen Age écrits en français ou en provençale et actuellement publiés ou analysés, (Publications du Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, No. 2, Poitiers, 1962).

[29] As in the Prose Tristan, Malory and the two later Italian redactions.

[30] Scholl, op. cit., vv. 1012-3.

ne seit sëuz" (v. 160). His abrupt exit from the scene of the narrative is perhaps a further reminiscence of the misty world of the supernatural and at the same time heightens the suspense which Biket on several occasions wishes to evoke.

For the most part, then, the minor rôles in the Cor are filled by characters of the older generation of knights. The author of the Mantel, on the other hand, reveals no such bias in his choice of personalities.

Of the minor characters, only one knight, Giflet, figures in both texts and in neither of them is it explicitly stated that he is directly associated with the chastity test. In the Mantel, Giflet plays a relatively important part. He advises Arthur against impetuous declarations of confidence in Perceval's amie before she has tried on the cloak, and would seem to represent the calm voice of reason (vv. 552-556c). Before very long, however, his attitude changes radically, so that he becomes "fel et engrès" (v. 600) and in appealing to the king to discontinue the test, is apparently trying to avoid the event of his own humiliation. He urges that the trial has now served its purpose in that on seeing the mantle, the women freely admit their deceit and transgressions. Any further degradation is therefore unnecessary. Although welcomed by Arthur, the suggestion is thwarted by the messenger and Giflet continues his rôle as observer of the trial. He comments on the shortening of the garment when

Yder's amie puts it on, and later in the story, is credited with finding Caradoc's lady. Obviously, Giflet's rôle has been greatly expanded from the mere mention of his name in the Cor.

Of the remaining six unsuccessful knights who are named, the amies of only three are reported to have donned the wonderful cloak:[31] Bedoer, Guivret le petit and Brun sans pitié all escape direct implication. The first of these characters has enjoyed a place in the Arthurian legend since Geoffrey of Monmouth, where for the first time he is named as Arthur's butler, and is said to have been granted the dominion of Normandy.[32] The same information is offered by Wace (vv. 1615-7), while in Erec, Bedoer appears as "li conestables/ qui molt sot d'eschas et de tables." (vv. 1703-4) He rarely plays a major part in French Arthurian romance and is limited in the Mantel to one brief remark (vv. 448-59). Here, "li bons botilliers" suggests that the garment should be donned by Gauvain's amie, thereby courteously implying both Gauvain's supremacy over the other knights and the probable victory of his lady.

The character of Guivret le petit cannot claim such long-standing association with the Arthurian legend as can

---

[31] According to vv. 685-7, however, the unfavourable result of the test seems to be applied to everyone.

[32] Thorpe, Historia, p. 225.

Bedoer, yet he does appear as early as Erec. The wealthy dwarf-king rules over the men of Ireland and is undaunted by his small stature: ". . .il estoit molt de cors petiz,/ mes de grant cuer estoit hardiz" (vv. 3665-6). Guivret makes a habit of attacking every knight who enters his territory and since Erec unwittingly does so, the two fight a long and arduous combat. After a fierce struggle, Guivret is vanquished and subsequently becomes Erec's devoted friend.[33]

The same Guivret, lord of the Irish, appears in Le Bel Inconnu[34] and Loomis also links Guivret's identity with that of the Petit Chevalier who, in the Second Continuation, owns a virtue-testing magic shield.[35]

In the Mantel, Guivret's realms are not mentioned and his rôle and speech are not marked by any really distinctive features. Like Giflet, Guivret also warns the king against unjustified assertions of trust in another knight's amie (vv. 506-8).[36] When the lady fails the test, Guivret offers the cynical opinion that only a fool believes in the loyalty of women, for notwithstanding a knight's merit, he will still

---

[33] Roques, Erec, vv. 3653-3910.

[34] G. P. Williams, op. cit., vv. 5483-4; 5830.

[35] Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, pp. 139 ff.

[36] This time, the knight in question is Yvain.

be the victim of deception (vv. 515-18).[37] He reminds Arthur of the advice he gave, and comments on the behaviour of the mantle which very readily lengthened on the right side and shortened on the left. Yvain's amie is infuriated by her humiliation and probably also by Guivret's tactless remarks on the spectacle.[38]

As his name indicates, Brun sans pitié is often depicted as a proud and merciless knight; he is a frequent opponent of the warriors of the Round Table and of Gauvain in particular. He is king of La Rouge Cité in L'Atre Périlleux[39] and is overcome by Gauvain in combat. Brun's treachery is recorded in the Livre d'Artus[40] and in the Prose Lancelot, where he is again defeated by Gauvain.[41] In Gerbert's Continuation, he is briefly mentioned in a list of knights who have assembled for a tournament at King Mark's court, and on both occasions, his name is linked with "Brunamort/ Qui maint bon chevalier a mort. . ."[42] Perhaps with such an

---

[37]Note this veiled insult to Arthur; by implication, the king is also "fous".

[38]The similarity between the names Giflet and Guivret probably indicates confusion on the part of authors and scribes. In the Mantel, variants of Guivret include Girflet on two occasions, vv. 505 and 514.

[39](Ed.) B. Woledge, L'Atre Périlleux. Roman de la Table Ronde (CFMA 76; Paris, 1936). Appendix, v. 558-9. The episode belongs to MS. N^2 only.

[40]Sommer, op. cit., VII, 116 ff.

[41]Ibid., III, 183-8, 193-4.

associate, Brun is once again regarded as an unpleasant character.

Bearing in mind the other references to this knight in Old French literature, it is quite surprising to find him a respected member of Arthur's court. His rôle in the Mantel involves only five lines, in which he sarcastically mocks Kei's boast that the peerless Androëte will prove chaste and loyal. He sneers at the unpopular seneschal's unjustified confidence, recalling the latter's own words:

> Veirement n'i avez vous per,
> . . . . . .
> Bien deit estre joian[z] et lié[z]
> Messire Keis li seneschaus.
> Veirement estes des leiaus!
> (vv. 414-18).

As the testing of Brun's amie is not mentioned, Kei has no opportunity to retaliate to this mordant jeer, after which there is no further reference to Brun sans pitié. It would seem, then, that Brun's fleeting appearance serves in part to add yet another name to the impressive list of Arthurian knights. Furthermore, through the use of yet another speaker, the author also expands the scope of the dialogue which he skilfully manipulates and directs from various angles, thus giving a fast and fluid rhythm to the narrative.

---

[42](Ed.) M. Williams, Gerbert de Montreuil. La Continuation de Perceval (CFMA, 28 and 50. 2 vols., Paris, 1922 and 1925), vv. 3981 f. and 4247 f.

The rôle assigned to Tor, the son of Arès is equally brief, despite his popularity within the Arthurian legend, which is attested by frequent references to his name. He does not usually play rôles of any importance and is very frequently confined to lists of knights belonging to Arthur's Round Table.[43] In the Huth Merlin, however, his character takes on a brutal and sinister aspect: he stuns a knight then presents the knight's sister with his head.[44] The precise origin of his name, and that of his father, is unknown.

Like Brun sans pitié, Tor's appearance in the Mantel is restricted to one speech. It is his amie who tries on the wonderful gown immediately after the queen and on Yvain's suggestion, yet Tor's reaction at the proven disloyalty of his lady is not recorded. His one remark--" 'Cist conforz est assez mauvès'" (v. 728)--is in answer to Kei's warped sense of values. The seneschal argues that shared dishonour constitutes the best consolation and Tor merely reiterates Gauvain's condemnation of such an attitude.

For the student of Arthurian romance, the character of Perceval le Gallois needs little introduction. He is

---

[43] As in Erec, v. 1508; Le Bel Inconnu, vv. 42, 5582; L'Atre Périlleux, v. 136; and the Long Redaction of the First Continuation, v. 5448, etc. In this last text, he makes several appearances.

[44] (Ed.) G. Paris and J. Ulrich, Huth Merlin (SATF, 2 vols., Paris, 1886), II, 110 ff.

first named in Erec,[45] and in Le Bel Inconnu, is referred to as "uns chevaliers preus et cortois,"[46] while in Cligés, Chrétien allocates to him second place in his list of honoured knights.[47] He is, of course, the hero of Chrétien's Perceval, ou le Conte del Graal, of some of its subsequent Continuations and of the numerous adaptations of the Grail cycle.

As we have seen, several of the characters included in the narrative of the Mantel are used mainly to add more colour and depth to the general Arthurian background, while the personalities of these individuals remain undeveloped. Perceval furnishes another excellent example of this feature. In the Mantel, he is the "dameisel galleis" (v. 546), an epithet first used by Chrétien in Erec and Perceval's customary sobriquet from that time. There is no reference to Perceval's exploits in search of the Grail. In fact, Perceval's rôle is so minor in this version of the chastity-test that he takes no part, however small, in either the dialogue or the action. The cloak's fastenings break when his amie puts on the garment, proving her own suspicions of failure (vv. 557-63). The mantle falls to the ground and despite the vividness of this humiliation, possibly the most striking example of its kind,

---

[45] Roques, Erec, v. 1506.

[46] G. P. Williams, op. cit., v. 5502.

[47] Micha, Cligés, vv. 4774, 4777, 4793, 4797. He is, however, overthrown in a tournament by Cligés.

Perceval's reaction receives no comment from the author.

Yder, son of Nut, is the last remaining knight to be examined here. His long established connection with Arthurian literature begins in Geoffrey's Historia, where he helps Arthur in his skirmishes with the Romans,[48] and Geoffrey's redactor, Wace, mentions Yder on several occasions.[49] When Chrétien adopts the character, however, some confusion is evident, as this author distinguishes not only Yder, son of Nut, but also li rois Yder[50] and Yder del Mont Delereus.[51] The king is one of Arthur's advisers, while the last named character is included in the roll of illustrious knights present at court.

In Geoffrey and in Wace, Yder son of Nut had played a very creditable rôle and in early tradition probably anticipated Lancelot as Guinevere's lover.[52] Nevertheless, the exploits which Chrétien assigns to this Yder in Erec are of a distinctly unfavourable nature, and are at extreme variance with tradition.[53] In the first episode, he appears accompanied

---

[48]Thorpe, Historia, p. 243.

[49]Arnold and Pelan, op. cit., vv. 3381, 3388, 3391, 3629.

[50]Roques, Erec, v. 313.

[51]Ibid., v. 1694.

[52]See above, pp. 38-39.

[53]See Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, pp. 77-79.

by a maiden and a dwarf who slaps both Guinevere's maid and then Erec whom the queen had sent to summon the three travellers to her pavilion (vv. 138-274). The second episode offers occasion for Erec to avenge these insults: Yder is vanquished by the hero in a sparrow-hawk contest, is sent to Arthur's court at Caradigan and becomes one of his knights (vv. 863-1237).

An unusual reversal of rôles is to be found in Durmart le Galois[54] where this time Yder Hfiz Nu plays the part of the unnamed escort of the queen and on her abduction can only follow her to her ravisher's castle (vv. 4185 ff).

The adventures of Yder, son of Nut, are told in detail in the Roman d'Yder[55] and he is often mentioned in those characteristic lists of Arthurian knights.[56] Occasionally, the name Yder appears without the added detail of his lineage.[57]

One of Yder's most prominent traits in the Mantel is

---

[54](Ed.) J. Gildea, O.S.A., Durmart le Galois, (2 vols; Vinnanove,Pa., 1965-66).

[55]Gelzer, op. cit.

[56]E.g. Gerbert's Continuation, v. 4242; Sommer, op. cit., III, 227; Ibid, VII, 298, 320; Roach, op. cit., II, 9230, 12938, 8532.

[57]E.g. Li Chevaliers as deus Espees, v. 83; Le Bel Inconnu, v. 5525, etc. The author of the latter text names both li rois Yder and Yder. Perhaps, again, there are two distinct personalities.

his hostility towards Kei.[58] He quickly attacks Kei mockingly when the latter's amie fails the test. Yder had doubtless had first-hand experience of Kei's derisive jeers and sarcasm, for he thoroughly enjoys the opportunity for revenge and eagerly welcomes this overdue exchange of rôles. Mockery is the obvious weapon with which to fight Kei for, as Yder remarks, "'Bien deit a eschar revertir/ Qui en toz tens en seut servir'" (vv. 425-6). When the messenger insists on every lady's undergoing the trial, Yder becomes angry (v. 618), his wrath probably masking his fear of humiliation, a reaction which denotes that he is rational enough to guess that if so many ladies have already failed, then his amie will be equally unfortunate. However, he acknowledges the necessity of getting the trial finished and decides to put on a show of bravado. He reassures his amie of his trust and urges her to don the mantle, since the event cannot be forestalled or avoided (vv. 626-33). Kei is delighted when the cloak rolls up and harshly scorns Yder's arrogant and ill-founded faith (vv. 653-65). Yder's fury and shame devastate his power to retaliate: "Ydiers ne set en nule guise/ Que il deie faire ne dire;" (vv. 666-7). He seizes the abominable garment and flings it at Arthur's feet.

Like many of his companions, Yder fits neatly into the customary portrayal of the traditional Arthurian knight. His presence conveniently increases the number of Arthur's

---

[58] Cf. their mutual emnity in Gerbert's Continuation, vv. 1512 ff.

warriors and at the same time underlines more noticeably the unpopular character of Kei.

A few conventional features constitute the character of the anonymous messenger. He is exceedingly handsome (vv. 127-35),[59] and suitably eloquent for his profession (vv. 136-9), greeting Arthur with extravagant praise and compliments (vv. 161-5). In contrast with the Cor, there is no marked emphasis on the other-wordly nature of the young man: we are told simply that: "'Une pucele m'a tramis/ De mout lointain païs a vos'" (vv. 168-9), and that he has journeyed "'d'estrange terre'" (v. 223) for the express purpose of delivering the gift. The sender's motive is neither stated nor implied, but she is evidently very interested in the results of the test and probably in the hostility it has caused at court (vv. 882-87). If, like Morgain, she wished to cause dissension and unpleasantness at Arthur's court, then she certainly succeeds.

In discussing the beauty of the precious mantle, the author leaves much to the imagination,[60] avoiding a too lengthy pictorial representation with the explanation:

---

[59] Note the convehtional method of description, beginning with the head or face and working downwards.

[60] Contrast the elaborate description of the mantle given to Enide by Guinevere, Erec, vv. 1573-1606.

Onques nus hom ne vit si bel,
Quar une fée l'aveit fait.
Nus hom ne savreit le portrait
Ne l'uevre dou drap [acointier].
(vv. 192-5).

There is no intermediary agent, such as Biket's chaplain, to reveal the function of the talismanic garment. Instead, its wonderful quality is briefly yet emphatically stated: "La fée fist ou drap une uevre/ Qui les fausses dames descuevre:" (vv. 201-2). The author makes no attempt to create an atmosphere of suspense or of supernatural intervention and he seems to accept the garment as a relatively ordinary marvel. It would appear that Biket's awe has no counterpart in the work of the more sophisticated poet who was probably so steeped in tales of the miraculous, which were abundant in the Middle Ages, to be comparatively unmoved by the magical nature of the marvellous cloak.

When the garment will fit no woman present, the messenger obliges Arthur to search thoroughly for anyone who might not have undergone the test. His remarks that the court's reputation will suffer if the mantle has to be returned have an almost threatening undertone, or, at the very least, are tinged with a nuance of bribery.

The characters of the court-ladies in both the Cor and the Mantel need minimal consideration. Out of the two texts, only two women are named: the amie of Kei in the Mantel, Androëte, and Gauvain's lady, Venelas. The former lady is

"gay" (v. 429) and the latter noble and courteous (v. 455), an appropriate companion for the paragon of knights. All the ladies react predictably during the test: they blush, chatter nervously, are desperately embarrassed and would go to any lengths to escape the humiliating test.

As for the knights, we have been confronted with a variety of names which can be arranged in two categories. Those of the Cor are either unknown or relate to the older Arthurian traditions found in Geoffrey's Historia and in the Brut,[61] and there is no perceptible influence of the romans of Chrétien de Troyes. The heroes in the Mantel, on the other hand, are stock Arthurian characters who reappear frequently throughout the Arthurian cycle. Interaction between these personalities is controlled so as to make excellent use of dialogue, thus widening the panorama of the narrative, and, by this variety, helping to sustain interest in the story.

---

[61] With the exception of Giflet.

CHAPTER V

THE HERO AND HEROINE

As we have seen in Chapter I, it is with remarkable frequency that the name of Caradoc is associated with the theme of chastity tests. In some texts, including that of the Mantel, he is given the sobriquet Briebraz or Brefbraz or a similar form of the name,[1] in which many critics detect a clue to the identity of the figure. The historic Celt whom this legendary Arthurian hero may represent has already been mentioned,[2] and the similarity between the Celtic Brec[h]bras and Briebraz, as the name appears in the Old French, would not seem to be merely coincidental.

A popular theory concerning these surnames reasons that the Celtic Brec[h]bras, meaning Arm-strong, was confused with Briebraz, Short-Arm, with the result that a legend arose explaining the sobriquet and also emphasizing the exemplary devotion of the hero's wife. Hence, the serpent myth was attached to Caradoc's name and history.

---

[1] Erec, v. 1689; L'Atre Périlleux, v. 138; Gerbert's Continuation, v. 14041; Roach, op. cit., II, 5479 etc.; III, pt. 1, 2859; 3784; F. Wolf, loc. cit.; Li Chevaliers as deus Espees, v. 3437.

[2] See above, p. 19.

The bizarre story of Caradoc and the serpent is told in detail in the Livre de Caradoc and in summarized form in Renart le Contrefait. According to the first of these redactions,[3] the strange tale begins with the marriage of Arthur's niece, Ysaive of Carhaix to Caradoc, king of Vannes.[4] For the first three nights of her marriage, however, the queen's lover, the enchanter Eliavrés, managed to substitute consecutively a bitch, a sow and a mare in place of Ysaive who was thus able to spend these nights not with her husband but with the amorous magician. From their illicit union was born a son who received the name of his putative father, Caradoc. The deception is concealed until Eliavrés admits his identity to the young Caradoc whom he had challenged to a beheading test and then spared. Enraged and indignant, Caradoc reveals to the king of Vannes the machinations of his wife and Eliavrés, whereupon the former is punished with imprisonment and the latter is compelled to lie with a bitch, a sow and a mare. Intent on revenge, Ysaive conceals a hideous black snake in her cupboard, which she asks her unsuspecting son to open, in order to bring her a mirror. On so doing, Caradoc is seized by the serpent which fastens itself onto his arm. Overjoyed, his mother tells him that

---

[3]The following summary is taken from Roach, op. cit., III, pt. 1,L2047-2875.

[4]Or, according to some MSS., Nantes.

in two years' time, he will be dead, his life-blood having been drained away by the parasitic and tenacious snake.

Convinced of his imminent destruction, Caradoc wanders through the countryside until a loyal friend, Cador of Cornwall, prevails upon the queen to inform him of any possible cure for her son's miserable plight. After consultation with Eliavrés, she reveals that Caradoc must stand in a vat full of bitter vinegar and beside this must be placed a vat of milk, in which a pure maiden is to take her place. Cador's sister, Guignier, offers to save Caradoc's life and the experiment begins. As soon as the maiden exposes her breast, and in God's name commands the serpent to leave Caradoc's arm, the snake leaps towards her. Cador kills the reptile as it passes between the two vats but unfortunately also cuts off part of Guignier's breast. The grateful Caradoc marries his devoted saviour whose breast is later restored in gold by the application of the magic boss of a shield. As for the hero's arm, however, we are told that:

> Ainc puis ne pot garir si bien
> Del bras qu'il ne l'eüst plus gros
> De l'autre, assez bien dire l'os;
> Por ç'ot non Caradués Briesbras.
> (L vv. 2870-73).

This astonishing story is regarded by some modern scholars as an ingenious attempt by French writers to account for Caradoc's nickname and, at the same time, include some glorification of his wife's legendary fidelity. Similarly,

the detail of her injured breast and its subsequent reparation in gold is the explanation offered for "Eurvron" meaning "Golden-breast", the sobriquet of the wife as she appears in the Celtic story.[5] The tale summarized above is followed by the episode of the chastity-testing horn, further evidence of Guignier's admirable constancy.

Although in the Lai du Cor there is no mention of Caradoc's surname, nor of his origin nor relationship with Arthur, one can surely rely on the fact that the Caradoc of this poem is, in effect, the same person as the hero of the story recounted above.

Biket's portrayal of the fortunate husband is that of a traditional hero, and lacks any distinguishing points of real originality. The first trait remarked upon is Caradoc's civility and courtly manner (vv. 483-84). After this, comes the usual commendation of the hero's prowess in arms, and the comparison with Gauvain, the only knight whose valour surpasses his own (vv. 485-90). The short physical description follows the traditional pattern, beginning with the hair and ending with the feet:

> Il out les chevels blonz
> e rossez les guernons,
> les oilz vairs e rianz;
> sis cors ert avenanz,
> piez out voltiz e dreiz;
> (vv. 491-95)[6]

---

[5]For the etymology of the name see Loomis, Franciplegius, p. 234; also Gaston Paris, "Caradoc et le Serpent", Romania XXVIII (1899), 214-231.

He is encouraged by his wife to take the test and after filling the horn with wine, salutes Arthur with the exclamation "Wesseil!" (v. 538). This greeting previously appeared in the work of another Anglo-Norman poet, the Brut, in a comparable situation: Hengists's daughter Rowenna greets Fortiger with a cup of wine and the words, "Laverd King, Wesheil!"[7]

Caradoc quaffs the wine and is so delighted at his unique achievement that he jumps over the table and proclaims to Arthur, "'Sire, bëu l'ai plein,/ tuit en seiez certain'" (vv. 549-50). Arthur acknowledges the triumph and the overjoyed Caradoc is allowed to retain Cirencester, his wife's birthplace. In an attempt to authenticate his poem, Biket asserts that Caradoc himself composed the original lai.

As can be expected, the representation of the hero of the Mantel is more detailed and explicit. In contrast with the abrupt, stereotyped description offered in the Cor, Caradoc Briebraz now assumes traits of character which afford clear insight into several aspects of his personality.

He had been secretly glad to have avoided the shame which the other knights had borne and his natural fears concerning the outcome of the test render him angry when his

---

[6]Notice that like Caraton (v. 430), Caradoc also wears moustaches.

[7]Arnold, op. cit., I, 6953. The term is explained by Keredic (=Caradoc?), "li premiers des Bretuns/ Ki sout le langage as Saissuns". (vv. 6959-70).

amie appears (vv. 788-93). Preferring ignorance to knowledge of his wife's inconstancy (vv. 793-97), he pleads with her not to don the mantle, for his grief would be unbearable should she prove disloyal:

> Por tot le reiaume de France
> N'en voudreie je estre cert;
> Quar qui sa bone amie pert
> Mout a perdu, ce m'est avis.
> (vv. 812-15).

His last remark is taken up by Kei who points out that the loss of an unfaithful woman is no real loss whatever. The heroine is unperturbed by these comments and Caradoc is obliged to grant his permission--"mout a envis" (v. 843)--for the trial to take place. Although only his wife passes, Caradoc's relief and pleasure are not recorded. "Liez et joianz" (v. 897), he takes his virtuous amie back to his own territory, leaving behind an atmosphere of embarrassed and angry humiliation.

As we have already noticed,[8] the concept of Caradoc's wife as a paragon of connubial devotion is of long-standing tradition. She is unnamed in the Cor, yet we are informed that she was "suer le rei Galahal, / née de Cirencestre;" (vv. 500-1). Unfortunately, this additional detail concerning her brother does not facilitate any attempts to identify her. This king may have some connection with Galahaut de

---

[8] See above, pp. 19-20.

Sorelois, the sovereign of a supernatural realm who plays a rôle of considerable importance in the Prose Lancelot.[9] The heroine's background as depicted by Biket is, of course, in direct opposition to the account given in the Livre de Caradoc.

Her loyalty is a distinctive characteristic from the very beginning of Biket's description of her: Caradoc "Femme aveit molt leial," (v. 499) and, naturally, she is extraordinarily beautiful, "si resemble bien fée" (v. 504).[10] But just as Caradoc had his superior in Gauvain, so his wife must acknowledge the supremacy of the queen's loveliness (vv. 507-8). When the horn is passed to her husband, she shares none of the embarrassed apprehension previously experienced by the other court ladies, and even encourages Caradoc to take the test. In a charming speech addressed to him, she dispels any natural hesitancy on his part, assuring him of her steadfast love and impeccable loyalty. She will never leave him for another lover, she asserts, and rather than marry a second time, she would prefer to become a nun. Her short monologue ends with an unusually attractive simile:

---

[9] Sommer, op. cit.; III, pt. 1, pp. 201 ff.

[10] If Galahal is the sovereign of Sorelois, then this simile applied to his sister is particularly appropriate. The phrase is, however, by no means of rare occurrence.

Car chascune femele
dëust estre tortrele:
puis que masle prendra
ja mais altre n'avra;
iceo deit dame faire
se ele est de bon aire.
(vv. 525-30).[11]

Heartened by such a warm exhortation, Caradoc does not fail to drink from the horn and although Biket does not refer to it, the wife's pleasure can well be imagined. To the heroine, who is indeed "molt fait a preisier" (v. 562), Arthur donates the precious horn which is still on view in Cirencester (vv. 577-80).

Caradoc's wife in the Mantel is also anonymous and the author presents no details whatever concerning her family or background. As in the Cor, she is the last woman whose virtue is tested by the magic object. She is found resting in her room by Giflet and willingly joins the assembly. Before so doing, however, she displays a characteristic common to all women. Knowing that she will be the centre of attention:

Vestue s'est et atornée
Au mieus et au plus bel que pout
De la meillor robe qu'ele out. . .
(vv. 784-6).

On entering the hall, she is informed by the valet of the mantle's function and is implored by Caradoc, "son trés

---

[11]Similar, though mere brief encouragement occurs in the Livre de Caradoc. Guignier reassures her husband with the words, "Sire, seüremant bevez", (Roach, op. cit., I, 8678-8686; II, 12450-8; III, pt. 1, MS.L, 3226-9. MSS. ASPU, 3205-9).

douz ami preisié" (v. 842) to forego the test. To Kei's cynical comment on the invariability of woman's infidelity, she modestly replies that she would not dare presume her ability to outshine such a noble assembly of ladies, but will try on the garment nevertheless. Yet, as she is a model wife, her husband's approval of her participation in the test is essential (vv. 831-37). When the garment fits her exactly, Caradoc is overjoyed, and to stress her triumph, the messenger reveals the unique nature of her achievement: more than a thousand women in several different courts have failed what she has accomplished. The valet gladly presents her with the costly mantle and Arthur sanctions the gift. The delighted couple return to "Gales" where the mantle is put on display in an abbey. (v. 894 ff.).

Unlike the account in the Cor, the heroine's success prompts anger and envy in the Mantel, although the situation is not as dangerous as the atmosphere which terminates the Livre de Caradoc. In the latter, Caradoc so fears Guinevere's spiteful and jealous vengeance that he removes Guignier to his own kingdom with all possible speed. In fact, Guinevere is antagonized not only by the heroine's triumph, but primarily by her confidence.[12]

Although a too direct or detailed comparison between

---

[12]Roach, op. cit., I, 8724-8729; II, 12496-12501; III, pt. 1, MSL 3262-4; MSS.ASPU, 3245-9.

the heroic couples in the Mantel and the Cor is gratuitous, Biket's portrayal of Caradoc and his wife is perhaps the more attractive representation, probably because of its very naïveté.

CONCLUSION

As asserted at the beginning of this paper, an examination of characters is of essential importance in attempting to establish the date of composition of any medieval literary work. On this basis, and in consideration of the general naïve tone of the poem, Gaston Paris and Heinrich Dörner allocate the Lai du Cor to circa 1150-75.[1] Their judgement is accepted by E. K. Heller[2] and R. S. Loomis,[3] and is echoed by F. A. Wulff.[4]

A different criterion is utilized by F. Wolf, who, while arriving at a conclusion similar to the above, bases his assessment on the evidence afforded by the poet's style.[5] In discussing the problem of dating, Wolf stresses the importance of Biket's simple yet vital narrative which is characterized by the lack of elaborate descriptive detail.

---

[1] Dörner, op. cit., p. 44 f.

[2] E. K. Heller, "The Story of the Magic Horn: A Study in the Development of a Medieval Folk Tale", Speculum, IX (1934), 38-50.

[3] Loomis, Arthurian Tradition, pp. 28, 98.

[4] Wulff, art. cit., p. 357.

[5] Wolf, Über die Lais, p. 174.

E. Hoepffner[6] avoids stating any figures, but suggests that: "The earliest surviving lai is probably the Lai du Cor of Robert Biket" (p. 113).

Contrary to these arguments in favour of the early composition of the lai, K. Togeby places the first appearance of the poem at circa 1200.[7] This same date is also cited by Warnatsch as the latest possible for Biket's completion of the poem.[8] In endeavouring, rather unconvincingly, to prove that Biket knew and used Chrétien's Erec and the lais of Marie de France, S. Hofer[9] relies on purely textual evidence and allocates the Lai du Cor to the 1170's (p. 46).

However, in the light of the characterization in the Cor, any hypothesis suggesting a late date of composition would seem untenable. The representation of Arthur as a dominant and positive royal personality, and his lack of moderation; the portrayal of the seneschal Kei as a relatively unimportant yet at least not an unpleasant character; the companions of the king, Gauvain and Yvain, and those who belong

---

[6]Ernest Hoepffner, "The Breton Lais", ALMA, pp. 112-121.

[7]Knud Togeby, "Les Fabliaux", Orbis Litterarum XII (1957), 85-98.

[8]Warnatsch, op. cit., p. 60.

[9]Stefan Hofer, "Bemerkungen zur Beurteilung des Horn--und des Mantellai", Romanische Forschungen LXV (1954), 38-48.

to the older generation of knights; the other guests, some of whom are unknown or appear only in Geoffrey's Historia or in the Brut: all these factors demonstrate that Biket wrote his lai when the literary phenomenon of the Arthurian cycle was at a comparatively early stage in its development. It is very possible that Biket knew Wace, or at least was familiar with the fine eulogy of Gauvain to be found there (vv. 1317-1320), which may have influenced the author of the Cor to depict this knight in such a favourable manner.[10] Yet there is no clear evidence of any influence of Chrétien's romans.

The lai, therefore, has not only intrinsic merit; it has also valuable significance in that it is one of the few Arthurian texts in which no reflections of Chrétien's work are seemingly manifest. As Hoeffner comments:

> Though nearly contemporary with Chrétien's earliest work, the Lai du Cor belongs to an older world, and its importance lies largely in shedding light on the nature of Arthurian fiction before the influence of Chrétien was felt. (p. 115).

The dating of the Conte du Mantel has proved a less controversial topic. The polished style and clever use of dialogue; the host of well-known Arthurian figures; the representation of a mild King Arthur whose glory is rather eclipsed by the presence of Gauvain; Kei's unpopular reputation:

---

[10] See above, p. 47. Cf. also the toast "Wesseil!", which appears in Brut, ed. Arnold, I, 6953.

such are the indications that the author of the Mantel was familiar with the established traditions of Arthurian romance and used them to his best advantage.

Warnatsch implies that the conte must have been written after 1195,[11] while F. A. Wulff places the composition of the poem somewhere between 1175 and 1200.[12]

It is to be remembered, however, that a short summary of the test appears in La Vengeance Raguidel, dated by Bruce at circa 1200.[13] The theme, then, soon entered the realm of legend. A reference from Der Tannhaüser, the German poet of the thirteenth century, also speaks for the popularity of the mantle test motif:

> Ich muoz gewinnen ir den grâl. . .
> unt den mantel der beslôz gar die
> vrowen diu ist unwandelbaere.[14]

In that a few decades separate the composition of the Cor and that of the Mantel, any conclusion regarding their overall merit will necessarily be a purely subjective preference. Yet it can be affirmed that both poets recount the similar

---

[11] Warnatsch, op. cit., p. 69.

[12] F. A. Wulff, loc. cit.

[13] J. D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to the Year 1300 (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Massachusetts, 1958), II, 208.

[14] As quoted in Warnatsch, op. cit., p. 78. Cf. also Caxton's reference to Craddock's mantle, on view at Dover castle. Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, ed. John Rhys (2 vols.; London, 1906), I, 2.

tales in a lively and entertaining manner, which reflects faithfully the literary atmosphere of their respective generations.

ABBREVIATIONS

ALMA	Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: a collaborative history. ed. R. S. Loomis. New York: 1959.
CFMA	Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age. general editor Mario Roques.
SATF	Société des Anciens Textes Français.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Biket, Robert. Robert Biket's Lai du Cor, mit einer Einleitung über Sprache und Abfassungszeit. ed. Heinrich Dörner. Strassburg diss.: 1907.

"Le Conte du Mantel". ed. F. A. Wulff. Romania XIV (1885), 343-80.

The following texts are cited in chronological order and according to the language in which they were written.

Wace, Robert. Le Roman de Brut. ed. I. Arnold. SATF, 2 vols.; Paris: 1938, 1940.

--------. La Partie Arthurienne du Roman de Brut. ed. I. Arnold and M. Pelan. Paris: 1962.

Chrétien de Troyes. Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, I: Erec et Enide. ed. M. Roques. CFMA 80; Paris: 1953.

--------. Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, II: Cligés. ed. A. Micha. CFMA 84; Paris: 1957.

--------. Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, III: Le Chevalier de la charette. ed. M. Roques. CFMA 86; Paris: 1958.

--------. Les Romans de Chrétien de Troyes, IV: Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain). ed. M. Roques. CFMA 89; Paris: 1960.

--------. Der Percevalroman von Christian von Troyes. ed. A. Hilka. Halle: 1932.

Marie de France. Lais. ed. A. Ewert. Oxford: 1952.

Renaut de Beaujeu. Le Bel Inconnu. ed. G. P. Williams. CFMA 38; Paris: 1929.

The Continuations of the Old French Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes. ed. W. Roach. Vols. I, II, II part i; American Philosophica Society, Philadelphia: 1949-.

Perceval le Gallois ou le Conte du Graal. ed. C. Potvin. 6 vols. Publications de la Société de Bibliophiles belges, Mons: 1865-71.

Gerbert de Montreuil. La Continuation de Perceval. ed. M. Williams. CFMA 28 and 50, 2 vols.; Paris: 1922 and 1925.

Raoul de Houdenc. La Vengeance Raguidel. Vol II of Raoul von Houdenc, Sämtliche Werke. ed. M. Friedwagner. 2 vols. Halle: 1897-1909.

La Folie Tristan de Berne. ed. E. Hoepffner. Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, Textes d'Etude 3; 2nd ed. Paris: 1949.

Huon de Bordeaux. ed. p. Ruelle. Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles: 1960.

Li Chevaliers as deus Espees. ed. W. Foerster. Halle: 1877.

Durmart le Galois. ed. J. Gildea O.S.A. 2 vols., Villanova, Pennsylvania: 1965-66.

Der altfranzösische Yderroman. ed. H. Gelzer. Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur 31; Dresden: 1913.

"Les Enfances Gauvain. Fragments d'un poème perdu". ed. P. Meyer. Romania XXXIX (1910), 1-32.

Huth Merlin. ed. G. Paris and J. Ulrich. SATF, 2 vols., Paris: 1886.

Le Roman en prose de Tristan, le roman de Palamède et la compilation de Rusticien de Pise: analyse critique d'après des manuscrits de Paris. ed. E. Löseth. Paris: 1890.

Heldris de Cornuaïlle. "Le Roman de Silence". ed. L. Thorpe. Nottingham Medieval Studies V-VIII, X, XI (1961-67).

L'Atre Périlleux. Roman de la Table Ronde. ed. B. Woledge. CFMA 76; Paris: 1936.

The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances. ed. H. O. Sommer. 8 vols. Washington: 1908-16.

"Le Roman de Renart le Contrefait". ed. F. Wolf. Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Philos.-Hist. Klasse), XII Vienna: 1861, 71-86.

Diu Crône. ed. G. H. F. Scholl. Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart XXVII. Stuttgart: 1852.

Gottfried von Strassburg. Tristan. ed. R. Bechstein. 2 vols. 5th ed. Lepizig: 1930.

Wolfram von Eschenbach. Parzival.. [translated by H. M. Mustard and C. E. Passage]. New York: 1961.

Caesar, Julius. De Bello Gallico. ed. J. T. Phillipson. London: 1948.

Geoffrey of Monmouth. The History of the Kings of Britain. [translated by L. Thorpe]. Penguin Classics. London: 1966.

Malory, Sir Thomas. Le Morte d'Arthur. ed. J. Rhys. 2 vols. London: 1906.

--------. The Works of Sir Thomas Malory. ed. E. Vinaver. 3 vols. Oxford: 1948.

Ancient Metrical Tales. ed. C. Hartshorne. London: 1829.

Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. ed. T. Percy. 3 vols. London: 1844.

Spenser, Edmund. The Poetical Works. ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt. London: 1912.

Il Tristano Ricardiano. ed. E. G. Parodi. Bologna: 1896.

La Tavola Ritonda, o, l'Istoria di Tristano. ed. F. L. Polidori. 2 vols. Bologna: 1863.

Roman van Lancelot. ed. W. J. A. Jonckbloet. 2 parts. The Hague: 1846-49.

Secondary Material Books

Bruce, J.D. The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to the year 1300. 2 vols. 2nd ed. With a supplement by A. Hilka (Goettingen) Gloucester, Massachusetts: 1928. Reprinted 1958.

Flutre, L. F. Table des Noms Propres avec toutes leurs variantes figurant dans les Romans du Moyen Age écrits en français ou en provençal et actuellement publiés ou analysés. Publications du Centre d'Etudes Supérieurs de Civilisation Médiévale, II. Poitier: 1962.

Heinzel, R. Über die französischen Gralromane. Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Philos.-Hist. Klasse), XL. Vienna: 1891.

Loomis, R. S. Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance. New York: 1927.

--------. Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes. New York: 1949.

--------. Wales and the Arthurian Legend. Cardiff: 1956.

--------, editor. Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: a collaborative history. Oxford: 1959.

MacCulloch, J. A., ed. The Mythology of all Races. 13 vols. New York: 1916-64. III part 1: Celtic (1918)-.

Paton, L. A. Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance. Burt Franklin Bibliographical Series XVIII. 2nd ed. New York: 1960.

Richter, W. Der Lanzelet des Ulrich von Zatzikhoven. Frankfurt: 1934.

Schwietering, J. Die Deutsche Dichtung des Mittelalters. Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. Darmstadt: 1957.

Warnarsch, O. Der Mantel. Breslau: 1883.

Webster, K. G. T. Guinevere. A Study of her Abductions. Massachusetts: 1951.

Wolf, F. Über die Lais, Sequenzen und Leiche. Osnabrück: 1841.

Articles and Parts of Books

Ackerman, R. W. "English Rimed and Prose Romances", ALMA pp. 480-519.

Bromwich, R. "A note on the Breton lais", Medium Aevum XXVI (1957), 36-38.

Cross, T. P. "Notes on the Chastity-Testing Horn and Mantle", Modern Philology X (1913), 289-299.

Harper, C. A. "Carados and the serpent", Modern Language Notes XVII (November 1898), 417-431.

Heller, E. K. "The Story of the Magic Horn: A Study in the Development of a Medieval Folk-Tale", Speculum IX (1934), 38-50.

Hoepffner, E. "The Breton Lais", ALMA pp. 112-121.

Hofer, S. "Bermerkungen zur Beurteilung des Horn-und des Mantellai", Romanische Forschungen LXV), 38-48.

--------. "Untersuchungen zum Mantellai", Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie LXXIII (1957), 469-485.

Loomis, R. S. "The Strange History of Caradoc of Vannes" in Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody Magoun Jr. ed. J. B. Bessinger Jr. and R. P. Creed. New York: 1965. pp. 232-239.

Micha, A. "Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse", ALMA pp.358-392

Paris, G. "Carados et le Serpent", Romania XXVIII (1899), 214-231.

Togeby, K. "Les Fabliaux", Orbis Litterarum, XII (1957), 85-98.