'WICHECRAFT & VILAINE':
MORGAN LE FAY IN MEDIEVAL ARTHURIAN LITERATURE

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by

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ABSTRACT

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ZOË EVE ENSTONE

Morgan le Fay appears in medieval literature over a period of over three hundred years and across an array of languages and genres. This study examines the development of Morgan in relation to the English romances, tracing her emergence in the English chronicle tradition, the French romance tradition, and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, combined with a detailed analysis of the four theories of origin posited by previous generations of scholars. It initially examines the potential origins of Morgan in the classical tradition, noting the analogous figures of Medea and Circe in particular; the allegorical tradition of abstract personification, including such exegetical allegories as Luxuria before discussing the possible influence of Irish and Welsh vernacular literature, focusing on such figures as the Morrigan, Medb and Modron. Morgan’s various manifestations in the French romance tradition are then examined, with particular reference to the *Lancelot-Graal* or Vulgate Cycle, and those texts based upon it, including the Prose *Tristan* and Post-Vulgate Cycle, which were in themselves highly influential in the development of later texts. This leads to an analysis of the Middle English romance tradition in the light of these French sources, focusing on a range of texts, with particular reference to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. A series of close readings challenges previous assertions that Morgan’s character is subject to a consistent process of clerkly vilification that reaches its apogee in the later middle ages. Rather, Morgan’s character is subject to the specific context of each text and its sources. Indeed, one of the earliest, twelfth-century references to Morgan demonstrates that many of the negative aspects associated with her later incarnations are integral features of her nebulous character from the beginning.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Biblical quotations remain as they appear in context in cited Latin works. All other Bible quotations in Latin are taken from *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, ed. R. Weber et al., 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, 1983). All Bible quotations in English are taken from the Douay-Challoner translation of the Vulgate. References are, however, cited according to the Hebrew chapter and verse unless otherwise indicated. The LXX and Vg numbers of the psalms are frequently one number lower than the Hebrew. Old Irish,
Middle Irish, Early Modern Irish, Old Welsh, Middle Welsh, Old French, Old English and Middle English quotations remain as they appear in context in cited works, retaining the orthography of the source unless otherwise stated. Standardized orthography has been adopted for proper nouns throughout the text.
INTRODUCTION

During the medieval period Morgan le Fay appears across a wide range of languages and genres in various roles and forms. She makes her earliest appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* (c. 1150) in which she is portrayed as a mysterious figure, the head of a group of sisters who inhabit an island.¹ She is later incorporated into King Arthur’s family, portrayed not only as a kinswoman of unspecified relationship to Arthur, but also as his sister.² Critics have tended to assume that Morgan’s character is consciously blackened as the Arthurian tradition develops, and that, over the course of time, the authors of romances modify her original benign role as a supernatural healer to that of an evil and malicious woman who displays all of the inherent frailties of woman as defined by the medieval anti-feminist tradition. As Anne Berthelot notes, ‘her reputation tends to degenerate from one romance to the next,’³ while Clark Colahan points to a ‘great affective chasm’ between the ‘beautiful young fairy, all sweetness’ in the ‘beginning of English Arthurian literature’, and ‘Arthur’s wily, old rival and secret enemy’ in the ‘later medieval tradition’.⁴ Margaret Jennings has gone as far as to claim

that this involves the transition ‘from goddess to witch, from nurse to seductress’.  

Various reasons have been posited for this perceived decline. Maureen Fries notes ‘the evil which is to besmirch her character’ from the thirteenth century onwards and suggests that ‘the decline in her moral nature, her magic powers and even her beauty coincides with the virulent growth of woman-hatred in both religious and lay society and in all kinds of literature documented by historians as a feature of the later Middle Ages’.  

Charlotte Spivack claims that the demonization of Morgan begins with the French romances, suggesting this is partly connected with her initial role as a healer as, ‘in a Christian milieu’, the ‘arts of healing with herbs and other natural remedies became in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance associated with older women who were accused of witchcraft’.

There is indeed a great divergence between her portrayal in various texts and several romances cast her in direct opposition to her initial role in Geoffrey’s Vita. Many critics of various disciplines including folklore and Celtic studies have attempted to explain this divergence in terms of the influence of vestigial traces of her ultimate source or sources in earlier literature. As Fanni Bogdanow notes, ‘For the folklorists there was no transformation, for in their opinion Morgain’s roles in the Arthurian romance are all a perverted reflection of her earlier roles in oral tradition and Celtic

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6 ‘From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance’, Arthuriana 4 (1994), 1-18, at pp. 3-4.

literature.’ Writing in response to Ferdinand Lot’s initial contention that Morgan was ‘originally a Celtic mermaid’, Lucy Allen Paton was the first Arthurian critic to associate Morgan with one of the most feared and shadowy figures in early Irish literature, the Mórrígan. Paton points out that the Mórrígan’s dichotomous attitude toward Cú Chulainn, the hero of the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythopoeic narrative, seems to echo Morgan’s conflicted relationship with Arthur, and her study did remain, in the words of Nitze, ‘for a long time without a peer in its special field’. Following on from Paton, a pivotal article by R.S. Loomis traced elements of her character to a variety of figures in Irish and Welsh texts, which influenced generations of critics, keen to stress a pagan, Celtic theory of origin for this ‘Welsh fairy’, and still exerts a powerful influence on popular conceptions of Morgan to this day. More recently, Myra Olstead and Carolyne Larrington have noted correlations between Morgan and the sorceresses Medea and Circe, identifying particular elements and scenes that would seem to be derived from the classical tradition. Moreover, Maureen Fries has pointed out that Geoffrey of Monmouth’s concept of Morgan ‘bears marked resemblances to such figures as Boethius’s Lady Philosophy and other allegorical females current from Prudentius onward’ and indeed, other critics have noted that later representations of

10 ‘Origins of Arthurian Romance’, p. 82. The Ulster cycle is one of the four great cycles of Irish mythology, centred on the reign of Conchobar mac Nessa in Ulster and Ailill mac Mata and his wife Medb in Connacht.
11 Roger Sherman Loomis, ‘Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses’, *Speculum* 20 (1945), 183-203.
13 ‘Lady to the Tramp’, p. 15.
Morgan also draw on the vast repository of abstract personifications deployed in the medieval allegorical or exegetical tradition.\textsuperscript{14}

An analysis of these potential sources reveals that they should not be considered in isolation, as the classical tradition not only fed into the allegorical or exegetical tradition in Latin, but also into the mythopoeic narratives recorded in the vernacular in both Ireland and Wales. The transmission of these texts must also be considered. There is copious evidence to suggest that both Medea and Circe were well-known figures throughout the medieval period and the allegorical or exegetical tradition is an intrinsic part of medieval literature. However, the direct influence of the Irish and Welsh vernacular texts is rather more contentious. With the notable exception of the early twelfth-century \textit{Lebor na hUidre} or Book of the Dun Cow (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Ms 23 E 25), begun before the death of Máel Muire mac Céilechair in a Viking raid on Clonmacnoise in 1106, the extant manuscripts of the Irish and Welsh texts post-date the earliest appearances of Morgan.\textsuperscript{15} Even though these manuscripts preserve material that dates to the Early Irish period, recording texts originally written down during in Old Irish, it is hard to accept Loomis’ claims of an unbroken oral tradition stretching back to the twilight of the Celtic gods and goddesses.\textsuperscript{16} That this oral tradition ensures the process of transmission of early Irish texts from Ireland to Wales to Brittany, and thence to France, where they become the \textit{matière} of the first generation of romance writers is notoriously problematic, because there is no hard,

\textsuperscript{14} See, for instance, Marco Nievergelt, ‘Paradigm, Intertext, or Residual Allegory: Guillaume de Deguileville and the \textit{Gawain-poet’}, \textit{MÆ} 80 (2011), 18-40, esp. p. 28.

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Paul Russell, ‘What was Best of Every Language’, in \textit{A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland}, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2005), pp. 405-50, at p. 407, who gives the following date boundaries: Early Old Irish: mid sixth century to the end of the seventh century; Classical Old Irish: Eighth and ninth centuries; Middle Irish: tenth to twelfth centuries.

historical evidence to substantiate this claim. Indeed, a close analysis of the putative sources for the character of Morgan in Irish and Welsh texts reveals that there is actually only a superficial similarity at best. Loomis, like Brown and to a certain extent Paton before him, tends to blur the distinctions drawn between individual female characters in both the medieval Arthurian tradition and their putative Irish and Welsh sources, in order to lend weight to his argument. However, there is evidence that suggests Irish and Welsh narratives had a role to play in the formation of the matière of Arthurian romances more generally. Indeed, a comparative study between the development of Morgan and the figure of Medb across a selection of Old, Middle and Early Modern Irish texts, demonstrates that writers in Ireland, Britain and the Continent would appear to have been drawing on analogous themes and motifs. There are a number of analogues between the Arthurian tradition and early Irish and Welsh vernacular literature in terms of general character traits and strands of narrative, which allow for the possibility of some level of influence on the formation and subsequent development of Morgan’s character. However, there is little justification for identifying one particular figure such as the Mórrígan as the fons et origo of Morgan, in spite of sharing ‘a dual nature combining aspects of fertility and aggression, an association with magic, and a tendency to shape-shift’, or for conflating an array of discrete characters

to produce an archetypal composite in the manner of Loomis and several contemporary critics.\(^{20}\)

Moreover, there are considerable points of correspondence between Morgan and her two classical antecedents. As we shall see, her gift of a robe that kills its wearer, found in the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* and Malory, echoes Medea’s deadly gift in Seneca’s *Medea*, Euripides’ *Medea*, and Hyginus’ *Fabulae*. Morgan’s vengeance against a female rival in the Vulgate *Lancelot* and Malory also recalls Circe’s punishment of Scylla, found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Servius’ commentary on *Virgil*.\(^{21}\) Given Medea and Circe’s appearances in texts that were a core part of the school curriculum, their influence on the development of Morgan is much more likely. However, this influence may not have been one-sided: the description of Morgan in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* is strikingly similar to that of Medea in the *Roman de Troie*, but the *Vita* predates the *Roman de Troie*, although it cannot be identified definitively as a source for it.\(^{22}\) Thus it seems likely that these two authors, and many of the later authors who wrote about both Medea and Morgan, had recourse to general associations surrounding magical women. Indeed, depictions of Medea are as changeable as those of Morgan; she is not represented uniformly in a negative light by

\(^{20}\) Cf., for instance, Larissa Tracy, ‘A Knight of God or Goddess? Rethinking Religious Syncretism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Arthuriana* 17 (2007), 31-55, at p. 35: ‘the pagan goddess, who occasionally appears in medieval literature as Morgan le Fay’; p. 41: ‘As an old woman, Morgan takes the place of the crone, one of the manifestations of the Irish goddess Mórrigan.’


medieval authors. An examination of Morgan also demonstrates that, in some texts, there would appear to be an allegorical or exegetical dimension to her depiction, particularly in Lancelot’s dream in the Post Vulgate *Queste* in which she appears as the leader of a group of devils and sends them after Lancelot.\(^2^3\) However, influence of the allegorical or exegetical tradition is difficult to quantify, as it seems unlikely that Morgan is drawn from a single source.

Indeed, we can discern classical, allegorical, Irish and Welsh elements in Morgan’s character, but it is likely that none of these elements alone point to the ultimate source for Morgan; rather, the various authors who portray her character built on a combination of previous sources, allied to the specific influences upon them. Furthermore, there is little textual evidence to suggest that we can treat Morgan as an archetypal ‘portrayal of the tripartite goddess’; she appears in a wide range of shifting roles across the range of texts in which she appears.\(^2^4\) This study traces the development of Morgan through the French texts which influenced the Middle English Arthurian romances, but Morgan does not appear exclusively in Arthurian texts, and her characterization differs dramatically even within the Arthurian tradition. Thus, whereas in later medieval English texts such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, she is depicted as inherently evil and ugly in keeping with such French texts such as the Prose *Tristan* and Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, in the Italian Arthurian tradition, she ‘is seldom presented under the sinister, or at least ambiguous aspect, that she wears for English readers; more frequently, she is the type for


\(^2^4\) Tracy, ‘Knight of God or the Goddess’, p. 32.
beauty’. However, the development of her character in the French Arthurian tradition goes a long way to explain the evil figure found in some later English texts. From the Vulgate Lancelot onwards Morgan is generally placed in opposition to the principal male protagonist of the text: Lancelot in the Lancelot, Arthur in the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin, Tristan in the Prose Tristan and Alixandre in Alixandre l’Orphelin. Bogdanow has noted that ‘her character as presented in the thirteenth-century romances cannot be traced to a single common pattern’:

A close study of the available material suggests that her character developed consistently from one romance to another and that its development was largely determined by the context and structure of each romance.

This statement is applicable to some degree to Morgan’s appearances more generally. Thus, a close examination of the possible sources is important in determining her character in the French texts and those English texts that draw on them. In the Prose Tristan, for instance, the author uses the character of Morgan to integrate Tristan into the Arthurian world, and equate him with Lancelot; just as she is the sworn enemy of Lancelot, she also becomes an enemy to Tristan. However, the Gawain-poet makes her position in the text more ambiguous. He is influenced by specific sections of the Lancelot, but places Morgan in an entirely new role; he draws on her portrayal in the French romance tradition, while incorporating his own refashioning of her character within the complex narrative framework he has constructed. The final text discussed in this study, Malory’s Morte Darthur, is also the latest. Malory presents his audience

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with the most wicked incarnation of Morgan of all, whereby he reworks his French sources in a manner which seems to point to an increasing tendency in society to castigate and vilify powerful, educated women.

Although we begin our journey searching for Morgan’s origins in the classical world and the imaginative landscape of early Irish and British society before we finally reach Malory in the autumn of the middle ages, it is important to remember that there is no clear chronological progression from the ‘good Morgan’ of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, and the ‘bad Morgan’ of the Vulgate Lancelot and Malory’s Morte. In the Roman de Troie written only a few years after Morgan’s first appearance in the Vita Merlini, Morgan exhibits some of the negative characteristics generally associated by critics with her later appearances, such as lust and hatred for an honourable man who rejects her. Yet in the fourteenth-century Bâtard de Bouillon, she is depicted in an entirely positive light, as Arthur’s companion in a mysterious land. Each text, therefore, needs to be considered individually in the light of its known sources, possible analogues, and the contemporary context in order to determine the author’s rationale for his depiction of Morgan rather than seeing that depiction as an archetype, or merely as part of a more general trend in the development of Morgan. Because of the myriad and often self-contradictory characterization of Morgan in previous texts going back as far as Geoffrey’s Vita, authors had a choice about the way in which they chose to portray her, or, as in the case of Malory, the problem of creating a level of consistency in a selection of disparate sources. This study seeks to treat each text on an individual basis, by identifying the possible sources and analogues particular to that text, before going on to analyse the particular characteristics of Morgan’s depiction within it. It is hoped that such an examination of some of the many Morgans of medieval romance will prove that the generalisations of previous critics regarding the
origin and development of her character are hardly reflective of the diversity of characterization found in each text which features her.
CHAPTER ONE

THE ORIGINS OF MORGAN

It has been claimed that ‘It is useless to search for the origin of each of Morgain’s traits in the earlier traditions: the fay Morgue, such as she appears in the French romances, is a creation of twelfth and thirteenth centuries.’ 27 Morgan’s character does indeed undergo a radical transformation in each of the twelfth and thirteenth-century French texts in which she appears, but a close examination of the sources that may have influenced the authors of these texts is crucial to our understanding of each transformation.28 By identifying the ways in which these potential sources and analogues interact, we can better understand the respective depictions of Morgan as part of a tradition defined by established topoi concerning the depiction of magical women, or as a rejection of this tradition. Several critics have commented on the possible origin of the character of Morgan in a variety of other texts and literary figures. These hypotheses can be broadly categorized into four theories of classical, allegorical or exegetical, Irish, and Welsh origin. It is, of course, almost impossible to identify definitively a single character or tradition as a source for Morgan, she is a protean entity

28 Here, I adopt Christine Rauer in her definitions of a source as a text which ‘presents distinctive parallels with the target text’s phraseology and/or imagery’, ‘demonstrably predates the target text’ and ‘demonstrably circulated in the same historical and literary context as the target text’. An analogue ‘presents parallels with the target text’s phraseology and/or imagery’, ‘cannot be shown to predate the target text; it is determined by a late or undetermined date of composition’ and ‘cannot be shown to have circulated in the same historical and literary context as the target text; is characterized by a different or undetermined historical and literary background’ (Beowulf and the Dragon (Woodbridge, 2000), p. 10).
presented in many different guises in the succession of texts in which she appears, leading to a somewhat confused and confusing figure. However, through an analysis and comparison of the potential sources of Morgan we can identify the constituent elements of her composite character.

Morgan le Fay’s first named appearance occurs in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, where we are given the following description:

That is the place where nine sisters exercise a kindly rule over those who come to them from our land. The one who is first among them has greater skill in healing, as her beauty surpasses that of her sisters. Her name is Morgen, and she has learned the uses of all plants in curing the ills of the body. She knows, too, the art of changing her shape, of flying through the air, like Daedalus, on strange wings. At will, she is now at Brest, now at Chartes, now at Pavia; and at will she glides down from the sky on to your shores. They say she had taught astrology to her sisters – Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliten, Glitonea, Glitont, Tyronoe, and Thiten, – Thiten, famous for her lyre.

Geoffrey goes on to state that Morgan received ‘Arthur after the battle of Camlan, where he had been wounded’:

She put the king in her chamber on a golden bed, uncovered his wound with her noble hand and looked long at it. At length she said he could be cured if only he stayed with her a long time while and accepted her treatment. We therefore
happily committed the king to her care and spread our sails to favourable winds on our return journey.\textsuperscript{29}

Carolyne Larrington claims that figure of Morgan found in the \textit{Vita Merlini} ‘is derived from classical sources – from the two most influential enchantresses of Greek mythology, Medea and Circe’.\textsuperscript{30} These classical figures may have also influenced later Morgans, and Myra Olstead notes a particular episode in Malory that ‘does not contain the usual elements of the fairy; it suggests, rather, Medea and her revenge’.\textsuperscript{31} As Corinne Saunders points out, ‘Classical writing itself conveyed to later readers something of the diversity of notions of magic and the supernatural, popular and learned, positive and negative, in the Graeco-Roman world.’\textsuperscript{32} Both Medea and Circe have a long literary tradition, appearing in a range of classical, but also medieval texts. Many classical texts were extremely influential in the middle ages, and we can assume that a highly educated \textit{clericus} like Geoffrey would have had knowledge of the classical curriculum of the time; even the short passage above contains a direct classical reference to Daedalus.\textsuperscript{33} There is quite a variation in the presentation of Medea and Circe, as indeed there is in the character of Morgan in the range of texts in which she appears, ‘Writers, both classical and medieval, are rarely compelled to tell the whole

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini}, pp. 100-3.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{King Arthur’s Enchantresses}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{31} ‘Morgan le Fay’, p. 134.


story and so much of the complexity evident in variant portraits of the enchantress results from an author’s careful manipulation of just one or two aspects of her story.  

In terms of classical texts, Medea is mentioned in a brief reference in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, composed around 700 BC, but the ‘earliest complete manuscripts of the *Theogony* date only from the end of the thirteenth century’. It is therefore difficult to establish how influential or popular this text was. Medea is also mentioned in Pindar’s *Odes*, written between 498-444 BC, which were popular in the *studium* during the medieval period, ‘The *scholia vetera* to Pindar are preserved in several manuscripts’ ranging in date from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, and were influential in other texts such as the *Etymologicum Magnum*. Medea is also found in Hyginus’ *Fabulae*, written between 64 BC- 17 AD, but it is rather difficult to determine how popular the *Fabulae* was in the medieval period due to ‘a scarcity of manuscripts’. The 1535 printed edition of the *Fabulae* was based on a manuscript from c. 900 which has since been lost, but Trzaskoma and Smith note that there are also fragments of an ‘abridged *Fabulae*’. Holzworth points out that there are direct references within the commentary tradition, citing a commentary by Arnulfus Rufus on Ovid’s *Fasti*, from  

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36 Henry Thomson Deas, ‘The *Scholia Vetera* to Pindar’, *HSPC* 42 (1931), 1-78, at p. 50; the manuscripts cited by Deas are Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Ms graecus 1312 (late 12th century) and Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms plut. 32. 52 (late 13th/early 14th century), although Deas points out there are ‘numerous’ others, most notably Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms gr. 2403 (late 13th century).


the twelfth century, which appears in at least six manuscripts, which suggests that there was ‘a more complete and satisfactory manuscript tradition’. Medea also appears in three works by Ovid: the Tristia (AD 8), the Heroides (25-16 BC), and the Metamorphoses (2-8 AD), which formed part of the curriculum during the middle ages. Ovid’s work served a number of pedagogic functions:

For some students he provided an opportunity for grammatical, i.e. Latin instruction; for other, more advanced students, his texts were presented as examples of rhetoric, of argumentation in verse; for all, though to varying degrees, he served as a compendium of classical mythology, for some an introduction to the more basic stories, for others information about the truly recherché.

Hexter notes that ‘From every indication, the Tristia ... suffered no lack of readers in the Middle Ages, even the early centuries’, noting that during ‘the twelfth century, new attention was paid to the Metamorphoses’. Hexter cites the contemporary example of Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 19475, ‘The contents suggest a strong interest in grammar, the epistolary form, and the school authors.’ This familiarity with Ovid was crucial to establishing a tradition of feminine representation that, while

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40 Cf. Curtius, European Literature, p. 49.
42 Ovid and Medieval Schooling, pp. 86-8.
43 Ovid and Medieval Schooling, p. 144.
obviously relevant to Medea and Circe, is also applicable to several portrayals of Morgan:

His collection of women driven beyond the bounds of reason established once and for all a rhetorical *topos* of the irrational woman articulating love/hate frenzy which (because it was multiplied and embodied in numerous women in Ovid’s own work as well as such successors as Seneca) appeared to prove the truth of the depiction of ‘woman’. Woman is a threat because she deceives men under the impetus of erotic passion, not only her husband or lover, but her own kin: she cannot be trusted to be loyal, cannot be assumed to obey her father. The logical conclusion is that women in control of knowledge destroy the patriarchal house.44

As well as Ovid’s texts, we may note the enormously influential commentaries on his works, for instance the mid twelfth-century *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin* of Arnold of Orléans,45 John of Garland’s *Integumenta Ovidii* (c. 1235),46 the *Ovide Moralisé* (1316-28),47 and the *Ovidius Moralizatus* (c. 1340).48 As Morse points out, the importance of these ‘moralized Ovids is manifested by the number of translations,

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modifications, and modernizations which were made for more than a century after’. 49 All
to the Ovidian tradition, we may note that Euripides’ Medea (431 BC) is preserved in a
collection of eleven manuscripts dating from the late tenth century to the fifteenth century.50 In the case of Seneca’s Medea (4 BC-65 AD), there is an extensive list of
manuscripts dating from the end of the eleventh century to the fifteenth century,
while Nicholas Trevet produced a commentary on the tragedies in 1315-16.51

49 Morse, Medieval Medea, p. 142.
50 Cf. Euripides, Medea, ed. Denys L. Page (Oxford, 1938), pp. xlvi – xlviii. The manuscripts include: Jerusalem, Patriarch’s Library, Palimpsest Codex 36 (late 10th century); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms gr. 2713 (12th-13th century), and Ms gr. 2712 (13th century); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Ms graecus 909 (c. 1250-80); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms pl. 32. 2 (late 13th-early 14th century), and Ms pl. 31.10 (14th century); Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliothek, Ms Gammel Kongelig Samling 417 (c. 1315); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms pl. 31.15 (14th century), and Ms conv. soppr. 172 (late 14th century); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Ms Palatinus graecus 287 (14th century); Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ms gr. 468 (14th century). Cf. also James Diggle, ‘On the Manuscripts and Text of Euripides’ Medea’, CQ 33 (1983), 339-357, at p. 339, who notes an additional selection, including Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms 31 (late 12th century); Mount Athos, Ms Mone Iberon 208 (c. 1300); Venice Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Ms gr. 468 (c. 1300); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana 31.15 (14th century); Vatican City, Ms Vaticano gr. 910 (14th century).
51 Cf. ‘The Manuscript Tradition of Seneca’s Tragedies’, CQ 18 (1968), 150-179, at pp. 151-3. The manuscripts include: Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms 37.13s (11th century); Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ms 406 (early 13th century); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms lat. 8260 (mid 13th century); Cambrai, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 155 (13th-14th century); Eton, Eton College Library, Ms B1. 2. 9 (13th-14th century); Augsburg, Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Ms 23 (14th century); Brescia, Querinian Library, Ms B. I. 13 (14th-15th century); Breslau (olim), Stadtbibliothek, Codex Rehdigeranus 122 (14th century); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms 37.6 (1368); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms 24 sin. 4 (1371); London, British Library, Ms Harley 2484 (14th century); London, British Library, Ms Burney 250 (1387); London, Society of Antiquaries, Ms 63 (14th century); Madrid, Escorial, Biblioteca Monasterio, Ms io8. T. III. II (14th century); Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana Ms D 159 inf. (14th century); Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, Ms IV. D. 47 (1376), and Ms IV. E. I (late 14th century); Padua, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms 896 (14th century); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms lat. 11855 (14th century), and Ms lat. 6395 (14th century); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Ms lat. 1769 (14th century); Ms Urb. lat. 355 (14th century); Vatican lat. 1650 (14th century), and Codex Regniensis 1500 (1389); Brescia, Querinian Library, Ms B. I. 13 (14th-15th
Medea’s influence and fame can be seen in the variety of medieval texts in which she appears, including Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie*; Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*; the *Book of the Duchess*; the *Canterbury Tales*; and the *House of Fame*, and the ballad, ‘Medee fu en amer veritable’.  

Circe proves somewhat more difficult to trace, as her part in Homer’s *Odyssey* would not have been well known in the medieval period. However, she appears in several sections of Servius’ series of commentaries on the work of Virgil. Curtius describes Virgil as the ‘universally valid Roman national epic’, which ‘became a schoolbook’. This transformation was achieved through Servius’ commentary, ‘About 400 Macrobius and Servius lay the foundations for medieval Virgilian exegesis.’ Certainly, ‘Medieval compilers quarried it extensively’, and there is an extensive list of Servian manuscripts dating from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries.

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54 Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 36.


56 Sinéad O’Sullivan, *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius' Psychomachia: The Weitz Tradition* (Leiden, 2004), p. 114. Cf. John Joseph Hannan Savage, ‘The Manuscripts of Servius’s Commentary on Virgil’, *HSCP* 45 (1934), 157-204; Valerie Edden, ‘Early Manuscripts of Virgiliana’, *The Library* 28 (1973), 14-25. Servius appears in the following manuscripts (list updated from Savage’s article): Leiden, Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Ms Bibliotheca Publica Latina 52 (8th-9th century); Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Ms 363 (9th century); Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Ms 22 sin I (9th century), and Ms 45.14 (9th century); Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Ms 52 (9th century); Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Augiensis 116 (9th century), and Codex Augiensis 186
The influence of Servius on representations of Circe is commented on by Judith Yarnall:

As for Virgil’s contribution to Circe’s legend during the Middle Ages, he himself cannot be blamed for it. That distinction belongs to Servius, author of the most widely read ancient commentary on the *Aeneid*, written around the turn of the fifth century.57

Circe also appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and is commented upon in Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*.58 In the medieval period, she appears in the *Roman de Troie*, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and *The House of Fame*.

The wide range of classical texts available in the medieval period, and the selection of examples given above of medieval texts which feature Medea and Circe suggest that

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contemporary authors would have been familiar with at least some elements of these two figures. In terms of Geoffrey’s *Vita*, some key elements of the character of Morgan are demonstrably based on elements of the two classical figures. Larrington notes that her location on ‘a distant island’ would seem to resemble Circe’s location, and that ‘Morgan’s sisters all have Greek or quasi-Greek names; their form and number probably recall the nine muses’. 59 Circe’s island is mentioned in Servius’ commentary,60 but the description of this fortunate island would seem to be drawn from the *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville.61 Elsewhere, Isidore mentions Circe in three separate books, ‘A certain sorceress (maga) is also reported, the very famous Circe, who turned the companions of Ulysses into beasts’.62 Later in the text he states ‘she was a sorceress and a witch and a priestess of demons; in her conduct we may recognize both the working of the magical arts and the cult of idolatry’.63 Morgan’s skill in healing could be a reflection of Circe’s skill with potions and herbs, although Circe uses them in an entirely malicious manner, described particularly in Book XIV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, where Glaucus visits her to request assistance in his pursuit of Scylla, ‘if there is any power in charms, sing a charm with your sacred lips; or, if herbs are more effectual, use the tried strength of efficacious herbs’.64 She also turns ‘her wrath upon the girl who was preferred to her’, slipping a potion her rival Scylla, who is

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60 *Servii Grammatici*, I, 3, p. 411, l. 386.


62 *Etymologies*, p. 181; *Etymologiaraum sive Originum*, I: VIII. ix. 5.

63 *Etymologies*, p. 367; *Etymologiaraum sive Originum*, II: XVIII, xxvii.2.

rendered a monster from the waist down, ‘feeling for her thighs, her legs, her feet, she finds in place of those only gaping dogs’ heads’.65

However, Morgan’s healing skills would seem to echo more closely Medea’s legendary revival of Jason’s father, described in detail in the *Metamorphoses*.66 Here, Medea also flies through the air, gathering ingredients from several places, ‘nine days and nine nights had seen her traversing all lands, drawn in her car by her winged dragons’.67 Thus, the *Vita*’s assertion that ‘She knows, too, the art of changing her shape, of flying through the air, like Daedalus, on strange wings’, may in part reflect the abilities of Circe, but Morgan’s flight might equally draw on a wide selection of transformations of people into birds as found in Ovid.68 Moreover, the author mentions Daedalus, which suggests a link to the learned arts and creative ingenuity that Daedalus possesses; this is particularly resonant in the light of Geoffrey’s references to Morgan’s learning, most notably that she has taught her sisters astrology.69 The acquisition of magic by dint of the application of learning was also a characteristic specific to Medea in the medieval period. In the *Roman de Troie*:

Benoit strongly emphasises the acquired nature of Medea’s magic, a knowledge that is outlined in terms that match the medieval arts curriculum. His portrait of

68 Cf. Larrington, *King Arthur’s Enchantresses*, p. 21: ‘Shape-changing, transforming oneself and others, is a skill inherited by the medieval enchantresses from Circe.’ Circe’s transformative abilities are mentioned in the section with Scylla, see above, and *Servii Grammatici*, I, 4, pp. 507-8, l. 242; II, 7, p. 141, l. 190.
Medea makes ample use of terms which later become a staple in depictions of Arthurian enchantresses.\textsuperscript{70}

Indeed, the description of Medea in the \textit{Roman de Troie} is very similar to that of Morgan:

Medea was very knowledgeable: she had great skill and mastery, and knew so much of magic and sorcery; and she so studied the arts that she was very wise and learned; she knew astronomy and necromancy by heart since childhood; she knew the arts so well and also magic that she could make bright day into dark night; if she wanted, it would seem that you were flying through the air; she could make the rivers run backwards: she was extremely knowledgeable.\textsuperscript{71}

Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s description of Medea and Geoffrey’s description of Morgan potentially draw on a similar range of sources in terms of the two enchantresses, and were written around the same time. Loomis claims that the \textit{Roman de Troie} may have been influenced by the \textit{Vita Merlini}, particularly because it mentions Morgan, and he lists a correlative series of names to that effect.\textsuperscript{72} However, as Christopher Dean notes, the \textit{Vita Merlini} ‘did not even seem to have been very well-known’; thus, it is impossible to say whether Geoffrey’s description of Morgan may have influenced the \textit{Roman de Troie}.\textsuperscript{73} Certainly, Benoît de Sainte-Maure is ‘indebted to the famous

\textsuperscript{70} Larrington, \textit{King Arthur’s Enchantresses}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{72} ‘Morgain La Fee’, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{A Study of Merlin in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present Day: The Devil’s Son} (Lampeter, 1992), p. 5.
description of the enchantress found in the *Metamorphoses*, but for the most part Benoit’s understanding of Medea’s prodigious power is original’:

The poet emphasizes the learned (*aprise*) nature of her art. Breaking with the classical tradition which envisaged Medea as a divinely inspired sorceress, the daughter of Helios, god of the Sun, and niece of Circe, Benoit explains her *saveir* in terms that would have been familiar to a medieval reader. Reference to *arz* and to *maistre* recalls the medieval university arts curriculum, and Medea’s powers are seen to derive from diligent study.74

This focus on the relationship between education and magic is expanded and continued in later representations of Morgan, which discuss her acquisition of knowledge from either Merlin, as in the *Lancelot* of the Vulgate or *Lancelot-Graal* Cycle,75 or in a nunnery, as in Malory.76 Thus, these contemporaneous texts show the reinterpretation of magical women within a specifically medieval, educational context. However, the magic that Morgan uses in the *Vita*: healing; flying; and shape-shifting, have analogues in the classical tales of Medea and Circe.

Indeed, if we look at later depictions of Morgan, we can see that Medea and Circe could have been influential in the development of her character, and indeed in the development of the variety of other magical women within Arthurian texts. This is especially evident in the texts in which Morgan is depicted in a more negative light, where she attempts to avenge herself on her enemies using her magical abilities in much

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74 McDonald, *Diverse folk*, pp. 111-2.


the same way as her classical predecessors. Yet all three of these figures: Circe, Medea and Morgan, are characterized by the manner in which their representation can vary between texts depending on which elements of their characters are highlighted. As McDonald notes:

The two very different Medeas who emerge from Ovid’s poetic corpus – the faithful and innocent young lover who debates the opposing demands of reason and passion, and the wild, compelling sorceress who is capable of freely following her passions along their evil course – offer enormous scope for interpretation.77

One of the key points in the depiction of both Medea and Morgan is their prioritization of a lover over familial ties. Medea’s relationship with Jason and her assistance of him in his quest for the Golden Fleece means that she has to betray the secrets of her family. In the Heroides, Medea complains to Jason that ‘I saw you and I was undone.’78 She is ‘the giver of the charmed drug’,79 which enables him to plough the field with the fire-breathing bulls, she tells him how to turn the warriors that grow from the teeth he sows against each other and finally, she causes the guardian of the fleece to sleep, ‘I closed the lids of the flame-like eyes in slumber wrought by my drug, and gave into your hand the fleece to steal away unharmed.’80 However, Medea’s biggest crime against her family is the murder of her brother, described in the Heroides and the Tristia. She

77 McDonald, Diverse folk, pp. 60-1.
78 Heroides, XII, Heroides and Amores, ed. and trans. Grant Showerman, LCL (Cambridge, MA, 1947), pp. 144-5.
80 Heroides, XII, pp. 150-1.
scatters parts of his body in order to forestall her father who is pursuing her and Jason, secure in the knowledge that her father, acting in the interests of his family, will stop to gather every piece:

she tore him limb from limb, scattering the fragments of his body throughout the fields so that they must be sought in many places. And to apprise her father she placed upon a lofty rock the pale hands and gory head.81

Medea’s final act of revenge against Jason, once he has left her for another woman, is to murder their two children, which ‘renders Medea the archetype of the villainous woman of classical antiquity’.82 This betrayal of her family is similar in many aspects to several French and English representations of Morgan, albeit Medea is considerably more successful in her plans. Morgan prioritizes her lovers over her familial connections in several of the romances in which she appears, most notably the Accolon episode in the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin and Malory’s Morte Darthur. She uses her knowledge of the powers of Excalibur and the trust placed in her because she is Arthur’s sister to steal the sword, replacing it with a replica, then contrives to have Accolon kill her brother in battle.83 She then tries to kill her husband, Uriens, in order to further her plan, as his death would leave her free to be with Accolon. There is,

82 McDonald, Diverse folk, p. 37.
however, a difference in the way in which the two women regard their actions; in several classical texts Medea seems to lament her alienation from her family, ‘of the deed my right hand was bold enough to do, it is not bold enough to write’. 84 Although she describes her actions in killing her brother and betraying her family as necessary to enable her escape, she feels that she is forced to act by her love for Jason, which was induced by the gods and some texts lend support to this notion by citing gods or, more accurately, goddesses, who have determined that Medea will fall in love with Jason. In Hyginus’ Fabulae for example, Juno tests Jason before asking Venus to make Medea love him so that he will succeed in his quest. 85 Morgan, on the other hand, has no such excuse, and although she is well aware of her family ties, she exploits them to her own advantage, invoking the familial bond in order to prevent her son from punishing her. 86 No sense of remorse or helplessness concerning the way she behaves is ever suggested in the romances in question.

In terms of magical powers, there are also a compelling series of correspondences between specific instances of Morgan’s magic and Medea and Circe, especially given the circumstances in which they tend to use their abilities. There is a distinct correspondence between Circe’s treatment of Scylla, found in both Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Servius’s commentary, and Morgan’s behaviour. Circe wants Glaucus as a lover, but he rejects her because of his love for Scylla. Circe is so angry that she concocts a poison to infect the pool in which Scylla bathes; when Scylla enters the pool she is transformed into a hideous monster from the waist down, ‘all at once she

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84 Ovid Heroides XII, pp. 150-1.

85 Cf. Fabulae, 13, p. 100; Hygini Fabulae, p. 44; Fabulae, 22, p. 106; Hygini Fabulae, p. 53.

sees her loins disfigures with barking monster-shapes’.\(^{87}\) In the *Metamorphoses*, this act is specifically linked to Circe’s lust and her jealous rivalry, ‘no one had a heart more susceptible to such flames than she ... she turned her wrath upon the girl’.\(^{88}\) This attitude to potential rivals is reminiscent of the figure of Morgan in the Vulgate *Lancelot*, where she places her rival in ‘a harsh prison, where she had the feeling day and night that she was standing in ice from the waist down and in a blazing fire above’.\(^{89}\) There is also another incident in the Medea narrative which finds an echo in Morgan’s actions in some of the romances. When Jason marries King Creon’s daughter, Creusa (sometimes also called Glauc), Medea sends her sons with a gift of a beautiful robe for Jason’s new wife. It is described in Seneca’s *Medea* as ‘a present to my heaven-born family, the glory of our throne, given Aeetes by the Sun as an assurance of his parentage’, with a necklace ‘that gleams with woven gold, and the golden thing set off with bright gems that usually encircles the hair’.\(^{90}\) However, this beautiful gift burns her rival and Creon to death, ‘crawling flame may burn its way deep into her bones’.\(^{91}\) In a similar fashion, Morgan sends a cloak to Arthur in the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, which is described by Malory as ‘beautiful and rich in appearance’, but ‘anyone who puts it on will fall dead the minute he puts it around his neck’.\(^{92}\) According to Larrington, ‘Morgan’s transformation of the cloak alludes


directly to her principal classical archetype, Medea, who kills her rival, Jason’s chosen bride, with just such a poisoned gift’. The circumstances of the gift are indeed very similar, and demonstrate the potential danger posed by a vindictive woman who has acquired a powerful level of magic. In the Arthurian romances, however, Morgan’s scheme proves unsuccessful. Having been warned by Ninianne (Nymue in Malory), Arthur does not wear the mantle. Similarly, Morgan’s punishment of the lady in boiling water in Malory is only temporary; she is eventually rescued by Lancelot. There are further instances of the probable influence of the classical tradition on the development of Morgan’s characterization. In the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* she harnesses the magic she has acquired to turn herself and her followers into stone when pursued by Arthur; having stolen his scabbard, ‘she cast her spell and turned them all into stone.’ This is reminiscent of the pursuit of mortals by the gods in the *Metamorphoses*, and their escapes which are facilitated by transformation. However, there is an implicit ironic contrast between such figures as Daphne, who flees from a promiscuous, amoral god in an attempt to preserve her chastity, and the promiscuous, amoral Morgan, who flees punishment for a series of crimes perpetrated by her. Moreover, she is the agent of her own metamorphosis, but it is important to note that petrifaction is also a punishment in the classical tradition, which may inform Arthur’s assumption that Morgan’s transformation is divine, as ‘at the end God taught her a lesson’.

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93 *King Arthur’s Enchantresses*, p. 36.
It would appear that Morgan’s character is informed by aspects of the most infamous classical enchantresses during the middle ages. Geoffrey’s *Vita* portrays Morgan’s magic as a learned art rather than an inheritance, which, as we can see in the *Roman de Troie* and later medieval depictions, is reminiscent of Medea’s power as is Morgan’s knowledge of herbs and healing. Later Arthurian texts, most notably the *Lancelot* and Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, and those texts which make use of them, would seem to draw more specifically on episodes from the classical tradition, especially in relation to Morgan’s antipathy to Arthur and various other knights. Several medieval depictions of Medea specifically associate the enchantress with the deadly sin of *luxuria*, as in the case of Morgan in some texts. Thus, the *Ovide Moralisé* notes that ‘Medea truly knew so much about natural philosophy and enchantment’, but gives a ‘positive reading of Medea’, even reworking the murder of Creusa as ‘God’s vengeance as the fiend is returned to the fires of hell’. However, in the *Ovidius Moralizatus* Medea ‘is read exclusively on a moral level as an example against the malice of evil women who can bewitch’, and in an allegorical context, ‘Medea is the sinful soul, “anima peccatrix” (111), who fornicates with the devil and, by sinning, destroys Christ, her brother (“ideo fratrem suum Christum” (111))’. A similar allegorical or exegetical interpretation of Medea, and indeed of Circe, is found in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Medea’s actions punish those who are spiritually barren:

> Where the fair goddess dwells,

> Sprung from the Sun’s seed,

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97 McDonald, *Diverse folk*, p. 80-2.

98 McDonald, *Diverse folk*, pp. 86-7.
Who mixes for each new guest
An enchanted cup.
Her herb-skilled hand
Thus changes them in various ways

Similarly ‘the wicked’, like the victims of Circe, are ‘changed into beasts’, at least ‘in the quality of their minds’, even though ‘they preserve the form of a human body’. 99 Such reinterpretations demonstrate the allegorical or exegetical potential of the characters of Medea and Circe in the hands of patristic and medieval authors.

Certainly, Geoffrey’s Morgan ‘bears marked resemblances to such figures as Boethius’s Lady Philosophy and other allegorical females current from Prudentius onward’, and an examination of Morgan in the texts in which she subsequently appears reveals that there are elements of abstract personification in many of her guises. 100

According to Joan Ferrante:

One of the most striking features of twelfth century literature is the importance of female characters. They are not portrayed as ‘real people’ with human problems; they are symbols, aspects of philosophical and psychological problems that trouble the male world. In the Latin allegories, women personify cosmological forces that govern man’s life; in lyrics and romance, they represent his ideals, his aspirations, the values of his society. But the embodiment of these

100 Fries, ‘From the Lady to the Tramp’, p. 15.
forces and values in female figures is significant. The fictional world in which
the twelfth-century hero moves is dominated, for good or ill, by women.101

By the point at which Morgan appears in literature, the tradition of feminine
personification of abstract nouns is well established, and her characterization reflects
this tradition from Geoffrey onwards. In the *Vita Merlini*, Morgan’s very appearance
suggests an abstract personification: she is beautiful and has ‘strange wings’, which
calls to mind the figure of Nike or Victoria who was ‘one of the mythological figures to
survive almost without interruption from Greece to Rome to Christian Europe’.102
Nike is not the only figure with wings; other examples include Iris, Nemesis, Eos or
Aurora, Poine or Poena, and the Erinyes or Furies. Although these winged figures are
not necessarily benign, retaining generally a moral neutrality in keeping with their
abstract status, the Christian modification of Nike transforms her into an angel as
‘angels became the object of increasing interest in Christian devotion during the fourth
century’; it is at this point that they gradually begin ‘to be depicted with wings’.103
Warner notes that angels ‘whose very name means messenger, retained the goddess
Nike’s classical function as the bearer of good tidings’.104 Thus Morgan’s wings in the
*Vita* reinforce her benignity, and it is hardly surprising that she loses them in later texts

103 Gunnar Berefelt, A Study on the Winged Angel: The Origin of a Motif, trans. Patrick Hort
104 Monuments and Maidens, p. 139. There are some depictions of Satan with feathered wings, see for
instance Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Bodley 579, fol. 50r. But this is a reference to Satan’s state as a
fallen angel, cf. Peter Dendle, Satan Unbound: the Devil in Old English Narrative Literature (Toronto,
when her enmity to Arthur and his court is a key element of her character. Her wings suggest speed and freedom, and Morgan is able to move around quickly, ‘At will, she is now at Brest, now at Chartres, now at Pavia; and at will she glides down from the sky on to your shores.’ Moreover, this geographical freedom reflects the intellectual freedom afforded by Morgan’s learning.

In later French texts, Morgan seems less like an allegorical or exegetical figure as her character develops and she takes on the role of Arthur’s sister. However, in the Post-Vulgate *Queste del Saint Graal*, Lancelot dreams that Morgan appears to him with a host of devils:

> it seemed to him that he saw before him Morgan, King Arthur’s sister, ugly and fearsome; she seemed to him as if she had just emerged from hell, and she wore no clothing except a wolf’s pelt, which covered her poorly. She groaned as if she were wounded, and Lancelot, who recognised her easily as Morgan, looked at her and saw that more than a thousand devils were with her, and each one laid a hand on her to hold her better.  

Here, Morgan does appear as a personification of sin, specifically the deadly sin of *luxuria*. Indeed, Morgan is consistently associated with ‘sensuality and the devil’ in the Post-Vulgate Cycle. This association builds on the description of her as ‘lustful and

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wanton’ in the Vulgate *Lancelot*,108 and the ‘most lustful woman in all Great Britain and the lewdest’ in the Vulgate *Merlin*.109 Furthermore, that Morgan plays an active part in punishing Lancelot in his dream of hell also echoes her punitive role in the *Lancelot*, where she subjects the woman who is her rival in love to a brutal punishment, ‘she put her into a harsh prison, where she had the feeling day and night that she was standing in ice from the waist down and in a blazing fire above’.110 Malory adapts this image, albeit in a different context, where we hear that ‘here is wythin this towre a dolorous lady that hath bene there in paynes many wyntyrs and dayes, for ever she Boyleth in scaldyng watir’. In this instance, the woman, who is being punished by Morgan le Fay and her confederate, the Queen of North Galys, is there ‘bycause she was called the fayryst lady of that contrey’.111 This episode is not taken from Malory’s principal source text for this section, the Prose *Tristan*, but is actually a borrowing from the Vulgate *Lancelot*, which was interpolated into several ‘fourteenth and fifteenth-century manuscripts of the Prose *Tristan* so as to form a continuous account of the origins of Galahad’.112 In the Prose *Tristan* and the Vulgate *Lancelot*, Morgan is not involved in this punishment at all; it is, in fact, God who subjects the women to ‘agony


112 Anne Marie D’Arcy, *Wisdom and the Grail: The Image of the Vessel in the Queste del Saint Graal and Thomas Malory’s Tale of the Sankgreal* (Dublin, 2000), p. 321. Cf. Malory, *Works*, III, p. 1524, citing Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Fr. 97; Ms. Fr. 99; Ms. Fr. 101; Ms. Fr. 349, and Ms. Fr. 758; Chantilly, Musée Condé, Ms. 646; and Ms 648; Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 2542; London, British Library, Ms Additional 5474; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms 41.
and torment’ from which she is not permitted to escape ‘for He has not yet avenged himself of a great sin I committed’.113

According to Olstead, the imprisonment of the woman in scalding water is ‘a motif that folklorists and Arthurian scholars recognize as unusual, if not, in fact, unique’.114 She claims that this episode in Malory, and the fight that Lancelot has with a dragon immediately afterwards, are a fractured version of a single episode involving a woman like Melusine, who is half serpent:

Melusina combines both the attributes of the fay and the lamia because she is a true fay in her relationship with the hero and a serpent figure who spends part of her time half-submerged in water. As such, she offers a source for a woman submerged in water to the waist, the situation from which Lancelot rescues the maiden.115

The legend of Melusine is a common folkloric motif, but ‘the tale – from the end of the twelfth century onward – was engraved upon literature in Latin as well as in the vernacular’.116 Two romances were written, both called the Roman de Mélusine: the first by Jean d’Arras, for the Duke of Berry in 1393, and the second by Couldrette, for

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115 ‘Lancelot at the Grail Castle’, p. 52.
the Seigneur de Parthenay in 1401. In both romances, Melusine is cursed by her mother so that on Saturdays she becomes a half-serpent, or mermaid, immersed in a bath. According to Olstead, the image of the serpent lady also appears in Breton and Welsh tales, in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Lanzelet written sometime after 1194, and the Pulzella Gaia, which dates from the middle of the fourteenth century. In fact, in the Pulzella Gaia, the heroine is later imprisoned in a dungeon by Morgan ‘up to her waist in water’, thus we can identify at least one analogue to the episode in Malory.

However, although Olstead is right in claiming that the image of a woman up to her waist in boiling water is unusual in romance, it is much more common in depictions of the punishments of hell, specifically, as the penalty for luxuria. The temperature of the water in Malory’s Morte initially points to a hellish punishment, as in the tenth-century Fis Adamnáin, or Vision of Adamnan, preserved in Lebor na hUidre, the oldest surviving compilation of early Irish vernacular literature. Here, we are presented with various punishments which involve to fire and heat; we are told that a ‘river of fire, its surface an ever-burning flame’ lies before one of the portals to heaven:

Abersetus is the angel’s name who keeps watch over that river, and purges the souls of the righteous, and washes them in the stream, according to the amount of guilt that cleaves to them, until they become pure and shining as the radiance of the stars.

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118 Gardner, Arthurian Legend, p. 244.
Here, the number of ablutions is related to the level of sin that needs to be purged. This theme of the punishment fitting the crime was common, stemming from the third-century Greek *Apocalypse of Paul* (extant in Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopic) and its fifth or sixth-century Latin translation, the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, which was well-known during the Insular period, influenced a number of Old and Middle English texts, and is also preserved in an Old French version. As Theodore Silverstein notes, ‘it became one of the chief formative elements in the later legends of heaven and hell’.\(^{120}\) While visiting hell, St. Paul sees a ‘fiery stream’ in which sinners are punished to different levels according to their sins, ‘some up to their knees, some up to their navels, others to their necks, others still, up to their eyebrows.’ The archangel Michael, who acts as Paul’s psychopomp, tells him that ‘Those in pain to their navels were adulterers who did not repent until the time of death.’\(^{121}\) A similar punishment is meted out to the lustful in *Visio Tnugdali*, or Vision of Tnugdal, written by an Irish monk at Schottenkloster of Regensburg in 1149 during the abbacy of Christianus Mac Cartaig. This text proved extremely popular throughout the later middle ages.\(^{122}\) Here, Cormac Mac Cartaig, king of Desmond and Munster, is immersed to the waist in fire as an ‘expiation of a breach of his marriage vow’.\(^{123}\) However, as Paton has noted, the motif also appears in Andreas Capellanus’ *De Amore*, and the demarcation of the body at the waist also

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\(^{121}\) *Visio Sancti Pauli*, pp. 12-3.


\(^{123}\) Boswell, *Irish Precursor of Dante*, p. 222.
features in the descriptions of Circe and Scylla discussed above. The tropological significance of this demarcation is emphasized in John Mirk’s *Festial*, where he describes an abbess who was ‘a clene woman of hyr body as for dede of lechery’, but ‘had gret lust to talke þerof’ and is therefore punished above the waist while her lower half ‘schon as þe sonne’. Similarly, it appears in Richard Pynson’s 1506 edition of the *Kalender of Shepherdes*, which is based on the highly influential *Le Compost et kalendar des bergiers*, first published in Paris by Guiot Marchant in 1493 (fig. 1).

We may also recall King Lear’s summation of women, which reflects the late medieval homiletic commonplace that *superbia* and *luxuria* are especially characteristic of the frailty of women:

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Down from the waist
They’re centaurs, though women all above.
But to the girdle do the gods inherit;
Beneath is all the fiend’s.
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Yet the precise nature of the maiden’s sin is not revealed in the Vulgate *Lancelot*; she merely tells Gawain, who tries unsuccessfully to free her, that God is avenging himself upon her, but claims that ‘neither you nor anyone else will ever find out why I am here until the knight comes who will release me’. In fact, no further information is forthcoming when Lancelot succeeds in this task. Gawain is invited by the damsel to test the water so that he may understand the level of suffering to which she is subjected, ‘He found the water so hot that he thought he had lost his hand forever.’ 129 This is reminiscent of Lancelot’s brief encounter with the ‘anguish’ of hell in his dream in the Post-Vulgate *Queste*. Thus, it seems likely that the reason the woman is immersed only to her waist in Malory’s sources demonstrates that her ‘great sin’ should be related to her punishment; she is being punished by God for a sexual transgression. It is also telling that the recipient of God’s justice, and indeed, the rather improbable agent of that justice, is female. By the later middle ages ‘lust was considered the woman’s sin par excellence’. 130 In fact, ‘The trope of the extreme “sexual sinner” is decidedly gendered, in keeping with beliefs surrounding female sexuality and carnality.’ 131 Ferrante notes that the specific association of women with *luxuria* had a putative physiological rationale, ‘woman was held to be more given to lust than man because she was thought to be, in her humors, more cold and wet’. 132 Indeed, *Luxuria* was generally portrayed as a feminine personification, who is often portrayed intertwined with a serpent, as in the carving of *Luxuria* in the Chapter House Vestibule of Salisbury

Cathedral (c. 1260-80). The serpent or dragon is traditionally associated with the devil, ‘And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world; and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him’ (Revelation 12: 9). However, serpents, ‘dragons and other monsters seem frequently to have exhibited an association with untrammled sexuality within medieval written and visual culture’. In this context we may also note the scene in Herrad of Hohenburg’s Hortus Deliciarum (1186-c. 1196, Alsace), in which the lustful are punished in hell by both flames and serpents (Fig. 2).

The association between luxuria and the punishment meted out to Morgan in the Post-Vulgate Queste, particularly her role in punishing Lancelot, echoes the earlier punishment she inflicts on her lover’s lover in the Vulgate Lancelot. When Morgan ‘caught them in the act’, she reacted by subjecting the woman to ‘ice from the waist down’ and ‘a blazing fire above’. Moreover, her lover’s infidelity causes her to create the Val sanz Retor, where she punishes the entrapped knights ‘if they had been unfaithful to their lovers in any way whatever, even in thought’. Although life in the valley is not particularly punishing, being ‘much more pleasant than generally thought’, there are hellish aspects to it. On entering the Val sanz Retor, Lancelot has to fight his way through a series of magical opponents including two dragons and a wall of fire, which ‘was so intense that it seemed nothing could enter it without being burned up; and it stretched all the way from the wall on the right to the one on the

left’. This wall of fire and focus on the thoughts of the knights demonstrates Morgan’s association with Luxuria personified, an inversion of the essentially benign allegorical aspect of Morgan in Geoffrey’s Vita.

In addition to her clear debt to the allegorical or exegetical tradition of abstract personification, it has been suggested that Morgan may have developed from a mythical figure in early Irish literature, the Mórrígan. Loomis expands on this suggestion to include a wider range of Irish mythical females, and a Welsh intermediary figure, Modron:

Here, then, the explanation of Morgain’s multiple personality, her infinite variety. She has acquired not only the attributes and activities of Macha, the Morrigan, and Matrona, but also the mythic heritage of other Celtic deities. She is a female pantheon in miniature.138

Rosalind Clark also notes a correspondence between the Mórrígan and Morgan, but is more cautious in her claims:

It is impossible to prove that two characters of two literatures so far apart in time, space, and culture are identified with each other; we can only say that they represent similar creatures, and that the similarity in the names may demonstrate a connection.139

139 The Great Queens: Irish Goddesses from the Morrigan to Cathleen ni Houlihan (Gerrards Cross, 1991), p. 22.
Several other critics have also commented on the ‘Celtic’ nature of Avalon, for instance, Fries states that it is a ‘typical Celtic Otherworld’. Other critics are less convinced; Angelique Gulermovich notes that ‘The case for the relationship between the Morrigan and Morgan le Fay remains one of speculation rather than fact,’ while Bogdanow emphatically denies a connection, ‘not only is there no evidence to prove that Morgain equals either Muirgen, Morrigon or Modron, but the stories told about these characters are entirely different from the incident associated with Morgain’. According to Paton and Loomis, the literature of Ireland had a strong influence on that of Wales, which was diffused throughout continental Europe, transporting the Mórrígan in myriad forms to various vernacular literatures. Paton states that ‘it appears more probable that before the tradition reached Armorica, it passed in Wales through an intermediate stage in which the Morrigan’s name had become associated plainly with the conception of a fairy queen’. Loomis is more definite in his assertion that ‘It is certain that the Irish elements in the Matière de Bretagne did not pass directly from Ireland to France, but were transmitted through Wales.’ This hypothesis is based on the similarity between Irish and Welsh myth, which is primarily due to a ‘period of mythology common to

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141 ‘Woman’s Word’, p. 192.
142 Bogdanow, ‘Morgain’s Role’, p. 124.
143 Fairy Mythology, p. 163.
both branches of the Celts’. Cecille O’Rahilly sees the literature of the two countries as directly related to each other:

The close and continuous intercourse of Wales with Ireland from earliest times down to the twelfth century afforded ample opportunity for literary borrowings of one body of literature from the other. These borrowings moreover were facilitated by the already existing similarity of idiom, language-structure, traditions and spirit.

There is a consensus among scholars that there is an Irish influence on Welsh texts, particularly the four branches of the *Mabinogion*, composed between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. As Proinsias Mac Cana points out, we can ‘presume a considerable amount of borrowing from Irish tradition as a result of intercourse between the two countries in the three or four centuries preceding the composition of the Four Branches’. Mac Cana notes the importance of the role of monasticism in the transference of literary traditions, ‘cultural relations between Welsh and Irish monasteries were accompanied by some exchange of secular literature’. However, it would appear that it was Welsh literature that exerted the greatest influence on the continental romances. According to Bruce, Brythonic influences on the romances are

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144 ‘Morgain La Fee’, p. 194.
145 *Ireland and Wales: Their Historical and Literary Relations* (London, 1924), pp. 94-6.
146 The *Mabinogion* is the name given to a collection of eleven Welsh stories, the first four of which are referred to as the four branches as they end in the phrase ‘And so ends this branch of the Mabinogi.’ Cf. *The Mabinogion*, ed. and trans. Sioned Davies (Oxford, 2007).
most likely the product of ‘emigration to Armorica of the Britons who fled from Great Britain under the pressure of Anglo-Saxon invasion’. Moreover:

During the reign of Henry I, South Wales was thoroughly subdued to a Norman rule, and early in the twelfth century the conditions for peaceful intercourse between victors and vanquished were established … So here was a ready channel for the diffusion of Welsh stories among the Normans and thence among the French.148

Certainly, there is considerable evidence of Welsh influence throughout the romance tradition as it develops across Europe, most notably, the etymology of many personal and place names.149

There is, therefore, a possibility that the Mórrígan could have developed into Modron, then into the figure of Morgan in the romance tradition. The claim that Morgan is a direct descendant of the Irish Mórrígan is due to several common motifs, most notably her appearances as part of a triad of fays; her transformation into a bird; her conflicting attitude to the hero of the text, and her gift of a horse. However, the association of the Mórrígan with horses is dependent on the assumption that the Mórrígan and Macha, another Irish feminine deity, are one and the same figure, allied to the assumption that several unnamed fays in a range of romances, as well as some with

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different names, are actually Morgan in disguise, as Loomis suggests. Paton also notes these similarities, particularly the Mórrígan’s powers of shape-shifting and identifies several analogues. Whilst there is a wide selection of texts which feature the Mórrígan, there are considerably fewer which feature Modron. What little textual evidence that has come down to us would seem to suggest a similarity between Modron and the Mórrígan, and the naming of Modron’s husband and child as Owein and Urien respectively is suggestive of Morgan’s developing biography in the romance tradition. According to Helaine Newstead:

Modron is also the Welsh prototype of Morgain, a fact established by their family relationships. In the large group of Welsh folk tales which preserve the traditions of Modron, we find clear analogies to Morgain’s medical powers and her association with water. The heroines of these legends inhabit lakes and pools throughout Wales, leaving their watery homes to dwell for a time with mortal lovers or husbands.

However, there is little else that directly links the two figures; there are some similarities between the Mórrígan and Morgan le Fay, but these similarities do not seem extensive enough to prove an origin in this specific character. Yet there are aspects of Morgan that relate to the general themes and ideas surrounding magical women in both Brythonic and Goidelic literature. There is the shared emphasis on the healing power of

151 Cf. Fairy Mythology, p. 149.
women, which is often acquired through learning, which may suggest that the origin and development of Morgan has been influenced by some aspects of Brythonic and Goidelic literature even if she is not a direct descendant of Modron or the Mórrígan. We may note, for example, certain similarities between Morgan and the figure of Medb in early Irish literature: both figures are powerful, promiscuous queens, who are often portrayed in a negative light.\footnote{Medb appears as the queen of Connacht in the Ulster Cycle, which is thought to date to at least the eighth century, although the earliest extant version is preserved in Lebor na hUidre.}

The Mórrígan appears several times within various texts, including Cath Maige Tuired (‘The Second Battle of Mag Tuired’);\footnote{The text is thought to date originally to the early Old Irish period, but preserved in an early sixteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library, Harleian Ms 5280, fols 63v-70r; cf. ‘The Second Battle of Moytura’, ed. Whitley Stokes RC 12 (1891) 52-130, 306-308; Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired, ed. Elizabeth A. Gray (London, 1982).} Táin Bó Regamna (‘The Cattle Raid of Regamain’);\footnote{Written between the eighth and eleventh centuries, but preserved in the late fourteenth-century Leabhar Buidhe Lecain or Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, Ms 1318), and London, British Library, Ms Egerton 1782 (15th century); cf. Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch, ed. Ennrst Windisch and Whitley Stokes, 4 vols (Leipzig, 1887), II,2, 239-54; Táin bó Regamna: eine Vorerezäh‌lung zur Táin bó Cúailnge, ed. Johan Corthals (Vienna, 1987).} Táin Bó Cúailnge (‘The Cattle Raid of Cooley’);\footnote{The text is not only preserved in such manuscripts as Lebor na hUidre and Leabhar Buidhe Lecain and Ms Egerton 1782 (Recension I), but also in the mid twelfth-century Leabhar Laighneach or Book of Leinster (Dublin, Trinity College, Ms 1339), and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Ms C vi 3 (Recension II); cf. Táin Bó Cúailnge: From the Book of Leinster, ed. and trans. Cecile O’Rahilly (Dublin, 1967); Táin Bó Cúailnge: Recension I, ed. and trans. Cecile O’Rahilly (Dublin, 1976).} Echtra Nerai (‘The Adventure of Nera’);\footnote{The text is thought to date to the tenth century, but preserved in Leabhar Buidhe Lecain and Ms Egerton 1782, with a fragment in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, Ms 23 0 48 (c. 1435-40); cf. ‘The Adventures of Nera’, ed. and trans. Kuno Meyer, RC 10 (1889), 212-28; John Carey, ‘Sequence and Causation in Echtra Nerai’, Ériu 39 (1988), 67-74.} and the earliest fragmentary version of Aided Con Culainn (‘The Death of Cú Chulainn’) or Brislech Mór Maige Muirthemni (‘The Great...
Defeat on the Plain of Muirthemne’). It is important to remember that the manuscripts in which these texts are preserved are of a later date than the texts themselves and even the earliest extant texts in Old Irish such as *Cath Maige Tuired*, in which the Túatha Dé Danann (‘The Tribes of the Goddess Danu’) defeat the sinister race of the Fomoiri or Fomorians and gain sovereignty over Ireland, were adapted and compiled in a medieval, Christian milieu, albeit based on much older versions. As James Carney points out, ‘It would seem probable that uncensored oral traditions of the ancient gods continued strongly among the secular poets for many centuries after Christianisation, and that the tales and traditions that we possess are but the tip of the pagan iceberg.’ It is generally accepted among scholars that the extant texts are reasonably accurate retellings of the original tales; however, the female characters in particular were subject to a considerable degree of humanization as goddesses became less acceptable within a Christian context. Yet Rosalind Clark claims that the Mórrígan survived in a relatively unchanged form in these texts, perhaps because she was a difficult character to reconfigure as a human being, while other characters, most notably Medb, have been significantly altered:

The Mórrígan, goddess of war, was not easily changed. It was very difficult for the early Irish writers to fit her into their new system. She therefore remained a

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goddess. While Brigit became a saint, and Medb became a mortal queen (or, in folklore, a fairy queen), the Morrigan remained unchanged.\textsuperscript{160}

It is also generally accepted that Medb started life as a goddess, who gradually became more human in the medieval versions of the texts, ‘Although Medb is presented as a mortal queen, she retains the arbitrariness and some of the destructiveness of a Celtic goddess.’\textsuperscript{161} Indeed, a closer examination of her character and the vestigial traces of her original form will yield valuable insights into the origin and development of Morgan, as it shows how a similar process may have occurred in relation to her character.

The depiction of the Mórrígan varies greatly in the texts in which she features, especially with regard to her attitude to Cú Chulainn, the hero of the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythopoeic narrative. It is her dealings with Cú Chulainn that the correspondence between the Mórrígan and Morgan is most evident. According to Paton, ‘if Morgain be derived from the Mórrígan, there is an easy explanation for her otherwise puzzling two-fold attitude toward Arthur, who is the object of her care and her vengeance. The Mórrigan stands in specially intimate relations to Cuchulinn.’\textsuperscript{162} The Mórrígan has a complex attitude to Cú Chulainn; she not only offers herself to him and attempts to aid him in battle, but also threatens him, then thwarts his best efforts. The \textit{Táin Bó Regamna} is a rémscél of the Ulster Cycle, that is, a prefatory tale detailing events leading up to the central drama of \textit{Táin Bó Cuailnge}. Here, the Mórrígan appears as a \textit{ben derg} (‘red woman’) with ‘eyebrows red, and a crimson mantle round her’, in a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{160} Clark, \textit{Great Queens}, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{161} Clark, \textit{Great Queens}, p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{162} \textit{Fairy Mythology}, p. 148.
\end{itemize}
chariot with a retainer and a cow. She is challenged by Cú Chulainn, who assumes she has she has rustled the cow from the Ulster herd. He declares that ‘the cows of Ulster belong to me’, then threatens her with his spear, whereupon she warns him ‘Do not play your sharp weapons on me!’ When he challenges her again, she takes on her emblematic guise of the ‘black bird on a branch close by him’. She then describes how she will attack him in battle in a variety of forms: as an ‘eel’, a ‘grey wolf’ and a ‘white red-eared cow’. Similarly, in Táin Bó Cuailnge, she appears to Cú Chulainn as a ‘young woman of surpassing beauty, clad in clothes of many colours’, claiming to be the daughter of King Búan of Leinster and offering him her love. However, Cú Chulainn rebuffs her brusquely, ‘It is not for a woman’s body that I have come.’ Like Morgan, the Mórrígan does not handle rejection well; she makes similar threats to those in Táin Bó Regamna:

‘It will be worse for you’, said she, ‘when I go against you as you are fighting your enemies. I shall go in the form of an eel under your feet in the ford so that you shall fall.’ ‘I prefer that to the king’s daughter’, said he. ‘I shall seize you between my toes so that your ribs are crushed and you shall suffer that blemish until you get a judgment blessing.’ ‘I shall drive the cattle over the ford to you while I am in the form of a grey she-wolf.’ ‘I shall throw a stone at you from my sling so and smash your eye in your head, and you shall suffer from that

163 ‘The Appearance of the Morrigu to Cuchullin before the Táin bó Cuailgne, from the German of Dr Ernst Windisch’, in The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature, ed. Eleanor Hull (London, 1898), pp. 101-7, at p. 105; Corthals, Táin bó Regamna, p. 54.
165 Cuchullin Saga, pp. 105-7; Corthals, Táin bó Regamna, pp. 54-5.
blemish until you get a judgment blessing.’ ‘I shall come to you in the guise of a hornless red heifer in front of the cattle and they will rush upon you at many fords and pools yet you will not see me in front of you.’ ‘I shall cast a stone at you,’ said he, ‘so that your legs will break under you, and you shall suffer thus until you get a judgment blessing.’ Whereupon she left him.  

However, in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, she makes good on her threat:

the eel twined itself in three coils round Cú Chulainn’s feet so that he fell prostrate athwart the ford … Cú Chulainn arose and struck the eel and its ribs were broken within it, and the cattle rushed eastwards over the army, carrying off the tents on their horns, so great was the thunder-feat of the two warriors in the ford. The she-wolf attacked him and drove the cattle on him westwards. He threw a stone from his sling and her eye broke in her head. Then she went in the guise of a red hornless heifer and the cattle stampeded into the streams and fords. Cú Chulainn said then: ‘I cannot see the fords for the streams’.  

Here, in reciprocal fashion, Cú Chulainn also inflicts the injuries ‘he had threatened her with in the *Táin Bó Regamna*’, in retribution for her shape-shifting attacks, but ‘the Mórrígan came to him in the guise of an old crone, one-eyed and half-blind and engaged in milking a cow with three teats’:

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He asked her for a drink. She gave him the milk of one teat. ‘She who gave it will at once be whole’, said Cú Chulainn … Thereupon her head was made whole. Then she gave him the milk of the second teat, and her eye was healed. She gave him the milk of the third teat, and her leg was cured … ‘But you told me,’ said the Mórrígan, ‘that I should never get healing from you.’ ‘Had I known that it was you’, said Cú Chulainn, ‘I should never have healed you.’

However, this animosity toward Cú Chulainn does not always a feature in the Mórrigan’s relationship with him. In Aided Con Culainn, she attempts to prevent the death of the hero, damaging his chariot to try and avert his death, ‘Now, the Mórigan had smashed the chariot the previous night. She did not want Cú Chulainn to go to the battle because she knew he would not return to Emain Macha.’ Loomis, Paton and Clark have taken the Mórrígan’s dualistic role as the ‘watchful protectress’ of Cú Chulainn, who sometimes acts as ‘his enemy, seeking to destroy him’, as evidence of a link between her and Morgan, who ‘was both the enemy of Arthur and his nurse in Avalon’. Morgan’s changeable attitude to Arthur is evident in several of the romances, for instance, in Malory, in spite of having attempted to kill Arthur several times, it is Morgan who escorts him to Avalon to be healed. However, in other romances she is often either portrayed as being entirely benevolent, as in the Vita Merlīnī, or wholly malignant, as in the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin. Indeed, the antagonism between Morgan and Arthur only develops in the Post-Vulgate Cycle, and would seem to be a result of a realignment of the source material in order to focus more

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169 Tymoczko, Two Death Tales, p. 42; Stokes, ‘Cuchulainn’s Death’, p. 175.
170 Loomis, ‘Morgain La Fee’, p. 197.
closely on the character of Arthur than in previous romances. Moreover, the contention that Morgan finds her source in the Mórrígan relies on the assumption that Morgan’s initial role in the Arthurian tradition was that of Arthur’s fairy mistress. Consequently, it is only when she becomes his sister that ‘the original love adventure could no longer be related of them’. \(^\text{171}\) The evidence for this hypothesis is limited. Whilst it is certainly the case that ‘Morgain’s hatred of Hector is paralleled by the Morrigan’s of Cuchulinn’, \(^\text{172}\) this hellish fury of a woman scorned is hardly the preserve of these two characters.

The Mórrígan’s shape-shifting has also been identified as a key aspect that links her with Morgan. As we have seen, the Mórrígan appears in *Táin bo Regamna* and *Táin Bo Cuailnge* as a beautiful young maiden in iridescent robes; as the formidable *ben derg* in her chariot, and as a crone. She also transforms herself into a black bird, an eel, a wolf, and a heifer, but it is her transformation into the black bird, described variously as a raven or a crow, that is most ill-omened. Indeed, the Mórrígan, and her sisters Macha and Nemain or Badb, collectively make themselves known to mankind in times of trouble as the *Badb* (‘scald or carrion crow’). \(^\text{173}\) The Mórrígan not only appears in this guise when she gives her ominous warning to Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Regamna*, but also when she warns the Brown Bull of Cooley in *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, ‘Allecto came for a while, that is, the Mórrígan, in the form of a bird which perched on the pillar-stone in Temair Cuailnge’. \(^\text{174}\) Moreover, at the point of death, Cú Chulainn is visited by a triad

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\(^\text{171}\) Paton, *Fairy Mythology*, p. 65.
\(^\text{172}\) Paton, *Fairy Mythology*, p. 22.
\(^\text{174}\) *Táin Bó Cuailnge: Recension I*, p. 152.
that truly resembles the Erinyes or Furies: the Mórrígan, Macha and Nemain, in the form of black birds who perch on his shoulder. However, the power of turning into a bird is not unique to the Mórrígan, Macha and Nemain; there are several women who are capable of this feat. For example, in the longer recension of *Tochmarc Emire* (‘The Wooing of Emer’), Derbforgaill ingen Ruaid and her handmaid take the form of birds in advance of the arrival of Cú Chulainn and his fosterling, Lugaid Reo nDerg. Cú Chulainn ‘put a stone in his sling and aimed at the birds. The men ran up to them after having hit one of the birds. When they came up to them this is what they saw, two women, the most beautiful in the world.’ Similarly, in *Serglige Con Culainn* (‘The Sickbed of Cú Chulainn’, or more correctly, ‘The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn’), Lí Ban and Fand belong to the áes síde or fairy folk, but initially appear as two birds, yoked together by a red gold chain. Cú Chulainn attempts to capture them for his wife, but misses with the first two shots from his sling, which is significant as this the first time he has ever missed his target. However, he succeeds in hitting one of them in the wing with his spear, but the birds fly away, only to submerge beneath the lake.

175 Tymoczko *Two Death Tales*, p. 64; Stokes, ‘Cuchulainn’s Death’, p. 182.
176 Cf. Gregory Toner, ‘The Transmission of *Tochmarc Emire*, Ériu 49 (1998), 71-88, at p. 71, who notes that the text ‘is extant in two main recensions’; the longer version survives in several MSS of which the earliest is a fragment in *Lebor na hUidre*, while the shorter version ‘exists solely in the fifteenth-century Oxford MS Rawlinson B.512’.
178 Cf. *Serglige Con Culainn*, ed. Myles Dillon (Dublin, 1953), pp. 2-3, ll. 59-70. The original text is most probably ninth century, with eleventh-century interpolations, which explains why Ethne Inguba is named as Cú Chulainn’s wife before the narrative switches to Emer. It is preserved in *Lebor na hUidre* and *Leabhar Buidhe Lecain*. 
Paton notes a similarity between Fand’s subsequent summoning of Cú Chulainn to the island of Mag Mell, or the Plain of Delights in *Serglige Con Culainn*, and Morgan’s role in Arthur’s translation to Avalon. In a similar manner to Cú Chulainn, Arthur is taken ‘in a magic boat’ to another dimension ‘for the healing of his wound’, where he ‘dwells with a beautiful fairy queen’.\footnote{Fairy Mythology, p. 30. In addition to Newstead, ‘Besieged Ladies, pp. 822-6, and Jennings, ‘Metamorphosis of Morgan’, p. 198; cf. Arthur L.C. Brown, *Origins of the Grail Legend* (Cambridge, MA, 1943), pp. 16-21. We may also note the parallels drawn between Cú Chulainn and Yvain; cf. Arthur C. L. Brown, ‘Chrétien’s “Yvain”’, *MP* 9 (1911), 109-28; Helaine Newstead, ‘Kaherdin and the Enchanted Pillow: An Episode in the Tristan Legend’, *PMLA* 65 (1950), 290-312, at pp. 301-2; William A. Nitze, ‘Yvain and the Myth of the Fountain’, *Speculum* 30 (1955), 170-9, at p. 175; Raymond J. Cormier, ‘Cú Chulainn and Yvain: The Love Hero in Early Irish and Old French Literature’, *SP* 72 (1975), 115-29. Cf. also Tom Peete Cross, ‘The Celtic Elements in the Lays of “Lanval” and “Graelent”’, *MP* 12 (1915), 585-644, at p. 19, n.3.} Avalon has been the subject of much speculation with regard to the possibility of a ‘Celtic’ source.\footnote{Cf. Howard Rollin Patch, ‘Some Elements in Mediæval Descriptions of the Otherworld’, *PMLA* 33 (1918), 601-43; A.H. Krappe, ‘Avalon’, *Speculum* 18 (1943), 303-22; A.L. Brown, ‘Camlann and the Death of Arthur’, *Folklore* 72 (1961), 612-21.} However, Paton concedes that it is ‘surprisingly barren’ of many *topoi* characteristic of the *síd* or Otherworld visited by Cú Chulainn, not only in *Tochmarc Emire* and *Serglige Con Culainn*, but also in *Fled Bricrenn ocus Loinges mac nDuil Dermait* (‘Bricriu’s Feast and the Exile of the Sons of Dóel Dermait’), *Siaburcharpat Con Culainn* (‘The Spectral Chariot of Cú Chulainn’), *Forfess Fer Fálgae* (‘The Siege of the Men of Fálgae’), and *Amra Con Roí* (‘The Eulogy of Cú Roí’), although the latter three texts include variations on the same journey.\footnote{Fairy Mythology, p. 39.} Consequently, Paton’s argument focuses on the fairy origins of Fand and Morgan, but while Fand’s healing of Cú Chulainn would seem to echo Morgan’s

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healing of Arthur in Avalon, but there is not enough specific detail to make the case for *Sergrige Con Culainn* as a definite source.\textsuperscript{182}

In the *Vita Merlini*, Morgan is associated with birds through her capacity to change her shape at will to enable flight. However, the *Vita* does not specifically state that Morgan changes into a bird, and in this instance the debt to classical sources seems to be more obviously apparent than any Irish analogue, given the reference to Daedalus.\textsuperscript{183} Furthermore, as discussed above, the association of women and flight and, indeed, their transformation into birds, is not unique to the Irish tradition. The classical and allegorical or exegetical traditions predate the Irish sources in using these motifs, and were, indeed, influential in the development of the Irish narrative tradition, written in the vernacular, albeit in a Hiberno-Latin milieu.\textsuperscript{184} With the notable exception of Geoffrey’s *Vita*, Morgan’s shapeshifting would not seem to be similar to the Morrigan. Paton notes the similarity between Morgan’s transformation of herself and her followers into stone in Malory and the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* to the Mórrigan’s various guises when escaping Cú Chulainn in *Táin Bó Regamna*, ‘Both Cuchulinn and Arthur rise from their sleep to hasten out in pursuit … The Morrigan reminds Cuchulinn that she can transform herself at her pleasure, and threatens him

\textsuperscript{182} *Fairy Mythology*, p. 39.

\textsuperscript{183} This is indicative of Geoffrey’s debt to the *Aeneid*; cf. Hans Taunsendfreund, *Vergil und Gottfried von Monmouth* (Halle, 1913).

with destruction; Morgain reminds Arthur that while she can transform herself into stone she does not dread him.’ However, Paton does conceded that the ‘differences in detail are too great for much importance to be attached to the parallel’. 185

Certainly, the Mórrigan does share with Morgan a vengeful streak, ‘transformation by enchantment is one of the means employed by the Morrigan to avenge a personal affront’. 186 In the *Metrical Dindshechas*, which is ascribed to the sixth-century poet Amairgen mac Amalgado in three late medieval recensions, including the fourteenth-century *Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta* or Book of Ballymote (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy Ms 23 P 12, fol. 188), 187 the Mórrígan is described as ‘The envious queen fierce of mood, the cunning raven-caller.’ 188 Having stolen the bull of a woman named Odras, Morgan is pursued by her, but then she turns the unfortunate woman into a pool of water:

The horrid Mórrígan out of the cave of Cruachú, her fit abode, came upon her slumbering: alas, the combat on the hill!

The owner of kine chanted over her, with fierceness unabating, toward huge Sliab Bodbgna every spell of power: she was full of guile.


187 In addition to Oxford, MS Rawlinson 506, fol. 11r (14th century); Rennes, Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole 598, fol. 90r (15th century); cf. J. O’Beirne Crowe, ‘The Dind-Senchus of Eriu’, *JRSAI* 12 (1872-3), 139-90, at pp. 140-1: ‘This is the Dind-seanchus of Eriu, which was made by Amargein, son of Amalgaid, son of Mael Ruain of the Deisi of Temair. He was the poet of Diarmaid, son of Cearball.’

The forceful woman melted away toward Segais in a sleepy stream, like a pool void of lustre: she lost her victorious powers.

Odras is the sweet-sounding noble name of the sluggish pallid streamlet: it passed from the lady – luckless visitant – to the river Odras. 189

This vengeance is similar to Morgan’s actions in the Vulgate Lancelot and in Malory, where she punishes other women in extreme ways. 190

The Mórrígan is predominantly focused on war and participates in numerous battles. She appears in Cath Maige Tuired, which, ‘although surviving only in a sixteenth-century manuscript’, most probably ‘derives from the early Old Irish period, but in the course of transmission has been subjected to partial rewriting and possibly interpolation’. 191 In this text, she sleeps with the Dagda, father of the gods and high king of the Túatha Dé Danann: 192

Then she told the Dagda that the Fomoire wold land at Mag Céidne, and that he should summon the áes dána of Ireland to meet her at the Ford of the Unshin, and she would go into Scétne to destroy Indech mac Dé Domann, the king of

189 ‘Dindsencha 50’, Metrical Dindshenches, IV, p. 201.
192 In early Irish historiography, the Túatha Dé Danann are the fifth race to invade Ireland. The first group of invaders are led by a descendant of Noah, Cessair; the second are led by Partholon; the third are led by Nemed, but some are forced to flee to Greece after Nemed dies, but return to Ireland as the Fir Bolg. The Túatha Dé Danann are also descendants of Nemed, but have learned magical arts, and defeat the Fir Bolg in the first battle of Mag Tuired, before facing the Fomorians in the second battle; cf. ‘The First Battle of Moytura’, ed. John Fraser, Eriú 8 (1915), 1-63. In addition to Carney, ‘Language and Literature’, p. 461, cf. The Book of Invasions: Lebor Gabála Érenn, ed. R.A.S. Macalister, 5 vols (Dublin, 1938-56). On the Dagda see Thomas F. O’Rahilly, Early Irish History and Mythology (Dublin, 1946; repr. Dublin, 1984).
the Fomoire, and would take from him the blood of his heart and the kidneys of his valour. Later she gave two handfuls of that blood to the hosts that were waiting at the Ford of Unshin. Its name became the ‘Ford of Destruction’ because of that destruction of the king.193

Morgan does not share the interest in battle that is an integral aspect of the Mórrígan. Although Morgan does promote fights between individual knights in order to seize power, for example, between Arthur and her paramour, Accolon, in the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin and Malory, and while delighting in setting traps for some of her more worthy adversaries, she does not ever involve herself directly in the fighting.194 Moreover, in contradistinction to Paton’s assertion that Morgan is represented ‘as visiting in person the field of battle’, she is never actually present during a battle in any of the texts in which she appears.195 The Mórrígan’s apparent revelry in death and destruction on the battlefield is in stark contrast to Morgan’s association with healing, which remains her primary function in those romances where she translates Arthur to Avalon. Furthermore, it is important to remember she is also mentioned in a number of romances as a healer; in Erec et Enide she provides a salve which is ‘so effective’ that it guarantees healing,196 while in the Vulgate Suite du Merlin, we are told that she ‘knew a great deal about the healing arts’.197 However, Morgan’s misuse of her knowledge of the healing arts in other romances finds a parallel in the moral neutrality of Lí Ban

193 Gray, Cath Maige Tuired, p. 46.
195 Fairy Mythology, p. 33.
and Fand in *Serglige Con Culainn*, which is all too characteristic of the *áes síde*. As Cú Chulainn sleeps they appear to him in the emblematic colours of the síd: one is clad in a *brat úaine* (‘green cloak’), the other in a *brat corcra* (‘purple cloak’):

> He saw two women come towards him. One wore a green mantle; the other a purple mantle in five folds. The woman in the green mantle came to him and laughed at him, and struck him with her horse-whip. The other came to him, too, and laughed at him, and struck him in the same way. And they continued for a long time, each of them in turn coming still to him to beat him, so that he was almost dead. Then they went from him.\(^{198}\)

After this attack, which would appear to be retribution for the palpable hit with his spear, he wastes away for a year, but when he encounters Lí Ban and Fand again, they tell him that they intend him no lasting harm. Lí Ban claims that his wasting sickness will only last a while longer, then his strength will not only be restored, but also fortified. This would seem to find an echo in which Morgan makes Alixandre L’Orphelin more ill in order to manipulate him, only to then cure him.\(^{199}\) Morgan ‘gaff hym suche an oynement that he sholde have dyed’, but once she has caused him to suffer ‘she put another oynemente uppon hym, and than he was cure of his payne’.\(^{200}\) However, given that the capriciousness and moral neutrality of the *áes síde* was a *topos*

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of the romance tradition even before any of Malory’s sources were written, we cannot posit a direct debt to Serglige Con Culainn.

The claim, popularized by Loomis, that the Mórrígan is the direct source for Morgan because they both are part of a triad and have a strong association with horses is equally questionable. In the Roman de Troie Morgan provides her lover with a horse:

That was the most beautiful horse
That any mortal man ever mounted,
And the best and the fastest,
The hardiest and the biggest:
So beautiful a thing was never born.201

On the basis of this reference, Loomis associates Morgan with a tradition of fairies and other women providing magical horses and goes on to note that many other incidents in romance where a horse is given must relate back to Morgan.202 He then relates this to the grey of Macha mentioned in Irish literature,203 and notes that a gloss in an unidentified fourteenth-century manuscript runs, ‘Machae, a scald-crow; or she is the

201 Twomey, ‘Morgain la Fée’, p. 102. Cf. Benoit, Roman de Troie, I, p. 434, ll. 8023-33. Twomey notes that her name is only spelt as ‘Morgain’ in six manuscripts, in the others, as ‘Orva’.

202 Cf. ‘Morgain La Fee’, pp. 186-9, where Loomis claims a relationship on this basis with wife of Meleagant’s seneschal and the sister of Meleagant in Le Chevalier de la Charrette, in addition to the Lady of Malehot and the Lady of the Lake in the Vulgate Lancelot; the Soldan’s wife in II Bel Gherardino; an unnamed damsel in Historia Meriadoci; the Lady of the Sea in Ulrich von Zatzikhoven’s Lanzelet, and the fairy mistresses in Graelent and Sir Launfal.

203 Macha is associated with horses in Noínden Ulad (‘The Debility of the Ulstermen’), one of the rémscéal of the Ulster Cycle, preserved in a number of manuscripts in addition to Leabhar Laighneach and Leabhar Buidhe Lecain, including the Book of Fermoy, which dates from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century (Dublin, Royal Irish Academy.Ms 23 E 29). Cf. “‘Noínden Ulad’: The Debility of the Ulidians’, ed. and trans. Vernam Hull, Celtica 8 (1968), 1-42.
third Morrigan.’ This gloss is significant because it indicates that Macha was equated with a crow; that she was one of a triad of similar figures; that she appeared also under the name of Morrigan.’

However, as seen in the texts discussed above, the Mórrígan is rarely featured as part of a triad with Nemain or Badb and Macha, which makes their furious assault on Cú Chulainn in Táin Bó Cuailnge all the more devastating, while ‘traditions regarding the third member of the sisterhood, Macha, are quite separate and distinct’.

Ultimately, there are aspects of the Mórrígan that seem similar to Morgan, but the two characters remain decidedly at a distance. Morgan can also be seen to share common characteristics with such other characters in the early Irish literary tradition as Lí Ban and Fand, and more particularly, Medb. Originally, Medb is believed to have been a goddess, most probably embodying sovereignty, fertility and battle. As Clark points out:

She gives her sexual favours to any lover she chooses, and confers kingship on her many husbands. She also protects the tribe in war in a much more active way than other sovereignty figures, since she acts as a warrior herself instead of just an inciter to battle.

However, Medb is transformed into a mortal queen in the narratives that have come down to us, and characteristics that would have not seemed unusual in a goddess are no

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204 Loomis, ‘Morgain La Fee’, p. 192.
206 Great Queens, p. 126.
longer portrayed in a positive light. For instance, her promiscuity is thought to have been originally associated with her role as a sovereignty figure, bestowing kingship on her current sexual partner. In this context, it is worth noting that she has at least four named husbands: Conchobar mac Nessa, Tinne, Eochaid, Dala, and Ailill mac Mata. Sovereignty figures are generally associated with the kingdom or the actual land with which the king must unite, however, Medb as a goddess may have combined other aspects with this role. In the extant texts, she is described as a female warrior, who fights alongside the men in battle. As Clark points out, Medb ‘must act as the protectoress of the tribe in a human, not an immortal way’. Moreover, as queen of her people, she ruled for some time on her own before she was married. However, it is important to note that these terrestrial roles do not earn her any respect; she is consistently undermined. According to Clark, she retains ‘the sexual powers of the goddess, but she is therefore portrayed simply as a promiscuous woman’. Her queenly


208 Great Queens, p. 127.


210 Great Queens, p. 132.
role ‘is ridiculed and belittled. Medieval misogyny has a great influence on her characterization.’\textsuperscript{211} In the \textit{Táin Bó Cuailnge}, this is exemplified by a conversation between Medb and Fergus in the aftermath of the last battle:

Now when they were finally routed Medb said to Fergus: ‘Men and lesser men meet here today, Fergus.’ ‘That is what usually happens’, said Fergus, ‘to a herd of horses led by a mare. Their substance is taken and carried off and guarded as they follow a woman who has misled them.’\textsuperscript{212}

As in the case of the Mórrígan, the warlike aspect of Medb’s character is hardly reflected in the characterization of Morgan. However, Morgan can be seen to have some link to Medb’s role as a sovereignty figure. Morgan seems to think she will be able to secure the throne for Accolon if he defeats Arthur. According to Accolon:

she lovyth me oute of mesure as paramour, and I hir agayne. And if she myght bryng hit aboute to sle Arthure / by hir crauftis, she wolde sle hir husbonde kynge Uryence lyghtly. And than had she devysed to have me kynge in this londe and so to reigne, and she to be my queene.\textsuperscript{213}

\textsuperscript{211} \textit{Great Queens}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{212} O’Rahilly, \textit{Táin Bó Cúalnge: Recension I}, pp. 236-7; cf. \textit{Táin Bó Cúalnge: From the Book of Leinster}, p. 270: ‘This day was indeed a fitting one \textit{for those who were} led by a women’ said Fergus … ‘This host has been plundered and despoiled today. As when a mare goes before her band of foals into unknown territory, with none to lead or counsel them, so this host has perished today.’
As this plot fails, it is difficult to determine the veracity of Morgan’s vaunted role as a kingmaker; she is also forced to flee, becoming a social outcast after her plots against Arthur are discovered. Indeed, Morgan’s power as a queen fluctuates from text to text; she may have castles, knights and damsels at her disposal, and in fact, in the *Vita* (where she is not allied to the court at all), she and her eight sisters rule over Avalon. But, unlike Medb, she is not permitted to choose her own husband; she is forced to marry Neutres of Garlot in the Vulgate *Merlin*, or Uriens in the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin* and Malory. Morgan is also consistently promiscuous in many texts, but this is clearly portrayed in a negative light. In the Prose *Lancelot*, Guinevere’s nephew Guyamour is easily persuaded to forsake Morgan as a lover, being ‘hardly so in love with her that he could not get by without her’. Both Accolon and Hemyson, another of Morgan’s short-lived lovers, are killed because of her. Moreover, the worthiest knights are never interested in her. Lancelot, Tristram and Alexander are adamant in their rejection of her. Indeed, in Malory, Alexander claims, ‘I had levir kut away my hangers then I wolde do her ony suche pleasure!’

Morgan also resembles Medb in her exploitation of other women as extensions of herself. She is prepared to force her damsels to attempt to seduce any knight if she feels it will be to her advantage, such as the episode in the Vulgate *Lancelot* when Morgan instructs her one of her handmaidens to seduce Lancelot. Similarly, in the *Táin Bó*

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Cuailnge, Medb offers her daughter Findabar as a reward to Fer Diad, Cú Chulainn’s great adversary:

For the sake of his honour Fer Diad came with them, for he deemed it better to fall by shafts of valour and prowess and bravery than by the shafts of satire and reviling and reproach. And when he arrived, he was greeted with honour and served, and pleasant-tasting, intoxicating liquor was poured out for him until he was intoxicated and merry. And great rewards were promised him for engaging in that fight, namely, a chariot worth four times seven cumala, the equipment of twelve men in garments of every colour, the equal of his own domains in the arable land of Mag n-Aí, freedom from tax and tribute, from encampment and expedition and exaction for his son and his grandson and his great-grandson to the end of time, Findabair as his wedded wife, and in addition the golden brooch in Medb’s mantle.220

Thus there are aspects of Medb’s character that are reminiscent of Morgan, especially as her character develops, particularly her promiscuity, and her assumption of the role of kingmaker.

Certainly, on a superficial level, we can discern strong similarities between the characteristics of Morgan and those ascribed to various women in early Irish literature, but these analogues are tentative. Even Paton acknowledges that there is ‘A remoteness from the Celtic which is perceptible in the French material is scarcely easy to reconcile with the view that the latter is directly repeating the former. In the French sources we

220 O’Rahilly, Táin Bó Cúalnge: From the Book of Leinster, p. 212.
are merely listening to an echo, at times clear and distinct.'

Loomis claimed that the Welsh mythological goddess Modron provided ‘an intermediate figure between the Irish goddesses and the Arthurian fay’. He maintained that the considerable cultural influence exerted by the Irish on Wales resulted in the Mórrígan, and such other, distinct figures as her sisters Nemain or Badb and Macha, which he chose to interpret as aspects of the Mórrígan as a triple goddess, being transposed into Welsh mythology as Modron. Moreover, the nebulous figure of Modron, and a variety of nameless fairy women whom Loomis at least recognizes as types of Modron, developed in turn into Morgan and her minions in Arthurian romance. However, Modron is mentioned relatively few times in Welsh literature; she appears in the *Mabinogion* as the mother of Mabon, and in a folk tale and a triad as the mother of Urien’s two children, Owain and Marfudd. Furthermore, the host of nameless fays that Loomis claims are types of Modron are not definitively identified as such. Loomis, Rachel Bromwich and several contemporary critics claim that Modron is a form of Matrona, the ‘Great Mother’ who ‘gave her name to the River Marne’, which suggests that Modron is rooted in a mythopoeic tradition larger than that which her few, named appearances in Welsh literature might suggest.

The most frequent references to Modron identify her as the mother of Mabon, ‘the archetypical divine figure of early Welsh sources, Mabon ab Modron: ‘The Son, son of the Mother’, as one recent article put it. However, Triad 52 merely states ‘and the

222 ‘Morgan La Fee’, p. 194.
224 William Sayers, ‘“La Joie de la Cort” (Érec et Énide), Mabon, and Early Irish “síd” [peace; Otherworld]’, *Arthuriana* 17 (2007), 10-27, at p. 11.
second, Mabon son of Modron,’ 225 while Rhonabwy’s Dream is in the Mabinogion is similarly terse. 226 We are given slightly more information in Culhwch and Olwen, where the reader is informed that Mabon ‘was taken when three nights old from between his mother and the wall’. 227 Modron appears in completely different circumstances in Triad 70, where she is named as the mother of Urien’s children. This triad appears in two manuscripts: Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Ms Peniarth 47, which dates from the mid fourteenth century and ascribed to the Anchorite of Llanddewi Brefi, and Ms Peniarth 50, which dates from the early to mid fifteenth century. There is a slight variation between the two texts: Ms Peniarth 47 states, ‘The second, Owain and Morfudd daughter of Urien and Anarun archbishop of Uydaw, by Modron daughter of Afallach their mother’, while in Peniarth 50 we find ‘The second, Owain son of Urien and Mor(fudd) his sister who were carried together in the womb of Modron daughter of Afallach.’ 228 Bromwich notes that this familial setup is also mentioned in a folk tale preserved in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Ms Peniarth 147. Here, we are given an amplified account of the circumstances surrounding the twins’ conception, Urien Rhegad investigates dogs barking at a ford but ‘he saw nothing there except a woman washing’:

And then the dogs ceased barking and Urien seized the woman and had his will of her; and then she said ‘God’s blessing on the feet which brought thee here’. ‘Why?’ said he. ‘Because I have been fated to wash here until I should conceive a son by a Christian. And I am daughter to the King of Annwfn, and come thou

226 Davies, Mabinogion, p. 225.
227 Davies, Mabinogion, p. 203; cf. pp.204, 205 and 212.
here at the end of the year and then thou shalt receive the boy.’ And so he came and he received there a boy and a girl: that is, Owein son of Urien and Morfudd daughter of Urien.229

Both Loomis and Bromwich have noted the similarity of this incident to that of the coupling of the Mórrígan and the Dagda in *Cath Maige Tuired*. In both texts, the women are washing at fords and the union with the hero is providential. Bromwich, however, merely notes that this proves that the ‘Washer at the Ford’ is a common *topos* in Celtic myth, whereas Loomis sees this as proof of the relationship between of the Mórrígan and Modron. Given that Peniarth 47 and 50 date from the fifteenth century, while Peniarth 147 dates from the mid sixteenth century, it would be difficult to demonstrate conclusively that Modron is part of a catena of sources that directly links the Mórrígan with Morgan. Loomis, however, remains undeterred, noting that ‘Though little record of Modron under her own name is left in Welsh literature, we have some compensation in the many folktales of a usually nameless fay who seems to have inherited the Modron tradition’:

Even if one concedes the possibility that some of these connections between the modern Welsh folktale of the Lady of the Lake and the legends of Morgain, Launfal’s mistress, Modron, and Macha are fortuitous, they cannot all be; there are too many of them.230

However, any oral tradition is a notoriously difficult witness to invoke in the pursuit of a proven source because of the uniquely protean qualities of orality. The argument initially set forward by Loomis for a Welsh intermediary can only be assessed in terms of the manuscript evidence, and it is important to remember that these texts are preserved in manuscripts produced rather late in the development of the character of Morgan. As Richard White notes, ‘While some of the extant Welsh Arthurian material may be of early date, it survives only in relatively late manuscripts and is extremely difficult to date.’\textsuperscript{231} Such texts do not fulfil the criteria encapsulated in Rauer’s definitions of either a source or an analogue.

Ultimately, when we consider the possibility of a Goidelic or Pan-Brittonic source for Morgan we are beset with difficulties. Most of the extant versions of the source texts in question were produced after Morgan’s character was well-established; thus there is little evidence to suggest that these texts influenced her development. Furthermore, many of the parallels that have been identified between Morgan and the Mórrigan are quite general and do not offer the ‘distinctive parallels’ that Rauer claims a potential source should provide. When we consider the four possible areas of sources and analogues for Morgan: the classical tradition; the exegetical or allegorical tradition; and the Irish and Welsh literary traditions, it becomes clear that it is impossible to identify a definite source for much of the character of Morgan. Nor should these four traditions be considered in isolation, given the consistent interpenetration between the classical and allegorical or exegetical traditions throughout the patristic and medieval periods. In the Hiberno-Latin milieu of Insular culture during the early middle ages, the classical tradition played its part in the modification of the corpus of vernacular literature, which then influenced the Welsh legends. This fusion of myriad sources and

traditions is given concrete expression in Morgan’s wings in Geoffrey’s *Vita*. The author relates them to the wings of Daedalus, but, within the classical tradition, these wings could also relate to the shape-shifting abilities of Circe; the various transformations into birds in the *Metamorphoses* and other texts, or to the speedy flight (albeit in a chariot) of Medea as she collects the ingredients for her potions. From an allegorical or exegetical perspective, her feathered wings are reminiscent of the wings of various abstract personifications developed during the classical period, which are gradually fused with Christian sources to produce the traditional appearance of a Christian angel. Moreover, in the early Irish vernacular tradition, the Mórrígan frequently assumes the guise of a bird and other magical women also assume this form, which may in turn be influence by apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts in the secular narratives which have come down to us. Thus, it is impossible to isolate a particular source, or catena of sources, for Morgan, as medieval authors would potentially have had access to a range of sacred and profane texts, and may not have been drawing on a single source. Finally, given the wide range of Arthurian texts in which she appears, Morgan’s character is also subject to change depending on the author’s recourse to previous works in the Arthurian canon, and the author’s own vision of the Arthurian legend.
CHAPTER TWO
MORGAN IN THE FRENCH TRADITION

Morgan appears across a wide range of French texts; many of these are Arthurian romances, but she also appears as a point of reference in non-Arthurian texts at least as early as Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Roman de Troie*, of around 1155-60.\(^2\) In several instances her name is merely mentioned with no further attempt to establish her character for the audience, which presumes a familiarity as to who she is and why her presence informs the text. This chapter will examine those French texts which were particularly important to the development of the character of Morgan in the English tradition. The most important texts in this respect are Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide*, the Lancelot-Graal or Vulgate Cycle, the Post-Vulgate Cycle, the Prose *Tristan*, and Alixandre L’Orphelin.

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Chrétien de Troyes’ *Erec et Enide* was written in 1170 and *Yvain* or *Le Chevalier au Lion* between 1177 and 1181. Not much is known of Chrétien himself, but ‘Chrétien was almost certainly a cleric.’ *Erec* survives in twelve manuscripts in seven complete copies and five fragments, and *Yvain* in fourteen manuscripts in nine complete copies and five fragments. *Yvain*, as Roger Middleton notes, ‘enjoyed a reasonably wide circulation as early as the 1190s’, as evinced ‘by the fact that copies were available to Hartmann von Aue for him to make his adaptations into German’. We know that Chrétien’s patrons included Marie of Champagne, the daughter of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Philippe of Alsace; thus, he ‘won favour in chivalric and courtly circles’, and ‘raised the Matter of Britain, still new and uncertain, to a high eminence’. Indeed, with this royal endorsement Arthurian literature flourished, while the influence of Chrétien ‘was immense’. By the thirteenth century, ‘It is scarcely an exaggeration ... to talk of an Arthurian industry, with opportunist poets, prose-writers, copyists, translators, sedulously exploiting the new romances and their


new conventions.\textsuperscript{238} Chrétien’s texts were particularly significant in the development of the Vulgate Cycle where the matièr was ‘partly “recycled” from other texts’:

In particular, Chrétien de Troyes and Wace have been major influences for, respectively, the romance and historiographic aspects of the Cycle. But even if the architect of the \textit{Lancelot-Grail} drew on these authors, he also modified their legacy profoundly.\textsuperscript{239}

The Vulgate Cycle is ‘an anonymous text comprising at least five different works, possibly by five different authors, a text with no clear provenance although the majority of its manuscripts come from the north-east corner of France and what is now Belgium and Flanders’.\textsuperscript{240} Its literary evolution is complex:

Manuscript evidence suggests that the \textit{Cycle} existed initially as a mini-cycle, the \textit{Lancelot – Queste – Mort Artu} trilogy ... The subsequent addition of the \textit{Estoire del Saint Graal} and the \textit{Estoire Merlin-Suite}, however, gave the mini-cycle a new historical and religious foundation.\textsuperscript{241}


\textsuperscript{240} Dover, ‘Introduction’, p. xi.

\textsuperscript{241} Dover, ‘Introduction’, pp. xi-xii.
There is no clear consensus on the authorship of the Vulgate Cycle and suggestions have ranged from a single author to five separate authors. Indeed, it is even difficult to establish exactly what texts definitively constitute the Vulgate Cycle, because the term ‘can be used to cover any number of texts from one to fifteen, or even more’ due to the immense variation within the versions of each of the branches. In the case of the Merlin, for example, there is ‘a short and long version, as well as occurring with or without one or other of its various sequels (Vulgate Suite, Huth Suite de Merlin, or the Livre d’Artus of BNF, fr. 337)’. The Estoire del Saint Graal and the Merlin may have formed a separate cycle with the Didot-Perceval:

Not fully incorporated into the Lancelot-Grail Cycle, but not entirely independent, are the three prose texts attributed to Robert de Boron: Joseph, Merlin and Didot-Perceval. These occur together in just two manuscripts: Modena, Biblioteca Comunale Estense, MS E. 39 and BNF, nouv. Acq. Fr. 4166.

The Merlin is present in forty-six manuscripts and nine fragments and frequently appears without the other texts of the Vulgate Cycle and without the Suite du Merlin. The Vulgate Cycle was copied extensively, demonstrating its wide-ranging

244 Middleton, ‘Manuscripts’, p. 38.
popularity; there are currently ‘220 surviving manuscripts and larger fragments of the various texts that make up the *Lancelot-Grail*.\(^{247}\) Several of these manuscripts were produced in England, or are of English provenance; of the forty manuscripts currently extant in England today, ‘nineteen were in England during the Middle Ages, and at least six of them were likely to have been written there’.\(^{248}\)

Morgan does not appear in all five branches of the Vulgate Cycle; the two Grail-related texts, the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Quesce del Saint Graal*, do not include her. However, she does appear in the Post-Vulgate *Quesce*. The Post-Vulgate Cycle, written between 1230 and 1240, is a reworking of the Vulgate Cycle, with an *Estoire del Saint Graal*, an *Estoire de Merlin*, and a continuation (called the *Suite du Merlin*), a *Quesce del Saint Graal* and a Mort *Arut*.\(^{249}\) As Fanni Bogdanow notes:

> the *Post-Vulgate* has not been preserved in French in its complete form in any one manuscript, but has to be reconstructed from fragments of varying lengths which have come to light only gradually, and Portuguese and Spanish translations, as well as the redactional indications supplied by the writer himself in various parts of the narrative.\(^{250}\)

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The text is quite different from that of the Vulgate Cycle because the author ‘did not simply accumulate episodes, but sought to produce a compact and coherent Arthurian history in which the various events of Arthur’s reign were more adequately motivated than in the versions at his disposal’.251 The Vulgate Cycle was also influential in the development of the Prose Tristan, of which ‘the “First Version”, written between 1225 and 1235’, is comparatively short, while ‘an expanded “Second Version” can be dated ‘to the second half of the thirteenth century’.252 According to Joan Tasker Grimbert, the Prose Tristan, ‘which may or may not have been begun by Luces de Gat and completed by Hélie de Boron, dates from the second and third quarters of the thirteenth century’.253 However that might be, the Prose Tristan draws on the well-established legend of Tristan in French romance, but is also influenced by the Vulgate Cycle, as it seeks to establish Tristan within the Arthurian framework.254 Baumgartner notes that ‘its author or authors knew at least the whole of the Lancelot-Queste-Morte Artu’, being ‘influenced in particular by the Lancelot proper’.255 Indeed, Vinaver claims that the Prose Tristan is ‘to all intents and purposes, a sequel to, and an elaboration of, the

254 Stories about Tristan were already a well-established genre, distinct from the Arthurian tradition, as evinced by Béroul, Tristan (1150-1190); Thomas of Britain, Tristan (1170-5); Eilhart von Oberge, Tristant (1170-1190), and Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan (c.1210). Cf. Bogdanow, ‘Morgain’s Role’, p. 126.
French Vulgate cycle,256 and it was equally popular as a ‘bestseller’ during the later middle ages.257 By contrast, *Alixandre l’Orphelin* appears in nine manuscripts as part of other texts and miscellanies: it is interpolated into four manuscripts of the *Prophéties de Merlin*, three manuscripts of the *Prose Tristan*, and two miscellanies.258 The earliest version of the text is from the fourteenth century.

All of these romances, from Chrétien onwards, were part of a much wider French Arthurian tradition, which stems back to Geoffrey of Monmouth. Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, which is a translation and re-working of Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Brittaniae* of around 1155, did much to increase the popularity of Arthurian material with French-speaking audiences.259 However, it is important to remember that ‘Arthur was a household name before the *Historia* was published’, as indeed, was Morgan.260 Although both the *Historia* and Wace’s *Brut* mention Arthur’s journey to Avalon, they do not mention Morgan in this context. However, she was sufficiently familiar to Benoît de Sainte-Maure, a contemporary of Wace, to justify a guest appearance in the

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Roman de Troie. Benoît does not feel the need to explain who she is to his audience; he mentions that she provided a horse for Hector, but she is also spurned by him:

Hector mounted on Galatée,

Which Morgain la Fée had given him,

For she loved him greatly and held him dear,

But he would not sleep with her;

Because of the shame she felt on account of it,

She hated him as much as she could.

That was the most beautiful horse

That any mortal man ever mounted,

And the best and the fastest,

The hardiest and the biggest:

So beautiful a thing was never born.261

As Twomey points out:

261 Twomey, ‘Morgain la Fée’, p. 102, who notes that her name is given as ‘Morgain’ in six manuscripts. She is called: ‘orva’; ‘oura’; ‘oua’; ‘orains’; ‘ornainz’; ‘ornaine’; ‘orueins’; ‘oruain’; and ‘orais’ in some of the other manuscripts. Cf. Benoit, Roman de Troie, I, p. 434, ll. 8023-33. J. D. Bruce provides a list of the manuscripts which provide the name with an initial ‘m’: ‘morgain’ in Montpellier, Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire, Section Médecine, Ms H 251 (13th century); ‘morgain’ in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 783 (13th century); ‘morguein’ in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouvelles acquisitions françaises, Ms 6534 (13th century), ‘morgan’ in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms français 2181 (13th Century), ‘morganz’ in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms français 794 (13th century); ‘morgan’ in Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reginensi Latini, Ms 1505 (14th century). See J. D. Bruce, ‘Some Proper Names in Layamon’s Brut Not Represented in Wace or Geoffrey of Monmouth’, MLN 26 (1911), 65-9, at p. 67.
in order for Morgain’s love affair with Hector to be meaningful, it must refer to something intelligible to the reader. Supposed oral sources notwithstanding, Morgain’s function ... is as a gloss on Hector. She is a figure haunting the margins whose personal history in relation to Hector defines Hector in his heroic role.262

This would seem to suggest that the audience is familiar with the predatory, malevolent Morgan we tend to associate with later texts that deviate from the tradition established by Geoffrey’s *Vita*, which portrays her as a beneficent presence with healing powers. However, this portrayal of Morgan as a spurned and vindictive lover has generally been interpreted by critics as a later reinterpretation of Morgan’s character, influenced by the Church’s mounting condemnation of womanly *craft*:

Her gradual change (one can hardly call it growth) from a connector of life with healing, as mistress of Avalon, into a connector of death with illicit sex and wrongful imprisonment as she appears in most subsequent romances, indicates the increasing inability of male Arthurian authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms.263

Certainly, that Morgan’s craftiness is familiar to a twelfth-century audience is borne out by her appearances in Chrétien’s *oeuvre*. In *Erec et Enide*, she demonstrates many of the characteristics that are developed and expanded on in the Vulgate Cycle, especially

262 ‘Morgain la Fée’, p. 105.
her association with healing. When Erec is wounded, ‘The king sighs very deeply and has an ointment brought which Morgan, his sister, had made’:

This salve that Morgan had given Arthur was so effective that no wound that was treated with it, whether on a nerve or on a joint, did not fail to be quite healed and cured within a week, provided the salve was applied once a day.264

This association with healing possibly stems from her role in the *Vita Merlini*, but she is also identified as Arthur’s sister, which she is clearly not in the *Vita*, or indeed, in most chronicles. The exception to this is the *Draco Normannicus* of Étienne de Rouen, which states that ‘the wounded Arthur seeks after the herbs of his sister; these the sacred isle of Avalon contains. Here the immortal fay Morgan receives her brother, attends, nourishes, restores, and renders him eternal’.265 The *Draco Normannicus* was written between 1167 and 1170 for Henry II, and survives in a single manuscript, Vatican Library, Ms Ottobuoni Lat. 3081. Mildred Leake Day describes it as ‘political satire’ and notes of this section that Etienne not only draws on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, but also on the *Vita Merlini*, although she goes on to point out that ‘Whether Etienne learned of Arthur’s survival from oral tradition or directly from the *Vita Merlini* would be difficult to determine’.266 Indeed, ‘the relative chronology of *Draco Normannicus* and *Erec* is not certain’, thus we cannot be sure whether *Draco Normannicus* influenced Chrétien in naming Morgan as Arthur’s sister.

sister. However, this relationship makes the miraculous nature of the salve and Arthur’s faith in its powers all the more convincing, and an extension of Arthur’s concern for Erec. Chrétien evidently had some knowledge of Morgan’s association with Avalon, as she is also mentioned in relation to ‘Guingomar, lord of the Isle of Avalon’. Chrétien states that ‘We have heard of the latter that he was Morgan the Fay’s lover, and that was certainly true’. Therefore, we may conclude that if Chrétien was not familiar with *Draco Normannicus*, he must have known of Morgan’s association with Avalon from another text.

Morgan appears for a third time in *Erec*, albeit in a section which appears in only one manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. fr. 794, produced in the early thirteenth century:

> Then she placed on the altar a green *paille*, the likes of which no one had seen, and a great embroidered chasuble all embroidered in pure gold. It was well known that Morgan la Fay had made it in Val Perilleus. She had taken great care over it. It was of gold Almena silk. The fairy hadn’t at all made it to be a chasuble to sing mass in, but wanted to give it to her lover to make a rich garment out of. Through a clever scheme, Guenevere, wife of the powerful King Arthur, got it through Emperor Gassa. She had a chasuble made from it, and had kept it in her chapel for a long time, for it was good and beautiful.

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When Enide left her, she gave her this chasuble; in truth, it was worth more than a hundred silver marks.270

This could be a genuine addition on the part of Chrétien, or scribal interpolation by Guiot, the compiler of the manuscript.271 The matière would seem to suggest a connection to the Vulgate Cycle, as Morgan is associated with a ‘Val Perilleus’, relating perhaps to the Val sanz Retor of the Lancelot,272 and also her aptitude for skilled needlework as evinced by the headpiece she makes for her sister in the Merlin out of ‘golden thread’.273 The passage also suggests an antagonism between Morgan and Guinevere: a common motif in such romances as the Lancelot, and the favour she shows her lovers, which, if we are to accept the inferences of the Roman de Troie, would also seem to be an accepted part of her character by Chrétien’s time, and certainly well-established when this version of Erec is produced. As Maureen Fries notes, Morgan is an incidental ‘healer in the work of Chrétien de Troyes’:

she also acquires – in his Erec – her first lover, Guilgomar, upon which liaison the sophisticated poet makes no comment except to denote him sire of Avalon. If already scaled down from the goddess-like personage of the Vita Merlini into


a this-worldly rather than an Otherworldly figure, Morgan does not as yet in the twelfth century evince the evil which is to besmirch her character from the thirteenth on.274

In Chrétien’s work, Morgan’s role as a healer is entirely positive and is in keeping with her innovatory presentation as Arthur’s sister. This role is reprised in Yvain, where she provides another magical salve, ‘For I’ve remembered an ointment given me by Morgan the Wise, who told me that there’s no madness in the head it won’t clear’.275 In fact, it would seem that it is Guinevere who is depicted in a less honourable light with her ‘clever scheme’, although perhaps this is justified by her transformation of a love token into an ecclesiastical vestment. For Chrétien, Morgan is associated with healing and Avalon, and has assumed the role of Arthur’s sister, whether due to the influence of the Draco Normannicus, or as an entirely new departure on the part of Chrétien. If we accept the section from Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale Ms. fr. 794 as the work of Chrétien, and not Guiot, then there are several other characteristics which come to define Morgan’s later depiction, which have already been established during the writing career of le père du roman français. Certainly, it is clear that Chrétien presumes his audience will be familiar with Morgan; it is as if her reputation precedes her. He does not deem it necessary to establish her character, any more than Benoît de Sainte-Maure.

Morgan is described in a fully developed manner in the Vulgate Cycle, where she is situated precisely within a specifically royal genealogy, informed by an underlying moral framework. The Merlin section of the Vulgate Cycle was produced separately to the trilogy of the Lancelot, Queste del Saint Graal and the Mort Artu. As Elspeth

274 Fries, ‘From the Lady to the Tramp’, p. 3.
Kennedy points out, ‘it is generally acknowledged that the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and *Estoire de Merlin* were later additions to the Cycle, carefully presented to prepare the way for later events’.276 The *Merlin* is a prose version of Robert de Boron’s verse *Merlin*, which is found in manuscripts independently of the Vulgate Cycle, as well as in various conjunctions with other parts of the Vulgate Cycle. Robert de Boron’s verse *Merlin* is now extant only in a fragment, and the surviving sections do not contain any reference to Morgan.277 The prose *Merlin* is followed by a bridging section, called the *Suite du Merlin*, which connects it to the rest of the Vulgate Cycle. In the prose *Merlin* without the *Suite*, Morgan only appears in a single instance, but this section elaborates on several aspects of Morgan’s character outlined in previous texts, and contributes other aspects to her portrayal:

The wedding of the king and Ygraine was on the thirtieth day after he had lain with her in her room. And of the lady’s elder daughter and King Lot were born Sir Gawain, Agravain, Guerrehet, Gaheriet, and Mordred. And King Neutres of Garlot took the other daughter, a bastard named Morgan. On the advice of his kinsmen, Neutres put her in a nunnery to learn to read and write, and she learned so much so well that she mastered the arts. She became wonderfully skilled in an art called astrology, and she worked hard all the time and knew a great deal about the healing arts. For her mastery of knowledge, people called her Morgain the Fay.278

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Here, the author is keen to situate her in a familial context, the author follows Chrétien and the *Draco Normannicus* in making Morgan Arthur’s sister, but in contrast to previous texts, she is here only Arthur’s half-sister. This innovation is perhaps to exculpate Arthur from any association of *astrologia judicalis* (‘judicial astrology’), but the author heightens the sense of distance by designating Morgan a bastard.²⁷⁹ He reduces her to a mortal queen who is skilled in the arts, as opposed to the fairy woman possessed of magical power and an island realm which we find in Geoffrey of Monmouth. There is, however, some difference between the manuscripts. As Pickens notes, Sommer’s manuscript (London, British Library, MS Additional 10292) ‘introduces a third daughter as Neutres’s wife and does not mention that Morgan was a bastard (73, l. 23). Later the text explicitly mentions five daughters (96, ll. 27-30), none of whom is singled out as a bastard’.²⁸⁰ Larrington points out that ‘Arthurian sisters multiply wildly in the *Merlin* as its author(s) try to reconcile varying traditions,’²⁸¹ and this confusion would seem to be derived from Morgan’s relatively recent refashioning as Arthur’s sister in Chrétien and the *Draco Normannicus*. Previously, other sisters of Arthur are mentioned, most notably in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, where his sister (a full sister here), Anna, is married to Loth of Lothian, ‘Impressed by his talents; the king had given him his daughter Anna’s hand and stewardship of the realm while he was


²⁸¹ *King Arthur’s Enchantresses*, p. 32.
According to Wace, ‘After Arthur, Anna was born, a daughter who was bestowed on a noble and courteous baron, Loth of Lothian.’²⁸³ For Helaine Newstead, ‘The Lady of Lothian, then, would be known only as Arthur’s sister and Loth’s wife, and it would therefore be natural to identify Loth’s wife with the far more notorious sister of Arthur, Morgain La Fee.’²⁸⁴ However, this would not seem to be supported by the development of this strand of the narrative in the Arthurian tradition as the two sisters evolve independently of each other. The treatment of the sisters here is, however, similar to that found in Geoffrey: the daughters of Igerne, but not Uther, become chattels of Uther, who marries them off to his loyal followers. However, the amplification of Geoffrey that we find here in the Merlin is also informed by the identification of Morgan as one of Arthur’s sisters found in Chrétien and the Draco Normannicus. The author integrates Morgan into the marriage of Uther and Igerne, which clarifies her familial relationship to Arthur. He also provides a rational explanation for her powers of healing, which is grounded in her knowledge of medical astrology, a branch of astrologia naturalis (‘natural astrology’), although she is noted to have mastered the arts more generally.²⁸⁵ This focus on her education stems from the references in the Vita Merlini to her ‘skill in healing’, but this expertise is not directly linked to the rumour that ‘she had taught astrology to her sisters’.²⁸⁶ That Morgan has ‘mastered the arts’, which presumably includes the Quadrivium given her interest in

²⁸³ Wace’s Roman de Brut, pp. 222-3.
²⁸⁵ Sommer’s version of the text mentions her skills in medicine twice; cf. Vulgate, II, p. 73.
²⁸⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Vita Merlini, pp. 100-1.
astrologia naturalis, situates her knowledge within a specifically academic, as opposed to a magical framework. This rationalisation of Morgan’s powers is also found in Gerald of Wales’ Speculum Ecclesiae, written around 1216, which states that Arthur was buried at Glastonbury (previously known as Avalon) by Morgan: a nobili matrona (‘noble matron’) and cognata (‘kinswoman’). Gerald is scathing of those Britons who believe the legends of the dea quædam phantastica (‘imaginary goddess’) and Arthur’s return. Gervase of Tilbury’s influential Otia imperialia also dismisses the validity of the magical island and Morgan’s powers:

Hence there arose the popular tradition of the Britons, whereby they claim that Arthur was carried off the Isle of Avalon, in order that his wounds, which break open afresh every year, might be healed by the ever-renewed ministrations of Morgan the Fay. And the Britons fancifully believe that after a given time Arthur will return to his kingdom.

The Otia imperialia was written between 1210 and 1214 and survives in thirty manuscripts ‘dating from the early thirteenth to the seventeenth century’. Thus the depiction of Morgan that we find in the Merlin, firmly incorporated into Arthur’s family and stripped of her magical powers, albeit possessed of exceptional expertise in the liberal arts, which is all the more exceptional given her gender, would seem to correspond with contemporaneous references to Arthur’s death.

287 Gerald of Wales, Speculum ecclesiae, p. 46.
288 Speculum ecclesiae, p. 47.
290 Gervase of Tilbury, Otia Imperialia, p. lxxxv.
However, the family history of Arthur is somewhat different in the *Lancelot* to that found in the *Merlin*:

The fact is that Morgan was the daughter of the duke of Tintagel and his wife Ygraine, who later became queen of Britain, the wife of Uther Pendragon and mother of King Arthur, whom she conceived during the duke’s lifetime through Merlin’s treachery. When Ygraine came to Uther and married him, she had her daughter Morgan with her; she left behind in the dukedom of Tintagel a boy who was the duke’s son by a wife the duke had had before Ygraine.  

This would imply that Morgan is Arthur’s only sibling, due to the total excision of the marriages of Igrayne’s daughters to Uther’s allies. Moreover, Morgan is left conveniently free to pursue a relationship with Guyamor, Guinevere’s nephew, and a subsequent relationship with an unnamed knight (which is actually presented earlier in the text). She then pursues and subsequently imprisons Lancelot on three separate occasions, due at least in part to her desire for him. Morgan is clearly presented as a single woman throughout the text, and Lancelot laments her single state, ‘But if it please God, some worthy man will yet come who’ll take you in hand and free this world from you, which will be a great joy, for you are intent only on doing evil.’

One of the most notable features of Morgan’s portrayal in the *Lancelot* is her implacable hatred of Arthur’s queen because of the role played by Guinevere in ending Morgan’s relationship with Guyamor:

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The queen had already been warned and had been keeping close watch on them, as she would gladly have kept Morgan chaste lest the king be shamed, and Guyamor as well lest the king punish him, for he would have hated him for such behaviour, had he learned of it.293

Morgan has already been described as ‘so lustful and wanton that a looser woman could not have been found’.294 We can therefore sympathise with Guinevere’s attempt to protect her cousin, and Arthur’s sensibilities. Morgan’s subsequent flight to Merlin leads to her acquisition of magical knowledge, ‘She came to know Merlin well, and he loved her more than anything else. He taught her all the spells and bewitchments that she knew later on.’295 Thus her magical expertise is ascribed solely to Merlin’s tutelage in the Lancelot, as opposed to the nunnery as in the Vulgate Merlin. This expertise is put to good use after her second love affair (or possibly her third if we count her interlude with Merlin), which follows a similar pattern to that of Guyomar, in that she loves a knight more than he loves her, ‘She had given him her whole heart, for she loved him more than any other man and believed that he loved her above all other women.’ However, we are told that ‘he felt more fear than love’, and is, in fact, in love with someone else. In a parody of Guinevere’s actions, Morgan has ‘been keeping them under watch’ and discovers their liaison. Her wrath is such that she punishes both lovers, particularly the woman, who is consigned to ‘a harsh prison, where she had the feeling day and night that she was standing in ice from the waist down and in a blazing

fire above’, and her lover by the creation of the ‘Valley of No Return and the Valley of False Lovers’:

It was called the Valley of No Return because no knight came back from it; and it was named the Valley of False Lovers because all knights stayed there if they had been unfaithful to their lovers in any way whatever, even in thought.296

As Lucy Allen Paton points out, ‘With the exception of those episodes in which Morgain is represented distinctly as living in Avalon … her abode here is more purely an other-world abode than in any other incident told of her.’297 This is indeed an impressive demonstration of her powers, as she manages to imprison two hundred and fifty-three knights over a period of seventeen years. The description of the valley is idyllic, with ‘very handsome houses’, ‘a chapel where they heard Mass every day’, ‘no lack of food and drink’, and ‘outdoor sports and backgammon and chess; there were dances and carols all day long and the delights of fiddles and harps and other instruments’.298 However, as beautiful as this prison is, it is still a prison, and many of the knights are unhappy, ‘there had already been many deaths, some the outcome of great sorrow, some from long imprisonment, some from another affliction’. There is a clear discrimination against men in this setup, as they are imprisoned by Morgan’s magic, whereas women are free to ‘go away at will’.299 Morgan laments the release of the knights by Lancelot on the behalf of the other women of the valley:

297 Fairy Mythology, p. 83.
There are beautiful and loving young ladies in this place who have been fully satisfied by their lovers, because these knights could go nowhere else. Once they are out, things will change and they won’t ever again spend so much time with their ladies.

Although ostensibly representative of the collective feeling of the women of the valley, Morgan’s speech would appear to reflect her own desire to retain a lover at any cost, given that she lost Guyomar to Guinevere’s interference, and would have lost her other lover had she not trapped him in the valley. It is also a response to her own entrapped lover’s ecstatic reaction to the end of his imprisonment:

the knight came in who was Morgan’s lover and because of whom the bewitching had taken place. When he saw Lancelot, he greeted him, saying: ‘My lord, you are welcome here as the flower of all knighthood’, and he fell to his knees before him.300

Indeed, although there would seem to be a conflict between the demonstration of knightly prowess through adventures and the time spent with a lover, it is worth noting Lancelot’s comments concerning a knight he has killed. He tells the woman who tries to avenge this knight’s death by stabbing him in the back that ‘no worthy young lady should have loved him, for he was the most cowardly and craven knight that I have ever yet seen, however tall and handsome he was!’301 Lancelot’s comments are also a reflection on the rest of the knights in the valley; if they are unable to fulfil their


knightly calling, there is no means to discern which knights are worthy of love, thus a worthy maiden would surely prefer her knight to be free to pursue adventure and prove his merit. It is only Morgan, with her penchant for imprisonment and her inherent unworthiness, who would want to keep her knights down in the Val sanz Retour.

Morgan’s relationships with other women in the Lancelot are variable; her virulent hatred of Guinevere becomes her raison d’être later in the text, but her other relationships are more ambiguous. She is said to be good friends with the other two women in the text who are also empowered by their use of magic, ‘they were the three women in the world who knew the most about enchantments and charms, saving only the Lady of the Lake. And because they knew so much about magic, they enjoyed one another’s company and always rode together and ate and drank together’. 302 Moreover, her reaction to the maiden who guides Lancelot to the Val sanz Retor is one of consideration and reassurance:

Then Morgan noticed me and saw that I was extremely unhappy. Pity, I know, took hold of her, and she rode up beside me and whispered into my ear, ‘Honestly, my dear friend, are you something to the knight over there? ... I assure you that he will bring the search for Gawain to a happy end.’ 303

However, her punishment of her rival shows her vindictive nature, and one of Morgan’s maidens claims that she has to do as she is told ‘or be killed’. 304 Therefore, it would seem that Morgan’s capacity for compassion and tolerance is rather limited.

Morgan’s relationship with Lancelot defines her character in the text, which is hardly surprising given his central role in the narrative, and much of the detail discussed above is provided in order to explain her treatment of Lancelot. It is important to note that her hatred is reserved for Guinevere rather than Arthur in the *Lancelot*. Although her actions cause problems for other knights, they are motivated by personal antagonism rather than general antipathy to the collective cohort of Round Table knights. Lancelot’s first encounter with Morgan does not bode well. In chasing a cowardly knight, he upturns her bed, with her in it, ‘Lancelot, not wanting to be stuck down there with him, seized the bed without realising a lady might be lying on it, and dragged it forward and upward with all his might, so that it turned upside down’.  

This is emblematic of the way in which Lancelot also disrupts the magical crystallization that defines the valley, by releasing all the knights imprisoned there. Yet although Morgan is chagrined by the end of her rule of terror over the valley, it is only when she discerns Lancelot’s true identity, and thus his relationship with Guinevere, that she decides to imprison him:

> When she learned that he was Lancelot, she guessed right away that he was in love with the queen, and resolved to cause her some distress. Indeed, she thought that, if the queen loved him as much as he did her, she would deprive her of happiness forevermore, for she hated the queen more than any other woman.  

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This malicious caprice is in keeping with Morgan’s claim that she is not holding Lancelot prisoner ‘because of any wrong you may have done me, but because that’s what I want to do!’

She also displays her underhand methods by releasing him in order to accomplish his mission, but instructing ‘the most beautiful of her maidens’ to do ‘whatever she could to entice him’ all the while. Lancelot is suitably shocked by this behaviour, ‘I’ve never heard of a lady, young or old, trying to force herself on a knight!’

Similarly, Morgan (this time in conjunction with her two friends) attempts to abduct Lancelot at a later point in the narrative. She states confidently that ‘once we have him in our power he’ll more easily do what we want’, ordering him to choose one of them as his mistress. However, Morgan does not recognise Lancelot at this juncture due to his short hair, as the author is at some pains to point out; otherwise, she would have realised the futility of their plan. In fact, this passage once again demonstrates Lancelot’s devotion to Guinevere, ‘saying to himself that he would rather be dead than take one of these old women instead of his lady the queen, who is the fountain of beauty’.

In both episodes, Lancelot is presented with a challenge which does not merely test his physical strength, but also his mental fortitude. However, he is not entirely without magical assistance as the Lady of the Lake has provided him with a ring which reveals spells. This talisman proves effective in the *Val sans Retor*.

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With that, he pulled off the left gauntlet of his hauberk and looked at his ring. Not seeing any trace left of the broad stream and the plank bridge that he had seen and crossed, he realised right away that it had all been a magic spell.\textsuperscript{313}

Here, the contrast between the Lady of the Lake and Morgan is implicit; the Lady of the Lake is equally able to create her own realm, and has also honed her magical powers under Merlin’s tutelage.\textsuperscript{314} Moreover, Morgan is also described as using a magic ring in her initial abduction of Lancelot, ‘This ring was such that, if it was put onto the finger of a sleeping man, he would remain asleep as long as it stayed in place,’\textsuperscript{315} which mirrors Lancelot’s gift from the Lady of the Lake. Later on, the author mentions that she has used a magic pillow, which echoes Viviane’s actions in the \textit{Merlin}.\textsuperscript{316} Here, she persuades Merlin to teach her ‘how to cast a spell and bring forth a pillow, which she put in his arms, and then Merlin went to sleep’.\textsuperscript{317} In the \textit{Lancelot} we witness a perversion of Morgan’s traditional healing role associated with Arthur’s death, which stems from the \textit{Vita Merlini} and continued in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes. Morgan’s magical abilities and objects are only used for deception and to bring suffering. During Lancelot’s first imprisonment ‘she put a potion in his drink that was brewed with magic spells; and it so muddled his brain that in his sleep that night he

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dreamt he found the queen in bed with another knight’.\(^{318}\) Once again she uses a potion to put him into a deep sleep during his third imprisonment, confident in the belief that ‘he’ll never return to his full senses as long as this powder is working in his brain’.\(^{319}\) Her deployment of these items is in keeping with her characterisation in the *Lancelot*, particularly her manipulation of its hero in her attempts to avenge herself on Guinevere. As the text unfolds, her attitude toward Lancelot proves increasingly paradoxical. Morgan claims that he is ‘the man she most hated in the world’, but also that ‘she loved him as much as a woman could love a man for his great beauty’, and ‘she was very sad that he refused to love her, because she did not hold him in prison out of hatred, but hoped to vanquish him through persistence’.\(^{320}\)

Much of Morgan’s hope for revenge on Guinevere centres on Arthur discovering the adulterous relationship between the queen and Lancelot. She initially sends ‘a very intelligent maiden’ to court with the ring she has stolen from Lancelot (initially described as a gift from the Lady of the Lake, but as a love-token from Guinevere later on in the text), claiming that he has admitted ‘to a base and horrible sin: that he had long brought shame to his lord, here present, and to his wife’. However, the Queen claims that it was ‘never a guilty love’ and Arthur seems curiously unconcerned by the news.\(^{321}\) In Lancelot’s third imprisonment he paints a series of pictures on the wall of his prison depicting his relationship with the queen. Morgan immediately sees her opportunity to reveal the relationship to Arthur, ‘I’ll see to it that my brother Arthur


comes here, and I’ll show him the facts about Lancelot and the queen’. Morgan does indeed explain the pictures to Arthur in the Mort Artu section of the Vulgate Cycle. Here, however, Arthur stays with Morgan by chance rather than by her design. Although the description reminds the reader of the events of the Lancelot in as much as we are reminded that ‘Lancelot had once been imprisoned there for two winters and a summer by the treacherous Morgan’, she is ‘overjoyed’ at the prospect of Arthur staying at her house, but does not seem to relish her revelation of Guinevere’s infidelity.

Indeed, she wonders whether she should reveal the paintings to him at all:

Morgan was thinking intently about King Arthur, for she wanted to be certain that he knew all about Lancelot and the queen’s affair; but on the other hand she feared that if she revealed the truth and if Lancelot heard that the king had learned it from her, nothing could prevent him from killing her. For a long time that night, she considered whether to tell him or remain silent. For if she told him, she would be placing herself in mortal danger should Lancelot ever find out; but if she concealed it she would never again have such a good opportunity to tell him.

This timid Morgan who seems afraid of Lancelot is completely at odds with the powerful, decisive Morgan of the Lancelot, who is, in fact, the one that makes Lancelot afraid. Even when Lancelot is blatant in his hatred for her, ‘So help me God, I swear

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324 Lacy, Lancelot-Grai, IV, p. 106; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, p. 237.
that if you weren’t a woman, I’d see to it that you’d never harm another knight errant or worthy man, for your body harbours nothing but disloyalty and treason’, Morgan threatens him, ‘Be on your way now and rest assured I’ll take the first opportunity that comes my way to do you ill.’ This causes Lancelot to scurry away, ‘fearful as he was of Morgan’s deceitfulness and charms’.325 He has good reason to avenge himself on Morgan, and by the time of his third imprisonment he is only restrained from exacting his revenge by his ‘love for King Arthur and because she was a woman’.326 This is a far cry from his reaction when he accidentally overturns Morgan’s bed when he first meets her, when he is ‘so ashamed that he barely dared to look at her, for of all the knights in the world he was the one most unwilling to wrong any lady or maiden’.327 However, Morgan does seem to gain a new appreciation for Lancelot when he breaks through the bars of his prison with his bare hands, ‘Have you ever seen such marvels as that devil performed, breaking such strong iron bars with the force of his bare hands? Upon my word, no man ever wrought such devilry!’328 In fact, she is so impressed that she shows Arthur when he comes to stay, who refers to Lancelot’s feat as the ‘greatest sorcery’.329

Reassured by Arthur’s promises, Morgan reveals the full truth which informs the paintings, as ‘she hated Lancelot more than anyone in the world, because she knew the queen loved him. And while the king was there with her, she did not stop urging him to

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328 Carroll, Lancelot-Grail, III, p. 225; Micha, Lancelot, V, p. 64.
avenge his shame’. Morgan’s family background is crucial here; Arthur admits that ‘Agravain himself told me this same thing the other day, but I didn’t believe him; instead, I thought he was lying’. However, Morgan plays on the close familial relationship between herself and the king, ‘I ought to love you as much as is humanly possible ... I am your closest relative’. The reality of Morgan’s actual affection for Arthur remains a moot point; her overwhelming motivation is her hatred of Guinevere, and in contradistinction to the final comment on the matter in the Lancelot section, ‘she hated Lancelot more than anyone in the world, because she knew the queen loved him’. However, Arthur is convinced of her sisterly affection, as ‘he jumped joyfully out of bed and told her that he was very happy that God had lead him to her,’ and accepts her explanation of the paintings as the truth. Yet Arthur has convinced himself that Lancelot and Guinevere are not having an affair on his return to court, although ‘there was never again a time when he did not consider the queen more suspect than before’. Indeed, Arthur asks her to return to court with him, but she refuses, saying that ‘when I leave here, I will most certainly go to the Isle of Avalon, where the women live who know all the world’s magic’. It is these women, presumably, who appear on a ship at the end of the text to escort Arthur on his final voyage. In keeping with his acceptance of Morgan’s sincerity as a loving sister when she shows him Lancelot’s wall paintings, he is reassured by her presence in the company of these women:

331 Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, pp. 106-7; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, pp. 238-41.
333 Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 106; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, pp. 239-41.
334 Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 110; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, p. 248.
335 Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 106; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, p. 238.
The first among them held Morgan, the sister of king Arthur, by the hand and began to beckon to the king. And the king, as soon as he saw his sister Morgan, immediately rose from the ground where he was sitting and went aboard the ship.336

Here we can discern the influence of the depiction of Avalon in the *Vita* and the chronicle tradition, where it is associated with Morgan and magical women.337 However, in keeping with her new position as Arthur’s sister and her previous characterisation in the text, Morgan is not actually one of the women of Avalon. Yet the descriptions of her as one who ‘knew more about witchcraft and spells than any other woman’,338 and as one of ‘the three women in the world who knew the most about enchantments and charms’,339 serve to remind us of her affinity with the women of Avalon. Indeed, the author comments on the ‘many people (there was no dearth of fools at that time through the countryside)’ who ‘never spoke of her as a woman but rather called her Morgan the Goddess’.340 This is a reiteration of the concept of the *dea quædam phantastica* which appears in the *Speculum ecclesiae* of Gerald of Wales. Although the author is happy to acknowledge the existence of magical women, he refuses to entertain the notion of them as goddesses. Indeed, the two principal magical women of the Vulgate Cycle, Morgan and the Lady of the Lake, have both acquired their magic from the same source: their relationship with Merlin. Merlin’s powers are

placed in a specifically Christian context, as although he is described as the son of an incubus in the *Historia regum Brittaniae*,\textsuperscript{341} Robert de Boron ‘drew upon Christian tradition by making the sire a devil in hell, motivated not merely by sexual desire but by a complicated plot to circumvent the mother’s natural goodness and piety to create the Antichrist’.\textsuperscript{342} The plan is undermined by Merlin’s baptism, but his powers are still ascribed to his demonic parentage (and the power of God). By contrast, the magical women of the Vulgate Cycle may possess arcane knowledge and magical powers up to a point, but are not all-powerful goddesses, and it is ignorant folly to believe that this could be the case. Thus it should come as no surprise that Arthur is categorically described as dead at the end of the text. He affirms he ‘was right to think that my death was fast approaching,’\textsuperscript{343} and assures Girflet that they will not meet again. Girflet later discovers a tomb, this time with the inscription ‘HERE LIES KING ARTHUR, WHO BY HIS VALOUR CONQUERED TWELVE KINGDOMS’, and Arthur’s identity is confirmed by a hermit who notes that ‘some ladies whom I don’t know brought him here’.\textsuperscript{344} The otherworldly allure of Morgan does not prove sufficiently strong for the author of the *Morte Artu* to reject the reality of Arthur’s death; rather, he categorically rejects the possibility of a return from Avalon.

Although the *Suite du Merlin* falls chronologically between the *Merlin* and the *Lancelot*, it is generally accepted that it was the last work in the Vulgate Cycle to be written:

\textsuperscript{344} Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, p. 156; Sommer, *Vulgate*, VI, p. 381.
The *Suite du Merlin*, also known as the Vulgate *Suite*, is the last component to be added to the *Lancelot-Graal*. In the manuscripts it is placed on principle between the *Merlin* and the *Lancelot*, where it fulfils its most obvious function of linking the two works and bringing the *Cycle* to completion. It is a lengthy narrative that owes its existence to the fact that the *Merlin* and the *Lancelot* were composed roughly ten years apart, before the idea of a cyclic ensemble required the connection.345

Morgan appears in several instances in the *Suite*. She is used as a point of reference in the description of Carvile, the sister of Hardogoban. By ranking her second only to Morgan and Vivianne, the author is keen to make a point about her superior levels of knowledge and power. Once again, Morgan is described as *la suer le roy artus* (‘the sister of King Arthur’), in keeping with the role she assumes in the *Merlin*.346 Her association with Vivianne is also relevant, given that these two figures are united by Merlin’s training. However, in such later texts as the Post-Vulgate *Suite*, this relationship is developed into a bitter rivalry.

Morgan is frequently referred to in the *Suite* as a *boine clergesse* (‘good woman clerk’).347 She is ‘a woman of wondrous learning’, who knows ‘much about astrology’, which reminds us of the *Merlin* where astrology is again specifically mentioned as one of her achievements. In fact, the same phrasing is used when describing her cognomen, ‘she learned so well that afterwards she was called Morgan the Fay, sister of King Arthur, because of the wonders she worked throughout the

However, the source of Morgan’s great knowledge is significantly altered in the *Suite*, where she has a relationship with Merlin and he teaches her the arcane knowledge on which her fame rests. She is actually described as a *clergesse* on two occasions before she meets Merlin, which presumably follows the *Merlin* in allowing her to achieve a high level of education at the nunnery. However, upon meeting Merlin, ‘she grew so close to him and came around him so much that she found out who he was. He taught her many wonders in astrology and necromancy, and she kept them all in her mind’. This appropriation of Morgan’s magic by Merlin would appear to serve as a bridge between the highly intelligent and scholarly, but non-magical Morgan of the *Merlin*, and the highly magical Morgan of the *Lancelot*, who is able to conjure up a magical valley and all manner of other tricks to torment unsuspecting worthy knights. Morgan’s instruction by Merlin is also mentioned in the *Lancelot*, but her convent education is passed over in silence. The *Suite* combines the two Morgans whereby her well-established reputation as a *boine clergesse* precedes her, but that Merlin significantly expanded her education, especially the dark art of necromancy.

Morgan’s relationship with Guiomar is also developed in the *Suite*. When he is introduced to the reader as a messenger, the author recapitulates the nature of their relationship for his audience:

> He was the one on whose behalf the knights of the Round Table went through such hardship for the harm Queen Guenevere did him because of the great love

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Morgan, King Arthur’s sister, had for him; she loved him so much that Guenevere cast much blame on her, just as the story will tell you later.\textsuperscript{350}

Here, as in the \textit{Lancelot}, Morgan is not so much to blame for Guiomar’s hardship as Guinevere, and the section that describes their relationship in greater detail is also sympathetic to Morgan. However, Morgan’s hatred for Guinevere stems from the queen’s efforts to separate her from Guiomar, ‘Morgan began to hate her for it and afterwards did many troublesome things to her, and she cast such blame on her that it was not forgotten for as long as she lived’.\textsuperscript{351} Furthermore, the chronology of events is different in the \textit{Suite}; in the \textit{Lancelot}, it is Morgan’s pregnancy by Guiomar that prompts her to go to Merlin, whereas in the \textit{Suite}, she has already come under the influence of Merlin before she meets Guiomar, although the text implies that she receives further lessons, ‘And later he taught her a great deal more about it, just as the story will recount to you later.’\textsuperscript{352} By contrast, in terms of her relationship with Arthur we are told that ‘to the man she ought to have loved best she brought the worst harm and such great guilt that people talked about it afterwards for as long as she lived’.\textsuperscript{353}

This reference does not refer to anything that actually happens in the Vulgate Cycle; rather, it seems to anticipate Morgan’s antipathy to Arthur in the Post-Vulgate \textit{Suite}. Given that the \textit{Suite} was composed later than the rest of the Vulgate Cycle, this could imply that the author was aware of the description of Morgan in the Post-Vulgate \textit{Suite}. Moreover, elsewhere in the \textit{Suite} we hear that Arthur and Morgan are delighted to see


each other, ‘they rejoiced with great gladness, because they had not been together for some time. And they kissed one another like brothers and sisters’. In terms of the description of Morgan herself, the author of the Suite presents us with a complicated mixture of praise and censure. She is ‘a young lady, very cheerful and merry, but her face was sombre; she had a rounded build, not too thin and not too plump’:

She was quite clever and comely in body and in features; she stood straight and was wonderfully pleasing and a good singer ... she had the fairest head of any suited for a woman, the most beautiful hands, and wondrously well-made shoulders ... Her skin was softer then millet. And she had yet another quality that must not be skipped over, for she had a sweet, soft way of talking, and she was well spoken.

This is in direct opposition to the Lancelot where she is described as ugly, but it mirrors the Vita Merliniti where we hear that ‘her beauty surpasses that of her sisters’. The Suite also attributes to her a variety of skills, apart from her singing voice, ‘She was the best worker with her hands that anyone knew about in any land’, and ‘the cleverest of all’, which is bulwarked by the references to her extended periods of instruction under Merlin. However, she is also described as lascivious by nature, which echoes the Lancelot as ‘she was the most lustful woman in all Great Britain and the lewdest’.

357 Geoffrey of Monmouth, Life of Merlin, pp. 100-1, l. 919.
The dichotomous nature of her character is emphasized, ‘as long as she was in her right mind, she was more courteous than any, but when she was angry with anyone, there was no need in trying to reconcile them’. This dichotomy allows for a Morgan who is not only wise and beneficent, but also the vindictive shrew of the Lancelot. Thus, the Suite makes use of both the Merlin and the Lancelot in its depiction of Morgan, but its attempts to reconcile disparate material are not always entirely successful.

The Post-Vulgate Cycle is both a development and a condensation of the Vulgate Cycle. This is particularly evident in the depiction of Morgan who is recast as an enemy to Arthur in the Post-Vulgate Suite, although this role dissipates in the Post-Vulgate Queste and Morte, where she appears as his ally and Lancelot’s enemy because of his betrayal of Arthur. According to Fanni Bogdanow, the Post-Vulgate Cycle presents ‘a far more unified whole than the Vulgate’. However, this is not the case in the depiction of Morgan. The author would seem to struggle between his recasting of Morgan as Arthur’s foe and her role in the Vulgate Cycle as his ally, albeit strongly opposed to Lancelot and Guinevere. In the later elements of the text, which draw more directly on the content of the Vulgate Cycle, her role becomes increasingly nebulous.

According to Martha Asher, ‘The Post-Vulgate author seems to have begun as a copyist, transcribing the History of the Holy Grail and the prose reworking of Robert de Boron’s Merlin from the Vulgate with no important changes’. However, Morgan appears in the Post-Vulgate Suite with her mother Igrayne as a single woman, implying that the author was not aware of, or had forgotten, her earlier marriage to Nentres.

Although he appears in the *Merlin*, Nentres is not actually mentioned in either the *Suite* or the *Lancelot*. Given that his existence would have considerably complicated her characterization in the *Lancelot*, the author of the *Suite* may have chosen to ignore his existence. In the Post-Vulgate *Suite* it is Arthur who arranges her marriage to King Urien:

King Urien asked him for his sister Morgan for his wife. He gave her to him willingly, for he could not have married her to a better man in his land. With this, he gave her a great part of his kingdom, including a castle called Taruc, which lay on the sea and was stronger than any other. King Urien of Garlot held a large, marvellous wedding and was delighted that he had married so well.362

Arthur’s actions on behalf of his half-sister give him an immediate involvement in her life, and a level of personal interaction with her husband that is not present in other Arthurian texts. We are told that Morgan remained at Arthur’s court after her marriage, but that ‘King Urien visited Arthur’s court frequently for love of his wife, who was there constantly, day and night.’ At this juncture ‘King Arthur loved her well’, especially because ‘she was so adroit at many things’. However, the author goes on to state that Arthur came to hate ‘her mortally, as this story tells, and rightfully, for she would have had him killed’.363 Morgan’s constant presence at court as a young woman ensures that she plays a more prominent role in the earlier part of the text. Moreover, the author gives us a detailed account of her relationship with Merlin. The text follows the *Lancelot* and the *Merlin* in describing her acquisition of knowledge.

under his tutelage. We learn that she initially sees some candles enchanted by Merlin and ‘thought she would make his acquaintance and learn enough of what he knew that she would be able to do some of what she wanted everywhere’.\textsuperscript{364} Her relationship with Merlin is quite exploitative; once she had settled on this course of action, she ‘begged him to teach her what he knew, on her promise that she would do for him whatever he dared ask of her’. Because of his infatuation with her, which anticipates his later fascination with the Lady of the Lake, he agrees willingly, ‘There is nothing you could ask of me that I wouldn’t do if I could.’ However, as soon as she has acquired his knowledge, ‘she drove Merlin away from her, because she saw that he loved her excessively, and she told him that she would have him tortured and killed if he came near her again’.\textsuperscript{365} This is an extension of the description in the \textit{Lancelot}, where ‘he loved her more than anything else,’ but, as in the \textit{Lancelot}, it is her problematic relationships with Arthur’s worthy knights that prove crucial to her subsequent opposition to Arthur.\textsuperscript{366} However, Merlin’s relationship with Morgan does compromise his support of Arthur in the Vulgate \textit{Suite}. When Morgan steals Arthur’s sword and scabbard, because of his abiding love for her, ‘even though she had driven him away’, he warns her of the king’s wrath, saying ‘You are dead and shamed’.\textsuperscript{367} Merlin’s penchant for Morgan presages his weakness for Ninianne; he also turns a blind eye to her treachery, which leads to her eventual imprisonment of him. When Ninianne assumes Merlin’s role as Arthur’s protector, she has no interest in protecting Morgan, who does not in any case need her protection, as the text evinces. Merlin’s magic is the


source of Morgan’s magic, but she is depicted as considerably worse than Merlin. As her son Yvain notes:

I would rather be called the son of a devil like Merlin, for no-one ever saw that Merlin’s father was a devil, but I have seen you both devil and true enemy. I was conceived in you and issued from you, so I can truly affirm that I am more the son of a devil than Merlin.  

This comment is not prompted by Morgan’s use of magic; rather by her evil actions as the text unfolds. Here, magic, like knightly prowess, is depicted as an acquired skill, as demonstrated by the treatment of Merlin’s tutelage of Morgan in ‘the science and art of necromancy’, which can be used for the purposes of good or evil. The Post-Vulgate Suite concurs with the Vulgate Cycle in its depiction of Morgan’s education and the less than supernatural origins of her magic, but it exaggerates the inherent evil of Morgan’s character. Moreover, it situates her in an unambiguously moral context which equates the beautiful and the good:

Unquestionably she was a beautiful girl up to the time she began to learn enchantments and magic charms; but once the enemy entered her and she was inspired with sensuality and the devil, she lost her beauty so completely that she became very ugly, nor did anyone think her beautiful after that, unless he was under a spell.

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However, the acquisition of magical powers is not entirely to blame for her wickedness, as even before she had met Merlin, ‘She was malicious and much given to gossip and evil thoughts’. However, Merlin fosters her capacity for evil by entrusting her with a prophecy concerning the deaths of Arthur and Gawain, which she placed in a tomb, but cannot consult because ‘it is not permitted for a woman to know the death of either the king or Gawain before it happens’. The author of text informs us that ‘much evil happened from this tomb’ without giving us any specific details, or mentioning it again, which serves to heighten Morgan’s reputation for maleficence. This uncompromisingly moral context also informs the general threat she presents to Arthurian chivalry. The Post-Vulgate Suite explores the relationship between Arthur and Morgan in significantly greater detail than the previous texts under discussion. This is mainly due to the shift in focus ‘from Lancelot to Arthur’, who bears the brunt of Morgan’s characteristic antipathy to the hero of the hour, resulting in his betrayal by a member of his own family, even though ‘the king trusted her more than anyone else in the world’. Arthur entrusts Morgan with Excalibur and its scabbard, which ‘is worth more than ten such swords, for it is made of a leather which has the virtue that a man who wears it will never lose blood or receive a mortal wound, if he is armed rightfully’. Morgan’s lover-knight is desirous of these items, ‘I’ll never be happy until I have it’, so Morgan has a counterfeit made which is intended for Arthur. This reflects the episode in the Lancelot when she steals Lancelot’s ring and replaces it with

a replica, which he is not able to tell from the original. However, in the Post-Vulgate *Suite*, she has to delegate the work to a craftsman, and is not, in fact, then able to tell the difference between the two swords herself. As in the *Lancelot*, her actions seem to be motivated by the intensity of her feelings for her lover-knight, whom ‘she loved ... above all men’, but this is coupled with a virulent hatred for Arthur that is never entirely explained.  

The lover-knight reveals Morgan’s plot to Arthur, declaring that ‘Morgan, your sister, hates you; I don’t know why it is, but this hatred is so very great that she seeks your death always in every way she can.’ We might assume that the lover-knight is lying, engaged in an attempt to exonerate himself, but the narrator informs us that ‘by trickery Morgan made peace with her brother whose death she sought with all her might’. We are later informed that her hatred of Arthur stems from her own inherently evil nature:

Morgan, the story tells, hated her brother King Arthur above all men, not because he had wronged her in any way but because it is customary for bad, false people always to hate honourable ones and bear them everlasting resentment. Morgan unquestionably hated King Arthur because she saw that he was more honourable and gracious than all the others of her kindred.

Here, the author eschews the detailed explanation of Morgan’s motivation in the *Lancelot*; it seems sufficient to state she is intrinsically evil; thus opposed to the intrinsic worthiness embodied in Arthur. We are, however, given a sense that her evil

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actions are motivated by love, or lust at the very least. Her first action against Arthur is motivated by the entreaties of her lover-knight, just as her first attempt on Arthur’s life stems from her desire to usurp Arthur with her favourite, Accolon of Gaul, ‘She loved him so madly that she desired to kill her husband and her brother, for she thought she could make Accolon king, either by the devil’s help or by magic or by entreaty of the nobles of Great Britain’. Accolon initially appears to be entirely innocent of this scheme; he is as taken aback as Arthur and Uriens when, having boarded a ship of maidens, on awaking ‘they found themselves in such different places that they could hardly believe that they were themselves’. This instance of Morgan’s magic not only borrows elements from both abductions of Lancelot in the *Lancelot*, but also her traditional appearance on the *nef des femmes* at Arthur’s death. Accolon immediately suspects a diabolic scheme:

‘I believe,’ he said, ‘that it was an illusion or a devil that appeared to us, when we thought they were women, and I think they were the devil’s ministers who served us so nobly, for all the ladies in the world could not serve us as well as we were served’.382

However, he is quick to forget his suspicions when he receives the sword from Morgan. Although the text is emphatic in its vindication of Accolon in the ensuing conflict with Arthur, noting that he is unaware of his opponent’s identity, Accolon is aware that the sword has been stolen from Arthur and that Morgan’s intentions are to murder her

brother, ‘Queen Morgan gave it to me because I was supposed to kill her brother King Arthur with it.’ Thus Arthur has full knowledge of Morgan’s treachery, which motivates his thirst for revenge, ‘I will take such a vengeance on her as never before was taken on a false woman’.\textsuperscript{383} From this point in the text, her sole motivation is to exact revenge on Arthur, rather than a general antipathy towards his goodness, combined with a desire to advance the prospects of the man she loves. This is in contrast to the \textit{Lancelot}, where her devotion to Guiomar, or her unnamed lover-knight, or her mixed feelings for Lancelot himself, dictate her actions alone. Indeed, Arthur is not her only innocent victim in the Post-Vulgate \textit{Suite}; she also tries to kill her husband, Uriens. Unusually for Morgan, there is no magic or trickery involved; she sends a maid to fetch a blade, then lays down the challenge to ‘come forward and see a king’s daughter wield a sword.’ However, Yvain not only prevents her from murdering Uriens, but also confirms her infamy, ‘they tell the truth, the knights of this country, who say you work only sorrow and treachery and work by the devil’s arts in everything you do’.\textsuperscript{384} Here, the author would seem to suggest that Morgan’s bad reputation precedes her, given that her theft of Arthur’s sword and scabbard, followed by the murder of the craftsman who replicated them, have been kept secret or dismissed as lies. This accusation by Morgan’s own son serves to emphasise her lack of familial loyalty; she has tried to kill both her brother and her husband, in contrast to Arthur’s preferential treatment of his nephews later on in the text. Morgan’s quick-thinking reminder to Yvain that if he punishes her and her attempted crime is revealed he ‘will be thought ignoble’ due to their family connection, reveals the importance of kinship, and


Morgan’s ability to use the expectations of society to her advantage. When Arthur sends Accolon’s body to court with the message ‘never was treason so well avenged as this will be’, Morgan is able to deflect suspicion through her reaction, ‘when the others, who did not know how the affair had gone, heard how boldly she rescued herself, they did not think that she was guilty of anything, because of her cheerful manner, and they all turned it into game and amusement’. Even though she ‘had as much grief in her heart as a woman could have,’ she does not allow her emotions to overcome her. Instead, she attempts revenge on Arthur by stealing the sword and scabbard for a second time, but is only able to procure the scabbard. She plunges it into a lake, echoing Arthur’s acquisition of the sword and scabbard, and anticipating his final relinquishment of Excalibur in the Post-Vulgate Morte. Morgan’s disposal of the scabbard is motivated by Arthur’s pursuit of her party, but also the desire to preclude any future use, ‘I will put it, for the love of him, in such a place that it will never profit king or knight.’ We are told in passing that it was of assistance to Gawain in the future, but this episode is not included in the Post-Vulgate Cycle as it stands. Arthur’s scabbard is, henceforth, lost to him, and we are reminded of the threat this loss holds for him, ‘Morgan, his sister, stole it to give it to her lover, who was to fight King Arthur. And because she stole it, the king might have been killed, had it not been for Merlin’s foresight.’ But in the Post-Vulgate Morte, Arthur does, in fact, sustain a potentially mortal wound at the hands of Mordred in the final battle, which would not have posed such a serious threat if Arthur had retained the scabbard in the Post-Vulgate Suite.

Here, Morgan’s fear of Arthur’s retribution echoes her fear of Lancelot’s vengeance in the *Morte*. This leads her to perform a striking piece of magic in petrifying herself and her followers, ‘Then she cast her spell and turned them all into stone.’ Arthur is so impressed that he assumes this is the Lord’s doing and it is wondrous in his eyes, ‘She never did anything but evil, and at the end God taught her a lesson, for he has confounded her and all those who followed her.’ 390 That Arthur was mistaken regarding the source of this unholy power is used by Gawain in the Post-Vulgate *Queste* to justify his dismissal of yet another magical feat:

Gawain, exceedingly sad at what had happened among so many good men, answered, ‘My lord, you shouldn’t believe everything they tell you. Know that it’s all an illusion and deceit, the greatest you’ve seen in a long time. Don’t you remember when you saw Queen Morgan and all her company turned into stone? Therefore you shouldn’t believe this.’ 391

Arthur’s assumption that this act of petrifaction is an act of God suggests that he underestimates Morgan’s powers. Indeed, her gender would appear to have a direct impact on her status as a practitioner of magic in the Post-Vulgate *Suite*. When she initially persuades Merlin to accept her as a pupil, she measures capabilities in terms of womankind, ‘I ask you to teach me so much magic that no women in this land will know more than I.’ 392 It would appear that Merlin acquiesces, but Morgan’s superlative status is undermined by his relationship with Ninianne. She proves to be

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Merlin’s most powerful protégé, so powerful that Morgan is unable to match her, never mind overcome the apotropaic defences created to protect Arthur:

‘If I could manipulate him by magic, as I can others’, she said, ‘he would never see Camelot again, for I would kill him at once. But I cannot do that, for a maiden who has recently come to this country has so fortified him, for fear of me alone, that no spell can hurt him as long as she stays in this land.’

The author of the Post-Vulgate Suite builds on the opposition between Morgan and Ninianne established in the Lancelot, where they do not purposely thwart the actions of each other. However, in this text, Ninianne, having imprisoned Merlin, assumes his mantle as Arthur’s protector, being specifically suited to this role, given her magical training. As Arthur notes, ‘I should love her more than my sister, for she has been more loyal to me.’ Ninianne’s attitude to the benighted Merlin is similar to that of Morgan; she is merely using him to acquire knowledge, and claims that ‘I will guard you as I guard my own person, for I love you more than any other man in the world.’ In reality, ‘she hated nothing else so much as she hated him’. Whereas Morgan merely threatens Merlin, forcing him to leave her alone, partly through her connection to Arthur, Ninianne’s course of action is a great deal more drastic. Although she claims that ‘I haven’t the heart to see him killed’, she actually devises a much

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crueller death for him to ‘avenge myself better’ by imprisoning him within a tomb. Ninianne’s actions are prompted by the changed nature of Merlin; in the Vulgate Cycle he is respectful of his love’s wishes, however, in the Post-Vulgate Suite ‘he did not much want to be with her without knowing her carnally and doing with her all that man does with woman’. Ninianne ‘knew well that he wanted nothing but her virginity, and she hated him mortally for it and sought his death by any means she could’. Here, Merlin’s imprisonment is radically different to that in the Lancelot, where Merlin is willingly imprisoned, the Lady of the Lake loves him, and only a ‘few days or nights went by when she was not with him’. Merlin’s character is denigrated here, in line with his demonic parentage and the increased focus on the moral aspect of Arthurian narrative. Although Ninianne is shown in a good light because of her relationship with Arthur, she is similar to Morgan in her vindictive reaction to those whom she hates. Ninianne intervenes in the conflict between Arthur and Accolon, enabling Arthur to regain his own sword and scabbard, and triumph over Morgan’s usurper.

The polarity between the two women is also emphasized when Morgan sends a magic mantle, ‘beautiful and rich in appearance’, to court. Ninianne warns Arthur of its effects, ‘This mantle is so efficacious that anyone who puts it on will fall dead the minute he puts it around his neck.’ She advises him to make the messenger wear it, as a punishment to Morgan, ‘if she dies of it, Morgan will be angrier than at anything else that could happen to her, for she loves her with a very great love’. By contrast, Ninianne does not succumb to love. The magic mantle is a motif that appears in earlier

399 Pickens, Lancelot-Grail, I, p. 417; Sommer, Vulgate, II, p. 452.
romances, generally as a mantle that cannot be worn by unchaste women.\(^{401}\) The mantle that kills its recipient would appear to be derived from the magic cloak that Medea sends to her rival.\(^{402}\) The association of Morgan with beautiful garments is, however, already well-established. We may recall the ‘green paille’ in Chrétien de Troyes, and in the \textit{Merlin} she makes ‘a headpiece for her sister, the wife of King Lot’; this interest in textiles, allied to her aptitude for malevolent magic would make the romance \textit{topos} of the deadly cloak a suitable choice on the part of the author.\(^{403}\) The name given by the messenger, ‘the lady of the Enchanted Isle,’ would also appear to refer to Morgan’s role in the Post-Vulgate \textit{Morte} as one of the women from Avalon.\(^{404}\)

The post-Vulgate \textit{Queste} follows on from the \textit{Suite du Merlin} in its depiction of Morgan. It not only refers to her deception of Arthur when she turns herself and her followers to stone, as described above, but also plays on several other demonic and sinful associations already noted in descriptions of Morgan, even by herself. Indeed, in attempting to murder Uriens, she claims that ‘the devil had so overcome me that I didn’t know what I was doing’.\(^{405}\) Given the explicitly religious focus of the Post-Vulgate \textit{Queste}, it is no surprise that Morgan’s demonic associations are highlighted. Lancelot dreams that Morgan drags him to hell:

\(^{402}\) See above, p. 31.
it seemed to him that he saw before him Morgan, King Arthur’s sister, ugly and fearsome; she seemed to him as if she had just emerged from hell, and she wore no clothing except a wolf’s pelt, which covered her poorly. She groaned as if she were wounded, and Lancelot, who recognised her easily as Morgan, looked at her and saw that more than a thousand devils were with her, and each one laid a hand on her to hold her better.

One said to another, ‘Let’s go as fast as we can.’
But however they tormented her, she seized Lancelot by the hand and gave him to those who guarded her, saying, ‘Keep him well, for this is one of your knights’. 406

The description of Morgan as ‘ugly and fearsome’ echoes the Post-Vulgate Suite, where she is described as beautiful in her youth, that is, until her pursuit of ‘sensuality and the devil’ render her ‘very ugly’. 407 She is, therefore, a fitting minion for the demons of hell, who claim the soul of Lancelot because of his relationship with Guinevere. This relationship is not only sinful due to its sensual aspect, but also because it leads to Lancelot’s betrayal of his sworn bond to Arthur. As the author of the Queste evinces repeatedly, Lancelot’s lapse occurs in spite of his best intentions, but Morgan actively works toward Arthur’s death and downfall in the Post-Vulgate Cycle. Her principal motivation, initially at least, is invariably the advancement of her lovers. However, Morgan is generally more sinful than Lancelot, even if their moral decline is rooted in the same sin of luxuria. That the author of the Post-Vulgate Queste emphasizes the

commonality of their sin in the dream sequence is in keeping with her characterization in the *Lancelot*, and, indeed, her defining characteristics in the *Roman de Troie*.

The remainder of Morgan’s appearances in the Post-Vulgate *Queste*, and indeed, the Post-Vulgate *Morte*, draws more directly on her depiction in the *Lancelot* and the *Morte*, but seem incongruous given the moral condemnation of Morgan that characterizes the rest of the Post-Vulgate Cycle. At one point, Morgan invites her three nephews, Gawain, Mordred and Gaheriet, to her home to rest until they are healed of their wounds, and ‘they went to embrace her’. Here, Morgan once again assumes her traditional association with healing: we are told that ‘she saw to their wounds and injuries, as she knew a great deal about it’. However, given her antipathy to Arthur, which Gawain himself has already noted in his recollection of the incident in which she turned to stone, it seems unlikely that her nephews would be particularly pleased to see her, or that they would agree to go home with her. It is clear that the text draws on the events of the *Lancelot* as we hear that the house is ‘where Lancelot had been prisoner two winters and a summer’, which, is not mentioned elsewhere in the Post-Vulgate Cycle, which condenses much of the material about Lancelot. While the brothers take their ease in Morgan’s house, Mordred discovers ‘by chance’ the murals painted by Lancelot depicting scenes from his relationship with Guinevere. Morgan is initially reluctant to explain the paintings, declaring that Mordred would ‘be more deeply shocked than by anything else you ever heard, nor would it please you, for you’d find your dishonour there openly’.408 However, she soon relents, claiming that her hatred of Lancelot stems from this betrayal of Arthur:

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I’ve hated him mortally since I knew it, and I’ll hate him as long as I live, for he couldn’t cause me greater grief than by bringing shame on such a noble man as my brother and by loving his wife and lying with her ... Because he isn’t true to King Arthur his lord, I hate him and will always hate him, and you should hate him even more mortally, for you, to the extent that you are of higher rank, are more dishonoured by this.409

This is a total reversal of the characterization of Morgan up to this point in the Post-Vulgate Cycle, but it sets the tone for her later appearances. From this point onward in the narrative, she is regarded as a reliable source of information concerning the whereabouts and even the identity of Arthur’s son, Arthur the Less, and she is confirmed in her traditional role at Arthur’s death.410 It is doubtful whether Arthur would be greatly comforted by Morgan’s assurances that his son is alive and well, given her earlier unveiling as his sworn enemy, but the author is recalling a similar episode in the Morte. As in the Morte, Morgan wants action once the murals have been revealed; in this instance, she entreats Arthur’s nephews, as opposed to Arthur himself, to make the affair public, ‘I conjure you by the faith you owe to me and the thing you love most in the world to tell my brother the truth about Lancelot and the queen.’411

Morgan’s depiction in the Post-Vulgate Morte is in keeping with her benevolent role in the latter stages of the Post-Vulgate Queste, but is startlingly at variance with her

previous expressions of hatred of Arthur. Arthur claims that ‘I know well that my death is fast approaching’, but, in fact, his death remains an open question in this text. He declares that ‘it isn’t fitting that anyone know the truth of my end’, and when Girflet opens Arthur’s grave to confirm it is indeed the king buried within, it contains ‘nothing except King Arthur’s helmet’.\textsuperscript{412} Thus, the author chooses not to comment on the death or possible return of Arthur, and the reader is left to make up their own mind. In fact, the author deliberately excises much of the detail surrounding Arthur’s passing in earlier accounts; Avalon is not mentioned, and although it is Morgan that persuades Arthur to board the bark, she makes no mention of healing or her intentions toward her brother. Given the conventional moral framework underpinning the Post-Vulgate Cycle, the suggestion of Arthur’s return is problematic from a Christian perspective; thus the author avoids the issue completely, shrouding the events of Arthur’s passing in mystery.

The Post-Vulgate Cycle incorporates elements of Morgan’s character and specific events described in the Vulgate Cycle, but expands and revamps them in keeping with the focus on Arthur rather than Lancelot, and the moral dimension of the work, particularly the quasi-religious aspects of knighthood. As Bogdanow and Trachsler point out, the Post-Vulgate Suite is characterized by ‘a constant preoccupation with sin’, reflected in the exploration of Morgan’s dichotomous appearance and reputation.\textsuperscript{413} However, midway through the Post-Vulgate Queste, the author appears to revert to a characterization of Morgan closer to that of the Vulgate Cycle than the demonic and anti-chivalric figure of the Post-Vulgate Suite and the early part of the Post-Vulgate Cycle.

\textsuperscript{412} Asher, Lancelot-Graal, V, pp. 306-7; Magne, Santo Graal, II, pp. 465-72.

Queste, particularly Lancelot’s dream of hell. By incorporating such episodes drawn directly from the Vulgate Cycle as the discovery of Lancelot’s murals and Arthur’s final voyage on the *nef des femmes*, the author portrays Morgan as a friend to Arthur and their nephews.

The Post-Vulgate Cycle is not the only group of texts that draws on the content of the Vulgate Cycle in its depiction of Morgan. In the Prose *Tristan*, Morgan forms part of a framework used to situate Tristan within the context of the Vulgate Cycle. Here, her attitude to Lancelot reflects that of the Vulgate Cycle:

> she hated him with a great hate, and on the one hand she loved him once and still she loved him, though this was against her own will, because she had seen him to be so beautiful, and on the other hand she hated him mortally because he had refused her. Thus she hated and loved Lancelot all at once.414

Similarly, Morgan’s hostility toward Guinevere is also related to her mixed feelings for Lancelot; it is particularly noted that Morgan wants to bring ‘shame and disgrace’ on Arthur’s queen by revealing her relationship with Lancelot because she views her as a rival.415 Morgan attempts to make their affair public on three separate occasions in the Prose *Tristan*. The first is taken from the *Lancelot*, that is, Morgan’s attempt to reveal his guilt by sending a ring to court with a maiden. As in the *Lancelot*, Arthur does not believe the maiden’s tale, dismissing it as a mere fable, concocted to cause discord between himself and the queen.416 Morgan’s second attempt to reveal their

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relationship involves sending a magic horn to Arthur’s court, ostensibly to test the chastity of all women, but primarily intended to prove Guinevere’s infidelity as ‘No lady who has dishonoured her husband and taken a lover outside her marriage will be able to drink from this horn without spilling wine all over herself.’ However, Lamorat waylays the messenger, and instead sends the horn to King Mark’s court in Cornwall. Iseult immediately questions the reliability of the test:

It may be a magic horn made in order to upset the noble ladies who haven’t acted in accordance with the wishes of the enchanter and enchantresses of Great Britain. Indeed, I’m sure it came from Great Britain, which is full of enchantments, and that it was sent to you with the intention of creating discord between you and me or between other good people in Cornwall.

This concern regarding the validity and provenance of the object mirrors Arthur’s dismissal of the damsel with the ring; both the courts of Arthur and Mark require more substantial proof against their queens and, perhaps more importantly, against the exceptional military prowess of Lancelot and Tristan. Moreover, of the three hundred women at court, only four are capable of drinking from the horn without spilling any of the wine. The barons join with Iseult in rejecting the validity of this test, claiming that it is a ‘poor reason’ to punish their wives as unfaithful. The horn as a test of chastity is a motif that appeared in earlier romances, most notably in Robert Biket’s *Lai du Cor*,

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418 Curtis, Romance of Tristan, p. 139; Curtis, Roman de Tristan, II, p. 132.

419 Curtis, Romance of Tristan, p. 140; cf. Curtis, Roman de Tristan, II, p. 133.
which dates to the late twelfth century.\footnote{In addition to Cross, ‘Chastity-Testing Horn and Mantle’, pp. 1-2; cf. Edmund Kurt Heller, ‘The Story of the Magic Horn: A Study in the Development of a Mediaeval Folk Tale’, Speculum 9 (1934), 38-50. 420} Thus the ascription of this donnée of the romance tradition to Morgan is in keeping with her well-established association with magical objects, and her consistent desire to expose Guinevere’s infidelity. Moreover, the redeployment of the horn to Cornwall not only demonstrates the similarity between the adulterous relationships which threaten to undermine both courts, but also emphasises the link between Lancelot and Tristan.

Morgan’s third and final attempt to expose Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship directly involves an unwitting Tristan in her scheme. She asks him to bear a shield at a tournament at Arthur’s court with the blazon of a knight with a king’s head under one foot and a queen’s head under the other.\footnote{Cf. Ménard, Roman de Tristan, III, p. 212. 421} This graphic symbolism mirrors Lancelot’s murals in the Vulgate Cycle, as revealed to Arthur by Morgan. Indeed, during his visit with Morgan, Tristan stays in the very same room as Lancelot and sees the murals.\footnote{Cf. Ménard, Roman de Tristan, III, pp. 208-9. 422} The parallelism between Tristan and Lancelot are further emphasized when Morgan goes on to inform him that he is her prisoner and will not be permitted to leave until he reveals his identity. Once she knows who he is, she is irritated at the thought of being obliged to release him, having promised him his freedom, but keeps her word in keeping with the romance custom of the don contraignant.\footnote{Cf. Ménard, Roman de Tristan, III, p. 207. Morgan had already established Tristan was not one of the knights of the Round Table, otherwise it is unlikely that she would have made such easy terms for his release. Cf. also Corinne Cooper-Deniau, ‘Culture clericale et motif du “don contraignant”. Contre-enquête sur la théorie de l’origine celtique de ce motif dans la littérature française du XIIe siècle et dans les romans arthuriens’, MA 111 (2005), 9-39. 423} Tristan is uncertain about the image on the shield, because he has his suspicions that the blazon is conceived
with malign intent. However, Morgan tells him that the device is derived from the arms of her father, whom she names as Uther to great ironic effect in this episode, and that she wants him to bear this shield, which would potentially destroy the harmony of Arthur’s realm, in memory of Uther.\textsuperscript{424} According to Larrington, ‘Morgan is Arthur’s full sister in the \textit{Tristan}; she invokes their adulterous father, begetter of Arthur in scandal and deception, to justify the device intended to reveal the queen’s adultery.’\textsuperscript{425} Yet if Morgan (and the audience) is aware that Uther is not actually her father, but is in fact responsible for the death of her father, then the scene is invested with an added dimension of bitter irony. The projected revelation of the blazon to Arthur’s court parallels the revelation of Lancelot’s murals in the \textit{Lancelot}, but while these wall paintings are invested with a sense of raw authenticity given the identity of the painter, the blazon is conceived with malign intent and fails to convince. Even Morgan’s ancillary plan of sending yet another maiden to Arthur’s court in the wake of Tristan, who tells Arthur directly that the blazon is representative of his dishonour and disgrace, is dismissed by the king.\textsuperscript{426}

Although Morgan’s primary concern, in keeping with the \textit{Lancelot}, is her pursuit of Lancelot, she also grows to hate Tristan. This antipathy is due initially to his defeat of the thirty knights deployed by Morgan to overcome Lancelot, but he also kills her lover, Huneson, later on in the text. Morgan is both sorrowful and angry at Huneson’s death, and immediately plans her revenge, sending a damsel to retrieve the lance that killed Huneson.\textsuperscript{427} Morgan finally gets her revenge when Tristan is killed by this very lance, later on in the text; we are told that Mark struck him down with a poisoned spear that

\textsuperscript{424} Cf. Ménard, \textit{Roman de Tristan}, III, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{425} \textit{King Arthur’s Enchantresses}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{427} Cf. Ménard, \textit{Roman de Tristan}, III, p. 217; the damsel retrieves the lance at p. 222.
Morgan had given him.\textsuperscript{428} This is the magical object that Morgan contributes to the narrative; the lance allows Mark to kill Tristan in a cowardly and unchivalrous manner, which makes the link between the malignity of Morgan and Mark abundantly clear. The underhand methods employed by Morgan throughout the text are an amplification of her role in the \textit{Lancelot}. Her emotional reactions are also consistent with those displayed in the \textit{Lancelot}, where the majority of her actions are prompted by revenge, for instance, the creation of the \textit{Val sanz Retour}, or sending Lancelot’s ring to court, and this is reflected in the \textit{Tristan}. In this text, the majority of her plots are aimed at Lancelot and Guinevere; it is only when Tristan specifically angers her that she takes action against him, but this action culminates in his cold-blooded, ignoble murder. Moreover, the incidental casualties who get caught in the traps she sets, do not seem to concern her.

Morgan also appears in \textit{Alixandre l’Orphelin}, which dates from the fifteenth century in its extant form, and does not exist independently, being intercalated into four manuscripts of the Prose \textit{Tristan}, four manuscripts of the \textit{Prophéties de Merlin}, as well as two miscellanies.\textsuperscript{429} As Paton points out, the sections dealing with Morgan ‘are substantially alike’ in all versions.\textsuperscript{430} Indeed, when we examine the portrayal of Morgan in this text, we can discern distinct similarities between her character and her portrayal in the earlier French romances. However, the author is selective, choosing characteristics and episodes that show Morgan in the worst possible light. In fact, some of her more positive attributes are modified by the author to produce an entirely debauched figure. The textual context is also important to the overall depiction of

\textsuperscript{428} Cf. Ménard, \textit{Roman de Tristan}, IX, p. 188.


\textsuperscript{430} \textit{Fairy Mythology}, p. 55.
Morgan. In the Prose Tristan, Morgan is a marginal figure whose principal importance lies in her interaction with a succession of knights, including the hero.\textsuperscript{431} In the Prophéties de Merlin, the intercalated sections form part of a larger narrative concerning Morgan, which is much more extensively concerned with her as an individual. Her dealings with other women with magical powers are described in detail in an amplification of the episode in the Lancelot where she features as one of a group of such women who abduct Lancelot.

Morgan’s actions in the version of Alixandre l’Orphelin found in the Prose Tristan, which was known to Malory, are uncompromisingly evil, particularly with regard to Alexander himself. Here, the author presents us with an axis of evil between Mark and Morgan. Mark is undoubtedly the villain of the piece, and in murdering Alexander’s father, he provides the motivation for Alexander’s avengement. Moreover, his close association with Morgan does not reflect well on her. Morgan’s capture of Alexander is not only motivated by an account of his beauty and prowess given by one of her maidsens, but also by a letter from Mark who asks that if God or chance delivers Alexander into her arms, that she should not release him. Morgan does not leave the matter to God or chance, but sends her maidsens in pursuit of him, and having heard of a probable sighting, she sets off to capture him herself, mostly because she is intrigued by the description given by her maiden.\textsuperscript{432} This active pursuit epitomises Morgan’s depiction in the text; she takes the lead, revelling in the thrill of the chase, and controls the progression of events. Morgan’s lascivious intentions towards Alexander are explicitly stated by her cousin later on in the text, notwithstanding Alexander’s horror at the prospect of a relationship with her. He exclaims that he would rather cut off his

\textsuperscript{431} Cf. Pickford, Alixandre L’Orphelin, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

\textsuperscript{432} Cf. Alixandre L’Orphelin, pp. 10-12.
own testicles, than sleep with her, while in the *Prophéties de Merlin*, this disgust is qualified by comments on Morgan’s age and appearance. Here, she is described as *vielle* (old) and *laide* (ugly), which could refer to the corrupt state of her soul as well as the decrepit state of her body.

Indeed, her lascivious interest in Alexander and her subsequent capture of him are reminiscent of similar episodes in the *Lancelot*. Even the manner in which Morgan abducts the young knight by drugging him with a sleeping draught before carrying him off to Belle Garde, directly recalls repeated abductions of the hero in the *Lancelot*. In bestowing Morgan’s attentions on a horrified Alexander, the author is making a clear statement about Alexander’s status in comparison to some of the other knights of the Round Table. In his rejection of Morgan, he compares favourably with Lancelot and Tristan; it serves as a benchmark of his inherent worthiness. The author of *Alixandre l’Orphelin* is also clearly familiar with Morgan’s most famous role as healer, which he parodies in his depiction of her. On capturing Alexander, Morgan does not immediately heal his wounds, but deliberately makes them worse, thereby exerting her power over him. Under these conditions, she extracts a promise from him to do as she says. She forces him to abandon his plans to marry the maiden he loves, having won her hand by dint of his knightly prowess. Thus Morgan’s principal redeeming feature, which she retained even in such texts as the *Lancelot* and Post-Vulgate *Queste* where she is hardly depicted in a positive light, is modified to such an extent that becomes irredeemable. Alexander is finally able to escape from Morgan with the assistance of

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433 Cf. *Alixandre L’Orphelin*, p. 27.
437 Cf. *Alixandre L’Orphelin*, p. 15.
one of her maidens, and this detail is again reminiscent of the *Lancelot*, where the hero escapes from the enchantresses thanks to an obliging maiden. Ultimately, the author of *Alixandre l’Orphelin* deploys Morgan in a similar manner to that of the Prose *Tristan*; he reworks scenes and motifs from the Arthurian tradition to show his hero in a positive light.

Morgan appears in a wide variety of French texts, of which those discussed in this chapter form only a small selection. However, in considering the relationship between these texts, we can see that there are clear links between their individual portrayals of Morgan. Each of the authors builds upon the characteristics and motifs associated with Morgan as established by his predecessors; modulating the focus of her ire – the vice which ultimately defines her – in relation to the protagonist of the text. However, due to the sprawling, collaborative nature of the prose romance cycles, there is great variation in the character of Morgan, even within a single text, and whether we can count the Vulgate Cycle and the Post-Vulgate Cycle as single ‘texts’ is questionable. That Morgan undergoes several transformations as the French romance tradition evolves is beyond question; she is almost unrecognisable from the kindly fay of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita* by the time we encounter her as the epitome of feminine evil in *Alixandre l’Orphelin*. However, when we examine her development, text by text, we can see that the desire to rationalize Morgan, for good or for evil, is present from at least the time of Chrétien. Morgan’s inherent flexibility as a character owes much to her shadowy origins and it is this nebulous, protean quality which makes her such a useful foil for other characters, even in texts that are not explicitly Arthurian in terms of content from at least the time of Benoît de Sainte-Maure. Morgan is consistently refashioned throughout the French romance tradition as it develops over

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438 Cf. *Alixandre L’Orphelin*, p. 27.
several centuries, and her presence is also felt in contemporaneous French texts which could not be classed as romances. However, this refashioning is also a feature of the English romance tradition, and other texts in English which draw on the French material discussed above.
Morgan appears in several English texts before Malory’s *Morte Darthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (which will be discussed in the following two chapters). Given the range of texts in which she appears, this not only suggests the popularity of the French romances in England, but also the importance of Morgan as a character in her own right. The chronicle tradition plays an important part in terms of the development of English texts. However, English treatments of Morgan are sourced, in most instances, from the French romance tradition, generally stemming from the Vulgate Cycle, as opposed to those French works, such as Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de la feuillée* and the *Bataille Loquifer*, that feature the character divorced from her Arthurian context. Furthermore, her character is often modified in light of such sources as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*, or a single aspect of her personality is emphasized in the text. What is particularly noteworthy is the date range of the texts that contain Morgan; spanning the period between the early thirteenth to the mid fifteenth century, they encompass a wide range of socio-historical and linguistic contexts.

The earliest text of those discussed in this chapter is Laȝamon’s *Brut*, which was composed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and is mainly based on Wace’s *Brut*. It survives in two thirteenth-century manuscripts, London, British Library, Ms Cotton Caligula A ix and London, British Library, Ms Cotton Otho C. xiii.439

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Rosamund Allen suggests that English would be ‘the obvious language’ for her suggested audience of a ‘mixed household group of a moderately prosperous manor house,’ noting of the text that it would be ‘appropriate ... to amuse and inform merchants, managers of estates, families and parish priests’. There is then a gap of nearly a hundred years before Morgan re-emerges in English literature, in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, thought to have been composed in around 1300, although it is difficult to give an exact date. Macrae-Gibson notes that the ‘main source’ of the text is a version of that part of the Vulgate Cycle, ‘known as the *Merlin Ordinaire*, the French Prose *Merlin, L’estoire de Merlin*, or simply *Merlin*. The earliest version of *Of Arthour* is found in the Auchinleck manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Ms Advocates 19.2.1), thought to have been produced between 1331 and 1340, and Macrae-Gibson describes this as ‘earlier, longer and better’. Parts of this version have been reproduced in two later manuscripts, London, British Library, Ms Harley 6223 (late 15th century), and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 124 (c. 1800), which was mostly transcribed by John Leyden, the Scottish poet and

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orientalist. There are also variations of the text in London, Lincoln’s Inn Library, Ms Hale 150 (c.1450); Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Douce 236 (late 15th century), and London, British Library, Ms Additional 27879 (c.1650).

Macrae-Gibson claims that the Auchinleck manuscript ‘must have been composed in the London area, by a poet well versed in French as well as English’. There has been much critical debate about the context of its production, but critics agree that it was produced in the London area by professional scribes, since ‘A natural reading public, natural buyers, existed there, if anywhere, for such a book as this, at once modest yet substantial in format, and wholly English in character.’ Loomis’s suggested audience for this type of text is ‘the increasingly vigorous “comonalte”’, which is supported by J.S.P. Tatlock’s assertion that ‘With the increase of a middle class, of reading the vernacular, of production of meritorious literature in it, and the desire for literate entertainment, clerical scribes would hardly figure here.’ More recently, Malcolm Parkes claims that there would have been ‘a popular demand for such anthologies’ and sees its primary audience as ‘the middle-class reader’, reflecting the contemporary ‘expansion of literacy among the population’. This results in ‘the

increasing use of the English language coupled with an increase in the number of surviving vernacular manuscripts’. According to Harriet Hudson:

Though these volumes [compendiums] were not mass-produced, their uniformity, plainness and proliferation all anticipate the printed book. They also indicate the existence of a large audience demanding a variety of reading materials in a convenient, attractive, but not-too-expensive format.

However, she qualifies this by stating that ‘The bookshop where this volume was made would have produced a variety of booklets such as these to be selected and bound together as the patron saw fit.’ According to Ralph Hanna, ‘the book must have been “bespoke”, a client’s special order. The separable production may suggest that this was an order that, in some sense, got out of hand, that scribe 1 was provided with a succession of requested items’. Pearsall and Cunningham suggest that these items are not in “popular” taste; rather, ‘The taste that it appeals to and is designed for is that of an aspirant middle-class citizen, perhaps a wealthy merchant.’ For Thorlac Turville-Petre, ‘Its size, the professionalism of its scribes, its illumination, would have made it a very expensive volume indeed, and it is difficult to imagine that there could

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have been any kind of steady demand for productions of this sort. The diverse nature of the compilation and the fact that it is written in English suggests a secular audience, but more specifically that ‘the Auchinleck manuscript was designed for the household’ as ‘Some works would be more appropriate to one member of the family, others to another.’

Thus, our earliest text in its earliest surviving manuscript remains the topic of considerable debate, both in terms of production and audience. Whilst some critics have seen the use of English as a major indicator of the audience, Turville-Petre notes that ‘The great merchant families of the late Middle Ages were an urban élite who controlled the cities with their wealth and political power’:

For merchants, at least a working knowledge of French must have been essential to their activities. What little evidence we have of their literary tastes at this time points to a preference for French, at least in public ... It was all right to read romances in English. It is important, though, to recognize that the use of English does not simply answer a social need but is an expression of the very character of the manuscript, of its passion for England and its pride in being English. Its Englishness is much more than a matter of language.

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Indeed, Hudson notes that most manuscripts containing romances ‘seem to have belonged to the gentry class’:

As a group, the gentry might well have found their lives unduly circumscribed by those customs and laws which kept them outside of the fold, since the social myth of the medieval gentle classes, feudal knighthood, had not changed along with social practice. Thus they would have found in romances ... a means of exploring and resolving, at least in art, the conflicting attitudes they might have harboured about the structure of their society. It was partly because they sought to display and enhance their gentility that they owned manuscripts of romances in the first place. In their desire for literature of instruction and entertainment, the gentry continued the practice of the wealthier and more powerful nobles.457

P. R. Coss acknowledges that the romance reading public may well have included the gentry, but it is difficult to make assumptions about the audience based on the language that the texts are written in, ‘there can have been no clear dividing line between those who read French and those who read English, and no date can be established as to when the reading of English displaced French among the gentry’.458

As this survey of critical responses to the manuscript context and potential audience demonstrates, we cannot reach a definitive conclusion regarding these points in relation

to the romances under discussion in this chapter. According to the author Of Arthour and of Merlin:

\[
\text{Riȝt is þat Inglische vnderstond} \\
\text{Þat was born in Inglond.} \\
\text{Freyn sche vse þis gentil man} \\
\text{Ac euerich Inglische Inglische can.} \\
\text{Mani noble ich haue yseiȝ} \\
\text{Þat no Freyn sche couþe seye.}^{459}
\]

If we take the author at face value, we can assume that not all of the ‘noble’ classes were able to speak French, which would imply that this text could have been written either for the nobility or the merchant classes, or indeed, for any of the intermediate strata in society.

This is borne out when by a comparison of this text with the details we have of the other two texts in English drawn from the Vulgate Merlin. The complete prose Merlin, which is, as Robert W. Ackerman claimed, a ‘fairly literal translation from the French Vulgate’, written in around 1450, exists in one manuscript (Cambridge, University Library, Ms Ff 3.II ), but there is also a single leaf remaining of another manuscript (now found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms Rawlinson D.913).^{460} This single leaf is thought to date from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and Meale dates the full

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459 Of Arthour and of Merlin, pp. 3-5, ll. 21-6.
manuscript to c. 1450, that is, at around the same date as the translation itself.461 Meale also notes that ‘there seem to be good grounds for concluding not only that the two copies are independent of one another, but also that they derive from different exemplars’.462 This would suggest that there were several copies of this translation in circulation. The remaining manuscript has been signed by two owners, and there are numerous annotations, thus ‘the Merlin was read – indeed scrutinised – with great attention’.463 One of the annotators is Elyanor Guldeford whom Meale assigns to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century,464 linking her to the Guildford family who rose to social prominence and had ‘a high level of cultural activities and interests ... which encompassed literature, art and music’.465 Therefore, although we cannot know for whom the English Prose Merlin was composed, we do know that within a few decades of its composition, it was in the possession of a wealthy and sophisticated family. This is in contrast to the third translation of the Merlin discussed in this chapter, that of Henry Lovelich, written some time between 1425 and 1440.466

Lovelich’s Merlin survives in one manuscript, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ms 80, and comprises 27,852 lines, which, ‘enormous as it is, represents only about 50

462 ‘Manuscripts and Early Audience’, p. 95.
463 ‘Manuscripts and Early Audience’, p. 98.
464 ‘Manuscripts and Early Audience’, p. 97.
per cent of the French Vulgate Merlin. Lovelich is described by Ackerman as an ‘amateur purveyor of romances’ and by Warren as having an ‘amateur relation to literature’. However, Warren also notes that, as we do not have the version of the French Merlin that Lovelich used, we do not ‘in fact know what he translated, how he translated, and what he “created”’. Yet we have fairly accurate information regarding the production and audience of this version of the Merlin, ‘the available evidence suggests that he was a member of the London Company of Skinners and wrote his prodigious Merlin and Holy Grail as a compliment to a fellow guildsman of no small importance in his day, Harry Barton’. This deduction is based on a marginal note on fol. 127r of the manuscript, which claims that ‘J henr' louelich skyn-ner' ṭt translated ṭs boke oute of ffrensche in to englysshe at ṭe instaunce of harry bartoun. Evidence found in wills and other documents suggest that Harry Barton was both Sheriff and Lord Mayor of London, but Ackerman suggests that the two men were friends, rather than Barton acting as a patron to Lovelich. Lovelich’s text would seem to suggest that people in the middle classes were interested in romance and that some, but not all, of them were able to read French. As Parkes points out:

in the 14th and 15th centuries there was an increasing number of translations from French and Latin into English ... The majority of these translations not only

470 ‘Translation’, p. 53.
471 Ackerman, ‘English Rimed and Prose Romances’, p. 486.
reflect the pragmatic taste of the middle-class reader … but indicate that this growing class was extending its interests and becoming more cultivated. The texts may be placed in two categories: those for edification and profit, and those for edification and delight … For edification and delight the reader turned to the romances, ‘biographies’, and saints’ lives.473

Lovelich’s ability to translate this text does show that some merchants were indeed fluent in French and interested in romances in this language, but were also interested in having these romances available to them in English. Warren sees Lovelich’s audience as important to the process of reconstructing the text, noting that it is ‘an intensely transformative dialogue between an inherited vision of noble chivalry and an emerging concept of urban citizenship, a concept documented both linguistically and materially on an illustrated paper manuscript designed for craftsmen.’ Indeed, the text is ‘a sustained effort to bend the aristocratic source to the civic milieu’.474 Thus, it remains difficult to identify the audience of these three romances, drawn from the same source and written within one hundred and fifty years of each other. Critics are similarly divided regarding the potential audience and production of the other texts discussed in this chapter: the Alliterative Morte Arthure and the Parlement of the Thre Ages are both alliterative texts, and have proved problematic to classify in terms of audience.

The Parlement of the Thre Ages survives in two manuscripts: London, British Library, Ms Additional 31042, and an incomplete version in London, British Library, Ms Additional 33994. There is no critical consensus as to the precise date of composition, but it is generally held to have been written in the latter half of the

474 ‘Translation’, pp. 55, 57.
fourteenth century. The Alliterative Morte Arthure, which is discussed in this chapter as an example of a text that chooses to eliminate Morgan from the Arthurian narrative, has been dated by J.L.N. O’Loughlin to between 1360 and 1440. It appears in a single manuscript, Lincoln, Cathedral Library, Ms 91, which, in addition to London, British Library, Ms Additional 31042, was compiled by Robert Thornton. As Jetta Wurster notes:

> There is hardly any doubt that Robert Thornton, a country gentleman from East Newton near Pickering in the North Riding of Yorkshire, compiled both manuscripts, although other scribes may have had a hand in them. The Lincoln manuscript probably dates from about 1430-40; it was written at any rate after 1422 and before 1453/54.

Harriet Hudson points out that the ‘Thornton manuscripts are both organized in ways that suggest they were conceived as units and composed as booklets,’ and that Thornton’s ‘family, both before and after him, were people of local importance. They were educated – there is some evidence that Thornton knew some Latin and French –

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but their names do not appear in university rolls.\textsuperscript{478} Given the more northern origins of the alliterative texts, there has been much speculation regarding the possible audience. Wurster concludes her discussion of the Alliterative Morte’s audience with a comment that can be applied not only to the other alliterative texts, but also to the other works discussed in this chapter:

Intrinsic information in the poem does not suggest an audience that was provincial and uncultured, but rather one that was intellectually active and educated and had a wide range of interests. Although extrinsic evidence makes a noble audience seem very improbable, intrinsic features do not justify rejection of the possibility that, in addition to the gentry, the courts of the nobility in the East Midlands may have formed part of the audience.\textsuperscript{479}

This chapter will also examine Ywain and Gawain, which is ‘the only Middle English redaction’ of a work by Chrétien de Troyes, a version of Yvain or Le Chevalier au Lion.\textsuperscript{480} It survives in a single manuscript, London, British Library, Ms Cotton Galba E. ix, and critics generally assign it to the first half of the fourteenth century, Friedman and Harrington give the date of composition as 1325-50,\textsuperscript{481} and note that the text is ‘clearly the work of a minstrel catering for the sober, realistic audience of a provincial

\textsuperscript{478} ‘Middle English Popular Romances’, pp. 72-6.
\textsuperscript{479} ‘Audience’, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{480} Ackerman, ‘English Rimed and Prose Romances’, p. 507.
This suggestion is refuted by Andrew Taylor, who notes ‘the surviving manuscripts which contain Middle English romances provide little support for the minstrel cause’. The Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur* also survives in a single manuscript, London, British Library, Ms Harley 2252. This manuscript was compiled in the early sixteenth century by a mercer, John Colyns, but this copy of the Stanzaic *Morte* was not produced by Colyns. Along with the copy of *Ipomyden* found in the same manuscript, it was ‘produced as two independent booklets between 1460 and 1480’ and was ‘unbound for some time until Colyns acquired them’.

Thus, with the exception of Lovelich’s *Merlin*, we cannot say definitively for whom the texts under discussion were written. They cover a wide range of styles and are geographically diverse. This range demonstrates that Morgan was a widely-known figure, and although the authors generally draw on aspects of her character developed in the French tradition, there is significant variation in the manner in which Morgan is depicted within these various texts.

Laȝamon’s *Brut* describes Arthur’s removal to Avalon:

> And ich wulle uaren to Aualun: to uairest alre maidene.
> to Argante þere quene: aluen swiðe sceone.

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482 *Ywain and Gawain*, p. xvii.


485 Meale, ‘Compiler at Work’, p. 83.
& heo scal mine wunden: makien alle isunde.

al hal me makien: mid haleweiȝe drenchen.486

The character who is here credited with healing Arthur is named Argante (also given as Argane and Argant in the Otho manuscript), but J.D. Bruce argues that this is merely corruptions of the French forms of Morgan(t) based on Laȝamon’s source which Bruce claims was ‘some expanded version of Wace’.487 This is in direct contradiction of Arthur C. L. Brown’s assertion that Laȝamon’s ‘situation was evidently too remote for him to be acquainted with the romances current at Paris and London,’ and much of the material, including Argante, was therefore drawn from Welsh sources. 488 More recently Le Saux has argued that Geoffrey’s Vita is a possible source, noting a series of similarities between the two texts, and especially the similarities between Morgan in the Vita and Argante:

The resemblance between Geoffrey’s Morgen and Laȝamon’s Argante is striking ... Argante’s beauty is stressed three times ... her supremacy over the island is implied by her being called a queen; her skill at healing and her knowledge of medicines is given special emphasis by the repeated use of the word ‘haleweiȝe’ (ointment, balsam). As for the more supernatural attributes of Morgen, they are suggested by Laȝamon’s 'aluen swi(th)e sceone', 'elf most fair'. These

487 Bruce, ‘Some Proper Names’, p. 67.
similarities point either to a direct borrowing from the Vita, or to Laȝamon’s knowledge of Geoffrey's (oral?) source. 489

Laȝamon’s Argante, much like Geoffrey’s Morgan and the character in most texts which deal exclusively with Arthur’s death, is portrayed entirely positively and her beauty and skill emphasized. Her attributes and healing skill mean that Arthur’s return is depicted as much more of a certainty than it is in other texts; Laȝamon notes that ‘Bruttes ileueð ȝete: þat he bon on liue’. 490 This recalls the dismissive remarks of Gerald of Wales’ *Speculum Ecclesiae*, 491 and Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia imperialia*, 492 which may have been composed at around the same time. However, Laȝamon goes on to note that Merlin says that ‘an Arður sculde ȝete: cum Anglen to fulste,’ and that ‘his quiðes weoren soðe’. 493 Laȝamon’s text differs from Geoffrey’s *Vita* in that Arthur is taken away by boat by two women, rather than left on an island by his fellows, indicating that Laȝamon may have used another source as well as the *Vita* or that Le Saux’s suggestion of knowledge of Geoffrey’s source may be a possibility. 494

Three of the texts discussed in this chapter are drawn from the Vulgate *Merlin*; the earliest of which is *Of Arthour and Merlin*. Morgan is merely a reference point for the author in this text, when talking of Camile, another magical woman, he notes:

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489 *Layamon’s Brut*, pp. 111-16.
491 *Speculum Ecclesiae*, p. 47.
Of wichecraft & vilaine
And eke of nigramace
Of þis warld sche couþe mast
Wiþouten Arthours soster abast –
Morgein forsoþe was hir name
And woned wiþouten Niniane
Pat wiþ hir queint gin
Bigiled þe gode clerk Merlin.495

This reference to Morgan occurs slightly differently in the French versions, it is missing from the manuscript that forms the basis of Sommer’s edition, London, British Library, Ms Additional 10292. However, it is included in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 9123,496 which notes that Carvile knew more than any woman except Morgain, Arthur’s sister and Viviane who Merlin taught all the marvels of the world to, and also Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 337 which gives a slightly different account describing Morgan as Merlin’s love to whom he taught the marvels of the world.497 Although we cannot know which version the author had access to, we can assume that it was nearer to Ms 9123, given that this is the only one of the three which

496 Sommer, Vulgate, II, p. 131, fn. 4. ‘par lenchantement dont caruile sauoit tant conques nule femme nen sot tant fors que morgain la suer le roy artus . et viuiane que merlins ama tant quil li aprist toutes les merueiles dou monde que li contes uous deuisera ca auant quant ma matiere mi aportera et par ce chastel dont uous oez parler orrent li sesne tout le recouurier et tout le secours dou pays.’
497 Cf. H. Oskar Sommer, The Structure of Le Livre D’Artus and its Function in the Evolution of the Arthurian Prose-Romances (London, 1914), p. 27. ‘par enchantement dont Kanille sauoit tant quainz nule dame tant nen sot fors que Morguein la suer du roi Artus & fille Yguerne que Merlin ama tant. a cui il aprist a eles deus toute la merueille du mont que li contes uos deuisera ca auant quant ma matire mi amarra.’
that includes the names (albeit with variant spellings) of all three of the women. However, it remains difficult to state categorically what changes the author made.

The comparison to Morgan and Vivianne is particularly relevant when we consider Carmile’s role in the French texts; although this is her only appearance in the *Merlin*, she features more prominently in the *Lancelot*. Sommer gives the variants of her name as Camille, Ganille, Caville, Carvile, Kanille and Camyle,498 and, in fact, an examination reveals that she is remarkably similar to Morgan.499 As Paton has noted, part of Camille’s story mirrors that of Morgan in the episode after the *Val Sanz Retor* episode in the *Lancelot*, ‘the author is simply applying an episode twice to the same hero, but in the story of Camille he varies with commonplace details what he probably knew first as an other-world situation’.500 Newstead comments on the similarity of the three characters grouped together:

the linking is understandable since similar stories are related of them. Each one is said to have built for her victims an enchanted prison enclosed by a wall of air. Morgain and Camille both display hostility to Arthur, and both imprison their rivals. Both Morgain and Niniane learned the magic arts from Merlin, and both deceived him in similar ways to avoid granting him their love.

Newstead also notes that Camille appears in the *Estoire* and would seem to be modelled on Morgan as she heals the hero and provides a horse and arms.501 Thus, in the French

498 Sommer, Vulgate, VIII, p. 19.
sources there is a clear precedent for the identification of Carvile with Morgan and Vivianne, and the comparison is clearly based on a detailed knowledge of these three characters. However, the use of the French text in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is somewhat different. It is likely that the French version of the *Merlin* that the English author was using was similar to his translation, however, many of the details given about Morgan in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* can be found in other parts of the French *Merlin* texts.

We can see here that there are many elements taken from the traditional presentation of Morgan: she is associated with ‘wichecraft & vilaine/ And eke of nigramace’; she is considered to be a bastard, a theme which also appears in the Vulgate *Merlin* texts; she is Arthur’s sister, and is considered to have ‘Bigiled’ Merlin with her ‘queint gin’. It is interesting to note here that ‘Niniame’ is also mentioned in conjunction with this beguiling, although the phrasing is somewhat unclear here. Macrae-Gibson notes that she is ‘properly [a] sorceress, apparently treated as town near whic which Morgan le Fay lives’, however, this interpretation rests on the accuracy of ‘woned’; if this word is a scribal error, then the rest of the reference would make sense.

The author may well have been drawing on wider sources than the Vulgate *Merlin* in his depiction of Morgan, as her use of ‘wichecraft & vilaine’ is somewhat limited in this text. The Vulgate *Merlin* makes frequent references to what will happen after the events of this text, but he does not go into detail. It is likely that the author of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* had a wider knowledge of Morgan’s role in Arthurian romance. The description of Morgan as a bastard in this text connects to the French

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503 *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, II, p. 255.
504 And, indeed of Nimiane/Vivianne if ‘woned’ is a mistake. In the Vulgate *Merlin*, it is Vivianne who imprisons Merlin, however, he knows what she is planning to do, and, indeed, tells her how to go about it.
sources, the Vulgate *Merlin* claims, ‘And King Neutres of Garlot took the other daughter, a bastard named Morgan.’\(^{505}\) However, this is obviously not a standard part of the description of Morgan as Ms Additional 10292, the basis for Sommer’s edition does not include this description. As Pickens notes, ‘Sommer’s text introduces a third daughter as Neutres’s wife and does not mention that Morgan was a bastard. Later on the text explicitly mentions five daughters, none of whom is singled out as a bastard.’\(^{506}\) So we must assume that the author of the English text had access to a source that described Morgan as a bastard, and he included this in his description of her, which corresponds to the negative portrayal of Morgan in this instance. In fact, the French source does not portray Morgan’s acquisition of Merlin’s knowledge in a negative light:

> Morgan and Merlin became friends; she was endowed with great learning, and she grew so close to him and came around him so much that she found out who he was. He taught her many wonders in astrology and necromancy, and she kept them all in her mind. \(^{507}\)

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\(^{505}\) Pickens, *Lancelot-Grail*, I, pp. 207-8. Cf. Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, p. 245; Sommer, *Vulgate*, II, 73. Micha uses Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 20047 and Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms fr. 747 as his base text, but also notes the following variants for this section: ‘et rois Neutres de Garlot rot l’autre fille batarde qui avoit non Morganz.’, found in Tours, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms 951; Cambridge, University Library, Ms Additional 7071; and Rome, Vatican Library, Ms Reg. 1687; ‘rot une autre fille bastarde et il en ot une qui ot a non Morgain’ found in Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms 24394; and Bonn, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms 526.

\(^{506}\) Pickens, *Merlin*, p. 207, 14n.

Although Vivianne is not portrayed in a negative light, *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is particularly interesting as it does not include Viviane and her imprisonment of Merlin, which plays an integral role in the Vulgate *Merlin*. Indeed, it is mentioned in the French *Merlin* that Morgan learns from Merlin, however, the implication in *Of Arthour* would not seem to be that Morgan has tricked him into revealing knowledge to her. Sklar notes of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* that ‘Merlin’s rather unfortunate entanglement with Nimiane, elaborately described in the French work, is almost completely absent ... Nimiane’s name is mentioned only once in passing’.\(^\text{508}\) This could be due to the source used for this text, as Sklar notes that ‘none of the 29 extant MSS of *Merlin*, including the one printed by Sommer, provides a complete correspondence’ and the ‘problem is compounded by the possibility of a lost Anglo-Norman intermediary’.\(^\text{509}\) However, Sklar goes on to note that she believes that some of the changes made to the text are intentional, specifically the author ‘reduces or excises altogether thematic material not directly related to political concerns’.\(^\text{510}\) Thus, we must assume that the author was not aware of the aspect of the narrative relating to Vivianne, or was only aware of her under another name and does not realise that the ‘Niniame’ of his manuscript is the same character. However, the author does have a clear idea of who Morgan is, and, given that this is her only appearance in the text, would seem to expect that his readers will also understand the comparison. When we compare this text with the other texts based on the same source at a similar time we can see that there are subtle differences in the way that Morgan is deployed.

\(^{508}\) ‘*Arthour and Merlin*’, p. 54.

\(^{509}\) ‘*Arthour and Merlin*’, p. 49.

\(^{510}\) ‘*Arthour and Merlin*’, p. 54.
Henry Lovelich’s *Merlin* is also a translation of the Vulgate *Merlin*. In general, we can see that the text adheres very closely to the French source. For instance, the section described above, giving a comparison of Carvile to Morgan contained in the Vulgate *Merlin* and *Of Arthour* is also present in Lovelich’s *Merlin*:

> For this carville cowde more of enchantement
> than ony oþer womman, verament,
> Except Morgain, that Sostir was
> To kync Artheur, jn Everi plas,
> oþer ellis juanne, the love of Merlyn,
> that of enchantement coude wel & fyn;
> For sche knew more of merlynnes konnyng
> thane alle þe creatures that weren levyng,
> as ȝe scholen heren jn tyme comeng,
> whanne ȝe me heren speke of swich a thing.511

In spite of the fact that Morgan does not feature greatly in Lovelich’s translation of this text, he still uses her as an example of a woman who knows more of enchantment than Carville, a character who appears only in this section of the text. The use of the name ‘Juanne’ for Merlin’s lover would, similarly to *Of Arthour and Merlin*, seem to indicate an uncertainty about the Ninianne/Vivianne storyline. Possibly this is because Lovelich did not finish his translation of the French *Merlin*, or if he did, did not return to correct his mistake in this section. Ackerman notes that Lovelich may well not have finished

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the translation ‘if one takes seriously the poet’s lugubrious complaints about his poor eyesight and about the vast size of his appointed task’. However, Lovelich cannot simply be dismissed as an unquestioning conduit for the material he translates. Dalrymple notes that Lovelich made changes to the text as he translated it, focusing on aspects that interested him, ‘Lovelich is very much a London poet, and when the focus of action is civic the narration picks up’. Dalrymple also claims that ‘Much emphasis is placed on viewing each episode as part of a whole and upon the need to follow through to a clear end.’ Thus we can assume that he intended to include more information about things that he mentions briefly here, or that he would assume a level of knowledge amongst his readers. This would indicate that Lovelich intended to include the other sections from the Vulgate *Merlin* which include Morgan, thus elucidating his references in this context.

We may also note the section describing the marriages of Arthur’s sisters:

kyng newtres anothyr hadde to wyve,
lyk as aftyr 3e scholen heren as blyve
...
and the fyfte, at londone hyt is,
and there to Scole it is set, jwys,
and moche clergye forsoth hit can,
as of þe age doth ony man

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512 Ackerman, ‘Herry Lovelich's Merlin’, p. 487.
513 ‘Evele knowen 3e’, p. 163.
514 ‘Evele knowen 3e’, p. 159.
The text seems to ascribe the twin aspects of Morgan described in the Vulgate *Merlin* to two distinct sisters: one sister marries Newtres while the other is sent to school and becomes learned. However, it is evident from Sommer’s edition that a similar division occurred in some versions of the Vulgate *Merlin*, as his edition notes a sister that marries Nextres and another called Morgain who is sent to ‘vne maison de religion’ and learns the arts, becoming known as ‘morgue la fee’.\(^{516}\) However, curiously, in Lovelich’s *Merlin*, neither of the two sisters is named Morgan, but it is evident from the other references to Morgan that she is definitely Arthur’s sister. In addition to the section above, there is a later section where Morgan and Morgause greet Arthur:

\[
\text{with hire cam Morgayn, \(\hat{\text{p}}\)at hire sostir was,}\\
\text{which that gret clergyse cowde in Euery plas.}\\
\text{Anon as the kyng gan hem aspye,}\\
\text{ful gret joye he hem Mayde, trewelye,}\\
\text{and kysten to-Gyderis as Soster and bro\(\hat{\text{p}}\)er,}\(^{517}\)
\]

So we know that Lovelich was clear about Morgan’s relationship to Arthur, as he mentions that she was his sister both here and in the comparison to Carvile, and Lovelich also mentions her extensive education, but it is unclear as to which of the sisters in the initial description can be read as Morgan. If the manuscript that Lovelich was using was similar to that used as the basis of Sommer’s edition we can assume that she is the sister sent to ‘scole’. This is enhanced by Lovelich’s use of the term ‘clergye’. When referring to the education of the unnamed sister, the term in Old

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\(^{516}\) Sommer, *Vulgate*, II, p. 73.  
French generally used to describe her learning is clergesse, thus we can see that a clear correlation in the language used to describe Morgan’s learning and that of the unnamed sister. Unfortunately, the last reference to Morgan in Lovelich’s Merlin is the passage described above; in which Morgan and Morgause welcome Arthur, so we cannot be sure how Lovelich may have treated Morgan in his depiction of her if he had succeeded in translating the entirety of the Vulgate Merlin. Much like the author of Of Arthour and of Merlin, Lovelich seems to follow his source quite closely, but uses Morgan more as a point of reference than as an actual character. Her role as a magical woman with whom Carvile can be compared is not supported by the other mentions of Morgan in the text; Lovelich does not go on to give any details of her. Thus we can assume that Lovelich either followed his source blindly, even though he did not include the later sections (or the later sections do not survive), or that he intended to include her in the later sections, or that he thought that this reference would be clear to his audience on its own terms.

The English Prose Merlin, written in the mid-fifteenth century is also directly derived from the Vulgate Merlin, but we can see that this seems to be much closer to extant sources. Interestingly, this text also contains the comparison to Morgan when describing Carvile:

by the enchhauntment of Carnile, that moste cowde of that art, but yef it were Morgain, the suster of kynge Arthur, and Nimiane, that Merlin dide love so moche, that he taught here alle the merveiles of the worlde as this boke shall declare yow here-after.518

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The initial reference to Carnile reads ‘a feire mayden is lady that is suster to Hardogebrant that moche knoweth of egremauncye, be whom thei haue grete socour and helpe but yef we take hasty counseile’.\textsuperscript{519} This second description of Carnile would, then, seem to be an attempt to remind the reader of the power of Carnile, which is emphasised further by the comparison to a more famous, powerful sorceress. The French manuscript on which the author of the Prose \textit{Merlin} based his translation must have differed from the manuscript that Sommer uses for his edition, as his text only includes the second of these references.

The Prose \textit{Merlin} is much more extensive than \textit{Of Arthour and of Merlin}, however, there is some confusion over Morgan. She is introduced as a bastard, and is married to Ventres, ‘And the kynge uentres of Garlot hadde a-nother of hir doughters, that was geten on baste.’ As in the Vulgate \textit{Merlin}, she is speedily dispatched to the confines of a nunnery where ‘she lerned so moche of an arte that is cleped astronomye, wher-in she wrought many tymes; and by that crafte was she cleped morgne-le-fee’.\textsuperscript{520} However, the text also introduces another character, Basyne, as Uentres’ wife, and describes their son, Galeshyn. This confusion would seem to stem from the French sources, as not all versions of the Vulgate \textit{Merlin} describe Morgan as married to Uentres; Sommer’s text claims that it is another sister, ‘& li rois nextres de garloc ot . j . autre fille’, who, at this point, is not named, but is later revealed to be Blasine.\textsuperscript{521} The exact source of the English prose \textit{Merlin} has not been identified from extant manuscripts, but it is likely,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{519} Wheatley, \textit{Merlin}, I, p. 176.
\item \textsuperscript{520} Wheatley, \textit{Merlin}, I, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{521} Sommer, \textit{Vulgate}, II, p. 73.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
given the conflicting information in the manuscripts which have come down to us, that this confusion was present in the source.

The remaining sections concerning Morgan seem to follow French texts closely, she is happy to greet Arthur when he returns, 'and with hir com Morgne le fee, hir suster, that was so grete a clergesse. And whan the kynge hem knewe he made of hem grete ioye, for longe tyme hadde he not hem sein; and thei kissed as brother and suster.'\textsuperscript{522} Furthermore, she learns from Merlin, ‘Morgne le fee a-queynted hir with Merlin, an was with hym so prive, and so moche she was with hym that she knewe what he was, and many merveilles he hir taught of astronomye and of egraumauncye, and she helde it right wele.'\textsuperscript{523} However, this text differs from \textit{Of Arthour and Of Merlin} and Lovelich’s \textit{Merlin}, which were also derived from the French Vulgate \textit{Merlin}, as it includes Morgan’s relationship with Guyamor, and an extended section of description about her nature and appearance:

This Morgain was a yonge damesell fressh and Iolye. But she was som-what brown of visage and sangwein colour, and nother to fatte ne to lene, but was full a-pерт, auenaunt and comely, streight and right plesaunt, and well syngynge. But she was the moste hotest woman of all Breteigne, and moste luxuriouse, and she was a noble clergesse, and of Astronomye cowde she I-nough, ... and the beste workewoman she was with hir handes, that eny man knewe in eny londe, and ther-to she hadde oon of the ffieirest heed, and the feirest handes vnder hevene, and sholdres well shapen at devise; and she hadde feire eloquense, and

\textsuperscript{522} Wheatley, \textit{Merlin}, II, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{523} Wheatley, \textit{Merlin}, II, p. 375.
tretable, and full debonair she was as longe as she was in hir right witte, and
whan she were wroth with eny man, she was euell for to acorde.\textsuperscript{524}

It is unclear, given the almost exact replication of the hypothetical French source, how
much the English author was applying his own knowledge of Morgan. But, this would
seem to suggest that Morgan’s reputation was well-established; that he knew who she
was, and wanted to include her in his translation of the text.

It is clear that there are distinct similarities between the three texts taken from the
Vulgate *Merlin*, similarities which suggest a coherence regarding the character of
Morgan, substantiated by the fact that the texts themselves are spread over a period of
approximately 150 years. In spite of the fact that there are often various spellings of
Morgan’s name in French manuscripts,\textsuperscript{525} none of the authors are confused over her
place; she is invariably depicted as Arthur’s sister and ascribed a level of education
which makes her a suitable foil for Carnile. By contrast, Ninianne seems to create much
more of a problem of recognition when her name is also mentioned in the texts. It is
difficult to determine exactly how much each author contributed to the development of
the character of Morgan, and how much is due to the versions of the French which were
available to them, but it would seem that Morgan was a character with a clearly defined
*hintergrund* in the minds of these three authors.

That Morgan is a well-known character in the period before Malory is also
suggested by her other appearances in literature prior to this period. Her most common
role in material not derived from the French tradition is as the final companion of
Arthur on his journey to Avalon. This is her earliest role, derived ultimately from


\textsuperscript{525} Cf. Michael W. Twomey, ‘Is Morgne la Faye in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* - or Anywhere in Middle English?’, *Anglia* 117 (1999), 542-57, at p. 546.
Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlin* and appears in both the romance and chronicle traditions. Thus, our next comparative study concerns the three Middle English texts that describe the death of Arthur and treat Morgan in radically different ways. The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* of c.1400 is based on the French *Mort Artu*, and thus is influenced by the romance traditions surrounding Morgan, whereas the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, which O’Loughlin dates to between 1360 and 1440, draws more directly on the chronicle tradition and does not mention Morgan at all. Morgan also appears in a summary of Arthur’s activities in the *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, where he appears as one of the Nine Worthies.

In the *Stanzaic Morte* Morgan appears to be linked to the disposal of Excalibur. Once Sir Bedivere finally succeeds in throwing the sword into the sea, after a third appeal from Arthur to fulfil his request, a hand rises out of the water to take the sword:

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There cam An hand with-outen Reste,
Oute of the water And feyre it hente,
And brandysshyd As it shuld braste,
And sythe, as gleme, A-way it glente.
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527 O’Loughlin claims the earlier estimate of 1360 would ‘accord with the spirit of the work’ (‘English Alliterative Romances’, p. 521).

528 The nine worthies were exemplary figures and consisted of three pagans; Hector, Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, three Jews: Joshua, David and Judas Maccabeus, and three Christians: King Arthur, Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon.

Arthur is then taken to the shore where ‘A ryche shyppe, with maste And ore, / Full of ladyes, there they fonde’. Morgan is not named in this text, but her identity is clear given that the woman that ‘bryghtest was of blee’ addresses him as her brother:

“Broder,” she sayd, “wo ys me!
Fro lechyng hastow be too longe.
I wote that gretely greuyth me,
For thy paynes Ar full stronge.”

Arthur takes his leave through the ship with the women, informing Bedivere that he is going ‘In-to the vale of Avelovne, / A whyle to hele me of my wounde’. Here, Morgan would seem to resume the role that she traditionally takes in Galfredian historiographic tradition. In fact, when we compare this text with the Mort Artu, which has been identified as the author of the Stanzaic Morte’s main source, we can see that there are substantial changes and that the author has completely reworked the narrative to incorporate a more positive account of Arthur’s journey to Avalon. In this text, solely concerned as it is with the final part of the Arthurian narrative, her role is not, in fact, contentious; she is portrayed as an entirely beneficent character. As Lumiansky notes, ‘Morgan seems sympathetic towards the king, who appears comforted by her

\[530\] Le Morte Arthur, p. 106, ll. 3500-1.
\[531\] Le Morte Arthur, p. 106, l. 3504.
\[534\] Le Morte Arthur, p. 107, ll. 3516-7.
In the \textit{Mort Artu}, the arm that claims the sword is interpreted as a bad omen by Arthur, he assumes that it is a sign of his impending death “‘In God’s name,’” said the king, “I was right to think that my death was fast approaching”’. Moreover, he answers Girflet’s enquiries about his return in the negative, “‘No,’” said the king, “you may be assured of that,’” and refuses to tell him where he is going.\footnote{Lacy, \textit{Lancelot-Grail}, IV, p. 155; Sommer, \textit{Vulgate}, VI, p. 380.} Therefore, Girflet’s conclusion that it is Arthur’s body in the grave, given the hermit’s assertion that it is definitely him, however, as ‘Some ladies whom I don’t know brought him here’, is not contentious, there is no suggestion of a return.\footnote{Lacy, \textit{Lancelot-Grail}, IV, p. 156; Sommer, \textit{Vulgate}, VI, p. 381.} By contrast, the author of the Stanzaic \textit{Morte Arthur} has Arthur specifically inform Bedivere that he is going to Avalon and that he believes his visit there will only be a temporary one until he is healed. Therefore, it comes as somewhat of a surprise to the reader that Arthur’s tomb is discovered by Bedivere, although it would also appear that it is the same barge of ladies who have brought him there. As the hermit claims:

\begin{quote}
A-bowte mydnyght were ladyes here,  
In world ne wyste I what they were ;
Thys body they broght vppon a bere  
And beryed it \textit{with} woundys sore.\footnote{Le \textit{Morte Arthur}, p. 108, ll. 3538-41.}
\end{quote}

Whether this is, in fact, Arthur’s grave is not questioned in the text, for it is mentioned later that Guinevere (or Gaynor as she is called in this text) is buried there with him,
‘And forthe they bare hyr theym by-twene, / And beryed hyr with masse full merry / By syr Arthur, as I yow mene.’ 539

Therefore, the author of the Stanzaic Morte Arthur gives conflicting accounts of the end of Arthur, but settles eventually on a full death with no prospect of return, thus adhering to his French source. The mention of Avalon and a possibility of healing Arthur would appear to be his own interpolation based on other versions of the death of Arthur. According to Edward Kennedy:

Differences between the stanzaic Morte and its French source indeed suggest that the English author was attempting to popularise the story for a less sophisticated audience and are typical of other Middle English adaptations of French romance: a simplified, more concise plot; fewer characters; and greater emphasis upon action and dialogue. Changes made in the character of Arthur and in the concluding scenes of the romance indicate, however, that in popularising this work the author was concerned with factors besides narrative technique and had a conception of the Arthurian tragedy quite different from that of the French Mort Artu. 540

Consequently, he claims that the chronicles may have been a key influence in the changes that the author made. 541 Other critics have contended that the version of the Mort Artu used by the author of the Stanzaic Morte Arthur must have been different

from that which is still available, ‘The source of the romance, which was composed about 1400 in the North-west Midlands, is apparently the French Mort Artu in a version somewhat different to the one known to us; we cannot, therefore, be sure how literally the poet has rendered his original.’\textsuperscript{542} Robert H. Wilson, however, claims that it is more likely that the Stanzaic Morte Arthur 'represents an original treatment, by the English poet' of the Mort Artu, which remains substantially as we know it.\textsuperscript{543} We can, therefore, assume that the author made these changes himself in light of an alternative tradition of Arthur’s death, popular in literature and folklore from Geoffrey of Monmouth onwards. Morgan is, therefore, depicted in a completely different way in the Stanzaic Morte Arthur than in the French source. The Mort Artu makes reference to Arthur staying with Morgan and her revelation of the paintings of Lancelot’s love for Guinevere.\textsuperscript{544} Morgan tries to persuade Arthur to regain his honour, claiming when she revels the truth of the pictures that if he does not he will ‘be disgraced before God and everyone’.\textsuperscript{545} In this text Morgan is indisputably a good sister, and the specific enmity between them that characterises such other French texts as the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin is missing here. The French author was, moreover, also clearly aware of the tales of Avalon, as Morgan comments to Arthur that she ‘will most certainly go to the Isle of Avalon, where the women live who know all the world’s magic’.\textsuperscript{546}

\textsuperscript{543} ‘Malory’, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{544} Lancelot creates a series of wall paintings depicting the full story of his romance with Guinevere while Morgan has imprisoned him in the Lancelot section of the Vulgate Cycle; cf. Kibler, Lancelot-Grail, III, p. 218; Micha, Lancelot, V, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{545} Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 107; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{546} Lacy, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 106; Sommer, Vulgate, VI, p. 238.
Therefore the absence of Avalon at the end of the *Mort Artu* was clearly intentional, as the author was aware of other versions and made the decision to include Arthur’s death and burial instead.

The author of the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* was presented with an unambiguous portrayal of Morgan, and would not have seen her inclusion at the death of Arthur as problematic. We cannot be sure if his version of the *Mort Artu* contained the section where Arthur visits Morgan at her castle, certainly he has not included it in his text, but the tone adopted by Morgan would indicate a level of affection between the siblings. Morgan is deeply upset by Arthur’s state at the end of the text: she ‘wepyd sore and handys wrange’,\(^{547}\) which would imply that Arthur was expected. This level of personal detail is unusual in the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* here characters ‘appear for the most part to be rigidly stylized abstractions,’ yet the text ‘intermittently permits them vividly realistic episodes’.\(^{548}\) This empathetic depiction of a sister weeping for her wounded brother, expressing concern that it may be too late to save him, would seem to be an exceptional moment that clearly demonstrates the pathos of the scene, and perhaps endorsing Arthur’s confidence in his own return. Moreover, it would seem that Morgan is accorded considerable status by the author of the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. In the *Mort Artu* she is merely holding the hand of ‘the first among them’, who beckons Arthur to the boat.\(^{549}\) This is in keeping with her earlier assertion that she is going to visit the wise women of Avalon; she does not claim to be counted as one of them. In the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, however, Morgan is the ‘bryghtest ... of blee’, and takes the

\(^{547}\) *Le Morte Arthur*, p. 106, ll. 3505.


\(^{549}\) Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail*, IV, p. 156; Sommer, *Vulgate*, VI, p. 381.
initiative in persuading Arthur aboard. This would accord with the tradition established by Geoffrey in the *Vita Merlini*, who makes Morgan the head of a company of sisters, although not Arthur’s sister, and the only one responsible for Arthur’s care at his passing. It is noteworthy, however, that Morgan is not named; this implies that the author assumed that his audience would know who she was, as this story is the climax of the Arthurian oeuvre. The poet was evidently knowledgeable about the wider tradition surrounding Arthur’s death, as he specifically mentions that Arthur and Gaynor’s grave is at Glastonbury, ‘An Abbay full Ryche, of order clene’. This demonstrates awareness of elements of the narrative, apparently confirmed by the exhumation of Arthur’s body at Glastonbury Abbey in 1191.

By contrast, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* does not feature Morgan at all. The knights decide to go to Glastonbury as ‘Thare we may ryste vs wi th roo, and raunsake

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They enter the Isle of Avalon from there, and Arthur proceeds to a manor where he is seen by a ‘surgyn of Salerne’.

This is significant because, ‘As far back as the late tenth century Salerno appears as the most celebrated centre of medical learning in the West.’

Thus the king is being placed in the best possible medical care, trusting in a long tradition of medical expertise. Salerno is mentioned earlier in the text too, in a similarly reverential manner, ‘No surgyone in Salerne sall saue the bettyre.’

It is quickly established that the king is beyond help and, having given his final instructions to his knights, he dies; ‘thus passes his speryt, and spekes he no more’.

The original version of the Alliterative _Morte Arthure_ ends with Arthur’s burial at Glastonbury, which is in contrast to the Alliterative _Morte Arthure_’s putative source, a version of Wace. However, a later hand has added what was traditionally thought to have been the inscription on Arthur’s grave, ‘Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam rex que futurus’, which relates much more closely to the tradition with which Morgan is involved, suggesting the possibility of Arthur’s return.

Although the Alliterative _Morte_ reduces the otherworldly elements of the tale; by portraying Avalon as a real place and Arthur’s attempted healer a surgeon from Salerno, it is evident that the link between Avalon and Arthur’s death is well established by this period. There is a similar use of Avalon and Glastonbury in _Arthur_, an English verse chronicle.

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554 _Morte Arthure_, p. 127, l. 4311.
555 Rosemary E. Wallbank, ‘The Salernitan Dimension In Hartmann Von Aue's Der Arme Heinrich ‘, _German Life and Letters_, 43 (1990), 168–176, pp. 170-1. I am grateful to Anne Marie D’Arcy for bringing the importance of the Salernitan reference to my attention.
556 _Morte Arthure_, p. 76, l. 2586.
557 _Morte Arthure_, p. 128, l. 4327.
559 _Morte Arthure_, p. 128, l. 4347.
interpolated into a Latin chronicle in Longleat House Ms 55, which dates to between 1412 and 1428.\textsuperscript{560} Here, the author claims that Arthur ‘Was browȝt to Auelon / Þat was a place fayr & Mury; / Now hyt hooteþ Glastyngbury’,\textsuperscript{561} but does go on to note the legend of Arthur’s return among the ‘Bretons & Cornysch’.\textsuperscript{562} While the author of the Stanzaic \textit{Morte Arthur} has incorporated Avalon into his version of the Vulgate \textit{Morte Artu}, which specifically excludes the potential of Arthur’s healing and return, this tradition has been appropriated by the author of the Alliterative \textit{Morte Arthure} by the addition of the Latin tag.

Morgan’s involvement in this element of the tale was evidently well-known. \textit{Parlement of the Thre Ages}, dating from the latter half of the fourteenth century, is not an Arthurian text.\textsuperscript{563} However in describing the Nine Worthies, it gives us a brief account of Arthur’s life in which Morgan is mentioned: \textsuperscript{564}

\begin{quote}
And Wawayne wondres of this werke, and wendes by-lyue
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{561} Arthur: A Short Sketch of His Life and History in English Verse of the First Half of the Fifteenth Century, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS os 2, 2nd ed (London, 1864), pp. 18-19, ll. 612-4.

\textsuperscript{562} Arthur, p. 19, l. 618.

\textsuperscript{563} The text survives in two manuscripts: London, BL Additional MS 31042, and an incomplete version in London, BL Additional MS 33994. There is no critical consensus as to the precise date, cf. Offord, \textit{The Parlement}, p. xxxvi.

To his lorde, there he hym lefte, and lokes abowte,
And he ne wiste in alle this werlde where he was by-comen.
And then he hyghes hym in haste, and hedis to the mere,
And seghe a bote from the banke and beryns there-inn.
There-inn was Sir Arthure and othire of his ferys,
And also Morgn la Faye that myche couthe of sleghete.
And there ayther segge seghe othir laste, for sawe he hym no more.565

Offord notes that ‘The Parlement had probably no immediate literary source,’566 but the nine worthies were an established motif, ‘the earliest known treatment’ of which being found in Jacques de Longuyon’s Vœux du Paon, written around 1312.567 However, the author of the Parlement expands his description of some of the worthies, ‘he has crammed into them all that he could remember, from reading or hearsay’.568 He uses them as ‘cautionary examples of the fall of the great’, but the extended section on Arthur is due to the popular nature of Arthurian romances.569 As J.A. Burrow notes, ‘The peoples of England and Wales naturally had a particular interest in him – the Welsh as an ancestral Celtic hero, the English as a great predecessor of their own kings.’570 This ‘strongly suggests that the poet regarded his task as one of reminding

565 Parlement of the Thre A ges, pp. 23-4, ll. 505-12.
566 Parlement of the Thre A ges, p. xxxix.
567 Parlement of the Thre A ges, p. xli.
568 Parlement of the Thre A ges, p. xli.
his audience of their favourite romances’. The reference to Morgan is particularly unusual as she does not generally appear in descriptions of Arthur from the Nine Worthies tradition, suggesting that the author was amplifying the standard section on Arthur with his own knowledge:

The account of Arthur, the first of the three Christians, is a much lengthier affair. The details of the Vœux story are given ... but a great deal more information is added to this, with special concentration upon the final battle and death of Arthur, as befits the moral aim of the description.

This could explain Morgan’s inclusion but, as seen in the Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure, there were conflicting ideas about Arthur’s death, and the author of the Parlement has here decided to draw on the more optimistic version of the Arthurian narrative. Indeed, although Morgan is seen as important enough to be included in a summary of Arthur’s life, not very much detail given about her character, except that she ‘myche couthe of sleghte’.

This could merely refer to Morgan’s wisdom, and therefore her suitability as a healer for Arthur, or to her sorcery or guile,

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571 Turville-Petre, ‘Nine Worthies’, p. 43.
573 The MED defines ‘sleghte’ as ‘1. (a) Wisdom, prudence; cleverness, ingenuity; also, an instance of prudence; (b) skill, expertness; dexterity; (c) strategy, planning, art; (d) a clever device, stratagem, plan; a technique, trick, feat; (e) diligent activity, effort, zeal; also, force, power; (f) subtlety; a subtlety, refinement; sorcery; (g) a fine, excellent thing; beauty.’ and also ‘2. (a) Slynness, cunning, craftiness; guile, trickery, deceit; (b) a trick, scheme, plot, wile.’ The other manuscript, Additional Ms. 33994, uses ‘sight’ rather than ‘sleight’, but, given the context, this may be the result of scribal corruption.
which would indicate knowledge of her expanded role in the French Arthurian romances. However that might be, nothing is added to the character of Morgan, she is merely part of Arthur’s cohort, and allows the author to allude to the possibility of his return.

Thus, these three texts which deal with the death of Arthur approach the presence (or absence) of Morgan very differently. Their very difference underlines the widespread debate about what happened at Arthur’s death; the more factual-based approach of the Alliterative Morte contrasts with the obvious debate inherent in the conclusion of the Stanzaic Morte. This debate, and Morgan’s role in it, has even been imported into the Nine Worthies tradition which does not generally include her in the description of Arthur. Thus, we can see that the authors of these three texts had to make choices about the Arthurian material with which they were familiar. In their depiction of Morgan, they eschew any references to her difficult relationship with Arthur’s court, for instance, as they only focus on a single aspect of the Arthurian narrative.

Morgan also appears as a point of reference in Ywain and Gawain, which, in contrast to most of the preceding texts, does not draw on the Vulgate or Post-Vulgate Cycle, but is a rendering of Chrétien Yvain.\footnote{Le Chevalier au Lion, p. 90, ll. 2947-51.} The only manuscript of this text dates to the early fifteenth century,\footnote{Wilfred Lister, ‘Notes on the Text of the Middle English Romance Ywaine and Gawin’, MLR 35 (1940), 56-59, at p. 56.} whereas the text itself was written in the first half of the fourteenth century.\footnote{Cf. Ackerman, ‘English Rimed and Prose Romances’, p. 509.} Albert C. Baugh’s suggests that the author had a copy of Chrétien’s text in front of him when he was composing his own version, ‘the translator seems to have read a dozen lines or so and then rendered them in his own words, reproducing with fair fidelity the ideas which he thought essential and echoing many
expressions’. Morgan does not appear in the narrative, but is the provider of a magical ointment:

For þare I have an unement dere;
Morgan þe Wise gaf it to me
And said als I sal tel to þe.
He sayd, ‘Þis unement es so gode,
Pat if a man be braynwode
And he war anes anoynt with yt,
Smertly sold he have his wit.’

The influence of Chrétien’s Morgan is not limited to the example above, as there is also a male physician in the Welsh *Geraint, Son of Erbin* called Morgan Tud, who would seem to be inspired by Morgan’s appearance in Chrétien’s *Erec et Enide*. In both instances Morgan is linked with healing, and in *Ywain*, this healing is distinctly magical. As in some of the other examples in this chapter, Morgan’s role is not developed in *Ywain and Gawain*, but remains an important reference point in the text. Her character is deployed in the same way as in Chrétien, as the reference to Morgan makes the complete success of the ointment more credible, as it has come from a renowned healer.

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578 *Ywain and Gawain*, p. 47, ll. 1752-8.

Thus, we can see that each Middle English text discussed in this chapter, with the exception of *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*, is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by a limited range of French romances, and ascribe a clearly defined set of characteristics to the character of Morgan. However, as such texts as the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* demonstrate, there were alternatives available to each of these authors, and, even when the text was translated directly from the French, we can discern a considered selection of material on the part of the author. Most of the texts discussed in this chapter draw on specific sections of the Vulgate Cycle, which narrows the focus, streamlining the conflicting portrayal of Morgan presented in the various sections of this composite work. Thus, we generally catch only a fleeting glimpse of Morgan while the author leaves much unsaid, relying on the reader’s knowledge of the Arthurian narrative in general and details of Morgan’s place in it in particular.
CHAPTER FOUR

MORGAN IN SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is thought to have been written in the mid to late fourteenth century in the north-west midlands. As Michael J. Bennett notes, ‘The works may have been written as early as the 1360s or as late as the manuscript itself, around 1400.’ The author’s identity is unknown, but ‘the combination of aristocratic tenor and deep learning in his work mean that many critics think he was a member of a noble household,’ and, indeed, that ‘he assumes a courtly audience. In his descriptions of aristocratic and courtly life, he does not seek to impress or presume to educate the people for whom he wrote.’

The essence of the narrative of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is also present in The Greene Knight, thought to date to the mid to late fifteenth-century, which survives in a compilation of the 1640s, the Percy Folio manuscript (London, British Library, Ms Additional 27879). The text is also thought to have been written in the Midlands,

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580 ‘The Historical Background’, in A Companion to the Gawain-Poet, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 71-90, at p.71. Ad Putter notes that ‘The presence of scribal errors in the manuscript suggests that Cotton Nero A.x. is some stages removed from the author’s original, which must therefore have been written some time before 1400.’ (An Introduction to the Gawain-poet (London, 1996), p. 3).


582 Diane Speed notes that the text is ‘thought to have been composed at the end of the fifteenth century’ (‘The Grene Knight’, in Medieval English Romances, ed. Diane Speed, 3rd edition, 2 vols (Durham, NC, 1993), I, pp. 236-40, at p. 237).
but ‘opinions range from the south Midlands to north/north Midlands’.

The existence of *The Greene Knight* may suggest that there were other versions of the Green Knight narrative in circulation, as there are considerable differences between the two texts although they draw on much of the same material.

In contrast to many of the English texts discussed in the previous chapter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* does not derive from a specific French source, although a wide range of French romance material provides analogues to key elements of the text. Morgan le Fay is a pivotal character in this work, given that it is revealed that she is responsible for the events of the narrative, which has elicited much critical attention.

Several critics have seen her as ‘marginal,’ or peripheral to the action of the text. Benson, for instance, claims that ‘she is so clearly imposed on the structure that she

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585 Cf. Derek Brewer, ‘The Interpretation of Dream, Folktale and Romance with Special Reference to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *NM* 77 (1976), 569-81, at p. 570.
harms the poem more than she helps it’, but actually she plays an integral role. The text is carefully structured, and Morgan is part of a complex process of narrative contrasts within *Sir Gawain*. Furthermore, she is also the fulcrum of the action in the text, as it is she who instigates the various elements of the plot.

Critical interpretations of Morgan are generally based on the idea that the *Gawain*-poet was making use of a wide range of material in his portrayal of Morgan, but although he was aware of a general level of detail, we can see that almost all of his depictions of Morgan, and many other details of the text, are drawn from a short section of the Vulgate *Lancelot* called the *Val sanz Retor* (‘Valley of no Return’) or *Val des Faux-Amants* (‘Valley of False Lovers’). When we consider Morgan’s representation and the way in which the character is reworked within the context of this text, it is evident that she is presented in a straightforward manner, uncomplicated by the divergent depictions of her in the French tradition. The author of *Sir Gawain* gives us a convenient vignette of Morgan that fits his requirements for the villain of the piece, and although Burrow is correct in assuming that the characteristics of Morgan depicted here are commonplace, she is the *fons et origo* of ‘sorcery, hostility, and threat’.

This is not by any means the only way in which she is depicted in the French romances, or even within the Vulgate Cycle. However, if we look closely at each aspect of the

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description of Morgan in *Sir Gawain*, we can see that there is generally a direct parallel to be found in the Vulgate *Lancelot*.

In fact, there are also other elements of *Sir Gawain* which would also seem to draw directly on the *Val sanz Retor* section of the *Lancelot*, although both *Sir Gawain* and the *Lancelot* also draw on wider romance traditions. The similarities include Bertilak’s castle and Gawain’s approach to it; the nature of his testing within the castle, the relationship of Morgan and Lady Bertilak, and Morgan’s familial ties and her appearance. However, the Gawain-poet uses these features to create a unique and mysterious figure who is central to the romance. Bertilak’s castle would appear to be a suitable abode for Morgan as it has features typical of the Otherworld, and more specifically to Morgan’s magical valley in the *Lancelot*, with Gawain’s approach to the castle emphasising this sense of alterity. Gawain has been travelling for quite some time in dangerous circumstances, we hear that ‘Nade he ben dughty and dryye, and Dryghtyn had served, / Douteles he hade ben ded and drepoed ful ofte.’

But, once he has prayed and crossed himself ‘bot thrye’, he stumbles upon a *locus amoenus*:

A castel þe comlokest þat euer knytt aȝte,  
Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,  
With a pyked palays pyned ful þik,  
Þat vmbeteȝe mony tre mo þen two myle.

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590 *Sir Gawain*, p. 22, l. 763.  
591 Ernst Robert Curtius describes the *locus amoenus* as ‘a beautiful, shaded natural site. Its minimum ingredients comprise a tree (or several trees), a meadow, and a spring or brook’. (*European Literature*, p. 195). Cf. Derek A. Pearsall, ‘Rhetorical “Descriptio” in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *MLR* 50 (1955), 129-34.
That holde on þat on syde þe haþel auysed,

As hit schemered and schon þur þe schyre okez;

...

And innermore he behelde þat halle ful hyȝe,

Towres telled bytwene, trochet ful þik,

Fayre fyllyolez þat fyȝed, and ferlyly long,

With coruon coprounes craftyly sleȝe.

Chalkwhyt chymnees þer ches he innoȝe

Vpon bastel rouez, þat blenked ful quyte;

So mony pynakle payntet watz poudred ayquere,

Among þe castel carnelez clambred so þik,

Þat pared out of papure purely hit semed.

Þe fre freke on þe fole hit fayr innoghe þoȝt,

If he myȝt keuer to com þe cloyster wythinne,

To herber in þat hostel whyl halyday lested,

auinant.592

This castle, and its somewhat miraculous appearance in the middle of the wilderness, seem to evoke the ethereality of a fairy kingdom, similar to that of Sir Orfeo.593 Yet it also suggests the Val sanz Retor that Morgan creates in the Vulgate Lancelot. Morgan’s valley is hidden away behind a wall of air, ‘the only thing he saw was a kind of thick smoke all around the middle of the valley. This was the valley wall, which was made of

592 Sir Gawain, pp. 22-3, ll. 767-72, 794-806.
air’, but contains ‘very handsome houses’. 594 And, indeed, much like the fairy kingdom in *Sir Orfeo* which ‘Bi al thing him think that it is / The proude court of Paradis,’ the castle would initially appear to be a godsend. 595 Yet, this God-given ‘comfort and reassurance’ is nothing more than ‘a dangerous illusion’. 596 Larrington comments on the similarities between the *Val sanz Retor* and Bertilak’s castle, but relates them in terms of ‘a feminized space’, 597 however there is little intrinsically feminine about the castle, especially given Bertilak’s presence and the hunting scenes that parallel Lady Bertilak’s pursuit of Gawain. 598 However, we can recognise correlations with a generic fairy otherworld, and there are several direct similarities between the *Val sanz Retor* and Bertilak’s castle.

Gawain fights many opponents on his journey to the castle:

Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayez straunge.
Fer floten fro his frendez fremedly he rydez.
At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wyȝe passed
He fonden a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
And þat so foule and so felle þat feȝt hym byhode. 599

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595 *Sir Orfeo*, p. 33, ll. 375-6.
597 *King Arthur’s Enchantresses*, p. 62.
599 *Sir Gawain*, p. 20, ll. 713-17.
Here, Gawain is able to prove his military prowess before the test at the castle is revealed. In a similar instance in the *Val sanz Retor*, first the Duke of Clarence and then Lancelot have to fight against a variety of opponents before they are actually faced with the challenge of dispersing the enchantment which holds the valley together. We hear that Clarence fights against two dragons, ‘as large as dragons can grow’, and is then required to fight against two knights who guard a ‘broad stream, fast-flowing and noisy’. The challenges that Gawain faces are similar, ‘At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wyȝe passed / He fonde a foo hym byfore’: there is a clear association here with passing over water, a physical obstacle before fighting a (possibly otherworldly) opponent. This would correspond with a common *donnée* of the romance tradition, particularly ‘one of the stock incidents of Arthurian romance is a combat of the hero with one or more redoubtable antagonists at a ford’. Although this might suggest a correspondence between these two sections, they are also common features of the Otherworld more generally. H.R. Patch notes that the Otherworld is often ‘cut off from the everyday world by some sort of water barrier’, and ‘a splendid castle, usually guarded by armed figures; and a garden, with a beautiful fountain or fair running streams, and trees and remarkable birds’. In fact, it has been noted that the *Gawain*-poet deals with several of these episodes in much less detail than the reader would expect, ‘He dismisses, in a casual line or two, the challengers at the fords, the dragons, wild men, fierce beasts and fiercer giants with which his audience might expect to be

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602 ‘The Combat at the Ford in the *Didot Perceval*, *MP* 43 (1945), 63-71, at p. 64.
The author makes use of the standard features of romance without the extensive and detailed catalogue of combats that usually accompany a knightly quest. In the *Val sanz Retor*, when Lancelot arrives in the valley he faces the three knights at the other side of the bridge, and then, having passed through a fire which does not consume him, he faces a further three knights armed with axes. Lancelot strikes the third knight’s head off with his axe, ‘Lancelot would not let him be, but stepped over to the senseless body and, with a wide swing of his axe, made the head bounce off.’

Although there have been convincing arguments to suggest that *Sir Gawain* is based on version of *The Tale of Caradoc* from the *Perceval* Continuation, it would seem that there are certainly also details in this section of the *Lancelot* which may have influenced the English author.

When Gawain and Lancelot have passed through these initial battles they discover Morgan’s domain, which is not necessarily unpleasant. We are told that in the *Val sanz Retor*,

the prison was much more pleasant than generally thought, for there was no lack of food and drink, and there were outdoor sports and backgammon and chess;

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there were dances and carols all day long and the delights of fiddles and harps and other instruments.607

The castle in *Sir Gawain* is similarly hospitable; Gawain is made welcome by his host, and takes part in the feasting and merriment, ‘Þer watz mete, þer watz myrþe, þer watz much ioye, / Þat for to telle þerof hit me tene were, / And to poynte hit ȝet I pyned me parauenture.’608 However, much like the *Val sanz Retor*, in which a knight can be incarcerated ‘if he had been unfaithful to his lover in any way, even in desire alone’, the castle also has an underlying purpose.609 Gawain is systematically tested by Lady Bertilak and her husband on three separate occasions to establish the purity of his character. He establishes an exchange of winnings with Bertilak, and then Lady Bertilak does her utmost to seduce Gawain:

> And ay þe lady let lyk as hym loued mych;
> Þe freke ferde with defence, and feted ful fayre
> ‘Þaȝ I were burde bryȝtest’, þe burde in mynde hade.
> Þe lasse luf in his lode for lur þat he soȝt
> boute hone,
> Þe dunte þat schulde hym deue,
> And nedez hit most be done. 610

608 *Sir Gawain*, p. 28, ll. 1008-10.
610 *Sir Gawain*, p. 36, ll. 1281-7.
In this first seduction scene, the *Gawain*-poet makes it clear that the lady is not serious in her feelings for Gawain, it is only ‘lyk’ she loved him, while Gawain is more concerned with his prospective encounter with the Green Knight. But the lady remains undaunted, and on the second day,

Þus hym frayned þat fre, and fondet hym ofte,
For to haf wonnen hym to woȝe, what-so scho þoȝt ellez;
Bot he defended hym so fayr þat no faut semed,
Ne non euel on nawþer halue, nawþer þay wysten
bot blysse.611

Gawain still resists her advances; thus, on the third day she seeks to blame Gawain for is conduct towards her:

Quoþ þat burde to þe burne, ‘Blame ȝe disserue,
‘If ȝe luf not þat lyf þat ȝe lye nexte,
Bifore alle þe wyȝez in þe worlde wounded in hert,
Bot if ȝe haf a lemman, a leuer, þat yow lykez better.’612

But all to no avail; Gawain is not interested in her, and refuses her offer of the gift of a ring. Rings were commonly exchanged as love tokens in medieval romance, but could also provide magical protection; for instance, part of the reason that Lancelot is successful in the *Val sans Retor* is because he wears a ring from the lady of the Lake

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611 *Sir Gawain*, p. 43, ll. 1549-53.
612 *Sir Gawain*, p. 49, ll. 1779-82.
which has ‘the power to uncover and reveal all magic spells’. As Jessica Cooke notes:

That rings are the favourite protective talismans offered by ladies to knights in peril in the medieval romances will also have been well known. Indeed, the stark way in which the ring enters and exits the poem seems to depend on some contextual knowledge on the part of the audience about the protective property of rings and jewels, especially in the medieval romances, almost in the manner of an in-joke.

Gawain ‘may not accept the ring not only because of its great costliness, but also because it is a clear token of love’. However, in this romance the apotropaic power also associated with magic rings in the romance tradition, is transferred to a green girdle:

Forquatgome sosigordewithþisgrenelace,

Whilehehithadehemelyhalchedaboute,

Þerisnoonapelvnderheuenvohewehymþatmyȝt,

Forheimȝtnotbeslaynfortyslyȝtvponerpe.

613 Rosenberg, Lancelot-Grail, II, p. 64; Micha, Lancelot, VII, p. 270.
615 Cooke, ‘Lady's “Blushing” Ring’, p. 5.
616 Sir Gawain, p. 51, ll. 1851-4. What the girdle represents has caused much critical commentary; cf. Stoddard Malarkey and J. Barre Toelken, ‘Gawain and the Green Girdle’, JEGP 63 (1964), 14-20; Albert
In accepting the girdle, then failing to pass it on to Bertilak, he breaches their exchange of winnings agreement, and thus receives a ‘tappe’ from the Green Knight on the third swing of the axe, ‘Bot here yow lakke a lyttel, sir, and lewte yow wonted.'\textsuperscript{617} As Larrington notes, ‘The implication is that if Gawain had let himself be seduced by Bertilak’s wife, he would undoubtedly have been beheaded.'\textsuperscript{618} It is his refusal of her offers of love that mean that Gawain’s life is spared when he next encounters the Green Knight. The ‘tappe’ he receives from the Green Knight is a result of his failure in the exchange of winnings, where he does not reveal the gift of the green girdle; he passes the temptation of Lady Bertilak’s seduction, but accepts the magical protection that the girdle is supposed to bestow as a result of his \textit{timor mortis}, which also prompts him to not pass the girdle on to Bertilak.\textsuperscript{619} This would also seem to be another aspect of the \textit{Gawain}-poet playing with the conventions of romance: by accepting a supposedly magic girdle to save his life, Gawain not only falters in his knightly code of conduct, but also in his faith in Christian salvation, evinced by the pentangle, the picture of Mary inside his shield, and his prayers for salvation before Hautdesert is revealed to him. However, Gawain’s condemnation of himself is much more severe than Bertilak’s, who calls him ‘þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote ȝede’.\textsuperscript{620} His momentary lapse in accepting the girdle and concealing it is a much less severe fault than being seduced by Lady Bertilak, thus Gawain generally succeeds in withstanding the moral aspect of the

\textsuperscript{617} Sir Gawain, p. 65, l. 2366.

\textsuperscript{618} King Arthur’s Enchantresses, p. 61.


\textsuperscript{620} Sir Gawain, p. 65, l. 2363.
challenges of Hautdesert, and Gawain’s failure is not a major one according to Bertilak, ‘Bot for ye lufed your lyf; ye lasse I yow blame.’

Similarly, Lancelot is able to destroy Morgan’s enchantment of the *Val sans Retour* in the Vulgate *Lancelot* because of the purity of his thoughts, in as much as he is completely faithful to Guinevere. Thus, Lancelot and Gawain withstand the purely physical challenges that any knight of the Round Table should be able to overcome, but prove their worth through overcoming the moral challenges set by Morgan. Indeed, the testing of Sir Gawain by Lady Bertilak also seems reminiscent of the tests set by Morgan tests in the *Lancelot*. Even though Lancelot passes the initial challenge of the enchanted valley, Morgan continues to assail his fidelity to Guinevere. Having attempted to persuade Lancelot to reveal information about his love and give her his ring, Morgan employs a loyal female servant to act on her behalf, ‘the most beautiful of her maidens’, who tries various means to seduce Lancelot on the instructions of Morgan. As Laura Hibbard Loomis notes:

This enchantress, who in the course of the French narrative thrice attempts to seduce Lancelot in vain, sends her damsel, a younger self as it were, to effect the same end. Three times a young girl employs her amorous arts on the recumbent hero. From this episode, with the instigating background figure of Morgain and the foreground figure of the young, active seductress, it is but a step to the two

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621 Sir Gawain, p. 65, l. 2368.
figures in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the aged Morgan, prime mover in the plot, and the agent of temptation, Bercilak’s young wife.624

Some critics have gone as far as to suggest that Morgan and Lady Bertilak as the same character. Larrington notes that ‘Most scholars, except the most literal-minded, accept the Lady as a manifestation of Morgen’, although she sees them as ‘non-identical doubles’.625 However, this is to ignore the fact that they appear simultaneously as part of Gawain’s welcoming party and are treated quite differently by Bertilak and Gawain. The poet obviously intends us to see these figures as linked by the polarity of the contrast between them, but they are still discrete characters. Lady Bertilak acts as an agent of Morgan’s power in much the same way as her husband does, her seductive manner presumably as much of a guise as Bertilak’s green hue and ability to survive decapitation. This relationship is informed by the long tradition of female servants attending Morgan. For instance, in the Vulgate Suite du Merlin, she has a close relationship with one of her maids, confiding in her with regard to the potential murder of her husband, Uriens. This maid is ‘the one she most trusted and to whom she had most revealed her mind,’ and there is even discussion between them as to who will commit the crime.626 In the same text, in an episode that is repeated in Malory, she sends a messenger to court with a deadly mantle. We are told that ‘if she dies of it, Morgan will be angrier than at anything else that could happen to her, for she loves her with a very great love’.627 Indeed, Morgan’s close association with other women stems from her earliest appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Vita Merlini, where she

is the head of nine sisters and ‘has greater skill in healing, as her beauty surpasses that of her sisters’. 628 If the Gawain-poet is drawing on the French romance traditions surrounding Morgan, particularly the Vulgate Lancelot, there is no reason to see Lady Bertilak as Morgan herself, as there is a well established tradition of Morgan having close associations with other women, who carry out her malicious schemes. Indeed, as Burrow notes, the Gawain-poet ‘did not with absolute consistency imagine the lord and lady of Hautdesert as mere agents of Morgan le fay’. 629 However, Bertilak claims that his wife acted on his instructions, ‘And þe wowynge of my wyf: I wroȝt hit myseluen. / I sende hir to asay þe.’ 630 Some critics have found this problematic, stating that ‘The lady turns out to have been the agent of a controlling male figure in his test of another male figure,’ while others have noted that Morgan may not be involved in Lady Bertilak’s testing of Gawain at all. 631 According to Helen Cooper, ‘Bertilak is very clear that it was he himself who put his wife up to wooing Gawain, and there is no suggestion that Morgan even knows about this testing.’ 632 However,

Ho wayned me vpon þis wyse to your wynne halle
For to assay þe surquidré, þif hit soth were
Pat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table;
Ho wayned me þis wonder your wyttez to reue. 633

629 *A Reading of Sir Gawain*, p. 94.
630 *Sir Gawain*, p. 65, ll. 2361-2.
631 De Roo, ‘What's in a Name?’, p. 244.
This would suggest that Gawain’s testing at Bertilak’s castle is part of the test of the ‘renoun’ of Arthur’s court, as it is intrinsically linked with the reciprocal blow of the Green Knight: the level to which Gawain is punished by the Green Knight’s reciprocal blow is subject to his performance at Bertilak’s castle. Morgan is in residence at the castle, although neither Gawain or the reader are aware of it until Bertilak’s revelation at the end of the text, which suggests that she is a force to be reckoned with. Moreover, Gawain’s anti-feminist diatribe at the denouement would also suggest that he does not hold Bertilak responsible for the actions of his wife:

And comaundez me to þat cortays, your comlych fere,
Boþe þat on and þat oþer, myn honoured ladyez,
Þat þus hor knyȝt wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled.
Bot hit is no ferly þa ȝa fole madde,
And þurȝ wyles of wymmen be wonen to sorȝe,634

Gawain goes on to place the women within a specific anti-feminist context, likening his situation to those experienced by other men famously deceived by women. This passage has been variously interpreted by critics in terms of Gawain’s response to the ‘misogynistic Christian tradition’ on the one hand,635 and the idea that Gawain deploys ‘his “attack” on women in a semi-humourous fashion’ on the other.636 Mary Dove has

634 Sir Gawain, p. 66, ll. 2411-15.
noted that Gawain appears with the figures that he mentions (Adam, Samson and David) as part of a wider tradition, concluding that ‘there are several reasons for supposing that Gawain was known to the Gawain poet’, which is highly likely, but hardly as ‘one of the exemplary victims of deceitful womankind’, given his behaviour in the French tradition from Chrétien onwards. 637 Moreover, this does not explain Gawain’s anger here, which is in marked contrast to the polite, verbal parries of the bedroom scenes. Indeed, ‘Gawain’s diatribe seems to present a major inconsistency in his character.’ 638 What is particularly noteworthy in this context is that he blames both of the women in the castle. Given that this censure comes before Bertilak has informed him of Morgan’s involvement, or even identity, this speaks volumes about Gawain’s perception of ‘þe auncian lady’. As De Roo points out:

Not only has Gawain fallen back into shifting the blame away from himself, he implicates the old woman as well, who was never, after all, in the bedroom. Either he is blind with anti-feminist feeling at this point, or is right in extending his sense of involvement beyond the bedroom, or the poet is ‘cheating’ in his

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anticipation of the inclusion of Morgan le Faye in the Green Knight’s final revelations. 639

However, it is also likely that Gawain, and possibly a medieval audience, would have read more into the presence of the ‘auncian’ at the castle than modern critics. Morgan is initially presented to Gawain as diametrically opposed to Lady Bertilak in appearance, as the ugly, shrivelled crone of the pseudo-Ovidian De vetula and its counterparts in the medieval Latin tradition. 640 There is a long tradition of iconography relating to older women in medieval romance and, indeed, in medieval and classical literature more generally. As well as the physical qualities of older women, used in an exaggerated manner in this text, there are also specific character traits, which are also typical of the role that Morgan is assuming here. This tradition often turns these ‘bawds, the sorceresses, the aunts’; those old women ‘who showed the physical signs of age’, into matchmakers or go-betweens for any young beautiful heroines in the narrative. 641 The characters are not always negatively portrayed, but draw on stock traditions concerning age, wisdom and appearance. 642 These go-betweens can sometimes turn out to be one

639 ‘Undressing Lady Bertilak’, p. 309.
and the same as the beautiful maidens in the ‘loathly lady’ tradition, as in Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale*.643

In many of the French romances Morgan is depicted as young and beautiful, stemming from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* where it is said that ‘exceditque suas forma prestante sorores’.644 However, in *Gawain* she is contrasted with Lady Bertilak:

Bot vnlyke on to loke þo ladyes were,

For if þe þonge watz þep, ȝolȝe watz þat ȝep;

Riche red on þat on rayled ayquere,


644 *Vita Merlini*, p. 100, l. 919.
Rugh ronkled chekez þat oþer on rolled;
Kerchofes of þat on, wyth mony cler perlez,
Hir brest and hir bryȝt þrote bare displayed,
Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schedez on hillez;
Þat oþer wyth a gorger watz gered ouer þe swyre,
Chymbled ouer hir blake chyn with chalkquyte vayles,
Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
Toreted and treleted with tryflez aboute,
Þat noȝt watz bare of þat burde bot þe blake broȝes,
Þe tweyne yȝen and þe nase, þe naked lyppez,
And þose were soure to se and sellyly blered;
A mensk lady on molde mon may hir calle,
for Gode!
Hir body watz schort and þik,
Hir buttokez balȝ and brode,
More lykkerwys on to lyk
Watz þat scho hade on lode.645

Given the influence of the Latin rhetorical list of features of an ugly woman however, this description is not entirely unprecedented, and it would seem to be drawing directly on the Val sanz Retor section of the Lancelot, where we hear that Morgan’s father ‘was an ugly man, and Morgan, who took after him, was also ugly; and when she came of age, she was so lustful and wanton that a looser woman could not have been found’.646

645 Sir Gawain, p. 27, ll. 950-69.
This is in direct contrast to other descriptions of her in the Vulgate Cycle, but is not unique to the *Lancelot*.\(^{647}\) It suggests a link between the two texts, although the description given in *Sir Gawain* is much exaggerated; one is *ad laudem*, the other *ad vituperium*, ‘The description of the lady is appreciative, that of her old companion, harsh.’\(^{648}\) This contrast draws on stock descriptions of beauty which are then reversed and exaggerated in the case of this Morgan. The catalogue of beautiful traits and the specifics of their formulation can be traced back to classical sources, but became popular in the medieval period due largely to Matthew of Vendôme in his *Ars Versificatoria* and Geoffrey of Vinsauf in his *Poetria Nova*, the influence of which were, as D.S. Brewer notes, ‘immense’.\(^{649}\) A reaction to and embellishment of this tradition led to the development of an opposing tradition regarding ugliness,\(^ {650}\) nor is the *Gawain*-poet unique in his use of polarized portraits, as Jan Ziolkowski notes ‘Descriptions of a luscious young woman and a collapsing crone often come together in literature as an emphatic *memento mori* (or, to be more accurate, *memento senescere*).’\(^ {651}\) The *Gawain*-poet, however, carefully utilises Morgan’s ugliness to show a direct contrast between the two figures. In drawing upon such a well-known tradition the *Gawain*-poet must also have intended that the reader would have specific expectations of the old lady seen in the company of Lady Bertilak, possibly as a mere

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\(^{647}\) Cf. Tolkien, *Sir Gawain*, p. 130, n. 2460.

\(^{648}\) De Roo, ‘Undressing Lady Bertilak’, p. 313.


\(^{650}\) See the description of Beroe in *Ars Versificatoria*, I, pp. 130-2.

go-between. However, there is also Morgan’s position at Bertilak’s castle to consider. She is introduced as a figure of some importance, as we are initially told that she is ‘heȝly honowred with hapelez aboute’,\textsuperscript{652} and at the table ‘Þe olde auncian wyf heȝest ho syttez, / Þe lorde luſly her by lent, as I trowe.’\textsuperscript{653} This demonstrates Morgan’s esteemed status within the household and her link to Lady Bertilak. This would then undermine the association of the ‘auncian’ as a go-between, but would potentially leave the other impressions associated with this mode of description: wisdom; magic and lasciviousness. So, while she is not directly involved in the temptation scenes in the bedroom, it is little wonder that Gawain associates her with his trials at the castle and launches an attack against both women.

When the \textit{Gawain}-poet finally reveals the identity of the old woman, he demonstrates a detailed knowledge of Morgan’s background in the French romance tradition. Her familial relationships are described in great detail: when talking to Gawain Bertilak calls her ‘þyn aunt, Arþurez half-suster, / Þe duches doȝter of Tyntagelle, þat dere Vter after / Hade Arþur vpon’.\textsuperscript{654} Such specificity regarding the Arthurian family tree would seem to be reminiscent of a similar section in the \textit{Val Sanz Retor} episode which places Morgan in context, ‘The fact is that Morgan was the daughter of the duke of Tintagel and his wife Ygraine, who later became queen of Britain, the wife of Uther Pendragon and mother of King Arthur’.\textsuperscript{655} This section serves to remind the readers of the \textit{Lancelot} of Morgan’s lineage, and is followed by a description of her motivation for hating Guinevere. By formally introducing Morgan to

\textsuperscript{652} \textit{Sir Gawain}, p. 27, l. 949.

\textsuperscript{653} \textit{Sir Gawain}, p. 28, ll. 1001-2.

\textsuperscript{654} \textit{Sir Gawain}, p. 68, ll. 2463-70.

the audience for the first time, the Gawain-poet reveals Morgan’s relation to Arthur’s court, specifically to Gawain himself.

The Gawain-poet also maintains that Morgan is the particular enemy of Guinevere. Her hatred of Guinevere is not explained, which would seem to suggest that the author thought this donée of the Arthurian tradition would be clear to his readers; in the French romances she is frequently described as the enemy of Guinevere. In the Lancelot this enmity stems from Guinevere’s opposition to Morgan’s relationship with Guyamor, who is Guinevere’s nephew. Guinevere persuades him to end the relationship as she is worried that Morgan’s behaviour will shame the king ‘and Guyamor as well lest the king punish him for such behaviour’. Given that Guyamor is ‘hardly so in love with her that he could not get by without her’, he evinces no great sorrow in forsaking her. For Morgan, however, this is a disaster as she is pregnant; she decides to run away to Merlin to seek help. The text states that ‘she came to know Merlin well, and he loved her more than anything else. He taught her all the spells and bewitchments that she knew later on, and she stayed with him a long time.’

Once again, this detail is reflected in Sir Gawain, as Morgan’s relationship with Merlin is noted; ‘Pe maystrés of Merlyn mony hatz taken / For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme / With þat conable klerk.’

In the Vulgate Lancelot, we can see a clear link between Morgan’s hatred of Guinevere, which develops as the text progresses and she becomes, in Morgan’s eyes at least, a competitor for Lancelot’s love, and her acquisition of magical powers from the love-struck Merlin. Indeed, in the Lancelot, she attempts to frighten Guinevere in a manner very similar to Sir Gawain. She steals a ring from Lancelot which he was given by Guinevere, and in an attempt to reveal the truth to Arthur, sends the ring to the court

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657 Sir Gawain, p. 67, ll. 2448-50.
by a messenger, yet another of her loyal, female servants. The messenger claims to be from a penitent Lancelot who has confessed ‘to a base and horrible sin: that he had long brought shame to his lord, here present, and to his wife’.

Morgan’s plan backfires as Arthur and the court do not believe the messenger. However, her odium for Guinevere is made abundantly clear, so when Bertilak tells Gawain that the initial plan was ‘to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dyȝe / With gloplyng of þat ilke gome þat gostlych speked / With his hede in his honde bifore þe hyȝe table’, we can well believe that this is something that Morgan would readily attempt.

Morgan evidently has a considerable level of power in the text, as she is able to transform Bertilak into the Green Knight and prevent him from dying from his apparent decapitation. Indeed, Morgan is described as ‘Morgne the goddes’, which some critics have related to her persona in the Vita Merlini, and in the Speculum Ecclesiae of Giraldus Cambrensis, rather than the original French romances. Yet, once again, this description is also from the Lancelot where we hear that ‘many people (there were no dearth of fools at that time through the countryside) never spoke of her as a woman but rather called her Morgan the Goddess’, although Bertilak does not make the reference depreciatively.

According to Lawrence M. Clopper, the Green Knight is a providential figure, who lets Gawain make his own choices, but ultimately leads him to achieve a level of Christian fulfilment, ‘Gawain is not a fated victim but one who despite being caught in

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659 Sir Gawain, p. 68, ll. 2460-2.
660 Sir Gawain, p. 67, l. 2452.
661 McAlindon, ‘Magic, Fate, and Providence’, p. 135, n. 2; cf. Vita Merlini, p. 100-3, ll. 916-38; Speculum Ecclesiae, p. 49.
the trammels of an enigma will be led providentially home if he freely chooses the right path.’

However, if we take Bertilak’s claim seriously, that he is an agent of Morgan, then we need to consider his motivation in challenging Arthur’s court. Morgan gains her powers, though her ‘koyntyse of clergye’ and ‘Pe maystrés of Merlyn’. Given that Merlin’s power originally derives from his satanic parentage, thus we must view Morgan’s involvement in this text and her use of magic as dubious at best.

As Friedman notes, ‘By speaking of her as a goddess, the poet deepens the sinister gloom about her: a pagan goddess becomes automatically a Christian demon.’

Gawain’s journey does indeed involve a series of challenges posed by the world, the flesh and the devil, with a thoroughly evil Morgan in the role of demonic orchestrator. The depiction of Morgan in the Lancelot, is therefore a fitting precursor as far as the Gawain-poet is concerned, as she, in this part of the Vulgate Cycle, is almost entirely evil. In fact, in a dream that Lancelot has in a section of the Post-Vulgate Cycle, he envisages Morgan as ushering him into the hell that awaits himself, Guinevere, Tristan and Iseult:

she seemed to him as if she had just emerged from hell, and she wore no clothing except a wolf’s pelt, which covered her poorly ... she seized Lancelot by the hands and gave him to those who guarded her, saying, ‘Keep him well, for this is one of your knights.’

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664 Sir Gawain, p. 67, ll. 2447-8.

665 Merlin is referred to as the son of an incubi in the Historia Regum Britanniae, pp. 137-8, and later texts including the Vulgate Cycle refer to him as the son of a devil; cf. Sommer, Vulgate, II, p. 9.

666 ‘Morgan le Fay’, p. 267.

In *Sir Gawain*, it would be an exaggeration to describe Morgan as one of the hordes of hell; she is, after all, clearly depicted as Gawain’s aunt and very much in the land of the living. However, she would also seem to pose a challenge to the assumptions of contemporary Christians which are constantly questioned by Gawain’s pilgrimage to the barrow that serves as the ‘grene chapel’. Morgan is a consistently negative force in the text. Indeed, the very motive ascribed to Morgan’s use of the Green Knight is the work of the devil from a Christian perspective.

The final point concerning the *Gawain*-poet’s depiction of Morgan is the degree to which she succeeds in her intention. If we take the Green Knight at face value then we can assume that Morgan is hardly successful in her attempt as the poet does not portray Guinevere as falling into mortal terror at the sight of the Green Knight. In fact, the poet does not comment on her reaction, we are merely told:

> To þe comlych quene wyth cortays speche,  
> ‘Dere dame, to-day demay yow neuer;  
> Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse,  
> Laykyng of enterludez, to laȝe and to syng,

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Thus it would appear that Morgan did not succeed in her stated intention. Once again, we are reminded of the *Lancelot*, where Morgan’s attempt to expose Guinevere and Lancelot’s affair misfires and Lancelot destroys her *Val sanz Retor*. However, if we assume that Morgan is responsible for Gawain’s ordeal at the hands of Lady Bertilak, then we can see that, to an extent, she does undermine the values of Arthur’s court. Gawain has to reassess his own values in the light of her scheming, and reconsider his own concept of what constitutes the knightly ideal, which is demonstrated by his adoption of the green girdle as ‘*þe token of vntrawþe*’.

In this sense, Morgan proves that the ‘renoun’ of the Round Table may not be as unassailable as Arthur would like the world to think. However, this realisation is limited to Gawain’s perception of himself, now somewhat at odds with the ‘felaȝschip’ of the court. Furthermore, Morgan does not succeed in the way that she intends as the court interprets Gawain’s return as a victory:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,} \\
\text{A bende abelef hym aboute of a bryȝt grene,} \\
\text{And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were.} \\
\text{For þat watz acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table,} \\
\text{And he honoured þat hit hade euermore after.}
\end{align*}
\]

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669 *Sir Gawain*, p. 14, ll. 469-73.
670 *Sir Gawain*, p. 69, l. 2509.
671 *Sir Gawain*, p. 69, ll. 2516-20.
There are clear correlations between the Morgan of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Vulgate *Lancelot*, and it would appear that the *Gawain*-poet was influenced in his depiction of Morgan by one particular section, which displays all of the features that he elects to employ in his romance. However, the *Gawain*-poet treats the character of Morgan in a highly individual manner, interweaving the *données* of the French romance tradition into a distinctive new figure.

The main elements of the narrative of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exist in another, later version, *The Grene Knight* in which Morgan does not appear, and a similar character is, instead, called Agostes. Speed has noted that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ‘or a closely related version of it, must be the ultimate source of the Folio poem … there could well have been one or more intermediary versions’. 672 Hulbert maintained that *The Grene Knight* relates to a form of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ‘anterio to that in which we now have the poem’, 673 while Kittredge claimed that there was ‘doubtless more in the version of which the Percy MS is a poor copy … in general, it is evident that the Percy text is a faulty transcript, perhaps written down from memory’. 674 It is, therefore, difficult to be sure how closely the text is related to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and whether this would imply that the deployment of Morgan was the innovation of the *Gawain*-poet, while the author of *The Grene Knight* uses the name found in the earlier source text.

The events of the text are much compressed, and mainly told from the point of view of the Green Knight, Bredbeddle, and the other inhabitants of his castle rather than Arthur’s court. Lady Bredbeddle is genuinely in love with Gawain ‘Because Sir

672 *The Grene Knight*, p. 237.
673 *Syr Gawayn and the Grene Knyzt. (Continued)*, *MP* 13 (1915), 433-462, at pp. 77-8.
Gawaine was stiffe in stowre, / Shee loved him privilye paramour; / And shee never him see.’

Moreover, Agostes’ motivation is simple; she only wishes to attract Gawain into her daughter’s sphere of influence with the promise of a knightly challenge. Bredbeddle is fully responsible for the challenges that Gawain faces, although it is Agostes who is responsible for his survival from the blow at Arthur’s court. He is aware from the start of how his wife views Gawain, ‘Full well hee wist in certaine / That his wife loved Sir Gawaine.’

The return blow and the sharing of winnings, which is crucially not presented as an exchange in this text, thus rendering Gawain’s punishment for not revealing it an ‘absurd contradiction’, are not part of a wider plan by Agostes.

Her role is limited to contriving Gawain’s summons to the castle, where he will meet her daughter:

All was for her daughters sake,
That the witch soe sadlye spake
To her sonne-in-law, the knight:
Because Sir Gawaine was bold and hardye
And therto full of curtesye,
To bring him to her sight.

Given that her principal role in the development of the plot is to bring Gawain and her daughter together, she is instrumental in encouraging the single bedroom scene in the text:

675 *The Grene Knight*, p. 242, ll. 46-8.
676 *The Grene Knight*, p. 249, ll. 253-4.
677 *A Study of Gawain*, p. 126.
678 *The Grene Knight*, p. 243, ll. 61-6.
Up rose the old witch with hast throwe,
And to her dauhter can shee goe,
And said: ‘Be not adread!’

To her daughter can she say:
‘The man that thou hast wisht many a day,
Of him thou maist be sped:
For Sir Gawaine, that curteous knight,
Is lodged in this hall all knight.’
Shee brought her to his bedd.

Shee saith: ‘Gentle knight, awake,
And for this faire ladies sake,
That hath loved thee soe deere,
Take her bodily in thine armes;
There is noe man shall doe thee harme.’
Now beene they both heere.679

Thus, we can see the figure here adheres much more strongly to the tradition of the old
go-between than Morgan in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. However, the stock
description ad vituperium is not a feature of The Grene Knight; we are told that the

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679 The Grene Knight, pp. 253-4, ll. 364-78.
figure is an ‘old witch,’ but Bredbeddle’s wife is not presented to Gawain at the same time as her mother, thus omitting the Gawain-poet’s resonant juxtaposition.  

Morgan’s counterpart in *The Grene Knight* is much less impressive, albeit more straightforward, than Morgan in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. She has no particular problem with Arthur’s court and her plot to force Gawain to quit the court and journey to Bredbeddle’s castle is purely on behalf of her daughter. Bredbeddle’s wife merely acts as temptation to Gawain’s knightly loyalty. According to Heidi Breuer, ‘the foiling of Agostes provides reassurance that even witchcraft can’t successfully challenge convention as long as men loyally support one another’. However, this would seem to ignore Bredbeddle’s own agenda in deploying the magic he has learned from Agostes. The text makes it clear that he is well aware of his wife’s feeling for Gawain, thus presumably he is also of his mother-in-law’s motivation in enticing Gawain to the castle. That he is also responsible for setting Gawain a challenge in the sharing of winnings implies that he is also cognizant of the women’s intentions while he is out hunting. Thus, the challenges that Gawain faces are not here seamlessly interlinked with the plot as they are in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, while Agostes, although ostensibly placed in the same position as Morgan within the text, is a much less compelling presence.

This text raises issues for the depiction of Morgan in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as, if the author of *The Grene Knight* did base the text on a version which predates *Sir Gawain*, this would imply that the Gawain-poet introduced Morgan into a text in which she did not originally appear. Critics who view Morgan as peripheral to the text interpret this as further evidence that she does not belong in the narrative, being

680 *The Grene Knight*, p. 248, l. 213.

‘anomalous and almost certainly not original’. However, if the Gawain-poet did introduce her for the specific purpose of using her reputation as a justification for the framework of the romance, this can be seen as further evidence of the importance and renown of Morgan, and also as an additional example of the Gawain-poet’s familiarity with the French Arthurian tradition. Furthermore, this would suggest that the Gawain-poet consciously integrates the Morgan/Agostes character by rendering her the ultimate architect of Gawain’s challenge, thus creating a more coherent link between the two courts through the familial relations involved: Gawain moves from the court of his uncle to that of his aunt. This succeeds in focussing the text on the character of Gawain rather than Bertilak/Bredbeddle, while reaffirming its position in the Arthurian tradition due to its focus on Arthur’s court and the hostile challenger motif.

In contrast to many of the texts discussed in the previous chapter, the Gawain-poet incorporates details of Morgan’s character from a specific section of the Vulgate Lancelot, although he also draws on the wider reputation of Morgan, and utilises these features in a totally original way. Whether the author was re-working existing material from The Grene Knight, or was crafting a completely new text grounded in the topoi and traditions of romance, his pivotal deployment of Morgan demonstrates the importance of the character, and her consistent versatility as evinced in the wide range of preceding texts in which she appears. In featuring a single aspect of her character, the Gawain-poet does not address the conflicts in Morgan’s representation in the French tradition, but the fact that she is an integral part of the Arthurian family tree, but also external to Arthur’s court makes her particularly suitable as the prime mover controlling Gawain’s challenge and his subsequent humiliation. Even though the Gawain-poet’s direct recourse to the French romances in relation to Morgan is quite narrow in terms of

682 ‘Syr Gawayn and the Grene Knyzt. (Continued)’, p. 78.
specific details, he also utilises a wider range of *topoi* of the Arthurian tradition in his presentation of Morgan. This creates a unique and powerful figure who is pivotal, and wholly integral, to the intricate framework of the text.
CHAPTER FIVE

MORGAN IN SIR THOMAS MALORY’S MORTE DARThUR

Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* was composed in the mid to late fifteenth century and exists in a printed edition produced in 1485 by William Caxton and the Winchester Manuscript (London, British Library, Ms Additional 59678). Biographical details concerning the author of the text are limited, but critics now generally accept that the Malory who composed the *Morte* was Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel. As Thomas H. Crofts states, ‘probability favours this knight-prisoner as author’.⁶⁸³ All of the contenders for the authorship of the *Morte* would have been from a similar cultural milieu, but Malory’s audience is more difficult to define. Malory himself addresses the book to ‘all jentylmen and jentylwymmen’,⁶⁸⁴ but in the case of the Caxton edition:

> Caxton adroitly blurs lines of class distinction as he addresses his audience of ‘many noble and dyvers gentylmen’ and ‘al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates, of what estate or degree they been of’. Caxton, by directing his generically aristocratic book to both gentry and noble, makes it hard for us to

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know what class distinctions were asserted, or were being performed (whether
anachronistically or otherwise), by his (and Malory’s) audience.685

According to Raluca Radulescu, Malory was part of the gentry and the Morte reflects
the interests of ‘Malory’s own social class’, as ‘many members of the gentry combined
an interest in chivalry with political (and often even criminal) careers’.686 Thus the
Morte Darthur is similar to many of the English texts discussed in the preceding two
chapters, in that its contemporary audience is indeterminate. One of the factors that has
been considered in determining Malory’s identity is the potential access of the likely
author to the range of texts used in composition of the Morte. According to Croft,
Malory may have had access to a ‘single-volume compilation’, given his repeated
references to a mysterious ‘Freynshe booke’ when speaking of his sources.687
However, as Terence McCarthy has pointed out, often ‘he claims to be borrowing when
he is being original’ in order to add auctoritas to his narrative.688

The Tale of King Arthur (Caxton’s Books I-IV) is based principally on the Vulgate
Suite du Merlin, however, Edward D. Kennedy claims John Hardyng’s Chronicle was
an ancillary source,689 while McCarthy suggests that Malory had also read the Vulgate
Merlin by the time he was writing this section of the Morte.690 Malory’s Tale of the
Noble King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius (Caxton’s Book V), draws principally on

685 Malory’s Contemporary Audience, p. 6.
687 Malory’s Contemporary Audience, p. 17.
688 Terence McCarthy, ‘Malory and his Sources’, p. 78.
689 ‘Malory and his English Sources’, in Aspects of Malory, ed. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer
690 ‘Malory and his Sources’, p. 75.
the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*, but according to Ralph Norris, this tale is also indebted to the Vulgate *Merlin* and most probably Hardyng’s *Chronicle*.\(^{691}\) *The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake* (Caxton’s Book VI) is mainly based on three episodes from the Vulgate *Lancelot*, although, as Robert H. Wilson notes, the French *Perlesvaus* is the source for the episode of the Chapel Perilous.\(^{692}\) The origin of the *Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney* (Caxton’s Book VII) remains unknown, but critics have hypothesised either a French or English source. As Peter Field notes, ‘each of the other tales in *Le Morte Darthur* has a major source, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the *Tale of Gareth* had a similar one, now lost’.\(^{693}\) However, critics have highlighted the similarities to *La Cotte Mal Taillée* in the Prose *Tristan*, and Kennedy notes additional correspondences with the *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Ipomadon*.\(^{694}\) *The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones* (Caxton’s Books VIII-XII) is based on the Prose *Tristan*, although, as Vinaver notes, Malory’s version is ‘about six times shorter’.\(^{695}\) *The Tale of the Sankgreal* (Caxton’s Books XIII-XVII), which Malory describes as ‘cronycled for one of the trewyst and of the holyest that ys in thys worlde’, is drawn from the Vulgate *Quest del Saint Graal*.\(^{696}\) As Hynes-Berry points out, the fact that Malory retains as much as ‘one-third of its original length was more important than the words he added or altered,’ as this clearly indicates the degree of respect with which he treated the French

\(^{691}\) Malory’s Library: The Sources of the Morte Darthur (Cambridge, 2008), p. 54.


\(^{694}\) Kennedy, ‘Malory and his English Sources’, p. 27.


text. The *Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* (Caxton’s Books XVIII-XIX) draws on a variety of sources: ‘The Poisoned Apple’ and ‘The Fair Maid of Astolat’ are derived from the Vulgate *Mort Artu* as transmitted in the Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*. However, the ‘Great Tournament’ and ‘Healing of Sir Urry’ are ‘virtually unknown in Arthurian Literature’, although, according to Vinaver, the first part of the ‘Great Tournament’ is analogous to parts of the *Mort Artu* and the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*. The ‘Knight of the Cart’ ultimately has its origin in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Chevalier de la Charette*, adapted by the author of the Vulgate *Lancelot*, but Malory’s version is thought to follow a later, lost version. The *Most Piteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon* (Caxton’s Books XX-XXI) is taken from the *Mort Artu* and the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, although Shepherd notes that some elements are inspired by the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, while Norris claims that John Hardyng’s *Chronicle* was also used.

Although Malory’s *Morte* is largely based on French romances, there is a much greater concentration on chivalry and the relationship between knights in a manner reminiscent of the chronicle tradition. As Vinaver points out, ‘he had no sympathy with the French courtly tradition, and that he had a practical, matter-of-fact conception of

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700 *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 702.
701 *Malory’s Library*, p. 141.
Consequently, he ‘shows markedly less concern for women’ than his French sources. The role of the women in Malory’s text is, in general, considerably muted in comparison to the French courtly tradition and more akin to the chronicle tradition, which informs the historical context of the work. According to Fisher, Chaucer, the Gawain-Poet and Malory ‘were self-consciously aware of themselves as English writers separate from, even as they relied on, continental sources’, and may well have experienced ‘a national and nationalist anxiety about issues that, in their fictional forms, were the very stuff of romance’:

about English chivalry and knighthood and about English aristocratic masculinity in relation to the long war England was destined ultimately to lose, in their own encounters with a genre as deeply ‘French’ as the romance, then, these late medieval English writers may have been expressing an anxiety about masculinity, marginalization, and belatedness that voiced itself in the persistent marginalization of women.

Malory’s focus on the men, then, is at the cost of the women characters in his source texts and those social and cultural spheres that typically involved them. This is evident in Malory’s depiction of Morgan, as, compared to his sources, the level of detail concerning her character is significantly reduced, and her role is generally defined by her relationship to men. As Henry Grady Morgan states:

The most striking fact about Malory’s treatment of Morgan le Fay is that he has either removed or depressed considerably two of the most common traditions which throughout the Arthurian romance materials are associated with Morgan le Fay: the healing tradition and the power of prophecy.705

However, although a woman’s place in the text is decidedly of lesser importance than Malory’s knights, Morgan remains a force to be reckoned with. Generalisations regarding Malory’s attitude toward women, whereby ‘a man’s job is to fight and a woman’s to be beautiful’, must be reconsidered in the light of the palpable influence of Morgan’s magical powers.706 These powers give her a level of control over some of the events of the text, which is only matched by such other magical women as Nymue and Lynette. In fact, it could be argued that due to Malory’s simplification of some elements of the text, Morgan actually gains in reputation and influence. However, with the notable exception of the religious marvels of the Grail quest, ‘Malory took a sceptical view of the supernatural’.707 Generally he downplays the fantastic elements found in his sources; thus, many of Morgan’s actions are significantly curtailed, even though she has greater autonomy than many of the other women in the text. Malory also simplifies the motivations of the magical characters in his sources, most notably, Merlin. As Lumiansky notes:


in the French sources Merlin will use his magical abilities sometimes for good and sometimes for evil, sometimes selfishly and sometimes for common profit, Malory effects alterations in his inherited materials which cause Merlin to become much simpler and more consistent. While in the Old French *Suite du Merlin*, Merlin at times supports Arthur and at other times misleads him, in the *Morte Darthur* – from the beginning until his disappearance from the action – Merlin is always working beneficently for the king.708

The same process of simplification is applied to Morgan’s character, albeit to resoundingly negative effect. Malory has recourse to a wide range of source material with regard to the shaping of Morgan, but he chooses to portray her as ‘consistently evil’, in order to ‘present her throughout the work as the symbol of the basic weakness of the society, a weakness which is omnipresent and which ultimately is to bring about the downfall of the society’.709 Charlotte Spivack claims that this demonization begins in the French romances which Malory used as sources, and is partly connected with her initial role as a healer as ‘the arts of healing with herbs and other natural remedies became in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance associated with older women who were accused of witchcraft’.710 According to Fries, the degeneration in Morgan’s character is due to ‘the increasing inability of male Arthurian

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709 Morgan, ‘Role of Morgan’, p. 168.
710 ‘Morgan le Fay: Goddess or Witch?’, p. 19.
authors to cope with the image of a woman of power in positive terms’. However, as the examination of the French sources in the previous chapters of this study demonstrates, there is hardly a progressive degeneration in the character of Morgan from the twelfth century onwards. Indeed, her depiction in the *Roman de Troie* incorporates many of her more negative character traits, and in each subsequent text she is portrayed as an antagonist to the principal male character. Morgan’s negative depiction in Malory is largely due to the combination of all of the French sources he draws on, whereby Morgan is opposed to all of the worthy knights she encounters, rather than just Arthur himself. The changes that Malory makes to individual aspects of the sources, as well as what he chooses to omit, make a significant difference to the overall representation of Morgan, creating a character that can be seen as the embodiment of everything that stands in opposition to the ideals of the Round Table.

In the *Morte*, Morgan is initially introduced as one of three of Arthur’s sisters. Whereas the other two are immediately married off, Elayne to King Nentres of Garlot and Morgawse to King Lott of Orkenay, Morgan is sent to a convent before her marriage to King Uriens of Gore. It is here that Morgan hones her magical abilities:

> And the thyrd syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nonnery, and ther she lened so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye. And after she was wedded to kynge Uryens of the land of Gore that was syre Ewayns le Blaunche Maynys fader.  

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711 ‘Lady to the Tramp’, p. 2.

This section draws on the Vulgate *Merlin*, or the Post-Vulgate *Merlin* section which Asher notes is essentially the same as the Vulgate *Merlin*, in which Morgan is married to King Neutres of Garlot, and then he sends her to a nunnery. 713 In the Vulgate *Merlin*, the marriage of Arthur’s sisters not only serves to make amends to the kinswomen of Gorlois, who was killed in a battle against Uther, but also to dissipate the possibility of revenge or rebellion, ‘and do for the lady’s other friends what he must so that each and every one will take him as their lord and lawful king’.714 It is Neutres who then consigns Morgan to a convent:

    Neutres put her in a nunnery to learn to read and write, and she learned so much so well that she mastered the arts. She became wonderfully skilled in an art called astrology, and she worked hard all the time and knew a great deal about the healing arts. For her mastery of knowledge, people called her Morgan the Fay.715

According to Gayle Rubin, the marriage bond forms the basis of a political exchange:

    gift giving confers upon its participants a special relationship of trust, solidarity, and mutual aid … marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it


is women who are the most precious of gifts ... the relationship thus established is not just one of reciprocity, but one of kinship.  

This marriage therefore strengthens the tie between the king, the giver in the exchange, and Morgan’s prospective husband, the receiver. Morgan is reduced to a mere chattel by her marriage, although this passive role is qualified by her education in the *Merlin*, which shows her as an individual in her own right, corresponding more closely to her actions in the rest of the text. In Malory, she is treated as a chattel in spite of her established status as a ‘grete clerke of nygromancye’, which would see to imply that the limitations imposed by her gender vitiate her exalted status as a wielder of magic, even though it is this capacity that gives her autonomy later on in the text. In the Vulgate *Merlin* she merely learns the healing arts at the convent, portrayed as an essentially benign attribute, and it is only later that she becomes adept in necromancy due to Merlin’s tuition. This is similar to the *Lancelot* and the Post-Vulgate *Suite du Merlin*, as Morgan is educated by Merlin in both. Morgan’s convent education is important in the *Suite* as she is referred to as a *boine clergesse* (‘good woman clerk’) even before she meets Merlin.  

Fries notes that, ‘perhaps – as male authors for centuries before and after, as well as during Malory’s own, maintained – this schooling illustrates the danger of educating women beyond their appropriate sphere (which is to further male interests rather than their own)’. In fact, Morgan’s convent education may also be related to changes in the depiction of female spirituality and the potential negative connotations this might involve. Whereas such female religious figures as Hroswitha of


718 ‘Lady to the Tramp’, p. 10.
Gandersheim, Hildegard of Bingen, and Herrad of Hohenburg had been highly respected in their time for their learning, by the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, the church was ‘troubled by heresy, schism, the growth of ‘enthusiasm’, and the clamour of women mystics for recognition’.\(^{719}\) This is evinced by the fear such figures such as Margery Kempe engendered in contemporary churchmen. Margery is the unlikely product of ‘a nation where conformity has become an end in itself and where anyone, particularly a woman, who seeks to imitate the Christ-like life has trouble finding tolerance, much less approval’.\(^{720}\) More general disapproval of female spirituality was reflected in shifting attitudes to convents such as that which Morgan attends.\(^{721}\) In Malory’s *Morte*, Morgan’s formative years in the convent are depicted as part of her consistent rebellion within the text. As Armstrong points out, ‘this “thyrd sister” of King Arthur manages to appropriate and adapt the function of the convent to suit her own ends … exiting the convent a witch when she entered as merely a noble woman’.\(^{722}\)

Morgan’s next appearance in Malory’s *Morte* is with her mother, Igrayne, where we hear that she is ‘a fayre lady as ony myght be’.\(^{723}\) This section is a condensation of the Post-Vulgate *Suite*, where we are told:

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\(^{722}\) *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, p. 60.

Igerne’s daughter Morgan took the prize for beauty over all who were there that day. Unquestionably she was a beautiful girl up to the time she began to learn enchantments and magic charms; but once the enemy entered her and she was inspired with sensuality and the devil, she lost her beauty so completely that she became very ugly.724

This lengthier description, with its emphasis on the deterioration in her appearance thanks to her mastery of the black arts, does not concur with Malory’s claim that she was already familiar with necromancy thanks to a convent education. Moreover, by expunging Merlin’s involvement with Morgan, Malory clarifies the distinction between Morgan and Nymue. Nymue is introduced to magic through Merlin’s tuition, whereas Morgan would seem to be wholly responsible for her decision to study necromancy. This differentiation is important within the text as Malory polarises the two figures; in keeping with his focus on the men in the text, Morgan is depicted as entirely reprehensible whereas Nymue’s interest in magic is rehabilitated by her status as a pupil of Merlin.

The next sequence of events concerning Morgan in Malory is also taken from the Post-Vulgate Suite. Here, Morgan betrays Arthur twice by appropriating his magical sword and scabbard for two of her lovers. This is condensed in Malory to a single episode involving the battle she arranges between Arthur and Accolon, which has been described as ‘the key to her role throughout the work,’ and a turning point in the text as it is the ‘first attempt made against the person of Arthur himself’.725 According to

725 Morgan, ‘Role of Morgan’, p. 154.
Fries, this episode serves ‘to emphasize more thoroughly than ever the wickedness of Morgan’s role as well as the rather feeble scope of her magical powers’.\textsuperscript{726} Morgan’s strike against Arthur is especially reprehensible given the familial bond and the level of trust that he places in her as a result of this family connection. This foreshadows Mordred’s betrayal at the end of the text; both Morgan and Mordred should owe dual allegiance to Arthur, that of loyalty to a noble king and a close kinsman, but both plot against him with the aim of usurping his kingship and killing him. In the \textit{Morte}, Arthur entrusts Excalibur to Morgan’s care, but she gives it to Accolon, and then arranges for Arthur, Accolon and Uriens to go to a ‘lytyll shippe’ full of her maidens.\textsuperscript{727} When they have been separated, Accolon is told by Morgan’s messenger to prepare for battle with the help of Excalibur, sent to him by Morgan. However, he seems unaware that this battle involves turning on Arthur, in spite of Morgan informing him, as in the Post-Vulgate \textit{Suite}, of her schemes to kill her brother.\textsuperscript{728} Malory’s phrasing of the message sent by Morgan to Accolon, however, makes the would-be usurper’s protestations of innocence seem disingenuous:

\begin{quote}
she byddyth you as ye love her that ye do that batayle to the uttirmoste withoute ony mercy, lyke as ye promysed hir whan ye spoke laste togedir in prevyté. And what damesell that bryngyth her the kynges hede whyche ye shall fyght withall, she woll make hir a quene.\textsuperscript{729}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{726} ‘Lady to the Tramp’, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{727} Malory, \textit{Works}, I, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{729} Malory, \textit{Works}, I, p. 140.
Here, there is a marked modification of the episode in the Post-Vulgate *Suite*, in which Accolon is portrayed as the innocent victim of Morgan’s ploy, in spite his knowledge of her plot to kill Arthur. For Malory, his protestations of innocence are hard to believe.

Morgan’s treachery in this section is contrasted with the active role that Nymue plays in Arthur’s rescue. In the *Suite du Merlin*, the presence of Ninianne at the fight between Arthur and Accolon follows on from a preceding episode in which Merlin informs her of the risk to Arthur from Morgan’s scheme, and they decide to come to his aid. Having imprisoned Merlin, Ninianne decides to step into the breach and help Arthur herself. On arrival, ‘she was badly frightened and thought he was wounded to death’, so she causes Accolon to drop Excalibur, thus enabling Arthur to regain his sword and remove the magical scabbard from Accolon’s waist. Accolon’s loss of blood due to the wounds Arthur had already inflicted results in Arthur’s triumph. In Malory’s version, Merlin does not tell Nymue about the combat, this knowledge is ascribed to her own abilities, ‘and she com thidir for the love of kynge Arthur, for she knew how Morgan le Fay had ordained for Arthur shold have bene slayne that day, and therefore she com to save his lyff’. Indeed, Nymue appears to watch much of the fight before she intervenes, as though she is assessing Arthur’s worthiness to be king:

> whan the Damesell of the Lake behelde Arthure, how full of prouesse his body was, and the false treson that was wrought for hym to have had hym slayne, she

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had grete peté that so good a knight and such a man of worship sholde so be
destroyed.733

As in the *Suite du Merlin*, Nymue causes Accolon to drop the sword, and it is only the
repossess of Excalibur that allows Arthur to win the battle. In both texts, Arthur is
given the opportunity to prove his prowess initially, which demonstrates that he would
easily have won the battle were it not for the unfair advantage accorded to Accolon by
Excalibur. However, in Malory’s version Nymue’s hesitation not only allows Arthur to
‘preserve his worship and demonstrate his prowess’, but also ‘undercuts the proposition
that combat can reveal justice. It takes her magical power as a sorceress for the rightful
king to prevail.’734 Yet Nymue is merely re-establishing the balance upset by
Morgan’s intervention. Moreover, this combat hardly reveals justice in the first place
because Accolon has been provided with an unfair advantage, particularly due to the
substandard replica that Morgan sent to Arthur instead of Excalibur, which breaks
during the battle.735 It is worth noting that Arthur does not take back the scabbard that
would prevent him losing more blood from the wounds that he has sustained, but rather
throws it away, which shows that he and Accolon are now equal. Nymue is an essential
counterbalance to Morgan in this section because that knightly prowess which comes
from being a man of ‘worship’ cannot alone prevail over Morgan’s magic. In Malory,
in spite her support for Arthur, Nymue appears reluctant to intervene in the fight
without some tangible proof of Arthur’s worthiness, even though she knows of
Accolon’s unfair advantage. By removing Merlin’s involvement in Arthur’s rescue,

734 Kenneth Hodges, ‘Swords and Sorceresses: the Chivalry of Malory’s Nyneve’, *Arthuriana* 12 (2002),
78-96, at p. 85.
Malory makes the contrast between Nymue and Morgan more pronounced. Morgan’s magic is not derived from Merlin, and in contradistinction to the Post-Vulgate Suite, she has not been coerced into her initial betrayal of Arthur; she is solely responsible for her perfidy. Nymue is equally responsible for her own actions, she is not merely following what Merlin has intended, but her instincts lead her to the path of worthiness. Malory creates a binary opposition between these two figures by means of their use of magic that is not present in his sources, and this binary is characteristic of his later treatment of Morgan.

Secure in the belief that Accolon will succeed in killing Arthur, Morgan decides to kill her husband in the Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin, but is prevented by her son. In the Suite Yvain overhears the plot to kill his father, and concludes that Morgan is ‘possessed by the devil’. He informs her that he would have killed her ‘were you not my mother’, noting that ‘they tell the truth, the knights of this country, who say you work only sorrow and treachery and work by the devil’s arts in everything you do’.

This observation reaffirms the earlier statement that her beauty has faded because of her thraldom to Satan. In Malory, although Uwayne calls her a ‘fende’, declaring that ‘men seyde that Merlyon was begotyn of a fende, but I may say an erthely fende bare me’, Malory plays down the demonic associations of Morgan; she is merely an ‘erthely fende’, rather than a devil. In both texts she begs forgiveness, but in the Post-Vulgate Suite she warns Yvain that the incident will reflect badly on him, ‘you will be

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738 Malory, Works, I, p. 149. The Post-Vulgate notes ‘I would rather be called the son of a devil like Merlin, for no-one ever saw that Merlin’s father was a devil, but I have seen you both devil and true enemy. I was conceived in you and issued from you, so I can truly affirm that I am more the son of a devil than Merlin’ (Asher, Lancelot-Grail, IV, p. 265). Cf. Paris and Ulrich, Merlin, II, p. 214.
thought ignoble wherever you go.’\textsuperscript{739} However, in Malory she merely refers to ‘my worship,’\textsuperscript{740} which demonstrates she has not as yet acquired evil reputation already ascribed to her at this point in the narrative in the source text; it is, therefore, possible to salvage her reputation.

In the Post-Vulgate Suite and Malory, Arthur sends the body of Accolon to Morgan, but this episode is much more developed in the source text, as Morgan is forced to defend herself against the suspicions of the court. This distinguishes her from the numerous other ladies in the Arthurian tradition who mourn the loss of a lover with excessive displays of sorrow, ‘they did not think that she was guilty of anything, because of her cheerful manner, and they all turned it into game and amusement’.\textsuperscript{741} However, the text notes that ‘she had as much grief in her heart as a woman could have’.\textsuperscript{742} The situation in Malory is treated rather differently as the body is not brought to her publicly, although the narrator does state that ‘she was so sorrowfull that nye hir herte to-braste, but bycause she wolde nat hit were knowyn oute, she kepte hir countenaunce and made no sembelaunte of dole’.\textsuperscript{743} This again serves to differentiate Morgan from the other women of the text; her stiff upper lip reaffirms her position as a \textit{mulier fortis}, or even a virago in Malory’s eyes.

Armstrong notes that ‘Arthur’s choice of language acknowledges that Morgan has slipped outside the bounds of the chivalric feminine’. When he refers to her after the Accolon incident, he resolves to ‘be sore avenged uppon hir, that all Crystendom shall

\textsuperscript{740} Malory, \textit{Works}, I, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{743} Malory, \textit{Works}, I, pp. 149-50.
spoke of hit.’ This threat ‘suggests the great threat posed by Morgan, and by extension, all those who refuse to perform the gendered roles the chivalric community has assigned to them’:

The discourse of vengeance in romance is rarely, if ever, employed by the masculine in the direction of the feminine, and nowhere else in this first book of Malory’s does it approach the force with which we see it applied here. Arthur talks as he would of another knight or king who has challenged his authority; that he should name as potential witnesses ‘all of Crystendom’ speaks of punishment and revenge on the largest scale available to the Arthurian world.745

Arthur’s comment reaffirms Morgan’s position in the text as a virago and a genuine force to be reckoned with. In fact, her relationship with Accolon shows that she has taken on the more active role, typically that of the men in the text; it is ‘a warped reflection of the knightly devotion to the feminine’.746 Although Malory does not include any reference to prior wrongdoings, the inherent power which renders Morgan a serious threat to the community is emphasised. Much of her power is derived from her manipulation of perceived gender roles; when faced with the prospect of Uwayne’s vengeance, she is quite happy to play the penitent wife. Indeed, she is just as happy to benefit from her relationship to Uriens when it suits her as she is from her relationship

744 Malory, Works, I, p. 146.
745 Gender and the Chivalric Community, p. 63.
746 Armstrong, Gender and the Chivalric Community, p. 65.
with Arthur. Her magic enables her to overreach the limitations imposed on her due to gender, but she also uses the traditional norms of feminine behaviour to her advantage.

By condensing the Accolon episode so that Morgan only has one lover instead of the two she has in the Post-Vulgate Suite, Malory emphasizes her antagonistic relationship with Arthur. Morgan responds to Arthur’s provocative gesture of returning Accolon’s body to her by attempting to steal Excalibur, though she only succeeds in stealing the scabbard. This incident is vital to the outcome of Malory’s narrative, as in the final battle, Arthur’s life may have been saved by this scabbard and its apotropaic powers which prevent the owner from losing blood, ‘Morgan, by throwing the scabbard into the lake destroys the invincibility of Arthur and makes it possible for Mordred to deliver the final death stroke’.747 When Morgan is pursued by Arthur she throws the scabbard into a lake, ‘so hit sanke, for hit was hevy of golde and precious stonys’, and then turns herself and her followers into stone. Arthur presumes this act is ‘the vengeaunce of God!’ at work and leaves, thus facilitating her escape.748 This section draws directly on the Post-Vulgate Suite, but there are, however, subtle differences between the two texts. In the Post-Vulgate Suite Morgan calls a meeting of twelve ladies whom she trusts in order to discuss her escape before she actually absconds, ‘those whose company she liked best and whom she most trusted’.749 In Malory, although her company consists of ‘fourty horses’ no trusted female companions are noted, once again identifying Morgan as a rogue individual.750 Although she threatens, ‘lette hym wete I can do much more whan I se my tyme’, in fact, stealing his scabbard is the only malicious act that Morgan succeeds in perpetrating against Arthur in Malory.

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748 Malory, Works, I, p. 151.
750 Malory, Works, I, p. 151.
Furthermore, this threat is undermined at the end of the episode by a qualifying statement, ‘And so she departed into the contrey of Gore, and there was she rychely receyved, and made hir castels and townys strong, for allwey she drad muche kyng Arthure’.

However, Morgan does follow up on her threat by sending a maiden with a deadly mantle to Arthur’s court, ‘hit was sette all full of precious stonys as one myght stonde by another … Whan the kyng behelde this mantell hit pleased hym much’. Again, Arthur is only saved by the intervention of Nymue, who advises the king ‘putte nat uppon you this mantel tylle ye have sene more, and in ne wyse lat hit nat com on you nother on no knyght of youreys tyll ye commaunde the brynger thereof to putt hit uppon hir’, and, as in the Post-Vulgate Suite, the messenger dies. This episode undermines Arthur’s previous vow to wreak vengeance down on Morgan, as he now seems perfectly prepared to accept the mantle and call a truce. Much less detail is given in Malory’s account; we are not informed whether the messenger is involved in the plot to kill Arthur, or is an innocent victim, as in the Post-Vulgate Suite. In the French text, Arthur is effusive in his praise of Ninianne, ‘I should love her more than my sister, for she has been more loyal to me.’ However, Malory does not elaborate on how this plot affects the standing of the two women, which is in keeping with his focus on the men of the text.

Morgan’s next appearance in Malory’s Morte is taken from the Prose Lancelot. Here, she is one of four women who abduct Lancelot while he is sleeping. Malory’s

treatment it is similar to his source, but he refashions and condenses this episode to suit own agenda. In the Prose *Lancelot*, as in Malory, these women are described as queens, however, their defining feature in the French text is their knowledge of magic, ‘together they were the three women in the world who knew the most about enchantments and charms, saving only the Lady of the Lake’.755 Malory’s four queens are not actually described as magical; it is only Morgan who appears to have any magical power, although he identifies one of her companions as the Queen of North Galys, who is her partner in sorcery on several occasions.756 In contradistinction to the French text, the women immediately recognise Lancelot and ‘every of hem seyde they wolde have hym to hir love’.757 Morgan takes the lead in deciding that they will carry him off as a prisoner under her enchantment and then force him to choose one of them. He refuses them all and is imprisoned, but escapes through the help of one of Morgan’s servants. Armstrong notes that ‘the queens’ imitation of masculine behaviour subverts and challenges the paradigms of competition, fellowship, and recognition/identity that Malory’s text usually models’.758 Armstrong is correct in her observation that it unusual in Malory for women other than Morgan to act on their own initiative, independently of men, but, in fact, this is a faithful abridgement of the source text with one significant modification. The *Lancelot* describes more fully the cooperation and friendship between the women, however, once again Malory isolates Morgan by making her the only one of the women who practises magic. Moreover, he changes the focus so

756 In Malory, Morgan’s companions are identified as the Queen of North Galys, the Queen of Estland, and the Queen of the Oute Iles, but the queen of the land of Sorestan and Queen Sedile in the Prose *Lancelot*.
758 *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, p. 97.
that Morgan becomes the chief instigator of Lancelot’s abduction. In the source text, this event is stage managed by the Queen of Sorestan, with some helpful suggestions from Morgan, but in Malory, the three women are cyphers, whose only purpose in the narrative is to provide Lancelot with a choice of paramours. For Malory, this episode serves to remind his readers of Lancelot’s steadfast devotion to Guinevere. The four queens are in full knowledge of his identity, thus aware of his reputation, and also his relationship with the queen, ‘we know well there can no lady have thy love but one, and that is quene Gwenyvere, and now thou shalt hir love lose for ever, and she thyne’. By changing the source text in making the queens aware of Lancelot’s identity, Malory is able to emphasise Lancelot’s worthiness as a knight, and his defence of the queen’s honour, in contradistinction to his frank admission, to the reader at least, of their relationship in the Prose Lancelot. This is in keeping with the strong emphasis on Lancelot’s status as the best knight in the world in this section of the text. As Albert E. Hartung notes:

Malory's immediate purpose was to create a type of the ideal knight and the foremost among all of Arthur’s knights. His larger purpose was to show Lancelot and the court to which he belonged in a prelapsarian state, preceding and tragically contrasting with the corruption and downfall to come.

By attributing the comment on Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship to Morgan, as opposed to Lancelot himself, Malory glosses over the carnal reality of Lancelot’s

759 Malory, Works, I, p. 257.
760 Kibler, Lancelot-Graal, III, p. 156; Micha, Lancelot, IV, p. 176.
relationship with the queen. In the French text, Lancelot is imprisoned on three separate occasions by Morgan, but Malory focuses exclusively on this incarceration. This abridgement may be due to Morgan’s imprisonment of a variety of other knights in the Morte, and Malory’s fear of overplaying the motif. Moreover, as Hartung points out, Malory is not interested ‘in the proliferation of knightly feats, but in the development of his unique conception of Lancelot’s character’. The inclusion of all three of Lancelot’s incarcerations would merely draw attention to his illicit devotion to Guinevere, an aspect of his character which Malory, at this point in the text, wanted to downplay in a manner distinctly as odds with the frank revelations, examinations of conscience and confessions that we find in the Vulgate Lancelot and Queste.

Thus far in Malory, Morgan has been depicted in an entirely negative light: she has attempted to kill her brother twice and has imprisoned Lancelot just because he refused her advances. In his selection of material and modification of the sources, Malory has created a Morgan who is specifically antagonistic to Arthur, stemming from her initial hostility to her half-brother in the Post-Vulgate Suite, while Lancelot is merely an incidental victim of her lust. In Malory’s adaptation of the episode of the magic horn from the Prose Tristan, Morgan uses the horn ‘to create distrust in the mind of Arthur’. As with the mantle that Morgan sent to Arthur, this horn is a beautiful object, ‘a fayre horne harnayste with golde,’ but yet again it is not intended as a friendly gift. Morgan’s motivation for sending the horn is to spite ‘the quene

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762 It is worth noting, however, that later on in the text Bors comments to Elaine that: ‘this halff yere he hath bene in preson wyth quene Morgan le Fay, kynge Arthurs systir’, which is a vestigial reference to one of his other stretches in Morgan’s castle; cf. Malory, Works, II, p. 798.

763 ‘Narrative Technique’, p. 256.

764 Morgan, ‘Role of Morgan’, p. 167.

765 Malory, Works, I, p. 429.
Gwenyvere and in the dispyte of sir Launcelot’,\textsuperscript{766} which is an anomaly given that she is given no reason elsewhere in Malory to hate Guinevere, unless out of jealousy of Guinevere’s relationship with Lancelot. We are told that ‘the horne had suche a vertu that there myght no lady nothir jantyllwoman drynk of that horne but yf she were trew to her husbande’,\textsuperscript{767} but the horn brings no dishonour on Arthur’s court and Lancelot and Guinevere in particular. Sir Lamerok succeeds in diverting the horn to King Mark’s court, where it reveals that ninety-six of the hundred ladies tested are not faithful wives. Here, the result is heralded not as shocking revelation of Isolde’s infidelity, but treated as a testament to Morgan’s spiteful nature. Mark’s barons denounce her as ‘the false sorseres and wycche moste that i\textsuperscript{1} is now lyving’, claiming that if ‘ever they mette wyth Morgan le Fay that they wolde shew her shorte curtesy’, while the narrator notes that ‘she was an enemy to all trew lovers’.\textsuperscript{768} As Helen Cooper points out:

When Malory recounts the episode of Morgan le Fay’s gift of a drinking-horn intended to show up Guinevere’s guilt, he shifts its emphasis away from the mass female errancy it reveals to the hatred on Morgan’s part that drives her desire to damage Arthur.\textsuperscript{769}

Malory follows his source, the Prose Tristan, which in turn draws on the established setup of the Prose Lancelot, but he reworks the source text so as to focus once more on Morgan as the source of all evil magic. In the Prose Tristan, Isolde questions the

\textsuperscript{766} Malory, Works, I, pp. 429-30.
\textsuperscript{767} Malory, Works, I, p. 429.
\textsuperscript{768} Malory, Works, I, p. 430.
\textsuperscript{769} Helen Cooper, The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare (Oxford, 2004), p. 316.
validity of the test due to the fact that it may have been sent by ‘enchanters and enchantresses of Great Britain’ who want to cause ‘discord between you and me or between other good people in Cornwall’. But here it is important to note that Morgan is not specifically identified as the source of this horn of contention. By naming her, Malory relies on her black reputation alone to nullify the test. Armstrong interprets this incident as an indicator of Morgan’s general malice, ‘Morgan now directs her evil action not only toward individual knights and the person of her brother the king, but also and more ominously toward the Arthurian community at large.’ However, such a reading ignores Morgan’s intentions; the horn was specifically designed to reveal Lancelot and Guinevere’s relationship. It is possible that Morgan’s opposition to these ‘trew lovers’ could be due to her earlier attempt to steal Lancelot from Guinevere. However, as Lisa Robeson notes, the basis of the Round Table is the pursuit of worshyp, but whereas men earn it by dint of their prowess, women can only become the object of worshyp through ‘sexual restraint’. In the case of married women, ‘honour is earned by avoiding adulterous sex’, and Guinevere and Isolde may only achieve it in two ways: sexual fidelity to one’s knight-lover and evading public knowledge of one’s secret liaison’. Morgan is entirely opposed to this honourable description of love, as shown in her attempt to steal Lancelot from Guinevere, perhaps explaining why she is described as the enemy of true lovers.

Malory uses the Prose Tristan in several further incidents involving Morgan. Given the Prose Tristan’s debt to the Lancelot, these incidents, describe Morgan in terms of an

770 Curtis, Romance of Tristan, p. 139; Curtis, Roman de Tristan, II, p. 132.
771 Gender and the Chivalric Community, p. 113.
enemy to Lancelot, as in the example above, but also to good knights more generally, as she also turns on Tristram and Alixander. Tristram and Dynadan are informed by a damsel that Morgan has set a trap for Lancelot, ‘for he was ordayned for the treson of quene Morgan le Fay to have slayne hym, and for that cause she ordayned thirty knyghtes to lye in wayte for sir Launcelot’.\textsuperscript{773} Tristram, of course, manages to defeat these knights with only the help of Sir Dynadan, and in so doing, adds to his ‘worshyp’. No explicit explanation of this trap is deemed necessary by Malory; that Morgan is defined as rotten to the core seems sufficient justification for her actions against Lancelot. The next trap she arranges is aimed at both Lancelot and Tristram. A maiden tells Tristram that ‘he sholde wynne grete worshyp of a knyght aventures that ded much harme in all that contrey’ if he goes with her, but when Gawain meets them he recognises the damsel as one of Morgan’s and assumes that she intends ‘som myschyeyf’. Having informed Tristram that ‘she and her lady ded never goode but yll’\textsuperscript{774} he extracts a confession from her that Morgan ‘hath ordayned a thirty ladyes to seke and aspye aftir sir Launcelot or aftir sir Trystram’:

and by the traynys of thes ladyes, who that may fyreste mete ony of thes two knyghtes, they sholde do dedys of worship. And yf ony of tho two knyghtes cam there, [there] be thirty knyghtes liying and wacchyng in a towre to wayte uppon sir Launcelot or uppon sir Trystramys.\textsuperscript{775}

\textsuperscript{773} Malory, \textit{Works}, II, pp. 504-5.
\textsuperscript{774} Malory, \textit{Works}, II, p. 510.
\textsuperscript{775} Malory, \textit{Works}, II, p. 511.
In the *Prose Tristan*, Morgan’s motivation is explained more fully; having defeated the knights Morgan set up to ambush Lancelot, Tristan is then seen as the enemy by Morgan. Malory does not feel the need to explain her motivation in such detail, perhaps seeing Morgan’s inherent evil as enough of a reason for her antipathy to Tristram, in line with Gawain’s observation of her having ‘ded never goode but yll’. When Gawain and Tristram challenge the thirty knights, they are, due to their earlier defeat, unwilling to face Tristram again. These incidents show that Morgan is prepared to use unfair methods in order to her adversaries; as Sir Dynadan comments, ‘as to macche a knyght, two or three ys inow’.

Indeed, Morgan plans to set thirty knights against either Tristram or Lancelot. The disproportionate odds serve to highlight both the villainy of Morgan and the exceptional nature of Lancelot and Tristram. Indeed, in setting the second trap for either Tristram or Lancelot, Malory follows the author of the *Prose Tristan*, who is keen to demonstrate their equal prowess.

In a later incident which also occurs in the *Prose Tristan*, Tristram stays the night at Morgan’s castle by chance and is informed the next morning that he is a prisoner until he reveals his name to Morgan. When he does so she admits that ‘and I had wyst that, thou sholdist nat have departed so sone as thou shalt’:

> But sitthyn I have made a promyse, I wolde holde hit, with that thou wolte promyse me to beare uppon the a shylde I shall delyvre the unto the castle of the Harde Roche, where Kynge Arthure hath cryed a grete turnemente.\(^7^7^7\)

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\(^7^7^6\) Malory, *Works*, II, p. 505.

\(^7^7^7\) Malory, *Works*, II, p. 554.
Although Morgan claims that she is only releasing Tristram because she has given her word, in fact, to ensure that her shield is noticed at the tournament she would require a knight of great skill who would draw attention to himself through his feats of arms. By making Morgan claim that she is bound by her word, Malory not only reminds us of her previous treachery, especially her betrayal of Arthur in stealing his sword and scabbard, but also that there is more going on than Tristram realises. This is indeed proven to be the case when Morgan reveals the device on the shield to Tristram, but only partly explains it to him. She tells him that the king and queen depicted on it are Arthur and Guinevere, but not the identity of the ‘knyght stondynge aboven them with hys one foote standynge uppon the kynges hede and the othir uppon the quenys hede’. 778 The reader is, of course, well aware of what this signifies, but Tristram seems completely oblivious to the import of the device, which is even more curious given the changes that Malory makes to his source. In the Prose Tristan, Morgan claims that the device is that of her father, Uther, but makes no suggestion to Tristan that the king and queen represent Arthur and Guinevere. 779 However, by omitting Morgan’s controversial claim that Uther was her father, Malory avoids contradicting what he has previously said about Morgan, but still manages to make Morgan’s intentions clear through her partial explanation of the device.

Malory follows the Prose Tristan in giving a detailed explanation of Morgan’s hatred for Lancelot:

quene Morgan loved sir Launcelot beste, and ever she desired hym, and he wolde never love her nor do nothynge at her rekeyste, and therefore she hylde

778 Malory, Works, II, p. 554.
779 Roman de Tristan, III, p. 213.
many knyghtes togydir to have takyn hym by strengthe. And bycause that she
demed that sir Launcelot loved quene Gwenyver paramour and she hym agayn,
therefore dame Morgan ordayne that shylde to put sir Launcelot to a rebuke, to
that entente, that kynge Arthure myght undirstonde the love betweene them.780

This description of Morgan’s antipathy to Lancelot has some basis in her attempt to
seduce him earlier in the text, but it also highlights her desire to cause trouble for
Arthur. Morgan’s plan regarding the shield is successful up to a point. Arthur notices it
and a damsel of Morgan’s even provides him with a partial exegesis, ‘wyte you well
thys shylde was ordayned for you, to warn you of youre shame and dishonoure that
longith to you and youre quene’.781 As Lumiansky notes, although ‘Morgan has not
succeeded by means of the shield in causing the open dissension she hoped for, she
has frightened Guinevere and has given Arthur food for deep thought’.782 Arthur
does indeed seem somewhat puzzled by the shield, but is more intent on finding out the
true identity of Tristram, so whether the shield does indeed cause ‘deep thought’ is open
to speculation.

Morgan’s lust for Lancelot, and her generally lascivious nature are reflected in her
behaviour during Tristram’s sojourn at her castle. She pays special attention to him,
‘evermore the quene wolde beholde sir Trystram,’ suggesting that her lust for good
knights is not restricted to Lancelot alone.783 As in the Prose Tristan, this display of
attraction on the part of Morgan signifies that Tristram can be placed on an equal
footing with Lancelot. Morgan’s regard for Tristram is certainly strong enough to make

783 Malory, Works, II, p. 554.
her paramour, Hemyson, jealous. Once Tristram has left; he decides to pursue him, and is killed. Hemyson assumes that his rival is not in fact Tristram, ‘but a daffyshe knyght’ and ignores Morgan’s suggestion that she knows better than him; that the knight is in fact ‘the beste knyght that ever ye mette withall’.784 Morgan’s reaction to Hemyson’s death is described in a fairly formulaic manner, ‘she made grete sorow oute of reson’. but her desire for revenge against Tristram is not mentioned.785 The Prose Tristan links this episode with Tristan’s death, as Morgan provides the poisoned weapon that King Mark uses to kill Tristan in revenge for Huneson’s death.786 Malory does not include this detail; in fact, he only gives us a terse account of Tristram’s death, almost in passing. Lancelot merely mentions ‘how shamefully that false traytour kyng Marke slew hym as he sate harpynge afore hys lady, La Beall Isode. Wyth a grounden glayve he threste hym in behynde to the herte’.787 This serves to highlight the perfidy of Mark, rather than Morgan. This sparse account, bereft on any poignant details, is in keeping with Tristan’s diminished status in Malory’s scheme of things; for Malory, although Tristram is equal to Lancelot in terms of military prowess, is but one of several worthy knights, rather than the focus of Malory’s chivalric ideal. This would also accord with the shift in Morgan’s priorities, although she is obviously upset at the death of Hemyson, she has already lost Accolon in combat, and Hemyson is hardly her raison d’etre. Moreover, she has her vendetta against Lancelot and Guinevere to pursue, whereas, of course, in the Prose Tristan, the death of Huneson is the source of her hatred for Tristan. This is in keeping with the established pattern in the French tradition whereby the protagonist is usually Morgan’s principal, and often only, enemy. Thus for

784 Malory, Works, II, p. 555.
785 Malory, Works, II, p. 556.
786 Cf. Roman de Tristan, IX, p. 188.
787 Malory, Works, III, p. 1173.
Malory, the details of her involvement in Tristram’s death are only of minor importance and he therefore eliminates them.

Morgan’s general antipathy to worthy knights is emphasised through an exchange between Dynadan and Palomydes in which Dynadan expands on the considerable challenge that Morgan’s castle presents to Arthur’s companions. The castle itself was given to her by the king, but this has evidently backfired as: ‘ever as she myght she made warre on kynge Arthure’:

and all daungerous knyghtes she wytholdyth with her for to dystroy all thes knyghtes that kynge Arthure lovyth. And there shall no knyght passe this way but he muste juste with one knyght other wyth two other wyth three. And yf hit hap that kynge Arthurs knyght be beatyn, he shall lose his horse and harnes and all that he hath, and harde yf that he ascape but that he shall be presonere.788

This section is again taken from the Prose Tristan, and serves to highlight Morgan’s general malignity, but it is also in keeping with the Morte’s earlier descriptions of Morgan’s hatred of Arthur.789 However, this suggestion of Morgan waging ‘warre’ on Arthur through his companions significantly expands her range of knightly targets, though her focus remains fixed on Lancelot, Tristram, and later Alexander. Neither Tristram nor Alixander are actually Arthur’s knights, but both are worthy of worship, and sympathetic to the values of Camelot. Given that there are several major protagonists in Malory, drawn from a wide array of sources, her successive opposition

788 Malory, Works, II, p. 597.
to Lancelot, Tristram and Alixander is both in keeping with the French tradition, but also an attack on all that Arthur stands for.

In Malory, Morgan’s imprisonment of Alexander the Orphan is at the particular request of King Mark. In the Alixandre L’Orphelin episode in the Prose Tristan, Mark writes to Morgan to ask her to keep Alixandre if God or fortune brings him to her.\footnote{Alixandre L’Orphelin, pp. 11-12.} However, in Malory, Mark writes to both Morgan and her fellow adept, the Queen of North Galys, but this time, he does not merely request that Alexander be taken prisoner; rather he asks ‘them in his lettyrs that they two sorserers wolde sette all the contrey enyvrone with ladyes that were enchauntours, and by suche that were daungerous knyghtes, as sir Malagryne and sir Brewnys Saunze Pyté, that by no meane Alysaundir le Orphelyne shulde never ascape, but other he sholde be takyn or slayne.’\footnote{Malory, Works II, p. 638.} Malory’s version not only serves to heighten the inherent malignity of Mark by means of this very specific request, brimming with malice aforethought, but also magnifies the power and influence of Morgan in comparison to the French text. In Malory, she is capable of commanding a host of evil knights and enchantresses, albeit in tandem with the Queen of North Galys. This echoes Malory’s modification of the magic horn episode, whereby Morgan is depicted as the preeminent ‘sorseres and wycche’.\footnote{Malory, Works I, p. 430.} As in the Prose Tristan, Morgan is told of an accomplished knight and rides to find him, encountering four knights who have been defeated by him. They inform her of his location, however, Malory gives us a different perspective; he focuses on Alexander’s actions rather then Morgan’s pursuit of him. Alexander kills Malegryne but is badly wounded in the process, however, Morgan has by this time arrived and ‘bade hym be of goode
comforte’. However, as in the Prose Tristan she does not heal his wounds but ‘gaff hym suche an oynement that he sholde have dyed’. Yet, in contradistinction to the Prose Tristan, Malory’s Morgan does not extract a promise from Alexander before she ends his suffering, ‘she put another oynemente uppon hym, and than he was cure of his Payne’. Because she cures him he follows her advice not to marry the damsel of the castle, but he does so of his own free will, rather than being under an obligation to do as Morgan tells him. However, Morgan abducts Alexander and will only heal him fully when he promises to stay for ‘this twelve-monthe and a day’. This emphasis on healing is in keeping with her traditional, but ‘the motivation is vastly different here’ because there is ‘no benevolent motive’ underpinning her actions. She saves Alexander so that she can use him as she pleases, and subverts the precepts which govern courtly society in the process:

Since a knight who cannot fight is essentially a contradiction in terms, Alexander is compelled to make whatever bargain necessary to restore his health and thus make it possible for him to return to the realm of the quest and the tournament. Wounded as he is, the only portion of his knighthly identity still available to Alexander is that of courtesy and service – particularly to ladies – which Morgan quickly invokes.

794 Malory, Works, II, p. 642.
797 Morgan, ‘Role of Morgan’, p. 152.
798 Armstrong, Gender and the Chivalric Community, p. 126.
Here, Morgan once again demonstrates how adroit she is at manipulating the gender roles that define courtly society for her own purpose. Not surprisingly, as soon as Alexander recovered, ‘he repented hym of his othe’. Malory places a much greater focus on Alexander in his version of these events, while the Prose Tristan focuses more on Morgan’s perspective. Malory expands certain aspects of the text, for example, he provides a rationale for Morgan’s cousin who arranges for her castle to be burned down; she claims that ‘this castell ought of ryght to be myne’. This is typical of Malory’s consistent emphasis on blood ties which runs throughout the text. For Malory, Morgan’s wilful disregard for the institution of the family is pivotal to his interpretation of her betrayal of Arthur and her almost Satanic rebellion against societal norms. Her cousin also reveals to Alexander that ‘quene Morgan, kepyth you here for none other entente but for to do hir plesure whan hit lyketh hir’. Alexander’s manifest horror at the idea of a relationship with Morgan is not only rooted in his disgust at his imprisonment, which prevents him from pursuing his knightly path, but also at the inherent evil of Morgan herself. He expresses this disgust in graphic terms, ‘I had levir kut away my hangers than I wolde do her ony suche pleasure!’

It is telling that Malory does not include Morgan’s reaction to the burning of her castle, which is in keeping with his general tendency to omit incidents which do not directly concern his heroes.

Morgan’s association with the Queen of North Galys continues in her next appearance. In the Vulgate Lancelot, Gawain discovers a woman who is up to the waist in boiling water; she can only be rescued by ‘the best knight in the world’ and has been put there by the power of God as punishment for a ‘great sin’. The knight who frees

her from ‘the greatest pain a woman ever endured’ is, of course, Lancelot.801 This incident and his subsequent slaying of a dragon that emerges from a tomb prove Lancelot to be the best knight, and a suitable father for Galahad. In Malory, Lancelot is taken to the ‘dolerous lady’ whom ‘by enchauntemente quene Morgan le Fay and the quene of Northe Galys had put her there in that paynes’:

bycause she was called the fayryst lady of that contrey; and there she had bene fyve yere, and never myght she be delyverde oute of her paynes unto the tyme the beste knyght of the worlde had takyn her by the honde.802

There is no mention in Malory of sin and punishment; the penitential aspect with all of its exegetical connotations is expunged, and the motivation is reduced to mere jealousy. As Molly Martin notes, ‘The image that this woman has projected is so beautiful – a crucial marker of ideal femininity – that it enrages the two queens’ but through the punishment they are able to render her unthreatening, as while being engulfed in ‘scaldyng watir’ she does not diminish their beauty as she had previously.803 Lancelot, through his inherent goodness as a knight, overcomes the inherent evil of Morgan, and her familiar, the Queen of North Galys. Although the corresponding episode in the Vulgate Lancelot does not include Morgan, it is clear that her presence in Malory’s version is informed by another episode in the Lancelot, where she imprisons her love rival in ‘a harsh prison, where she had the feeling day and night that she was standing in

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ice from the waist down and in a blazing fire above’. It seems likely that Malory conflated these two incidents to arrive at the passage above; the emphasis on punishment, if not on penitence in the two passages is remarkably similar. So is the demarcation of the body at the waist, which is, as we have seen, a *topos* of the medieval homiletic tradition, which has its roots in apocryphal and pseudepigraphal material.

Morgan’s final appearance in Malory is as a participant in Arthur’s *transitus* at the close of the text. In describing this event it is likely that in addition to his principal source, the Vulgate *Mort Artu*, Malory drew on such ancillary sources as John Hardyng’s *Chronicle*, the Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthur*, and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. The certainly contributes to the ambiguity surrounding Arthur’s passing from the realm of Logres, which results in his death or his translation to Avalon, depending on the text in question. In Hardyng’s *Chronicle* and the Alliterative *Morte*, Morgan does not actually appear at all, but many of the themes surrounding Arthur’s death do relate back to a tradition that includes her, as both texts mention Avalon. The author of the Stanzaic *Morte* drew on the Vulgate *Mort Artu* and consequently, they both share a number of episodes. In both texts Arthur’s sword is cast into a body of water but is received by a hand; then Arthur leaves on a boat with a group of women who include Morgan, although the Stanzaic *Morte* does not name her. Both texts are fairly clear as to the reality of Arthur’s death. In the Vulgate *Mort Arthur* claims that ‘I was right to think that my death was fast approaching’, and Girflet’s discovery of Arthur’s tomb is

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depicted as confirmation of his death.\textsuperscript{806} The Stanzaic \textit{Morte} is equally definite about Arthur’s end, as although Arthur claims he is going ‘Into the vale of Aveloun, / A while to hele me of my wound’, his tomb is later discovered.\textsuperscript{807} In addition to the Vulgate \textit{Mort} and the Stanzaic \textit{Morte}, Malory most probably drew on Hardyng’s \textit{Chronicle} and the Alliterative \textit{Morte}, as well as adding some unique elements of his own to the scene. In Malory, Arthur asks for Excalibur to be cast away (by Sir Bedwere in this instance) that ‘my tyme hyeth faste’. This request to dispose of the sword is made three times in all of Malory’s sources, but Bedwere’s neglect of Arthur’s instructions is treated with a level of gravity which is unique to Malory. Arthur warns Bedwere that his ‘longe tarynge puttith me in grete jouperté of my lyff, for I have takyn colde’.\textsuperscript{808} After this chilling reminder, Bedwere succeeds in casting the sword into the water and ‘there com an arme and an honde above the watir, and toke hit and cleyght hit, and shoke hit thryse and braundysshed, and then vanysshed’.\textsuperscript{809} Arthur reiterates his concern over timing, ‘I dred me I have taryed over longe’, and then gets Bedwere to help him to the water where they discover ‘a lytyll barge wyth many fayre ladyes in hit, and amonge hem all was a quene, and all they had blak hoodis. And all they wepte and shryked whan they saw kynge Arthur.’ When Arthur is put into the barge, three ladies receive him and his head is laid in one of their laps. Morgan is again identified by the way in which she addresses Arthur, ‘A, my dere brothir! Why [ha]ve ye taryed so longe from me? Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught overmuch coulde!’ As in the Stanzaic \textit{Morte}, Arthur tells Bedwere that he is going ‘into the vale of Avylyon to hele me of my grevous wounde’, but in this version adds ‘if thou here nevermore of me, pray for my

\begin{footnotes}
\item 807 Stanzaic \textit{Morte Arthur}, p. 98, ll. 3516-7.
\item 809 Malory, \textit{Works}, III, p. 1240.
\end{footnotes}
soule!’ The ladies in this text are much more vocal ‘ever the quene and ladyes wepte and shryked, that hit was pité to hyre’. As in the other versions, Bedwere finds his way to the hermitage and a new tomb about which it is revealed by a hermit that ‘at mydnyght, here cam a numbir of ladyes and brought here a dede corse and prayde me to entyre hym’, Bedwere then immediately concludes that this must be Arthur.810

Thus far, the text is mainly a retelling of that presented in the Vulgate Mort and the Stanzaic Morte. However, Malory precedes to add several details at the end of the episode not found in these sources:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more wrytten in bokis that been auctorysed, nothir more of the verry sertaynté of hys dethe harde I never rede, but thus was he lad away in a shyp wherein were three quenys; that one was kynge Arthur syster, quene Morgan le Fay, the tother was the quene of North Galis, and the thirde was the quene of the Waste Londis. Also there was dame Nynyve, the chyff lady of the laake.

Then he appears to bring the narrative to a close, ‘Now more of the deth of kynge Arthur coude I never fynde, but that thes ladyes brought hym to hys grave’, but then he incorporates a scintilla of doubt’, ‘But yet the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that he was veryly the body of kynge Arthur.’811 Thus Malory makes a conscious decision to leave Arthur’s passing an open question, noting only that ‘I wolde sey: here in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff’. According to Kennedy the author of the Stanzaic Morte ‘had a conception of the Arthurian tragedy quite different from that of the French Mort Artu’

810 Malory, Works, III, p. 1241.
811 Malory Works, III, p. 1242.
which is why he included additional references to Avalon and the possibility of a return. Similarly, it seems reasonable to assume that Malory had a concept of an alternative tradition, and was not entirely comfortable in following his sources and claiming for ‘sertayne’ that Arthur was dead.

In terms of this tradition, it is important to note that Malory names Morgan as one of the women on the boat: the one who addresses him as brother. This suggests the possibility of Arthur’s healing in Avalon, but stops short of endorsing the idea of Arthur’s return; he merely claims that this is what some people think. The tender concern that Morgan exhibits for Arthur in this episode is in stark contrast to the representation of her in the rest of the text. However, this tradition is one of the most integral of the entire Arthurian legend, appearing in the great majority of works comprising the Arthurian materials:

Since it was Malory’s purpose to tell the entire Arthurian story, he would be defeating his own purpose by leaving out such an integral part of the tradition as Arthur’s departure to Avalon. Thus, the incident is left as it is in the work, however inexplicable it may be to the thematic whole of the work.

Moreover, in acknowledging this tradition, Malory is also faced with the problem of integrating Morgan in a group of benevolent women, so he counterbalances the presence of Morgan with the unambiguously benign figure of Nymue on the barge. It is


worth noting that Malory initially follows his sources, claiming that there is only one queen on board, but then he changes his mind and adds two more, in addition to Nymue, who he is at some pains to identify, ‘Also there was dame Nynyve, the chyff lady of the laake, whych had wedde sir Pellyas, the good knyght; and thys lady had done muche for kynge Arthure.’ This reminds us of Nymue’s constancy throughout the text; she is a steadfast friend to Arthur and his knights and a good wife, as opposed to the unfaithful and malicious Morgan. The preceding version of events; where Morgan shows her great concern for the welfare of Arthur do not quite ring true within the context of the overall text, and therefore Malory adds this coda to lend more weight to his conclusion. As Holbrook notes:

Nymue's place in the ship of ambiguous destination is part of the balanced hope and grief in the mystery of Arthur's death. Nymue, who has always aided Arthur and prevented his death before, is there along with Morgan le Fay, who has consistently tried to destroy Arthur. By using Nymue as a counterbalance, Malory retains Morgan's legendary association as the healing goddess of Avalon without letting her presence seem incongruent with her preceding role; that is, she continues to be a negative presence, her solicitous healing power notwithstanding, because she is off-set by Nymue.

The other two queens, the Queen of Norgales and the Queen of the Wastelands, are similarly balanced, creating a binary opposition that encompasses the darker side of magic as well as the gift of healing associated with arcane knowledge, as all four of the women

814 Malory, Works, III, p. 1242.
have preternatural powers. As we have seen, the Queen of Norgales is ‘three times a confederate in Morgan's nefarious activities’, and the only other reference to her ‘is as paramour to the King with the Hundred Knights’. By contrast, the Queen of the Wastelands is Perceval’s aunt and ‘a recluse’. Thus Malory attempts to balance the conflicting demands posed by his range of sources in this final episode by including Morgan, but also Nymue.

This final laceration of mind concerning the role of Morgan in Arthur’s passing is emblematic of Malory’s struggle with conflicting sources throughout the text. His overall representation of Morgan is a great deal more evil than each of his individual sources, as he includes the entire spectrum of her negative attributes, but precious few of her redeeming features. She is recast as the principal antagonist of a series of worthy knights as opposed to just one at a time as in the source texts, and she undermines the values of the Round Table, rejecting the bonds of kinship and marriage, and subverting the norms of courtly society. Her magic is somewhat vitiated by Malory’s rationalization of the supernatural, especially when compared to the Vulgate Lancelot. Malory eschews such phantasms as the Val sanz Retor, magic dust which makes knights mad, or poisoned lances. However, it would seem that he adds to her pre-existent host of victims, by introducing yet another woman who finds herself quite literally in hot water thanks to Morgan, but this new episode merely underlines her spiteful nature. Morgan’s power in the Morte Darthur is diminished by Malory’s typification of her as vice incarnate. Yet, paradoxically, it is this type casting which makes her the most memorable female adversary in the text.

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CONCLUSION

Morgan is a diverse, complex figure, and her myriad manifestations over the course of Arthurian, and indeed non-Arthurian, texts across several languages and several hundred years demand that we examine each appearance within the specific context of the text in question. Although there is a strand of consistent development in a limited number of texts which draw on the Vulgate or Lancelot-Graal cycle, whether directly or through intermediary sources, it is incorrect to suggest that Morgan’s intrinsic character undergoes a systematic process of degeneration from the twelfth century onwards which mirrors the rise of late medieval anti-feminism. As we have seen, in one of her earliest appearances in the Roman de Troie, she is characterised by her lust for the hero, followed by her hatred of him when he rejects her. Conversely, in many later medieval texts, especially those which take as their focus Arthur’s translation to Avalon, she is presented in a wholly positive light, for example such fourteenth-century texts as the Bâtard de Bouillon and the Stanzaic Morte Arthur.

A thoroughgoing examination of the potential sources and analogies of Morgan reveals that although there are several similarities between Morgan and characters in Goidelic and Brythonic texts, her point of origin cannot be sourced in any one of these characters. Paton’s original suggestion of the Mórrígan as the ultimate source for Morgan, which is still endorsed by critics to this day, does not correspond with the finer points of Morgan’s characterization as it develops from the twelfth century onwards. Indeed, Morgan’s changeable attitude to Arthur across a range of medieval romances, which forms the basis of all arguments that foster Morgan on the Mórrígan, is due to the shifting focus of each of the texts in which Morgan appears, as opposed to an intrinsic aspect of Morgan’s character from her first appearance in the Vita Merlini. The
identification of Modron as she appears in some Brythonic texts as a possible source for Morgan is also questionable, as this association relies on a conflation of characters in the medieval romance tradition and the putative Brythonic sources in a manner that hardly does justice to Modron or Morgan. There is a greater likelihood that the classical tradition influenced the depiction of Morgan from the *Vita Merlini* onwards, as there was ample opportunity for medieval authors to have recourse to texts including both Medea and Circe. Indeed, Medea’s influence in particular was so great during the medieval period that she was incorporated into a wide range of contemporary texts. Several episodes within the romance tradition are strikingly similar to those involving the two enchantresses, and in more general terms, there are several points of correspondence between Morgan and medieval depictions of Medea, which suggests there was an informed awareness of the similarities between these two figures. The allegorical tradition of abstract personification, particularly the exegetical personifications which emerge in the patristic period, may also have influenced aspects of Morgan’s character, especially the figure of *Luxuria*. However, the use of allegorical, or specifically exegetical, imagery is so integral to the thinking of the middle ages it would be impossible to state conclusively that the character of Morgan finds her origin in a particular figure.

In attempting to identify a definitive source for Morgan, critics have tended to treat these four theories of origin as mutually exclusive, and have consequently disregarded the interpenetration between classical, allegorical, or specifically exegetical, material and the vernacular literatures of Ireland, Britain and the Continent. Indeed, many of the elements that have been used to link Morgan to a particular theory of origin are not specific enough to come to any definitive conclusion regarding her source. This is particularly true in the case of Irish and Welsh vernacular texts as the precise method of
transmission of any putative sources cannot be prove, causing critics to fall back on an vaguely defined oral tradition.

Moreover, although a close study of the possible sources for Morgan does shed light on the potential influences of the authors involved, we should not underestimate the individual auctorial contributions to the development of Morgan’s character in each of the texts in which she appears. This is especially relevant when we consider the contribution of the authors of the Lancelot-Graal or Vulgate Cycle, who refashioned the character of Morgan, from which so many of the later texts discussed in this study were derived. In the Vulgate Cycle Morgan becomes fully integrated into the Arthurian world; the fleeting references to her as Arthur’s sister or kinswoman in previous texts are fleshed out with a credible amount of personal detail. This process of humanisation is in keeping with the descriptions of Arthur’s death given in texts contemporaneous with Chrétien, most notably the Speculum Ecclesiae and Otia Imperialia, which downplay the supernatural possibilities of Arthur’s sojourn in Avalon. Morgan’s practise of magic becomes linked to her education rather than any inherent supernatural aspect, in much the same manner as Medea in such texts as the Roman de Troie. In those romances where she learns to practise magic under Merlin, namely the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Suite du Merlin and the Vulgate Lancelot, this knowledge is situated within a religious framework consistent with the spiritual focus of a catena of texts that includes the quest for the Holy Grail. In these romances, Morgan’s expertise in arcane topics which sometimes shades into intrinsic magical powers, makes her an ideal opponent for Lancelot an Guinevere; she has an unfair advantage over Lancelot though her use of magic, her gender and her relationship to Arthur. This means that her victimisation of Lancelot through her schemes does not reflect badly on his knightly prowess; indeed, it allows him to demonstrate his chivalrous qualities to their best
advantage. Later texts refashion Morgan’s unique position to make her an effective enemy for such other worthy knights as Tristan and Alexander, but also Arthur in the Post-Vulgate Cycle.

The Vulgate Cycle is not only the matrix of Morgan’s character for many of the later French texts discussed in this study, but also several of the texts written in English. Of Arthour and of Merlin, the prose Merlin, and Henry Lovelich’s Merlin adapt and translate parts of the Vulgate Cycle. However, these texts should not be dismissed as slavish imitations. There is evidence to suggest that there was a considerable amount of editing and alteration during the process of translation, and why each author chose to retain their particular selections of the original matière is important to our understanding of their individual perceptions of Morgan. Unlike Ninnianne/Vivianne, Morgan seems to be a character with whom these translators were entirely familiar.

There are also English texts which would appear to draw on the chronicle tradition and possibly the Vita Merlini, rather than the French romances. Laȝamon’s Brut, which is the earliest text in English to include Morgan (albeit spelt Argante), repeats the events of the Vita, while the author of the Parlement of the Thre Ages feels that her presence is so intrinsic to Arthur’s death that she appears in a tradition of representation that does not normally include her. Each of the Middle English texts that include Morgan, even those which are translations, involve the author making a decision about what material is included and the level of knowledge he can assume on the part of his audience.

In the case of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight the author draws on a range of French sources, but he incorporates elements of a specific section of the Vulgate Lancelot, to form the basis of his characterization. Moreover, it is possible that the author integrates Morgan into a pre-existent narrative, ultimately derived from the Irish vernacular tradition, but he utilises her character in a unique manner. The Gawain-Poet
clearly assumes that his audience will recognise Morgan’s principal traits, such as her antipathy to Guinevere, which he does not feel the need to explain, but he also deploys her in an entirely new context, which demonstrates the inherent flexibility and resonance of her character.

Malory’s *Morte Darthur* is a sovereign example of the selective process involved in transposing the Morgan of the French romances into an English text and context. Morgan’s antipathy to a series of knights across a wide variety of texts is condensed and therefore amplified in Malory. He removes much of the personal detail found in the French texts, and indeed the vast majority of background information that does not directly involve Morgan’s series of knightly antagonists. Malory planes down Morgan’s character to produce a figure who is an exaggerated condensation of all the Morgans he finds in his French and English sources. Furthermore, Malory simplifies Morgan’s character by making her the epitome of evil, akin to vice incarnate, and although this diminishes her on a human level, it paradoxically lends weight to her reputation within the text.

Much of Morgan’s representation in Middle English texts can therefore be traced to the French romance tradition, but a close analysis of her appearances in romances written in English is highly revealing. It sheds new light not only on the divergent expectations of the audiences of these texts, but also on the choices made by such authors as the *Gawain*-Poet and Malory in modifying the Morgans they find in their sources to the specific requirements of their own creative process. Morgan was clearly a well-known figure in Britain, having first taken flight on British soil; thus authors writing in English did not feel the need to contextualise her for their audiences. In this respect, these authors mirror such twelfth-century writers as Benôit de Sainte-Maure and Chrétien de Troyes. Morgan’s fleeting appearances in the *Roman de Troie* and
Chrétien’s romances are also presented as a *donnée*, but *données* only work effectively if the audience feels that no further explication is necessary. As this study has demonstrated, Morgan was obviously known by reputation in medieval Britain and France from at least the twelfth century onwards. Even the earliest extant witnesses to her existence felt that they could refer to her without explanation, but succeeding generations of authors also felt that the character of Morgan was sufficiently nebulous that she could be modified to their specific requirements.
Fig 1.

*Kalender of Shepherdes* (London: Richard Pynson, 1506).

Based on *Le compost et kalendrier des bergiers* (Paris: Guiot Marchant, 1493).
Fig. 2
Herrad of Hohenburg, *Hortus Deliciarum*, Strasbourg: Bibliothèque publique,
Ms LIV, fol. 255r
(late twelfth century, no longer extant)
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