

THE CHARACTER AND ROLE OF BOHORT IN THE
VULGATE CYCLE

by



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ABSTRACT

Bohort's importance in the Vulgate Cycle has been dealt with to some extent in all the critical works but no real attempt has been made to turn this into a comprehensive study. Thus I have attempted in the following pages to tackle this character in all the romances in which he appears in the Vulgate Cycle and to establish his importance, as I firmly believe that he contributes in a very big way to these romances. His development as a character has been closely followed by analyzing his worth as a chivalrous Knight of the Round Table and by examining his relationships with other important characters of the Vulgate Cycle, especially his cousin Lancelot.

In addition, the study has also served as an attempt to try and determine the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle. This was perhaps the most intriguing part of the research and it was extremely difficult to arrive at any sort of a coherent conclusion. I tried to determine the authorship by examining the consistency in the presentation of Bohort and I tend to believe that more than one author was responsible for the compilation of the Vulgate Cycle. It does seem though, that this team of authors could have been inspired by a plan laid out by a single person.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study the character of Bohort in the three volumes of thirteenth-century prose romances - the Lancelot Propre, the Queste del Saint Graal and the Mort le Roi Artu. These form part of the series of prose romances known as the Vulgate Cycle, which provides a history of King Arthur's reign and the search for the Holy Grail. In the edition by H. Oskar Sommer,¹ we have seven volumes in the following order: Vol. 1. L'Estoire del Saint Graal; Vol. 2 L'Estoire de Merlin; Vols. 3,4, and 5. Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac; (of which Vol. 3 and part of Vol. 4 is known as Le Galehaut, the remainder of Vol. 4 as La Charrette and Vol. 5 as L'Agravain). Vol. 6 contains La Queste del Saint Graal², and La Mort le Roi Artu³ and Vol. 7 is Le Livre D'Artus.

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- 1 H. Oskar Sommer, The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances - Edited from manuscripts in the British Museum. The Carnegie Institution of Washington, Volumes I - 7, 1909 - 1916. Since more editions of the Queste del Saint Graal and the Mort Artu are available, they have been used in the main for the study of Bohort at the end of the Vulgate Cycle.
 - 2 All references are to Albert Pauphilet's edition - La Queste del Saint Graal, Paris, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion 1923. Hereafter Queste.
 - 3 All references are to Jean Frappier's edition - La Mort le Roi Artu, Genève, Droz et Paris, Minard, 1964, Hereafter Mort Artu.

Bohort is an important character in the Vulgate Cycle. He is the cousin of Lancelot, his father King Bohort the elder of Gaunes being the brother of Ban, Lancelot's father. Thus Bohort is a leading member of what is called Ban's kin.⁴ He appears very often in Volumes 3 - 6 of the Vulgate Cycle and for the purpose of this study, we will restrict ourselves to three romances mentioned above in which Bohort does appear, ie. the Lancelot Propre, the Queste and the Mort Artu, which are together called the Prose Lancelot. An important character here, Bohort is curiously enough, absent from the earlier Arthurian chronicles and from the early histories of Britain⁵. Nor is he to be found in the verse romances, except in Manessier's Continuation de Perceval⁶ which contains the quarrel with Lionel (Bohort's elder brother) also found in the Queste. However, it is probable that Manessier was influenced by the Queste while writing this episode. Pauphilet tends to support this theory - "La continuation de Manessier utilise la Queste. Elle date vraisemblablement des environs de 1227".⁷

4 This is the accepted term for all the relatives of King Ban, Lancelot's father.

5 Le Roman de Brut by Wace, the Historia Regum Britanniae and the Vita Merlini by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

6 A continuation of Chrétien de Troyes's Perceval. The reference here is to Ch. Potvin's edition of Perceval Le Gallois ou le Conte du Graal, Société des Bibliophiles Belges, no. 21, Mons, Dequesne-Masquillier, 1865-71.

7 Albert Pauphilet, Etude Sur La Queste del Saint Graal, Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1921, p. 12 Hereafter Etude sur la Queste.

One can thus assume perhaps that the character of Bohort has been invented by the author of the Lancelot Propre. The name is an uncommon one, not found in any other thirteenth-century author and we come across it for the first time in the Lancelot. Both Lancelot's uncle and his cousin (with whom we are dealing in this study) have the same name. Lot feels that only the man who introduced the name into the very first page of the Lancelot would have used the same name in the Queste and the Mort Artu and that it has been borrowed from that of an Abyssinian king or from an Ethiopian king, Beor, in the Passio Matthaei, a work which lent inspiration to the author of the Estoire, the first romance in the Vulgate Cycle.⁸

Jean Marx too seems to support this theory but insists that the name was not invented by the author of the Lancelot Propre or by Manessier but that they both had a common source which is now lost.⁹ Bruce, on the other hand, staunchly disputes this theory, claiming that the name 'Beor' occurs only once in the text (of the Passio Matthaei) and that the derivation is not probable.¹⁰ Also, in his articles on the Composition of the French Prose Lancelot, Bruce claims that the adventures of Bohort, if not the very existence of the character, are due to later expansions of the original Lancelot, which consisted originally of the story of Lancelot's birth, his early misfortunes, his being carried away by the Lady of the Lake,

8 Ferdinand Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot en Prose, Paris, Champion 1954, pp. 124-125. Hereafter Etude sur le Lancelot.

9 Jean Marx, Nouvelles Recherches sur La Littérature Arthurienne Paris, 1965, p 62, Hereafter Nouvelles Recherches.

10 J. D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance; From the Beginnings down to the year 1300, I, 401, n. 69. Hereafter Evolution of Arthurian Romance.

his entrance into Arthur's court, the love affair with Guinevere and the friendship with Galehaut which ended with the latter's death. Characters like Bohort and Lionel, Bruce feels, were not introduced into this original storyline until much later.¹¹

Carman provides a theory of his own. He does not speak of the derivation of the name 'Bohort', but suggests that the character is based on an historical person. Historically, he claims, there existed a family by the name of Marshal which lent its sponsorship to many medieval works. The Earl William Marshal had two sons, William Jr. and Richard who could be the Lionel and Bohort of our romances. Carman suggests that both sons of Earl William Marshal might have protected the authors of the Vulgate Cycle. He states,

"I have suggested earlier that they furnished models for Lionel and Bohort. In the Benoic-Gaunes, Lionel seems the older of the two, certainly he receives more attention from the author both at Gaunes and at the lake. He is more aggressive, endowed with much 'fierté'. Though it is natural that a boy farther advanced in adolescence than his brother should be more apt to display such qualities, Lionel's marked 'fierte' accompanies him through the Cycle, becomes the violence of a 'réprouvé' in the Queste. Bohort, when the princes grow up, is the darling of the narrators, and in the Mort Artu, the spokesman of the clan of Ban".¹²

Loomis, who seeks to trace back the names of Arthurian heroes to Celtic legend, advances the interesting theory that the name 'Bohors' is a substitution for the name Gohors. "In what is

11 J. D. Bruce, Romanic Review, X (1919), 48, 50 and 59.

12 J. Neale Carman, A Study of the Pseudo-May Cycle of Arthurian Romance, Kansas, 1973, pp. 112-113. The Benoic-Gaunes, is the early part of Sommer III describing the childhood of the brothers, their stay at Claudas's court and their flight to the home of the Lady of the Lake.

perhaps our earliest Arthurian poem in French, the Lai du Cor (1150 - 75), there is mentioned a King Gohors. He apparently corresponds to King Bohort, the father of the young Grail Quester".¹³ Apparently Arthurian romance owes a great deal to Celtic mythology because "the Grail heroes, Gauvain, Lancelot, Boors, Perceval and Galahad, all may claim to be young sun-gods who have descended into Arthurian romance, from the realms of Celtic mythology."¹⁴

A variety of views have thus been offered on the derivation of Bohort's name and on the introduction of his character into the Prose Lancelot. It has been very difficult to pin down the name of the author (or authors) of the Prose Lancelot. However, it is worthwhile to examine the views of experts on this question.

 13 R. S. Loomis, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance, Michigan, 1964 pp. 151-152. A modern edition of the Lai du Cor is available. antel et Cor: Deux Lais du XII siècle. Textes établis et présentés par Philip Bennett. University of Exeter, 1975. Bennett, in the Introduction, p. xxii, suggests the end of the twelfth century as the date of composition of Cor. NB There is also Gornemans de Gohort, who appears in Chrétien's Erec and Perceval (See G. D. West. An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances: 1150 - 1300, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.)

14 Ibid, p. 156.

Lot, who has done extensive research on this subject, feels that the author has been so effectively hidden because, "il n'y aurait pas d'auteur. Toutes ces aventures sont vraies. Elles ont été consignées sous la foi du serment par les héros eux-mêmes qui les ont dictées à de sages clercs de la cour d'Arthur."¹⁵ However, Lot offers no further proof that these adventures were real, and there is perhaps no need for us to believe that they were indeed so. But it is entirely possible that they had been preserved in some kind of archives by the scribes who wrote them where they were discovered later.

The name of Walter Map appears in some of these romances. It is hinted that he could be their author. This confuses the issue still further. Is he or is he not the author? Lot is emphatic on this point too: "Ces aventures merveilleuses étaient, cela va de soi, écrites en latin. Pour l'amour du roi d'Angleterre, Henri II, son seigneur, M. Gautier Map les fit traduire de latin en français..."¹⁶

In effect, there should be no dispute whether Gautier Map wrote these words, because his job was that of translator, not of author.

Also, interestingly enough, Bohort, the man who doesn't even appear in the Vulgate Cycle till the beginning of the Prose Lancelot, becomes one of the important characters in helping resolve this question. His name lends a possible clue to the unity of the work. Perhaps it was he who narrated these adventures to the monks, in the Abbey of Salisbury and to future chronicles.

¹⁵ Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, p. 126. This quotation is an adaptation from the closing lines of the Queste.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 127 (also see below, p. 71).

The intent, thus, is to examine the question of authorship in relation to the character of Bohort, and to see if any factual discrepancies arise in the presentation of his character and in his relationships with other characters.

Lot tends towards the single author theory and advances a variety of views in order to support it. For one thing, he feels that only one author could have bound up the chronological details so well. A medley of authors, Lot says, would have tended to get lost in this labyrinth of facts and chronological details.¹⁷

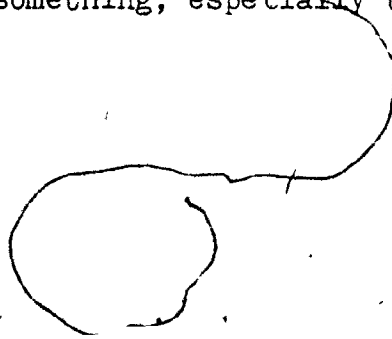
However, this is a mistake. As we proceed with our analysis and examine the views of other experts on this subject, we will see that in fact all the details do not really coincide with each other.

At points, the Lancelot seems fantastic but closer examination, Lot feels, shows this is not the case. It has certain definite goals which only one author could have defined while maintaining the unity of the characters and writing all these romances, e.g., the adventures of the Charrette get monotonous in parts but in effect, they provide us with an indispensable introduction to the Agravain and indeed to the Queste because Bohort has to be introduced in some fashion as the future conqueror of the Holy Grail. So the adventure of Bohort in the Charrette is not as ineffective as it seems.¹⁸

The various quests in the Agravain, which seem to stretch the narrative needlessly, all mean something, especially the end

17 Ibid, p. 5.

18 Ibid, p. 70.



which is a preparation to the Queste. Also, it is absolutely necessary to fill in the interval until Galahad becomes fifteen years old and arrives at court for the Grail adventures. The war against Claudas¹⁹ is necessary in order to show that both Lancelot and Bohort win back their territories like worthy knights. Bohort's bravery at battle serves as his introduction as a principal character²⁰. However, these quests at the end of the Agravain seem so entangled and obviously inserted later that it is quite possible that the Agravain was written after the Queste in order to fill in the time period till Galahad's entry into King Arthur's court, thus providing a continuity with the Queste.

The Mort Artu is in many ways linked to the Queste. Bohort is the binding link. He returns from Sarras to Camelot and relates the adventures of the Queste. In the Mort Artu, there are also various allusions to the earlier books, eg., Gauvain mentions Lancelot's affair with Pelles's daughter.²¹ Due to all this, Lot seems to feel that his single author theory is valid.²²

However, another scribe who had read the earlier books could have filled in these details, at the same time missing out a few, e.g., the complete disappearance of Hêlain le Blanc, Bohort's son begotten from King Brangoire's daughter from the Queste adventures, even after the promise that he would play a big part in the Queste where he had probably been intended to be a companion for Galahad, like the Bohort-Lancelot pair.²³

19 Claudas is a rival king who usurps the territories belonging to King Ban and King Bohort the Elder, the fathers of Lancelot and Bohort, respectively. See below p. 19.

20 Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, p. 70.

21 This has taken place in Sommer V, 108-111. Gauvain refers to it in the Mort Artu, 30, 80-83.

22 Lot Etude sur le Lancelot, pp. 83-84.

23 See below p. 30.

Examples like these lend substance to Frappier's theory that though conceived by one man, (whom Frappier calls the 'architect'), these books were written by different people.²⁴

Lot admits that the mystical tone of the Queste is very different indeed from the chivalrous spirit of the Lancelot and the Mort Artu but still feels that a single author could have written them simultaneously, especially since the chivalry and courtly atmosphere of the Lancelot continue into the first pages of the Queste.²⁵

However, it does seem impossible for a literary artist to unite two books so absolutely contrary in spirit and tone as the Lancelot and the Queste. It seems more probable that the religious-minded author of the Queste must have tried to incorporate something of the Lancelot in his work and then given it an altogether mystical tone.

An important point, Lot feels, is that the man who has known the name Bohort from the first page of the Lancelot and who has probably borrowed it from the Passio Matthaei where 'Beor' figures, has to be the same as the author of the other books.²⁶

This is again a bit too far-fetched because another author could very well have used the same name. One wonders why Lot goes to such lengths in order to prove his theory of a signal author, in spite of textual discrepancies and evidence to the contrary.

24 Jean Frappier, Etude sur la Mort le Roi Artu, Genève, Droz et Paris Minard, 1961, p. 146. Hereafter Etude sur la Mort Artu.

25 Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, p. 86.

26 Ibid, p. 125.

Myrrha Lot-Borodine tends to support Lot's view claiming that the overt dualism in the Prose Lancelot really leads to a single, unified whole where the sacred is integrated with the profane. There is a falling back upon the world in which all appearances are deceptive (the Queste) but this is a brief interlude. The Mort Artu, she feels, is the logical end to the adventures of a great soul - Lancelot.

In fact, according to her, this series reflects very well the medieval ages of Christianity and feudalism - where the cult of the Damsel alternately replaces the cult of the Virgin.²⁷

J. D. Bruce, in his essays on the composition of the French Prose Lancelot, has this to say:

"The original Lancelot underwent additions and changes of various kinds. It remains extremely difficult, in the absence of external evidence, to distinguish the limits of such additions and changes; for any one who added to the work of a predecessor (or predecessors), would as a rule, naturally make his own work fit as closely as possible with that of his predecessor, so that the result might well baffle the highest analytical acumen".

This, he feels, is illustrated by the Charrette story, which has been incorporated into the Lancelot romance. He is quite certain that Bohort did not occupy anything like so large a part in the primitive Lancelot and that his adventures are later additions.²⁸

Bruce tackles the question of H elain de Blanc too. He is the son of Bohort and King Brangoire's daughter and is supposed to be playing a big part in the Queste where he is nowhere mentioned. We will tackle this issue further in the chapter on the Queste.

Regarding this Bruce states:

27 M. Lot-Borodine in the Appendix to Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, pp. 455-456.

28 J. D. Bruce, Romanic Review, IX (1918), 246-247.

"the whole episode of Bohort and Brangoire's daughter is a manifest imitation of the story of Lancelot and Pelles's daughter (Sommer, V, 105 ff) so must be reckoned among the later expansions of the Lancelot, like the accounts of Bohort's visit to Corbenic (King Pelles's castle - Sommer, V, 139 ff, 294 ff) which were similarly suggested by Lancelot's visit (Sommer, V, 105 ff) All these adventures of Bohort, which I have just named, as well, of course, as everything pertaining to H elain le Blanc in our romance, were composed by the same man." 29

Bruce also tends to lean towards the theory that the Agravain and the Mort Artu were written by the same man and that the Mort Artu was, in fact, written first, followed by the Agravain in order to make various episodes coincide with each other. He offers some examples to support this theory. Lancelot is thrown into a well full of serpents and vermin. In his lament over his misfortune, Lancelot says that Bohort would lose by his death for he (Lancelot) had intended to crown him. This is probably a reminiscence of the Mort Artu (Sommer, VI, 315 ff) where Lancelot actually has Bohort crowned King of Benoic. The same thing is true of Sommer V, 377, where Lancelot offers to make Bohort King of Gaunes, but the latter declines.³⁰

Later, Bohort tells Lancelot that he has seen Galahad at Pelles's castle during his second visit there (Sommer, V, 294 ff) and says that hermits and holy men testify that this child will achieve the adventures of the Holy Grail. Again, we have a reference to the Queste. Bohort, however, keeps secret from the Queen, Lancelot's affair with Pelles's daughter. He says, too, that he likes the Queen only for Lancelot's sake. These relations of Bohort to Guinevere remind one of the Mort Artu (Sommer, VI, 244 f. and 263 f)³¹

29 Ibid, p. 358.

30 Ibid, p. 376 (Also see below, p. 87).

31 Ibid, p. 389.

All these examples do serve to lend substance to this theory of the two books having being written by the same author. It is a little unclear however, why Bruce claims that the Agravain must have been written later. It is entirely possible that these bits were inserted into the Mort Artu (rather than the other way around) in order to maintain factual continuity.

↳ Bruce does point out that his whole article implies a refutation of the authorship of the Lancelot to Walter Map.

"We have no means of judging why these ascriptions were made. Map, however, was one of the leading men of the age and of Welsh origin, and it may be that on that account some scribe or redactor, or possibly even the author of some part of the romance, endeavoured to win the prestige of his name for these pseudo-Celtic stories." 32

This is a very interesting theory indeed.

Jean Frappier, another acknowledged expert in this field, does not suggest that Map is the author of these romances. Nor is he wholly in agreement with Bruce's suggestions that the Agravain and the Mort Artu were written by the same person. He does admit to the intimacy of the Queen with Bohort in both books. Also, he realizes that certain incidents in the Agravain, e.g. the episode of Lancelot's capture by Morgan,³³ are again referred to in the Mort Artu.³⁴ But this could merely mean, according to Frappier, that the man who wrote the Agravain had the plan of the Mort Artu

32 Ibid, p. 122.

33 Morgan le Fay, half-sister of Arthur in some texts and natural sister in others. See G.D. West, An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Prose Romances, University of Toronto Press, Toronto Buffalo, London, 1978, pp. 226-227 Hereafter Prose Index.

34 This incident is first mentioned in Sommer, IV, 217-218 and again in the Mort Artu, 50-52.

which someone else worked out later.³⁵

Frappier agrees with F. Lot that "l'homme qui écrivait L'Agravain avait dans sa tête le plan de La Mort d'Arthur". But at the same time, he contests the idea that the spirit and the language of all the books is the same.³⁶

It does not seem, according to Frappier, that the author of the very cistercian Queste ever had the intention of writing a Mort Artu.³⁷ One would tend to agree with this view. The whole spirit and language of the Queste make it seem impossible that the same author could have written the Mort Artu and so Frappier says:

"La Queste est donc liée, de façon terne, il faut le reconnaître, mais liée tout de même, à la Mort Artu comme à l'Agravain. Son originalité ne saurait empêcher de croire que le plan de tout le Lancelot-Graal a été conçu par un architecte unique."³⁸

So the theory that Frappier advances tends to the side that though different authors wrote the various romances in the Vulgate Cycle, they conformed to a set plan, laid down by one single architect. After all, says Frappier, "le Moyen Age nous donne un exemple plus probant de création collective, celui des constructeurs de cathédrales."³⁹

Pauphilet too attacks Lot's theory of a single author being responsible for writing all the books. He feels that the same religious and mystical quality and spirit of the Queste do not exist in the rest of the Lancelot, including the Mort Artu. In fact, the Queste seeks to discredit the chivalrous "courtoisie" of the Lancelot. And so Pauphilet states:

 35 Jean Frappier, Etude Sur la Mort Artu, p. 83
 36 Ibid, p. 63.
 37 Ibid, p. 63.
 38 Ibid, p. 142.
 39 Ibid, p. 142

"Si le Lancelot Propre et la Queste sont d'un seul auteur, il faut lui supposer non plus seulement un double esprit, comme dit M. Lot, mais une capacité de contradiction plus qu'humaine." 40

In fact, Pauphilet feels that to maintain the diversity between the Lancelot and the Queste, the Agravain was probably written after the Queste. Lot, on the contrary, is convinced that it was written earlier. Pauphilet also points out that the author of the Mort Artu shows little respect for the innovations of the Queste. He admits, however, that these two have indeed been written in relation to each other in order to maintain the unity of the whole work.⁴¹

Vinaver, another important critic, credits M. Lot with what he calls "an all-important discovery". This was the discovery that no single section of the cycle is self-contained: earlier or later adventures are recalled or announced, as the case may be, in any given part of the work. To achieve this, the author or authors had recourse to a narrative device known to earlier writers, including Ovid, but never before used on so vast a scale, namely the device of interweaving a number of separate themes. Far from being a mosaic from which any one stone could be removed without upsetting the rest, the cycle turned out to be remarkably like the fabric of matting or tapestry where a single cut across it, made at any point, would unravel it all.⁴² This is an interesting observation that Vinaver makes.

40 Quoted from Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 47.

41 Ibid, pp 47-48.

42 Eugène Vinaver, The Rise of Romance, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 71.

He finds it puzzling that such a structure consisting of such a large number of themes without a common beginning, middle and end, in other words a narrative devoid of unity in one sense of the term, be as impregnable as a composition revolving round a single centre and constructed like a well-made play.

"Had we not learnt from Aristotle," he states, "that such a thing could never happen? that unless the golden rule about the beginning, the middle and the end was observed, no work of art could have any proper solidity? Surely, if the rule were ignored altogether, any part of the work could be removed without damaging the whole. How, then, could one account for an eminently acentric composition, with as much internal cohesion as one would find in any centralized pattern?" 43

There is a feeling that we are in a vast forest of adventures that were going on before we arrived and will continue again after we have left. This, Vinaver feels, is precisely what the authors of the Arthurian Prose cycle strove to achieve: the feeling that there is no single beginning and no single end, that each initial adventure can be extended into the past and the final adventure into the future by a further lengthening of the narrative thread.⁴⁴ Also, he says:

"the next and possibly the decisive step towards a proper understanding of cyclic romance is the realization that since it is always possible, and often even necessary for several themes to be pursued simultaneously, they have to alternate like threads in a woven fabric, one theme interrupting another and again another, and yet all remaining constantly present in the author's and the reader's mind. Though sometimes, this sort of thing presupposes a phenomenal memory on the reader's part; e.g., in the course of a combat with Bohort, Lancelot recognizes him by his sword (Sommer, V, 239); it is the sword of Galehaut, which in an earlier episode, some 600 pages further back, Lancelot had sent to Bohort as a present." 45 (Sommer, IV, 279)

43 Ibid, p. 72.

44 Ibid, p. 76.

45 Ibid, p. 76 and p. 83.

Carman prefers to suggest a slight modification to Frappier's contention of an 'architecte' (which he finds reasonable) by preferring to think of a powerful and resourceful chairman guiding an ideologically diversified group in the making of a complex plan.

He also claims that contrasting views can be found in a single work. There are other examples of this in the Middle Ages, e.g., Le Roman de La Rose. Chronological considerations remove any suspicions that Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung planned it together. This provides the proof that the public had a taste for extensive works with such contrasts written by more than one individual. The romances under discussion could also have been written by a group of authors with divergent views, forced into co-operation by a great patron who contributed something for both sens and matière.⁴⁶

The cycle, written probably between 1194-1246, Carman feels, could have been assembled in England.⁴⁷ Some author who liked Bohort could have added his adventures to the original Lancelot. (So this supports Bruce's theory) Carman ascribes the Queste and the Mort Artu to separate authors.⁴⁸

46 J. Neale Carman, A Study of the Pseudo-Map Cycle of Arthurian Romance, pp. 97-98.

47 Ibid, p. 128.

48 Ibid, p. 130.

Carman concludes by saying that the value of this hypothetical history lies not only in its dates and its naming of places and people of kings, queens and great lords, but especially in explaining the genesis of a work of character that is valuable as an entity. Without the concept of cyclic unity great passages are diminished in interest and in meaning.⁴⁹

Thus, we have seen, it is difficult to agree on the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle, which is and has remained a complex issue for a long time. In the following chapters, as we analyze the character of Bohort, who, as Lancelot's cousin and an illustrious Knight of the Round Table, is one of the most important characters of the Prose Lancelot, we will perhaps, be able to throw more light on the perplexing question of authorship, by discussing whether Bohort's personality and his relationship with other characters are consistent enough to attribute the authorship to one single person.

49 Ibid, p. 131.

Chapter I BOHORT IN THE LANCELOT PROPRE

Both in the Queste and in the Mort Artu, Bohort stands out as a very distinctive character. At first glance, it would seem that this was not true of the Lancelot Propre. By its very name, this work (Volumes III, IV, and V by Sommer) seems to be dedicated to the exploits of that other great knight of the Round Table, Sir Lancelot del Lac. And indeed, the first part of the Lancelot (Vol. III Sommer) only confirms this idea, so little is the importance given to Bohort in the text. However, the later part of the Lancelot (Vols. IV and V Sommer) dispels this notion. Even here, we know that it is Lancelot who is the hero of these adventures which retain him as the single focal point, but at the same time, we meet characters who are very interesting and very real. Galehaut, Gauvain, Guinevere and Bohort are only some of these. In the last named, especially, we can already recognize the man who will later be one of the three privileged heroes of the Queste and an extremely important knight in the Mort Artu. Here too, in the latter half of the Lancelot Bohort is already emerging as one of the bravest of knights and as an important companion of Lancelot, admired by the latter for his maturity and sagacity.

Yet it is in the Galehaut (Vol. III Sommer), that Bohort first appears, and though much importance is not given to him in the book, it still remains extremely valuable as an introduction.

As a knight, Bohort comes of a highly respected family. The very first page of the Lancelot makes this obvious. The name Bohort, which is mentioned here, belongs to Lancelot's uncle

(Bohort's father) but a little later, (III, 16) we are told that the territories of King Bohort and his brother Ban, (Lancelot's father), are usurped by Claudas, a rival king, "Lord of Boorges and king of la Deserte or la Terre Deserte."¹ Both the brothers die and King Bohort leaves behind two sons, Lionel, aged twenty-one months, and Bohort, aged only nine months. This then is Bohort's first appearance on the scene.

Thus the character is introduced to us when he is little more than an infant in arms. For a while, in fact, it is Lionel who plays the more dominant role. Indeed, from later events, it is curious that Lionel is the older of the two because it is Bohort who displays greater maturity and level-headedness throughout the cycle and who always tries to calm down his more impulsive brother. Later in the Lancelot, Lionel loses this early importance as Bohort emerges as the chief companion of Lancelot. An example of one important incident where Bohort displays greater maturity and seems to be the older brother, is the incident in the Queste (pp 177-193) where he is caught in the dilemma of saving either a damsel in distress or his elder brother, Lionel. He opts for the former and an outraged Lionel very nearly commits fratricide.²

As little children, however, the brothers are entrusted to the care of Pharien, a knight of Gaunes (King Bohort's kingdom) who has been banished by King Bohort, but who is loyal to Queen Evaine, the mother of the two boys (III, 17-18). She is sent to live with her sister Elaine, Lancelot's mother and King Ban's wife

1 See G. D. West, Prose Index, p. 81 (Claudas).

2 See below, pp. 61-64.

and Pharien tries to bring up the children as fine knights, worthy of their lineage. However, the news is carried to Claudas by Pharien's wife who loves Claudas, and Pharien entrusts them to Claudas's care because the latter promises to restore to them their inheritance after they come of age (IV, 24-26). However Lionel has already learnt of his own high lineage through Pharien (III, 51, 15-25), and once, while dining at Claudas's table, his wish to take revenge manifests itself. He throws the goblet of wine offered to him by Claudas in his face and then kills Dorin, Claudas's son. Bohort does help his brother in the battle that ensues and thus testifies to his later prowess as a knight, but Lionel is very clearly the more dominant of the two (III, 52-53).

Saraïde, a maid of the Lady of the Lake who is taking care of Lancelot, turns the children into greyhounds, thus protecting them from Claudas, and takes them away to her mistress where they meet Lancelot who is told that they are the nephews of his Lady. At this point, Bohort's high lineage is stressed once again, because we are told that Lancelot treated the two boys as his equals while he looked upon all others as his subordinates (III, 58-59).

Actually, Saraïde has been sent to Claudas's court by the Lady of the Lake, and she has criticized Claudas for keeping the two boys prisoner and for not letting them dine at his table even though they are of high birth (III, 47-50).

Once they are with Lancelot, Bohort and Lionel establish a close relationship with him. The children are well brought up

by the Lady of the Lake, but fret because they have been separated from their masters and confide in Lancelot, telling him everything about the incident at Claudas's court (III,80). Their masters are sent for and Bohort is truly happy to see Lambegues,³ his master. This is just one example of his ability to attract people due to his basic good nature (III, 84, 28-29).

Lancelot, who feels an inexplicable affinity for the two boys, shares the wreath of roses that he receives every morning from an unknown source with them (III, 86, 23-26). It is at this time that suspicion is aroused regarding Lancelot's identity. Leonces de Paerne, the wisest and most loyal man in Gaunes and first cousin of Ban and Bohort the elder,⁴ has accompanied Lambegues on his journey to see Bohort (III, 82-83). He weeps for joy to see the two boys because he is extremely attached to them (III, 89). He hears Lancelot address the two as his cousins and immediately suspects his identity especially as Lancelot has King Ban's features. (III, 89-90).

We are also told that the Lady of the Lake has become very attached to the children and that she finds consolation in the fact that even after Lancelot leaves, she will have Lionel and then Bohort with her for a long time. (III, 90, 12-16).

This is all the space devoted to Bohort in Vol. III. It is clearly Lancelot who is the hero of these adventures. In keeping with the conventions of most of the prose romances of this period, Bohort's physical characteristics are never described. But

³ Nephew of Pharien. See G. D. West, Prose Index, p. 185 (Lambegues, s¹).

⁴ Ibid, p. 191 (Leone(h)e).

curiously enough, some space has been devoted to a description of Lancelot which puts the stamp on the fact that he is the undisputed hero of this cycle. His physical characteristics like his eyes, his hair and the set of his shoulders, are very clearly described and we are told that Guinevere has said that even if she were God, she could not have made Lancelot more handsome than he is (III, 34-35). Such a passage is reminiscent of some of the "portraits" of formal pattern appearing in verse romances of the period.

In the rest of the Lancelot Propre, Bohort plays a role that grows steadily in importance. At the beginning of Sommer's Vol. IV (which contains the rest of the Galehaut and the Charrette), he appears at court in a very humiliated manner, in a cart (the charrette), driven by a dwarf and drawn by a horse without ears or tail (IV, 215, 10-13). This is the famous incident that Lot calls by the name of Bohort sur la Charrette.⁵ Bohort has to gain in importance at some point during the romance since he has to be introduced as one of the future conquerors of the Grail. So this story is not as ineffective as it seems, though one does wonder why Bohort is introduced in this abrupt manner. A very definite motif of the Lancelot is the constant effort of the author (or authors) to establish parallels between the lives of Lancelot and Bohort. This is one of those occasions.

A similar incident has taken place in Lancelot's life. Riding in a cart was a disgrace in those days because only men stripped of all honour who had committed crimes would be made to ride in a cart. Lancelot rides in one because the dwarf who

5 Lot, Etude sur Le Lancelot, p. 400.

is driving it promises to show him the Queen who has been carried off by Meleagant, "the evil son of King Baudemagu (of Gorre) who hates Lancelot and believes himself to be a better knight."⁶

Lancelot is pelted with mud, because everyone naturally assumes that he has to ride in the cart due to his having committed some disgraceful crime (IV, 162-163). Later Gauvain recognizes Lancelot (IV, 166, 36-38) and for that reason, he (Gauvain) is the only one to show Bohort any sympathy at all. The knight is refused a place at supper with the rest of the Knights of the Round Table and eats his food outside in the cart where Gauvain goes to keep him company. King Arthur rebukes Gauvain for this lack of good breeding on his part and says he has abused the honour of the Round Table. Gauvain retorts that dishonourable treatment of this knight would mean that Lancelot is being badly treated - "se il est honnis par la charrete. que dont est Lancelot honnis" (IV, 216, 4-5). The knight would only be delivered if someone took his place in the cart but nobody wants to do so. Bohort (the knight in the cart), thanks Gauvain for his sympathy and leaves. Shortly afterwards, he appears on one of King Arthur's best horses and offers to fight anyone who said that Gauvain had disgraced himself by eating with him. He claims that Arthur is a wretched king who has no knights capable of retrieving his horse for him. Hence the knight (Bohort) has to establish his superiority by fighting King Arthur's knights. For the second time in the Lancelot (the first occasion being the killing of Dorin, Claudas's son, III, 55), Bohort displays his skill at arms and emerges victorious. A damsel, who is in fact the Lady

6 See West, Prose Index, p. 216 (Meleagan (t)).

of the Lake, who returns later with the cart, reproaches King Arthur and his knights for their behaviour and reveals Bohort's identity. The idea is put forth that for Lancelot's sake, knights in carts should be honoured since even a great knight like him had the misfortune of being treated like a common criminal (IV, 215-217). It is stressed once again that these romances revolve around Lancelot.

Bohort, and this is a curious characteristic when compared to the Mort Artu, where he desires revenge at all costs, takes off his helmet and returns to the king the five horses that he had captured - a very chivalrous deed. He is welcomed by the Queen and offered a place at the Round Table but modestly refuses to accept it as he does not consider himself worthy of the honour. Also, he does not wish to do so without Lancelot's advice - his subservience to his cousin is much more apparent here (IV, p. 218) than either in the Queste or in the Mort Artu. Though this respect for Lancelot, which borders on definite adulation at times, is a consistent feature through this cycle, Bohort is growing as a character all the time and in the last two books, he will shed the hero's image he had of Lancelot as a boy and in his early youth. Bohort's chivalry during the Charrette incident draws due praise from his idol Lancelot, another instance of their mutual respect. Lancelot, who later hears about Bohort's exploits, is very pleased with them and wants him to go on to more chivalrous deeds, which a knight can only accomplish by leaving court (IV, 227, 22-30). This message is conveyed to Bohort by Lionel and Hector and Bohort

immediately acts on the advice, such is his implicit trust in Lancelot's judgement (IV, 237, 25-28). Anxious to meet his cousin, he departs by the shortest route to Gorre, in the hope of finding him (IV, 237, 30-34).

This entry of Bohort into the Charrette is significant but it does seem a little abrupt. Hence it is possible that this passage has been added to the cycle after Bohort had already achieved renown as the hero of the Queste. Also, a justification has to be provided for the hero of this cycle, Lancelot, riding in a cart. All the important scholars on Arthurian Literature agree that the episode of Bohort in the cart is an invention.

Frappier says:

"Il (l'auteur) a cependant entièrement inventé l'épisode de Bohort sur la Charrette.....On discerne sans peine le sens de cette invention: Lancelot, qui est monté dans la charrette pour l'amour de sa dame, doit être lavé de tout soupçon de vilénie."

So Frappier is convinced that the incident has been added to clear Lancelot's name, rather than for anything else

And Myrrha Lot-Borodine feels, "il fallait à tout prix réhabiliter la charrette aux yeux de tous, puisque Lancelot, cet arbitre des élégances courtoises, y était monté pour l'amour de sa dame". She also feels, however, that in introducing Bohort, one of the three 'élus' of the Queste, in this humiliated manner, the author wants to teach a lesson to the worldly knights of the world.⁸

Frappier does not agree. "Myrrha Lot-Borodine interprète bien ainsi l'épisode, mais elle l'enrichit aussitôt d'une signification nouvelle qui me paraît des plus contestables. Bohort s'annoncerait

⁸ M. Lot-Borodine in Lot, Etude sur Le Lancelot 402-403, Appendix V.

déjà comme l'un des élus de la Queste! Moreover he feels it is wrong to call Bohort 'pénitent', 'pur' or 'chaste' just because he has his arms tied behind his back and goes on to say, "Bohort est tout simplement le bon chevalier, c'est - à - dire le chevalier vaillant et généreux qui s'est dévoué pour son cousin Lancelot....."⁹.

J. D. Bruce certainly feels that even though it is really quite difficult to distinguish the limits of such additions and changes because the later authors would try to conform to the earlier matter as far as possible and thus baffle the highest analytical acumen, the 'charrette' has been incorporated into the Lancelot.¹⁰

He admits later that the sudden appearance of Bohort in the cart is curious because:

"it is to be observed that there had been no allusion to Bohort in the Lancelot since III, 124, when Lancelot took leave of his cousins on first going to court. Here (IV, 215), after all these intervening adventures (521 large quarto pages), he turns up again. Now, no one, I believe, will imagine that the person who wrote the account of the childhood of the brothers, Lionel and Bohort, wrote the 521 intervening pages, or even so much of them as is left, keeping in reserve all the time the character of Bohort for future exploitation....The adventures of Bohort, if not the very existence of the character are due to later expansions of the original Lancelot." 11

One would tend to agree with this view but not with the fact that Bohort's very existence as a character is due to later expansions of the work. That seems a bit too far-fetched, since he does play a very important and a very consistent role, both in the Queste and in the Mort Artu.

The common motifs between the lives of the two cousins continue to occur. Both of them father sons out of wedlock and

9 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, pp. 90-91.

10 J. D. Bruce, Romanic Review, IX (1918), 246-247.

11 Bruce, Romanic Review, X (1919) 58-59.

both are tricked into doing so. Again, the similarity in the situations is very interesting indeed.

Bohort attends a tournament at 'La Chastel de la marche', the abode of a king named Brangoire, whose daughter falls in love with Bohort. There is no handsomer or better knight at the tournament. Here there is a moment of suspense, because one wonders what Bohort's reaction will be. But as Frappier says that, "si la fille du roi Brangoire est follement amoureuse de Bohort, le futur élu de la Queste n'est pas du tout disposé à l'épouser.... il entend rester chaste...."¹² Bohort is unanimously selected by the ladies as the knight of the tournament. King Brangoire offers his own horse to Bohort; an indication perhaps that he wishes Bohort would marry his daughter.

As the victor of the tournament, Bohort selects damsels for the twelve other knights but refuses to break his vow of chastity until his quest is over. Neither does he want to make the damsel wait for him till after he finishes his quest. However, he does promise the King's daughter that he would capture Queen Guinevere from four knights, provided one of them was not Lancelot, again an indication that he reveres his cousin too much to fight with him. Frappier is sceptical about whether Bohort makes the promise with any detachment at all; he feels that the girl's beauty has begun to impress Bohort.¹³

At this point, there is a turn in the story that will leave its mark on Bohort's chastity, thus compelling him to take third place among the Grail knights, (after Galahad and Perceval), because his virginity has been lost.

¹² Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 98.

¹³ Ibid, p. 97.

The nurse of King Brangoire's daughter gives Bohort a ring which leads him to reciprocate the princess's love. Under the spell of this charm, he sins carnally for the first and only time in his life. This is the occasion when H elain le Blanc is conceived. We are told that he later becomes an Emperor of Constantinople. There is also a factual discrepancy here, because he is supposed to figure in the Queste del Saint Graal, but is only mentioned once in that book (Queste, 23, 23-24). This matter is discussed below.¹⁴

Bohort realizes the deceit the next morning but since it is perhaps part of his code of honour not to wreak revenge on a girl, he agrees to her proposal to return after six months and speak to her father. He obviously has the ability of keeping his temper well under control.(IV, 262-270).

The similar incident in Lancelot's life takes place with the daughter of King Pelles who resides at Corbenic, from which he sometimes takes his title, is Guardian of the Grail and appears to be the Fisher King.¹⁵ This parallel again testifies to the close relationship between Bohort and Lancelot, so much so that their lives too follow the same pattern. Lancelot refuses to offer his love to King Pelles's daughter. Once again, we have a crucial intervention by a nurse, the character here being called Brisane, who lures Lancelot to the girl's bed by offering him a drink with a magic potion in it. He is thus tricked into sharing the girl's bed with her. Galahad, the perfect knight, is born of this union

¹⁴ See below, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ See West, Prose Index, p. 246 (Pelles¹).

(V, 108-111) Perhaps H elain le Blanc, Bohort's son was supposed to take part in the adventures of the Queste alongside Galahad as a sort of repetition of the Bohort - Lancelot pair but that doesn't happen. So this lends support to the theory of dual or multiple authorship, meaning that later authors did not always know thoroughly what had been written before.

Lancelot is very angry at thus being cheated, and his first thought is of revenge, but at the damsel's pleading he leaves her alone (V, 111-112). Bohort had not let himself lose his temper in a similar situation (IV, 270). He is more level-headed than Lancelot and this is definitely an instance where he scores over his cousin.

The parallelism continues. Both Bohort and Lancelot meet each other's sons later on. When Lancelot sees Bohort's son, he is very happy and the whole story reminds him of his own adventure at King Pelle's's castle. When King Brangoire's daughter complains that Bohort has not keep his promise to come and see her, Lancelot makes excuses for Bohort and offers to be the lady's knight (V, 311-312). Similarly Bohort meets Galahad when he is visiting King Pelles's castle and recognizes him by his features. He is overjoyed to meet Galahad (V, 296, 18-43). Also, in another parallel, Bohort promises to be the knight of a damsel he meets in his quest for Lancelot because he knows Lancelot loves her dearly (V, 423, 30-35).

Bruce has his own comments to offer about these parallels. Discussing the complete disappearance of H elain le Blanc in the later portion of the Vulgate Cycle, he states:

"In the Vulgate Queste, however, H elain's name occurs only once, viz. in the list of the Grail questers, VI, 18, and that only in a few Mss. On the other hand, he figures in an episode of the Spanish Demanda 16 which represents the lost Queste of the so-called pseudo Robert de Boron cycle of the Arthurian prose romances. The name here appears in a mutilated form 'lain' (Layn) but there is no doubt about the identity of H elain. He has been received as a companion of the Round Table and Lancelot next predicts for him great achievements. The name throughout this passage is correctly spelt H elain (Helayn). It is possible that the author of the Demanda used the reference in the Lancelot to H elain's name. Could this be the author who added Bohort's adventures to the Lancelot then? 17

Bruce goes on to say that the whole episode of Bohort and Brangoire's daughter in a manifest imitation of the story of Lancelot and Pelles's daughter, V, 105 ff, so must be reckoned among the later expansions of the Lancelot. Thus the adventures of Bohort's as well as everything pertaining to H elain le Blanc, were composed by the same man, he feels.¹⁸

16 The pseudo-Robert de Boron cycle is a revision of the Vulgate Cycle intended to produce a more homogenous composition in which Arthur rather than Lancelot was the central character. This is also known as the post-Vulgate Cycle. We have a Spanish and a Portuguese translation of a later version of the Post-Vulgate Queste, the Demanda del Santo Grial and the Demanda do Santo-Graal. See F. Bogdanow, The Romance of the Grail - A Study of the Structure and Genesis of a Thirteenth-Century Arthurian Prose Romance, Manchester University Press, Barnes and Noble, Inc., New York, 1966 pp 12-13.

17 Bruce, Romanic Review, IX (1918), 355-357.

18 Ibid, 357-358.

There is one other clear parallel in the lives of the two cousins. One day, King Arthur and his knights are in the woods near Camelot practising archery. They meet a knight who has two lance-heads stuck in his body and a sword in his head. The knight asks for help but also lays down the condition that the one who delivers him should agree to avenge him on all those people who preferred his tormentor to him. He has come to King Arthur's court to seek help since all the bravest knights are to be found here. Nobody is willing, however, to aid the knight.

A little later, the knights meet the Damsel of the Lake, who is bringing Lancelot to the King's court. Arthur agrees to knight the youth. Lancelot sees the wounded knight and offers to help him but Yvain, one of the famous knights of the Round Table, stops him. Yvain is the "legitimate son of Urien, nephew of Arthur and cousin of Gauvain and his brothers".¹⁹ He explains to Lancelot that one would need twenty knights to perform this feat. However Lancelot does withdraw the weapons a little later and so delivers the poor wounded knight (III, 119-128).

A similar incident takes place in Bohort's life. He is on his way to the tournament at King Brangoire's castle when a damsel approaches him and says he could try to achieve an adventure if he could confidently say he was the best knight in the world. Bohort disclaims the title but goes with her all the same. The two meet another knight and damsel on the way and they all go and see a knight who is lying on a rich bed with one of his hands involuntary grasping a sword which has penetrated his other hand.

¹⁹ See West, Prose Index, pp 309-310 (Yvain²).

The maimed knight tells them that the one who could draw the sword from his hand would be acclaimed as the best knight in the world. Bohort's companion tries and fails while Bohort refuses to even attempt the operation, since he knows he is not the best knight in the world. The knight who has failed says Gauvain is the best, while Bohort is adamant that nobody could surpass Lancelot. In an ensuing duel, Bohort defeats the other knight and forces him to acknowledge Lancelot's superiority over Gauvain. He also asks the knight to find Lancelot and beg his forgiveness for the slander. The other knight discloses that he is Agravain the Proud but keeps back the fact that he is Gauvain's brother (IV, 259-262). This incident is perhaps one of the reasons for Agravain's hatred of Ban's kin in the Mort Artu.

It is really difficult to tell whether these similarities in the lives of the two cousins were later added to the main story so that Bohort's reputation could be established. Whatever the conclusion, the fact remains that these parallels help in establishing the close relationship that the two share. Nothing mars this relationship except a small incident towards the end of the Lancelot Propre (V, 332-334), where Bohort is displeased with Lancelot for the first time. King Arthur asks everyone to relate their adventures. Lancelot's are so numerous and exciting that the king has his scribes write down all of them. Lancelot mentions Bohort's encounter with King Brangoire's daughter and Bohort is irked by this. In a sudden fit of pique and with the

intention of teaching his cousin a lesson, Bohort pays him back in the same coin by mentioning King Pelles's daughter and Galahad. However, he is moderate in his anger and does not talk to Lancelot in front of the other knights of the Round Table but draws him away to a window where nobody else could hear them. One wonders why Bohort feels like mentioning King Pelles's daughter and Galahad to Lancelot. He is irked perhaps by the fact that Lancelot has not confided in him, but then he hasn't personally talked to Lancelot about his own encounter with Brangoire's daughter either. Lancelot is embarrassed and says that he has never knowingly wronged the Queen, whereupon Bohort relents, admits to having been a victim of the same kind of trick and consoles Lancelot by telling him that his son Galahad will achieve the adventures of the Holy Grail.

It is extremely important for us to realize that this respect is very mutual. It is not merely the blind adoration of Bohort for Lancelot. The latter has the highest regard for his cousin too. At one point in the story, Lancelot gives Bohort the sword that used to belong to Galeholt,²⁰ his dear friend. (IV, 279, 33-38). Obviously, Lancelot would only have given his close friend's sword to someone whom he really admires and the fact that Bohort gets it tells us much about the latter's ability.

20 Galeholt - "Lord of les Lointaignes Illes who invades Arthur's kingdom and is filled with admiration for Lancelot's bravery and agrees to humble himself before Arthur. Thereafter, he becomes a knight of the Round Table and shares till his death a great friendship with Lancelot." See West, Prose Index p. 126 (Galehot¹).

We have one other example of Lancelot's love for Bohort when Lancelot is on the verge of death, having been maltreated by some knights and then let down into a well full of cold, filthy water, serpents and vermin. Lancelot thinks of Bohort and feels that if he (Lancelot) died now, his death would be a loss to the Round Table and to Bohort who has been doing so well as a knight. Thus, he pays homage here to Bohort's prowess as a knight and also indicates his wish to teach Bohort more about chivalrous behaviour. (V, 156, 32-27).

Spiritually though, Bohort is indicated to be Lancelot's superior. It is because of this that he deserves the honour of becoming one of the three Grail knights. One can point out a very concrete example to prove this point. When Bohort visits Corbenic, King Pelles's castle, for the first time, he sees the Holy Grail at supertime and instantly kneels devoutly, since he is well aware of the religious significance of the vessel (IV, 140-142). On a similar kind of visit to Corbenic, Lancelot, who knew nothing about the Grail vessel, had knelt merely because he saw everyone else around him doing so and felt it right to follow their action (V, 108, 1-9). Judging from these incidents, one can safely say that Bohort is indeed Lancelot's spiritual superior and thus deserves to be one of the three Grail knights. His sexual "innocence" is also in his favour.

After Bohort leaves Corbenic, though, he meets a damsel who tells him that Lancelot has no reason to be proud of him, since Bohort had made no attempt to stay in the Adventurous Palace inspite

of having spend two nights at Corbenic Every worthy Knight of the Round Table should try to accomplish the adventures that he comes across in this palace. Only a select few are capable of achieving them. Unfortunately, Bohort had never heard about the place and so he refuses to accept the blame of cowardice. However, he does vow to go there on his next visit to Corbenic (V, 145-146). Later he fulfils that promise he made to himself (V, 295-303), and proves his integrity as a knight.

Again, on that second visit he makes to Corbenic, Bohort's superiority to Lancelot in these matters is mentioned. In the Adventurous Palace, Bohort has to fight really hard in order to defeat a knight, a lion, a serpent and a fierce leopard. He then meets a man with a jewelled harp who sings "the lay of tears" or the "Lais de Plors"²¹ and who tells Bohort that these adventures can only be accomplished by the one who is successful in the Quest of the Holy Grail. Then Bohort sees the Bleeding Lance.²² The old man who is carrying it tells Bohort that he is the purest knight who ever entered the palace but that only the knight who occupies the Perilous Seat ('le siège périlleux'),²³ at the Round Table will be able to learn its secret. The old man does mention,

21 The lai deals with the arrival of Joseph of Arimathea in Britain See West, Prose Index, p. 184, (Lais de Plors).

22 The Lance connected with the Grail and sometimes identified as the weapon with which Christ was wounded on the cross. Ibid, pp. 186-7 (Lance)

23 The seat at the Round Table destined for Galahad, the Grail knight, who would sit in it unharmed. All others would be killed if they attempted to sit there. Ibid, pp 279-80 (Siège^l Perilleus).

however, that Lancelot could have achieved these adventures had he taken care of himself in the same way as Bohort has done and had he not allowed himself to sin carnally. About midnight, Bohort sees the Holy Grail once again but is blinded by its brightness and warned not to step further. When begged by Bohort to reveal the secret of the Bleeding Lance, Pelles assures him that he will learn it when the last Quest of the Grail is over (V, 295-303). Besides being an indication of future events, this adventure establishes once again Bohort's spiritual greatness as compared to his cousin Lancelot.

This then, is the sum total of the Lancelot-Bohort relationship in the Lancelot Propre. There is, however, one other occasion towards the end of the book when Bohort tries to assert himself rather than live in his cousin's shadow. The Knights of the Round Table go to war with Claudas (V, 323). Bohort is entrusted with the leadership of a division (V, 344, 19-23), and proves himself to be a very able leader indeed. This division has been made up of the companions of the Round Table and the best knights of Logres, and so this is no mean honour. Bohort has a personal interest in the war since it is Claudas who has deprived him of his inheritance.

At one point in the war, Gauvain asks Bohort to wait till he is needed, and Bohort agrees to obey orders, but says he prefers to fight rather than rest. He later goes to the aid of Gauvain, Hector²⁴ and Gaheriet²⁵ and his arrival turns the scales. Gauvain, a great fighter himself, admires Bohort's bravery and skill.

24 One of the principal Knights of the Round Table. Illegitimate son of Ban and half-brother of Lancelot. See West, Prose Index, p. 155, (Hector³).

25 One of the best knights of the Round Table. Brother of Gauvain and next to Gauvain, Arthur's favourite nephew. Ibid, pp 121-122 (Gaheriet¹).

(V, 350-352) Later on, the Romans arrive to help Claudas, and Bohort proposes the astute plan that half their men should always be armed while the other half rested (V, 357). These examples show what a fine tactician Bohort is, in addition to being a great fighter, and so one can understand why he is displeased when Gauvain is happy that Lancelot is going to join the war. Bohort declares that he would have preferred to remain at home, rather than seek Lancelot's help. Evidently, his pride is hurt because he has shown himself to be capable of winning the war without Lancelot. But the others are well aware of Bohort's worth. This is reflected in Hector's opinion of Bohort. He, too, is happy that Lancelot is coming but declares that it is not Bohort's fault that they haven't been successful and that Lancelot himself could not have done any better. (V, 363-364).

In the Mort Artu, Bohort shares a close relationship with Lancelot's beloved, Guinevere. Here, in the Lancelot, the seeds of this relationship are already being sown. Throughout the cycle, we are left wondering why Bohort condones the adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere. For some reason, he never reproaches Lancelot and it is perhaps for his cousin's sake that he helps the Queen constantly even though he does not quite seem to like her. It is also possible that he is slightly jealous of the Queen due to her intimate relationship with his cousin, whom he idolizes. There are various examples of the Bohort-Guinevere relationship.

Bohort had promised King Brangoire's daughter that he

would take Guinevere away from four knights provided one of them was not Lancelot.²⁶ Yet when he comes to court in the early part of Sommer V, Bohort is wounded because he has fought with Lancelot in an attempt to take away the Queen. This leads to another discrepancy in authorship. Why does he try to seize the queen from Lancelot despite the condition he had made to Brangoire's daughter? This incident of the fight with Lancelot is nowhere mentioned. Perhaps another scribe filled in this detail without checking up the rest of the story material.

Bohort has also wounded Lancelot badly in the fight and is now very worried about him. He cries everyday with the Queen and Lionel when they visit him (V, 60-62). Guinevere herself does not blame Bohort for the attempt to seize her.

Her trust in Bohort is already obvious at this point. When Lionel and Bohort depart after the latter has been completely cured, they take leave of her privately and she is very sad to see them go. This motif recurs in the Mort Artu²⁷. Here, in the Lancelot, Guinevere's implicit trust in Bohort is indicated when she gives him a ring for Lancelot. After the departure of Bohort and Lionel, she takes to her bed because she feels she has lost some really dear friends. (V, 63).

Later, Bohort meets Lancelot, gives him the ring, and confesses that he has been responsible for Lancelot's wound. He also promises never to displease Lancelot again (V, 76). Here again, we see that he never wants to hurt Lancelot because he loves and respects his cousin more than anything else in the world. Perhaps, it is this that leads him to tolerate Lancelot's love for a married woman. He realizes that Guinevere means a great deal to Lancelot and inspires his deeds as a knight.

26 See above p. 27.

27 See below p. 81.

Later, a tournament is being held at Arthur's court and Ydier, a king and one of the Knights of the Round Table,²⁸ and some other knights feel that they can win even without Lancelot and that four knights could easily defeat Lancelot. The Queen is incensed and confides in Bohort who has no doubt about Lancelot's fighting power and offers to ask Lancelot to turn up for the tournament. Guinevere, however, prefers to send one of her damsels.

In the tournament, Bohort and Gauvain are both very successful. Once again, Guinevere's fondness for the former is reflected when she is the only one to praise him. The other ladies praise Gauvain more, perhaps because Bohort has never shown himself to be easily attracted by female charm.

Lancelot enters the fray and is completely victorious until he sees the Queen and faints. He hasn't seen her for a long time and the sight of her affects him so deeply that his strength suddenly fails him and the sword slips from his hand. He has arrived in red armour according to Guinevere's wishes, so nobody has recognized him. Guinevere tells only Bohort about Lancelot's disguise and asks him to visit Lancelot. Bohort, willingly gives her message to Lancelot, that he should visit her secretly at night. (V, 169-178). Again, he does not criticize his cousin and one strongly feels that having seen the extent of Guinevere's influence upon Lancelot, so much so that he faints when he sees her after too long a time, Bohort is convinced that his cousin needs the Queen's love if he is to continue being the finest knight in the world. Again, this reminds one of the Mort Artu where Lancelot meets Guinevere clandestinely.²⁹

28 See West, Prose Index, pp 305-306 (Yder¹).

29 See below, p. 86.

Bohort will not have anyone accuse his cousin. He is the only one who dares to criticize the Queen. Lancelot is once again tricked into meeting Pelles's daughter. The Queen blames Lancelot for this meeting, whereupon he departs in great grief, turns mad and retires to a lonely island. Bohort blames the Queen and tells her in sharp words that her repentance will not help much, now that his cousin is in such a bad state. (V, 379-382). Bohort does not really owe any allegiance to King Arthur and can dare to say what he likes to Guinevere who somehow always listens to him. Again, this reminds us of an incident in the Mort Artu.³⁰

This relationship continues in the Mort Artu where it has been extremely cleverly handled. Some of the finest dialogue in that book takes place when Bohort and the Queen are together. We shall see this later in the chapter on the Mort Artu.

Finally, in the Lancelot Propre, we find a number of incidents where the unknown author attempts to establish Bohort's capabilities as a fighter. On many occasions, Bohort's chivalry towards the fairer sex is put to the test and he willingly aids any damsel in distress. Here are two typical examples.³¹

There is one occasion where Bohort is riding along through a forest, and he meets a damsel who begs him to help her. This incident takes place just after the Charrette story. Bohort leaves court because Lancelot has advised him that a knight can accomplish greater deeds when he goes out to seek more glory.³²

Immediately, Bohort meets this damsel and gets a chance

30 See below, pp. 81-82.

31 See above, pp. 24-25.

32 In all, I counted six examples of this sort.

to show his worth. It is a knight's duty to make himself useful in a variety of ways. He should not give evil counsel to a lady and must give help, if possible, to a fellow-being in distress.³³

The damsel tells Bohort that she comes from the castle of Hongrefort, a castle in Le Terre de Bruieres inhabited by the two daughters of Atous.³⁴ Hongrefort belongs to her sister but Galindes, lord of the Blanc Castel and uncle of the two sisters of Hongrefort,³⁵ has threatened to disinherit her if she refuses to marry his seneschal. The damsel of Hongrefort has no desire to accede to her uncle's wishes. Fortunately, many knights and soldiers are on her side and she has succeeded in capturing her uncle's son, whereupon Galindes has promptly laid siege. Bohort recognizes immediately that his duty lies in helping the two sisters and so he agrees to accompany the younger sister to Hongrefort. On the way, they meet the seneschal and three other knights. Bohort defeats all of them and sends the seneschal to surrender to the Damsel of Hongrefort. Reluctantly, the seneschal agrees but warns Bohort that the blame would be his if the damsel did not pardon him (the seneschal). And indeed the damsel of Hongrefort does give orders that the seneschal should be executed.

Bohort is given a strong lance to which is attached a pennant of white samite, when he sets out the next day to fight Galindes. He defeats several knights. While he is fighting them a damsel arrives. She asks Bohort not to touch the knight he was fighting, as he was under her protection. Bohort courteously obeys but asks the damsel to make the knight go to Hongrefort as prisoner.

33 Marc Bloch, Feudal Society, II, Translated by L. A. Manyon, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 318.

34 See West, Prose Index, p. 164 (Hongrefort).

35 Ibid, p. 129 (Galindes)

The damsel does so and then sits down in the shade of a pine tree to watch the combat. Then Galindes appears on the scene. The two are extremely well-matched, but Bohort slowly gains the upper hand. However, just as the climax approaches, the damsel gets up from her post under the pine tree and asks Bohort to give up his sword. In deference to a lady's wishes, Bohort promptly does so. He finds out that the damsel is Saraïde who had taken him and Lionel from Gaunes to the abode of the Lady of the Lake. Saraïde is pleased to see that he immediately surrenders the sword and promises to tell her mistress that her love and kindness have not been wasted on Bohort who has grown up into an extremely chivalrous knight.

Having lost his sword, Bohort fights with his lance and succeeds in capturing Galindes's sword. He lets Galindes free on the condition that the latter restores his niece's property to her. He also conveys the message that he is displeased at the way she has treated the seneschal. Bohort's displeasure means a great deal to the Damsel of Hongrefort. Ashamed, she decides to start a penance, whereby she rides on a horse without a mane or tail and with her dress turned inside out. She sets out to seek Bohort and beg his pardon (IV, 238-254). She does meet him later in the story and he forgives her but asks her never again to kill a man sent to her as a prisoner. (IV, 299).

A second example of Bohort's chivalry is presented to us at the beginning of Sommer V. Bohort is resting at court, recovering from a wound, when a damsel enters. She is in the service of the Lady of Galvoie, a liege of Arthur's, and declares that her mistress needs either Lancelot or Gauvain to fight on her

behalf. Neither knight is at court. Arthur asks the lady to choose anyone else and she promptly asks for Bohort, thus testifying to the fact he has already earned a reputation for being the third best Kinght of the Round Table. Bohort willingly agrees to go with the damsel. (V, 61-62).

The Lady of Galvoie needs his help to defeat a knight called Mariales, who has seized her castle. Mariales is the son of Kahenin, a "duke who, in return for aid against his enemies built a castle on an island and gave both to the father of the Lady of Galvoie."³⁶ It is at Corbenic, King Pelles's castle, that Bohort meets Mariales and it is Pelles who summons Mariales and arranges the time and place for the battle. However, Pelles also tries to settle the quarrel as he thinks Bohort is too young for a duel. Bohort, in his turn, advises the Lady of Galvoie to ask for very high compensation, so that Mariales would not agree to the terms and would insist on the battle taking place.

The fighting place is marked off by stakes and ropes and it is decided that the first to cross the ropes will be declared the loser. Both men break their lances and then draw their swords. Finally, Bohort fells Mariales with a terrible blow on his helmet and threatens to kill him unless he surrenders. It was an accepted practice for a knight to set free those of his adversaries who surrendered to him and agreed to come to terms. Mariales surrenders his sword to Bohort, and at the latter's request, King Pelles restores her castle to the Lady of Galvoie. (V, 138-142).

³⁶ Ibid, p. 177 (Kahenin).

These are just two examples of Bohort's prompt aid to ladies. While they may not be very important to the main thread of the story as such, they serve a very great purpose in that they establish Bohort's chivalry and his worthiness as a future Knight of the Grail. Another way of establishing this point is to show how successful Bohort is when battling with knights or appearing at tournaments. There are, once again, various examples in the texts that indicate his bravery, his courage and his sincere modesty despite his position among the Knights of the Round Table.

We have already seen earlier in this chapter that Bohort emerges victor in the tournament at King Brangoire's castle.³⁷

We have also seen how certain knights of the Round Table felt that four of them could easily defeat Lancelot, and Guinevere plans that Lancelot should come to the tournament disguised in red armour and fight against the Round Table. Lancelot is completely victorious till he sees the Queen and faints³⁸ and so Arthur's side gains the upper hand over Baudemagus, for whom Lancelot has been fighting. The Queen asks Bohort to get Lancelot to renew the challenge and now Lancelot and Bohort both fight against King Arthur's side. This time the former is dressed in white and the latter in red. Together, the cousins are completely invincible. Arthur acknowledges this after he gets Lancelot to remove his helmet and reveal his identity. He says that the Round Table would have won had it not been for the fighting powers of the two cousins. (V, 169-178).

One other episode, which underlines Bohort's fighting skills which is important for us in consideration of the Queste, is that of 'le Tertre Dève', a hill which is on or near la Forest Perilleuse.³⁹

37 See above, p. 27.

38 See above, p. 39.

39 See West, Prose Index, p. 289(Tertre⁵).

On one occasion, Lancelot sees a dead knight in a litter followed by four squires and inquires of a hermit as to why the knight died. He learns that a knight called Clochides, who is in love with the daughter of Esclamor, king of La Cité Vermeille,⁴⁰ has married her and kept her in the well-fortified 'tertre deuse' in order to ensure her complete safety. Anyone who ascends this hill is promptly done away with. Curious, Lancelot climbs up himself and sees fourteen knights of the Round Table held captive, with Gauvain among them. The knight who has been causing this damage appears and is hailed by the dwarf on the hill as the best in the world. He is certainly swift in the field, and he even causes Lancelot to drop his sword. An ashamed Lancelot continues the struggle and captures his opponent's sword. It is a familiar weapon; it is in fact his dear friend Galeholt's sword which Lancelot had given his cousin Bohort.⁴¹ Lancelot guesses immediately who the knight of 'le Tertre Devee' is. Bohort has not recognized Lancelot either and courteously introduces himself as Lancelot's cousin. The two embrace and Bohort regrets the wound he has caused Lancelot. The latter offers his sword to Bohort for having vanquished him whereupon Bohort throws himself at Lancelot's feet.

Bohort had heard of the knight of the hill and his doings and had come up to fight him. He had to swear that if he proved victorious, he would have to take the former knight's place and kill all opponents, except friends or relatives.

40 Ibid, pp 83 (Clochidés) and 106 (Esclamor¹).

41 See above, p. 33.

Bohort also exempted his companions of the Round Table but had to keep them in prison. He kills sixty knights and imprisons fourteen belonging to the Round Table. He now asks Lancelot what he should do. Lancelot's advice is that he should set them free and beg them for mercy. Bohort immediately does this. Gauvain has recognized Lancelot but nobody has guessed that Bohort has been their captor. They pardon Bohort readily enough (V, 237-242).

One wonders how this episode of murdering so many people leaves no blot on Bohort's image as a Grail knight. Perhaps, he is forgiven since he resorted to murder only because he had to keep a promise.

We have already seen how invaluable Bohort is during the war with Claudas. "To the extent that chivalry was the essence of nobility, a man's true worth could only be proved in battle"⁴² Bohort's skill is mentioned once again just before this war when a damsel, who is the Queen's cousin, arrives at Claudas's court and he asks her opinion of Lancelot. She says that he is the best knight in the world and his two cousins are brave and renowned knights, inferior only to him. She gives Claudas an ominous warning, telling him that they do not love him, since he has deprived them of their inheritance. Obviously, this is a portent of things to come in the future. (V, 257-258).

This is the sum total of Bohort's role in the Lancelot Propre. Starting out insignificantly, he has steadily grown in stature and is a character to be reckoned with, as Lancelot's

⁴² Carl Stephenson, Medieval Feudalism, Ithaca, New York, Great Seal Books, A Division of Cornell University Press, 1960, p. 45.

favorite cousin, fine warrior, the Queen's confidant and a renowned and well-loved Knight of the Round Table.

At the end of the book, a reunion takes place between Arthur, Lancelot, Perceval (the second knight of the Grail), Lionel, Bohort and his son H elain le Blanc. Even more important, a hermit brings the message that the Knight of the Perilous Seat would arrive at King Arthur's Court at Whitsuntide. This knight is Galahad, Lancelot's son and the purest knight on earth who will be the first to complete the Quest of the Holy Grail. The stage is thus set for the adventures of the Holy Grail (V, 408-409).

CHAPTER II BOHORT IN LA QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL

We have seen how Bohort has grown steadily in importance through the Lancelot Propre. At the end of that book he has established himself as one of the foremost knights of the Round Table. As the cycle continues, Bohort acquires even more importance. In the Queste del Saint Graal, Bohort is accorded the exalted position of being one of the three select knights who achieve the Quest of the Holy Grail. It is true that only about a tenth of the work is devoted to his exploits. Galahad and Perceval, the other two successful knights of the Grail Queste are purer than he and get more attention in the Queste. But this in no way detracts from Bohort's importance; he still plays an extremely crucial role in the book. In fact, Loomis seems to be of the opinion that Bohort in the Queste is advanced to a position second only to Galahad's.¹

Before we go on to review Bohort's position in the book, it would be interesting to pause for an analysis of the troublesome question of authorship. Is there any obvious relationship between the end of the Lancelot Propre and the beginning of the Queste that tells us anything new about the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle? Certainly the two books seem to blend extremely well. At the end of the Lancelot, we have already been told that the knight of the Perilous Seat, Galahad, will soon come to Arthur's Court.² Lot, convinced about his single author theory, calls the Agravain

1 R. S. Loomis, The Grail - From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol
New York, 1963, p. 165.

2 See above, p. 47.

(Sommer Vol. V, the last part of the Lancelot Propre), a preparation for the Queste.³ Even in the various adventures, Lot seems to recognize the same hand:

"L'esprit chevaleresque ne disparaît pas subitement à la fin du Lancelot. Il se prolonge dans les premières pages de la Queste. Et si l'interprétation des combats et des aventures témoigne d'un symbolisme achevé, leur description ne diffère en rien de celles des combats et des aventures des autres parties. On peut même regretter que l'auteur ne sache pas se dégager autant qu'on voudrait des conventions courtoises et de la platitude du siècle." 4

Frappier too, maintains his stand on the single architect theory. Once again, he refuses to accept the theory advanced by certain critics like Bruce and Pauphilet, that the cohesion between the various parts of the Vulgate Cycle, is due to the patching up done by later redactors and interpolators because:

"it fails to take account of the essential fact that Lancelot is the father of Galahad. This invention is the keystone of the arch; it could not have been conceived except by one who had the whole edifice in mind, or who, at least saw the Lancelot proper and the Queste as inseparable. Is such an idea merely the afterthought of a redactor? Are we not rather in the presence of the original and dominant theme? The man who conceived it was the true creator of the Lancelot-Graal and its unity. And the Queste itself looks forward to a sequel. In the middle, the destruction of the Round Table is predicted in veiled terms and before the end Lancelot and Bohort have returned to Camaalot to share in its downfall." 5

3 Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, p. 76.

4 Ibid, p. 86.

5 Frappier, "The Vulgate Cycle" in Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, edited by R. S. Loomis, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1959, p. 316.

As a literary work, the Queste is more compact and less disjointed than the Lancelot, perhaps because it has one specific goal in mind - achieving the Grail Quest. Or is it because a wholly different author wrote this book? Loomis says:

"the Quest of the Holy Grail begins without interruption or gap of any kind where the Lancelot leaves off. But one does not need to read more than a few pages before realizing that a new hand, a more sensitive and clear-sighted intelligence, has assumed control of the narrative." 6

Once again, the major scholars on Arthurian romance advance widely differing theories on the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle.

The Queste in the Vulgate Cycle is postdated to the Conte del Graal written by Chrétien de Troyes. Pauphilet, who has published an extensive study of the Queste, dates it between 1214 and 1227.⁷ For his part, he does not believe in the unity of authorship proposed by Lot. He feels that the same religious and mystical quality and spirit of the Queste do not exist in the rest of the Lancelot, including the Mort Artu. In fact, the Queste seeks to discredit the chivalrous 'courtoisie' of the Lancelot rather than provide a continuation to it.⁸

Before we go into that, however, we must discuss what exactly the word 'queste' means. Pauphilet says, "La "quête", la recherche d'une personne ou d'un objet à travers des aventures enchevêtrées ou successives, était l'une des formes narratives les

6 R. S. Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance London, Hutchinson University Library, 1963, pp.99, Henceforth ALMA.

7 Albert Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste, p. 12.

8 Quoted from Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p.47.

plus familières aux romanciers."⁹ The Lancelot Propre is full of quests for people, where a party of knights sets out to find one of their number who is missing. Generally, it is Lancelot for whom they are looking.

Here, in the Queste, however, the knights of the Round Table are looking for a thing, something of religious value - the Grail. There is only one goal and it is because of this, Bruce feels, that the Queste is very superior to the best of the Vulgate Cycle:

"The plan here again takes the form of a quest - the form which had already been employed so often in the Lancelot, - but, in the present instance, the effect of the device is not weakened by repetition: the whole book is made up of a single quest, in which the participants and adventures are relatively few. Moreover, the object of this quest is not to recover an absent companion of the Round Table, but to obtain possession of the mysterious symbol of our highest spiritual aspirations: in other words, the quest in this case, is a quest for the ideal." 10

What exactly is this ideal, the Grail? It is identified by Christians as the vessel which was used at the Last Supper and in which Christ's blood was caught at the Crucifixion. This then, was the vessel which Joseph of Arimathea brought over to establish the Christian faith in some lands. However, it appears that the explanation is not so simple because "not only is there a massive inconsistency in the stories of the Grail, there is not even agreement on what the Grail itself was. The word itself seems to mean "large receptacle" or "dish" but not "cup" or "chalice".¹¹

9 Pauphi let, Etude sur la Queste, p. 13.

10 J. D. Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, pp 422-423.

11 W. T. H. Jackson, The Literature of the Middle Ages, New York, Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 113.

The number of Grail legends, too, is so varied that Prof. Loomis says: "There is no one authentic Grail legend but a multitude of Grail legends, each a medley of incoherent motifs."¹² Further Loomis says, "these legends may vary, but the Grail is in all of them the symbol of the highest spiritual experience a Christian knight can have on this earth. It remains not only the object of a quest but virtually a means of detecting who is the best of all the knights."¹³ So here in the Queste del Saint Graal, Bohort steals a march over Lancelot, who is in many ways the undisputed hero of the Lancelot Propre. It is a pointer to his worth as a character in Arthurian romance that Bohort succeeds in the Grail Quest which is the highest spiritual aspiration of medieval chivalry.

How different is the Bohort of the Queste? In this work, he is introduced to us almost at once. In the very beginning of the book, a damsel comes to Camelot and begs Lancelot to go with her into the forest. He obliges and is taken to a nunnery where he finds his cousins Bohort and Lionel, who are sleeping. They are all overjoyed to see each other (Queste, 1-2). This mutual love has been very much in evidence in the Lancelot Propre too. Through the entire cycle, Bohort and Lancelot will always be close, and constantly have each other's welfare at heart.

Lancelot has high respect for his cousin Bohort, who is younger than he but has already proved himself an able knight. The damsel has brought Lancelot to the nunnery in order to knight a boy

12 Loomis, Quoted from Jackson: The Literature of the Middle Ages
p. 113.

13 Ibid, p. 115.

who has been raised by the nuns. This fair and handsome youth is in fact his own son, Galahad,¹⁴ but at this point in the Queste, Lancelot does not know that. He willingly agrees to knight the youth and shows his respect for Bohort when he asks Bohort to fasten one spur on the youth, while he puts on the other himself (Queste, 3, 5-9).

Bohort is an extremely perspicacious person. In the Lancelot he recognized the two year old Galahad immediately when he first saw him at King Pelles's castle.¹⁵ That consistency is maintained in the Queste. After Galahad has been knighted and the three cousins (Lancelot, Bohort and Lionel), are back at Camelot, they begin to talk of the youth Lancelot has just knighted. Bohort has noticed the resemblance of the youth to Lancelot and says that the boy must be Galahad, since he bears an uncommon likeness to both King Pelles's lineage and to their own (Queste, 9, 20-26).

Though Bohort is an important member of the trinity of knights who achieve the Grail Quest, it is Galahad who is the real hero of the Queste. In the Agravain, we have often been told that Lancelot would have achieved the Quest had he not sinned carnally so often.¹⁶ But all said and done, Lancelot is still the hero of the Vulgate Cycle and the unknown author (or authors) must have wanted something of him to remain in the Queste. This is probably why it is his own flesh and blood, Galahad, who is given the honour of being the first Grail knight, as it is his cousin Bohort, with whom Lancelot shares an extremely close relationship, who is made the third Knight of the Grail.

14 See above, pp. 28-29.

15 See above, p. 29.

16 See Sommer V, 59, 107, 110, 111, 191-192, 195-196, 247-248, 279, 280, 303.

The indications are present, however, right from the beginning, that Bohort is going to be overshadowed by Galahad who is pure enough to become the foremost of the Grail Knights. Galahad is able to unhorse Bohort in the tournament held in the meadows of Camelot (Queste, 14, 3-19). In fact, the only two he cannot unhorse are Lancelot and Perceval. So the latter two are also superior to Bohort; Perceval because of his virginity and Lancelot because he is the better warrior. As the Queste unfolds however, this superiority at arms is not going to matter. Lancelot has sinned because of his adulterous relationship with Guinevere and will not be able to top Bohort in the Quest for the Grail.

There is yet another example of Bohort's perspicacity and his insight into the future. He predicts that Galahad will achieve greater feats than any other knight he has known - a prediction that turns out to be absolutely correct as Galahad achieves the most sought after feat in all Arthurian romance, that of becoming the first Grail Knight.

We have already seen in the Lancelot Propre¹⁷ that others besides Lancelot are aware of Bohort's worth. In the Queste, just Lancelot has allowed Bohort to put on one spur for Galahad, so does Arthur give him the honour of carrying Galahad's helm when the latter is led bare-headed through the streets of Camelot (Queste, 14, 20-23).

¹⁷ See above, p. 38.

A little later, the Quest of the Holy Grail commences and Bohort is made to take the oath to pursue the Quest for a year and a day, and more if need be, and never to return to court until he learned the truth about the Holy Grail, if it lay in his power to do so. His order in the oath-taking ceremony is fifth, after Galahad, Lancelot, Gauvain and Perceval (Queste, 23, 20-24). This order is probably their ranking of prowess at arms. In other respects, purely as a chaste, religious and humble Grail knight, Bohort is clearly superior to both Lancelot and Gauvain. "The events of the Queste are greatly altered from the Didot Perceval and Chrétien and concentrate as much on the failure of the once invincible heroes of Arthur's court, Lancelot and Gauvain, as on the success of Galahad, Perceval and Bors."¹⁸ As a Grail Knight then, Bohort is superior to both Lancelot and Gauvain, the only two in the Lancelot Propre who were capable of beating him in the field

The various knights in the Grail Quest then go their own ways to search for it. Their adventures are described in separate episodes and it is during Perceval's adventures that we have the first indication, from Perceval's aunt, as to which knights will complete the Quest. She tells Perceval that the glory of the Quest will only be attained by three select knights, of whom two will be virgins (Galahad and Perceval) and the other chaste (Bohort) (Queste, 73, 9-15). So for the first time, we have concrete evidence that Bohort will be a member of this very important trinity of knights.

¹⁸ R. Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History, The Boydell Press, Ipswich and Rowman and Littlefield, 1974, p. 81. The Didot Perceval is the Perceval branch of what may be termed the Robert de Boron Cycle. It shows the influence of Chrétien's Perceval; it contains material that appears in the Second Continuation of Chrétien's romance.

This concept of virginity and chastity is important to the Queste. Jackson writes:

"Although the romances do not show evidence of a spiritualized love, it cannot be denied that they all recognized love between man and woman as a great power, working upon man for good or evil". 19

In the Grail Quest, love is very clearly evil and the Grail knights are constantly warned that they must stay away from members of the fairer sex. It is the more saintly virtues like chastity and humility which matter to a Grail knight. Mere worldly chivalry does not count. If it did, Lancelot and Gauvain, better warriors than Bohort, could have become Grail Knights.

This is why the concept of love suffers a setback. The Grail knights are not averse to helping damsels in distress but will have nothing more to do with women. More often than not, they are saved from the danger of being tricked into a relationship with a lady by the sign of the cross. When they either see the cross or make the sign, the illusory world around them crumbles and they are brought to their senses. As Pauphilet says:

"Dans la Queste, l'amour n'est plus que le vil péché de luxure. Pour avoir eu jadis une passade amoureuse, Bohort, malgré sa vie exemplaire, ne sera pas au premier rang des héros du Graal. Parce qu'il fut l'amant passionné de la reine Guenièvre, Lancelot est précipité de son haut rang de gloire dans l'opprobre et la souffrance". 20

This is just why the chaste, pure Bohort is elevated as a knight above Lancelot in the Grail Quest.

The woman is in fact the enemy. "La femme toujours belle, toujours aimée, entourée d'un culte fervent, est bannie de la Queste."²¹

19 Jackson, The Literature of the Middle Ages, p. 99.

20 Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste, p. 14.

21 Ibid, p. 15.

All the beautiful women, whom Bohort and Perceval meet, and who try to tempt them, are disguised demons. So the glorious, gracious heroes of the earlier romances, wrapped up in love for their ladies, receive a setback in this work. The intention of the author of the Queste is to do away with the ideas which other authors of this period held sacred. The Grail is all that is important and so love and prowess at arms must take second place, though it must be admitted that all the three Grail knights are fine warriors indeed. The point that strikes home is that success at arms or with women are external qualities; the more important virtues of a good knight are the saintly ones. The Grail Quest is a very religious, sacred adventure "Le premier trait qui frappe dans tous ces récits," says Pauphilet "c'est le caractère exclusivement chrétien du Graal".²² It is the ultimate service to Jesus Christ and so must be accomplished by worthy knights. In fact it is Bohort who explains that the Quest is a service to Christ by saying it is "mees me servise Jhesucrist" (Queste, 164, 11)

The Grail knights are admired by all. Everyone recognizes their worth and Gauvain pays tribute to all of them when he points out to Hector that if these three (Galahad, Perceval, Bohort) should strive in vain in the adventures of the Holy Grail, the rest would get nowhere (Queste, 148, 3-10). This is a very big compliment indeed, coming from Gauvain who is one of the foremost knights in Arthurian Romance. Later, when Gauvain is pursuing his own Quest

22 Ibid, p. 21.

for the Grail, we learn once again about the three select knights who will be victorious. While explaining to Gauvain his vision about the one hundred and fifty bulls, a holy man tell him that the two pure and white ones are Galahad and Perceval (a tribute to their virginity) and that the third who wore traces of spots is Bohort because he had lost his virginity while sinning carnally for the only time in his life. This was the occasion when he fathered H elain le Blanc (Queste, 156, 9-26). This is the first time in the Queste that the reader is told why Bohort is not a complete virgin even though he is very chaste.²³ However, he has remained pure since that incident, which is why he is worthy of completing the Quest. The three bulls are yoked together at the neck and are powerless to lift their heads. This signifies that they are secure against the assaults of pride (Queste, 156, 28-31). Gauvain's vision also indicates that only one of the three will return to court at the end of the Quest to relate their adventures (Queste, 157, 20-24). We know at the end of the book that the knight in question is going to be Bohort.

Later on, we come to that part of the book where Bohort's own adventures are recorded (Queste, 162-195). Right in the beginning, he meets an aged monk and greets him respectfully. This humility is always very evident throughout the book. Bohort knows the value of the Quest and is prepared to accept the hold man's view that confession is very important to a Grail Knight. He is also warned that he should not fall into the sins of adultery or murder. The man asks Bohort not to labour any longer in this Quest if he felt

23 This incident has already taken place in the Lancelot Propre. See above, pp. 28-29.

he could not fulfil the requirements. But Bohort knows that he is chaste and is confident of his strength in accomplishing his task. Humbly, he asks the old man for advice as the priest stands in the stead of Jesus Christ (Queste, 164, 17-20).

The philosopher in Bohort comes to the fore in this book. When the priest tells him that he is a good man because he comes of excellent lineage, being the son of King Bohort the elder and Queen Evaine, Bohort retorts that a man's own heart and his inclinations determine his character, the good or evil of which cannot be traced back to one's parents. (Queste, 164-165). This theory is almost modern in its application - the theory that one cannot blame others for one's own faults. In these romances, we suddenly come across ideas that sound almost contemporary and this is one of the reasons why they are still readable despite being seven centuries old. This very philosophic explanation from Bohort is a pointer to his constant development. Ever since the first moment when we met him in the Lancelot Propre, (Sommer III, 33), he has been steadily growing in stature.

In his quest, Bohort agrees to resort to absolute penance and abstinence. He eats only bread and drinks only water, sleeps on a hard bed and wears only a white frock, so as to chasten the flesh (Queste, 165-166). He is determined enough to stick religiously to this penance, even when he is offered different kinds of meat and fish later (Queste, 168, 23-31). Curiously enough, there is one occasion where he sleeps on the hard floor and is careful that his servants do not find out about this (Queste, 170, 19-29). One really wonders why he wants to keep secret the simple ways he has adopted.

Barber writes, "Each step in the progress of the knights is expounded by hermits, with whom they hold long conversations, and the doctrines they teach correspond closely to the ideals of the Cistercians."²⁴ With his humility, his love for Christ, his staunch faith, Bohort demonstrates that he is a mouthpiece of Cistercian dogma and lends support to the theory of the Cistercian origins of the Queste..

Having decided on this ascetic way of life, Bohort is now prepared to face the adventures that are going to follow in his Quest for the Grail.

The first test comes when he is required to protect a young, defenceless lady who has been deprived of her wealth by her sister. Before the combat with Priadan, the older sister's knight, Bohort sees three visions and though his sensitivity in realizing that they all mean something is remarkable, he can find no explanations for them at this point. He is particularly struck by the one of the big bird feeding its little ones with its own blood. (Queste, 167-168). Later, he is told that this is God trying to protect mankind (Queste, 184, 5 - 14). In this adventure Bohort displays great chivalry in rushing to a defenceless woman's aid. He had done this repeatedly in the Lancelot Propre.²⁵ However, as a Grail Knight, he takes extra care to make sure that he is fighting a just combat and methodically checks with other people to make certain that he is right. (Queste, 172-173)

Bohort's qualities as a fine warrior of the first rank

²⁴ Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History, pp. 81-82.

²⁵ See above, pp. 40-44.

have never been in doubt. Here too, he fights a skilful combat, defeats Priadan, and grants him mercy at the end. The younger sister's wealth is restored to her. In the Queste itself, this granting of mercy is in sharp contrast to the murders that Gauvain and Hector commit. Homicide is a vice, denounced in the Queste, and Bohort is wise enough to keep away from it. There is only one occasion in the Lancelot Propre, in the adventure of the 'Tetre Devee',²⁶ when Bohort has wantonly killed men. Why does he do this? Lot feels that this adventure serves a definite purpose - that of showing that Bohort is capable of beating the best Knights of the Round Table in combat and thus preparing the reader for his glory in the Queste.²⁷

The Queste is full of allegories and symbols. Animals like the lion symbolize God; the serpent is Satan. This combat with Priadan too is an allegory, as Bohort has heretried to defend the new law against the old for being the Knight of Jesus Christ, it was his duty to defend the Church (Queste, 185, 13-16).

Through actions like these, Bohort is now becoming worthy of deserving the position of one of the three 'élus' of the Quest.

The next test arrives. Bohort has to make a choice between protecting his brother who is being beaten and carried away by two knights or rushing to the aid of a maiden who is in danger of being seduced and who beseeches him for help. Plunged into an agony of indecision, Bohort hesitates only for a while before choosing to help the damsel, since he would be the one to blame if she was dishonoured. She thanks him and tells him that by saving her, he has achieved a great deal since five hundred

26 See above, pp. 44-46.

27 Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, pp 75-76

more would have perished had she been deflowered. Their talk is interrupted by twelve armed knights who have been searching for the maiden. They offer Bohort their hospitality but he knows that his duty now lies with Lionel and rides away quickly to where he had last seen his brother.

He meets a man in monk's attire, riding a black horse, who tells him that Lionel is dead and takes him to the corpse. Beside himself with anguish, Bohort faints. When he is conscious again, he asks the man to take him to a church or a chapel nearby where he could bury his brother. The man takes Bohort to an old ramshackle building which looks like a chapel but looking around Bohort sees no cross or any other symbol of Jesus Christ. Next to the building is a tall and well-defended tower. Bohort accompanies the man into this tower and meets a beautiful girl who says she loves him passionately and entreats him to spend the night with her. She then takes twelve maidens with her and climbs up into the battlements. If Bohort does not grant her wish, she and the twelve maidens would throw themselves from the tower and die.

Bohort feels great pity for them but refuses to accede to their wish. Thereupon they all jump from the tower and Bohort crosses himself at the sight. Immediately, everything in front of him, including the tower, disappears and Bohort realizes that this was a trick. This is one of those occasions when an ambush has been laid for him by the Devil and the sign of the cross saves him. There is no trace of his dead brother either and Bohort is convinced now that Lionel is not really dead.

He rides away once again in search of Lionel and comes to an abbey where a monk explains to him the meaning of some of the visions he has had. The monk tells Bohort that he has always chosen the right path and is therefore a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ. The monk also asks Bohort to pray for him as God would listen readily to Bohort's prayers. Bohort keeps silent at this because he is ashamed that the monk should have this high opinion of him. This natural modesty and humility is another feature of his personality.

Riding on, Bohort comes to a fortress known as the Castle Tubele where a tournament is to take place the next day. He decides to stay on at this place because he hopes to meet some of his companions of the Quest there. He also hopes to find his brother and indeed he does meet Lionel sitting down on the steps of a chapel. Bohort is overjoyed at the sight of his brother, but the latter is enraged that Bohort has not come to his rescue and blames Bohort for the betrayal. Then Lionel gets his arms from a hermit's house where he has left them and challenges Bohort to a fight. Bohort has no wish to fight his brother and kneeling on the ground, humbly begs his forgiveness. But Lionel lets his horse plunge forward and strike Bohort in the chest. Bohort faints and Lionel dismounts with the intention of beheading his brother.

The hermit at whose house Lionel had left his arms now comes running up and tries to protect Bohort but is killed in the process. Then Calogrenant, a companion of the Round Table comes riding by and begs Lionel not to kill his brother Bohort, who is one of the finest knights in the world. Calogrenant fights Lionel who is adamant about killing his brother and though Bohort sees that Calogrenant who has rushed to his aid is losing, he is far too

badly injured to go to Calogrenant's aid. In the end, when Calogrenant cries for help, Bohort struggles to his feet and puts his helmet on. However, Lionel succeeds in killing Calogrenant with a final blow and then rushes on Bohort who at last prepares to defend himself. As he raises his hand a voice asks him to stay his arm and a thunderbolt plummets down from heaven between the two and burns both their shields and knocks them to the ground. Recovering consciousness, Bohort hears a voice which asks him to join Perceval near the sea. He asks Lionel to bury both the hermit and Calogrenant and leaves (Queste 177-194).

This episode where Bohort has to make an extremely difficult choice is very interesting. It is another assault by the Devil. Bohort appears only once in all the verse romances and in fact, it is this very episode which was adapted by Manessier in his continuation of Chrétien's Perceval.²⁸

28 There is an edition of the Third Continuation - Ch. Potvin's Perceval le Gallois ou Le Conte du Graal, Société des Bibliophiles Belges No. 21, Mons, Dequesne - Masquillier, 1865-71. The episode with Bohort and Lionel is ll. 42715 - 43718 of volume VI. Jean Marx, in Nouvelles Recherches, p. 62 thinks that both the author of the Queste and Manessier had a common source, now lost, but that in no way did the author of the Queste borrow the name or character from Manessier. He dates Manessier's Continuation very loosely between 1214 and 1227. Since this is Bohort's only appearance in all the verse romances, so far as we know, it is more likely that Manessier was borrowing from the Queste.

It is significant that Calogrenant, even while watching Bohort who does nothing to help him says he does not mind losing his life for a better man (Queste, 192, 16-18), another indication of the esteem in which Bohort is held by his companions.

It is clear at this point that Bohort is a worthy Knight of the Grail. He has been able to combat successfully all temptations. Pauphilet says - "il repousse l'assaut, combiné de l'amour, de l'amitié et de la pitié... Plus de désirs, plus d'affections familiales, plus d'humanité même, plus rien dans cette âme que la dévotion."²⁹

Now Bohort meets Perceval on the ship (Queste, 195, 3-4) and slowly the three knights are being brought together in order to bring the Grail adventures to an end. When the three are together, it is always emphasized that Galahad is the superior one. One of their first adventures together is that of the Sword of the Strange Belt (originally David's sword and destined for the principal Grail Knight) which has to be drawn out. Once this was done, all the perilous adventures that they encountered daily would stop. Neither Perceval nor Bohort can even encircle the hilt in order to get a grip on the sword and invite Galahad to make the attempt. Galahad succeeds quite easily and establishes his worthiness as the first Knight of the Grail (Queste, 201-206 and 226 - 228).

Their next adventure together is at a castle called Carcelois where King Arthur is hated. The three Grail knights are
 29 Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste, pp. 44-45.

attacked by the men in the castle when they reveal that they are knights of King Arthur's household. The three are successful in defeating the knights in the castle but have to kill many in the process and wonder if they have sinned. However, Bohort is sure that what they have done is right and that the Lord has sent them to this castle to punish the knights therein.

Galahad finds this explanation inadequate but Bohort is the one who is proved right since a priest they meet later tells them that they have done no wrong. On the contrary, they have served God and the Holy Church since the men in the Castle were wicked infidels (Queste, 229-233). This is the only time in the book where Bohort manages to top Galahad, no mean feat indeed.

For a while, the companions are separated once again. Finally they meet at Corbenic where the Grail ceremony takes place. The spirit of Josephus, the first Christian bishop, also appears after the Grail, with four angels bearing him on a golden throne. The first two angels then place candles on the table, the third lays a cloth beside the Holy Vessel and the fourth holds the Bleeding Lance upright over the Vessel so that the blood is caught in the Holy Vessel. Then the three Grail knights are given the most glorious food as their reward and Josephus disappears. Another figure of a man, however, bleeding from his hands and feet and body, rises from the Holy Vessel and tells the Grail Knights that their labours have won them a place at his table. This is the Maimed King³⁰ who is cured when Galahad anoints him with the blood from the Lance. (Queste, 268-272).

30 The Maimed King is also sometimes the Fisher King and sometimes a separate character. In the Queste he is Parlan (=Pelehan) and his wound in the thighs is a celestial punishment for drawing L'Espee Renges (the sword of David) from its sheath. See West, pp.

The adventures of the Holy Grail are now at an end. The three companions are overwhelmed with gratitude and joy in having received this singular honour. "Les pleurs de joie des trois, criant merci à Dieu...sufficent à nous faire sentir l'ardeur de leur désir pénétrer le mystère, dans la pleine intelligence de la foi".³¹

Galahad and Perceval want no more now from life and desire death in this moment of supreme happiness. "These final scenes of the Queste achieve an irresistible power as a vision of man's aspiration towards a higher existence, that existence into which Galahad and Perceval pass".³² Why doesn't Bohort do the same? Perhaps because he knows that he has to perform the duty of carrying news of the Grail Quest back to Camelot.

Once Galahad is dead, however, the fate of the other two is dismissed within a few pages. Pauphilet says: "Il n'y a pas de place après cette scène suprême (of Galahad's death) que pour une épilogue indiquant en quelques lignes le sort de Perceval et de Bohort."³³

Another discrepancy arises here in authorship. Galahad entrusts Bohort with a message for his father Lancelot. He asks Bohort to greet Lancelot on his behalf when he sees him next (Queste, 278, 27-28). But there is no mention in the Mort Artu of Bohort having performed this duty.

Bohort, who returns to Camelot at the end of the Queste (Queste, 279-280) where he relates his adventures to the Round Table,

31 M. Lot Borodine, Les Grands Secrets du Saint-Graal dans la Quest del Pseuda-Map, in Nellii Lumière du Graal, Paris 1961, p. 157.

32 Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History, p. 82.

33 Pauphilet, Etude sur La Queste, p. 169.

thus becomes a very important link between the Queste and the Mort Artu. Lot says:

"An fond, Bohort comme Galehaut, est une grant utilité. Il est conçu en vue de la Quête. Néanmoins...la pureté de Bohort est inférieure à celle de ses deux compagnons...Elle permettra de ramener Bohort d'Orient en Grande Bretagne pour faire savoir à la cour d'Arthur la destinée des deux protagonistes, Galahad et Perceval. Indispensable à la Quête, Bohort l'est par surcroît, à la mise en train de La Mort d'Arthur." 34

In comparison with his two companions, Bohort's place in the hierarchy in third position is always emphasized. Galahad is the Christ figure of the story. But he always seems too good to be true, more like a mystical, ephemeral vision. In this scene, Bohort and Perceval seem more human because they are continually resisting temptation and displaying their strength. Galahad is so complete that nothing can even tempt him. He is the Messiah figure and for that reason seems more godlike than human.

Perceval's childlike simplicity and directness are in contrast with Bohort's shrewdness and his ability to question things and think about them before making decisions. Bohort proves himself with his deeds and really tries to brush away the one blot on his character. He has this fantastic ability of being able to make a reasoned choice despite conflicting duties.

"The three Grail knights", writes Barber, "correspond to varying degrees of spiritual perfection. Galahad attains this perfection; Perceval achieves redemption through innocent faith; while Bohort reaches it through good works by which he expiates his one venial sin." 35

34 Lot, Etude Sur Le Lancelot, p. 76, note 3.

35 Barber, King Arthur in Legend and History, p. 83.

Besides, Bohort presents the human touch to the Grail Quest. Here is a man who is tempted by evil and displays the strength to reject it. His success is the result of hard work. Pauphilet says,

"le plus voisin de l'ordinaire imperfection humaine, c'est Bohort. Il a commis jadis un grand péché, il le rachète par une vie exemplaire; c'est un saint particulièrement laborieux". 36

or again,

"il gagne le paradis à la sueur de son front." 37

After all, these knights are human beings, prone to human error. They are not infallible beings. Too much perfection seems unreal. This is why Bohort's presence is reassuring; he lends a human touch and provides a constant contrast to the godlike figure of Galahad.

Indeed, Bohort does play a very important role. Pauphilet claims that it is not correct to see him (as Lot has³⁸) as merely the third member necessary to complete the trinity of Grail knights or as a link between the Queste and the Mort Artu³⁹. Admittedly he takes third place in the Queste to Galahad and Perceval as he takes second place to Lancelot in the rest of the Lancelot, but in no way does this make him an insignificant character. His presence is vital to the Grail Quest. We have seen him as a splendid warrior and as a chivalrous and loyal knight in the Lancelot Propre. In the Queste, he plays a more saintly role. He displays humility and devotion and presents himself as a really complete character.

36 Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste, p. 131.

37 Ibid, p. 132.

38 Lot, Etude sur le Lancelot, p. 191.

39 Pauphilet, Etude sur la Queste, p. 132, note 2.

Throughout he is interesting, very human, and this, besides the fact that he is the indispensable link between the Queste and the Mort Artu, as the carrier of first-hand information, adds to his worth.

CHAPTER .III

BOHORT IN LA MORT LE ROI ARTU

'La Mort le Roi Artu' is the final romance that appears in the Prose Lancelot. Frappier, who has done extensive research on this book and is widely accepted as an authority, suggests the approximate date of 1230 A.D. for the composition.¹ Here again, the question of authorship is a tantalizing one. At the very beginning of the book, and at the end (Mort Artu, 1, 1-9 and 104, 8-13), credit has been given to Walter Map, who was attached to the court of Henry II of England. However, Map died before 1230 A.D. the date Frappier attributes to the Mort Artu. So it is not really possible that he could have written it. He is cited as an author who wrote about Lancelot. Yet few people believe the attribution of authorship given to him in the Mort Artu, though it is possible that Map might have written a Latin text.² One does wonder why the true author wished to conceal himself behind the identity of Map. Frappier feels that Map's name was included to lend historic authenticity to the work, since his was a famous name.

As we have seen earlier, Lot claims that Map was a translator rather than an author.⁴

The Mort Artu continues from where the Queste left off. Its aura of worldly chivalry links it directly to the Lancelot Propre. Beverly Haj-Ahmad has done a detailed study of the structure and substance of the last part of the Lancelot Propre, the Agravain and the Mort Artu and is emphatic that both books

1 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 26.
 2 See West, Prose Index, pp 133-4 (Gautier¹).
 3 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 21.
 4 See above, p. 6.

were written by the same author. She finds structural similarities between the two books, eg, the technique of 'entrelacement' which links various episodes together is the same, she feels. "Entrelacement" appears in other prose romances though, including the Queste and outside the Vulgate Cycle. In both books, the use of the French second person in the plural, 'vous', occurs at similar occasions. Also, there are various predictions in the Agravain that are fulfilled in the Mort Artu. Taking these various points into consideration, she concludes that the same author was responsible for the Agravain and the Mort Artu⁵. And yet, the Mort Artu is very different from the rest of the Prose Lancelot. Frappier explains, "the first part of the trilogy, the Lancelot Propre, is three times as long as the Queste and the Mort Artu combined. In a work of such length, one expects an unevenness, an occasional slackening of inspiration. Especially in Sommer's volumes IV and V of the Vulgate Corpus is the reader impressed by the banality and irrelevance of many of the episodes."⁶ The Queste, too, so wrapped up in its religious dogma, contains passages which the reader may find monotonous.

It is not so with the Mort Artu. "No other prose romance of the Middle Ages," says Frappier, "offers a texture so tightly woven as the Mort Artu.....if the composition of the Lancelot proper is loosely narrative, that of the Queste symbolic and didactic, that of the Mort Artu is dramatic."⁷

5 Beverly Haj-Ahmad, Etude Comparée Sur Les Interventions d'Auteur dans la Mort le Roi Artu et dans l'Agravain, Thèse présentée à la Faculté des Etudes Graduées pour la Maîtrise es Lettres, McMaster University, 1979.

6 Frappier in ALMA, p. 297.

7 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 308.

The romance is very closely structured. The Lancelot Propre is filled with adventures of various knights that break off and leave the reader quite baffled at times. In the Mort Artu however, the story has a definite goal. Its main objective is to produce a follow-up to the Queste and to provide a conclusion to the adventures of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table by portraying a disintegration of the Arthurian world after the great adventures of Lancelot in the Lancelot Propre and of Galahad, Perceval and Bohort in the Queste. With that objective in mind, the story moves very gradually but extremely logically and concisely towards its inevitable conclusion. The story is carefully divided into three. The adultery of Lancelot and Guinevere is the main theme, but this no longer plays any part once the secondary theme of Gaheriet's death has been introduced. Then the theme of Mordred's⁸ treachery takes over and brings the story to its conclusion.⁹ This tight structure resembles the structure of a modern novel.

There is another technique that is very modern. R. S. Loomis discusses the author's literary techniques and his skill in sustaining the reader's interest by constant action. He feels that the three devices used to accomplish this are Fortune, the retributive justice of God and most important, characterization of the actors in the prose romance.¹⁰ Even minor characters have been cleverly handled and exist as real people. This development of the psychology and personality of the characters is certainly one of the most significant elements in this book.

8 Knight of the Round Table, one of Gauvain's brothers and a nephew of Arthur's. See West, Prose Index, p. 225 (Mordret).

9 J. Cable, The Death of King Arthur (a translation of Frappier's edition), Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1971, p. 21

10 R. S. Loomis, The I . . . ment of Arthurian . . . ce, London, 1963, p.110

J. D. Bruce agrees whole-heartedly. "As a work of art, the Mort Artu is superior, at every point, to the preceding branches of the cycle; in this respect, it outweighs all the rest put together. In the first place, it is the only one of the branches that is marked by a genuine construction skill."¹¹ or again:

"So much for the superiority of the Mort Artu in respect to construction. Perhaps, even more important, however, is the fact that its author does not aim at engaging or holding the reader's attention by cheap supernaturalism or by the puerile extravagance of his hero's exploits or by appeals to the prevalent taste for the artificial fashions of courtly love. The potency of his narrative rests rather on permanent elements of human interest - on the variety - and, in the climax, the grandeur of its action, or its delineation of powerful passions of different kinds, on its dramatic interplay of character with character. We have, consequently, a subtler psychology displayed in the invention of situations and in the portrayal of the actors of the story than is observable in the other branches of the cycle, save, possibly, in a few of the earliest and latest episodes of the Lancelot." 12

For the rest, Lancelot returns at the hero of this cycle after the low profile he was forced to maintain in the Queste. The difference in tone between the two books is immediately obvious. Lancelot seems to have forgotten the lessons of the Queste and relapses into his adulterous relationship with the Queen, Guinevere (Mort Artu, 4, 1 - 10) Pauphilet is critical of the way in which the author of the Mort Artu shows little respect for the innovations of the Queste.¹³

11 Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, p. 429.

12 Ibid, pp 431-432.

13 Quoted from Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 48.

And if one discusses the differing tone of the two works, ie. the Queste and the Mort Artu, one has to take Bohort into consideration. His character portrayals in the two books differ significantly. Frappier writes, "Malgré quelques traces d'esprit mystique", La Mort Artu est éloignée de la sévérité monacale et de la doctrine cistercienne de la Queste."¹⁴ Hence the religious, pious Bohort of the Queste appears in the Mort Artu as the very epitome of the courtly traditions of his age, except perhaps in his dealings with women. Though quite willing to help them out of trouble, he seems to be especially in his relationship with Guinevere, slightly anti-woman. This antagonism arises out of his feelings for Lancelot.

The chaste Bohort of the Queste is personally never attracted to women in the Mort Artu but surprisingly enough, encourages Lancelot in his adulterous love affair with Guinevere. It is a bit difficult to accept this. Frappier rebukes him for it, saying that he has retained nothing of the spiritual education of the Queste.

"C'est qu'il semble avoir remplacé l'amour de Dieu par l'amitié de Lancelot. Faut il que son amitié l'aveugle pour qu'il ait oublié à ce point la leçon des ermites?"¹⁵

In the same manner, the Bohort of the Mort Artu looks for glory at the tournaments and is quite willing to kill. Murder of the fellow Knights of the Round Table is taboo to the Grail knights. In the Queste, Bohort would rather die than kill his brother Lionel in order to defend himself.¹⁶ Again this lesson of not committing

¹⁴ Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 398.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 327.

¹⁶ See above, pp. 61-64.

homicide is forgotten in the Mort Artu. Once his vengeance is aroused, Bohort in the latter romance is prepared to go to any lengths to appease it. In fact, it is Lancelot who is superior to him here as he (Lancelot) tries to curb his temper and is even willing to forgive and forget.

Frappier says, "Son prestige de conquérant du Graal est donc aboli dans La Mort Artu".¹⁷ In a sense, this may be true because the chaste, totally religious Bohort of the Queste is not present in the Mort Artu. But there are endearing qualities to him in the latter work - his absolute loyalty to the ones he loves, his solid good sense and his promptness in rushing to the Queen's help despite his reputation as a misogynist.

Bohort is important to the development of the Mort Artu. His presence lends a kind of stability to some of the more impulsive characters in the book, e.g., Guinevere. The book begins and ends with him. He is almost the first of the characters to be introduced to us as he relates the adventures of the Queste at King Arthur's court. Thus he provides the link with the Queste. Everyone is very anxious to see him and the King commands that all the adventures of the Grail Quest be set down in writing (Mort Artu, 2, 1-12). There are various references in the book to Bohort's bravery in the field. He is one of the outstanding knights in the tournament at Winchester and even succeeds in wounding and unhorsing Lancelot (Mort Artu, 19-20). Again, at Tenebourc, he is the best knight along with Gauvain (Mort Artu, 43, 1-11) and he is victorious in

17 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 328.

the tournament at Camelot (Mort Artu, 66, 7-11). We are also told that the King of North Wales is very happy (before the tournament at Tanebourc) that the relatives of King Ban are joining him, because they are the most famous knights in the world and of the greatest prowess and chivalry (Mort Artu, 37) Bohort, of course, is one of the important members of Ban's kin.

In fact, the tournament at Winchester where he wounds Lancelot, is very important to the further development of the story. Bohort matches a brilliant Lancelot in every way. On his day, he is capable of running through everyone and only Lancelot and Gauvain can match him in the field.

His pride and loyalty to his fellowmen are other points well worth noting in this character. Betrayal is not a part of his make-up. His loyalty manifests itself most in his relations with Lancelot but it does so with Guinevere too, even after he is quite disgusted by her suspicions of his idol Lancelot. Despite this, he promises to protect her if the need does arise (Mort Artu, 80, 14-20).

At one point in the book, there is a mention of Bohort's reputation of leading a better life than any other knight in the kingdom of Logres. It is also mentioned that Bohort has a greater reputation and practised finer chivalry than the other knights in Logres. (Mort Artu, 36, 90-95). As regards his personal morality, Bohort seems to carry on from where he left off in the Queste. In a book like the Mort Artu that is full of people being crossed in love, e.g., Lancelot and Guinevere, Lancelot and the Damsel of Escalot,¹⁸ Sir Gauvain and the Damsel of Escalot and Mordred and Guinevere, Bohort remains aloof to the charms of women and his friendship with

¹⁸ Escalot is a castle situated between Camelot and Winchester. The owner's daughter falls in love with Lancelot and persuades him to wear her sleeve, - Lancelot rejects her love and she dies of grief. See West, Prose Index, p. 105 (Escalot)

Guinevere is purely platonic. In any case, he would never think of betraying his cousin Lancelot in any way. The only spot on Bohort's morality in this book arises when he says nothing to condemn the adulterous relationship between his cousin and the Queen. However, this could be due to a conflict of morality and loyalty to one's king.

There are four persons in the book with whom Bohort shares intimate contact. - Arthur, Gauvain, Guinevere and last but by no means least, Lancelot. The last two especially lean on his good sense at many points in the book.

Bohort's relations with Arthur seem to be based more on his loyalty to Lancelot rather than anything else. In fact, there is no better example of Bohort's pride than the part where he decides to move out of Arthur's court after everyone starts suspecting Lancelot of sharing an adulterous relationship with the Queen. Of course, Bohort owes no real allegiance to Arthur since he holds no land from him. Arthur regrets Bohort's departure immensely but can do nothing to stop him (Mort Artu, 36, 86 - 93). On two occasions, (Mort Artu, 44, 1 - 4 and 66, 7 - 24), the King asks Bohort to return but does not dare insist after Bohort refuses to do so. Arthur holds Lancelot and the rest of his kin in high regard and pays homage to their greatness (Mort Artu, 67, 9 - 16)

Once enmity with the court has been declared though, Bohort does not feel he owes Arthur any common civilities. Before the battle with Arthur, Bohort accompanies Lancelot in order to meet the King and is loath to dismount and greet Arthur. Finally he does so,

but only because Lancelot dismounts (Mort Artu, 147-1-17). Arthur knows Bohort's worth and indeed as a Knight of the Round Table, Bohort would never have dreamed of betraying his King in any way, but his single-mindedness when in pursuit of a goal prevents him from remaining loyal to his knightly duties at King Arthur's court. Lancelot is capable of pardoning people; Bohort, once overtaken by vengeance, is ruthless in getting to his goals. The spirit of revenge does not blind his loyalties, however. He is determined to rush to the aid of the Round Table in the final battle with Mordred (Mort Artu, 196, 13-21).

His ruthlessness with his enemies is best illustrated, perhaps, in his relationship with Gauvain. There is never any excessive friendship between them, at any point in the book, but no antagonism either. Towards the end, the war could have been avoided if Lancelot and the King had had their way. It is only Bohort who, wanting to protect the pride of his cousin Lancelot, responds to every move from Gauvain with commendable spirit. When Gauvain threatens Lancelot that he would cut off Lancelot's head in order to avenge the death of his brother Gaheriet, Bohort challenges Gauvain for a fight in single combat (Mort Artu, 119)

At the beginning of the book though, when Bohort is searching for Lancelot who has been missing since the tournament at Winchester, it is Gauvain who helps with the suggestion that they should look at Escalot since it was here that he had last heard of Lancelot's existence. He even accompanies Bohort to Escalot (Mort Artu, 44, 45-52).

Later, the relationship begins to crumble. Gauvain takes great delight in pointing out to Lancelot that it was Bohort who had wounded him at Winchester. He is happy to see that Bohort is ashamed about the incident and mentions it repeatedly (Mort Artu, 46-47).

This, however, could be analysed as mere good-natured bantering. It is only when his brothers Agravain, Guerrehet and Gaheriet are killed by Lancelot and Bohort that Gauvain's anger really erupts and he actively begins to seek vengeance. (Mort Artu 115). Lancelot is willing to make peace, but Bohort wishes to reply in kind. Lancelot wounds Gauvain badly when he fights him in single combat but chivalrously, he lets Gauvain off with his life. Bohort is sure that Lancelot would repent that he did not kill Gauvain (Mort Artu, 157-158). However, he has never doubted Gauvain's bravery and praises him by saying that he is the finest knight in the world along with Lancelot (Mort Artu, 158, 48-55).

The emphasis laid by the unknown author on psychological analysis is one of the highlights of this book. His technique of trying to penetrate the insides of his character, especially through their dialogues is very interesting. He is more of a psychologist than a moralist. Though he does intervene with short comments about his characters, much of their psychology is revealed through their dealings with others. And Bohort so often seems like his mouthpiece, a detached, worldly-wise spectator who is quite aware of the qualities and the idiosyncracies of the other characters. This is especially true of his dealings with Guinevere. Bohort understands the feelings of women and through this mouthpiece, the

author seems to advise his readers to understand them better.

The intimacy of the Queen with Bohort was very much in evidence in the Lancelot Propre too.¹⁹ In fact, the recurrence of this motif in the Mort Artu after it had already appeared in the Agravain (Sommer V) is one of the reasons that prompts J.D. Bruce to conclude that the two works were written by the same person.²⁰

This is an interesting relationship that Bohort shares with Guinevere. In the beginning, one detects a certain antagonism between them—perhaps the Queen is jealous of Bohort's close relationship with her lover Lancelot. After the tournament at Winchester, the Queen is really curious to find out if Lancelot did indeed wear the sleeve of the Lady of Escalot at that tournament. She trusts Bohort and so asks him what happened. In fact, it is she who tells Bohort that he has wounded Lancelot quite badly. Bohort tries to calm her down by telling her that it is unlikely that Lancelot would agree to be another lady's knight (Mort Artu, 34)

Later, Guinevere overhears a conversation between Arthur and Gauvain which convinces her that Lancelot is in love with the Damsel of Escalot. Once again, she confides in Bohort and tells him that she will never forgive his cousin. Bohort retorts by telling her that if she continued to doubt his cousin, who really loved her, he saw no point in remaining at court. He wants to help the Queen but his pride and his trust in Lancelot take precedence (Mort Artu, 35-36).

Later on, Guinevere really regrets Bohort's departure because he and his companions are such good company (Mort Artu, 44, 15-29)

¹⁹ See above, pages 37-40.

²⁰ Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, p. 418. See also note 413. Beverly Haj-Ahmad in her M.A. thesis. See above, pp. 71-72.

One wonders if this sorrow is purely selfish because she needs someone to protect her when Lancelot is away from court.

Bohort refuses to accept any accusations against his cousin and once he reacts quite vehemently when Guinevere tells him that she hates Lancelot more than anything else in the world and that she has never in her life loved him as she hates him now. Bohort tells her that this is a great pity. The philosopher in him cannot be still and he breaks out into a long sermon on what woman has been doing to man all through the ages. He tells her that she is damaging the reputation of the Round Table through her accusations of Lancelot (Mort Artu, 59, 30-84).

Guinevere is really sorry; she has now lost Bohort's valuable friendship as well as Lancelot's love. She stands in great need of both when Mador de la Porte, a Knight of the Round Table, accuses her of having killed his brother Gaheris de Karaheu with a poisoned apple (Mort Artu, 62 and 67). She has to face the justice of the court and regrets that she would never find any knight prepared to fight for her except one of King Ban's kinsmen, who would not fail her if they were present at court (Mort Artu, 69). Bohort is happy to hear this news because he knows that the moment has arrived for Lancelot to make peace with the Queen. Lancelot entrusts him and Hector with a message for Guinevere, telling her that he would fight for her if the need arose. Guinevere is happy to see Bohort and feels that all will now be well with her. Bohort refuses to help her and tells her that Lancelot might even be dead. Guinevere begins to cry bitterly. But Bohort is fond of her; he cannot bear to see her in distress. Later, Guinevere falls

at his feet, beseeching him to help her and Bohort takes pity on her, raises her from the ground and promises her that if she doesn't find a better champion by the next day, he would willingly fight for her. This is of course a hint that Lancelot himself would be her saviour. (Mort Artu, 75-80). This incident serves as a good example of his kindness to the Queen, especially in the light of his later spirit of vengeance for King Arthur and Gauvain, and especially for the latter.

After the Queen has been rescued, Bohort is very concerned about her safety (Mort Artu, 96, 18-20), an indication that he really cares for her despite his constant criticism of her.

Adept at recognizing the psychology of others, Bohort urges Lancelot to keep away from Guinevere after she begins to doubt his love as she would surely begin to miss him when he was absent. He tells Lancelot that she would become so anxious for his company that she would send someone to find him (Mort Artu, 60, 54-62)

It would have been rather uncharacteristic if the Bohort of the Queste had advocated adultery in this fashion. This strengthens the theory that the author for the two books was not the same one. In fact, teachings of morality are absent from this work and Frappier points out that:

"les considérations didactiques sont absentes du roman: il y a même une intention de parodie dans le 'sermon' que Bohort adresse si ingénument à Guinevère sur le thème de l'inconstance des femmes." 21

The most remarkable of the relationships, though, is that of Bohort with Lancelot. Through the entire cycle, Bohort

21 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 327.

has always admired his cousin. In the Mort Artu, this relationship has in some ways all the ingredients of a young boy looking up to an older man and thoroughly idolizing him. In fact, this seems even a bit overdone at times, because one simply cannot believe the fact that a man who is so calm and collected otherwise, would be so completely overwhelmed by his hero. Frappier feels that, "son amitié pour son cousin est plus que de dévouement, c'est de la dévotion et même de l'idolâtrie".²² This is not to say, however, that Bohort is a slave to Lancelot - in fact, what makes this particular relationship so very interesting is the reciprocation of his love by Lancelot who trusts Bohort absolutely, and has faith enough in his wisdom to demand his advice at almost every step and abide by what he says.

Both cousins are overjoyed to meet each other after there has been no news of the wounded Lancelot after the tournament at Winchester. (Mort Artu, 45, 27-29) This reminds one of the Queste, where a similar meeting takes place.²³

Bohort's dismay when he hears that he has been the cause of Lancelot's wounds, knows no bounds. He is really very sorry, implores Lancelot's pardon constantly and does not have the heart to tell him about the Queen's anger for fear of hurting him further (Mort Artu, 46-47). Lancelot is pleased with the skill both Bohort and Hector have shown at Winchester and pardons him quite readily (Mort Artu, 46, 35-52).

22 Ibid, p. 327

23 See above, p. 52.

There are, in fact, many similarities between the two as Frappier points out:

"En réalité Bohort manifeste à plusieurs reprises son bon sens tout positif en face de l'idéalisme de Lancelot: on a alors comme une esquisse, encore bien incertaine, il est vrai, du fameux couple antithétique Don Quichotte - Sancho Panza." 24

But there is one plane on which Bohort cannot match Lancelot in this book - once consumed by vengeance, he does not find it easy to forgive. We have already seen how he wished Lancelot had killed Gauvain instead of letting him go.²⁵ In a way, this single-mindedness is worth admiring because without this practical mind constantly egging him on, Lancelot's idealism could have proved dangerous for him. In the Mort Artu, Bohort provides the ideal balance for Lancelot and they complement each other beautifully.

When Lancelot learns about Guinevere's doubts of him, Bohort is the first person he turns to. This is when Bohort tells him that he must stay away from Guinevere.²⁶ Also, Bohort is the only person who is told about the white arms Lancelot will be wearing when he appears in disguise at the forthcoming tournament at Camelot (Mort Artu, 61, 12-15). Later, Lancelot says, he is doing this largely for Bohort because he does not wish to wound him or to get wounded himself. (Mort Artu, 64, 8-15). This is not the first time when Lancelot is concerned about Bohort's well-being.²⁷

Bohort also has some inkling of future events, especially where Lancelot is concerned. When the latter fails to appear for the tournament in Camelot, Bohort immediately senses that

24 Frappier, Etude sur la Mort Artu, p. 317.

25 See above, p. 80.

26 See above, p. 83.

27 See above, p. 34.

something is wrong with his cousin (Mort Artu, 66, 40-43). In fact, it is indeed unfortunate that Lancelot does not heed his cousin's advice for once and still meets Guinevere clandestinely. Bohort knows that everyone suspects Lancelot and the Queen. When Lancelot is worried about the angry look he received from King Arthur one evening, Bohort tells him to be careful as Arthur has without doubt heard about Lancelot's love for Guinevere. A little later, when Lancelot sets out to meet the Queen, Bohort begs him not to do so. Lancelot is adamant, however and in this rejection of sound advice are sown the seeds of future conflict between Arthur and Lancelot on the one hand and Gauvain and Lancelot on the other. Seeing that Lancelot is determined to go, Bohort asks him to take the quietest and least frequented path and also to carry his sword with him.

His fears are proved right. Agravain has been on the watch for Lancelot who has to arm himself in the Queen's Chambers and fight his way out of trouble. Bohort sees his cousin return fully armed and is astute enough to guess that all is not well. He tells Lancelot that the King would never forgive him and that a war would begin which would never end during their lifetimes. This prophecy of a war later proves to be absolutely correct. Bohort does not forget Guinevere at this point. He is sorry for her since she will be put to death because of Lancelot and wants to try and arrange for her safety. His loyalty to his cousin never wavers for a moment, however, and he says that Arthur would now be his mortal

enemy (Mort Artu, 89-90). This incident shows that Bohort does not entirely approve of Lancelot's adultery but is far too fond of his cousin to criticize him constantly. Curiously enough, when Lancelot decides later on to return the Queen to the King, Bohort is critical of the action, because he feels that Lancelot would miss Guinevere terribly and regret his action after a month (Mort Artu, 118). He knows his cousin well and does not want to see him suffer.

This concern for Lancelot is quite evident once again, during the combat with Gauvain, when Lancelot does not seem to be able to withstand his opponent's attack. Bohort tells Hector that he is worried about Lancelot for the first time since Lancelot has never had to rest in order to regain his breath on any other occasion (Mort Artu, 152, 1-7). His love for Lancelot manifests itself totally at the very end of the book when he is heartbroken on hearing of Lancelot's death and decides to become a hermit and stay on in the hermitage where Lancelot spent his last days. (Mort Artu, 203) Perhaps Bohort has always longed to be Lancelot and here, he becomes, in a way, Lancelot, by taking his cousin's place. Probably this was also a way of bringing Bohort back to the role that he played in the Queste. At the end of the Mort Artu, there is a renunciation of everything that is worldly, and this is symbolized by Bohort.

Earlier, Lancelot has proved his real affection for Bohort by asking him to become the King of Benoic (Mort Artu, 125) At the end of the book, Bohort orders his men to choose anyone they liked as king, and then leaves to spend the rest of his life at the hermitage. (Mort Artu, 204)

Bohort is thus more than just a link between the Queste and the Mort Artu. His is an endearing character; though hot-headed at times, he is absolutely trustworthy and loyal. He is everyone's friend and Lancelot and Guinevere, two of the most important characters in the book, depend constantly on his practical advice. He plays the role of some kind of a psychologist and philosopher. At least as far as the Queen and Lancelot are concerned, he appears to understand them better than they do themselves.

The Mort Artu is the book that provides the epilogue to the Arthurian story. In direct opposition to the Queste, courtly love is once again elevated to take a major place in the plot. Adultery (between Lancelot and Guinevere), is one of the chief reasons for the decline of the Round Table. Two other reasons are the enmity that develops between the Round Table and Ban's kin and Mordred's treachery. Since Bohort helps Lancelot in his love affair with Guinevere he is also, in a sense, partly responsible for the ruin of the Round Table.

The ever-present question of authorship still puzzles the reader at the end of the Mort Artu. In its description of courtly love, it resembles the Lancelot Propre rather than the Queste. It is difficult to arrive at a firm conclusion on this issue, but at least, after studying Bohort's character in both the Queste and the Mort Artu and seeing how different it is in both books, one could safely conclude that the same author was not responsible for both works.

CONCLUSION

We set out with the objective of studying the character of Bohort in the Vulgate Cycle. We have accomplished this in three chapters, one each on the Lancelot Propre, the Queste and Mort Artu. At the same time, we attempted to try and determine the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle.

This question of authorship poses a big problem. All the major critics on Arthurian Romance have advanced different opinions, as we have seen, ranging from Lot's theory of a single person being responsible for writing these romances to J. D. Bruce's theory that a multiple number of authors was involved.

Certainly the Vulgate Cycle has a very definite cyclic character. It consists of a mosaic of pattern fitting into each other and of cross-references that coincide. And yet, as we have often pointed out, pieces of information are missing at times, thus making the mosaic incomplete. Therefore it is difficult to believe that this vast cycle was composed by a single author. At various points in the story we find examples to support this. In fact, the character of Bohort is a prime example. The Bohort of the Queste is very different from the man who appears in the Lancelot Propre or in the Mort Artu. The difference in spirit between the Queste and the Mort Artu tells us that the authorship for these two romances at least, was positively different.

Whitehead is extremely emphatic on this point. Talking of the Queste and the Mort Artu, he has this to say:

" An even more striking discrepancy between the two works, and one which to my mind proves multiple authorship, is the treatment of the character of Boors. The Boors of the Queste is one of the three wholly spiritual knights who are present at the mystical communion at Corbenic: if God permits him to return to the court of Arthur, it is (157, 22-24): 'ne mie por la viande dou rastelier, mes por anoncier la bone pasture que cil ont perdue qui sont en péchié mortel.' But the Boors of the Mort Artu simply does not announce 'the good pasture': he is Lancelot's supporter in his love affair with the queen, and his spokesman with her." 1

The very style of dealing with the subject matter differs. The Lancelot Propre is a vast, ambitious panorama dealing with the adventures of most of the prominent Knights of the Round Table. Its very approach leaves it subject to monotony and inconsistencies. It is possible though that this book revolved originally around Lancelot and that the various adventures of the other knights were added late. This could be true of some of Bohort's own adventures, e.g., the one at the "Tertre Devese"² is definitely one of this kind. It must have been inserted into the Lancelot Propre after Bohort had already achieved renown as a Grail Knight in the Queste.

Both the Queste and the Mort Artu are more compact than the Lancelot Propre, with a much more sophisticated and skilful treatment of the subject matter. Yet the mystical spirit of the one and the emphasis on worldly chivalry in the other do suggest to us that the authorship for the two romances would not be the same. Besides the author of the Mort Artu seems so much more realistic. His ability to tell a superb narrative and his psychological approach

1 Frederick Whitehead - 'Lancelot's Redemption' Mélanges de linguistique romane et de la philologie médiévale offerts à M. M. Delboulle, Gembloux (Duculot), 1964, volume 2, pp. 738-739, n.5.

2 See above, pp. 44-46.

to his characters seem almost modern in the period in which he was writing. The Mort Artu is coherent and its unified structure makes it one of the real masterpieces of the Middle Ages.

Frappier feels that one would expect that in a vast compilation like the Vulgate Cycle, there would be found reliable clues as to the identity of the authors.³ But unfortunately these clues are not present. At the end of our study, however, it is Frappier's theory that seems most valid - that some 'architect' who had a definite plan in his head motivated this work and that different authors contributed to it. This 'architect' could have envisaged the difference in spirit between the Queste and the Mort Artu, but he could not have written two such widely differing works himself.

Despite these problems about authorship, the Prose Lancelot remains a great work. Frappier says that the great conflict between the idealization of adultery and the institution of marriage and the additional conflict between both of these and the cult of virginity and celibacy preached by the Church are illustrated more fully than elsewhere in this vast work⁴ He goes on to say:

"Of course, the inconsistencies are numerous, the main themes are obscured by totally irrelevant matter, the workmanship is uneven. Yet it is an amazing fact that, viewed in the large, this conglomeration of material was finally revised and moulded to form a majestic structure." 5

3 Frappier - "The Vulgate Cycle," in Development of Arthurian Romance, pp 92-93.

4 Ibid, p. 92.

5 Ibid, p. 92.

Bohort, the main objective of our study, is a character who has steadily grown in importance through the Lancelot - from being merely Lancelot's cousin to advancing as a knight to be reckoned with at the end of the Lancelot Propre, and then emerging even superior to Lancelot in the Queste. The fine warrior of the Lancelot Propre grows into the philosopher and religious man of the Queste and into the psychologist of the Mort Artu. He is a flower of medieval chivalry, and yet is staunch enough to keep away from carnal pleasure, except once, when he is tricked into it.⁶ This determination qualifies him as a Grail Knight. He lends the human touch to the extreme godliness of Galahad in the Queste and then develops into a really complete character in the Mort Artu, where everyone admires him and where the lovers around whom these romances revolve, Lancelot and Guinevere, depend constantly on his advice and good judgement. He is certainly no superfluous figure.

The 'architect' who was the brain behind the composition of the Lancelot must have envisaged Bohort as an important character. He certainly occupies a big place both in the Queste and in the Mort Artu. Though he does play second fiddle to Lancelot in the Lancelot Propre, he provides the important link between the Queste and the Mort Artu. His philosophy of moderation and his solid good sense set him apart from the more impulsive characters like Lancelot, Guinevere, and Gauvain. He contributes in a very big way to the Lancelot and is much more than a mere cousin of Lancelot. Bohort exists as a character in his own right.

⁶ See above pp. 27-28.

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