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## **A Consideration Of Some Archetypes In Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur**

Philip Lawrence Mead

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1969



This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of The University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

A CONSIDERATION OF  
SOME ARCHETYPES IN MALORY'S LE MORTE DARTHUR

Title

PHILIP L. MEAD

Candidate

ENGLISH

Department

*At Home*

Dean

5-16-69

Date

Committee

*Samuel*

Chairman

*Robert P. Fleming*

*Mary Bess Whidden*



A CONSIDERATION OF SOME ARCHETYPES IN MALORY'S

LE MORTE DARTHUR

BY

PHILIP LAWRENCE MEAD

B. A., Hiram College, 1949

M. A., University of New Mexico, 1968

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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LE MORTE DARTHUR

A CONSIDERATION OF SOME ARCHETYPES IN MALORY'S

LE MORTE DARTHUR

According to C. G. Jung, the fundamental human needs,

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**BY Philip L. Mead**

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A CONSIDERATION OF SOME ARCHETYPES IN MALORY'S

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Abstract

According to C. G. Jung, the fundamental human needs, loves, and hatreds are reflected in dreams in the forms of personalities and situations. These feelings, he maintains, have always been common to humanity, and have been recorded in man's mythology.

Extrapolating from this principle, Joseph Campbell, in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, has found enough common elements in mythologies from several cultures to postulate the "monomyth": a cyclical hero's life that is found in all the world's major mythologies. The cycle duplicates the quest a person makes in times of great stress into his own inner self for strength and renewal. In mythological terms, the cycle consists of the hero's preparation for this "soul journey," his departure upon it, and his return with some form of reward.

On the basis of the monomyth, and using other psychologically oriented books for elucidation, I have tried to demonstrate that Malory's Le Morte DARTHUR is an outstanding example of the appearance of archetypes in literature.



I begin with a survey of criticism in which I find no previous archetypal examination of Malory's work. As a prelude to making such an examination, I briefly list the major events of Malory's century, and give a plot summary. I then analyze, roughly in their order of appearance, the situations and characters in Le Morte Darthur that appear archetypal.

The primary themes of the book are isolation, fruitlessness, and death. I devote a chapter to the tale of Balin and Balan, which, in small, duplicates the essential patterns of Malory's entire work.

Le Morte Darthur, as a whole, conforms to the archetype of rebirth, except that the final step of regeneration is not taken. Arthur, initially the hero, goes through the entire monomyth cycle in the first few chapters of Malory's book. Thereafter he ceases to strive, and Lancelot becomes the hero, remaining so (along with Arthur) even after the breakup of the Round Table. According to the monomyth (the basis of which is an unrelenting demand for new growth), Lancelot should have been the destroyer of Arthur's inactive reign, but in this he failed, becoming instead a partner in maintaining the status quo. Mordred, the new challenger, did manage to kill the "tyrant," Arthur, but, in doing so, was himself destroyed. No one was left to rebuild. Thus

the rebirth cycle is left incomplete, and the end effect of Le Morte Darthur is one of darkness, death, and hopelessness-- an effect not dispelled by the famous inscription on Arthur's tomb, the validity of which is questioned by Malory himself.

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## Preface

Le Morte Darthur is the terminal work produced in the Middle Ages from the corpus of Arthurian legends. It is the most disciplined attempt made in that era to synthesize this vast group of lais, poems, and tales into a coherent whole.<sup>1</sup> The work was compiled by a Thomas Malory whose name is quite certain to be historical but whose identity is not clearly established. He undertook the translation and compilation of the book at the request of William Caxton, the most prominent printer of the time, and apparently completed his work in 1469-70. The book was published at Winchester in 1485. Seven other editions were made between then and 1650, perhaps the best known of which were the Wynkyn de Worde editions of 1498 and 1529. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, while the attention of readers and critics was diverted to the Augustan outlook, there were no editions of this essentially romantic work, but in the nineteenth century, six more editions appeared, notably those of Robert Southey (1817) and Oskar Sommer. Sommer's edition, which was definitive for many years, appeared in three volumes. The first of these, the text, appeared in 1889, followed by an introduction in 1890, and a study of sources in 1891.<sup>2</sup> No other significant issuances



were made until 1947, when a definitive edition was published by Eugene Vinaver of Manchester University in England, based on a manuscript discovered in 1934, which reflects Malory's work without Caxton's editing. This fifteenth-century manuscript, complete except for eight pages at either end, was found, during a search for another document, by the librarian of Fellows' Library in Winchester College.<sup>3</sup> The manuscript is not the one used by Caxton, but is in Vinaver's opinion "in many respects more complete and authentic than Caxton's edition" and indeed may be somewhat earlier (Works, I, vi, and lxxxvii). The manuscript revealed that Caxton had edited the work of Malory to a very considerable extent, and that some of the changes were significant.

The appearance of the Winchester manuscript gave new life and direction to critical opinion regarding Malory's work. While all previous publications, and consequently the criticism, had been based on Caxton's edition, it now became possible to evaluate what Malory himself had written as against the elisions, additions, and alterations made by Caxton. The result was a flurry of new studies focused on the effects of these changes. One of the most comprehensive of these is Edmund Reiss's Sir Thomas Malory.<sup>4</sup> Vinaver, in the section of his introduction entitled "The Writer's Progress," gives



details showing how Malory developed as a writer as he proceeded with Le Morte Darthur (Works, I, xli-lxxxv). A number of critics have taken cues from this discussion, and several of their commentaries have been gathered by R. M. Lumiansky into the collection Malory's Originality, the main thrust of which is evident from the title. Charles Moorman, on the other hand, took issue with Vinaver's stand that Malory wrote most or all of Le Morte Darthur with no intention of arriving at a unified book; the result is Moorman's The Book of Kyng Arthur, in which he attempts to demonstrate that Malory's purpose was to write a single, unified history of Arthur's reign, detailing "the rise, flowering, and downfall of a well-nigh perfect civilization."<sup>5</sup>

The Bibliography gives a representative sampling of articles about various aspects of the Winchester manuscript.

There has been comparatively little criticism of Le Morte Darthur per se. One possible reason for this is Caxton's statement in the Preface to the 1485 edition (given in full in Works, I, cxi) that Malory's stories are translations. What had been done in Malorian criticism up to the late 1800's was discussed by Gaston Paris and M. J. Ulrich in the introduction to their Merlin, published in Paris in 1888. The subject was further explored in Sommer's 1891 volume. In the proliferation



of studies in sources and origins made in the early twentieth century, the most redoubtable names have been those of R. S. Loomis, Jessie Weston, Vida Scudder, and Helaine Newstead. Vinaver published a source study (Malory) in 1929, in which he drew some conclusions that he questions in his 1947 edition of the new manuscript (Works, I, vi, and elsewhere).<sup>6</sup>

Many of the studies in the legends, especially early in the twentieth century, concentrated on the influence of Welsh and Irish origins. Others were investigations of Dutch, Germanic, and French sources, particularly the work of Chrétien (sometimes spelled Chrestien) de Troyes, the French writer who, in the twelfth century, had recorded stories dealing with all the major elements of the Arthurian cycle.

In 1920, a new approach was made by Jessie Weston in From Ritual to Romance. Basing her ideas largely on Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, she postulated that much romantic material such as the Arthurian cycle was pre-Christian ritual that had survived in literary form.

In the research done on the Arthurian canon before 1950, there was a tendency to consider Malory as a latecomer to the Arthurian legends, who, being only a translator, could not be expected to know the origins of the material with which he dealt, and who was not very careful about his use of that



material as long as he made a roughly coherent story out of the main elements of the cycle: Arthur's birth and establishment of the Round Table, the conquest of Rome, the Grail quest, and Arthur's death. Because of this attitude, critics preferred to dwell upon Malory's predecessors rather than upon Malory himself.

Of those who did try to deal with Malory directly, some focused attention on the weaknesses in Malory's writing, such as an apparent carelessness of organization, a habit of re-using characters who had previously been killed off, and an inclination to leave situations incomplete.<sup>7</sup>

The effect of such attitudes was to discourage intensive criticism on the grounds that, in addition to being "merely" a translator, Malory was just too sloppy a writer to be examined seriously--an attitude that has undergone forced modification since publication of the Winchester manuscript.

A further deleterious effect, I fear, was exerted by the biography of the Sir Thomas Malory who was then believed to have written Le Morte Darthur.

In his introduction in 1890, Sommer had mentioned a Sir Thomas Malory who lived at the correct time to have written Le Morte Darthur, and who resided in Newbold Revell in Warwickshire.<sup>8</sup> In 1894 George Lyman Kittredge of Harvard made



a convincing case that this Malory must have been the author. Proceeding on this assumption, various scholars between 1920 and 1932 published additional details about the Warwickshire Malory: they included the facts that he was a rapist, a robber, an extortionist, a political muscle-man, and one who had attempted murder (Matthews, p. 7, and Works, I, xvi). He had spent so much time in jail for these various offenses that some critics were puzzled as to when he could have found time to complete Le Morte Darthur. An even more pertinent question was whether a man of this stripe would have been likely to have either the intellectual attainments to have done the job, or access to a library which contained the necessary sources.<sup>9</sup>

While no critic, to my knowledge, has admitted that his opinion of Malory's work was affected by knowing Malory's background, I suspect that to some of the more delicate, these biographical facts, coupled with Roger Ascham's severe judgment of the 1500's,<sup>10</sup> have made it easy to bypass this translator in favor of more "creative" people working in the same genre (i.e., writers who did exactly what Malory did--copy, translate, and redact--but who were not cursed with an editor who had pointed out these facts for all generations to see).



Then, in 1966, William Matthews, of the University of California at Los Angeles, published The Ill-Framed Knight, in which he re-examines the whole question of authorship, making a more detailed analysis of the evidence than had ever been offered before. He champions another Thomas Malory who lived in Yorkshire (Matthews, p. 152), and who seems to be a far better candidate for authorship than the scapegrace of Newbold Revell, who would have been 75 years old at the time Le Morte Darthur was compiled. The Yorkshire Malory was younger (about 34) at the time Le Morte Darthur was turned over to the printer, and had access to a library at a monastery near York, as well as possibly to one owned by Jacques D'Armagnac in France (Matthews, pp. 149-150). Matthews also offers linguistic and other arguments to show that Le Morte Darthur is more likely to have been written in northern England than in the central section around Warwickshire.<sup>11</sup> We do not know yet what effect these revelations will have on scholarship, because no one has had time to react to this careful piece of documentary detective work, but it seems evident that the publication of the Winchester manuscript, together with the new possibilities opened up by consideration of a Northern Malory, may have cleared the way for a new era of criticism of Le Morte Darthur.



There is an interesting sidelight to all of this. At the ends of several sections of Le Morte Darthur, Malory placed explicits, which either explain what has just taken place in the story or forecast what is next in the book. Some of these end with a sort of little prayer, somewhat reminiscent of Chaucer's apotropaic paragraph at the end of The Canterbury Tales. Only one of Malory's small prayers was allowed to appear in Caxton's edition. In part it reads:

"I preye you all Ientyl men and Ientyl wymmen that redeth this book . . . praye for me whyle I am on lyue that god sende me good delyveraunce & whan I am deed I praye you all praye for my soule. . . ." (Quoted in Works, I, xiii)

Once the "facts" about the Newbold Revell Malory were known, it was easy for editors to read into this paragraph the view that poor Thomas, languishing in jail, as he frequently seems to have been, was appealing to society for release.

When the Winchester manuscript was discovered, two more explicits of this kind were found, containing words which seemed to clinch the matter. The first appears at the end of "The Tale of King Arthur" (as Vinaver divides the book):

And this booke endyth whereas sir Launcelot and sir Trystrams com to courte. Who that woll make ony more lette hym seke other bookis of kyng Arthure or of sir Launcelot or sir Trystrams; for this was drawyn by a knyght



presoner, sir Thomas Malleoré, that God sende  
hym good recover. Amen. (Works, I, 180)

The second occurs at the end of "The Tale of Gareth":

And I pray you all that redyth this tale to  
pray for hym that this wrote, that God sende  
hym good deliveraunce sone and hastely. Amen.  
(Works, I, 363)

Even the careful Matthews was convinced that these passages could only mean that Malory had been a literal prisoner at the time Le Morte Darthur was compiled. Consequently, while he could find no evidence that the Yorkshire Malory had ever been in prison, Matthews felt compelled to say that Malory may have been a military prisoner at some time, possibly in France (Matthews, pp. 137, 139, 149-150).

Now let us turn to an anonymous book called The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnall, which is approximately contemporaneous with Le Morte Darthur in composition. At the end of this little book appears the following explicit:

And, Jesus, as thou were born of a virgin, help  
him that did devise this tale out of sorrow, and  
that now in all haste, for he is beset with many  
jailers that keep him full surely with wrong and  
powerful wiles. Now God, as thou art very royal  
king, help him that made this tale out of danger,  
for he hath long been therein; and of great pity  
help thy servant--for body and soul I yield into  
thine hand--for he hath strong pains.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the author of this tale may also have been in a physical prison, but the tone of his explicit, and its



striking parallels to those found in Malory, lead me to suspect that both authors were following a convention, and that the phrase has a spiritual meaning: something like, "I am a prisoner on earth (or, in this mortal body); please God, set me free."<sup>13</sup>

Such an interpretation seems supported by two textual citations. One of them occurs when a hermit is interpreting some adventures to Gawain. He explains, "The Castell Of Maydyns betokenyth the good soulys that were in preson before the Incarnacion of our Lorde Jesu Cryste" (Works, II, 892). The word "preson" here seems to mean "an unredeemed state." The fact that they were "good souls," and that they were in this state before the birth of Christ, implies that they were in the non-punitive hell of the Apostle's Creed (as distinct from the hell of Lucifer), from which Christ rescued them in his descent to hell between his crucifixion and his ascent to heaven.

The second occurrence is when Lancelot, seeing a castle defended by a group of black knights against a party of white knights, sides with the defenders. However, the white knights press so closely and persistently around him that they wear him down and finally capture him.



And than they all toke and ledde hym away into a foreyste and there made hym to alyght to reeste hym. And than all the felyship of the castell were overcom for the defaughte of hym. Than they seyde all unto sir Launcelot,

"Blessed be God that ye be now of oure felyship, for we shall holde you in oure preson."

And so they leffte hym with few wordys.  
(Works, II, 932)

The white knights obviously do not refer to an actual prison. Their meaning seems to be something like, "We have now imposed upon you a rule from which you will not be able to free yourself." In any event, they patently have in mind spiritual, rather than physical, bondage.

If "preson" in Malory's time carried these meanings as well as that of corporeal incarceration, there may be little justification for assuming, on the basis of the "implicit," that the author of Le Morte Darthur was ever in jail at all. This assumption could open the door for consideration of even other respectable Malorys who might have compiled the work.

At any rate, because so much of the previous criticism has been limited to studies of specific sources and origins, and so little consideration has been given to Le Morte Darthur as a work of art that can stand alone, I am interested in trying a new approach: the analysis of archetypal elements in Malory's work. Except for a few periodical articles in



which Arthurian characters have been traced or compared to figures in early myth and history, no one, to my knowledge, has analyzed Le Morte Darthur on the basis of its archetypes. I have been stimulated in this direction partly by Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism, in which he defines and categorizes archetypes and shows how these categories can be applied to literary criticism. More importantly, I have consulted the works of C. G. Jung, who observed the relationship of psychology to myth, and who first used the term "archetype" in this context. I have found particularly useful a book called Man and His Symbols, edited and with a foreword by Jung, which contains interpretations and illustrations of Jung's ideas by several psychologists. Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry has also helped to confirm my opinions regarding the archetypal method.

Generally speaking, I have tried not to deal with sources. In the first place, as we have seen, this kind of study has been made extensively already. Vinaver, in the huge commentaries appended to the Works, has diligently compared phrases used by Malory to similar phrases that appear in Malory's sources for each section of Le Morte Darthur, except for the story of Gareth's adventures, and "The Healing of Sir Urry," for which no positive sources



have been located. Another recent, and highly detailed, source study is The Tragedy of Arthur, by the same William Matthews who wrote The Ill-Framed Knight. This book, which analyzes the English alliterative poem Morte Arthure on the basis that Alexander was the model for Arthur in that poem, is not written with the intent of relating the alliterative poem specifically to Malory's work; nevertheless, the connection is inescapable, as the poem is known to be the primary source for several Malorian incidents, notably the account of Arthur's conquest of Rome.

My second reason for ignoring immediate sources is that my aim is not in that direction. My approach is that of "standing back," to use Frye's phrase; of looking at a scope of literature and myth much broader than is encompassed by Malory and his sources combined. The fact that several incidents having to do with Lancelot in Malory were derived from Chrétien's Le Conte de Charette is interesting in that it tells us something about Malory's way of reducing and rewriting, but the fact that interests me is that both Malory and Chrétien, and their predecessors as well, used the same archetypal themes. My purpose is to reveal archetypes in Malory's book which are common to the European and near-Eastern imagination, as well as to the dreams and desires of modern man.



## FOOTNOTES TO PREFACE

<sup>1</sup>Michel Gonnot of Crozant, France, finished a less-disciplined compilation in 1470, the same year in which Malory is believed to have finished his. Malory and Gonnot used the same methods of conflation, anthologizing, and arranging. See William Matthews, The Ill-Framed Knight (Berkeley, Calif., 1966), p. 146 (hereafter cited as "Matthews").

Eugene Vinaver, the twentieth century's outstanding Malorian, states that a coherent compilation was not Malory's intention. See The Works of Thomas Malory, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1947), I, xxxiv-xxxv. Citations from Malory will be from this edition, and will be given in the text as Works, or simply as a page number (Vinaver's three volumes are paginated consecutively).

<sup>2</sup>Le Morte Darthur by Syr Thomas Malory, the original edition of William Caxton now reprinted and edited with an Introduction and Glossary, ed. H. Oskar Sommer, 3 vols. (London, 1889-91). Vinaver lists all of the editions in Works, I, xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>3</sup>For an exciting account of the discovery of the manuscript, by the discoverer himself, see "The Finding of the Manuscript," by W. F. Oakeshott, in Essays on Malory, ed. J. A. W. Bennett (Oxford, 1963), pp. 1-10.

<sup>4</sup>Reference information on this and all other works cited in the Preface may be found in the Bibliography.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur (Nashville, 1965), p. xi. Moorman's main chapter headings are interesting: "The Failure in Love: Lancelot and Guinevere"; "The Failure in Religion: The Quest of the Sankgreall"; and "The Failure of Chivalry: Lot and Pellinore."

<sup>6</sup>Aside from studies of sources and origins, the research done on the Arthurian canon may be divided into three categories: general studies covering all of the legends; studies



on specific areas such as the Grail and Tristram stories, or on characters such as Lancelot and Morgan le Fay, and studies specifically on Le Morte Darthur. The greater number of these has been in the first category, in which representative titles include J. D. Bruce's The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings Down to the Year 1300, R. S. Loomis' collection Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages, or Sir John Rhys's Studies in the Arthurian Legend. In the second category fall such specialized studies as A. E. Waite's The Holy Grail: The Galahad Quest in the Arthurian Literature, Miss Jessie Weston's The Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac, and V. J. Harward's The Dwarfs of Arthurian Romance and Celtic Tradition. The third category is represented by Edmund Reiss's Sir Thomas Malory and Charles Moorman's The Book of Kynq Arthur; collections such as Bennett's Essays on Malory and Malory's Originality, edited by R. M. Lumiansky, and of course Vinaver's Malory and the commentaries in his Works.

<sup>7</sup>For comments of this type, see R. W. Chambers, On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and his School (London [EETS], 1932), p. cliii, and E. K. Chambers, English Association, Pamphlet No. 51 (1922), 5, as well as his English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford, 1945), pp. 191-192. Vinaver also mentions some of these anomalies at various places in his Commentary: Works, III, 1265 et seq.

<sup>8</sup>"Revell" is Vinaver's spelling; Matthews prefers "Revel."

<sup>9</sup>Matthews calls this situation the "moral paradox" (p. 7). His questioning of Malory's access to a proper library appears on p. 141 and elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup>Ascham said: "The whole pleasure of this book standeth in two special points, in open manslaughter and bold bawdry. In which book those be counted the noblest knights that do kill men without any quarrel, and commit the foulest adulteries by subtle shifts" (Roger Ascham, The Schoolmaster, ed. L. V. Ryan [Ithaca, 1967], pp. 68-69). Ascham's opinion has had inordinate influence over the years, and may be partly responsible for the fact that no new editions were printed between the mid-seventeenth century and the early nineteenth century.



<sup>11</sup>Matthews' chief arguments are summarized on p. 150 of his book.

<sup>12</sup>The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnall, ed. G. B. Saul (New York, 1934). Saul states in the introduction that this work dates from "toward the end of Henry VII's reign": 1485-1509 (pp. vii-viii).

<sup>13</sup>"while there is only one clear statement that Malory was a prisoner, the rest of these prayers must refer to the same condition. Some readers have continued to believe that they refer merely to sickness, or that they may be a pious Christian's wishes for release from the prison of the body and the world" (Matthews, p. 138).

For a detailed discussion on the medieval view of the body as a prison, see Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1960), pp. 100-103. He comments: "When Orphism, Platonism, asceticism, and the intellectual twilight which began to settle down over civilized Europe in the second century had combined to ensure the success of Christianity, that religion, in its turn, regarded the body as a prison. In the Middle Ages the phrase occurs again and again" (p. 100).



## CHAPTER I

### THE CONCEPT OF ARCHETYPES

The way toward archetypal criticism was pointed by the work of Carl G. Jung, who used the term "archetypes" to describe those contents of the unconscious part of the human mind that he believed are present in the minds of all modern men, even as they were in the minds of earliest man. To distinguish these archetypes from unconscious images and motifs peculiar to individuals, he calls this great inter-personal reservoir the "collective unconscious." He declares:

There are present in every individual . . . the inherited possibilities of human imagination as it was from time immemorial. The fact of this inheritance explains the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the world over in identical forms. . . . I do not by any means assert the inheritance of ideas, but only of the possibility of such ideas, which is something very different.

When fantasies are produced which no longer rest on personal memories, we have to do with the manifestations of a deeper layer of the unconscious where the primordial images common to humanity lie sleeping. I have called these images or motifs "archetypes," also "dominants" of the unconscious.<sup>1</sup>

.....

I have often been asked where the archetypes or primordial images come from. It seems to me that their origin can only be explained by assuming



them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity. One of the commonest and at the same time most impressive experiences is the apparent movement of the sun every day. We certainly cannot discover anything of the kind in the unconscious, so far as the known physical process is concerned. What we do find, on the other hand, is the myth of the sun-hero in all its countless modifications. It is this myth, and not the physical process, that forms the sun archetype. The same can be said of the phases of the moon. The archetype is a kind of readiness to produce over and over again the same or similar mythical ideas. . . . There is nothing to prevent us from assuming that certain archetypes exist even in animals, that they are grounded in the peculiarities of the living organism itself and are therefore direct expressions of life whose nature cannot be further explained. (Jung, p. 69)

Jung's thesis is that the major experiences of life (birth, initiation, aging, etc.) and our frustrations and conflicts that relate to these experiences, were also dealt with by prehistoric man. He argues, too, that conflicts can be resolved, now as then, only through a process of self-discovery that brings the archetypal elements of our unconscious into service as working parts of our conscious minds. Otherwise, a constant pressure is exerted by the unconscious, which insists upon being recognized in one way or another.<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing for it but to recognize the irrational as a necessary, because ever-present, psychological function, and to take its contents not as concrete realities . . . but as psychic realities, real because they work. The



collective unconscious, being the repository of man's experience and at the same time the prior condition of this experience, is an image of the world which has taken aeons to form. In this image certain features, the archetypes or dominants, have crystallized out in the course of time. They are the ruling powers, the gods, images of the dominant laws and principles, and of typical, regularly occurring events in the soul's cycle of experience. In so far as these images are more or less faithful replicas of psychic events, their archetypes, that is, their general characteristics which have been emphasized through the accumulation of similar experiences, also correspond to certain general characteristics of the physical world. Archetypal images can therefore be taken metaphorically, as intuitive concepts for physical phenomena.

On account of their affinity with physical phenomena, the archetypes usually appear in projection; and because projections are unconscious, they appear on persons in the immediate environment, mostly in the form of abnormal or over- and under-evaluations which provoke misunderstandings, quarrels, fanaticisms, and follies of every description. (Jung, p. 95)

According to Jung, the energy from the unconscious which otherwise would have gone into such quarrels (including war), was given a sort of release by the highly ritualistic religions of earlier times. Today, however, that has changed. Joseph L. Henderson, a Jungian psychologist, explains it this way:

The resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday is much less satisfying from a ritual point of view than is the symbolism of the cyclic religions.



For Christ ascends to sit at the right hand of God the Father: His resurrection occurs once and for all. It is this finality of the Christian concept of the resurrection (the Christian idea of the Last Judgment has a similar "closed" theme) that distinguishes Christianity from other god-king myths. It happened once, and the ritual merely commemorates it. But this sense of finality is probably one reason why early Christians, still influenced by pre-Christian traditions, felt that Christianity needed to be supplemented by some elements of older fertility ritual. They needed the recurring promise of rebirth.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, our devotion to science, with its love for precision, has led us to scorn the evocative image, whether in words or symbols, and yet our needs for richness of association--for linking what we say and think to something greater than ourselves--are as forceful as were those of our forefathers, whose world of mythology and ritual was so varied and intricate that a man could touch any portion of it--drama, for example--and be enriched by it.<sup>4</sup>

Once modern man has learned to free himself sufficiently from mundane concerns so that he can delve into this archetypal stratum, Jung says,

An interior spiritual world whose existence we never suspected opens out and displays contents which seem to stand in sharpest contrast to all our former ideas. These images are so intense that it is quite understandable why millions of cultivated persons should be taken in by theosophy and anthroposophy. This happens simply because



such modern gnostic systems meet the need for expressing and formulating the wordless occurrences going on within ourselves better than any of the existing forms of Christianity. . . . Neither in the past nor in the present has even Catholicism attained anything like the richness of the old pagan symbolism, which is why this symbolism persisted far into Christianity and then gradually went underground, forming currents that, from the early Middle Ages to modern times, have never quite vanished from the surface; but, changing their form, they come back again to compensate the one-sidedness of our conscious mind with its modern orientation. (Jung, pp. 77-78)

These atavistic feelings, pushed deep into our unconscious minds, constantly demand recognition, but because modern life is what it is, the only time we give them release is when we are not in control of our minds, i.e., in sleep. Particularly when we are troubled, our dreams reveal animations and situations which startlingly duplicate the myths of primitive people, whether in the Far East, in early Greece, or in Australia today. Indeed, it is a two-way process; dreams appear to have been the sources for many myths in the first place.<sup>5</sup> Among the terms used by modern psychiatric patients are such familiar mythological ones as "devil," "fiend," and "magician," all of which are common in Le Morte Darthur. Commenting on such dream images, Jung says,

"Magician" and "demon" may well represent qualities whose very names make it instantly clear that these are not human and personal qualities but mythological ones. Magician and



demon are mythological figures which express the unknown, "inhuman" feeling. . . .

These attributes always indicate that contents of the transpersonal or collective unconscious are being projected . . . i.e., collective psyche, and not individual psyche. In so far as through our unconscious we have a share in the historical collective psyche, we live naturally and unconsciously in a world of werewolves, demons, magicians, etc., for these are things which all previous ages have invested with tremendous affectivity. Equally we have a share in gods and devils, saviours and criminals. . . . Simple-minded folk have never, of course, separated these things from their individual consciousness, because the gods and demons were not regarded as psychic projections and hence as contents of the unconscious, but as self-evident realities. Only in the age of enlightenment did people discover that the gods did not really exist, but were simply projections. Thus the gods were disposed of. But the corresponding psychological function was by no means disposed of; it lapsed into the unconscious, and men were thereupon poisoned by the surplus of libido that had once been laid up in the cult of divine images. The devaluation and repression of so powerful a function as the religious function naturally has serious consequences for the psychology of the individual. The unconscious is prodigiously strengthened by this reflux of libido, and, through its archaic collective contents, begins to exercise a powerful influence on the conscious mind. The period of the Enlightenment closed, as we know, with the horrors of the French Revolution. And at the present time, too,<sup>6</sup> we are once more experiencing this uprising of the unconscious destructive forces of the collective psyche. The result has been mass-murder on an unparalleled scale. This is precisely what



the unconscious was after. Its position had been immeasurably strengthened beforehand by the rationalism of modern life, which, by depreciating everything irrational, precipitated the function of the irrational into the unconscious. (Jung, pp. 93-94)

The struggle that the individual must undergo to partake of the collective life that lies below the conscious mind, and to release its energies for use at the conscious level, is heroic indeed:

The parallel with the hero-myth is very striking. More often than not the typical battle of the hero with the monster (the unconscious content) takes place beside the water, perhaps at a ford. . . . In the decisive battle the hero is, like Jonah, invariably swallowed by the monster, as Frobenius has shown with a wealth of detail.<sup>7</sup> But, once inside the monster, the hero begins to settle accounts with the creature in his own way, while it swims eastward with him towards the rising sun. He cuts off a portion of the viscera, the heart for instance, or some essential organ by virtue of which the monster lives (i.e., the valuable energy that activates the unconscious). Thus he kills the monster, which then drifts to land, where the hero, new-born through the transcendent function (the "night sea journey," as Frobenius calls it), steps forth, sometimes in the company of all those whom the monster has previously devoured. In this manner the normal state of things is restored, since the unconscious, robbed of its energy, no longer occupies the dominant position. (Jung, p. 99)

The "sea-monster" usually appears in Le Morte Darthur as a magic ship. This device is used once when Arthur, Uriens, and Accolon chase a wounded deer, lose it, and stop to rest



by a river bank. A ship, covered with silk, beaches nearby and the three knights go aboard. They are feasted by twelve maidens, and then fall asleep. They awaken in various places, transported miles away by magic. The trick has been set up by Morgan as part of a plot to kill Arthur (Works, I, 140-145). During the Grail search, a magic ship appears before Percival, and eventually Bors and Galahad come to it also. There is a rich bed, a broken sword which only Galahad can repair, and other accoutrements. The ship takes them to a castle in Scotland that the knights are able to free from a tyrant (Works, II, 914-997 passim). In the fight, Galahad uses the sword he found on the ship, which may be the analogue of the visceral item mentioned above by Jung.

What happens when a man is able to pierce the Veil which lies between his conscious and unconscious mind? He returns from his "journey" enriched. In the first case cited above, Arthur returns with Excaliber; Galahad on his trip gains knowledge of the Grail, but here Malory introduces a variant: Galahad does not bring his knowledge back to his community, choosing instead to stay in the spiritual world.

When the unconscious energy is released, it can come into play with astonishing impact, appearing sometimes as a blinding flash of inspiration, or with such force as to change



a person's entire life-pattern, as in the case of abrupt religious conversions. In discussing the mysterious and powerful way in which the theory of the conservation of energy<sup>8</sup> came to its creator, Robert Mayer, Jung comments:

Whence came this new idea that thrusts itself upon consciousness with such elemental force? And whence did it derive the power that could so seize upon consciousness? The explanation could only be this: the idea of energy and its conservation must be a primordial image that was dormant in the collective unconscious. . . . As a matter of fact . . . the most primitive religions in the most widely separated parts of the earth are founded upon this image. These are the so-called dynamistic religions whose sole and determining thought is that there exists a universal magic power about which everything revolves. . . . This concept is equivalent to the idea of soul, spirit, God, health, bodily strength, fertility, magic, influence, power, prestige, medicine, as well as certain states of feeling which are characterized by the release of affects. (Jung, p. 68)

A particularly good example in Malory of this surge of strange power is the healing of Sir Urry by Lancelot (see Chapter IX, "The Summation").

It is easy to observe parallels between the activities and characters of the knights in Le Morte Darthur and the great myths, especially the Greek, and to realize that these myths came down circuitously but recognizably in descent to Malory (see Appendix). But the more closely we read Jung and later experimenters in the psychological field, and grasp



the fine points of the relevant theory, the more amazed we are to see how closely Malory's stories support the idea of archetypes even in the most minute details. Le Morte Darthur includes such a wealth of the images and motifs that Jung has demonstrated to be common human psychological property that Malory can almost be used as a handbook to illustrate Jungian dream psychology. I know of no piece of literature, including the Shakespeare canon, which so frequently strikes chords that send the mind echoing back along atavistic paths to the "misty mid-regions" where the minds of our forebears dwelt. For this reason, I feel that Le Morte Darthur deserves a reading that takes cognizance of the significance and appeal of these universal motifs.

In his introduction to the Works, Vinaver comments:

If . . . courtly poetry, through its survivals and adaptations, became the ancestor of the psychological novel, it was because the cardinal elements of psychological fiction were there, even though they were lacking in cohesion and unity of purpose. (Works, I, lxvii)

Vinaver then goes on to illustrate with numerous examples (see especially Works, I, lxix-lxxvii) how Malory conferred human emotion and motivation upon characters who in his French originals had been skeletal and formalized.

If Malory's approach to his characters was essentially psychological, and if the concept of archetypes is also



psychological in derivation, as well as universal in application, what more appropriate method for criticism of Malory than archetypal analysis?

Still, it is a long step from Jung's theories to Malory's works. A transitional step is needed, some method of interpreting literature in Jungian terms. Maud Bodkin, in Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, drafted the beginnings of such a theory.<sup>9</sup> Using the basic hypotheses of Jung, Freud, and Gilbert Murray, and supplying background from her own dream experiences, she applied the psychological principle of archetypes to selected dramas and poems from Greek literature, Shakespeare, Coleridge, Verhaeren, and others. The book is provocative, but Miss Bodkin concentrates on the demonstration of principles rather than a practical methodology.

Northrop Frye, in his monumental Anatomy of Criticism, provides a structure on which archetypal criticism can be built.<sup>10</sup> This structure is notoriously complicated, and there is neither room nor necessity for setting it forth here in detail. Nevertheless, a brief survey is essential to our purpose.

One of the four types of criticism discussed by Frye is called Archetypal Criticism, or the Theory of Myths. After discussing the types of imagery (apocalyptic, demonic, and



analogical) that come under his Theory of Archetypal Meaning, Frye begins his Theory of Mythos, with which we are most intimately concerned. He distinguishes four mythoi: The Mythos of Spring: Comedy; The Mythos of Summer: Romance; the Mythos of Autumn: Tragedy; and the Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire.

Le Morte Darthur fits best into the Summer Mythos of romance, but it also partakes of the Autumn Mythos of tragedy. Frye's structure has room for such vagaries because of an almost circular blending from romance to tragedy to irony to comedy.

With the foundation furnished by Jung, then, and the structure supplied by Frye, the only thing needed to complete the bridge between Jung and Malory is an analogical supply from which to draw. This is furnished by Joseph Campbell in his remarkable book The Hero with a Thousand Faces.<sup>11</sup> The book is based on what he calls the "monomyth," a term taken from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake. By showing examples from the mythology of every major culture and many minor ones, Campbell illustrates that there is a single hero whose characteristics are the same the world over, and that the myths which record his passage from birth to death or apotheosis show the same similarity. "The relationship of [the] timeless



symbols [of this composite figure] to those discovered by contemporary psychoanalysis is taken as a starting point for interpretation. . . . From behind a thousand faces the single hero emerges, archetype of all mythology," is the accurate summary given on the book's rear cover.

It is on the bases of these texts, then, that I shall conduct my examination of Le Morte Darthur as a classic example of the functioning of archetypes in literature.

In his introduction, Frye states that his approach is "based upon Matthew Arnold's precept of letting the mind play freely around a subject in which there has been much endeavor and little attempt at perspective" (Frye, p. 3). That is my own approach also. I intend to examine Le Morte Darthur without more than passing regard to its sources, its author, or any critical evaluations made of it in the past. I wish simply to look at it as a widely loved piece of literature, and to demonstrate that it was by using a rich concentration of archetypes that Malory produced a work of timeless and universal appeal. Jung makes it clear how this could be:

Not only are the archetypes, apparently, impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences, but, at the same time, they behave empirically like agents that tend towards the repetition of these same experiences. For when an archetype appears in a dream,



in a fantasy, or in life, it always brings with it a certain influence or power by virtue of which it either exercises a numinous or a fascinating effect, or impels to action. (Jung, pp. 69-70)

What could better explain the perpetual appeal of Le Morte Darthur?

Frye observes succinctly that "The romance, which deals with heroes, is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods" (Frye, p. 306). Having thus placed our area of interest in a semi-divine, semi-supernatural world, he sets up the following categories:

1. In the divine world the central process or movement is that of the death and rebirth, or the disappearance and return, or the incarnation and withdrawal, of a god. . . . As a god is almost by definition immortal, it is a regular feature of all such myths that the dying god is reborn as the same person. Hence the mythical or abstract structural principle of the cycle is that the continuum of identity in the individual life from birth to death is extended from death to rebirth. To this pattern of identical recurrence, the death and revival of the same individual, all other cyclical patterns are as a rule assimilated.
2. The fire-world of heavenly bodies presents us with three important cyclical rhythms. Most obvious is the daily journey of the sun-god across the sky, often thought of as guiding a boat or chariot, followed by a mysterious passage through a dark underworld, sometimes conceived as the belly of a devouring monster, back to the starting



point. The solstitial cycle of the solar year supplies an extension of the same symbolism, incorporated in our Christmas literature. Here there is more emphasis on the theme of a newborn light threatened by the powers of darkness. The lunar cycle has been on the whole of less importance to Western poetry in historic times, whatever its prehistoric role. But its crucial sequence of old moon, "interlunar cave," and new moon may be the source, as it is clearly a close analogy, of the three-day rhythm of death, disappearance, and resurrection which we have in our Easter symbolism.

3. The human world is midway between the spiritual and the animal, and reflects that duality in its cyclical rhythms. Closely parallel to the solar cycle of light and darkness is the imaginative cycle of waking and of dreaming life. This cycle underlies the antithesis of the imagination of experience and of innocence already dealt with. For the human rhythm is the opposite of the solar one: a titanic libido wakes when the sun sleeps, and the light of day is often the darkness of desire. Then again, in common with animals, man exhibits the ordinary cycle of life and death, in which there is generic but not individual rebirth. (Frye, pp. 158-159)

How closely Le Morte Darthur conforms to these judgments will be made clear in the course of this work. I expect to demonstrate that the underlying archetype of Le Morte Darthur is that of the rebirth-regeneration theme in which the cycle is stopped before the rebirth can take place (although it is forecast). The relationship between the spiritual and the



animal, mentioned in the last quotation from Frye, is the central argument of Le Morte Darthur. G. W. Knight points out that the Elizabethans discussed the tension between Christianity and Eros,<sup>12</sup> which is precisely our subject matter also: the failure of the earthly Round Table when exposed to comparison with the spirituality of the Grail.<sup>13</sup>

In one dimension, our story revolves from the turbulence of the days when Arthur was consolidating his kingdom, through the peace of the halcyon years of the Round Table, around again to the turbulence of the internecine fighting among Round Table members. In another dimension, there is a shift from the centrifugal situation where Arthur and his knights oppose external forces, to a centripetal one where the knights fight Arthur and each other. In a third dimension, there is a cyclical development from an aggressive Arthur, conquering chaos for his people, to a passive Arthur who lets his knights do the fighting, to an almost petulant Arthur at the end who, transformed from the upward-striving hero, keenly aware of his purpose, has become the downward-slipping defender of a system, bewildered and tearful at what has happened to his world.<sup>14</sup> Within these larger movements are smaller ones in which individual knights continually fall asleep and dream symbolic dreams, or emerge from various adventures greater or



less great than they were before. These cyclic patterns are analogous to the diurnal journey of the sun and to the sleeping-waking cycles noted by both Jung and Frye as being archetypal.

I have given exhaustively Jung's definitions of archetype, and have begun to unravel Frye's definition, but for simplicity's sake, I will restate these definitions in terms that I believe are closer to those actually used in criticism (by Frye, Bodkin, and Campbell, for example).

An archetype is a recurring, experiential focal point around which a series of images and associations cluster (Frye, p. 102). As we have seen, these associations refer us to the pre-dawn of history. The focal point may be a person, an object, a situation, or a concept. The archetype represents a recurrent human condition, situation, or feeling, and the representation of it may appear in mythological form. I shall give an example that will show the distinction between myth and archetype, but at the same time will illustrate how closely they are linked. Prometheus was a Greek god of the pre-Olympian order; one of the Titans. He rebelled against Zeus, the dominant figure of the incoming Olympian pantheon. (Archetype: the old in conflict with, but being conquered by, the new.) His form of rebellion was to steal fire from



the gods and give it to humanity. (Archetypes: the intermediary between gods and men; the old, even on its way out, has something good to give.) Zeus punishes him by chaining him to a mountain in the Caucasus. (Repetition of the first archetype above, in slightly different form: the new must conquer, however just the old.)

The name of Prometheus, then, calls before our minds a being who is greater than human, and who is punished on a superhuman scale because of what he did for us. The adjective "Promethean" means to us something larger than life, something awesome in proportion, as the gods were to the Greeks. The size of the figures involved, their distance from us in both time and concept, and the magnitude of the punishment fill us with awe and fear--which brings us to Aristotle's pronouncement that tragic drama purges through the catharsis of pity and fear. The idea of "purging" reminds us also of Jung's statement regarding the necessity to human beings of a ritualistic religion--of which Greek drama was originally a component--which can help to relieve us of pressures from the unconscious.

At the same time, if the term "Promethean" is to mean something to us, we must know enough about the myth to be able to recognize the associations. Thus the myth of



Prometheus is the nucleus in our minds around which is gathered a cluster of archetypes. (The concepts of "cluster" and "associations," incidentally, are almost themselves archetypes; for instance, they might call to mind the central idea of William Empson's Seven Types of Ambiguity: that it is the associations which gather around a word or group of words which give the requisite "echoes" to poetry. Similarly, we are reminded of the concept of the kernel and the nut expounded by Augustine in De Civitate Dei, in which the exegete is exhorted to peel away the outer layers--associations--of the nut in order to be able to see clearly the kernel of truth.)

An archetype, therefore, being a function of experience and knowledge, is also a function of culture. Prometheus would be unknown by name to the average member of an American Indian tribe, but the point made by Jung, and more pointedly by Joseph Campbell, is that the same essential archetypal ideas of an intermediary with the gods, or of regeneration, or of a superhuman being suffering for mankind, will be known equally well to the American Indians of our times, the Polynesians of Captain Cook's era, or the Greeks of the age of Pericles.



When one "stands back" to examine a work of literature from this point of view, it becomes unimportant what its sources are, or who wrote it, or where it stands in time in relation to other literary efforts. The point is that Malory, and his sources, and the Roman and Greek mythographers themselves, all drew from the archetypal well, so to speak: the reservoir of important human experiences common to all men of all times.

Nevertheless, as I think I have demonstrated in the case of Prometheus, the use of a myth is sometimes a useful way to backlight a literary character so as to silhouette him against the archetype he represents. For this reason I use, in what follows, mythical names and situations for illustrative purposes.

On the matter of "standing back," Frye makes the following comment:

In looking at a picture, we may stand close to it and analyze the details of brush work and palette knife. This corresponds roughly to the rhetorical analysis of the new critics in literature. At a little distance back, the design comes into clearer view, and we study rather the content represented: this is the best distance for realistic Dutch pictures, for example, where we are in a sense reading the picture. The further back we go, the more conscious we are of the organizing design. At



a great distance from, say, a Madonna, we can see nothing but the archetype of the Madonna, a large centripetal blue mass with a contrasting point of interest at its center. In the criticism of literature, too, we often have to "stand back" from the poem to see its archetypal organization. If we "stand back" from Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantoes, we see a background of ordered circular light and a sinister black mass thrusting up into the lower foreground--much the same archetypal shape that we see in the opening of the Book of Job. If we "stand back" from the beginning of the fifth act of Hamlet, we see a grave opening on the stage, the hero, his enemy, and the heroine descending into it, followed by a fatal struggle in the upper world. If we "stand back" from a realistic novel such as Tolstoy's Resurrection or Zola's Germinal, we can see the mythopoeic designs indicated by those titles. (Frye, p. 140)

An essential point here is that in order to identify the archetype of the Madonna from a distance, we must first have seen the picture more closely; otherwise, we should be in danger of confusing it with similar archetypes: an icon of Charlemagne, for example, or of Christ, both of which are constructed similarly. (If we were not concerned with the subject matter at all, we would be dealing with the archetype of the centripetal structure of painting.)

It is on this basis, which might be called "modified Frye," that I will examine Le Morte Darthur, first looking at the details, and then standing off to see what archetypal patterns may reveal themselves.



## CHAPTER I FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>C. G. Jung, "On the Psychology of the Unconscious," in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 2d ed., Bollingen Series, XX (New York, 1966), pp. 65-66. Hereafter cited as "Jung."

<sup>2</sup>Pertinently, although he is specifically discussing Spenser, G. W. Knight comments: "Behind all our poetry there is a communal store of semi-consciously possessed legendary material: Spenser seems to have possessed it consciously. As so often, the Elizabethan is fully aware, his mind flooded, where later poets rely on mysterious, not-to-be-accounted-for promptings, controlled or otherwise, from unconsciousness" (The Burning Oracle: Studies in the Poetry of Action [London, 1939], p. 7).

<sup>3</sup>"Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in Man and His Symbols (New York, 1964), p. 108).

<sup>4</sup>In this regard, Leroy Loemker comments: "Magic belongs . . . to a dream era, not a logical era. Science advances by treating signs as logical and rejecting any evocative effect they may have . . . on the mind of the scientist. A magical sign, on the other hand, ascribes to the symbol not merely a denotation but an efficient causal power" ("Symbol and Myth in Philosophy," in Truth, Myth, and Symbol [Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1962], p. 122).

<sup>5</sup>Offering proof that myth can arise from dream is Clyde Kluckhohn, who, after stating that "dreams are the source of 'new' rituals," quotes William Morgan in Human Wolves Among the Navaho (New Haven, 1936), p. 40, as follows: "Delusions and dreams . . . are so vivid and carry such conviction that any attempt to reason about them afterwards on the basis of conscious sense impressions is unavailing. Such experiences deeply condition the individual, sometimes so deeply that if the experience is at variance with a tribal or neighborhood belief, the



individual will retain his own variation. There can be no doubt that this is a very significant means of modifying a culture" ("Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," in Myth and Literature [Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966], p. 34).

<sup>6</sup>This passage was written in 1916, according to Jung's note.

<sup>7</sup>Leo Frobenius, Das Zeitalter des Sonnengottes (Berlin, 1904) (Jung's note).

<sup>8</sup>"One characteristic of all energy is its property of transformation, and in all its transformations there is evident the principle of conservation of energy. The physical law that is known by this name asserts that the total amount of energy in any isolated system is invariable in amount. Energy may be added or abstracted from without, but as long as no external influences intervene the total quantity of energy within the system can neither increase nor decrease. It is usual, therefore, to say that the entire energy of the universe is conserved" (The Macmillan Everyman's Encyclopedia, 4th ed., Vol. 5 [New York, 1959], 6).

<sup>9</sup>Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (New York, 1934). Hereafter cited as "Bodkin."

<sup>10</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957). Hereafter cited as "Frye."

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York, 1968). Hereafter cited as "Campbell."

<sup>12</sup>G. W. Knight, The Burning Oracle, p. 290.

<sup>13</sup>The same opposition is mentioned by William Matthews as that "body-soul tension which . . . lies at the heart of Le Morte Darthur: 'noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyté, frendlynnesse, hardynnesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, murdre, hate, vertue, and synne'" (The Ill-Framed Knight, p. 119, quoting from Caxton's preface).



14The terms "upward" and "downward" are meant not only in the literary sense of a rising and falling plot-line, but also in the philosophical sense of a man reaching upward for life and an ideal, as compared to that same man as he appears when the striving has stopped and his movements, whether he wills it so or not, are deathward.



## CHAPTER II

### MALORY'S EUROPE AND THE THEMES OF LE MORTE DARTHUR

Malory's weltanschauung is of a down-turning, deathward movement of life even at its brightest and most hopeful. Regardless of whether "Le Morte Darthur" is Malory's own title for the book--and Vinaver argues that it is not<sup>1</sup>--in fact that is the title we know, and it expresses succinctly a foreboding of which we find many supporting elements in the book itself. The use of the word "morte" significantly contributes to this sense of ominousness. The English word "death" is abrupt; it has the sound of a quick, brutal ending. The longer vowel in the French term has a more protracted sound, carrying to me the feeling that, even if dissolution is the end, there is a distance that can--or must--be traveled before it is reached. The syllable "mor" also echoes words like "mordant," the present participle of the Medieval French "mordre," to bite; and "mortality," which implies decay, and the brevity of life. That Malory probably recognized the weight of such echoes is suggested by his use of that prefix in the names of his villainesses, Morgan and Morgawse; in the name of his villain, Mordred, with its added connotation of "dread,"<sup>2</sup> and in what he calls the dark, dangerous body of water which the Grail knights must avoid: the Sea of Mortayse.



To employ the terms of music, the word "death" is like a single note, struck without pedal, whereas "morte" is a chord, comprising many notes and harmonics.

The three major thematic strains which sustain this opening chord in Le Morte Darthur are those of isolation, of sterility, and of death in life.

The idea of isolation is established by the fact that the action of the book takes place on an island. The concept of "island" includes the senses of snugness and self-containment, and also those of insulation and difficulty of approach. We are reminded several times that Le Morte Darthur is an island story; Arthur crosses the English Channel three times to invade Europe: once to conquer Rome, once to fight King Claudas (a battle we learn about only in retrospect), and once to fight Lancelot. Tristram crosses the channel twice in trips between his home in Brittany and King Mark's demesne in Cornwall, and crosses the Irish Sea to fetch Isolde. During the Grail quest, Percival, Bors, Galahad, and Lancelot all cross seas or channels in their adventures. (We shall deal later with the psychological implications of the act of water-crossing.)

This theme is repeated in the activities of individual knights who, in pursuit of their adventures, frequently must



cross water barriers such as rivers or moats, or encounter their "guides" at fountains or wells. Thus a parallel is drawn between the kingdom, surrounded by water, and the Round Table, also isolated by water from the outlying worlds of adventure. The Round Table is therefore an island within an island. In mythology such a place is called the umbilical spot, or the world navel, or the omphalos. In psychology it is a symbol of wholeness of the Self, the completion that we strive for. Whether in psychology or mythology, it is the center of the universe. All adventures start and end there; it is the reward for struggle: the Ithaca of Odysseus, the Rome of Aeneas, the Jerusalem of two great religions. It is the archetype of "home."

The idea of sterility takes many forms in Le Morte Darthur, and several of these will be dealt with in succeeding chapters. The symbol of sterility throughout the book is Guinevere, who is childless and apparently barren. There is also the sterility of the Round Table itself: a closed, self-contained society that is developed and maintained for its own purposes and self-perpetuation. When the values of this society are brought into face-to-face comparison with the richer ones of the Grail, they are revealed for what they are: worldly, fruitless, and spiritually barren.



The idea of death-in-life also appears in many guises in the book; we have heard its overtones in the title. Because the adventures of the knights are adventures of deadly combat, and because they are bound by their code to accept such adventures, the threat of death or maiming is before them every time they ride forth. Any knight who fights in single combat with a challenger at a crossroads or a river, or who takes part in a tournament, can be, and often is, killed; if he is defeated, he has only two choices: death, or surrender of all his worldly goods to his conqueror.

In addition, the menace of inimical forces, both supernatural and physical, hovers around and over the Round Table and the kingdom. This pressure is so unrelenting that, early in the book, even before Lancelot has come to court, Arthur is already weary of it. When he is informed that five kings have entered his land raiding, he says,

"Alas! . . . Yet had I never reste one monethe syne I was kyng crowned of this londe. Now shall I never reste tulle I mete with tho kyngis in a fayre felde, that I make myne avow; for my trwe lyege peple shall not be destroyed in my defaughte. Therefore go with me who so woll, and abyde who that wyll." (Works, I, 127)

These forces oppress Arthur and his knights from the beginning of the book to the end, and finally overcome him, although their specific agent is Mordred of the terrible



name. He, too, is an ominous shadow--the term itself has psychological implications--who is just at the fringes of all the colorful tournaments and the high-flown talk of nobility, awaiting his chance to bring it all down to his own dark level.

Isolation (a modern term is "alienation"), sterility, and death were commonplaces as much in Malory's world as in Homer's, or ours. They are, in short, archetypal, which is why Malory can speak to us in terms we understand, regardless of how archaic his language. It is easy to see how Malory should have been preoccupied with these archetypal themes when we reflect upon the condition of his world.

At the time Le Morte Darthur was being compiled, the Wars of the Roses, England's greatest political upheaval of the century, were ending, and much of civilized England lay in ruins. Deaths from war and disease had touched every major house in England, old estates had been broken up, and some of the great families were in their terminal generation for lack of progenitors.

The feudal age, for all practical purposes, was ended, and the age of business was beginning, with a consequent shifting in values away from a blooded aristocracy supported by a propertyless populace, toward a culture where wealth



created its own aristocracy, and, above all, where the increased value of workers was giving common people the groundwork for an eventual claim to equality.

Perhaps more importantly, as far as mass psychology was concerned, the solid religious faith of the early Middle Ages had been irreparably riven by four powerful forces. First there was the Great Schism, in which two Popes resided in different countries in Europe, each claiming to be the heir to "the one true church." Then there was the Black Plague, which had stripped Europe of a quarter of its population, and had given rise to questions about God's sense of justice. The impact of the East on the West as a result of the Crusades had revealed to the barbaric Christians that the hated infidel had a great deal to teach them about everything from the appreciation of luxury to higher learning, as well as how to build better castles. In England, the activities of Wycliffe, who had died in 1384--about fifty years before Malory's years of manhood--had left a legacy of religious turmoil.

The battles that England had been fighting since 1066 to bring France under the English crown had terminated in 1453 with the loss of everything that England had possessed on the continent except Calais. One agent in this defeat



was Joan of Arc, who was executed by the English in 1431, during Malory's lifetime. This act, perpetrated ostensibly for religious reasons, was repudiated a few years later by the Pope for equally religious reasons, causing puzzlement and bitterness that still echo in histories of the period.

In the same year as the collapse of the English hegemony in France (1453), one of the most far-reaching events in history occurred at the other end of the world: the loss of Constantinople to the Turks. Acquisition of this cornerstone of Asia by the infidels was not only the greatest, but the only, permanent material gain to be made by either Christians or Moslems after the hundreds of years (since 1095) and the thousands of lives that had been spent in the Crusades. The event terminated the brightest hope of Europe: the securing of the Holy Lands for Christendom. With that hope disappeared the last remnant of the Roman Empire, and the last foothold of Christendom in Asia. The overall effect of this catastrophe in Europe was to turn continental expansionist ambitions from the East, where they had been directed since before the days of Alexander, to the Atlantic Ocean and the West, with the directly related result of the discovery of the New World forty years later. However, this hopeful event had not occurred in Malory's time; all that he and his



compeers could know was that a door had been shut. Europe was now hedged on the East by the unknown Russian steppes, and on its other three sides by water, with Ireland its westernmost bastion. When Constantinople fell, Europe itself became an island.<sup>3</sup>

Small wonder that a man like Malory, obviously an observant and thinking person, and at the same time a member of the armored aristocracy, could look around at his world and see nothing but loss, the shearing-away of old values, and the ending of the era that gave him birth: in other words, isolation, sterility, and death. Given factors such as these, which touched upon every level of life as he knew it--religious, social, and military<sup>4</sup>--it is easy to see why Malory should write such a reversionary and nostalgic book as Le Morte Darthur, in which, while extolling the knightly virtues, he also is forced to recognize that an era has passed. Thus, by the failure of Arthur's society, he symbolizes the termination of a way of life that had been in existence for hundreds of years: Malory's England.



## CHAPTER II FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Works, I, xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup>The prefix "mor," however, was not restricted to literary names. A chieftain under King Harold of Saxon England in 1066 was named Morcar. See J. F. C. Fuller, A Military History of the Western World, 3 vols. (New York, 1955), I, 369-370.

<sup>3</sup>This was Malory's world as it really existed. However, the natural background of the dream-world of Le Morte Darthur is that of pre-Conquest Britain. In those days, the countryside of England consisted of strongpoints, usually based on the design (and in some cases the actual location) of Roman military camps, founded on or near a water-source, with dirt roads and forest paths connecting one strongpoint with another, and with the rest of the landscape covered by near-virgin forest. There are several indications that at least a vague notion of pre-Conquest Britain was in Malory's mind. One is the fact that he gives no hint of the bitter Norman-versus-Saxon conflict that was a major factor in English life for at least two centuries after the Conquest. No reference is made to the cult of the Virgin, which developed in England roughly contemporaneously with that of courtly love on the continent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; and there are no incidents which can be ascribed confidently to any historical or likely event occurring after about 1000 A. D. (although Vinaver, among others, sees elements in Le Morte Darthur as referring to events in the Wars of the Roses; see Works, I, xxv-xxvi, for example).

E. K. Chambers makes the same point: "Of the England of the fifteenth century, exhausted by generations of foreign enterprise and dynastic quarrels, of England as we find it depicted in the Paston Letters, of the complete breakdown of law and order, of the abuses of maintenance and livery and private warfare, of the corruption of officials, of the excessive taxation, of the ruin of countrysides by the enclosure of agricultural land for pasture--of all this we



find no consciousness whatever in Malory's pages. A revival of the spirit of chivalry might have done something to help matters, but a strong hand in the central government would have done more" (English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages, p. 197).

The only specific date in Le Morte Darthur is given during the seating of Galahad at the Round Table, where a golden inscription on the Siege Perilous says that it shall be "achieved" 454 years after the passion of Christ, which places Galahad in about 480 A. D. But the Roman withdrawal from Britain was not complete until about 490 A. D., and in Le Morte Darthur, Romans are treated as merely foreigners, not hated occupiers. In the fifth century, the English "castle" was a log or earthen palisade on a hill, surrounded by a waterless ditch from which the fortification had been dug. The armor, if Englanders could afford it at all, would have been the skimpy Roman armor, adapted to walking rather than riding. Knowledge of horsemanship would have been minimal, if only because of the rarity of horses, and the basic social organization was the north European comitatus, to which Arthur's court has some resemblances, notably in the stress placed upon gift-giving. It may help to place this England in context to remember that Beowulf is believed to have been written between the eighth and tenth centuries, about events and people of the end of the fifth century-- for example, Hrothgar, who died in 525 A. D. (See Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3d ed. [Boston, 1950], pp. xxxi and cvii.) Thus, Galahad would have been seated during Hrothgar's lifetime.

In those days the common man was a serf with neither rights of his own nor respect from the aristocracy, and that is exactly the attitude taken toward commoners by Malory: he only mentions them half-a-dozen times in his book, and of those instances, half are extremely uncomplimentary. Militarily, commoners were sometimes viewed as more of an impediment than a help (see Works, I, 35; V, 235).

<sup>4</sup>A major contributor to the sense of enclosure and defeatism which swept through Europe as a consequence of the listed occurrences was a matter especially pertinent to Le Morte Darthur: the most radical changes in military tactics and personal protection since the Roman tactics of dispersion and mobility replaced those of the Greek phalanx.



In Switzerland, a new and formidable democratic infantry--an unthinkable development from the viewpoint of the aristocracy--had defeated the feudal levies of the Hapsburgs three times in the fourteenth century, the last time in 1388. "After this achievement . . . it was idle to say that the wearing of armor and the use of weapons was [sic] reserved by God and nature for persons of quality" (Fuller, A Military History of the Western World, I, 474). This was especially true for those who remembered--and all fighting men did--the slaughter of the armored and mounted French knights at Crecy in 1346 by common men armed with longbows.

By far the greatest blow against the armored man and his castle, however, was struck by the introduction of gunpowder. A primitive cannon had been used in a siege of Metz as early as 1324; others had been used by Edward II in Scotland in 1327, and at the siege of Calais in 1346, the year of Crecy. By 1364 an early form of handgun was in use, primarily by infantry behind walls--another step toward the defensive battle of attrition as opposed to the battle of mobility and speed which was the specialty of the knights. By the time of the siege of Orleans in 1429, artillery had become a tactical military arm. This fact further eroded the value of an armored knight, and brought into question the worth of fortifications themselves. Surprisingly, cannon are mentioned once in Le Morte Darthur, and we learn something of what Malory thought of them in the fact that the "grete gunnes" are used by his villain, Mordred, in besieging the Tower of London after Guinevere has taken refuge there (Works, III, 1227).

As the longbow, crossbow, and artillery came into use, knights were compelled to thicken their armor, eventually to the extent that they had to be placed on horseback by means of a derrick, and once knocked to the ground could only flounder feebly until dispatched or rescued. Such armor was on the way to its final development in Malory's time, but it was a long way from the armor used in Le Morte Darthur, in which knights were able to mount and dismount alone, and fight for hours wearing sword and shield.

A Round Table knight wearing full armor and properly armed was carrying upwards of ninety pounds of wood, leather, and metal on his body. He was fully encased except under his arms and on the lower buttocks and thighs, which were protected



## CHAPTER III

### THE PLOT AND THE PROTAGONISTS

#### Plot Summary

Le Morte Darthur begins with events shortly before Arthur's conception, and proceeds through his growth and succession to the kingship, his marriage to Guinevere and the establishment of the Round Table, the intranational battles by which he secured his kingdom, his invasion of Europe, his victory over the Roman forces who defended it, and his coronation as emperor of Rome.

At this point, Arthur recedes into the background, and Lancelot becomes the hero. The central part of the book--the bulk of it--deals with the adventures of various Round Table knights. Part of these adventures fall into the large section that chiefly relates the fortunes of Tristram and Isolde; others appear in the section concerning the quest for the Grail. After the knights have returned from the Grail search, Arthur again becomes the focal point of the story (though he shares it with Lancelot) and remains so until his death in battle at the hands of his illegitimate son Mordred. There are two final chapters dealing with the ultimate fate



of Guinevere, Lancelot, and the few knights who survive the final battle.

### The Round Table

The chief protagonist in Le Morte Darthur is perhaps the Round Table itself--more exactly, the concept of the Round Table. This object-concept is the starting point for the majority of the adventures in the book, and most of the actions of the knights are governed by it in one way or another. It is referred to by its members with pride and by outsiders with envy; it is the touchstone of chivalric values from England to Rome, and it is the earthly, or secular, ideal against which the spiritual value of the Grail is compared.

The table, we are told, was "made" by Merlin for Uther, Arthur's father. This fact makes it likely that the table was the product of magic more than carpentry, which confers upon it a significance beyond that of a mere object of furniture. The table was given by Uther to King Leodogrance, Guinevere's father. When she married Arthur, she brought it with her as part of her dowry, thus establishing a complex series of connections that relate Arthur to his father in terms of the continuity of the kingship; relate Guinevere not only to Arthur but to the Table itself, and relate



Merlin's world of magic, through Guinevere and Arthur, to the knights of the Round Table. Gawain was knighted on the day that the Round Table became officially Arthur's property (i.e., Arthur's wedding-day), and this fact becomes thematically significant as we see how the moods and acts of Gawain interweave with the lives of Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and others.

The Round Table was, literally, the inner circle of Arthur's court. Only the best knights of all those who supported the court were appointed to one of the 149 available seats (one additional seat, for the total of 150, always being reserved for Galahad). The code for the knightly society which foregathered at the Round Table is stated shortly after its founding:

Than the kynge stablysshed all the knyghtes  
and gaff them rychesse and londys; and charged  
them never to do outerage nothir morthir, and  
allwayes to fle treson, and to gyff mercy unto  
hym that askith mercy, uppon payne of forfiture  
of their worship and lordship of kynge Arthure  
for evirmore; and allwayes to do ladyes,  
damesels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour:  
strengthe hem in hir rygtes, and never to  
enforce them uppon payne of dethe. Also that  
no man take no batayles in a wrongefull quarell  
for no love ne for no worldis goodis. So unto  
thys were all knyghtis sworne of the Table  
Rounde both olde and yonge. And every yere so  
were they sworne at the hygh feste of Pentecoste.  
(Works, I, 119-120)



Several times in the book, such phrases as "the High Order of Knighthood" and "the Order of Chivalry" are sounded; the implication is that the "high order" was established by means of this oath, and that it is the Round Table which is meant.<sup>1</sup> For example, when Percival is downcast during the Grail search, he tells a hermit,

"Sir, I am of kynge Arthurs courte and a knyght of the Rounde Table, whych am in the queste of the Sankgreall, and here I am in grete duras and never lyke to ascape oute of thys wyldernes."

"Doute ye nat," seyde the good man, "and ye be so trew a knyght as the Order of Shevalry requyrith, and of herte as ye ought to be, ye shold nat doute that none enemy shold slay you."  
(Works, II, 914)

Thus a connection is made between knighthood and sanctity; if a knight lives up to the secular code of chivalry, he will be supernaturally protected from death. It is this consciousness of invulnerability on both religious and secular grounds that lies behind Galahad's abilities both as a fighter and as a miracle-curer. This outlook is a logical extension of an attitude expressed elsewhere in the book that a knight is impervious to the actions of commoners. For example, when he is warned that he is exposing himself dangerously close to the walls of a besieged city, Arthur responds,



"They wyne no worshyp of me but to waste their toolys; for there shall never harlot have happe, by the helpe of oure Lord, to kylle a crowned kynge that with creyme is anoynted." (Works, I, 227)

The mystical meaning of the Round Table is given to Percival during the Grail search in these words:

"Merlyon made the Rounde Table in tokenyng of rowndnes of the worlde, for men sholde by the Rounde Table undirstonde the rowndenes signyfyed by ryght. For all the worlde, crystenyd and hethyn, repayryth unto the Rounde Table, and whan they ar chosyn to be of the felyshyp of the Rounde Table they thynke hemselff more blessed and more in worship than they had gotyn halff the worlde." (Works, II, 906)

Malory's words thus define the Round Table as an archetype, and further serve, as his words so often do, to illustrate the psychological principles governing the development and use of symbols.

In "Symbolism in the Visual Arts," Aniela Jaffé discusses three motifs that have been universally sacred or mysterious to man: "These are the symbols of the stone, the animal, and the circle--each of which has had enduring psychological significance from the earliest expressions of human consciousness."<sup>2</sup> While all three of these symbols appear in Le Morte Darthur, we will here discuss only the circle.

Miss Jaffé goes on, "The circle is a symbol of the psyche (even Plato described the psyche as a sphere)." In a



picture caption on the same page, Miss Jaffé adds: "Jung has suggested that . . . visions [of circles] are projections of the archetype of wholeness" (Man and His Symbols, p. 249).

Jung's own comment follows:

The . . . function [of the attempt to discover the Self] does not proceed without aim and purpose . . . it is . . . a purely natural process. . . . The meaning and purpose of the process is the realization . . . of the personality originally hidden away in the embryonic germ-plasm; the production and unfolding of the original, potential wholeness. The symbols used by the unconscious to this end are the same as those which mankind has always used to express wholeness, completeness, and perfection: symbols, as a rule, of the quaternity and the circle.<sup>3</sup>

The name ascribed by Jung to this essentially circular symbol is the Hindu word mandala, which M. L. von Franz defines as "a symbolic representation of the 'nuclear atom' of the human psyche. . . ." <sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, the same writer links this concept directly to our study:

Roundness . . . generally symbolizes a natural wholeness. . . . The round table . . . is a well-known symbol of wholeness and plays a role in mythology--for instance, King Arthur's round table [sic], which itself is an image derived from the table of the Last Supper. (Man and His Symbols, p. 215)

This terminal comment may be a trifle glib. Miss Jaffé demonstrates that many pre-Christian peoples used the circle-- which is after all a natural derivative from observation of



the sun, the moon, and the horizon--as a symbol of unity between earthly objects and the cosmos (Man and His Symbols, p. 240 et passim).

The Round Table, then, represents a desire for wholeness and completion, and as such, is a symbol of Arthur's (and the reader's) Self.<sup>5</sup> The Table is so inextricably bound up with Arthur's life that it is his life, and when it falls, he must fall. At the same time, the Table also serves an identity function for the knights who make up its complement. Thus, again, there is established an almost umbilical connection from the knights to Arthur and Guinevere and through them to the older world of Merlin and Uther. It is to this interconnected communal identity that Joseph Campbell refers when he says that it is "from the umbilical spot [that] the hero departs to realize his identity."<sup>6</sup> In anthropological terms, this simply means that the hero derives from his community the strength he needs to perform his great deeds, the results of which in turn are brought back and assimilated to furnish greater strength for the community.

The society which eddies about the Round Table is circumscribed by its own rules. Its members are aristocrats whose chief worries are their relative rankings and the gaining of "worship," which in fine means the secular goal of reputation. The first and most important question asked



of a newcomer is about his social status; if that is sufficiently exalted, it is considered axiomatic that he will become a knight of prowess. Few people work their way into this society from below, and only one--Galahad--moves out of it at the top. It is a private world, cocooned, incestuous, sybaritic, a dead end. During its great days, it is centrifugal in operation, with knights riding forth daily on adventures that further enhance the reputation of the Table. But after the Grail search, there are no longer worlds that seem worthwhile to conquer, and the Table becomes centripetal, so that what has been a center of genesis and renewal becomes instead the focus of an in-turning, a preoccupation with itself alone. In the long run, it becomes a treadmill to which every man and woman of the Arthurian world has to return, regardless of exposure to wider, deeper, or better things, there to pursue a deadly daily round that has ceased to be productive. In the grimly simple terms of archetype, when a person or a society stops growing, the stage is set for the arrival of the destroying, rebuilding hero. (The self-destructive elements in this society are dealt with in Chapter IV.)

It is interesting and possibly significant that Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, and Gawain, the four chief characters of Le Morte Darthur--the ones most intimately connected with



the Round Table--are the most difficult to analyze by archetypal methods. I believe the reason is that Malory made more of an effort to humanize these four, so that their archetypal outlines are more blurred than those of lesser characters. Of the four, Gawain and Guinevere are analyzed sufficiently elsewhere, but it is necessary to examine Lancelot and Arthur in some detail now, to furnish a predicate for later discussions.

Although Le Morte Darthur is clearly about Arthur and his court, Lancelot is the hero, whatever standard of judgment is used. His deeds are more sharply outlined than those of Arthur; more care is taken to show his great courage, courtesy, and prowess, as well as his weaknesses; he becomes involved in more adventures than anyone else, regardless of who starts them. And, whenever there is trouble of a kind to baffle others, it is always Lancelot who is called upon to resolve it.

We will first investigate the possibility that Lancelot is a "projection" of Arthur.

To project, in the psychological sense, is to see in another person the echoes of our own qualities. Thus, if we are subjugating within ourselves feelings that demand expression, we will find a person in our acquaintance upon whom to project these feelings which we dare not admit to be part of ourselves. Similarly, our good feelings, or



desires, we project in a form called "identification": the quality that enables us to share vicariously in the emotional states of the hero in a play or story.

To show how the psychological concept of projection appears in mythology, it is pertinent to examine some passages from Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature, by Paul Radin.<sup>7</sup> In this primitive myth we can see clearly the four basic phases of the hero's life story that recur in almost all other myth cycles, wherever found. The synopsis used here is from an article by Joseph Henderson.

Trickster is a figure whose physical appetites dominate his behavior; he has the mentality of an infant. . . . This figure . . . passes from one mischievous exploit to another. But, as he does so, a change comes over him. At the end of his rogue's progress he is beginning to take on the physical likeness of a grown man.

The next figure is Hare. . . . He has not yet attained mature human stature, but all the same he appears as the founder of human culture--the Transformer. . . . This archetypal figure represents a distinct advance on Trickster: One can see that he is becoming a socialized being, correcting the instinctual and infantile urges found in the Trickster cycle.

Red Horn, the third of this series of hero figures, is an ambiguous person, said to be the youngest of 10 brothers. He meets the requirements of an archetypal hero by passing such tests as winning a race and by proving himself in battle. His superhuman power is shown by



his ability to defeat giants by guile (in a game of dice) or by strength (in a wrestling match). He has a powerful companion in the form of a thunderbird called "Storms-as-he-walks," whose strength compensates for whatever weakness Red Horn may display. With Red Horn we have reached the world of man, though an archaic world, in which the aid of super-human powers or tutelary gods is needed to ensure man's victory over the evil forces that beset him. Toward the end of the story the hero-god departs, leaving Red Horn and his sons on earth. The danger to man's happiness and security now comes from man himself.

This basic theme (which is repeated in the last cycle, that of the Twins) raises, in effect, the vital question: How long can human beings be successful without falling victims to their own pride or, in mythological terms, to the jealousy of the gods?

Though the Twins are said to be the sons of the Sun, they are essentially human and together constitute a single person. Originally united in the mother's womb, they were forced apart at birth. Yet they belong together, and it is necessary--though exceedingly difficult--to reunite them. In these two children we see the two sides of man's nature. One of them, Flesh, is acquiescent, mild, and without initiative; the other, Stump, is dynamic and rebellious. In some of the stories of the Twin Heroes these attitudes are refined to the point where one figure represents the introvert, whose main strength lies in his powers of reflection, and the other is an extravert, a man of action who can accomplish great deeds.

For a long time these two heroes are invincible: Whether they are presented as two separate figures or as two-in-one, they carry all before them. Yet, like the warrior gods of Navaho Indian mythology, they eventually sicken from the abuse of their own power. There are no monsters left in heaven or earth for them to overcome, and their consequent



wild behavior brings retribution in its train. . . . When the Twins killed one of the four animals that upheld the earth, they had overstepped all limits, and the time had come to put a stop to their career. The punishment they deserved was death.

Thus, in both the Red Horn cycle and that of the Twins, we see the theme of sacrifice or death of the hero as a necessary cure for hybris, the pride that has over-reached itself. In the primitive societies whose levels of culture correspond to the Red Horn cycle, it appears that this danger may have been forestalled by the institution of propitiatory human sacrifice--a theme that has immense symbolic importance and recurs continually in human history. . . .

In the examples of the hero's betrayal or defeat that occur in European mythology, the theme of ritual sacrifice is more specifically employed as a punishment for hybris. But the Winnebago, like the Navaho, do not go so far. Though the Twins erred, and though the punishment should have been death, they themselves became so frightened by their irresponsible power that they consented to live in a state of permanent rest: The conflicting sides of human nature were again in equilibrium.

I have given this description of the four types of hero at some length because it provides a clear demonstration of the pattern that occurs both in the historic myths and in the hero-dreams of contemporary man.<sup>8</sup>

Although there are elements in all these stages that have analogues in Malory, the main line of Le Morte Darthur crosses the area described as the Twins who "constitute a single person." In the central portion of Le Morte Darthur, Arthur and Lancelot have clear resemblances to the introvert and the extrovert. Henderson says, "For a long time, these



two heroes are invincible: Whether they are presented as two separate figures or as two-in-one, they carry all before them. Yet . . . they eventually sicken from the abuse of their own power."

While to say that Lancelot and Arthur sicken from their power would be an over-simplification, the fact that "There are no monsters left . . . for them to overcome" is pertinent. At the late point in Le Morte Darthur to which this stage of Radin's is analogous, there are no internal wars for the moment; the external enemies have been largely conquered, and a kind of boredom sets in. Bickering and dissension, while they existed from the beginnings of the Round Table, become more pronounced. The bored knights grasp at the opportunity to search for the Grail, as earlier they had been eager to march on Rome. After they come back from the Grail search--those who do so--the rancor and dissension return to permeate and poison every subsequent action they take.

Henderson goes on, "We see the theme of sacrifice or death of the hero as a necessary cure for hybris. . . . In the primitive societies . . . it appears that this danger may have been forestalled by the institution of propitiatory human sacrifice." If we are to look for the pattern of



hybris punished by nemesis in Le Morte Darthur, we might say that Arthur is humbled by the destruction of himself and his society, or that Lancelot is punished for his pride by the discovery of his own unworthiness in the Grail quest. But it is Galahad who is the archetypal propitiatory sacrifice for the pride and worldliness of the Round Table.

The projection of an inner desire or necessity onto another person can also be accomplished in a more personal way: by developing a son- or father-figure. This may be an important consideration in dealing with the Arthur-Lancelot combination.

The themes of sterility and fruitlessness, as mentioned earlier, are found throughout Malory's work. Arthur, although he has bred children on other women, has no son by Guinevere whom he can recognize as the heir to his throne. This fact partly explains his almost morbid preoccupation with the Round Table, and why Lancelot, as the champion and representative of the Round Table, is so important to him. We learn late in the book that he has a similar feeling about only one other person: Gawain; and this is partly accounted for by the fact that Gawain is related to him, while Lancelot is not.

Let us examine a postulate set forth by Maud Bodkin in Archetypal Patterns in Poetry:



Perhaps the most important contribution that has been made by the Freudian theory of dream interpretation to the understanding of the emotional symbolism of poetic themes is that concerned with the "splitting" of type figures. In comparing the Hamlet story with the story of Oedipus, Dr. Jones asserts that both are variants of the same motif, but in one the father figure remains single, while in the other it is "split in two"--the father loved and revered, and the hated tyrannical usurper.

This assertion involves two elements of hypothesis:

1. The fundamental assumption--implied also in the statements of Jung and Gilbert Murray . . . that these ancient stories owe their persistence, as traditional material of art, to their power of expressing or symbolizing, and so relieving, typical human emotions.

2. That the emotion relieved is in this case the two-sided--ambivalent--attitude of the son towards the father.<sup>9</sup>

It would be easier to see the plausibility of such a relationship between Lancelot and Arthur if Malory did not have the habit, throughout Le Morte Darthur, of taking a "standard" literary situation and bending it askew. If he had told the story in a more conventional framework--such as might be found in eighteenth-century comedy or nineteenth-century sentimental drama, for example--Arthur would be wed to,<sup>10</sup> but estranged from, Morgan; Guinevere would be Arthur's ward; Lancelot his "good" son and Mordred the "bad" one. Morgan's own hot-headed offspring Gawain would be Lancelot's rival for Guinevere's hand.



If the story were told thus, many things which occur in Malory would make more sense than they now do. If the story in that hypothetical framework were examined from the viewpoint proposed by Miss Bodkin, Lancelot would be the one who, in most of the story, would love and revere his father Arthur, and Mordred, from motives primarily of father-rejection (Arthur did try to have Mordred drowned), would be in the position of Miss Bodkin's hated usurper. In this way, each son would reflect a portion of the father's psyche, and would personify Arthur's own ambivalent nature, split, as all our natures are split, between malevolence and good will.

Speaking of King Lear, Miss Bodkin goes on:

In this drama the emotional conflict between the generations is communicated from the standpoint of the old man, the father who encounters in separate embodiment in his natural successors, the extremes of bestial self-seeking, and of filial devotion. . . . To the feeling of the parent, the child may be both loving support of age and ruthless usurper and rival, and these two aspects find expression in separate figures, such as the tender and the wicked daughters of Lear.

She adds:

It is probably because, to the mind of the young child, the father appears of unlimited power that in the life-history of the individual imagination the figures of father and king tend to coalesce. Legends and fairy stories that reflect the feelings of more primitive people towards their king are interpreted by the child



in the light of his own earlier feeling towards his father. In the case both of the child and of the primitive individual the same process seems to take place--an emerging of the consciousness of self from out a matrix of less differentiated awareness, which may be called collective or group-consciousness. The figures of both father and king tend to retain within those deeper levels of the mind to which poetry may penetrate, something of the mana that invested the first representative of a power akin to, but vastly beyond, that of the individual emerging into self-consciousness.

It is this supernatural aspect which the father-king of tragic drama has for the kindled imagination that is of importance when we try to understand the element of religious mystery which is characteristic of tragedy. (Bodkin, pp. 15-17)

Returning, then, from our hypothetical reconstruction of Le Morte Darthur to the story as Malory wrote it, it may be argued that Lancelot is a projection, in the one case of the heroic aspect of Arthur, and, in the other, of that portion of Arthur's personality that wants a son, that values loyalty above all other virtues, and that desires tenderness as a response to trust. If we then read the Malorian words "courtesy" and "gentillesse" for the term "tenderness," we have described the qualities for which Lancelot was most widely renowned. If we see Arthur as one who has tried to conquer the unknown portion of himself--to pierce the Veil and return with the makings of a new world--and has failed, but who then steps into the background to allow a better man to try, a picture emerges that not only coalesces with the



one painted in Le Morte Darthur but which, at the same time, conforms to the psychological dream-reality sequence of the Twins: the splitting of a type-figure.

Another consideration in the relationship of the two men is that of the castration complex. One of the oldest ways of symbolizing the rivalry between the old and the new, or between the young and the established, is that of the son castrating the father. Regarding the archetypal castration of Uranus by his son Cronos as related in Hesiod's Theogony, Michael Grant makes the following comment:

Above all, here is the original sin--which, say the psychoanalysts, since it occurred, has not allowed mankind a moment's rest: here is Hesiod grimly tolling the knell of our primeval crime. The castration of Uranus is a reflex of unconscious desires. Freud . . . specified that the castration complex, which to him (by 1926) seemed present in every neurosis, becomes profoundly important at the climax of infantile sexual development (age 4-5). . . . In the story of the Theogony this universal fear of being castrated is transformed into the castration of the father, symbolizing the son's attainment of sexual freedom through the removal of the father-rival.<sup>11</sup>

Lancelot's continuing liaison with Arthur's wife is certainly an act of castration in this sense. It is also noteworthy that Guinevere bears no children, either to Arthur or Lancelot. This barrenness is another manipulation of the castration theme.



Arthur married Guinevere in the midst of his heroic rise to power. He reached the peak of this power when he was crowned emperor in Rome after the defeat of Lucius. It was in these same battles against the Romans that Lancelot first established his dominance over all the other knights. The return of Arthur and his knights from Europe marks the point at which Arthur recedes into the background of Malory's book, and Lancelot rises to the position of hero. While it is never precisely stated, it can be deduced by later information that Lancelot began his liaison with Guinevere at about this same time. I believe, therefore, that Arthur's passivity during the great part of the book--he never reassumes his commanding position until Lancelot has taken Guinevere from him--results from, and is symbolic of, the castrating effect of the Lancelot-Guinevere love affair.

### Arthur

We are early given a hint of the kind of intricate irony to which Arthur is to be subject all his life. After Arthur has taken the kingship, he has to fight a coalition of rebel kings under the leadership of King Lot, ruler of the house of Orkney and father of the brood of knights who, throughout the book, are never to relinquish their enmity toward Arthur.



Merlin advises Arthur that he cannot best this coalition without the help of two kings from France: Bors and Ban. The latter is Lancelot's father. It is essential that Arthur have the help of Ban to secure his own throne, and this association leads to Lancelot's coming to Arthur's court and becoming its champion--but these facts lead Guinevere to love Lancelot, with consequences that are to destroy the Round Table. In an inverted way, therefore, Merlin, whose every act is performed for Arthur's good, is an instrument by which Arthur's destruction is brought about. When Merlin is viewed as a spiritual guide developed from Arthur's own unconscious, the overall message of this irony becomes obvious: no matter how sagely a man may act, nor what advice he may provide himself with, he is still the toy of destiny. We will see this message restated in the Balin-Balan episode, which is treated in a later chapter.

While he is still consolidating his kingdom, Arthur's sexual life is revealed for the only time in the entire book. A lady named Lionors comes to pay homage; mutually attracted, she and Arthur go to bed together, and a son named Borre is born as a result. Borre eventually becomes a Round Table knight, but otherwise does not influence the story. But the point is made that Arthur can breed children; thus the fact



that there is no legitimate heir to Arthur's throne is shown to be Guinevere's fault, not Arthur's.

Shortly after his encounter with Lionors, Arthur has his first sight of Guinevere at her father's house, and falls in love with her. It is perhaps significant that Malory places these two events in juxtaposition, and then almost immediately adds a third: the meeting of Arthur and Morgawse. She is the wife of the rebel King Lot, and, also, unbeknownst to Arthur, is the daughter of Igraine, which makes her Arthur's half-sister. So when Arthur goes to bed with Morgawse, he unknowingly commits an Oedipus-like crime for which he is ultimately to be punished. In this case the cause-effect relationship is quite direct: the product of the union of Arthur with his half-sister is Mordred, who eventually kills Arthur.

With the kingdom in a period of peace, Arthur goes on an adventure in which he meets and fights King Pellinore. We thus observe yet another ironic situation, for just as Lancelot becomes both the champion and the destroyer of the Round Table, so Pellinore becomes one of Arthur's closest friends and mainstays; yet it is Pellinore's later action in killing King Lot that arouses the ire of the house of Orkney, and the resulting enmity is to plague Arthur to death.



The difference between the early Arthur, benefactor of magical acts and mighty man of battle, and the later, more passive one, is striking. The first is the man who, having been victor in desperate battles to secure his kingdom, takes umbrage at a demand for tribute from the Emperor of Rome; crosses the channel, fights his way through the Emperor's legions in France and northern Italy, and finally is crowned emperor in Rome. Vinaver characterizes this Arthur:

Arthur is the "Conqueror," the English counterpart of Charlemagne, and he claims by right the possession of the Roman Empire. He is the champion of the weak and the oppressed, witness his fight with the giant who had caused so much distress to the people of Brittany. But he has some of the characteristics of the primitive type of warrior. He does not shrink from a wholesale massacre of the Romans, and his cruelty in battle is equalled only by his enormous strength. Malory is careful to emphasize, however, that in spite of this cruelty to the enemy, Arthur has human qualities which endear him to his own people. The implacable conqueror of the Romans mourns the death of his own knights as an irreparable loss and forgets for a moment his grim and glorious task. The Roman Emperor's challenge grieves him because he cannot tolerate unnecessary bloodshed. He is wise and prudent, anxious to take counsel with his knights, and generous in rewarding them for their services. The noble king is thus shown in all his primitive, yet human glory: not as a mere abstract centre of the fellowship of the Round Table, but as a political and military leader, conscious of his responsibility for the welfare and the prestige of his kingdom. (Works, I, xxiv-xxv)



Vinaver adds, "This idealized portrait of Arthur may well be interpreted as a tribute to Henry V" (in which regard, see Appendix).

It is this warrior-king who rides into one of his early battles "with an egir countenans"; and "was wrothe, and with hys swerde he smote the kynge on the helme, that a quarter of the helme and shelde clave downe; and so the swerde carve down unto the horse necke, and so man and horse felle downe to the grounde" (Works, I, 29). It is this Arthur who kills the giant of San Michel, who is "from the hede to the foote fyve fadom longe"--a matter of thirty feet (Works, I, 203). The same Arthur, finding his seneschal Kay wounded during the battle against the Romans, first sees to his injuries and then returns for vengeance to the battlefield:

Than the kynge in this malyncoly metys with a kynge, and with Excaliber he smote his bak in sundir. Than in that haste he metys with anothir, and gurde hym in the waste thorow bothe sydes. Thus he russhed here and there thorow the thyckyst prees more than thirty tymes. (Works, I, 222)

But the other Arthur, the passive one who waits at Camelot for his knights to return and report their adventures, is quite a different kind of person. For example, when he hears Gawain vow that he will labor for a year and a day, if need be, to achieve the Holy Grail, and the other Round Table knights join in the vow, here is the king:



"Alas!" seyde kynge Arthure unto sir Gawayne, "ye have nygh slayne me for the avow that ye have made, for thorow you ye have berauffte me the fayryst and the trewyst of knyghthode that ever was sene togydir in ony realme of the worlde. For whan they departe from hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste. And so hit forthynkith nat me a litill, for I have loved them as well as my lyff. Wherefore hit shall greve me ryght sore, the departicion of thys felyship, for I have had an olde custom to have hem in my felyship."

And therewith the teerys felle in hys yen, and than he seyde,

"Sir Gawayne, Gawayne! Ye have sette me in grete sorow, for I have grete doute that my trew felyshyp shall never mete here more agayne."

No speech in the book more clearly betrays Arthur's inner loneliness and his deep need to be surrounded by his knights. Now it is Lancelot who steps forward with words that are intended, at least, to mollify:

"A, sir," seyde sir Launcelot, "comforte youreself! Fo hit shall be unto us a grete honoure, and much more than we dyed in other placis, for of dethe we be syker [sure]."

"A, Launcelot!" seyde the kynge, "the grete love that I have had unto you all the dayes of my lyff makith me to sey such dolefull wordis! For there was never Crysten kynge that ever had so many worthy men at hys table as I have had thys day at the Table Rounde. And that ys my grete sorow." (Works, II, 866-868)

We can hardly believe it is the same Arthur. Surely the Arthur of old would have taken up the Grail challenge himself;



perhaps would have led the quest. His tears and near-petulance, I think, have at least three roots. The first is merely a matter of chronology; both the Round Table and Arthur are old, and evidences of senility are not surprising in either. Secondly, Arthur has by the time of the Grail quest gained some inkling of the liaison between his wife and Lancelot, but avoids recognition of it because he knows the Round Table would suffer from the revelation. Therefore, the tears are, in a way, a recognition of his "castration" and of the weltschmerz that the events of his entire life cannot help but underline. Thirdly, the tears are about things as they have been. Thus Arthur is defined as Holdfast, to use Joseph Campbell's term (to be explained in detail in Chapter IX). The hero is the harbinger of Things Becoming; the "tyrant" is defender of Things as They Are. It is the hero's duty to destroy the tyrant; therefore Arthur is vulnerable in the archetypal sense: it is now he whom a new hero must unseat so that life can progress.

### Galahad

Galahad has to be given more space than he deserves, because he is not really a protagonist at all; he is an articulated symbol. He has no character that can be analyzed. He cannot be beaten in battle; he has no interest in, nor is



he ever tempted by, women; he is a shining, other-worldly figure to whom fellow knights, including his father Lancelot, attach themselves as for instruction. Because we know him to be invincible, there is no tension in the battles he fights; no odds are too great for him, but we do not care, because we know beforehand that nothing can happen to him. A recluse, talking to Percival during the Grail search, rightly places him as of a different world than ours:

"And that same knyght hath no peere, for he worchith all by myracle, and he shall never be overcom of none erthly mannys hande."  
(Works, II, 906)

In terms of archetype, he is a Christ-like figure, as far as such a comparison implies purity. But Galahad is never tempted like Christ, so that we never feel sympathy for his struggles; he lacks the humanity of Christ, and, above all, he is not humble as Christ was. He is not exactly arrogant; it is just that he knows his power, and assumes with a natural gravity the position he was born into. For example, years earlier, Merlin took the sword left by Balin when that unfortunate knight died, replaced the pommel, and stuck the sword in a stone that floated in a river below Camelot. Merlin made it clear that nobody could draw the sword but Galahad. In the intervening years, many knights tried to draw it, but none succeeded. In the afternoon of



Galahad's arrival at the Round Table, Arthur shows him the floating sword:

"Sir," seyde the kynge unto sir Galahad,  
"here ys a grete mervayle as ever y sawe,  
and ryght good knyghtes have assayde and  
fayled."

"Sir," seyde sir Galahad, "hit ys no  
mervayle, for thys adventure ys nat theyrs  
but myne. And for the sureté of thys swerde  
I brought none with me, but here by my syde  
hangith the scawberte."

And anone he leyde hys honde on the  
swerde, and lyghtly drew hit oute of the  
stone, and put hit in the sheethe, and seyde  
unto the kynge,

"Now hit goth better than hit dyd aforehand."  
(Works, II, 862-863)

It is instructive to compare this attitude with that shown by Arthur when he drew another sword from a stone before he became king. On their way to a tournament, Kay discovered he had left his sword at home, and sent his squire Arthur for it. Unable to get into the house, Arthur remembered the sword in the stone, and went there and drew it out. When he was told later that this meant he was king, he could not at first believe it (see Works, I, 13-15).<sup>12</sup> The sword constituted Arthur's credentials, which he had to earn, but Galahad comes to the court already possessing his. He is therefore a representative of something greater than himself. In one sense, he is the "Great Man" of psychology, the



all-encompassing figure that we would all like to become if we could realize our full potential. In archetypal terms, he is the referent for our collective unconscious; it is to him and his acts that we unconsciously compare ourselves in our search for perfection. He is the personification of the Self which represents newness and resurgence.

Another aspect of what he represents is shown in an article by Helen Adolf. Islam, she says, has a belief in a hidden host of angels who fight invisibly on the "right" side of every conflict. As this idea drifted into the West, these figures became identified with the warrior saints or the heavenly martyrs in murals and reliefs in Sicilian or Roman churches; in these ikons they appear in the garb of Roman or Byzantine soldiers. In the chronicles, they appear dressed in white, riding white horses, the signification of white being that of transfiguration--in other words, the rebirth archetype. The red cross, symbol of martyrdom, appears on some of these figures. Miss Adolf points out that in the stained-glass windows of the cathedral at Clermont-Ferrand, St. George appears in a white tunic with a red cross upon it. She adds, "it should be kept in mind that he was only prime inter pares, a leader of that hidden host of dead warriors . . . which seems to prefigure the Knights Templar as well as the Grail knights."<sup>13</sup>



To see how well Galahad fits this archetype, we have only to notice that he bore a white shield with a red cross upon it, and to look at one of his adventures that deals with a noisy fiend dwelling in a tomb. Having been asked to exorcise this demon, Galahad lifts the top from the tomb and a foul figure leaps out. A voice, presumably that of the dispossessed spirit, says, "Sir Galahad, I se there envyrowne aboute the so many angels that my power may nat deare the!" (Works, II, 882)--support enough for Miss Adolf's observation about the "hidden host."

The idea that one or more benevolent spirits hover over great personages and enterprises is archetypal, and has evidenced itself many times in history. Homer's description of gods and goddesses who fight with their favorites in the Trojan War is of this tradition; so is the alleged appearance of the Virgin (to Christian soldiers only, of course) during the siege of Acre in the First Crusade; so is the similar figure who became known as "The Angel of Mons," and whose appearance somehow transmuted that holding action into a signal victory in the minds of many British soldiers who fought there in World War I.

Briefly told, the story of Galahad is this. He comes to the court and is given the Siege Perilous at the Round



Table, which no knight before him has been able to occupy. He has neither shield nor sword, although he shortly acquires the latter in the manner already related. He fights in a tournament at Arthur's request, and, still without a shield, conquers all who come before him (Works, II, 864). Early in the quest for the Sankgreall, he comes to a hermitage where there is a white shield with a red cross, placed there many years earlier by a holy man; it is made known to us that this shield is for no one but Galahad. Bagdemagus tries to carry it, but is forthwith wounded by a strange knight, because the shield "coverde hym nat as at that tyme" (Works, II, 878).

Then follows a series of adventures which include the curing of a blind king, in addition to the cooling of a burning well ("hit was a sygne of lechory that was at that tyme much used. . . .") and a burning tomb (Works, II, 1025-1026). He arrives at the castle of Corbenic, where he sees the Grail, after which he, Percival, and Bors take a magic ship, at the direction of supernatural voices, for the city of Sarras "in the spirituall paleyse" (Works, II, 1030). There the three of them are imprisoned for a year, but when the pagan king dies, Galahad is chosen king by the people. Shortly thereafter, he is given another vision of the Grail,



and asks that his soul be taken from him, which it is (Works, II, 1035). His last speech encompasses just about his full range of human warmth and sympathy. To Bors he says,

"My fayre lorde, salew me unto my lorde sir  
Launcelot, my fadir, and as sone as ye se  
hym bydde hym remembir of this worlde  
unstable." (Works, II, 1035)

Like Gareth's, Galahad's quest conforms closely to the archetypal hero's journey in the monomyth, as will be seen in Chapter VIII.

It is indubitable that Galahad is a projection of Lancelot, just as Lancelot is a projection of Arthur; it might almost be said that it took three stages of increasing knightly excellence--Arthur, Lancelot, and Galahad--for the savage England of Uther and Merlin to reach the state where attainment of the Grail was possible.

I think the reason that Malory and I were glad to be rid of Galahad in so few pages is that, regardless of what he may represent to our unconscious selves, he is too spiritual to be believable on any viable adult level of experience. It may also be that subconsciously we understand enough of his perfection so that we, in our unholy, worldly ways, are made uncomfortable by him.

### Merlin

Of the minor characters, only two remain who might be considered protagonists: Merlin and Gareth.



To discuss Merlin, we must begin in an oblique way, and give some of his raisons d'être, because he is perhaps the most primitive archetypal figure in Le Morte Darthur. He is the messenger and guide who starts Arthur on his adventures.

In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell lists three phases through which the hero passes in the monomyth: the Departure, the Initiation, and the Return. Speaking of the hero-Self preparing for the Departure, Campbell states:

The dangerous crises of self-development are permitted to come to pass under the protecting eye of an experienced initiate [the psychoanalyst] in the lore and language of dreams, who then enacts the role and character of the ancient mystagogue, or guide of souls, the initiating medicine man of the primitive forest sanctuaries of trial and initiation. . . . His role is precisely that of the Wise Old Man of the myths and fairy tales whose words assist the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure. He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror, tells of the waiting bride and the castle of many treasures, applies healing balm to the almost fatal wounds, and finally dismisses the conqueror, back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night. (Campbell, pp. 9-10)

Von Franz states that one of the aspects of the Self is a "masculine initiator and guardian (an Indian guru),<sup>14</sup> a wise old man, a spirit of nature, and so forth." He goes on to say that the "wise old man" is "a typical personification



of the Self. He is akin to the sorcerer Merlin of medieval legend or to the Greek god Hermes" (Man and His Symbols, p. 196).

Jung himself says,

One of the archetypes that is almost invariably met with in the projection of unconscious collective contents is the "magic demon" with mysterious powers.

The image of this demon forms one of the lowest and most ancient stages in the conception of God. It is the type of primitive tribal sorcerer or medicine-man, a peculiarly gifted personality endowed with magical power . . . the demon can also have a very positive aspect as the "wise old man." (Jung, pp. 96-97)

We first meet Merlin when he arranges for Uther Pendragon to sleep with Igraine, another man's wife. Lust is Uther's motivation, but Merlin's is not. He tells Uther, through a messenger, that he will only arrange this tryst in return for one of the "blind promises" which are so common in Le Morte Darthur:

"And yf kynge Uther wille wel rewarde me and be sworne unto me to fulfille my desyre, that shall be his honour and profite more than myn, for I shalle cause hym to have alle his desyre."  
(Works, I, 8)

When Arthur is born of this union, Merlin invokes the king's promise: it is to be given the newborn baby, which Merlin then takes to the knight Ector and his wife to raise as their own.



Shortly thereafter Uther falls sick, and Merlin arranges it so that Uther will say in the hearing of all the barons that Arthur is to be his heir.

Thenne stood the reame in grete jeopardy long whyle, for every lord that was myghty of men maade hym stronge, and many wende to have ben kyng. Thenne Merlyn wente to the Archebisshop of Caunterbury and counceilled hym for to sende for all the lordes of the reame and alle the gentilmen of armes that they shold to London come by Cristmas upon payne of cursynge, and for this cause, that Jesu, that was borne on that nyghte, that He wold of His grete mercy shewe some myracle, as He was come to be Kyng of mankynde, for to shewe somme myracle who shold be rightwys kyng of this reame. (Works, I, 12)

The miracle, of course, is that of the sword in the stone. Many knights try to pull out the sword, but all fail until Arthur does so. But the barons who have been contending among themselves for the crown will not admit the evidence of their eyes, and continue to delay their consent that Arthur shall be king.

Thenne the Archebisshop of Caunterbury by Merlyns provydenche lete purveye thenne of the best knyghtes that they myghte gete, and suche knyghtes as Uther Pendragon loved best and moost trusted in his dayes. And suche knyghtes were put . . . alweyes about Arthur day and nyghte till the feste of Pentecost. (Works, I, 15-16)

At Pentecost, Arthur again draws the sword, and this time is acclaimed king. But at the coronation, King Lot and his rebel kings defy Arthur.



And within fyftene dayes ther came Merlyn amonge hem into the cyté of Carlyon. Thenne all the kyniges were passyng gladde of Merlyn and asked hym,

"For what cause is that boye Arthur made your kynge?"

"Syres," said Merlyn, ". . . for he is kynge Uther Pendragons sone borne in wedlok, goten on Igrayne, the dukes wyf of Tyntigail."

"Thenne is he a bastard," they said al.

"Nay," said Merlyn, "after the deth of the duke more than thre houres was Arthur begoten, and thirtene dayes after kyng Uther wedded Igrayne, and therfor I preve hym he is no bastard. And, who saith nay, he shal be kyng and overcome alle his enemyes, and or he deye he shalle be long kynge of all Englund and have under his obeyssaunce Walys, Yrland, and Scotland, and moo reames than I will now reherce."

Some of the kyniges had merveyl of Merlyns wordes and demed well that it shold be as he said, and som of hem lough hym to scorne, as kyng Lot, and mo other called hym a wytche.

(Works, I, 17-18)

Then occur the battles fought by Arthur for the internal security of his kingdom; Merlin guides and directs Arthur through every step of these travails. One point is worth noticing in relation to Campbell's remark about the Wise Old Man who "points to the shining sword" to be used by the hero. Excaliber's luminosity has not been mentioned previously, but at one point just before a particularly strenuous battle, the magician advises the young king thus:



"Syr," said Merlyn to Arthur, "fyghte not with the swerde that ye had by myracle til that ye see ye go unto the wers; thenne drawe it out and do your best."

A moment later, Arthur is unhorsed in the fighting.

With that his four knyghtes receyved hym and set hym on horsback; thenne he drewe his swerd Excalibur, but it was so bryght in his enemyes eyen that it gaf light lyke thirty torchys, and therwith he put hem on bak and slewe moche peple.<sup>15</sup> (Works, I, 19)

The period of peace that follows Arthur's victory in this battle marks a point of transition in the book. Up to this stage, we have seen Merlin acting in the capacity of medicine-man. The magic he undertakes is for the good of the tribe as a whole; hence his arrangements for the birth and protection of Arthur, and his help in the battles of consolidation. Now he changes to become Arthur's personal Wise Old Man.

Von Franz points out that the personification of the Self, in addition to appearing as the Old Man, may appear as a young boy or young man who represents newness, freshness, and the revival of life (Man and His Symbols, p. 199). Again, an incident in Le Morte Darthur corroborates the discoveries of modern dream psychology. With his internal battles over for the nonce, Arthur for the first time is exposed to the spirit world; he has passed his painful initiation and is



ready for the next transformation. This stage in psycho-mythology is announced by one or more magical precursors.

The herald or announcer of the adventure . . . is often dark, loathly, or terrifying, judged evil by the world; yet if one could follow, the way would be opened through the walls of day into the dark where the jewels glow. Or the herald is a beast . . . representative of the repressed instinctual fecundity within ourselves, or again a veiled mysterious figure--the unknown. (Campbell, p. 53)

The adventure begins for Arthur with a dream in which "gryffens and serpentes" appear and ravage his land, but he finally overcomes them. When he wakes, he tries to free his mind of the dream by going hunting.

And as sone as he was in the foreste, the kynge saw a grete harte before hym. . . . And so he spurred hys horse and rode aftir longe, and so by fyne force oftyn he was lyke to have smytten the herte. Wherefore as the kynge had chased the herte so longe that hys horse lost his brethe and felle downe dede, than a yoman fette the kynge another horse.

So the kynge saw the herte unboced and hys horse dede, he sette hym downe by a fowntayne, and there he felle downe in grete thought. And as he sate so hym thought he herde a noyse of howundis to the som of thirty, and with that the kynge saw com towarde hym the strongeste [strangest] beste that ever he saw or herde of. So thys beste wente to the welle and dranke, and the noyse was in the bestes bealy lyke unto the questyng of thirty coupyl houndes, but alle the whyle the beest dranke there was no noyse in the bestes bealy. And therewith the beeste departed with a grete noyse, whereof the kynge had grete mervayle. And so he was in a grete thought, and therewith he felle on slepe. (Works, I, 42)



A knight comes by in pursuit of the Questing Beast, and so dreamy is Arthur that he takes no action when the knight appropriates the king's horse. Now appears the human herald.

Ryght so com by hym Merlyon lyke a chylde of fourtene yere of ayge and salewed the kynge and asked hym whye he was so pensyff.

"I may well be pensyff," seyde the kynge, "for I have sene the mervaylist syght that ever I saw."

"That know I well," seyde Merlyon, "as welle as thyselff, and of all thy thoughtes. But thou arte a foole to take thought for hit that woll nat amende the. Also I know what thou arte, and who was thy fadir, and of whom thou were begotyn: for kynge Uthir was thy fadir and begate the on Igrayne."

"That ys false!" seyde kynge Arthure. "How sholdist thou know hit, for thou arte nat so olde of yerys to know my fadir?"

"Yes," seyde Merlyon, "I know hit bettir than ye or ony man lyvyng."

"I woll nat beleve the," seyde Arthure, and was wrothe with the chylde.

So departed Merlyon, and com ayen in the lyknesse of an olde man of four score yere of ayge, whereof the kynge was passynge glad, for he semed to be ryght wyse. Than seyde the olde man, "Why ar ye so sad?"

"I may well be sad," seyde Arthure, "for many thynges. For ryght now there was a chylde here, and tolde me many thynges that mesemythe he sholde nat knowe, for he was nat of ayge to know my fadir."



"Yes," seyde the olde man, "the chylde tolde you trouthe, and more he wolde a tolde you and ye wolde a suffirde hym. But ye have done a thyng late that God ys displesed with you, for ye have lyene by youre syster and on hir ye have gotyn a childe that shall destroy you and all the knyghtes of your realme." (Works, I, 43-44)

A moment later, Merlin tells Arthur, "hit ys Goddis wylle that youre body sholde be punyssed for your fowle dedis." So in addition to being a tribal medicine-man and Arthur's herald to adventure, Merlin now appears as a spiritual guide.

Shortly thereafter, Arthur learns that a young man named Griflet has been wounded by a knight at a fountain in the forest. To avenge Griflet, Arthur challenges the knight, who turns out to be the same one who had earlier taken Arthur's horse and ridden off in search of the Questing Beast. It is Pellinore, and he is too much for Arthur. He has beaten Arthur to the ground and stripped off the king's helmet to decapitate him when Merlin comes to the rescue by casting a heavy sleep over Pellinore.

"Alas!" seyde Arthure, "what hast thou do, Merlion? Hast thou slayne thys good knyght by thy craufftis? For there lyvith nat so worshipfull a knyght as he was. For I had levir than the stynte of my londe a yere that he were on lyve."



"Care ye nat," seyde Merlion, "for he is holer than ye: he ys but on slepe and woll awake within thys owre. I tolde you," seyde Merlyon, "what a knyght he was. Now here had ye be slayne had I nat bene. Also there lyvith nat a bygger knyght than he ys one; and afftir this he shall do you goode servyse. And hys name ys kynge Pellinore, and he shall have two sonnes that shall be passyng good men as ony lyvyng: save one in thys worlde they shall have no felowis of prouesse and of good lyvyng, and hir namys shall be Percyvall and sir Lamorake of Walis. And he shall telle you the name of youre owne son begotyn of youre syster, that shall be the destruccion of all thys realme." (Works, I, 51-52)

In addition to Merlin's other powers, then, he has the gift of prophecy. Also note the hint about the eventual coming of Galahad.

After Merlin has rescued Arthur from Pellinore and healed his wounds, the magician takes the young king to get the second of the two magic swords that Arthur obtains.

So they rode tyll they com to a laake that was a fayre watir and brode. And in the myddis Arthure was ware of an arme clothed in whyght samyte, that helde a fayre swerde in that honde.

"Lo," seyde Merlion, "yondir ys the swerde that I spoke off."

So with that they saw a damesell goynge uppon the laake.

"What damoysele is that?" said Arthur.

"That is the Lady of the Lake," seyde Merlion. "There ys a grete roche, and therein ys as fayre a paleyce as ony on erthe, and rychely besayne.



And thys damesel woll come to you anone, and than speke ye fayre to hir, that she may gyff you that swerde." (Works, I, 52)

Arthur does as directed, and obtains the sword. Now let us see how exactly Merlin has fulfilled the function of the Wise Old Man.

He is the one who appears and points to the magic shining sword that will kill the dragon-terror, tells of the waiting bride and the castle of many treasures, applies healing balm to the almost fatal wounds, and finally dismisses the conqueror, back into the world of normal life, following the great adventure into the enchanted night. (Campbell, pp. 9-10)

Arthur has now engaged in the complete cycle of the world-wide hero-story. He has had a dream in which his immediate past life is reviewed (the conquering of the griffins and serpents). Motivated by a nameless force, he goes hunting, and immediately sees the animal-guide (the hart), which he chases. He comes to the water-body (the fountain) that in both myth and dreams is a symbol of transformation. He sees the Questing Beast, which he cannot follow because Pellinore has taken his horse, and thus is left to meet his guide, Merlin, who appears in two of the most common guises of the questing Self: a young boy, and an old man. The guide then protects him from harm in his initiatory trial by combat (with Pellinore), heals his wounds, and introduces him to the magic sword, hinting of



the palace in the lake that is as fair as any on earth-- Malory makes clear the distinction between worlds--and then brings Arthur back to a reality which is underlined by the news that rebels are invading his northern borders.

Campbell states that in addition to his other services, the guide is to tell the hero "of the waiting bride." Malory alters the convention: Merlin, instead of guiding Arthur to his bride, in fact warns Arthur that he should not marry Guinevere because she will someday be unfaithful to him with Lancelot.

Thus we are informed that by the standards of archetype, Arthur is intended to be the hero of this portion of the book. Against the rightness and the vigor of his actions in this first section, we can compare all his later activities.

Two chapters intervene between the opening one of Le Morte Darthur which is called "Merlin" by Vinaver, and the one entitled "The Death of Merlin and the War with the Five Kings." These chapters deal with the adventures of some of Arthur's new knights, and during them Merlin continues in the advisory capacity he was in during Arthur's early battles; in short, he reverts to the capacity of tribal medicine-man instead of functioning exclusively as Arthur's guide.



In the chapter dealing with Merlin's death, we see him in a more human light.

Than hit befelle that Merlyon felle in dotage on the damesell that kynge Pellynore brought to courte; and she was one of the damesels of the Lady of the Laake, that hyght Nyneve. But Merlion wolde nat lette her have no reste, but allwayes he wolde be wyth her. And ever she made Merlion good chere tylle sche had lerned of hym all maner of thynges that sche desyred; and he was assoted uppon hir, that he myght nat be from hir. (Works, I, 125)

Knowing by his arts that for this fixation he is to be punished by being entombed alive, Merlin tells the king "many thyngis that scholde befalle," and warns Arthur never to allow the magic sword and its scabbard to get into other hands. When he tells Arthur of his own approaching fate, the king makes a sensible remonstrance:

"A," sayde the kyng, "syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure, purvey for hit, and putt hit away by youre crauftes, that mysseadventure."

"Nay," seyde Merlion, "hit woll not be." (Works, I, 125)

For all his powers, Merlin cannot or will not defer his own fate. The reason, I think, is archetypal: he is no longer needed. Having as tribal functionary helped to give England a strong king, and as personal guide helped Arthur toward self-knowledge, Merlin's purpose is ended. From this point on, Arthur's Self will find other means of expression--



notably the Round Table. Rightly or wrongly, his unconscious has decided that Arthur is ready to graduate to the next life-phase, and that Merlin's duties as medicine-man and guide are now superfluous. However, the function of physical guardian is still needed, and as we shall see, that duty is taken over by Nineve herself.

Merlin continues to "lay aboute" Nineve, and finally she learns enough of his arts so that she can rid herself of him.

And so one a tyme Merlyon ded shew hir in a roche whereas was a grete wondir and wrought by enchaument that went undir a grete stone. So by hir subtyle worchyng she made Merlyon to go undir that stone to latte hir wete of the mervayles there, but she wrought so there for hym that he come never oute for all the craufte he coude do, and so she departed and leffte Merlyon. (Works, I, 126)

Thus passes Merlin, a benevolent magician to those he loved, but a demon to their enemies.

### Gareth

Gareth is one of the sons of Morgawse, and thus is half-brother to Mordred. All the Orkney brothers are knights of the Round Table, and together they represent the behavioral spectrum in that society. The evil end of the scale is represented by Mordred and Agravain, who are discussed in Chapter IV. Gawain, also discussed elsewhere, is the strongest and



most prominent of the brothers, and his position is ambivalent: good much of the time, but with shocking lapses into evil. Gaheris is a nonentity through most of the book; the only outstanding things he does are to kill his mother and to be killed near the end of the book by Lancelot. Gareth is the good knight who counterbalances them all.

Gareth comes to court as an unidentified young man who asks two "blind" favors of Arthur. When these are granted, Gareth asks first merely to be allowed to work in Arthur's kitchens for a year, after which he will make his second request. Gareth's name being unknown, he is called Beaumains.

At the year's end, a lady comes to ask help in rescuing her besieged sister from a powerful and cruel knight. Beaumains asks for and is granted the quest. He is knighted by Lancelot after Lancelot learns, and promises to conceal his real identity.

Gareth and the maiden, whose name is Linet, set out for her sister's lands, and, at every step, the maiden reviles him for his activities in the royal kitchens. She tells him that no matter what he does on this venture, it will be luck, not skill, and that if he values his life, he will turn back. All of this Gareth bears with good-humored patience. They encounter a series of knights defending the passages to the castle, and Gareth overthrows them all.



It is worth noting at this point that each adventure undertaken by individual knights in Le Morte Darthur is the typical hero-quest in small; each contains the essential elements that Campbell calls Separation-Initiation-Return; there is the guide, either animal or human, the body of water to be crossed into the land of trial, the defenders of the secret land who must be overcome, the reward at the end of the journey, and, finally, the return to the world. A series of such similar adventures could easily become boring, but in Le Morte Darthur, they are not. After reading ten or twelve of them, one forms a great admiration for Malory's ability to alter each case so as to make it new and interesting, yet without removing any basic ingredients of the archetypal quest theme.

Gareth's is such an adventure. In it, the classical hero-story has a more clear-cut line than most of the other knights' adventures, yet its twists--the ways Malory changes it from the patterned story--give it a special charm. For example, the guide, who in many of the stories is either an animal or a human with about the same conversational ability, in Gareth's story is a vociferous scold. The knights who defend the various streams and bridges are individualized by being called the Blue Knight, the Brown Knight, the Black Knight, and so on.



After many strenuous fights, to the continual hounding of Linet, Gareth arrives at his goal, the castle of the Dame Lionesse. By this time Linet has altered her opinion of Gareth, and worries whether this new knight, in spite of his obvious prowess, can handle the savage Red Knight of the Red Lands who is besieging her sister, and who has the discouraging habit of hanging any knight he overcomes. As they ride into the castle's environs, they pass under the gruesome remains of these knights, hanging in full armor from the trees--a reminder that the terrors encountered on the soul-journey do not derive wholly from physical threats. But because Gareth is of the true heroic strain, the sight of this dishonor to knighthood has the opposite effect from the one intended: it angers him. Thus fortified, he is able, after a violent fight, to overcome the Red Knight. He is also spurred to success by his first glimpse of the beautiful Lionesse, who watches the duel from a castle window.

Now comes another Malorian twist. After a new-made knight has defeated five enemies of increasing mettle in the rescue of a lovely lady, he deserves his reward without further ado, and we are nearly as discouraged as Gareth when the castle gates remain closed to him, and Lionesse tells him from the window that while she will reward him, he must



go away and labor for a year in the service of her love before she will admit him to her favors. However, after using this device, Malory has too much sympathy for Gareth to insist upon the sentence being completed, and the lovers are thrown together within a few hours. So immediately and completely in love are they that they will not wait for marriage, but make an assignation for the same night. But Linet, acting as spiritual guide to both of them, is aware of their plans, and foils them in two such attempts, after which the lovers agree to wait until they can be wed at Arthur's court.

When Gareth announces their intentions to Arthur, the king asks him "whether he wolde have this lady as peramour, other ellys to have hir as his wyff" (Works, I, 359). Whereupon Gareth and Lionesse let it be known in no uncertain terms that they wish marriage, and no halfway measures.

By making Lancelot the one who confers knighthood on Gareth, and by afterward throwing them together on numerous occasions, Malory measures these men against each other. Thus, the insistence of Gareth and Linet on legal marriage in preference to other forms of assuagement is used as a standard against which Lancelot's affair with Guinevere can be gauged. When Lancelot ultimately kills Gareth in the rescue of Guinevere, he is symbolically destroying the image of marriage in favor of that of illicit love.



In a different sense, Lancelot and Gareth symbolize the spiritual-versus-physical tension that is to be more fully developed in the relationship between Galahad and Lancelot; in fact, Gareth is a surrogate for Galahad in several respects. Speaking of this tension, G. W. Knight (although referring specifically to Shakespearian characters) comments: "The union craved is that of the parental-filial and erotic impulses; of gentle love and sexual power. The very dynamic of life from which all thought, religion, art, and action originate is here at stake."<sup>16</sup>

The parental-filial association between Gareth and Lancelot reminds us of the Lancelot-Arthur relationship; both Gareth and Galahad are probably projections of Lancelot's psyche in the same way that Lancelot is a projection of Arthur.

The feeling that has developed between Lancelot and Gareth, even at this early stage in the story, is keyed in this paragraph:

Lorde, the grete chere that sir Launcelot made of sir Gareth and he of hym! For there was no knyght that sir Gareth loved so well as he dud sir Launcelot; and ever for the moste party he wolde ever be in sir Launcelottis company.

Gareth's relationship to his hot-blooded brother Gawain is then delineated:



For evir aftir sir Gareth had aspyed sir Gawaynes conductions, he wythdrewe hymself fro his brother sir Gawaynes felyship, for he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murther: and that hated sir Gareth. (Works, I, 360)

Later we see Gawain pulling away from Mordred and Agravain for similar reasons. The spectrum is thus established from Gareth the good through Gawain the changeable to Mordred and Agravain the vicious.

At the end, when Guinevere has been sentenced to the stake, Arthur orders Gaheris and Gareth to be among those escorting the queen to execution. Both follow orders, but state that to show their disagreement with Guinevere's sentence, they will appear without armor. Consequently, when Lancelot and his men ride in to rescue the queen, Gareth and Gaheris are unidentifiable--a throwback to Gareth's first incognito appearance at court--and in the hot melee that surrounds the rescue, Lancelot kills them both. He never stops grieving over this act.

Gareth is the most thoroughly likeable character in the book. He is not inhumanly virtuous like Galahad, nor can he be criticized for any one glaring fault, as can Lancelot for his pig-headed attachment to Guinevere, or Gawain for his unpredictability, or Arthur for his weakness in not squelching the Guinevere-Lancelot affair before it reached tragic



proportions. Gareth is a full-blooded man who does what he thinks is right, without fanfare or that overriding desire for "worship" that mars the characters of other leading knights. All of these qualities only underline the tragedy of his death at the hands of his best friend.



### CHAPTER III FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"By the fourteenth century [the Round Table] was thought of as a fellowship akin to that of some knightly order, such as the Garter, or the Bath, and certain kinds of tournament became known as 'round tables'" (M. C. Bradbrook, "Malory and the Heroic Tradition," in Arthur King of Britain, ed. R. L. Brengle [New York, 1964], p. 393).

<sup>2</sup>"Symbolism in the Visual Arts," in Man and His Symbols, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup>Jung, "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, p. 110.

<sup>4</sup>"The Process of Individuation," in Man and His Symbols, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup>"The Self can be defined as an inner guiding factor that is different from the conscious personality and that can be grasped only through the investigation of one's own dreams. These show it to be the regulating center that brings about a constant extension and maturing of the personality" (Von Franz in Man and His Symbols, p. 162).

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 336.

<sup>7</sup>Paul Radin, Winnebago Hero Cycles: A Study in Aboriginal Literature, Indiana Publications in Anthropology and Linguistics, Memoir 1 (Baltimore, 1948).

<sup>8</sup>"Ancient Myths and Modern Man," in Man and His Symbols, pp. 112-114.

<sup>9</sup>Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>There is in fact evidence that in an early stage of the legend, Arthur (or his counterpart) and Morgan were lovers. See Lucy Allen Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (Boston, 1901), pp. 64-65.



<sup>11</sup>Michael Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans (New York, 1964), pp. 100-101.

<sup>12</sup>If this wresting of a sword from stone is symbolic of freeing a people (more likely the unconscious) from bondage, as is commonly held, then the actions of Arthur, Galahad, and Balin are archetypal of an initiatory "unlocking," somewhat as Alexander's slashing of the magic knot at Gordium symbolized the opening of Persia to conquest.

<sup>13</sup>"Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages: New Light on 'Grail Stone' and 'Hidden Host'" (Speculum, LXIX [1957]), p. 109.

<sup>14</sup>The term "guru" reminds us of the current fad for taking hallucinatory drugs in order to experience the excitements of the dream world. Such a "trip" is the exact counterpart of the "night journey" of the hero in mythology. The guru is the initiator and guardian of the "tripper" in the same way that Merlin is Arthur's spiritual guide. The colorful visions, marvelous palaces, and lovely ladies encountered on the LSD trip, as well as the monsters and chimeras, are the same as those encountered by the heroes, as a perusal of the Grail story in Le Morte Darthur will show.

<sup>15</sup>Later on, we learn that the sword that Arthur obtained from the Lady of the Lake was also called Excaliber, and it is apparently this one that Arthur uses throughout the rest of the book. If the two swords have "meaning" other than that they are vestiges of two stories improperly resolved into one, there is a case to be made for the time-honored theory of the sword of temporal power and the sword of spiritual authority. If this theory were applicable, palpably the sword in the stone would be the one of temporal power, because the sword of the lake assuredly is not. Yet it is the sword in the stone that is said by Merlin to be a hint from Heaven as to who shall be king, which would make it symbolic of both spiritual and temporal power. That this issue had been a lively one not long before Malory's time is attested by the comments of a church historian:

There was also the long-standing topic of the relation of Church and State, of the two swords,



spiritual and temporal, and the question which of the two was superior . . . this question was brought up . . . by the renewal of the pope's claim to the tribute due from England by reason of King John's submission [to the pope] and it formed the main theme of that conference of 1374. (See W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century [Cambridge, England, 1955], p. 129.)

Two swords identified in a different way appear in the alliterative Morte Arthure: Clarent is Arthur's sword of state, and Caliburn his sword of war. Capital is made of this in the final fight between Mordred, who has treacherously obtained Clarent from Guinevere, and Arthur, who with Caliburn lops off that hand of the traitor that is holding the sword of state. For an analysis of this scene, see William Matthews, The Tragedy of Arthur (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 139-140, in which Matthews finally works the theme around so that Clarent does become the sword of temporal power and Caliburn (the war sword!) is the one invested with spiritual significance.

My own feeling is that Arthur's two swords are evidence of a tension that is found throughout Le Morte Darthur between the kind of intellectually principled spirituality represented by Christianity on the one hand and a more elemental and earthy spirit-world religion on the other. This tension permeates the entire book, and is clearly evidenced by the dichotomy between Galahad, representative of the ethereal, and, say, Gawain, who, though he was first to leave on the Grail quest, was one of the first to quit it; and who, through his aunt Morgan, seems to represent a world of ancient earth- and water-spirits of whom the sword-giving Lady of the Lake is another.

It is also worthy of note that Arthur, unlike Balin, does not actually end up carrying two swords; the sword of the stone, which presumably was the one he carried in the fight with Pellinore, is broken in half during that conflict, and is replaced by the sword of the lake (see Works, I, 50).

<sup>16</sup>The Burning Oracle, p. 290.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ANTAGONISTS

The antagonisms in Le Morte Darthur are of two kinds: the internal ones between individual knights or families of the Round Table, and the external ones that continually flare and die throughout the book. These latter, expressed now in one way and now in another, surround Arthur's court from the beginning to the end. Arthur and his men are never able to quell these antagonisms, and with good reason: they are projections of the fears, hostilities, and hatreds of the Round Table itself.

Otto Rank distinguishes two primary fears with which a person is born. One is the fear brought on by the child's departure from the security of its mother's body into the confusion of the world; Rank calls this the fear of life.<sup>1</sup> The other is death fear, and Rank comments, "Between these . . . poles of fear, the individual is thrown back and forth all his life."<sup>2</sup>

It is the death fear with which we primarily have to deal in Le Morte Darthur. It has been pointed out how the threat of death hovers over every Round Table knight



each time he rides forth; this death-in-life is one of the main themes of the book.

However, one of the ways the individual protects his ego against the death fear is by a paradoxical urge toward self-destruction. It is as though he feels that he owes a death, so to speak, for the life he possesses (Rank, pp. 275-277 passim). His sense of this debt brings on a kind of guilt. He may deny and fend off this guilty fear by killing others (i.e., by aggression), or palliate it by literally "killing" himself, and by allowing--even inviting--others to visit punishment and destruction upon him.

Arthur's society expresses its death fear in both these forms. It may be argued that the astounding aggressiveness of Arthur and the Round Table in subduing all the British Isles, and then conquering all of Europe between England and Rome, derived from the death-fear. On the other side of the coin, the urge toward self-destruction of the Round Table and its leader may be recognized in the projections of their own fear, guilt, and hatred onto external figures whom we call the antagonists. Of these, Morgan le Fay is unquestionably the primary personalization.

Just as Jung described a Merlin-like figure from the individual unconscious as a demon, so Morgan is a demon from



the collective unconscious of the Round Table. Many of her personal demonic aspects are dealt with in Chapter VII, "Anima Figures." Here we will consider her as representative of the antagonists to the Arthurian society. I shall define as "demonic" anything that she or the other antagonists do that is intended to injure the Round Table. Occasionally I will use the word "evil" as synonymous with "demonic"--an equivalence further clarified in Chapter VIII, "The Grail Quest."

Frye defines the demonic world as one "that desire totally rejects." He goes on:

The demonic divine world largely personifies the vast, menacing, stupid powers of nature as they appear to a technologically undeveloped society. Symbols of heaven in such a world tend to become associated with the inaccessible sky, and the central idea that crystallizes from it is the idea of inscrutable fate or external necessity. . . . Here . . . we are trying to isolate the sense of human remoteness and futility in relation to the divine order which is only one element among others in most tragic visions of life, though an essential one in all. (Frye, p. 147)

We are to see the quintessence of this tragic-demonic vision in the Balin-Balan story, which is discussed in Chapter VI. First, however, we shall see how the demonic influence expresses itself in projected form, i.e., as the antagonists. In the next chapter, we shall observe its



effects when deprived of such release, i.e., when it takes a self-destructive form within the individual: that of demonic possession.

Frye comments that a Christian criticizing a Sophoclean tragedy would view the Greek gods as demons, and thus would make an "undisplaced" or demonic interpretation of it. He says:

Such an interpretation would bring out everything that Sophocles was trying not to say; but it could be a shrewd criticism of its latent or underlying demonic structure for all that. . . . In pointing out the latent apocalyptic or demonic patterns in a literary work, we should not make the error of assuming that this latent content is the real content hypocritically disguised by a lying censor. It is simply one factor which is relevant to a full critical analysis. It is often, however, the factor which lifts a work of literature out of the category of the merely historical. (Frye, p. 158)

It is in this light that we shall focus our attention upon the demonic elements in Le Morte Darthur, not because the book is primarily, or even largely, demonic, but because the demonic elements reflect the fear that is an important part of the foundations on which it is built.

### The Antagonists

While the sons of Morgawse may or may not function as Morgan's agents (see below), their activities frequently



support those of Morgan, and the total effect is to reveal the house of Orkney, except for Gareth, as the primary antagonists to Arthur and the Round Table.

(It can be argued that Lancelot and Guinevere should be aligned with the antagonists, in view of the ultimate effect of their illicit love, but their actions are not deliberately inimical to Arthur--an essential feature, as I see it, of demonism.)

In view of the general opinion that Mordred is Arthur's chief enemy, it is surprising to find that Mordred does not show enmity toward Arthur until very late in the book, when Arthur is in France besieging Lancelot. How well Mordred kept his hand hidden up to that time is evidenced by the fact that Arthur appointed him interrex while Arthur left the country. It is Agravain, whose name implies that he is the more aggressive of the two brothers, who initiates the breakup of the Arthur-Guinevere-Lancelot-Gawain combination; and even then, his activities are directed against the lovers, not against Arthur himself.

Morgan's direct activities against Arthur are visible only in the first half of the book, up through the Tristram section. She vanishes before the Grail story begins, and does not reappear until she comes to take Arthur to Avalon



after the final battle. The reason she vanishes is that the fears of which she is the personification have been reduced by that time; for the same reason, the aggressions of the Round Table stopped after the battles for Rome. By the time of the Grail search, the Table had become firmly established and somewhat self-satisfied, without powerful external enemies. However, after the Grail quest, external projections of the fears and hatreds were no longer necessary, as the Round Table members themselves furnished all the impetus necessary toward self-destruction.

As a device for showing the various ways in which the enmity toward Arthur is expressed, I propose an intriguing possibility: that the house of Orkney acts against the Round Table according to a concerted, far-reaching plan. Such a proposal is not justified on the basis of anything said by Malory; however, when one stands back for an overall look, the evidence in the book is almost overwhelmingly in favor of such an idea. There is also another justification: that of paranoia.

Paranoia can be described as the fear that the world is conspiring against one. It is an exaggerated form of self-punishment. I do not allege that Arthur or his men are individually paranoiac, but I do suggest that the omnipresent



enmity that surrounds the Round Table, when viewed through that society's own sense of guilt and fear, could easily be seen as a continuous network rather than as a series of isolated incidents. There is even some evidence that Arthur, and especially Lancelot, whether or not they believe in the existence of a conspiracy, react to the Orkneys as though there were one.

In the beginning, when Arthur has drawn the sword from the stone and established his nominal right to the throne, King Lot, head of the Orkneys, is leader of the kings who fight Arthur because they do not believe that he should be Uther's successor (Works, I, 17-37 and 126-130. In this chapter, only page numbers of Vinaver's consecutively paginated volumes will be used). After Lot's forces have been defeated twice, Morgawse, Lot's wife, comes to Caerleon "to espy the courte of kynge Arthure" (41); but Arthur gets her into bed with him and breeds Mordred upon her (symbolic of the projection of his own evils into the form of another). One consequence of this act is that King Lot later arouses five kings to come against Arthur in the third great battle for his kingdom (77). In this battle, Lot is killed by Arthur's man Pellinore, "wherefore sir Gawayne revenged the deth of hys fadir the ten yere aftir he was made knyght,



and slew kynge Pellynor hys own hondis" (77-78). Thus the first great vendetta within the Round Table is founded.

In the meantime, learning from Merlin that the child who will destroy his kingdom had been born on May Day, Arthur puts all of England's children born on that day into a ship, which is sent to sea with the intent that they may be drowned; Mordred escapes, and though that is not Arthur's conscious fault (55-56), the boy's survival is symbolically portentous.

At one point, Morgan sends her lover Accolon to kill Arthur in a duel, but he fails, instead finding death himself. Arthur sends Accolon's body to Morgan, who is still at Arthur's court, with an insulting message (149). Morgan's plot was that, after Arthur had been killed, she would murder her husband Uriens (a Round Table member), and then would elevate Accolon to the kingship and herself become England's queen. To this end, and not knowing that Accolon is already dead, Morgan sends her maid for a sword with which to slay her sleeping husband. But the maid informs Morgan's son, Uwain (also of the Round Table), who arrives in time to prevent the murder. Then Morgan learns of Accolon's death; she hastily leaves the court, and on the way, contrives to steal and permanently dispose of Arthur's magic scabbard, which protected its wearer from bodily harm (149-151).



Let us now pause to review the box-score. Arthur has dishonored Morgawse, tried to drown Mordred, killed Lot, the husband of one Orkney, and Accolon, the lover of another, and banned Morgan from court forever--a significant index of the fears and hostilities that are being projected. To make matters worse, when he learns of Morgan's treachery, he "forgives" Uriens, Morgan's intended murder victim, but banishes from court her son Uwain, who prevented the murder (158). This act causes Gawain, out of sympathy for his half-brother, also to quit the court for an indefinite period. Thus, of those who make up the house of Orkney, Arthur has at this early date killed, banished, or insulted all but Gareth, Gaheris, and Agravain. It would be small wonder if Morgan should think that the Orkneys were involved in a war of attrition.

On the Orkney side, Morgan has deprived Arthur of his magical protection, and has the satisfaction of knowing that perpetual friction has been introduced into the Round Table in that all four of Morgawse's sons are Round Table members, close to Arthur and in a position to take advantage of any opportunity offered them. These facts may have been in Morgan's mind when she sent Arthur the ominous message,



"Tell hym I feare hym nat . . . and lette hym wete I can do much more whan I se my tyme" (152).

She does not wait long to implement this threat. As the first in a series of algolagnic ploys, she sends Arthur a poisoned robe, reminiscent of Deianera's "gift" to Hercules, but Arthur, at Nineve's advice, has the robe put on the maiden who brought it, whereupon she "fell downe deede and never spoke worde after, and brente to colys" (157).

Morgan's rancor extends also to Arthur's knights:

[Sir Lancelot] was ordayned for by 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. (505)

To this purpose, Morgan posts thirty ladies around the countryside to tell her when either Tristram or Lancelot is headed toward the castle where she has the ambush set (511). This, by its plainest name, is a spy network, which would be a natural concomitant of a conspiracy.

Later, we get another glimpse of this network. In a jealous rage, King Mark has killed the father of a boy named Alexander. At the boy's knighthood ceremony, his mother makes him swear to avenge the death of his father. Mark, learning of the vow, takes steps to have the young knight ambushed.



Than he sente unto quene Morgan le Fay and to the quene of Northe Galys, prayynge them in his lettyrs that they two sorserers wolde sette all the contrey envyrone with ladyes that were enchauntours, and by suche that were daungerous knyghtes . . . that by no meane Alysauindir le Orphelyne shulde never ascape, but other he sholde be takyn or slayne. (638)

Then there is the incident of the magic horn, which has attracted so much attention from folklorists. Sir Tristram and Sir Driant one day were riding,

. . . and by the way they mette with a knyght that was sente fro dame Morgan le Fay unto kynge Arthure. And this knyght had a fayre horne harneyste with golde, and the horne had suche a vertu that there myght no lady nothir jantyllwoman drynke of that horne but yf she were trew to her husbände; and if she were false she sholde spylle all the drynke, and if she were trew to her lorde she myght drynke thereof pesible. And because of the quene Gwenyvere and in the dispyte of sir Launcelot this horne was sente unto kynge Arthure. (429-430)

Tristram diverts the messenger to King Mark, who tries the horn in his court. Of one hundred one ladies who drink from it, only four do so without spilling, and these do not include Mark's wife Isolde. Mark is so angry that he orders all the ladies burned at the stake.

Than the barowns gadred them togedyrs and seyde playnly they wolde nat have tho ladyes brente for an horne made by sorsery that cam "frome the false sorseres and wycche moste that is now lyvyng". For that horne dud never good, but caused stryff and bate, and allway in her dayes she was an enemy to all trew lovers. (430)



The horn eventually arrives at Camelot and is tested with similar results, except that Arthur accepts the facts of courtly life more urbanely than Mark.

Morgan has other comparably thoughtful gifts for Arthur. She perpetrates a particularly nasty trick on him during a time when he either does not know of the Lancelot-Guinevere affair, or is trying to avoid knowledge of it. She fashions a shield that shows upon it a king and queen, and over them a knight, with a foot on either of their heads; its implication is that Lancelot holds both Arthur and Guinevere in thrall. Morgan talks the not-too-bright Tristram into carrying this shield during a tournament to be held before Arthur. Neither Arthur nor Tristram ever figures out what the shield means, but Guinevere gets the message immediately, and is badly shaken by it (554-558 passim).

Morgan's continual opposition to Arthur is summarized in this speech by the Saracen knight Palomides:

"Here is a castell that I knowe well, and therein dwellyth quene Morgan le Fay, kynge Arthurs systyr. And kynge Arthure gaff hir this castell by the whyche he hath repented hym sytthyn a thousand tymes, for sytthen kynge Arthur and she hath bene at debate and stryff; but this castell coude he never gete nother wyne of hir by no maner of engyne. And ever as she myght she made warre on kynge



Arthure, and all daungerous knyghtes she  
wytholdyth with her for to dystroy all  
thos knyghtes that kynge Arthure lovyth."  
(597)

This passage, together with those above about the "network," show how Morgan's organization has grown since she left Arthur's court alone except for her retainers. It also shows that rather than being solely against Arthur, Lancelot, or Tristram, or merely "an enemy to all trew lovers," she now wishes to destroy all Arthur's knights. It is the last we hear of Morgan until she comes in a totally different guise to take Arthur away to Avalon.

Morgawse, in spite of having been Lot's wife, does not work out well as an antagonist. It will be recalled that she came to Arthur's court to spy, but stayed to become a mother. The next we hear of her, she has become paramour to Sir Lamorak of Arthur's court. Now, Lamorak is a son of Pellinore, who is believed by the Orkneys to have killed their father and clan leader. Therefore, they not only have sworn to kill Lamorak, but they also dislike the fact that their mother Morgawse is involved with him. Gawain and his brothers inveigle their unsuspecting mother to a rendezvous with Lamorak, at which they plan to kill him. But the killing is left to Gaheris, who, as we have seen, is neither as good as Gareth, as bad as Mordred and Agravain, nor as strong as



Gawain. This fragile vessel waits until Lamorak and Morgawse are in bed together, and then grabs his mother by the hair and strikes off her head, after which he belatedly remembers the obligations of knighthood and refuses to cut down the naked Lamorak (611-612). Later, the brothers trap and kill Lamorak as he wearily leaves a tournament, Mordred dealing the fatal blow from behind the victim's back (699).

The following passage shows the reputation for both internal and external danger that Arthur's court had. Speaking of Lamorak's murder at the hands of the Orkneys, the good knight Dinadan says:

"And yf they were nat the cousyns of my lorde kynge Arthure that slew hym, they sholde dye for hit, all that were concentynge to his dethe."

"And for suche thynges," seyde sir Trystrams, "I feare to drawe unto the courte of kynge Arthure. Sir, I woll that ye wete hit," seyde sir Trystram unto sir Gareth.

"As for that, I blame you nat," seyde sir Gareth, "for well I undirstonde the vengeaunce of my brethirne, sir Gawayne, sir Aggravayne, sir Gaherys, and sir Mordred. But as for me," seyde sir Gareth, "I meddyll nat of their maters, and therefore there is none that lovyth me of them. And for cause that I undirstonde they be murtherars of good knyghtes I lefte there company, and wolde God I had bene besyde sir Gawayne whan that moste noble knyght sir Lamorake was slayne!" (698-699)



Morgan and her crew are not Arthur's only enemies. Early in the book Pellinore is escorting a lady back to Camelot when night overtakes them. Concealed by shrubbery and darkness beside the road, they overhear an interesting conversation:

So ryght evyn before hym there mette two knyghtes, that one com frowarde Camelot, and that othir com from the Northe, and eyther salewed other and asked:

"What tydynges at Camelot?" seyde that one knyght.

"Be my hede," seyde the other, "there have I bene and aspied the courte of kyng Arthure, and there ys such a felyshyp that they may never be brokyn, and well-nyghe all the world holdith with Arthure, for there ys the floure of chevalry. And now for thys cause am I rydyng into the Northe: to telle our chyfftaynes of the felyship that ys withholdyn with kyng Arthure."

"As for that," seyde the other knyght, "I have brought a remedy with me that ys the grettist poysen that ever ye herde speke off. And to Camelot woll I with hit, for we have a frende ryght nyghe the kyng, well cheryshed, that shall poysen kyng Arthur, for so hath he promysed oure chyfftaynes, and receyved grete gyfftis for to do hit." (117-118)

Nothing comes of this threat, but it is another evidence of the persistent turbulence that was born of the internal hatreds and fears of the Round Table. An evidence of this kind of projection appears when we learn that the Duke of the



South Marches is against Arthur and his men because Gawain has killed some of his sons (173).

From Lancelot, because he appears to be the most fearless of the knights, the demons of the unconscious are naturally projected more strongly than from others. Thus we learn, for instance, that Bagdemagus and Galahalt set up a plot to kill Lancelot because they are envious of his fame (675). On the surface this is surprising, because both are friends of his. But psychologically, it would be just such acquaintance upon whom his guilty fears would be projected. In another instance, King Mark, justifiably but treacherously, murders Tristram, a Round Table knight, with a stab in the back because of the young knight's attentions to Mark's wife Isolde (1149). Mark is not directly connected with the Orkneys, but he is one of the persistent enemies of Arthur, and, as we have seen, has at least an occasional adventitious connection with Morgan.

During the Grail quest, different members of Gawain's "gang," usually Agravain and Mordred, kill not only Lamorak, but others also, notably Dinadan (615), and Bagdemagus (1020). It will be noted that the effect of all these killings, whatever the alleged reasons for them, is to remove from the Round Table roster some of its best knights.



It is Gawain who first vows to make the Grail quest, and all the other knights are pulled along in his train. His ostensible purpose is of the highest: to attain the elusive Sankgreall. But Arthur seems to foresee trouble. He says, "For whan they departe frome hense I am sure they all shall never mete more togydir in thys worlde, for they shall dye many in the queste" (866). How could Arthur foresee so many deaths in a holy quest? Might he not simply have known that it was a quest he could not prevent his knights from undertaking, but that he knew would be used as a device to separate his forces and destroy them piecemeal? At any rate, he is right; when the Grail quest is over, the Round Table membership has been reduced by over fifty percent (1020), with powerful knights like Percival, Lamorak, Bagdemagus, Dinadan, and Galahad gone forever. On the other hand, all the Orkney men survive the quest, with their relative position improved considerably because of the reduction in Arthur's forces.

During these adventures, not only have all the brothers been members of the Round Table, but Agravain has belonged to an even more select circle: the Queen's Knights. It is this small group that, while a-Maying with Guinevere, is



called upon to defend her against the forces of Meleagance, who has lusted after Guinevere for many years, and now sees his chance to capture her (1121-1123).

In modern terms, all the brothers occupy the ideal position for agents provocateurs. Now that Arthur's camp is at half-strength, the actions of Agravain and Mordred begin closely to resemble the activities of such agents. It is now that we hear for the first time of their eagerness to catch Lancelot and Guinevere together (1161), and Agravain is emboldened to mention the queen's liaison with Lancelot, not only in open court, but before Arthur in person. Gawain reproves his brother for this action, and declares himself clear of any such plot. This statement can be taken at face value, but there is too much evidence of Gawain's involvement in other unsavory matters for us to believe him implicitly. He could be speaking more for public consumption than from any deep loyalty he might feel.

At any rate, Lancelot bests the ambushers, killing Agravain and twelve other Round Table knights in the process, so that again the power of the Orkneys is improved in relation to Arthur's party.

As a result of this entrapment, the queen is sentenced to be burned. She is rescued by Lancelot and his men, who,



in the process, kill off nearly everyone left at the Round Table: nineteen of them, including both remaining sons of Pellinore. (Aglovale and Torre) and Gareth, who must be counted with Arthur's side, and reducing the Orkney forces by one member: Gaheris (1177). (We also learn, ex post facto, that Lancelot has earlier slain two of Gawain's sons, Florens and Lovell [1175]).

If we assume that Malory's term "more than halff" (1020) means that at least eighty of the full Round Table complement were eliminated in the Grail quest, and if Lancelot killed twelve in the entrapment and nineteen more in Guinevere's rescue, then the Table has been reduced to 28 knights (with Lancelot himself gone), of whom two are the relicts of the Orkney clan (Gawain and Mordred), and another is Arthur himself. The odds which originally were 37-to-1 against the Orkneys now stand at 14-to-1: a very respectable reduction, however accomplished.

Gawain, for one reason or another (partly because he respects the power of the forces loyal to Lancelot; see 1162), has been able to forgive Lancelot everything, including the killing of his own sons, up to the slaying of Gareth, but this act he claims he cannot abide. He swears vengeance upon Lancelot, and goads Arthur into besieging Lancelot at



Joyous Garde. There is no visible reason to suspect chicanery in this, but let us examine the situation. Gawain and his brothers have known about the Lancelot-Guinevere liaison for years; why have they never before done anything about it if, as Agravain claims, they are doing it for the good of the kingdom (1161)? The best answer is that up to the time of the Grail quest, Arthur was too strong. But now he is weakened; the two major factions left to him are those of Gawain and those of Lancelot. It would be good strategy to split half of these forces away from Arthur. And what more simple way to do this than to bring the queen's liaison into the open so that Arthur will be forced to take action? The only action he can take will automatically alienate Lancelot from the court. Gawain could not have foreseen the destruction of Gareth and Gaheris, but he himself refused to be part of the guard escorting Guinevere to her death. His stated reason (that he did not agree in her sentencing) is good enough; but an equally reasonable one is that he knew Lancelot would come in with superior forces to rescue her, and he did not want to be part of that melee, not from cowardice, but because once all this had happened, he was going to become Arthur's strongest man. The death of Gareth offered him a fortuitous excuse to pursue the destruction of Arthur's court



beyond the first step of merely splitting it in half; now he could actually pit Arthur against his former champion.

It is pointed out elsewhere to what a great extent Arthur is under Gawain's control from this point onward, and it is only necessary to state here that when Lancelot returns Guinevere to Arthur from Joyous Garde, it is Gawain, in Arthur's presence, who banishes Lancelot from England (1200). But then, with Guinevere returned, and the casus belli removed, why does Gawain insist that Arthur gather an army and invade Lancelot's French domain? His stated reason is revenge for the death of Gareth, but let us look at a reasonable alternative.

Malory never states why Arthur appointed Mordred as his deputy in England while the king was on the continent. It could have been lack of judgment. It can also be seen, and probably should be seen, as part of Arthur's unconscious urge to self-destruction; the same nameless force that led Merlin to rush to his own doom in spite of foreknowledge. And we must remember also the extent of Gawain's influence over Arthur at this time. He is the only powerful baron left to Arthur, and the king himself is bewildered and heartbroken. It would be easy for Gawain to point out to the weakened ruler that only two of Arthur's kin (the Orkneys) are left,



and that now, with even his own champion against him, Arthur would do well to rely solely on his own blood. Of Arthur's two relatives, Gawain is the stronger, and also has the vendetta; therefore, he is the natural choice to accompany Arthur. That leaves only Mordred to serve as deputy. To Arthur, now in a riptide he can neither comprehend nor control, this would be a reasonable suggestion; remember that Mordred, of all the Orkney clan, has remained the most invisible: he has never been caught in an action inimical to Arthur.

With England to be in Mordred's control, Gawain has an excellent reason for pushing the invasion of Lancelot's kingdom under the guise of personal vengeance. It is interesting that he does this. After all, a personal vendetta is not new to Gawain: he entertained one for years against the house of Pellinore without causing a war over it. Why should he do so now? It could be because as soon as Gawain has gotten Arthur out of the country with most of England's loyal armed forces, Mordred is free to rebel.

Ridiculous? Possibly. Yet, whether it was all the result of a plan or not, the ultimate effect is the same-- the destruction of Arthur's court. And that was what Morgan had threatened from the earliest parts of the book.



As we have seen, Gawain is an unpredictable person; at one time we see him involved in a treacherous plot to kill Lamorak, and at other times we see him contrite over some unknighly act, or defending the queen's reputation. One way to account for these polar shifts is to see Gawain as torn between two loyalties: to his king and to his family. Such a dichotomy would be consonant psychologically with a nature as hot-blooded and double-sided as we have seen his to be. At crucial times, these loyalties could be brought into such equipoise as to throw Gawain into an unbearable agony. This may have been the case in Arthur's return to England to suppress Mordred. With the Orkney rebellion in full swing, Gawain could either join it against Arthur, or fight his own brother. Elective death is the only third alternative.

Malory may have been trying to make some such point. In the alliterative Morte Arthure, Gawain dies in a desperate attempt to fight his way toward Mordred, whereas Malory changes the story so that Gawain is simply found dying in a boat after the beaches have been won. Part of Malory's purpose may have been to imply that Gawain did not want to face Mordred in person.



That Gawain was deliberately trying to find death is attested by his own words in a letter he wrote to Lancelot just before expiring:

"And I woll that all the worlde wyte that I, sir Gawayne, knyght of the Table Rounde, soughte my dethe, and nat thorow thy deservynge, sir Launcelot, but myne owne sekynge." (1231)

In the last analysis, Gawain's admission is emblematic of the truth about the whole Round Table; it sought its own death. Probably my proposal of an actual well-planned and years-long conspiracy is not a tenable hypothesis; yet, in tracing out evidences for it, we have been able to observe the operation of an archetypal malignancy, closely resembling the pursuit of Orestes by the Furies, to which Arthur was subjected from the beginning of his life to the end. The demonic world that surrounded Arthur's idealistic society finally pulled it down, but the demons were the evil spirits of the Round Table itself, and when it died, they died also. This, I think, is why Morgan's character has changed by the time she comes to take Arthur from the final battlefield. As Bedivere helps the dying king into the barge where Morgan and the other queens stand hooded in black, she says,

"A, my dere brothir! Why have ye taryed so longe frome me? Alas, thys wounde on youre hede hath caught overmuch coulde!" (1240)



This speech is incredibly at variance with anything we have heard or been led to expect from Morgan. The reason, I think, is that the evil had all been killed, especially the selfishness and fear within Arthur. As had been the case with Merlin, the demonic world that Morgan represented had no longer a reason to exist, and what she represents in the death-barge, now that she is no longer a fear-figure, is the comforting mother that we all hope will accept us back into her warm, secure embrace when we finish our respective quests in this demonic world.



CHAPTER IV FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See also Karl Menninger, Man Against Himself (New York, 1938), pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup>Otto Rank, "Life Fear and Death Fear," in The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, and Other Writings, ed. Philip Freund (New York, 1959), p. 269. Hereafter cited as "Rank."



## CHAPTER V

### THE POSSESSED

Having examined the proposition that the antagonists of the Round Table are personified demons from the collective unconscious of that society, let us now turn to another form in which fear and guilt expresses itself: that of a temporary psychosis which in other times has been called "demonic possession."

The idea of demonic possession seems to be one of the oldest of beliefs. In Europe, by the time of the Middle Ages, the term meant "possession by evil spirits," but in Greece until the Roman conquest at least, and currently in Arab countries, the term is not necessarily pejorative. It can mean anything from religious frenzy to epilepsy to a more protracted kind of other-worldliness that we would probably call insanity. In Arab countries today, a person with these attributes, if not exactly revered, is at least held in awe; and while protected by the community from ill-treatment, is left to walk apart, because he is recognized as having some extra-human dimension not shared by his fellows.

It is something akin to this seemingly demonic invasion that causes a man suddenly to depart from the normal balance



of his life and to do things against his own and his society's best interests. Miss Bodkin refers to this mania as "that conception, belonging to Greek tradition, of the passionate actions of men and women as brought about through the invasion of the human mind by supernatural powers" (Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, p. 227). It is this form of possession that causes the heroes of Greek and other tragic drama suddenly to feel themselves larger than life, and in a position to challenge or defy the gods; and we have learned through literary convention that their utterances while under this possession are preliminary to some violent punishment.

Von Franz says,

Unfortunately, whenever one of these personifications of the unconscious takes possession of our mind, it seems as if we ourselves are having such thoughts and feelings. The ego identifies with them to the point where it is unable to detach them and see them for what they really are. One is really "possessed" by the figure from the unconscious. Only after the possession has fallen away does one realize with horror that one has said and done things diametrically opposed to one's real thoughts and feelings--that one has been the prey of an alien psychic factor. (von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 193).

Karl Menninger, in his book Man Against Himself, also comments upon this exaggerated form of self-destruction:

That one virtually destroys himself if he so far abandons his loyalty to reality as to yield to impulses contrary to natural laws or social standards is perhaps obvious. If



such a departure is extreme, if the impulses are so powerful as to escape all inhibition and express themselves in a chaotic, disorganized fashion without regard to any reality, we have what is designated medically as "psychosis" and, legally, as "insanity."  
(Man Against Himself, pp. 185-186)

Two men in Le Morte Darthur--Gawain and Lionel--seem possessed of just such archetypal devils from their own unconscious selves, driving them beyond the confines of balance, of common sense, and of their society's welfare.

The significant example is Gawain in his opposition to Lancelot. We have seen Gawain in a variety of moods and actions, but none is so striking as the one that shows itself when he learns that Lancelot has killed Gareth, even though everyone who witnessed Guinevere's rescue knows that the killing was as accidental as such a thing can be. Gawain was even able to forgive Lancelot the killing of his sons Florens and Lovell, but for some reason, the death of Gareth, for whom he has never expressed more than normal affection--no more than for his other brothers, certainly--sets him so insanely against Lancelot that he will not relinquish the thought of revenge until he and everything important to him have been destroyed.

The persistence and violence of his reaction go far beyond the bounds of whatever grief he may feel. For instance, he accuses Lancelot of having killed Gareth chiefly to spite



Gawain, which is clearly ridiculous. At various times he calls Lancelot a liar, a traitor, and a murderer, and while all of these are accurate terms, Gawain had never before this time been moved to use them.

It thus becomes clear that the demon from Gawain's unconscious which possesses him is distilled from the hate inherent in the Round Table itself. As Morgan was the focal point of the external enmities generated by the fears and guilt of the Round Table, so Gawain is the focal point for that society's internal dissensions. Unlike Morgan's activities, which were directed against the Round Table as a whole, Gawain's are brought against Lancelot, the champion of that society.

The pitting of Gawain against Lancelot on these terms makes their opposition resemble that between the vices and virtues in a psychomachia. Menninger calls hate and love "the emotional representatives of the destructive and constructive tendencies" (Man Against Himself, p. 6). Gawain is the one major figure who always gave uncontrolled release to the hatred within him. Malory says of him, "he was evir vengeable, and where he hated he wolde be avenged with murthur" (Works, I, 360). Lancelot, being the embodiment of love in its forms of courtesy and gentleness, represents



the opposite element. (Elsewhere I have stated that Lancelot is the highest expression of an essentially destructive society, and from that overall point of view, it seems difficult to describe him as a representative of love. Nevertheless, I believe that for Malory's purposes, where he wished to show the destructive and constructive tendencies of the Round Table in direct conflict, Lancelot must be viewed in this light.)

As we have seen, Arthur is heartbroken over the rift with Lancelot even before he gets his queen back, and after he has done so, it is only Gawain who keeps the spur firmly applied to Arthur's ribs. Malory states, "But . . . kynge Arthur wolde have takyn hys quene agayne and to have bene accorded with sir Launcelot, but sir Gawayne wolde nat suffir hym by no maner of meane" (Works, III, 1190).

Another instance of Gawain's intransigence appears when the Pope, hearing of the disruption of the world-famous Round Table, sends Arthur bulls

. . . undir lead . . . chargyng hym uppon payne of entirdytyng of all Inglonde that he take hys quene agayne and accorde with sir Launcelot . . . and whan the kynge undirstode them he wyste nat what to do: but full fayne he wolde have bene acorded with sir Launcelot, but sir Gawayn wolde nat suffir hym. But to have the quene he thereto agreed, but in no wyse he wolde



suffir the kynge to accorde with sir Launcelot;  
but as for the quene, he consented. (1194)

Gawain now controls Arthur to the extent that he is actually telling his king what to do. In the strongest position Lancelot ever had, Lancelot would never have so presumed. The words are a clear indication of the position that the strong Arthur of the early battles has sunk into. There is more of the same when, in France, a damsel comes from Lancelot with a peace offer to Arthur, who is on the verge of acceding when Gawain says,

"My lorde, myne uncle, what woll ye do?  
Woll ye now turne agayne, now ye ar paste thys  
farre uppon youre journey? All the worlde  
woll speke of you vylany and shame."

"Now," seyde kynge Arthur, "wyte you well,  
sir Gawayne, I woll do as ye advyse me; and  
yet mesemyth," seyde kynge Arthur, "hys fayre  
proffers were nat good to be reffused. But  
sythyn I am com so far uppon thys journey,  
I woll that ye gyff the damesell her answere,  
for I may nat speke to her for pité: for her  
profirs ben so large." (1213)

How docilely Arthur answers, without remonstrance!  
How sad to see Arthur so abject before this possessed man  
who is sweeping the king ineluctably to destruction that  
he cannot find his own words, but must repeat Gawain's  
phrase about having come so "farre uppon thys journey."

"And so the kynge passed the see and landed uppon sir  
Launcelottis londis, and there he brente and wasted, thorow



the vengeance of sir Gawayne" (1211). The wheel of irony has now come full circle: the only other times we have heard such words have been in regard to marauders and rebels whom Arthur himself had to punish:

So hit befelle on a tyme whan kynge Arthure was at London, ther com a knyght and tolde the kynge tydyngis how the kynge Royns of Northe Walis had rered a grete numbir of peple and were entred in the londe and brente and slew the kyngis trew lyege people. (Works, I, 61)

And evyn at the mete-whyle come two messyngers . . . that seyde to the kynge how the Emperour [Lucius] was entryd into Fraunce, "and hath destroyed much of oure marchis, and is com into Burgayne, and many borowys hath destroyed, and hath made grete slaughtir of your noble people. And where that he rydyth all he destroyes. And now he is comyn into Dowse Fraunce, and there he brennys all clene."  
(205-206)

But now it is Arthur who is the invader, the usurper, the violator. There is something appalling in the idea of Arthur "wasting" the lands of Lancelot. Thus Arthur is related, through Gawain, to Balin, who desolated lands through the Dolorous Stroke; also like Balin, he is driven by the energy of mighty events, and cannot quite catch up with the reasons for what he is doing.

We have observed two reasons that may have decided Gawain to pursue Lancelot to France after Guinevere had been turned over to Arthur: vengeance for the death of Gareth,



which is his stated reason, or as a step in a possible conspiracy against Arthur. Now we will look at a third, psychological, reason. Gawain is extremely clan-conscious. Regardless of how evil he must have known Mordred and Agravain to be, no matter how he may have resented Gaheris killing their mother, no matter how he may have resented the distance Gareth kept between himself and his brothers, Gawain was always loyal to them all. Until Mordred and Agravain tried to expose Lancelot and endanger the court, he always sided with them, whether he agreed with them or not. Now all of them are dead except Mordred.

It would not be surprising, then, if we learned that Gawain's urge to seek death, which was finally successful at the beachhead in England, had started before that, at the time he learned that Gareth and Gaheris had been killed. His rage against Lancelot is deeply connected with a death-wish. This explains his foolhardy insistence that Lancelot come out of Benwick and fight with him. Had he been in his right mind, he could hardly have failed to remember that every time he and Lancelot duelled in a tournament, Gawain always lost. Yet now, in the possession of his demon, he rides several times before Benwick, taunting Lancelot and challenging him to single combat. Finally Lancelot's knights



insist that he oblige Gawain, which he reluctantly does, with the opposing armies drawn up to watch. Gawain has a special gift: his strength increases each day "frome undern tyll noone as much as thryse hys strength."<sup>1</sup> Malory says that this was "a grace and gyffte that an holy man had gyvyn hym" (Works, III, 1216), but Malory also hints that it may have come from another source. He tells us that when Lancelot, who did not know of this special gift, felt Gawain's strength increase, "he wende . . . that he had bene a fyende and none earthely man" (1217). If we needed reminding that we are dealing with demonic possession, this phrase would serve the purpose.

Lancelot beats Gawain to the ground and then leaves him. Even before his wounds have thoroughly healed, Gawain is back at the gates of Benwick, challenging Lancelot again, and the pattern of the previous battle is repeated. The element of possession is stated clearly in this fight: "And ever sir Gawayne enforced hymselff wyth all hys myght and power to destroy sir Launcelot, for . . . ever as sir Gawayne's myght encreased, ryght so encreced hys wynde and hys evyll wyll" (1220).

Lancelot strikes Gawain again on the same wound he had previously given him, and Gawain falls. Again Lancelot walks



away. But this time Gawain recovers consciousness almost immediately, and the fierce unreasonableness is still in possession of him:

And anone as he ded awake he waved and  
foyned at sir Launcelot as he lay, and seyde,

"Traytoure knyght, wyte thou well I am nat  
yet slayne. Therefore com thou nere me and  
performe thys batayle to the utteraunce!"  
(1220-1221)

Lancelot refuses to take further advantage of a  
downed knight,

And than he turned hys way towarde the  
cité, and sir Gawayne evermore callyng hym  
"traytoure knyght" and seyde,

"Traytoure knyght! Wyte thou well, sir  
Launcelot, whan I am hole I shall do batayle  
with you agayne, for I shall never leve the  
tylle the tone of us be slayne!" (1221)

Under these conditions, what could Gawain have been  
asking for except death?

This blind insistence by a man upon his own punishment  
is an archetype. Miss Bodkin calls it "a fierce impatience  
for the fulfillment of ruin" (Bodkin, p. 228). It is the  
self-destructive urge in one of its suicidal aspects.

When people of normal balance, in whom the wishes to  
live and to escape pain are among the strongest internal  
forces, see a character taking what seem to be deliberate



steps toward a disaster that is fully visible to the audience, a kind of unbelieving and escalating fear results. This is our reaction to watching Gawain insist upon pursuing Lancelot in spite of Arthur's urge toward forgiveness, in spite of the most elaborate apologies by Lancelot. Here is one apology he makes:

"And as Jesu be my helpe, and be my knyghthode, I slewe never sir Gareth nother hys brother be my wyllynge; but alas that ever they were unarmed that unhappy day!

"But this much I shall offir me to you," seyde sir Launcelot, "if hit may please the kyngis good grace and you, my lorde sir Gawayne: I shall firste begyn at Sandwyche, and there I shall go in my shearte, bare-foote;<sup>2</sup> and at every ten myles ende I shall founde and gar make an house of relygions, of what order that ye woll assygne me, with an holé covente, to synge and rede day and nyght in especiall for sir Gareth sake and sir Gaherys. And thys shall I perfourme from Sandwyche unto Carlyle; and every house shall have suffycyent lyvelod. And thys shall I perfourme whyle that I have ony lyvelod in Crystyndom, and there ys none of all thes religious placis but they shall be perfourmed, furnysshed and garnysshed with all thyngis as an holy place ought to be. And thys were fayrar and more holyar and more perfyte to their soulis than ye, my moste noble kyng, and you, sir Gawayne, to warre uppon me, for thereby shall ye gete none avayle."

Than all the knyghtes and ladyes that were there wepte as they were madde, and the tearys felle on kyng Arthur hys chekis.

"Sir Launcelot," seyde sir Gawayne, "I have ryght well harde thy langayge and thy grete proffirs. But wyte thou well, lat the kyng



do as hit pleasith hym, I woll never forgyff  
the my brothirs dethe, and in especiall the  
deth of my brothir sir Gareth. And if myne  
uncle, kynge Arthur, wyll accorde wyth the,  
he shall loose my servys, for wyte thou well,"  
seyde sir Gawayne, "thou arte bothe false to  
the kynge and to me." (1199-1200)

To this rebuff Lancelot responds with dignity, and  
tries further to reason with Gawain, but the end of it all  
is this:

"Make thou no more langayge," seyde sir  
Gawayne, "but delyvir the quene from the,  
and pyke the lyghtly oute of thys courte!"  
(1202)

If Gawain had made some physical attack upon Lancelot  
in these circumstances, it would be understandable. But  
these cold, sneering insults are not those of the hot-headed  
Gawain we know; they are the voice of the demon from his  
unconscious which has him in possession.

The expedition returns to England, and Gawain is  
mortally wounded at the beachhead, as we have seen. At  
this moment of death, as was true of the Greek heroes, Gawain  
abruptly returns to balance.

"A, myn uncle," seyde sir Gawayne, "now I  
woll that ye wyte that my deth-dayes be com!  
And all, I may wyte, myne owne hastynes and  
my wylfulnesse, for thorow my wylfulnes I  
was causer of myne owne dethe. . . . And  
thorow me and my pryde ye have all thys  
shame and disease, for had that noble knyght,  
sir Launcelot, ben with you, as he was and



wolde have ben, thys unhappy warre had never  
ben begunne. . . . But alas that I wolde nat  
accorde with hym!" (1230)

Even in the agony that precedes death, Gawain is motivated by his "good" side, that for a time was in abeyance, to write asking Lancelot for forgiveness, and begging him to come to England to help Arthur. When a "possessed" person returns to sanity, it is predictable that he will have a sharp reaction, and will wish to repair the damage he has done. But in Gawain's case, it is far too late.

Than sir Mordred araysed mucche people aboute  
London, for they of Kente, Southsex and Surrey,  
Esax, Suffolke and Northefolke helde the moste  
party with sir Mordred. And many a full noble  
knyght drew unto hym . . . but they that loved  
sir Launcelot drew unto sir Mordred. (1233)

The tragic irony in this last line is on at least three levels: there is the fact that, with Gawain gone, Arthur is now free, as he has repeatedly wished to be, to "accorde wyth" Lancelot--except that it is now too late. There is the fact that even if he could make peace with Lancelot (who is still in France), there would be no way of getting word to Lancelot's adherents who have sided with Mordred, and perhaps woo them back to Arthur's camp. And, thirdly, there is the supreme irony that Lancelot mistrusted and disliked Mordred ("'For ever I drede me,' seyde sir



Launcelot, 'that sir Mordred woll make trouble, for he ys passyng envyous and applyeth hym mucche to trouble'" [1204]), and the last thing he would have wanted was for his sympathizers to side with Mordred.

It is part of Malory's writing technique, as I have said before, to lay the foundations for a major action by placing a variant of that action in the text well ahead of time. Gawain's intractability in refusing to forgive Lancelot's inadvertent killing of Gareth is foreshadowed by the fact that Gawain has twice himself done exactly the thing for which he criticizes Lancelot.

When Gawain, Uwain, and Morholt are on their first adventure as young knights, Gawain chases a deer into a castle and slays it. A knight comes out to bewail the loss of his pet and to fight with Gawain because of it. When Gawain has overcome him, the knight pleads for mercy, but, because the knight has killed two of Gawain's greyhounds, Gawain will not give it to him. At that moment the knight's lady throws herself across the knight's body to protect him, and Gawain, unable to stop his swing, decapitates her. When Gawain's squire, together with other knights of the castle, remonstrate with Gawain for this action, he responds with almost the same words that Lancelot is later to use to Gawain



about the death of Gareth: "'Me sore repentith hit'" (Works, I, 105-106; compare III, 1189). A statement of Gawain's crime and a forecast of his punishment are given by Gawain's squire (Gaheris) just after Gawain has beheaded the lady: .

"Alas," seyde Gaherys, "that ys fowle and shamefully done, for that shame shall never frome you. Also ye sholde gyff mercy unto them that aske mercy, for a knyght withoute mercy ys withoute worship." (Works, I, 106)

The same theme is underlined a page later by four knights of the castle who come to assail Gawain and his squire:

"Thou new made knyght, thou haste shamed thy knyghthode, for a knyght withoute mercy ys dishonoured. Also thou haste slayne a fayre lady to thy grete shame unto the worldys ende." (107)

Gawain is thus seen to have violated part of the knightly code postulated by Arthur: "to gyff mercy unto hym that askith mercy . . . and allwayes to do ladyes, damesels, and jantil-women and wydowes socour" (120). His refusal to offer Lancelot a different kind of mercy later shows that he was never, from his early knighthood, as ready to live by Arthur's code as to accede to the demands of his own hot nature. It was because of this lack of control that his demons could eventually gain such ascendancy over him.

Gawain was not even clear of the stigma of killing his own kin--a much worse crime than that with which he charges



Lancelot. In the Grail search, Gawain and Ector encounter a knight errant. Gawain fights and mortally wounds him. The wounded knight guides them to a hermitage, and before expiring, tells Gawain who he is: Uwain, Gawain's nephew, fellow member of the Round Table, and companion of Gawain's first adventure.

The hermit ably summarizes Gawain's weaknesses. Gawain has had a dream about 150 black bulls in a meadow who, not satisfied with their provender, leave the field to eat elsewhere. All the bulls are black except three, which are pure white, one of them having a single black spot. The hermit tells Gawain that the bulls signify the Round Table knights, and the white bulls are Percival, Galahad, and Bors (the latter has obtained his black spot on the one occasion when he surrendered to his fleshly lusts with a woman; he thus becomes that rara avis in terra, an almost-virgin). The meadow, says the hermit, signifies

" . . . humilité and paciens; tho be the thynges which bene allwey grene and quyk. For that men mowe no tyme overcom humilité and pacience, therefore was the Rounde Table founden, and the shevalry hath ben at all tymes so hyghe by the fraternité which was there that she myght nat be cvercom: for men seyde she was founded in paciens and in humilité. At the rack ete an hondred and fyffty bullys, but they ete nat in the medowe, for if they had, their hartes sholde have bene sette in humilité and paciens." (Works, II, 946)



Careful reading of this passage will reveal that Malory and his hermit are trying to get across some point about humility and patience, the qualities most notably missing in Gawain.

Later on, the hermit starts to give Gawain a lecture on his soul, but he has barely begun when the knight interrupts him:

"Sir," seyde sir Gawayne, "and I had leyser I wolde speke with you, but my felow sir Ector ys gone and abithe me yondir bynethe the hylle."

"Well," seyde the good man, "thou were better to be counceyled." (949)

Gawain's impatience, while understandable in the face of an impending sermon, underlines the points that the garrulous anchorite has made. Again, it is the lack of these desired qualities that furnishes the foundation for the demonic possession that is later to grip Gawain.

An even more striking instance of demonic possession is Lionel, brother to Bors and Lancelot. As with Gawain, there is some justification for Lionel's rage: Bors had seen Lionel being led away captive by two knights, but at the same time saw a gentlewoman being pursued by a knight who was trying to earn his black spot. Bors chooses to rescue the maiden, and Lionel, who escaped his captors, takes



umbrage at the choice Bors has made. But like Gawain, he carries the matter well beyond anything resembling self-control. After excoriating his brother, he tries to kill him, ignoring Bors' remonstrances. The "possession" is clearly stated:

So whatsomever sir Bors seyde to sir Lyonell  
he rought nat, for the fynde had brought hym  
in suche a wylle that he sholde sle hym.  
(970)

Bors kneels at the feet of his brother's horse with upraised hands and asks for mercy, whereupon Lionel rides him down. Seeing this, a hermit runs out and prostrates himself on Bors' body, just as the knight's lady had done with Gawain in the earlier incident. Says Lionel,

"So God me helpe, sir pryste, but if ye fle from hym I shall sle you, and he shall never the sunner be quytte."

"Sertes," seyde the good man, "I had levir ye sle me than hym, for as for my dethe shall nat be grete harme, nat halff so much as for his woll be."

"Well," seyde sir Leonell, "I am agreed," and sette his honde to his swerde, and smote hym so harde that hys hede yode off bacwarde.  
(970-971)

Now Sir Collgrevance, another Round Table knight, rides up protesting, and Lionel kills him too, after which he starts for Bors with renewed vigor. Bors, in tears but finally convinced of Lionel's sincerity, draws his sword, and, to



prevent another Balin-Balan episode, Malory uses a deus ex machina to solve the predicament:

Ryght so alyght a clowde betwyxte them in  
lykenes of a fayre and a mervaylous flame,  
that bothe hir two shyldis brente. Than  
were they sore aferde and felle both to the  
erthe and lay there a grete whyle in a sowne.  
(974)

A voice tells Bors to forget about his brother, and go find Percival. Before he leaves, Bors begs his brother for forgiveness. Lionel, chastened by the flaming cloud, answers, "God forgyff you, and I do gladly" (974).

The suddenness with which both Lionel and Gawain regain their sanity and balance is the result in each case of a mighty event: a mortal wound for Gawain, a gesture from heaven for Lionel. But no human advice can get through to them before those things happen.<sup>4</sup> The two men and their actions typify the way that the death-fear, as described in Chapter IV by Rank, is expressed in the dual forms of self-punishment (Gawain) and aggression (Lionel). When seen in such exaggerated form, it is not surprising that these expressions of fear, hatred, and guilt were called demons of possession.



## CHAPTER V FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This tripling of Gawain's strength during the morning hours probably derives from the days when the figure Gawain represents was a sun-god archetype. Thus Gawain is linked with the comments by Jung and Frye quoted in Chapter I that the diurnal sun-journey and the life of the hero were related through archetype.

<sup>2</sup>The style of penance chosen by Lancelot was apparently founded upon penances actually used in Malory's time. William Matthews cites a document stating that a William Monkton, of the first half of the fifteenth century, for the crime of fornication, "was sentenced to walk through the cathedral barefoot and bareheaded, wearing only a shirt and carrying a candle" (The Ill-Framed Knight, p. 125). It is interesting that Lancelot should choose to inflict upon himself elements of a punishment that was used for fornication.

<sup>3</sup>In typical Malory fashion, this incident is used to foreshadow Gaheris' later decapitation of his mother (q.v. under "The Antagonists"). On that occasion, Gaheris brutally murders a woman but leaves Lamorak untouched because he cannot bring himself to strike down an unarmed knight, thus leaving us in some uncertainty as to Gaheris' status in relation to the Arthurian code.

<sup>4</sup>Both Lancelot and Tristram run mad in the woods for lengthy periods, and thus would seem to qualify as being possessed. But these aberrations are actually mindlessness, where there is no conscious aim, good or bad. My discussion here has centered on demonic possession, which I take to be focused against a person or idea that we take to be desirable.



## CHAPTER VI

### BALIN AND BALAN

The story of Balin and Balan is the second chapter of Le Morte Darthur. In the sources from which Malory took his material, the story had been connected to the Grail sequence, but Malory detached it and moved it to this forward position. A possible reason is that the tale of Balin contains all the major themes in Le Morte Darthur--isolation, sterility, and death--and that connections are set up in the Balin story which link and interweave all the major figures. The story is itself the best argument I know for the belief that Malory intended Le Morte Darthur to appear as a unified whole.

In the Balin tale we obtain a different perspective of the world of demonic imagery from the one used in the previous two chapters. Especially pertinent to Balin's world is Frye's comment about

. . . the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion; the world as it is before the human imagination begins to work on it and before any image of human desire, such as the city or the garden, has been solidly established; the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly.  
(Frye, p. 127)



Thus, in one sense, the presentation of Balin's world of brutality and sorrow, together with the world we saw in "Merlin," with Arthur fighting desperate battles to secure his kingdom, is Malory's way of saying that this is the way things were before the coming of the Round Table, which superposed an "image of human desire" upon this dark, chaotic world. At the same time, in these two chapters are established the poisonous elements that are to plague and threaten the Round Table throughout its existence.

The story opens with Balin a prisoner in Arthur's court, for some unexplained reason. (Later, Arthur apologizes for the imprisonment, saying that he had been "misinformed.") Already, then, we see Balin as a man who has been mistreated by events. To use Frye's word, Balin is about to move from one kind of "bondage" to another.

A maiden comes to court wearing a sword that she announces can only be drawn from its scabbard by a knight who is "a passynge good man of hys hondys and of hys dedis, and withoute velony other trechory and withoute treson" (Works, I, 62); he must also be of the aristocracy: "of jantill strenne of fadir syde and of modir syde." Arthur and all his barons try, and fail, to draw the sword, and their failure is interesting. Not long before, Arthur had been the



only man in England who could draw the regal sword from the stone at London; now he is unable to draw a similar sword, and we are only in the second chapter of the book. In other words, he has somehow already failed. The failure was probably his copulation with his half-sister Morgawse, but it might also have been one of several other things: drowning all the children of England, for example.

When all have failed to draw the sword, Balin tries and succeeds. He is thus immediately related to both Arthur and Galahad, and presumably is similarly divinely sanctioned in some way. Also, because he is a prisoner, and therefore the underdog, he is related to Beaumains (Gareth) and other knights of the "ugly duckling" tradition who rise from downtrodden positions to become important figures.

The damsel then asks Balin to return the sword to her, but he refuses to do so. She comments that his refusal is unfortunate, because if Balin keeps the sword, he will kill with it the one he most loves. This accurate prophecy relates Balin to Lancelot and Gawain in an especially intricate way: Lancelot uses this very sword, presumably to kill his friend Gareth, but certainly to deal a fatal wound to Gawain.

Now further intricacies enter the story. As Balin prepares to leave the court with his new sword, the Lady of



the Lake appears--the same one who gave Arthur his second sword. She reminds Arthur that when she gave him the sword, she made him agree to a blind promise. She now asks that this promise be kept:

"I aske the hede of thys knyght that hath wonne the swerde, othir ellis the damesels hede that brought hit. I take no force though I have both theire hedis: for he slew my brothir, a good knyght and a trew; and that jantillwoman was causer of my fadirs death." (Works, I, 65)

Arthur refuses, telling her that she must ask another favor. She says that nothing else will suit her.

So whan Balyn was redy to departe, he saw the Lady of the Lake which by hir meanys had slayne hys modir; and he had sought hir three yere before. And whan hit was tolde hym how she had asked hys hede of kynge Arthure, he wente to hir streyght and seyde, "Evyll be ye founde: ye wolde have myne hede, and therefore ye shall loose youres!" And with hys swerde lyghtly he smote of hyr hede before kynge Arthure. (Works, I, 65-66)

It will be noticed that there is a certain directness about Balin. Because of this trait, he now becomes related to Gawain and Gaheris for their hot-headed tendency to lop off female heads, and to Arthur in the matter of bad judgment and timing.

But Arthur at this moment is blind. He feels that his court has been insulted by the beheading, and he is also disturbed because the lady was under his guarantee of



safe-conduct. Arthur now learns, as Balin is shortly to learn, that such a guarantee is worthless in the face of determined and impulsive action by another person. It will also be noticed that Arthur broke his promise to the Lady of the Lake. Both these broken pledges are examples of the way Malory shows the fruitlessness and meaninglessness of human decisions--the main message of the Balin story, and to some extent of the entire story of Arthur. A single example of how this theme is carried through Le Morte Darthur is Gawain's vow, toward the end of the book, that he will not leave Lancelot (before Benwick) until one or the other is dead. But Mordred, back in England, takes a determined action, and Gawain's vow is shown to be meaningless; he dies, it is true, but not until after he has "left" Lancelot. Similar failures elsewhere take the form of prophecies that are never fulfilled, as well as of promises not kept because of actions that the speaker cannot foresee.

Because of the beheading, Arthur banishes Balin. Here again is the theme of isolation. As Frye points out, the fear of exile is more terrifying than the fear of being in a relatively "sociable hell." Arthur actually banishes only three people in Le Morte Darthur: Balin, who is banished at least for a cogent reason; Morgan's son Uwain, for no



reason at all except a momentary pique; and Lancelot, for a reason that Arthur thinks is justifiable, but about which he later changes his mind.

(Incidentally, Lancelot is himself banished three times: twice by Guinevere because she thinks he is "unfaithful" to her, and once by Arthur through Gawain. Also, Lancelot defends Guinevere from the stake three times: once when she is accused of poisoning a Round Table member, where her cause is totally just; once when she is accused of sleeping with one of the Queen's Knights, where her cause is not wholly just--she is innocent of sleeping with one of her knights, but in fact was sleeping with Lancelot; and once when she and Lancelot are caught together, where her cause is totally unjust. In all of these and numerous other incidents grouped in sets of threes, one can see Malory's dexterity in twisting each occurrence just enough to avoid repetitiveness, and in using each series to point to a specific conclusion. An additional point is that three--or any uneven number--is looked upon by psychologists as a symbol of incompleteness; a common symbol of wholeness and completion is the number four, which almost never occurs in Le Morte Darthur.)<sup>1</sup>

After Balin has left the court, an Irish knight of the Round Table rides after him to avenge the insult given to Arthur (the beheading). The knight has another motivation



also: he resented the fact that Balin, a mere prisoner, should draw the magic sword when the Irish knight and his compeers had failed to do so. Thus he fights partly for an ignoble reason, and his reward is immediate: Balin kills him in fair combat. But a young woman suddenly appears to bewail the loss of her lover. She picks up the fallen knight's sword, and before Balin can stop her (although he tries), she kills herself with it. Balin now has another mark against him: in terms of the courtly love tradition, he caused the deaths of two lovers--a dreadful crime. When Merlin comes by and tells Balin that the death of the lady is to have unfortunate consequences, and that Balin should have tried harder to stop her suicide, all Balin can do, in effect, is shrug.

A little later, King Mark of Cornwall happens by (one of the few appearances he makes in Le Morte Darthur when his character is not derogated in some way) and erects a tomb for the dead lovers. This is fine irony; later, when Mark's nephew Tristram and his wife Isolde become paramours, Mark is represented as "a great enemy to lovers." To use Frye's terms, Mark represents the world of experience as against the world of innocence.

Merlin then comes past the tomb, and prophesies that the greatest battle of the world will take place there. We



later learn that this battle is between the two leading knights of Malory's world: Tristram and Lancelot, who, though they have sworn never to fight each other, are deceived because of a failure in identification, just as Balin and Balan are deceived. At this early point in the story, then, Balin and his adventures have already been related to most of the major figures in Le Morte Darthur: Gawain and Lancelot, Tristram, Gareth, Gaheris, and Arthur.

Balin now meets his brother Balan for the first time since Balin left prison, and we see another of Malory's poignant foreshadowings. The brothers are on their way to intercept the marauding King Royns, Arthur's enemy, in the hope of defeating him and thus regaining Arthur's favor. They meet Merlin, who asks them where they are going. They counter by asking his name, which he refuses to give. Whereupon,

"Hit ys an evyll sygne," seyde the knyghtes,  
"that thou arte a trew man, that thou wolt  
nat telle thy name." (Works, I, 73)

It is indeed an evil sign, and when these same knights later fight without learning each other's names, they die for the oversight. The matter of names is quite prominent in Le Morte Darthur. The pattern is that two knights sight each other, lower their visors, and charge. One or the other is unhorsed, and both then fight on foot. Only when they



mutually agree to stop for a breather do they get around to asking each other's names. So Balin does only what the other knights do, but in his case, it is fatal. The knight who first asks for the name of the other seems to attach such importance to it (being sometimes willing to duel over the matter)--and in some cases, the other tries so hard to conceal it--that it reminds one of the primitive belief that once a person knows your name, he can harm you with it, much as voodoo practitioners are said to be able to harm a victim through possession of a lock of his hair or a bit of fingernail. It behooves a person to be sure his questioner is a good man and not an incubus, before relinquishing to him such a potent weapon. Something related to this belief seems to be behind the statement made by Balin and Balan to Merlin: we are good men and not fiends, therefore you insult us by not telling your name; if you, on the other hand, are a "trew man," what motivation have you for concealing your name from us?

With Merlin's help, Balin and Balan capture King Royns and deliver him to Arthur; then they side with Arthur in the battle in which Pellinore kills King Lot. Their prowess astonishes observers, and is a major factor in winning the battle.

In a lull after the fighting, Arthur asks Balin to pursue a certain knight and bring him back for questioning.



Balin finds the knight with a damsel, but before he will agree to accompany Balin, he asks,

"Woll ye be my warraunte . . . and I go with you?"

"Yee," seyde Balyne, "other ellis, by the fayth of my body, I woll dye therefore."  
(Works, I, 80)

But no sooner have they started than an invisible knight named Garlon rides up, kills Balin's knight, and vanishes, leaving Balin without recourse. Again, the meaninglessness of human promises is underlined. As the knight dies, he makes Balin promise to complete his maiden's quest. Balin finds the maiden and they ride off together, she carrying the truncheon of the spear that killed her lover. Another knight, learning of Balin's quest, joins them, but no sooner does so than he, too, is killed by Garlon.

Balin and the damsel enter a castle for the night, and are barely inside when the damsel is attacked by a group of knights. As Balin prepares to defend her, they tell him that it is merely the "custom of the castle," and that they need a dish of the damsel's blood. There is a woman in the castle with a malady that can only be cured by the blood of a "clene maydyn" who is of royal descent. Balin agrees to let the girl be bled, but the woman's malady is not cured. (Later, in the Grail search, Percival's sister comes to the same castle and



grants her blood to the woman, who is cured, but Percival's sister dies of the loss of blood. It is surprising, considering Balin's record, that the woman lives long enough to be cured.)

A little later, as Balin and the maiden are at another castle, Balin hears a man groaning, and inquires as to the cause. His host tells him it is his son, wounded by the invisible knight Garlon at a tournament, who cannot be cured until some of Garlon's blood is used on him. The host then tells Balin that Garlon is the brother of Pellam, and will be found at Pellam's castle nearby. Balin and the maiden go to the castle, and Garlon is pointed out to Balin. As Balin looks at him, trying to decide whether to attack him in the castle or to wait until both are outside, Garlon sees him staring and strikes Balin across the face with the back of his hand, saying,

"Knyght, why beholdist thou me so? For shame, ete thy mete and do that thou com fore."

"Thou seyst soth," seyde Balyne, "thys ys nat the firste spite that thou haste done me. And therefore I woll do that I com fore." And rose hym up fersely and clave his hede to the sholdirs. (Works, I, 84)

Poor Balin! We have criticized him for his ill-timed and inconsiderate earlier actions, but now he takes time to think things out, and he is still as much wrong as right.



When Garlon is struck down, Balin takes the truncheon that the damsel has been carrying and plunges it into Garlon's body, saying, "'With that troncheon thou slewste a good knyght, and now hit stykith in thy body.'" Then, turning to the man whose son needed Garlon's blood for a cure, Balin says, "'Now may we fecche blood inoughe to hele youre son withall.'"

As he does this, Pellam, enraged at the killing of his brother in his own castle, comes after Balin and swings mightily at him with "a grymme wepyn," but Balin interposes his sword, and the sword breaks in two. He then runs from chamber to chamber of the castle, looking for a weapon with which to fight off the closely pursuing Pellam.

And at the last he enterde into a chambir whych was mervaylously dyght and ryche, and abedde [sic] arayed with cloth of golde, the rychiste that myght be, and one lyyng therein, and thereby stode a table of clene golde. And upon the table stode a mervaylous spere strangely wrought.

So whan Balyn saw the spere he gate hit in hys honde and turned to kynge Pellam and felde hym and smote hym passyngly sore with that spere, that kynge Pellam felle downe in a sowghe. And therewith the castell brake roffe and wallis and felle downe to the erthe. And Balyn felle downe and myght nat styrre hande nor foote, and for the moste party of that castell was dede thorow the dolorouse stroke.



And kynge Pellam lay so many yerys sore wounded, and myght never be hole tulle that Galaad the Hawte Prynce heled hym in the queste of the Sankgreall. For in that place was parte of the bloode of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste, which Joseph off Aramathy brought into thys londe. And there hymself lay in that ryche bedde. And that was the spere whych Longeus smote oure Lorde with to the herte. And kynge Pellam was nyghe of Joseph his kynne, and that was the moste worshipfullist man on lyve in tho dayes, and grete pité hit was of hys hurte, for thorow that stroke hit turned to grete dole, tray and tene. . . .

So he rode forthe thorow the fayre contreyes and citeys and founde the peple dede slayne on every syde, and all that evir were on lyve cryed and seyde, "A, Balyne! Thou hast done and caused grete dommage in thys contreyes! For the dolerous stroke thou gaff unto kynge Pellam thes three contreyes ar destroyed. And doute nat but the vengeance woll falle on the at the laste!"  
(Works, I, 85-86)

Note what a special gift Balan has for doing the right thing at the wrong time. He is following a quest for the sake of a wronged damsel, which is the rightest thing a knight can do. For the innocuous offense of staring, he is slapped in the face, which no man can take unavenged. Killing Garlon is the right answer, but he must then use a sacred lance to fend off Garlon's brother. The only alternative to any of these choices is death or dishonor.

The last room Balin enters is like the one encountered in the Grail story. It is related archetypally to the magnificent palaces, Aladdin's caves, and other places of



wonder encountered by all heroes when they reach their goal. To show the universality of this image, let us look at an Iranian tale called "The Secret of the Bath Bâdgerd." A synopsis follows.

The great and noble Prince Hâtim Tâi receives orders from his king to investigate the mysterious Bath Bâdgerd [castle of nonexistence]. When he approaches it, having gone through many dangerous adventures, he hears that nobody has ever returned from it, but he insists on going on. He is received at a round building by a barber with a mirror who leads him into the bath, but as soon as the prince enters the water, a thunderous noise breaks out, it gets completely dark, the barber disappears, and slowly the water begins to rise.

Hâtim swims desperately round until the water finally reaches the top of the round cupola, which forms the roof of the bath. Now he fears he is lost, but he says a prayer and grabs the centerstone of the cupola. Again a thunderous noise, everything changes, and Hâtim stands alone in a desert.

After long and painful wandering, he comes to a beautiful garden in the middle of which is a circle of stone statues. In the centre of the statues, he sees a parrot in its cage, and a voice from above says to him: "Oh, hero, you probably will not escape alive from this bath. Once Gayomart (the First Man) found an enormous diamond that shone more brightly than sun and moon. He decided to hide it where no one can find it, and therefore he built this magical bath in order to protect it. The parrot that you see here forms part of the magic. At its feet lie a golden bow and arrow on a golden chain, and with them you may try three times to shoot the parrot. If you hit him the curse will be lifted, if not, you will be petrified, as were all these other people."

Hâtim tries once, and fails. His legs turn to stone. He fails once more and is petrified up to his chest. The third time he just shuts his eyes,



exclaiming "God is great," shoots blindly, and this time hits the parrot. An outbreak of thunder, clouds of dust. When all this has subsided, in place of the parrot is an enormous, beautiful diamond, and all the statues have come to life again. The people thank him for their redemption.<sup>1</sup>

Von Franz comments, "The reader will recognize the symbols of the Self in this story--the First Man Gayomart, the round mandala-shaped building, the centerstone, and the diamond. But this diamond is surrounded by danger. The demonic parrot signifies the evil spirit of imitation that makes one miss the target and petrify psychologically."

Perusal of this narrative shows clearly how Malory inverted the conventional hero-story elements in order to arrive at the neat piece of irony that is the Balin-Balan tale. Present in the Iranian tale are the water-barrier (Balin encounters his in the next episode to be related), and the central symbol of the Self (the centerstone) which is conspicuously missing in Balin's room: the Grail. The time-space disruptions that occur when Hâtim "grabs the centerstone" and later kills the parrot, especially when he finds himself in the desert, directly correlate to the collapse of Pellam's castle and Balin's discovery that he has desolated three countries by the Dolorous Stroke. When Hâtim kills the parrot, the symbol of the integrated communal



Self (the diamond) is his reward, and the populace is thankful for it. But when Balin wounds Pellam, no communal symbol appears, and he is cursed by whatever of the populace is left alive, rather as the Ancient Mariner is cursed and isolated by his shipmates for killing the albatross.

Undaunted, Balin rides on until he encounters a knight with the fascinating name of Garnish of the Mount, who is weeping because his mistress has not kept an appointment with him. Balin promises to find her. He enters the girl's castle, again searches through a series of rooms, and finally sees her in the castle garden, making love to a repulsively ugly knight. The garden that in the Bath Bâdgerd story is beautiful, though lifeless with the stone statues of the unrealized Self, in Balin's story has life enough, but it is life so immoral and disgusting as even to violate the code of courtly love.

In his helpful way, Balin brings the lorn lover, Garnish, to a window where he can see his mistress and her paramour.

And whan Garnyssh beheld hir so lyeng, for pure sorow his mouth and nose brast oute on bledynge, and with his swerd he smote of bothe their hedes. And thenne he maade sorowe out of mesure and sayd, "O, Balyn! Moche sorow hast thou brought unto me, for haddest thou not shewed me that syght I shold have passed my sorow."

"Forsoth," said Balyn, "I did it to this entent that it sholde better thy courage and that ye myght see and knowe her falshede, and to cause yow to leve love of suche a lady; God



knoweth I dyd none other but as I wold ye dyd to me."

"Allas," said Garnysshe, "now is my sorou doubel that I may not endure, now have I slayne that I moost loved in al my lyf!"

And therewith sodenly he roofe hymself on his own swerd unto the hyltys. (Works, I, 87-88)

Balin, acquiring wisdom in some areas if not in others, leaves the castle hastily and secretly, fearing to be blamed for the deaths. But now fate, or the gods, or somebody, has had enough of this farce, and the "decision" is announced in an interesting way. The signification is that Balin's initiation period is over, and he is about to enter his greatest, and final, trial.<sup>2</sup>

And soo he herd an horne blowe as it had ben the dethe of a best. "That blast," said Balyn, "is blowen for me, for I am the pryse, and yet am I not dede." (Works, I, 88)

Again Balin is both right and wrong. He is indeed, as Arthur is, and all of us are, the prize being hounded to death by uncontrollable forces. And while it is true that he is not dead, the truth is nominal only; the echoes of the horn-blast will hardly have died before he has done so.

As he rides on, he comes to a cross on which, in letters of gold, is the statement "It is not for no knyght alone to ryde toward this castel."



Thenne sawe he an old hore gentylman comyng toward hym that sayd, "Balyne le Saveage, thow passyst thy bandes to come this waye, therfor torne ageyne and it will availle the," and he vanysshed away anone. (Works, I, 88)

The "hore gentylman" is our old friend the Merlin-figure, or the voice that tells Hâtim that no one ever returned from the Bath Bâdgerd; in short, the personification of the Self that we have seen before. In mythology, he is the terrifying three-headed dog Cerberus that guards the gates of Hell, the dwarf that guards the bridge, or, in inverted form, the angel with the flaming sword who guards Eden's entrances. But Balin is as stubborn as the rest of us (as stubborn as Arthur in marrying against the advice of Merlin, or as Gawain in spurning the advice of the hermit), and he rides on. In a castle he is feasted and rested, and then is told what a dozen other Round Table knights are told in the same circumstances: that there is a knight nearby who keeps an island against all comers, and he must be conquered before Balin can proceed on his way. As he prepares to cross the water-barrier and fight this second guardian-figure, one of his hosts, quite innocuously, tells Balin that his shield is worn, and is too small for the forthcoming conflict: will Balin accept a better one as a gift? Balin will, and does. He then crosses the water, meets the defending knight, and



they start to fight immediately. They "traverse" and "foyn" for hours, until finally the younger of the knights withdraws a little and lies down to catch his breath.

Thenne said Balyn le Saveage, "What knyghte arte thou? For or now I found never no knyght that matched me."

"My name is," said he, "Balan, broder unto the good knyght Balyn."

"Allas!" sayd Balyn, "that ever I shold see this day," and therwith he felle backward in a swoune. (Works, I, 90)

We learn that each of these powerful knights has given the other no fewer than seven great wounds, any one of which "myght have ben the dethe of the myghtyest gyaunt in this world." Balan asks his brother why he did not carry his own shield, so that he could have been recognized.

"Allas!" saide Balyn, "all that maade an unhappy knyght in the castel, for he caused me to leve myn owne shelde to our bothes destruction. And yf I myght lyve I wold destroye that castel for ylle customes."

"That were wel done," said Balan, "for I had never grace to departe fro hem syn that I cam hyther, for here it happed me to slee a knyght that kept this iland, and syn myght I never departe, and no more shold ye, broder, and ye myght have slayne me as ye have and escaped yourself with the lyf." (Works, I, 90)

So Balan himself was victimized by supernal forces that doomed him to remain in bondage on the island until Balin



should come--an archetypal form of ironic doom closely related to the "Appointment in Samarra" theme.

Balan dies, and a little later Balin dies also, after requesting a "jantilwoman" to bury them both in a single grave, with an appropriate monument. She does as directed, and in describing how she engraves the story of their deaths on the stone, Malory introduces a pathetic note: ". . . and the lady lete make a mensyon of Balan how he was ther slayne by his broders handes, but she knewe not Balyns name." Thus with all of us: the world does not mark our struggles, or how hard, Balin-like, we struggle to do the right thing. The simple end of it is that we are dead, and our names are not known. Here again is the reverse of the hero-story. The brave young man who, fearless and resolute, undergoes his painful rites of passage, crosses the barriers, and fights the monster for possession of the forbidden land--he should return to the sound of trumpets and fluttering flags, to be acclaimed by his people for his deeds. But not Balin. The "monster" he must defeat turns out to be the man he loves best in the world; and he cannot return from the depths, but must pointlessly die there, and the nearest he can get to acclaim is that his undertaker does not know his name.

There is a certain connection between Balin and Arthur in this respect also. As Balin's burial was made mysterious



by the lack of his name, so there is a comparable mystery about Arthur's identity at his burial. Arthur is borne away on a ship by Morgan and her women "into the vale of Avalon." The next morning Bedivere, Arthur's last companion, goes to a hermitage, where he is told that a group of women brought a fresh corpse to the chapel and placed it in a tomb on that same night. Bedivere immediately concludes that this is Arthur (Works, III, 1241). But here is what Malory himself says:

Thus of Arthur I fynde no more . . . of the verry sertaynté of hys deth. . . .

Now more of the deth of kynge Arthur coude I never fynde, but that thes ladyes brought hym to hys grave, and such one was entyred there. . . . But yet the ermyte knew nat in sertayne that he was veryly the body of kynge Arthur; for thys tale sir Bedwere, a knyght of the Table Rounde, made hit to be wrytten. (Works, III, 1242)

At any rate, Balin's tomb was not long nameless; Merlin came by shortly after his death and wrote Balin's name on the tomb in letters of gold. Then he took Balyn's sword, put a new pommel on it, and by his magic the sword was "put into a marbil stone stondynge upryght as grete as a mylestone, and hoved allwayes above the watir, and dud many yeres" (Works, I, 92). The stone floated down to Camelot and there, when the time came, Galahad retrieved the sword.



When Merlin put the sword in the stone, he made a prophecy:

There shall never man handyll thys swerde but the beste knyght of the worlde, and that shall be sir Launcelot other ellis Galahad, hys sonne. And Launcelot with hys swerde shall sle the man in the worlde that he lovith beste: that shall be sir Gawayne. (Works, I, 91)

Let us summarize briefly the history of this sword.

At some time before we first saw it, the brother of the Lady of the Lake had used it to kill his sister's paramour, whereupon she took the sword to the Lady Lyle of Avilion and asked vengeance upon her brother. The Lady Lyle cursed the sword, and forecast that the knight who withdrew it from its sheath should kill his brother with it. Thus the women, like the Fates of Greek mythology, blindly chose a man upon whom they could wreak vengeance for another man's crime; furthermore, their victim had to be "one of the beste knyghtes of thys realme, and he sholde be hardy and full of prouesse" (Works, I, 68), much in the same way that sacrifices for religious rituals must be the cleanest, healthiest, and best of their species. Whatever the women's reasons for choosing a man of Balin's excellence, the effect of the choice is to announce that no matter how brave, great, or competent a man may be, he is still the tool of destiny.



After Balin killed his brother with the sword, it went to Galahad, and at some unspecified time in the Grail quest, it went to Lancelot, who used it to give Gawain the head-wound from which he was ultimately to die. It is interesting that Merlin forecast that Lancelot should kill his best friend with the sword; it is almost as if Merlin had re-cursed the sword when he put it in the stone. One would expect that it would be purified by Galahad's use of it, but that is not the case; Galahad is simply the messenger who got the sword out of the stone and gave it to Lancelot.

The sword of Balin is one of the devices used by Malory to provide continuity to his book, just as he used the fact that Gawain was knighted on the day Guinevere and Arthur were married, causing him to become indissolubly interwoven with their lives and fates. Once a reader realizes that these threads exist--and after reading Balin's story, he can hardly help it--he can always sense their presence in the background, no matter what is occurring on the forestage. If I may use the analogy, Balin's sword and Gawain are two of the tracks upon which the action in Le Morte Darthur runs.

Balin's story is both tragedy and irony: Frye's mythoi of Fall and Winter, respectively. As we have said, Le Morte Darthur seldom fits precisely into any one of Frye's



categories, but lies athwart two or more of them. So in this case. There is no doubt that Balin is a tragic hero in the usual sense of the term. His background, his characteristics, and his motivations are all those of the classic hero; it is just that everything he touches turns to death under his hand. Frye cites incongruity as the factor distinguishing the tragic and the ironic heroes:

The central principle of tragic irony is that whatever exceptional happens to the hero should be causally out of line with his character. . . . Tragedy is intelligible because its catastrophe is plausibly related to its situation. (Frye, p. 41)

It is just this distinction that makes Balin's story pathetic. The fact that he has beheaded a lady cannot be justifiable cause for his punishment, even in terms of the courtly love convention: Gawain decapitates an innocent lady and lives a long and fruitful life thereafter; Gaheris beheads his own mother and suffers no particularly terrible fate. Furthermore, Balin's act is justified; it is clearly established that the lady Balin killed had been responsible for the death of Balin's mother. But from the time of that act, he can do nothing right. Frye defines the guilt and the innocence of such a figure:

Irony isolates from the tragic situation the sense of arbitrariness, of the victim's having been unlucky, selected at random or by lot, and no more deserving of what happens to him than



anyone else would be. If there is a reason for choosing him for catastrophe, it is an inadequate reason, and raises more objections than it answers. . . .

We may call this typical victim the pharmakos or scapegoat. . . . The pharmakos is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes, like the mountaineer whose shout brings down an avalanche. He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence. (Frye, p. 41)

He later adds, "The archetype of the inevitably ironic is Adam, human nature under sentence of death" (p. 42).

Thus Balin is placed; he is the surrogate for all of us, as Christ was. More specifically, he is the surrogate for Arthur, and, in some ways, for all the leading figures in Le Morte Darthur. All of them, like him, are punished for things for which they are not quite to blame. All of them, like Balin, are forced into isolation: Lancelot is banished from the Round Table; when that institution collapses as a result, Arthur and Gawain are also isolated from any world they wish to live in. Their efforts in every direction, like those of Balin, are brought to nothing by events outside their control and even of their knowledge. Lancelot, the resolutely unmarried man, spends his life in fruitless pursuit of barren Guinevere, until both wind up in hermitages; the Round Table degenerates; the knights die; nothing lasts.



The cry of Balan on the battleground, "Why did you change shields?" and Balin's bewildered "It was done to me, but I don't know why," are echoed by Lancelot's cry to his king from the battlements: "Why will you not forgive me?" and by Arthur's cry, "Why did this unhappy war have to start?" and, at the end, with Arthur's death-ship vanishing into the mists toward Avalon, by the cry of Bedivere, left alone on the shore among the dead:

"A, my lorde Arthur, what shall becom of me, now ye go frome me and leve me here alone amonge myne enemyes?" (Works, III, 1240)

All these voices and their words are one: the archetypal voice and words of Christ, speaking from the cross for us all: "Oh, Father, why hast thou forsaken me?"



## CHAPTER VI FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Synopsized in M. L. von Franz's "The Process of Individuation," in Man and His Symbols, pp. 216-217.

<sup>2</sup>In modern slang we have the phrase, "Somebody blew the whistle on him," which can mean that the activities of "him" have been reported to the police, or that "him" was prevented, perhaps by death, from continuing a certain course of action. The image is derived, of course, from the whistles used to interrupt or stop athletic contests. However used, the meaning is that a higher authority is about to dictate a change in the course of events. The distance between Malory's horn and the coach's whistle is unbridgeable by any historical, mimetic method, but the fact that both serve the same function, and that the idea is reborn when needed, is a perfect illustration of the operation of archetype, which is described by Jung as resembling a dry river bed into which water can flow again at any time.



## CHAPTER VII

### ANIMA FIGURES

Many of the women in Le Morte Darthur are either plainly identified as members of the spirit world, or have aspects revealing connections therewith. Whenever these other-worldly aspects appear in a character, we can be quite sure that we are in the presence of a Jungian anima figure. Von Franz defines this manifestation as follows:

The anima is a personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche, such as vague feelings and moods, prophetic hunches, receptiveness to the irrational, capacity for personal love, feeling for nature, and--last but not least--his relation to the unconscious. (von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 177)

Elsewhere he comments:

In the Middle Ages there took place a perceptible spiritual differentiation in religious, poetical, and other cultural matters; and the fantasy world of the unconscious was recognized more clearly than before. During the period, the knightly cult of the lady signified an attempt to differentiate the feminine side of man's nature in regard to the outer woman as well as in relation to the inner world.

The lady to whose service the knight pledged himself, and for whom he performed his heroic deeds, was naturally a personification of the anima. The name of the carrier of the Grail, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of the legend, is especially significant: Conduir-amour ("guide in love matters"). . . . When



the anima, as Virgin, was conceived as being all-positive, her negative aspects found expression in the belief in witches. (von Franz, p. 187)

As implied in the last sentence, there are both good and bad sides of the anima, respectively personalized as benevolent and malevolent persons. The good (i.e., non-malevolent) aspect is represented in Le Morte Darthur by figures such as Gareth's guide Linet, Percival's sister, and Guinevere; the bad aspect by Morgan and the witch-queens who consort with her. There are also those who show both good and bad aspects, such as Nineve, who kills Merlin, but does several good turns for Arthur, and finally becomes the lifelong lover of Pelleas.

Joseph Campbell summarizes the two aspects of this myth-dream figure:

She is the paragon of all paragons of beauty, the reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero's earthly and unearthly quest. She is mother, sister, mistress, bride. Whatever in the world has lured, whatever has seemed to promise joy, has been premonitory of her existence--in the deep of sleep, if not in the cities and forests of the world. For she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul's assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies the bliss that once was known will be known again: the comforting, the nourishing, the "good" mother--young and beautiful--was known to us, and even tasted, in the remotest past. Time sealed her



away, yet she is dwelling still, like one who sleeps in timelessness, at the bottom of the timeless sea.

The remembered image is not only benign, however; for the "bad" mother too--(1) the absent, unattainable mother, against whom aggressive fantasies are directed, and from whom a counter-aggression is feared; (2) the hampering, forbidding, punishing mother; (3) the mother who would hold to herself the growing child trying to push away; and finally (4) the desired but forbidden mother (Oedipus complex) whose presence is a lure to dangerous desire (castration complex)--persists in the hidden land of the adult's infant recollection and is sometimes even the greater force. She is at the root of such unattainable great goddess figures as that of the chaste and terrible Diana--whose absolute ruin of the young sportsman Actaeon illustrates what a blast of fear is contained in such symbols of the mind's and body's blocked desire. (Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 111)<sup>1</sup>

Among reasons for the appearance of the "bad" anima are that a man needs interpretation of matters beyond his male ken, or denies expression to the feminine side of his nature, or, worse still, disowns it entirely by refusing to admit its existence. The qualities that are then likely to appear in the unconscious are projected onto a real or imagined person.

The French call such an anima figure a femme fatale. . . . The greek Sirens or the German Lorelei also personify this dangerous aspect of the anima, which in this form symbolizes destructive illusion.

. . . . .



There are legends throughout the world in which "a poison damsel" (as they call her in the Orient) appears. She is a beautiful creature who has weapons hidden in her body or a secret poison with which she kills her lovers during their first night together. In this guise the anima is as cold and reckless as certain uncanny aspects of nature itself, and in Europe is often expressed to this day by the belief in witches. (von Franz, pp. 178-179)

In ancient Greece, this evil anima was considered to be of such a diversified nature that her aspects were divided into categories, as, for example, in the Theogony.

The Theogony of Hesiod presents a general view of Greek religious belief as it appeared about eight centuries before Christ. Hesiod codifies an amorphous and often contradictory body of myth that existed long before his own time. His conclusions seem to have been accepted by the Greeks as definitive for centuries. The book contains several catalogs of "families" that derive from various gods. Of interest to us are his catalogs of the Children of Night and the Daughters of Nereus. Because the catalogs are dispersed in the Theogony, Norman O. Brown, the editor, has synthesized them. His synopsis of the catalog of the Children of Night follows:

The key figure in the first group is Death: Hesiod introduces three synonyms for death to suggest death in all its forms, and adds Sleep and Dreams, on the ground of the affinity between sleep and death. The key notion in the second group is retribution: the most prominent figures in this group are the Fates and the Specters of



Vengeance, but Blame (and its by-product, Grief) and Retribution are also mentioned. The final group is introduced by the notion of Deceit; Deceit is followed by Love; the deceitfulness of Love is manifested by its juxtaposition with two things which are in contradiction with it, Old Age and Strife.

Strife is the only one of the children of Night who produces further children of her own. . . . In contrast with the Children of Night, who represent inevitable limitations and evils in human life, the offspring of Strife are man-made: they are the result of human actions inspired with the spirit of Strife. . . . In the first group Strife is presented as causing an interruption in economic productivity, and consequently bringing Distress, Famine, and Sorrow. In the second group Strife is presented as the cause of armed conflict; the third group shows Strife as the cause of legal disputes and the perversion of Justice.<sup>2</sup>

All the aspects of this "genealogy" appear in Le Morte Darthur. Sleep and Dreams frequently appear as transition mechanisms, and Death is a constant background to all Round Table activities. The specters of Fate and Vengeance are those that dogged the footsteps of Balin. The Deceit-Love aspects are vividly shown in the Lancelot-Guinevere liaison. Strife arose in the Round Table as a result of that liaison, and Old Age is one of the reasons for Arthur's petulance and bewilderment in the late stages of the book. Distress, Famine, and Sorrow are elements of the desolation caused by Balin's Dolorous Stroke, and the title of the Queen of the Waste



Lands, who appears during the Grail search, carries the same sense of desolation. Armed Conflict as a child of Strife is illustrated in the battles between Arthur and Lancelot; and the issue of legal disputes and the perversion of justice is paramount in the three "trials" of Guinevere, which range, as we have shown, from her defence in a just cause to her abduction in an unjust cause. This is a fine example of what was meant in Chapter II when it was said that Malory and his predecessors alike took their inspirations from the same archetypal reservoir, which knows no barriers of time, space, or language.

By far the most prominent anima figure in Le Morte Darthur is Morgan. While Guinevere is present throughout a larger portion of the book, most of her appearances are of a neutral nature. Seldom, until late in the book, does she show much strength. But when Morgan is up to something, the doings of Guinevere and other females become pale and uninteresting by comparison. This is not simply because evil is more fascinating than good; it is that Morgan represents a force that has been prominent in the human mind for centuries. She is the representative, the focal point, indeed the spokesman, for the spirit of discord and the dark, sorrowing evils which Hesiod personalizes as offspring of



Night. Her activities are primarily directed against Arthur, but it is stated more than once in the book that she is against all lovers and all good knights. As pointed out in the earlier discussion of demonism, she is the projected form of the Round Table's bent toward self-punishment and self-destruction.

A great deal has been written about Morgan. Lucy Allen Paton and Robert Graves, among others, believe that she is a direct descendant of the Morrigan, an Irish death-figure whose totem was the raven. While I am suspicious of much of Graves' historicity in The White Goddess and in his commentaries in The Greek Myths, he has obviously done a great amount of research in these areas, and his comment about Morgan is interesting:

The Copts [combined] "the Three Maries" who were spectators of the Crucifixion into a single character, with Mary Cleopas as a type of "Blodeuwedd," the Virgin of "Arianrhod" and Mary Magdalen as the third person of the ancient trinity, who appears in Celtic legend as Morgan le Faye, King Arthur's sister. Morgan in Irish legend is "the Morrigan," meaning "Great Queen," a Death-goddess who assumed the form of a raven; and "le Faye" means "the Fate." According to Cormac's Glossary the Morrigan was invoked in battle by an imitation on war-horns of a raven's croaking. She was by no means the gentle character familiar to readers of the Morte D'Arthur [sic] but like the "black screaming hag Cerridwen" in the Romance of Taliesin was "big-mouthed, swarthy, swift, sooty, lame, with a cast in her left eye."<sup>3</sup>



Miss Paton also equates Morgan with the tradition of the demoiselle cacheresse (or chasse[u]resse), who as an other-world figure entices the hero to a faery kingdom, after a certain time reluctantly permits him to return to the world, and finally is present at his death to escort him back to the land of faery--as Morgan is present to carry the wounded Arthur from the final battlefield to Avalon.<sup>4</sup>

While the tracing of lineal descent is not our business, Morgan seems to betray enough earth-bound, deathly characteristics to make it plausible that she arose from the same archetypal urge as led the Near-Eastern people to represent the evil anima as an aspect of the Magna Mater. Similarly, I think that the anima figure personalized in mythology as Diana-Artemis, who reflects the spirit of the cooler, alien, moonlit world, appears in Malory as Guinevere, who is barren (a kind of virginity), and whose lovable characteristics are never shown to us, despite the fact that two of the best men in the Malorian world loved her to their own destruction.<sup>5</sup>

The archetype which gives rise to these dual anima aspects is shown in a striking passage from Joseph Campbell:

In the Tantric books of medieval and modern India the abode of the goddess is called . . . "The Island of Jewels. . . ." [Its sands] are laved by the still waters of the ocean of the nectar of immortality. . . . She is the world



creatrix, ever mother, ever virgin. She encompasses the encompassing, nourishes the nourishing, and is the life of everything that lives.

She is also the death of everything that dies. The whole round of existence is accomplished within her sway, from birth, through adolescence, maturity, and senescence, to the grave. She is the womb and the tomb: the sow that eats her farrow. Thus she unites the "good" and the "bad," exhibiting the two modes of the remembered mother, not as personal only, but as universal. The devotee is expected to contemplate the two with equal equanimity. Through this exercise his spirit is purged of its infantile, inappropriate sentimentalities and resentments, and his mind opened to the inscrutable presence which exists, not primarily as "good" and "bad" with respect to his child-like human convenience, his weal and woe, but as the law and image of the nature of being. (Campbell, pp. 113-114)

Morgan's outlines appear clearly in this passage. Her abode, to which she transports Arthur from the final battlefield, is the Isle of Avalon, from where, it is hinted, Arthur will someday return; i.e., immortality is part of the "cure" for Arthur in that magic isle. In giving this gift to Arthur, Morgan does indeed nourish, and "is the life of everything that lives," as well as "the death of everything that dies"--the archetypal idea of rebirth. Morgan follows Arthur "through adolescence, maturity, and senescence, to the grave."

One of the aspects of such a figure must of necessity be that of the sexually alluring siren. While little is said about Morgan's allure, the evidence speaks for itself. She



has at least two lovers in the book: Accolon, as already mentioned, and Hemyson (Works, II, 554-555). During the same period she tries to interest Tristram (554), but is said to have "loved sir Launcelot beste, and ever she desired hym" (555). Indeed, at one point, in company with three other queens, she imprisons Lancelot, telling him that he will be freed only if he chooses one of the queens for paramour (Works, I, 257)--reminiscent of Paris's being required to choose the most beautiful of three goddesses.

Later, Morgan imprisons the young knight Alexander "for none other entente but for to do hir plesure whan hit lykyth hir." When he learns of this, Alexander's response is less than enthusiastic:

"A, Jesu defende me," seyde sir Alysaundir,  
"frome suche pleasure! For I had levir kut  
away my hangers than I wolde do her ony  
suche pleasure!" (Works, II, 643)

During all these peccadilloes, Morgan is still married to Uriens.

A psychologist comments upon this and other aspects of the anima:

The number four [a symbol of totality] is also connected with the anima because, as Jung noted, there are four stages in its development. The first stage is best symbolized by the figure of Eve, which represents purely instinctual and biological relations. The second can be seen in Faust's Helen: She personifies a romantic



and aesthetic level that is, however, still characterized by sexual elements. The third is represented, for instance, by the Virgin Mary--a figure who raises love (eros) to the heights of spiritual devotion. The fourth type is symbolized by Sapientia, wisdom transcending even the most holy and the most pure. . . . (In the psychic development of modern man this stage is rarely reached. The Mona Lisa comes nearest to such a wisdom anima.) (von Franz, pp. 185-186)

The sexually active sisters Morgan and Morgawse, therefore, correspond to the Eve-stage of anima development. Guinevere generally corresponds to the Helen-stage, although she has some siren-like qualities that extend into Eve's territory (this point is discussed in Chapter IX). Like Helen, she is abducted from her husband by her lover, and becomes the object of massive contention between the greatest military forces of her time.

We see Guinevere in person so little during the book that we cannot analyze her actions and statements as we can those of Morgan, or Nineve. Our views of her must therefore be overall, long-range ones. As we stand back to survey the course of her existence, we see that in the long run she is a femme fatale in that she lures Lancelot and Arthur to destruction. The femme fatale can represent destructive illusion, and in a sense, this is what Guinevere does. She marries Arthur, yet can give him no children. She loves



Lancelot, yet cannot give him marriage. To this extent, both men are cheated.

Guinevere's failure, however, is on a larger scale than either of these facts indicate. What she should have been is summarized by Menninger:

Fundamentally, woman is more predominantly than man the embodiment of the erotic power which is arrayed against self-destruction. While she shares his hostilities and his illusions, her role, even in war, is healing and sustaining. The erotic instinct, properly conceived of, does not refer solely to impulses toward physical contact, but to the drives in the direction of social and biological life, with the ultimate object of race preservation. A better term for it is simply love. (Menninger, Love Against Hate, p. 46)

Of all the women in Le Morte Darthur who might have counterbalanced the self-destructive tendencies of the Round Table, Guinevere should have been in that position; indeed, there is no other candidate. But Guinevere failed. Instead of furnishing a unifying influence, by her attachment to Lancelot she became one with the destroyers. Her barrenness is symbolic of this position; being unable to fulfill her biological duties toward preservation of her society, it was a small further step, and probably an unconscious one, to the destructive side.

At the same time, her destructive activities are never intentional, and she is neither sexually avid nor promiscuous,



as Morgan and Morgawse are. Therefore she unquestionably is at a "romantic and aesthetic level" considerably above the Eve-stage, although she never attains to the positions of spiritual devotion and wisdom that von Franz cites as the third and fourth stages of anima development. The character who comes closest to these is Percival's sister.

Percival's sister is never named in Le Morte Darthur, in what may be a deliberate effort to depersonalize her. She appears first in the Grail story as an unidentified gentlewoman who leads Galahad to a ship in which Percival and Bors are resting. When Galahad asks whence the ship came, "'Trewly,' seyde they, 'ye wote as well as we, but hit com of Goddis grace.'" The ship is the counterpart of the whale or the water-monster of the monomyth, but instead of one hero, there are three to be transported across the water-barrier.

The magic ship carries them "from the londe of Logrys many myles," to where there is another ship. When all are aboard the second ship, which though "ryche inowghe" is empty of other people, the "jantillwoman" announces to Percival that she is his sister. On the ship are a rich bed and a magic sword half-drawn from its scabbard. The sister then relates to the three knights the history and meanings of the sword, the scabbard, the bed, and the ship itself (Works, II, 989-995 passim).



During her monologue, Galahad interrupts to say, "'In the name of God . . . ye ar ryght wyse of these wordes'" (989). This phrase, plus her lack of a name, links her with von Franz's third and fourth phases of the anima: the wise virgin. She may be compared to the Fair Maid of Astolat, who would be the "foolish" virgin, having given up her life fruitlessly out of desire for the secular love of Lancelot, whereas Percival's sister gave up hers to save another woman's life. The biblical parable of the wise and foolish virgins is of the same archetype.

The three Grail knights and Percival's sister go back aboard their first ship, which takes them to a sin-ridden castle in Scotland. There the knights kill a large number of enemies and free the castle. The three knights who owned this castle loved their sister carnally, and raped her. To prevent discovery of this act, they killed her, and then jailed their father because of his protests (997-998). The carnality of the three evil knights toward their sister is directly compared against the purity of the Grail knights and "their" sister; thus we are given to see how purity makes men invincible, and how rigorous God is in the defense of virginity.

When they leave the castle, they come to a "waste foreyst," in which they see a white hart being followed by



four lions. They trail the animals to a hermitage, where they see the hart turn into Christ, and the lions become a man, a lion, an eagle, and an ox. At the end of the mass, the five figures disappear through an unbroken stained-glass window, whereupon a mysterious voice tells them, "'In such maner entred the Sonne of God into the wombe of Maydyn Mary, whos virginité ne was perissshed, ne hurte'" (999). The knights ask the hermit the meaning of the animals, and he tells them,

"Well ought oure Lorde be signified to an harte. For the harte, whan he ys olde, he waxith yonge agayne in his whyght skynne. Ryght so commyth agayne oure Lorde frome deth to lyff, for He lost erthely fleysse, that was the dedly fleysse whych He had takyn in the wombe of the Blyssed Virgyne Mary. And for that cause appered oure Lorde as a whyghte harte withoute spot.

"And the four that were with hym ys to undirstonde the four evaungelistis. . . . For wete you welle never arst ne myght no knyght knowe the trouthe; for oftyntymes or thys hath oure Lorde shewed Hym unto good men and to good knyghtes in lyknesse of an herte, but I suppose frome henseforthe ye shall se hit no more."  
(999-1000)<sup>6</sup>

Thus we are not only reminded of the archetypal theme of rebirth, but are led to believe that, when Arthur or Gawain pursued a deer as a prelude to adventure, they were really pursuing Christ to death, symbolically speaking, in that their quests were secular, and they were blinded to higher spiritual meanings.



Jung points out how such animals relate a person to the world of nature:

The animal symbol points specifically to the extra-human, the transpersonal; for the contents of the collective unconscious are not only the residues of archaic, specifically human modes of functioning, but also the residues of functions from man's animal ancestry, whose duration in time was infinitely greater than the relatively brief epoch of specifically human existence. (Jung, p. 98)

Von Franz expands on this idea:

The Self is often symbolized as an animal, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings. (That is why there are so many helpful animals in myths and fairy tales.) This relation of the Self to all surrounding nature and even the cosmos probably comes from the fact that the "nuclear atom" of our psyche is somehow woven into the whole world, both outer and inner. (von Franz, p. 207)

After the animal adventure, Percival's sister and her three companions come to the castle that Balin had encountered, wherein resides a woman who can be cured only by "a dysshfulle of bloode of a maydyn, and a clene virgyne in wylle and in worke, and a kynges doughter" (Works, II, 1002).

The "jantillwoman" agrees to be bled, and when they have drawn from her a silver dish full, she is so weak that she swoons. When she awakes, she says,



"Fayre brothir, sir Percivale, I dye for the helynge of this lady. And whan I am dede, I requyre you that ye burye me nat in thys contrey, but as sone as I am dede putte me in a boote at the next haven, and lat me go as aventures woll lede me. And as sone as ye three com to the cité of Sarras, there to encheve the Holy Grayle, ye shall fynde me undir a towre aryved. And there bury me in the spirituall palyse." (1003)

The maiden dies, becoming, like Galahad, a sacrificial figure for the worldliness and evil of the Round Table. The sick woman is cured.

Than sir Percivale made a lettir of all that she had helpe them as in stronge aventures, and put hit in hir rygth honde. And so leyde hir in a barge, and coverde hit with blacke sylke. (1004)

Again we see the parallel with the Fair Maid of Astolat, who requested that after she died, a letter detailing her love for Lancelot be enclosed in her right hand; that she be put "within a barget . . . coverde with blacke samyte over and over" (1095), and that she be rowed down the Thames to Camelot, so that the court will know who she was and why she died.

There is an unexpected aftermath to the curing of the lady by the maiden's blood. After the knights have watched the gentlewoman's death-ship driven away by a magical wind,

Than they drew all to the castell, and furthewith there fylle a tempeste suddeyne of thundir and lyghtnyng and rayne, as all the erthe wolde a



brokyn. So halff the castell turned up-so-downe. So hyt passyd evensonge or the tempest were seased. (1004)

When the knights investigate the castle next morning,

. . . they founde nother man nother woman that he ne was dede by the vengeaunce of oure Lorde. So with that they harde a voice that seyde,

"Thys vengeaunce ys for bloode-shedyng of maydyns!" (1005)

The effect of this destruction, which obviously killed the cured woman as well as everyone else in the castle, was to nullify the sacrifice made by Percival's sister, and that fact reminds us again of Balin, all of whose efforts were similarly nullified by an inscrutable providence.

For all practical purposes, this is the last we hear of Percival's sister until Percival, Galahad, and Bors, driven on another magic ship to the city of Sarras, find and bury the girl's body.

Percival's sister is a spiritual guide of a depth and complexity far greater than any similar figure in the book. In addition to acting as spiritual interpreter for her knights, she also furnishes a model of purity, patience, and wisdom that is envied even by Galahad. Although she is presented in a deliberately sexless way, she has some aspects of the Magna Mater figure described by Campbell:



The mythological figure of the Universal Mother imputes to the cosmos the feminine attributes of the first, nourishing and protecting presence. The fantasy is primarily spontaneous; for there exists a close and obvious correspondence between the attitude of the young child toward its mother and that of the adult toward the surrounding material world. But there has been also, in numerous religious traditions, a consciously controlled pedagogical utilization of this archetypal image for the purpose of the purging, balancing, and initiation of the mind into the nature of the visible world. (Campbell, p. 113)

One repeated characteristic of the anima figure seems to be inconsistency of behavior. This is understandable, as she is, after all, a reflection of submerged needs and desires, and she changes as these needs change. It is also characteristic of such figures in dream appearances that they shift suddenly and unaccountably from one aspect to another.

Nineve is a good example. We first meet her, without knowing her identity, when she comes to court to complain of the theft of a dog by a knight. In the midst of her speech,

. . . there com a knyght rydyng all armed on a grete horse, and toke the lady away with forse wyth hym, and ever she cryed and made grete dole. So whan she was gone the kynge was gladde, for she made such a noyse.  
(Works, I, 103)

The king assigns Pellinore to bring back the lady and her abductor. As he rides into the forest on his quest, he



finds a wounded knight by a well, and a fair-haired lady weeping over him. She pleads for Pellinore's help, but he will not stop. He finds Nineve, kills her abductor, and, as they start back toward Camelot, they pass the well where Pellinore had refused to help the wounded knight. They learn that the knight has died, and the grief-stricken lady has killed herself with her lover's sword. Lions and other beasts have eaten all of the lady except her head, to which Pellinore finds himself strangely attracted. Nineve recommends that the knight's body be taken to a nearby hermitage for burial, and that the lady's head be taken back to Camelot. When they arrive at the court, Merlin explains why Pellinore was attracted by the fair-haired lady, and why he should have helped her: she was his daughter.<sup>7</sup>

In Nineve's next appearance, she shifts closer to the cold-blooded "poison damsel" mentioned by von Franz. Shortly after Pellinore returns her to court, Merlin falls in love with her. "And ever she made Merlion good chere tulle sche had lerned of hym all maner of thynges that sche desyred; and he was assoted uppon hir, that he myght nat be from hir" (125). Merlin takes her on a visit to France, and upon their return, shows her various marvels. They come to Cornwall.

And allwayes he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode,  
and she was ever passynge wery of hym and wolde  
have bene delyverde of hym, for she was aferde of



hym for cause he was a devyls son, and she cowde not be skyfte of hym by no meane. And so one a tyme Merlyon ded shew hir in a roche whereas was a grete wondir and wrought by enchaument that went undir a grete stone. So by hir subtyl worchyng she made Merlyon to go undir that stone to latte hir wete of the mervayles there, but she wrought so there for hym that he come never oute for all the craufte he coude do, and so she departed and leffte Merlyon. (126)

Later, when Morgan sets up a plot to have Accolon kill Arthur in a fight, Nineve appears in another guise entirely: as Arthur's protector.

The meanewhyle that they were thus at the batayle com the Damesel of the Lake into the felde that put Merlyon undir the stone. And she com thidir for the love of kynge Arthur, for she knew how Morgan le Fay had ordayned for Arthur shold have bene slayne that day, and therefore she come to save his lyff. (142)

The knights fight until, with one particularly heavy blow by Arthur, his sword breaks off at the hilt. Even then he deals Accolon such a buffet with the sword-handle that Accolon is knocked to his knees.

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 had grete pité that so good a knyght and such a man of worship sholde so be destroyed. And at the nexte stroke sir Accolon stroke at hym suche a stroke that by the damesels inchaument the swerde Excaliber fell oute of Accolons honde to the erthe, and therewithall sir Arthur lyghtly lepe to hit and gate hit in his honde. (144-145)



When she appears in the next chapter ("Gawain, Ywain, and Marhalt"), she proves to be neither wholly punitive, as with Merlin, nor wholly beneficial, as with Arthur; now she places herself in judgment upon another. In the adventure, Gawain finds a weeping knight named Pelleas. His lady, Ettarde, has refused to see him, but each day he approaches her castle to try to get a glimpse of her. Gawain volunteers to help, just as Balin did in a similar circumstance. Gawain dons Pelleas' armor, tells the lady that he has killed Pelleas, and is admitted to her castle. He then talks her into becoming his paramour.

And on the thirde day on the morne erly sir Pelleas armed hym, for he hadde never slepte syn sir Gawayne promysed hym by the feythe of his body to com to hym unto his pavylyon by the pryory within the space of a day and a nyght. Than sir Pelleas mounted uppon horsebak and com to the pavylyons that stood withoute the castell . . . and founde sir Gawayne lyggyng in the bed with his lady Ettarde and aythir clyppynge other in armys. And whan he sawe that, his hert well-nyghe braste for sorow, and sayde, "Alas, that ever a knyght sholde be found so false!" (169-170)

This is another example of the way Malory shifts his viewpoint to illuminate different facets of a situation. Balin brought Garnish into his misuress's castle where he saw his lady and an ugly knight making love in the garden. Here is the same scene, observed this time from the lover's viewpoint instead of that of the guide, and with the guide



taking part in the act rather than pointing it out. Balin is thus shown to be better than Gawain; yet it is Balin who is punished.

Pelleas, instead of killing the lovers as Garnish does, lays his sword across their throats, and leaves. He gives all his goods to his servants and goes to his bed, swearing to stay there until he dies.

Than sir Gawayne and Ettarde awoke of her slepe and founde the naked swerd overthawrte [sic] their throtis. Than she knew hit was the swerde of sir Pelleas. "Alas!" she seyde, "Sir Gawayne, ye have betrayde sir Pelleas and me, for you told me you had slayne hym, and now I know wel it is not soo: he is on lyve. But had he bene so uncurteyse unto you as ye have bene to hym, ye had bene a dede knyght. But ye have dissayved me, that all ladyes and damesels may beware be you and me." And therewith sir Gawayne made hym redy and wente into the foreste. (170-171)

Nineve comes by and learns from one of Pelleas' servants what has happened.

"Brynge me to hym," seyde she anone, "and y woll waraunte his lyfe. He shall nat dye for love, and she that hath caused hym so to love she shall be in as evylle plyte as he is or hit be longe to, for hit is no joy of suche a proude lady that woll nat have no mercy of suche a valyaunte knyght." (171)

After causing Pelleas to fall into a deep sleep, she fetches Ettarde. As both look upon the sleeping Pelleas,

"Loo," seyde the Damesell of the Lake, "ye oughte to be ashamed for to murther suche a knyght," and therewith she threw such an



inchaumentente uppon hir that she loved hym  
so sore that well-nyghe she was nere oute  
of hir mynde.

"A, Lorde Jesu," seyde this lady Ettarde,  
"how is hit befallyn unto me that I love now  
that I have hatyd moste of ony man on lyve?"

"That is the ryghteouse jugemente of  
God," seyde the damesell. (171)

We have heard Merlin act as a messenger from God,  
and now Nineve does the same thing. No other magical lady  
in Le Morte Darthur uses this formula.

After Ettarde has been punished, Nineve rouses Pelleas  
and tells him to ride with her out of that country, "and ye  
shall love a lady that woll love you."

Anone sir Pelleas armed hym and toke his  
horse and commaunded his men to brynge  
aftir his pavylyons and his stuffe where  
the Lady of the Lake wolde assyngne them.  
So this lady Ettarde dyed for sorow, and  
the Damesel of the Lake rejoysed sir Pelleas,  
and loved togedyrs duryng their lyfe. (172)

Nineve changes from a depersonalized guide to a human-  
like but dangerous enchantress in the matter of Merlin, then  
to a helper of Arthur in his ceaseless war against Morgan,  
and finally to a woman who can appreciate, love, and remain  
faithful to Pelleas--but who nevertheless can cast such a  
spell on Ettarde as to cause her death, and to call this the  
judgment of God. She thus shows more different attributes



than any other anima figure in Le Morte Darthur; she is, in fact, just such a woman as one might encounter in a dream: sometimes vague in outline and function, sometimes clear-cut, sometimes dangerous, but at last warm, loving, and lasting.

We encounter ladies and damsels of the lake throughout the book. How they interrelate is difficult to fathom. The Lady of the Lake who gave Arthur the sword was later killed by Balin. Nineve is a "damsel of the lake," hence obviously a subordinate of the Lady. When Pelleas and Nineve leave Ettarde, they are ready to go "where the Lady of the Lake wolde assyngne them," implying that the dead Lady of the Lake has been replaced with another of the same title. The sentence also shows that both Pelleas and Nineve are under the orders of the Lady, Pelleas voluntarily and Nineve perhaps otherwise. The fact that Pelleas readily consents to this arrangement implies that the Lady is benevolent, in spite of what we remember about her treatment of Balin.<sup>8</sup>

To the love-blinded Pelleas, Nineve functions as an anima-aspect that is precisely outlined by von Franz from modern psychology:

Whenever a man's logical mind is incapable of discerning facts that are hidden in his unconscious, the anima helps him to dig them out. Even more vital is the role that the



anima plays in putting a man's mind in tune with the right inner values and thereby opening the way into more profound inner depths. (von Franz, p. 100)

In short, she shows the despairing Pelleas what every cooler-headed man, and every woman, knows: there are always other fish in the sea.

Nineve is used as a comparison against the lustfulness of Morgawse and Morgan, and the infidelity of Guinevere; early in our association with Nineve we learn she is a virgin (Merlin "laye aboute to have hir maydynhode"), but at the end she gives herself to Pelleas forever. This, plus the fact that she takes over after Merlin's death as Arthur's magical protector, and remains in that position until well after the Grail search, places her in opposition to Morgan.

As there is a parallel between Morgan and Hesiod's Daughters of the Night, so the ladies and damsels of the Lake resemble the Daughters of Nereus. These offspring are not as clearly defined in Hesiod as the Daughters of the Night, but the majority of the names deal with the bounty of the sea, and with successful venture. The last group of names refers to successful leadership, reflecting, as Brown says, "the qualities which Hesiod attributes to their father Nereus--unerring judgment and respect for justice" (Theogony, pp. 86-87).<sup>9</sup> Nineve, particularly in bringing Ettarde to



book, represents just these qualities in Le Morte Darthur. According to Brown, the Daughters of Nereus represent "the role of the sea in the life of man, and the existence of friendly powers in the human cosmos counterbalancing the dismal children of Night" (Theogony, p. 87). Thus, the "good" water sprites, best represented by Nineve, are shown to counterbalance the evils of Morgan and her brood.

A different group of beings is represented by Linet and Lionesse. These have no connection with water, but, like Morgan, are associated with Avalon (the castle of their brother Gringamore is on the Isle of Avalon: Works, I, 342). The resemblance stops there, however; both Lionesse and Linet are benevolent and wholesome women.

Linet was Gareth's guide to his first adventures. There she was at first a scold, then a helpful guide to Gareth to her sister's affections, and lastly protector of the lovers' morals until they could be married. Thus she reveals those shifts of function that we have come to expect from dream figures. There is no doubt, however, that she is a sorceress. When Lionesse and Gareth have finally met and fallen in love, they arrange an assignation for that night. But Linet, who knows of the assignation, sends a fearsome knight who wounds Gareth in the thighs--symbolic of his attempted sexual



transgression. Gareth overcomes and decapitates him, whereupon Linet comes in and replaces the knight's head. The knight is obviously a personalized conscience that can temporarily, but not permanently, be quieted. Later, when Lionesse is preparing a tourney, Linet, with her magical ointments, cures Gareth of his wounds so that he can take part (342). Later still, when Gawain and Gareth are unwittingly fighting each other, she stops the fight and heals their wounds by means of her magical ointments (357).

Lionesse displays toward Gareth changes of heart which are less indicative of the anima than of a normal woman: she first encourages him from the castle window during his fight with the Red Knight, then rejects him when he tries to enter the castle, then contrives to be where he will lodge for the night, and there becomes, as Nineve did, a warm and loving woman.

At the same time that Gareth and Lionesse are married, Arthur causes Gaheret, Gareth's brother, to marry Linet, and Agravain to wed Laurel, a niece to Lionesse. Thus is established another link between these sisters and the house of Orkney.

While there are incidental characters such as personal maids who display some anima characteristics, and Isolde,



who is a healer but not a sorceress, we have examined the major anima figures who exert a significant influence on the plot of Le Morte Darthur.



## CHAPTER VII FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Actaeon, while on a hunt, became separated from his companions. Wandering by chance into a grotto, he found Diana bathing, naked, in a pool, her unstrung bow and full quiver laid aside with her garments. Unable to reach her weapons, she dashed water in his face, saying, "Now tell, if you can, that you have seen the goddess nude." Whereupon he turned into a stag. His own hounds, scenting the great deer, pursued him, and in spite of his strongest efforts, ran him down. He tried to speak to them, but could only make deer-sounds. When the dogs had brought him down, one of his own hunting companions administered the coup de grace by slitting his throat (Michael Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans [New York, 1964], pp. 125-126; Ovid, The Metamorphoses, ed. Horace Gregory (New York, 1958), pp. 89-92).

<sup>2</sup>Hesiod, Theogony, ed. Norman O. Brown (New York, 1953), pp. 85-86.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess (New York, 1948), pp. 142-143. The idea of a trinity representing one multifaceted concept is an archetype. The three witches in Macbeth are an example. In Le Morte Darthur, when Gawain Uwain, and Marhalt go on their first adventure, they meet three women at a well. The women are respectively young, middle-aged, and old. Each knight takes one of the women as his guide to adventure. The women may be of the same archetype.

<sup>4</sup>Lucy Allen Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (Boston, 1901), p. 228.

<sup>5</sup>As an anima figure who is at the right place at the right time, perhaps Guinevere's attributes do not have to be displayed by Malory. Von Franz comments: "It is the presence of the anima that causes a man to fall suddenly in love when he sees a woman for the first time and knows



at once that this is 'she'" (von Franz, p. 180). This is precisely what happens to Arthur: "And there had Arthure the firste syght of queene Gwenyvere, the kyngis daughter of the londe of Camylarde, and ever afftir he loved hir" (Works, I, 39).

<sup>6</sup>The animals used by Malory as symbols for the four evangelists were conventional. There is a relief on Chartres Cathedral that portrays Matthew as a man, Mark as a lion, Luke as an ox, and John as an eagle, grouped around Christ on a throne. The winged lion as a symbol of Mark is particularly noticeable in Venice, where the Piazza de San Marco is named for the city's patron saint.

In a picture caption on page 29 of Man and His Symbols, the editor comments: "One of the countless symbolic or allegorical images of the sexual act is a deer hunt. . . . The sexual implication of the deer hunt is underlined by a medieval English folk song called 'The Keeper':

"The first doe he shot at he missed,  
And the second doe he trimmed he kissed,  
And the third ran away in a young man's heart,  
She's amongst the leaves of the green O."

A more direct sexual connection with the white hind is shown in numerous Danish, Norse, and English ballads of various periods. For examples of these, and for a discussion of the situation in English folk-song where the hunter's sweetheart appears before him as a white deer, see Lowry Charles Wimberly, Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads (New York, 1965), in the chapter "Transmigration and the Soul," especially pp. 52-58.

<sup>7</sup>These incidents are of considerable interest, aside from Nineve's participation. When Pellinore refuses to help a wounded knight and his sorrowing lady, he parallels an incident that occurred to Balin, except that Balin tried to help, and failed. The outcome was the same in both cases: the death of the wounded knight and his lady. But Balin is punished for this and other incidents, whereas Pellinore lives apparently without punishment (aside from sorrow because of his daughter's death) until Gawain later kills him in revenge for the death of his father.



The incident is also linked to another. On the Grail quest, Bors sees his brother Lionel being led away, naked and captive. At the same time, a damsel comes by, crying to be rescued from a knight who is following her. Bors helps the girl instead of his brother, and a hermit later tells him that he made the correct choice, saying that Lionel was a hardened sinner anyway, but that by saving the girl from rape, Bors had preserved both her soul and the soul of the knight who pursued her. (Lionel took exception to this view, and nearly killed his brother; see Chapter V, "The Possessed.")

These three incidents, all requiring that a choice be made between quests of apparently equal importance, form a good example of Malory's ability to "ring changes" upon a theme in order to extract from it a range of implications. The sum of the experiences of these three men, and the scope of the punishments visited upon them because of their choices, imply that no man can know whether he is doing the right thing, no matter what he does. This is an underlying theme of Le Morte Darthur.

<sup>8</sup>If this story were told wholly from Pelleas' point of view, we would have a variant of the widespread folk tale about the water-sprite who loves an earthly knight, but cannot resolve their dilemma, because, having learned to love, she can no longer be a sprite, but cannot live on land, whereas the knight cannot live in water. The archetype of this tale is the story of Undine, which appears in many guises and languages.

<sup>9</sup>One of the daughters of Nereus was Thetis, the sea-goddess, who married a mortal named Peleus. While it is extremely risky to try to connect names in Malory to persons in history or mythology, I cannot help feeling that the men in Le Morte Darthur whose names begin with the prefix "Pell"--Pelles, Pelleas, Pellinore, and Pellam--all derive from a general connection with bodies of water such as is represented in mythology by Peleus. Pellinore, for example, is king of the Out Isles. Pellam is the Maimed King who in Malory's sources also appears as the Fisher King (Malory calls the Fisher King Pecchere or Pescheors: Works, II, 861, 894). Pelles is Pellam's son. Without attempting to trace a group of undemonstrable analogies, I can see two connections between the life of Peleus and the "Pell" characters in



Malory: the magic spear that was presented to Peleus at his wedding, which compares to the sacred spear with which Balin wounded Pellam, and the fact that the mortal Peleus wed a sea-goddess, just as Pelleas, also a mortal, wed Nineve, a water-sprite. There seems to be an archetype here symbolizing the wedding of the sea and the land in a lasting and amicable relationship.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GRAIL QUEST

The story of the search for the Grail is so sprawling, and covers so many aspects of psycho-mythology, that it is important to keep two central things in mind while reading it.

The first is that the Grail, described in Malory only as a bowl or chalice, is, in psychological terms, a symbol of completion or wholeness for the entire Arthurian society.<sup>1</sup> While a sword, or a table, or a woman, may be the symbol of unity for a given man, the Grail is the same concept raised to the n<sup>th</sup> power, and is the object of striving for many men, not just one.

The second essential point is that the Grail search, taken as an entity, is a typical hero-quest (the monomyth), except that the name of the hero changes from time to time. The facts that Gawain never came close to the Grail, and that Lancelot almost had it in his hand, are essential failures and testings that had to be undergone before Galahad, at the apex of this structure of heroes, could see the Grail. The failures of all but Galahad define the difficulty of achieving the Grail, and make clear the excellence required of the man who attained the goal.



Within this large, diffuse framework, the adventures of individual knights conform also to the monomyth, except that they are proportionate to quests already familiar to us, such as those of Gareth, Balin, et al.

The Grail story is divided by Vinaver into nine sections, of which the central five deal with particular knights: Percival, Lancelot, Gawain, Bors, and Galahad. The first section, "The Departure," sets the tone for the quest. We have seen how it began, with Galahad taking his place at the Round Table, his withdrawal of Balin's sword from the floating rock, the vows of Gawain and the other knights to undertake the quest, and Arthur's sorrowing realization that the Round Table will never reconvene.

The caliber of the leaders of the quest is also established at the beginning:

So a lady that stood by the quene seyde,  
"Madam, for Goddis sake, ought he [Galahad] of  
ryght to be so good a knyght?"

"Ye, forsothe," seyde the quene, "for he  
ys of all partyes comyn of the beste knyghtes  
of the worlde and of the hyghest lynage: for  
sir Launcelot ys com but of the eyghth degré  
from oure Lorde Jesu Cryst, and thys sir Galahad  
ys the nyneth degré frome oure Lorde Jesu Cryst.  
Therefore I dare sey they be the grettist  
jantillmen of the worlde." (Works, II, 865)

If such men as these were to strive for the Grail,  
the chances of lesser knights were not great.



On the evening before the Grail knights are to depart, there is a foretaste of the marvels they will encounter:

Than anone they harde crakyng and cryyng of thundir, that hem thought the palyse sholde all to-dryve. So in the myddys of the blast entyrde a sonnebeame, more clerer by seven tymys than ever they saw day, and all they were alyghted of the grace of the Holy Goste. Than began every knyght to beholde other, and eyther saw other, by their semyng, fayrer than ever they were before. Natforthan there was no knyght that myght speke one worde a grete whyle, and so they loked every man on other as they had bene doome.

Than entird into the halle the Holy Grayle coverde with whyght samyte, but there was none that myght se hit nother whom that bare hit. And there was all the halle fulfyllled with good odoures, and every knyght had such metis and drynkes as he beste loved in thys worlde.

And whan the Holy Grayle had bene borne thorow the hall, than the holy vessell departed suddeynly, that they wyst nat where hit becam.

Than had they all breth to speke, and than the kyng yelded thankynges to God of Hys good grace that He had sente them. (Works, II, 865)

The second section, "The Miracles," begins with an adventure that contains the keys for many later events. Galahad has just completed the adventure of the fiend-ridden tomb that we examined in relation to Galahad as leader of a "hidden host." His squire, Melias de Lyle, requests that Galahad make him a knight, which Galahad does. They then encounter a cross on which is a legend saying that only a good knight can successfully negotiate



the road to the right, and that "if thou go on the lyffte honde thou shall nat there lyghtly wyne prouesse, for thou shalt in thys way be sone assayde" (Works, II, 883). Melias insists, against Galahad's advice, upon taking the left path. He finds a lodge with no one near, but in it a chair on which rests a gold crown. Melias scoops up the crown and rides off. A knight comes to him, demanding the crown, and when Melias refuses, the knight wounds him severely. Galahad happens by, and the knight attacks him also, but Galahad overcomes him. A second knight comes at Galahad, but Galahad lops off his left arm and chases him away. Galahad then takes the wounded Melias to a hermitage. The hermit explains what has happened:

"Sir . . . for hys synne he was thus wounded. And I mervayle," seyde the good man, "how ye durste take upon you so rych a thyng as the hyghe Order of Knyghthode ys withoute clene confession. That was the cause that ye were bittirly wounded, for the way on the ryght hande betokenyd the hyghe way of oure Lorde Jesu Cryst, and the way of a good trew lyver. And the othir way betokenyth the way of synnars and of myssebelevers. And whan the devyll saw your pryde and youre persumpcion [sic] for to take you to the queste of the Sankgreal, and that made you to be overthrowyn, for hit may nat be encheved but by vertuous lyvyng."

(Works, II, 886)

Melias, taking the left road, was wounded in the left side by the strange knight. When the second knight attacked Galahad, he lost his left arm. The hermit tells Melias that



the left road betokens the way of sinners and unbelievers. Speaking of dreams and modern psychology, von Frank says, "Among other things 'right' often means, psychologically, the side of consciousness, of adaptation, of being 'right,' while 'left' signifies the sphere of unadapted, unconscious reactions and sometimes even of something 'sinister'" (von Franz, in Man and His Symbols, p. 215). Malory associates "left" with wrongness--as we do today.

Continuing from the previous speech, the hermit goes on:

"Also the wrytyng on the crosse was a signifi-  
cacyon of hevynly dedys, and of knyghtly dedys  
in Goddys workys, and no knyghtes dedys in  
worldly workis; and pryde ys hede of every  
synne: that caused thys knyght to departe  
frome sir Galahad. And where thou toke the  
crowne of golde thou ded syn in covetyse and  
in theffte. All this was no knyghtly dedys.  
And so, sir Galahad, the holy knyght which  
fought with the two knyghtes, the two knyghtes  
signyfyeth the two dedly synnes whych were  
holy in thys knyght, sir Melias; and they  
myght nat withstonde you, for ye ar withoute  
dedly synne." (Works, II, 886)

The phrase "deadly sin" used by the hermit is one of the few references in Malory to the seven deadly sins that were so important to medieval peoples. According to Bloomfield:

The concept was at first allied to the religious and scientific yearnings of mankind which preceded the adoption of Christianity by the Western world. . . . Carried to the West by John Cassian



in the fifth century, incorporated into official Catholic teaching by Gregory the Great in the seventh, and spread by the penitential books, the Sins became an important part of medieval Catholicism. . . . For most men in the later Middle Ages, the Sins were as real as the parish church itself, and readily entered into everyday life. . . . In the story of this concept we see shifts of the tides of opinion. . . . At first the carnal sins, gluttony and lechery, were emphasized, then pride and envy, and finally, in the late Middle Ages, avarice and sloth.<sup>2</sup>

This is the background for the hermit's citations of the sins of pride (the "hede of every synne"), "covetyse" and "theffte"--in other words, avarice. Pride is a central issue throughout Le Morte Darthur; Arthur's excessive reliance on the Round Table is a form of it; the desire of all the knights for "worship" is another. Even the highly spiritual Percival's sister, when she consents to be bled for the benefit of the sick lady, says "'Truly . . . and I dye for the helth of her I shall gete me grete worship and soule helthe, and worship to my lynayge. . . ." (Works, II, 1002). The connection between "worship" and "soule helthe" reveals again the belief that if secular actions are performed to an ideal code, they become sanctified. Earlier we heard it said that if a knight lived up to the ideals of the High Order of Knighthood, he would be physically invulnerable, just as the churchgoer whose spiritual life was holy enough was armored against the onslaughts of the devil.

The finding of abandoned and desolate chapels is a commonplace, as we shall see, among the Grail knights.



Than sir Galahad com to a mountayne where he founde a chapell passyng olde, and founde therein nobody, for all was desolate. And there he kneled before the awter and besought Goð of good counceyle, and so as he prayde he harde a voyce that seyde,

"Go thou now, thou adventurous knyght, to the Castell of Madyns, and there do thou away the wycked customes!" (Works, II, 887)

The ruined chapels are symbols of incompleteness, as well as of destruction (by time or violence), and except in the case of Galahad, probably also indicate the condition of the souls of the knights who find them. The mysterious voice, which we first heard in Balin's adventures, is another commonplace, and has its psychological counterpart in the promptings which come from the unconscious, perhaps in the form of hunches or intuition. This inner voice, so frequently interpreted as an external one, is an archetype as old as man himself. Malory is especially fond of using it to give the knights their duty assignments. Moorman comments, "Twice (998, 1003), Malory assigns to a mystical voice commands given to Galahad by other characters in the French text, presumably in order to lend these commands supernatural authority."<sup>3</sup>

As Galahad approaches the Castle of Maidens, first an old man, and then a group of seven women, warn him against going to the castle. Nevertheless, he crosses the river,



and seven knights attack him at once. He beats them and chases them through the castle. A gentlewoman later tells him that seven years past, the seven knights had taken over the castle and its fiefs, and had raped the daughter of the castle's duke. Thus it is shown that the evil that Galahad has been sent to root out is another of the seven sins: lechery.

The number seven occurs more frequently in the Grail story than in the rest of Le Morte Darthur together. Like other odd numbers, seven has been connected with religious observances from the oldest times. St. Edmund, Bishop of Canterbury in the early 1200's, gives the following listing in his Speculum ecclesiae:

There is the contemplation of God in Holy Scripture, which gives us a knowledge of the seven sins, the seven beatitudes, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the ten commandments, the seven virtues, the twelve articles of the creed, the seven sacraments, the seven works of mercy, the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer, the seven joys of the body and seven joys of the soul in Heaven, and the seven pains of Hell. (Summarized in Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century, pp. 222-223)

During Gawain's adventures a few pages later, a hermit explains to him the meaning of the Castle of Maidens:

"Also I may sey you that the Castell of Maydyns betokenyth the good soulys that were in preson before the Incarnacion of



oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. And the seven knyghtes betokenyth the seven dedly synnes that regned that tyme in the worlde. And I may lyckyn the good knyght Galahad unto the Sonne of the Hyghe Fadir that lyght within a maydyn and bought all the soules oute of thralle: so ded sir Galahad delyver all the maydyns oute of the woofull castell." (Works, II, 892)

Now Galahad meets Lancelot and Percival in a "waste forest," and, because Galahad is "new dysgysed" they do not know him. Lancelot attacks Galahad and is knocked down, horse and man, after which Galahad turns to Percival and knocks him off his horse, "and had nat the swerde swarved sir Percyvale had be slayne" (893). Malory is very careful about how he allows Galahad to kill; Galahad is permitted to wreak havoc among unchristened people or nameless evil knights, but he kills no one that the reader knows. A hermit comments to Gawain at one point, "Sir Galahad hymself alone bete hem all seven [knights] the day toforne, but hys lyvyng ys such that he shall sle no man lyghtly" (892).

There are two possible reasons for keeping Galahad pure in this sense. Both Gawain and Lancelot, among others, are rightly accused by hermits of being "grete murtherars," and Malory probably did not want to have Galahad tarred by the same brush, no matter how just his cause. Malory recognized the thinness of the distinction between killing a man



deliberately, in the sense of murder as we know it, and killing him in a duel which one enters intending to be the victor regardless of cost.

A second possible reason is pointed out by Theodore Spencer in Death and Elizabethan Tragedy, where he states that the Middle Ages feared sudden death most, because it precluded preparation and repentance.<sup>4</sup> Galahad's mission would be tainted if he slew his opponents without giving them time to prepare for the journey.

After the contest with his father, Galahad rides away, and Percival and Lancelot separate. Lancelot begins his adventure on a note of desolation:

But syr Launcelot rode overthwarte and endelonge a wylde foreyst and hylde no patthe but as wylde adventure lad hym. And at the last he com to a stony crosse whych departed two wayes in waste londe, and by the crosse was a stone that was a marble, but hit was so durke that sir Launcelot myght nat wete what hyt was. Than sir Launcelot loked bysyde hym and saw an olde chapell, and there he wente to have founde people.

And anone sir Launcelot . . . wente to the chapell dore and founde hit waste and brokyn. And within he founde a fayre awter full rychely arayde with clothe of clene sylke, and there stode a clene fayre candyllstykke whych bare six grete candyls therein, and the candilstyk was of sylver; and whan sir Launcelot saw thys lyght he had grete wylle for to entir into the chapell, but he coude fynde no place where he myght entir. (Works, II, 893-894)



This is allegory as well as archetype. The waste forests are those in which the impure of heart must wander before finding redemption, as well as the waste spaces of the soul before they are fructified by the release of unconscious energies. The doorless chapel, in addition to signifying Lancelot's inadequate state of preparation, symbolizes the Grail room in the castle of Corbenic which Lancelot is forbidden to enter.

Frustrated, Lancelot lies at the foot of the stone cross and falls into a stupor, "half wakyng and half slepyng." Two white palfreys come to the cross bearing a sick knight. Suddenly a candlestick with six tapers is borne before the cross by invisible beings, followed by a silver table and the "holy vessell of the Sankgreall which sir Lancelot had sene toforetyme in kynge Pescheors house" (894). The sick knight kisses the vessel and is instantly healed--proof that the Grail signifies wholeness. All this Lancelot watches, "for he was overtakyn with synne, that he had no power to ryse agayne the holy vessell" (894-895).

The healed knight, apparently not fully agreeing with Melias's hermit who denounced "covetyse" and "theffte," takes Lancelot's helmet and sword, and then for good measure, "he toke there sir Launcelottis horse, for he was bettir than



hys, and so departed they frome the crosse" (895). Before they leave, the knight and his squire observe the sleeping Lancelot: "'I dare well sey,' seyde the squyre, 'that he dwellith in som dedly synne whereof he was never confessed'" (895).

Sorrowing, and convinced, because of the theft of his horse and accoutrements, that God is angry with him, Lancelot goes to a hermitage to be confessed. His exchange with the hermit is illuminating:

"My name ys sir Launcelot du Lake, that hath bene ryght well seyde off. And now my good fortune ys chonged, for I am the moste wrecch of the worlde."

The ermyte behylde hym and had mervayle whye he was so abaysshed.

"Sir," seyde the ermyte, "ye ought to thanke God more than ony knyght lyvyng, for He hath caused you to have more worldly worship than ony knyght that ys now lyvyng. And for youre presumpcion to take uppon you in dedely synne for to be in Hys presence, where Hys fleyssh and Hys blood was, which caused you ye myght nat se hyt with youre worldely yen, for He woll nat appere where such synners bene but if hit be unto their grete hurte other unto their shame. And there is no knyght now lyvyng that ought to yelde God so grete thanke os ye, for He hath yevyn you beauté, bownté, semelynes, and grete strengthe over all other knyghtes. And therefore ye ar the more beholdyn unto God than ony other man to love Hym and drede Hym, for youre strengthe and your manhode woll litill avayle you and God be agaynste you."



Than sir Launcelot wepte with hevy harte  
and seyde,

"Now I know well ye sey me sothe."

"Sir," seyde the good man, "hyde none olde  
synne frome me."

"Truly," seyde sir Launcelot, "that were  
me full lothe to discover, for thys fourtene  
yere I never discoverde one thyng that I have  
used, and that may I now wyghte my shame and  
my disadvantages."

And than he tolde there the good man all  
hys lyff, and how he had loved a quene  
unmesurably and oute of mesure longe.

"And all my grete dedis of armys that I  
have done for the moste party was for the  
quenys sake, and for hir sake wolde I do  
batayle were hit ryght other wronge. And  
never dud I batayle all only for Goddis sake,  
but for to wyne worship and to cause me the  
bettir to be beloved, and litill or nought  
I thanked never God of hit." Than sir Launcelot  
seyde, "Sir, I pray you counceyle me."

"Sir, I woll counceyle you," seyde the  
ermyte, "yf ye shall ensure me by youre  
knyghthode ye shall no more com in that  
quenys felyship as much as ye may forbere."

And than sir Launcelot promysed hym that  
he nolde, by the faythe of hys body. (896-  
897)

At the beginning of this sequence we begin to hear  
overtones of the wheel-of-fortune motif, which is to become  
more prominent during the days of strife at the Round Table.  
We also get the nearest thing to a physical description of  
Lancelot as is available in the book. We learn that he has



not been confessed for fourteen years, which is presumably the length of time he has been in touch with Guinevere.

The theme of "desmesure" in the middle of the passage touches upon one of Lancelot's personal faults (in addition to the lack of "stabilité"), as distinct from the religious sins of which he is guilty.

He confesses that he would do battle for the queen whether she is in the right or the wrong, and he is to prove this when he rescues her from the fire to which she has been justly condemned. In fact, that crime results from the breaking of the vow we have just heard Lancelot give: that he will eschew the queen's company.

When Lancelot asks about the words spoken by the mysterious voice, the hermit proceeds with his analysis:

"For men may undirstonde a stone ys harde of kynde, and namely one more than another, and that ys to undirstonde by the, sir Launcelot, for thou wolt nat leve thy synne for no goodnes that God hath sente the. Therefore thou arte more harder than ony stone, and woldyst never be made neyssh [soft] nother by watir nother by fyre, and that ys the hete of the Holy Goste may nat entir in the. . . .

"And why the voyce called the bitterer than the woode, for wheresomever much synne dwellith there may be but lytyll swettnesse; wherefore thou art lykened to an olde rottyn tre.

"Now have I shewed the why thou art harder than the stone and bitterer than the tre; now shall I shew the why thou art more naked and



barer than the fygge-tre. Hit befelle that  
oure Lorde on Palme Sondag preched in Jerusalem,  
and there He founde in the people that all  
hardnes was herberowd in them, and there He  
founde in all the towne nat one that wolde  
herberow Hym. And than He wente oute of the  
towne and founde in myddis the way a fygge-  
tre which was ryght fayre and well garnysshed  
of levys, but fruyte had hit none. Than oure  
Lorde cursed the tre that bare no fruyte; that  
betokenyth the fyg-tre unto Jerusalem that had  
levys and no fruyte. So thou, sir Launcelot,  
whan the Holy Grayle was brought before the,  
He founde in the no fruyte, nother good thought  
nother good wylle, and defouled with lechory."  
(897-898)

Here again is the theme of fruitlessness. Here also  
is the first accusation of lechery made directly to Lancelot.  
He is the first Round Table knight to have his sins enumerated  
to him during the Grail search, and the implication may be  
that lechery is the "first" (chief) sin of the Round Table,  
as Lancelot is its "first" member.

Lancelot has earlier been associated with a tree, and  
at the same time was given a hint about lechery, though he  
may not have recognized it at the time. While riding in the  
forest, he sees a falcon flying unattended, its "lunes"  
(retaining lines) dangling. The lunes become entangled in  
a tree, and, because he feels sorry for the bird, Lancelot  
rides to help. A woman appears, crying about the loss of  
her falcon, and asks the knight to rescue it. Lancelot



divests himself of his armor and other clothing except his shirt, rescues the bird, ties its lunas to a limb, and tosses limb and bird down to the waiting lady. At this point, her husband appears with naked sword in hand and announces that he will now kill Lancelot. Weaponless and half-naked, Lancelot tries to reason with the man, but when this is unavailing, he breaks off a bough of the tree, leaps to the ground in such a way that his horse is between him and the angry knight, knocks the knight down with the bough, and beheads him. Lancelot then dons his armor and rides off, muttering about ingratitude (Works, I, 282-284).

As we have seen, in dream psychology animals are indices of the human relationship to nature, and, as it was sympathy for the bird that led Lancelot into the adventure, this interpretation seems especially applicable in his case. The naked man in a tree is often a symbol of Christ on the cross, and while that imagery seems far-fetched in this instance, perhaps it is not. The picture of the naked man in the tree and a man with a drawn sword standing below, is something of a classic presentation of the idea of sacrifice.

Lancelot's breaking off of the bough with which to conquer his challenger is reminiscent of Aeneas's golden bough, which he uses to overcome the hazards of the underworld.



The falcon, a symbol of freedom trapped by its lures (normally held by a woman) could well be Lancelot himself, held in leading-strings by Guinevere, so that wherever he goes, and no matter how free he may seem, he is trapped as the falcon is trapped.

To terminate this intricate maze of associations, it is of interest to note that the falcon was apparently used in the symbolism of courtly love, to represent the entire man-woman relationship.<sup>5</sup> (I am indebted to T. M. Pearce for this suggestion.)

The first knight to be dealt with on an individual basis in the Grail story is Percival. This is fitting; Moorman comments: "As the original Grail knight [in continental sources] he had to appear in the story, but he has no function there except to serve as an excuse for introducing a few more hermits" (Moorman, The Book of Kyng Arthur, p. 41).

Vinaver holds that Malory, in his pursuit of believability, eliminated much of the religious content of the Grail story in his redaction from the French, but Moorman takes issue with him in a passage pertinent to our study:

Malory's great changes in the purely religious parts of his French source occur in the explanations of the knights' dreams. The basic pattern



is this: one of the knights falls asleep, dreams, and, puzzled by his vision, goes to a hermit for illumination. . . . [Malory] pares away from the hermits' comments the purely religious commentary which is alien to his purpose, yet he is always careful to keep, usually in summation, the religious core of the argument presented. . . . It will be seen that Malory . . . is not attempting to "secularize" the Grail. Had this been his purpose, he could have very easily omitted the hermits altogether, thereby increasing the pace of the narrative and shifting the reader's attention completely to the physical adventures of the knights. (The Book of Kynq Arthur, p. 34)

It might not have been so easy for Malory to eliminate the hermits as Moorman seems to think. In the Grail section, these recluses take over the functions of spiritual guides which heretofore have been performed by animals and damsels. The hermits are also useful as a literary device: whereas in other stories the damsels must seek out the knights, here the knights must come to the hermits in their fixed abodes, and this is more suitable when one is writing about a quest. It is also important to understand that the hermits, living in their forest caves, were an integral part of medieval thinking. The following passage from a religious historian is pertinent:

At the end of the century, c. 1400, comes the most elaborate treatise of all, the Desert of Religion. . . . A Northern English poem . . . it is a comprehensive allegory, made to include



all the allegories that the author could find. The Desert is the religious life, with its penances and its temptations. The author's idea of the Desert is not at all like the Thebaid; with a characteristically north-European point of view, he conceives the Desert as a forest full of trees and wild beasts. We are introduced to no less than twenty allegorical trees. . . . With all its quaintness, this poem is an impressive reminder of the hold that the idea of the Desert, the Desert Fathers and the solitary life had upon the later Middle Ages. It is not surprising that the solitaries and the Carthusians were the most active and influential spiritual writers and spiritual guides of the time. (Pantin, pp. 234-235)

It is no surprise, then, to find Percival in a hermitage at the beginning of his story. The recluse, it turns out, is Percival's aunt. She tells him that before she became a recluse she was Queen of the Waste Lands, "and I was called the quene of moste rychesse in the worlde. And hit pleased me never so much my rychesse as doth my poverté" (Works, II, 905).

When Percival asks his aunt where he can find Galahad so that he may "felyship" with him, the woman tells him to go to the Castle of Corbenic, "where the Maymed Kyng ys lyyng, for there shall ye here trew tydynges of hym" (907). He rides "tyll aftir evynsong, and than he herde a clock smyte" (907). The striking of the clock is an exact parallel to the horn that Balin heard; it is an announcement of



Percival's chief adventure. Percival finds lodging for the night, and in the morning goes to the monastery for mass, where he gets his first glimpse of an archetypal figure.

On the ryght syde he saw a pew closed with iron, and behynde the awter he saw a ryche bedde and a fayre, as of cloth of sylke and golde. Than sir Percivale aspyed that therein was a man or a woman, for the visayge was coverde. Than he leffte of hys lokynge and herd hys servyse.

And whan hit cam unto the sakarynge, he that lay within the perclose dressyd hym up and uncoverde hys hede, and than hym besemed a passyng olde man, and he had a crowne of golde uppon hys hede, and hys shuldirs were naked and unhyllid unto hys navyll. And than sir Percyvale aspyed hys body was full of grete woundys, both on the shuldirs, armys, and vysayge. . . . And hym semed to be of the ayge of three hondred wynter. (907-908)

As I have observed before, the similarities between the examples used by Malory and those used to illustrate modern psychology are sometimes astonishing. On page 166 of Man and His Symbols is a reproduction of a woodcut from a seventeenth-century alchemical manuscript that shows a sick king lying in a box bed, with the curtains open. He wears a crown, is supported half-upright by pillows, and is naked to the waist. (There is also a chamber-pot beside the bed; a detail overlooked by Malory.) The caption states that the illustration "depicts a king who has fallen ill--a common symbolic image of the emptiness and boredom (in the consciousness) that can



mark the initial stage of the individuation process." This process, and its relation to the sick or maimed king, is more fully explained in the text:

The actual process of individuation--the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self--generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it. This initial shock amounts to a sort of "call," although it is not often recognized as such. . . .

Or perhaps everything seems outwardly all right, but beneath the surface a person is suffering from a deadly boredom that makes everything seem meaningless and empty. Many myths and fairy tales symbolically describe this initial stage in the process of individuation by telling of a king who has fallen ill or grown old. Other familiar story patterns are that a royal couple is barren; or that a monster steals all the women, children, horses, and wealth of the kingdom. . . . Thus it seems as if the initial encounter with the Self casts a dark shadow ahead of time, or as if the "inner friend" comes at first like a trapper to catch the helplessly struggling ego in his snare. (von Franz, Man and His Symbols, pp. 166-167)

Observe the parallels to Le Morte Darthur. The "wounding of the personality" mentioned by von Franz is symbolized in Malory by the "grete woundys" on the sick king's body. The "initial shock" which symbolizes the beginning of the individuation process is a "sort of 'call'"--Balin's horn, and Percival's striking clock (with its overtones of the passing of time). The sick or maimed kings encountered by Balin and



Percival are symbolic of the spiritual emptiness and boredom of the Round Table knights. The barren royal couple is Arthur and Guinevere. The "monster" that steals all the children is Arthur when he drowns those born on May Day, and the sick knight who is healed by the Grail and then steals Lancelot's horse is another facet of the same symbolism. We can probably find no more striking parallels between Jung and Malory than these.

The fact that Malory's sick king chooses the time of the "sakarynge" to rise and unveil himself has numerous archetypal overtones. "Sakarynge" is defined in Vinaver's glossary (compiled for him by G. L. Brook) as "consecration" (Works, III, 1730). The sick king, then--the symbol of boredom and meaninglessness--rises and identifies himself by removing the cloth from his face at the moment that the Host is consecrated. In the Catholic church, the Host is a circle of unleavened bread, and, when consecrated by the priest, becomes, in the eyes of believers, the body of Christ, as the wine in a chalice becomes His blood. In a discussion of the Orphic mysteries, Joseph Henderson points out some archetypal relationships:

The early Christian church saw in Orpheus the prototype of Christ. Both religions brought to the late-Hellenistic world the promise of a future divine life. Because they were men, yet



also mediators of the divine, for the multitudes of the dying Grecian culture in the days of the Roman Empire they held the longed-for hope of future life.

There was, however, one important difference between the religion of Orpheus and the religion of Christ. Though sublimated into a mystical form, the Orphic mysteries kept alive the old Dionysiac religion. . . .

Christianity, on the other hand, dispelled the mysteries. . . .

Of course the asceticism of early Christianity did not last. The memory of the cyclic mysteries haunted its followers to the extent that the Church eventually had to incorporate many practices from the pagan past into its rituals. . . .

The ritual that has survived . . . and that still contains the meaning of a central initiation mystery for the devout, is the Catholic practice of the elevation of the Chalice. It has been described by Dr. Jung in "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass":

The lifting up of the chalice in the air prepares the spiritualization . . . of the wine. This is confirmed by the invocation to the Holy Ghost that immediately follows. . . . The invocation serves to infuse the wine with holy spirit, for it is the Holy Ghost who begets, fulfills, and transforms. . . . After the elevation, the chalice was, in former times, set down to the right of the Host, to correspond with the blood that flowed from the right side of Christ. (Henderson, Man and His Symbols, pp. 142-143)

I have quoted this section at length because it not only bears upon the adventure being discussed, but is central to many other events in the Grail story. The Grail, for



example, may be the original of the holy chalice used in the mass, because it is said by Malory to have been the vessel used to preserve the blood that flowed from Christ's side on the cross.

Thus, in psycho-mythological terms, when the Christian mass has reached the point that harks back to the Orphic mysteries, which themselves reflect the deepest needs of the human spirit--at this point, the symbol of boredom rises and partakes of the ritual. This is a clear-cut case of the hungry portion of Percival's--and the entire Round Table's--consciousness striving for wholeness (healing) through identification with a transcendent ideal.

As Percival rides on in search of Galahad, he is attacked by twenty knights, but Galahad shows up in time to save him. However, the knights have slain Percival's horse, so that he cannot pursue Galahad. In psychological terms, Percival's spiritual mentor has come to his aid, but Percival is not yet ready to use him as he should be used, and so he cannot catch up with him--just as many of us have dreamed of seeing something desirable that we cannot overtake because of a mysterious immobility.

Percival falls asleep in frustration and sorrow, and when he wakes at midnight, a woman appears before him who



agrees to get him a horse if he will promise to "fulfyller my wylle whan I somon the." Percival promises, and shortly she returns with a horse "that was ynly black" (Works, II, 911). Percival thoughtlessly leaps upon the animal.

And anone as he was uppon hym he threst to hym with hys spurres, and so rode by a foreste; and the moone shoone clere, and within an owre and lasse he bare hym four dayes journey thense untyll he com to a rowghe watir whych rored, and that horse wolde have borne hym into hit.

And whan sir Percivale cam nye the brymme he saw the watir so boysteous he doutted to passe over hit, and than he made a sygne of the crosse in hys forehed. Whan the fende felte hym so charged he shooke of sir Percivale, and he wente into the watir cryynge and rorynge and makying [sic] grete sorowe, and hit semed unto hym [Percivale] that the watir brente. Than sir Percivale perceyved hit was a fynde, the whych wolde have broughte hym unto perdicion. Than he commended hymselff unto God, and prayde oure Lorde to kepe hym frome all suche temptacions. (911-912)

Percival is now deep in the demonic world, where the clear moon and the dark forest are sinister presences, and where the "horses and hounds of romance" that Frye talks about have become devilish beasts that are "ynly black." Again, dream psychology uses similar images. The caption for a picture of fighting stallions in Man and His Symbols states, "Wild horses often symbolize the uncontrollable instinctive drives that can erupt from the unconscious--and that many people try to repress" (von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 174).<sup>6</sup>



In his next adventure, Percival sees a serpent carrying a young lion, and an older lion chasing the serpent. Percival draws sword to help the lion, "for he was the more naturall beste of the two" (Works, II, 912). When the serpent has been killed, the lion "made no sembelaunte to fyght with hym but made hym all the chere that a beest myghte make a man." Percival removes his helmet, and "stroked hym on the necke and on the sholdirs and thanked God of the feliship of that beste" (912-913). The lion and the knight sleep together amicably.

During the night, Percival dreams that he meets two ladies. The younger one is riding on a lion, and the older upon a serpent. The young one warns him that on the morrow he must fight the strongest champion and "'the grettist lorde of the worlde'" (913). The young lady then vanishes, but the older one says that the serpent that Percival had slain was her pet. She adds, "'I wolde . . . for the amendis of my beste that ye becam my man'" (914). When he refuses, she responds with a threat:

"No?" seyde she. "Truly, ye were never but my servaunte syn ye resseyved the omyage of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. Therefore I you ensure, in what place that I may fynde you withoute kepyng, I shall take you as he that somtyme was my man." (914)



(The structure of the lady's sentence is confused; I think she means that Percival was her man until he paid homage to Christ, and that therefore she has a prior claim upon him.)

Percival awakes, troubled, in time to see a ship land on a beach below him. The ship is covered in white samite, and at the helm stands an old man clothed "in lyknes of a pryste." He interprets Percival's dream thus:

"She which rode upon the lyon, hit betokenyth the new law of Holy Chirche, that is to undirstonde fayth, good hope, belyeve and baptyme; for she semed yonger than that othir hit ys grete reson, for she was borne in the Resurreccion and the Passion of oure Lorde Jesu Cryste. And for grete love she cam to the to warne the of thy grete batayle that shall befall the."

"With whom," seyde sir Percivale, "shall I fyght?"

"With the moste douteful champion of the worlde, for, as the lady seyde, but if thou quyte the welle thou shalt nat be quytte by losyng of one membir, but thou shalt be shamed to the worldis ende. And she that rode on the serpente signifieth the olde law, and that serpente betokenyth a fynde. And why she blamed the that thou slewyst hir servaunte, hit betokenyth nothyng aboute the serpente ye slewe; that betokenyth the devyll that thou rodist on to the roche [the black horse]. And whan thou madist a sygne of the crosse, there thou slewyst hym and put away hys power. And whan she asked the amendis and to becom her man, than thou saydist nay, that was to make the beleve on her and leve thy baptym."

(915)



The white ship departs, and shortly a black ship appears. This time a beautiful woman, richly dressed, is at the helm. She tells Percival that he will die in this wilderness without her help, and asks whether he has eaten recently. It seems an odd question, but, as we shall see, Malory is making a point.

"Nay, madam, truly I yeete no mete nyghe thes three dayes, but late here I spake with a good man that fedde me with hys good wordys and refreysed me gretly."

"A, sir knyght, that same man," seyde she, "ys an inchaunter and a multiplier of wordis, for and ye belyve hym, ye shall be playnly shamed and dye in thys roche for pure hunger and be etyn with wylde bestis. And ye be a yonge man and a goodly knyght, and I shall helpe you and ye woll."

"What ar ye," seyde sir Percivale, "that proferyth me thus so grete kyndenesse?"

"I am," seyde she, "a jantillwoman that am diseryte, whych was the rychest woman of the worlde."

"Damesell," seyde sir Percivale, "who hath disheryte you? For I have grete pité of you."

"Sir," seyde she, "I dwelled with the grettist man of the worlde, and he made me so fayre and so clere that there was none lyke me. And of that grete beawté I had a litill pryde, more than I oughte to have had. Also I sayde a worde that plesed hym nat, and than he wolde nat suffir me to be no lenger in his company. And so he drove me frome myne herytayge and disheryted me for ever, and he had never pité of me nother of none of my counceyle nother of my courte. And sitthyn,



sir knyght, hit hath befallyn me to be so  
overthrowyn and all myne, yet I have benomme  
hym som of hys men and made hem to becom my  
men, for they aske never nothyng of me but  
I gyff hem that and much more. Thus I and my  
servauntes werre ayenste hym nyght and day,  
therefore I know no good knyght nor no good  
man but I gete hem on my syde and I may.  
And for that I know that ye ar a good knyght  
I beseche you to helpe me, and for ye be a  
felowe of the Rounde Table, wherefore ye  
ought nat to fayle no jantillwoman which ys  
disherite and she besought you of helpe."  
(916-917)

The weather is hot, and the woman has her servants  
bring a pavilion and pitch it on the sands. There Percival  
sleeps "a grete whyle." When he awakes, he asks for food,  
and is served "all maner of meetes that he cowde thynke on.  
Also he dranke there the strengyst wyne that ever he dranke,  
hym thought, and therewith he was chaffett a lityll more  
than he oughte to be" (918). The wine causes him to view  
the woman with favor, and he importunes her to be his. After  
a coy refusal, she says that she will accede if he will swear,  
as a true knight, to be her servant from then on. To this he  
agrees.

And than two squyres were commaunded to make a  
bedde in myddis of the pavelon, and anone she  
was unclothed and leyde therein. And than sir  
Percivale layde hym downe by her naked. And  
by adventure and grace he saw hys swerde ly on  
the erthe naked, where in the pomell was a rede  
crosse and the sygne of the crucifixe therin,  
and bethought hym of hys knyghthode and hys



promyse made unto the good man tofornehande,  
and than he made a sygne in the forehed of hys.  
And therewith the pavylon turned up-so-downe  
and than hit chonged unto a smooke and a blak  
clowde. (918-919)

The woman herself disappears into her ship, expressing her disappointment, "and so she wente with the wynde, rorynge and yellynge, that hit semed all the water brente after her." In a rage of shame and sorrow, Percival drives his sword into his thigh in self-punishment and says, "'A, good Lord, take thys in recompensacion of that I have myssedone ayenste The, Lorde!'" (919).

Then, as he ponders over how close he has come to losing his virginity, "that may never be recoverde aftir hit ys onys loste," the white ship comes back "from the Oryente," guided by the old man he saw the day before. Percival relates his adventure with the woman.

"A, good knyght," seyde he, "thou arte a foole, for that jantillwoman was the mayster fyende of helle, which hath pousté over all other devyllis. And that was the olde lady that thou saw in thyne avision rydyng on the serpente."

Than he tolde sir Percivale how oure Lord Jesu Cryste bete hym oute of hevyn for hys synne, whycch was the moste bryghtist angell of hevyn, and therefore he loste hys heritaige. "And that was the champion that thou fought withall, whych had overcom the, had nat the grace of God bene. Now, sir Percivale, beware and take this for an insample." (920)



Much of the symbolism used in this episode is fairly obvious: the white and black ships, the pitching of the pavilion on sand, and so on. There is also the fact that at first Percival is satisfied for his sustenance with a holy man's words, but after sleeping in the devil's pavilion, he wakes to ask for food. We will see in the case of Bors how abstinence from food and general mortification of the flesh somehow increases one's chances of attaining the Grail.

Aside from these matters, there are some interesting elements in these passages. One such element is that Percival is more concerned about the risk to his virginity than to his soul. This terminology reveals that we have witnessed an attack by the demonic world of experience upon the world of innocence, to use Frye's terms. He comments:

In the analogy of innocence the divine or spiritual figures are usually parental, wise old men with magical powers. . . . Among the human figures children are prominent, and so is the virtue most closely associated with childhood and the state of innocence--chastity, a virtue which in this structure of imagery usually includes virginity. . . . [Chastity] is easiest to associate with young women . . . but male chastity is important too, as the Grail romances show. (Frye, p. 151)

We have seen this concern for chastity in a number of people, both in and outside the Grail section: Percival's sister, Bors, the Fair Maid of Astolat, and others. It is



because of his sexual purity that Galahad is allowed to achieve the Grail.

It is also noteworthy that the devil is represented as a woman. While in any generation there are men who would find no surprise in this, it is rare in literature. A woman may be pictured as the devil's agent, or his unwitting helper, but seldom as the devil himself. What led Malory to use a female personification of the "master fiend of Hell" is an intriguing question. First in our consideration, of course, is the psychological one. There is little doubt that she is an evil anima figure projected from Percival's unconscious, just as the old man in his white ship is a surrogate for Percival's conscience. Secondly, in a society infused with the courtly love ideal, what more natural than to postulate a female devil in opposition to the Virgin Mary? Thirdly, there is sheer literary necessity: Percival's virginity is to be tested; therefore a woman must be present.

But while each of these is a possibility, none of them accounts for all the evidence. What does "the olde law" mean? The term is used in another place in Le Morte Darthur, when a hermit tells Bors:

"Whan ye toke the batayle for the lady, by  
her shall ye undirstonde the law of oure Lord  
Jesu Cryst and Holy Chirche, and by the othir



lady ye shall undirstonde the olde lawe and  
the fynde which all day warryth ayenst Holy  
Chirch." (Works, II, 967)

In Catholic terminology, the old law is the covenant law of the Old Testament, while the new law is the law of love brought by Christ. D. W. Robertson, in A Preface to Chaucer, discusses several ways in which the Old Law-New Law dichotomy was treated in the Middle Ages. While analyzing Capellanus's The Art of Courtly Love, he points out one of these:

The distinction between the "heart" and the "will" here is based on the discussion of the Old Law and the New Law in Romans 7, where to do something contrary to the will means to allow concupiscence to overcome the will. . . . When the lover says, therefore, that his heart has diverted his will "from its natural path," he implies that his concupiscence is leading toward illicit and unnatural conduct.<sup>7</sup>

The old law cited in Romans 7 (see especially Romans 7.6) is essentially the force of desire as opposed to strength of will. Thus we see that the connection between the old law and Percival's temptation by a woman relates to the control imposed by his will. The demands of the flesh are unceasing; this is the fiend that "all day warryth ayenst Holy Chirch." Thus the struggle depicted in Percival's adventure is indeed over the preservation of his virginity, which in a larger sense is his soul.<sup>8</sup> In psychological terms, "the olde law"



is comparable to the monsters and chimeras encountered on the soul-journey. In the struggle to liberate the energies of the unconscious, it is important that these mighty forces not be allowed to subdue the conscious portions of the mind. The conscious must always dominate.

There is another possible meaning of "the olde law" that would also account for the use of a female devil. It is that the woman may represent a concept of matriarchy that existed in rural areas in Malory's time, especially in Scotland--Morgan's home--where the matriarchal Pictish culture had been absorbed, perhaps imperfectly, into patriarchal Scottish religious forms.

Of all the mysteries that challenged the primitive mind, the greatest immediate ones must have been those of germination, growth, and death. Man could hunt, kill, and build--and so could woman--but man could not reproduce. (In fact, in the early stages of some cultures, it seems not to have been known that man was essential to pregnancy in a woman. In very primitive Greece, for example, it seems to have been believed that both women and horses could be impregnated by the north wind; see Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, I, 27, citing Pliny, Natural History, and Homer, The Iliad.)



Because woman could duplicate in her person the mysterious reproductive principles visible in the plant and animal worlds, woman was (1) identified with the earth, because both could bear fruit; hence the term "Earth Mother," (2) presumed to be more intimate with the philosophic questions arising from the life-death cycle, and therefore (3) was venerated. The matrix (that word and "matter" are both derived from "mater") that accumulated around these kernels came to include reverence for and fear of certain earth-bound animals, particularly the serpent, which has been connected with goddesses and fertility figures from time immemorial (Astarte, Athene, Eve). This fear and reverence extended itself to the darkness that is under the earth, and consequently to the night and the moon (which is still believed to influence planting and harvesting). In a less philosophical vein, the matriarchate for similar reasons became identified with agrarian, rural, and land-bound practices.

The advent of patriarchal beliefs brought with it an associational complex which, deliberately or otherwise, was opposed to that of matriarchy on almost every count. The new society was governed by gods, not goddesses; it was concerned with the processes of day instead of night, and



hence with the sun rather than the moon. In place of earth-bound creatures like the serpent, the patriarchal society tended to look upward for its deities: to mountain-tops like Olympus, or to the sky itself. The patriarchs were interested in trade more than agriculture, and thus became more sea-oriented, and for related reasons were more inclined to urban than to rural living. H. D. F. Kitto, speaking of the matriarch-patriarch opposition, lists other differences:

In the religious observances of classical Greece there is a kind of dualism. This is rather surprising in so philosophic a people, and is most easily understood on the assumption that Greek culture is the offspring of two profoundly different ones. . . . The goddesses . . . turn out not even to have Greek names, and the keystone of the whole arch, the marriage of Zeus with Hera, looks very like a dynastic marriage. Moreover, there was a whole region of cult and belief that had only an adventitious connexion with Olympus. The true Olympian cults were based on the ideas of a god who protected the tribe or the state or the family, and took the guest or suppliant under his care; the god was, in fact, intimately connected with the social organism. . . . Cults based on the mysterious life-giving powers of nature existed in Greece side by side with the Olympian cults and in sharp contrast with them; for instance, these mystery cults appealed to the individual, the Olympian concerned the group: these admitted anyone, bond or free, the Olympians admitted only members of the group: these taught doctrines of rebirth, regeneration, immortality; the Olympians taught nothing, but were concerned with the paying of the honours due to the



immortal and unseen members of the community. They are entirely different concepts of religion, and it is roughly true to say that the god-conception is European and the goddess-conception Mediterranean; the goddesses come down in straight descent from Minoan Crete.<sup>9</sup>

As so often happens, the historical pattern followed by a society accurately reflects the life patterns of its individuals, and these in turn follow psychological development. So with the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. In primitive societies, boys are usually raised by women until their early teens, at which time they undergo an initiation ceremony, often involving circumcision. They then go to live in the "men's house" until they are married. These initiation ceremonies are related to the challenges encountered by the monomythical hero as he tries to cross the barriers toward his goal.

Thus we find another possible reason for a female devil. It is not merely that she may be an archetypal representation of the matriarchal impulse, but that she is symbolic of woman's part in the initiation ceremonies. The Grail knights in their earlier adventures encountered simple damsels and animals as their spiritual guides. On the Grail search they meet females of considerably more substance; and regardless of whether these females are bad or good (except for Percival's sister), the knights must obtain from male hermits



the final word on the correctness of their courses. Thus the Grail search forces the knights into a new initiatory situation; as they pass from selfish, secular quests to the larger, more important one, they must also pass from the gentle guidance of women to the sterner regimens imposed by men. They have been reborn to a new level of responsibility, where the very terms by which they judged their former existences must be redefined. Lancelot's struggle to encompass this change is particularly striking, because he must pass from one kind of excellence to another. Percival's struggle is not as difficult, because he is not burdened, as Lancelot is, with the secular habit patterns of years.

In speaking of the woman-devil, the old hermit tells Percival in one sentence "that was the olde lady," and in the next sentence tells how Christ "bete hym oute of hevyn for hys synne." I doubt that this switching of genders was an oversight on Malory's part. I think that the conflict between the patriarchal church and the matriarchal influences surviving in the rural areas of North England was still sharp enough in Malory's time so that he wished to make unmistakably clear the identification between the woman of the "olde law" and the Christian devil.



If the devil-woman and the "olde law" are viewed in this light, her remarks about being disinherited, and of enticing men away from her rival, have a relevance that they do not have under any of the other explanations we have found.

I think it not improbable that Morgan has a similar background. This could account for her antipathy to Arthur and his court, which is not explained in Malory and for which no adequate reason has been advanced by any critic. If we see Morgan as an anima-figure who answers in her time the same human demands which were answered in the Near East by the much older, rural, earth-bound cultural anima-figures of Ishtar and her forebears, and if we recognize this as the reason for Morgan's opposition to Arthur's upward-striving, god-worshipping, urban-centered society, then I think we have an explanation that can withstand rigorous examination. In fact, I am not sure that the whole structure of romance that pits men from the cities and castles against the spirit worlds of forests and lakes is not ultimately rooted in the opposition of these two ancient ideals.

To summarize, then: the woman is projected by Percival as desirable though dangerous, and is projected by Percival's society (with the hermit for its spokesman) as the devil. Miss Bodkin neatly pinpoints both types of projection thus:



If we attempt to define the devil in psychological terms, regarding him as an archetype, a persistent or recurrent mode of apprehension, we may say that the devil is our tendency to represent in personal form the forces within and without us that threaten our supreme values. (Bodkin. p. 223)

With a figure such as this for comparison, we can see that Mordred, for instance, cannot be characterized as a devil archetype until the very late stages of the book, when he has actually rebelled against Arthur; and Merlin, while he can be called demonic, does not conform to the devil archetype either.

Considering the woman's effect upon Percival, we also seem to be close to the idea of possession. However, it will be noted that no matter how susceptible Percival may have been to the woman's wiles, it took the wine to "enchaff" him to the point where she really appeared desirable. We never feel in Percival that inhuman, unreasoning quality which we felt in Gawain or in Lionel during their "possessed" periods. Nor did Percival require an external shock, as both the others did, to return him to his senses. While his making the sign of the cross was inspired by the sight of his sword, he made that saving sign of his own volition, which is not the case with truly possessed people. However weak Percival may have been in the hermit's eyes, he did



retain a certain control of his conscious mind, which made him better qualified to approach the Grail than either Gawain or Lionel, for all their prowess.

The miraculous elements in Percival's story, plus the kind of adventures he was faced with, are typical of those encountered by all the Grail knights, so we will not attempt to give each of them as detailed an accounting as we have done with Percival. However, in view of the richness of association which we have found at every turn in the Percival story, we may be justified in questioning Moorman's comment that Malory used Percival in the Grail section as an excuse "to introduce a few more hermits."

The narrative now returns to Lancelot. When he and Percival separated, Lancelot went into a hermitage where, after much admonition by the hermit, he was given a hair shirt to wear next to his skin for the rest of the quest. As he rides on after receiving this gift, he finds an adventure which we have touched upon earlier. He sees two parties of knights fighting before a castle; one group wears white armor and the other black. Observing that the black knights (the defenders of the castle) are getting the worst of it, he rides in on their side, and does marvelous deeds of arms.



But allwayes the whyght knyghtes hylde them nyghe aboute sir Launcelot for to tire hym and wynde hym, and at the laste, as a man may not ever endure, sir Launcelot waxed so faynt of fyghtyng and travaillyng, and was so wery of hys grete dedis, that he myght nat lyffte up hys armys for to gyff one stroke, that he wente never to have borne armys.

And than they all toke and ledde hym away into a foreyste and there made hym to alyght to reeste hym. And than all the felyship of the castell were overcom for the defaughte of hym. Than they seyde all unto sir Launcelot,

"Blessed be God that ye be now of oure felyship, for we shall holde you in oure preson."

And so they leffte hym with few wordys.

And than sir Launcelot made grete sorowe: "For never or now was I never at turnemente nor at justes but I had the beste. And now I am shamed, and am sure that I am more synfuller than ever I was." (Works, II, 932)

Shortly Lancelot meets the inevitable recluse, this time a woman. When he tells her about his unsuccessful tournament, she interprets for him:

"A, Launcelot," seyde she, "as longe as ye were knyght of erthly knyghthode ye were the moste mervayloust man of the worlde, and moste adventurist. Now," seyde the lady, "sitthen ye be sette amonge the knyghtis of hevynly adventures, if adventure falle hit have ye no mervayle; for that turnemente yestirday was but a tokenyng of oure Lorde, and natforethan there was none enchaument. For they at the turnemente were erthely knyghtes. . . ."



"The day of Pentecoste, whan kynge Arthure hylde courte, hit befelle that erthely kynges and erthely knyghtes toke a turnement togydirs, that ys to sey the queste of the Sankgreall. Of thes the erthely knyghtes were they which were clothed all in blake, and the coveryng betokenyth the synnes whereof they be nat confessed. And they with the coveryng of whyght betokenyth virginité, and they that hath chosyn chastité. . . . And whan thou saw the synners overcom thou enclined to that party for bobbaunce and pryde of the worlde (and all that muste be leffte in that queste, for in thys queste thou shalt have many felowis and thybettirs, for thou arte so feble of evyll truste and good beleve. Thys made hit whan thou were where they toke the, and ladde the into the foreyste[]). . . .

And for grete pryde thou madist grete sorow that thou haddist nat overcom all the whyght knyghtes. Therefore God was wrothe with you, for in thys queste God lovith no such dedis." (933-934)

Thus catechised, Lancelot rides into a deep valley.

And there he saw a ryver that hyght Mortays. And thorow the watir he muste nedis passe, the whych was hedyous. And than in the name of God he toke hit with good herte.

And whan he com over he saw an armed knyght, horse and man all black as a beré. Withoute ony worde he smote sir Launcelottis horse to the dethe. And so he paste on and wyst nat where he was becom. (934-935)

At one time or another, most of the Grail knights encounter the water of Mortayse, which is always fearsome. It is the water-barrier between the initiatory stage and the testing phase of all journeys into the unknown. But



Lancelot has a special pride that must be overcome, and this is symbolized by his horse. We have seen how much trouble he has in keeping horses since he entered this quest; now his last one is killed and he is afoot. But he has learned something about humility from his numerous lessons, so that after his horse is killed, ". . . than he toke hys helme and hys shyld, and thanked God of hys adventure" (935).

The discussion about the tournament given by the recluse is interesting, particularly in the parallel drawn between the Grail quest and a tourney. This is as plain a way of saying that a society is in search of its innermost identity as is possible without using the terms of psychology. An added piquancy is given to the whole subject when one realizes that tournaments may have been forbidden by the church in Malory's time.

. . . Caesarius remarks . . . that engaging in tourneys involves two mortal sins, the sin of pride (superbia) because it is done for worldly show, and the sin of disobedience because it is forbidden by the Church. Those who lose their lives in tournaments, he adds, are denied burial in consecrated ground. This was indeed the position of the Church. The earliest edict to this effect, according to Huizinga, was issued by the Lateran Synod of 1215.<sup>10</sup>

One suspects that such a ruling would always have been observed more in the breach than the observance, and there is no evidence that the interdiction still applied in



Malory's time; but the fact that it had existed, combined with the fact that Malory was writing about a time earlier than his own, does add interest. It is noticeable, in this context, that no archbishop or other church figure ever appears to bless any of Malory's tournaments, as one would think would be the case.

Gawain's more important adventures in the Grail quest have been discussed earlier. The essential message of the section dealing with his pursuit of the Grail is that Gawain and his fellow knight Ector are too sin-ridden to be successful in their search, and neither is willing to subjugate his pride in order to become so. Gawain knows this, in a vague way, at the beginning of the quest; speaking of Galahad, Percival, Bors, and Lancelot, he says, "'and they fayle of Sankgreall, hit ys in waste of all the remenaunte to recover hit'" (941).

A hermit makes it more specific: Gawain and Ector cannot succeed because of their lack of charity, abstinence, and truth (948). He later adds that Gawain is "an untrew knyght and a grete murtherar," and goes on to say,

"For I dare sey, as synfull as ever sir  
Launcelot hath byn, sith that he wente into  
the queste of the Sankgreal he slew never  
man nother nought shall, tylle that he com



to Camelot agayne; for he hath takyn upon hym to forsake synne. And nere were that [were it not that] he ys nat stable, but by hys thoughte he ys lyckly to turne agayne, he sholde be nexte to encheve hit sauff sir Galahad, hys sonne; but God knowith hys thought and hys unstableness." (948)

Thus we see again the peculiar interdiction against killing while on the Grail quest that we noticed with Galahad. It is particularly pertinent as spoken to Gawain, who has just killed his nephew Uwain through misadventure (945).

We also have a forecast of what is to become of Lancelot; it is a better summary than is ever given to Lancelot himself.

Bors starts his quest hungry; he has been adjured by a hermit to eat nothing but bread and water during the Grail search. He leaves the hermitage:

And so a litill frome thens he loked up into a tre and there he saw a passynge grete birde uppon that olde tre. And hit was passyng drye, withoute leyffe; so she sate above and had birdis whiche were dede for hungir. So at the laste he smote hymselffe with hys beke which was grete and sherpe, and so the grete birde bledde so faste that he dyed amonge hys birdys. And the yonge birdys toke lyff by the bloode of the grete birde. (956)

This bird, the pelican of the bestiaries, is almost as much an archetype for self-sacrifice as Prometheus or Christ,



as the hermit makes clear when he later explains the "signification" to Bors:

"Than oure Lorde shewed Hym unto you in the lyknesse of a fowle, that suffirde grete anguysshe for us whan He was putte upon the Crosse, and bledde Hys herte blood for mankynde; there was the tokyn and the lyknesse of the Sankgreall that appered afore you, for the blood that the grete fowle bledde reysyd the chykyns frome dethe to lyff. And by the bare tre betokenyth the worlde, whych ys naked and nedy, withoute fruyte, but if hit com of oure Lorde."  
(967)

The remainder of Bors' story deals with an episode we have investigated earlier, in which he helps a maiden escape from her would-be attacker, in deference to helping his brother Lionel.

The next section of the story, misleadingly entitled "Sir Galahad," deals with the adventures of Percival's sister and the three Grail knights aboard the magic ship, as detailed in the earlier chapter "Anima Figures."

The section called "The Castle of Corbenic" picks up Lancelot's story after Galahad has been called away from the ship where they have spent a six-month interlude together. After Galahad has left,

The wynde arose and drove sir Launcelot more than a moneth thorow the se, where he sleped but litill, but prayde to God that he myght se som tydynges of the Sankgreall.



So hit befelle on a nyght, at mydnyght,  
he aryved before a castell, on the backe syde  
whiche was ryche and fayre, and there was a  
posterne opened toward the see, and was open  
without ony keynge, save two lyons kept the  
entré; and the moone shone ryght clere. (1014)

The setting is reminiscent of the one Percival rode through on the evil black horse: it is midnight, with a bright moon, and there is a sense of brooding shadows and impending events. With Percival, the surroundings were demonic; with Lancelot they are otherwise. Yet the similarity is striking.

A voice tells Lancelot to leave the ship and enter Corbenic, before which the ship has stopped. In the castle, the voice declares, "'thou shalte see a grete parte of thy desyre.'"

Thenne he ran to hys armys and so armed hym,  
and so wente to the gate and saw the lyons.  
Thenne sette he hand to his suerd and drewe hit.  
So there cam a dwerf sodenly and smote hym the  
arme so sore that the suerd felle oute of his  
hand. Then herde he a voice say,

"O, man of evylle feyth and poure byleve!  
Wherefore trustist thou more on thy harneyse  
than in thy Maker? For He myght more avayle  
the than thyne armour, in what servyse that  
thou arte sette in." (1014)

Lancelot takes this heavenly rebuff meekly, picks up his sword, and enters the gate. The lions "made semblaunte to do hym harme," but he crosses himself and enters the castle.



Than sir Launcelot entred so armed, for  
he founde no gate nor doore but hit was opyn.  
And at the laste he founde a chambir whereof  
the doore was shutte, and he sett hys honde  
thereto to have opened hit, but he myght nat.  
Than he enforced hym myckyll to undo the doore.  
Than he lystened and herde a voice whych sange  
so swetly that hit semede none erthely thyng,  
and hym thought the voice seyde,

"Joy and honoure be to the Fadir of Hevyn."  
(1014-1015)

We will continue with this passage shortly, but we shall stop here to consider an archetype: that of the maze. It will be remembered that Balin ran desperately through a number of unlocked rooms in Pellam's castle trying to find a weapon. Now Lancelot enters a dark castle where everyone appears to be asleep, and finds all the doors open but one. Von Franz relates a modern dream, as told to a psychiatrist, which bears similar earmarks. Here is part of the dream:

I owned and inhabited a very big house in town, and I didn't yet know all its different parts. So I took a walk through it and discovered, mainly in the cellar, several rooms about which I knew nothing and even exits leading into other cellars or into subterranean streets. I felt uneasy when I found that several of these exits were not locked and some had no locks at all.  
(von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 169)

Von Franz goes on: "The maze of strange passages, chambers, and unlocked exits in the cellar recalls the old Egyptian representation of the underworld, which is a well-known symbol of the unconscious with its unknown possibilities"



(p. 170). In a picture caption the comment is expanded:

"The unconscious is often symbolized by corridors, labyrinths, or mazes." Pictures are shown of a Finnish stone maze of the Bronze Age, a nineteenth-century British turf maze, and a maze in tiles on the floor of Chartres Cathedral which could be walked as a symbolic pilgrimage to the Holy Land (p. 171).

In another essay in the same book, Jung relates a similar experience:

I myself dreamed of a motif over several years, in which I would "discover" a part of my house that I did not know existed. Sometimes it was the quarters where my long-dead parents lived, in which my father, to my surprise, had a laboratory. . . . Usually this unfamiliar guest wing was an ancient historical building, long forgotten, yet my inherited property. It contained interesting antique furniture, and toward the end of this series of dreams I discovered an old library whose books were unknown to me. Finally, in the last dream, I opened one of the books and found in it a profusion of the most marvelous symbolic pictures. When I awoke, my heart was palpitating with excitement. (Man and His Symbols, pp. 53-54).

Lancelot, then, has arrived at the door of the secret room, the contents of which are unknown to him, just as, in another age, Theseus arrived at the end of the Minoan labyrinth and prepared to battle the Minotaur. His initiation is ended; the "book with symbolic pictures" is about to be opened to him.



Than sir Launcelot kneled adowne tofore the chambir dore, for well wyst he that there was the Sankgreall within that chambir. Than seyde he,

"Fayre swete Fadir, Jesu Cryste! If ever I dud thynge that plesed The, Lorde, for Thy pité ne have me nat in dispite for my synnes done byforetyme, and that Thou shew me somthynge of that I seke."

And with that he saw the chambir dore opyn, and there cam oute a grete clerenesse, that the house was as bryght as all the tourcheis of the worlde had bene there. So cam he to the chambir doore and wolde have entird. And anone a voice seyde unto hym,

"Sir Launcelot, flee and entir nat, for thou ought nat to do hit! For and if thou entir thou shalt forthynke hit."

Than he withdrewd hym aback ryght hevvy. (1015)

In the middle of the chamber is the silver table that he has seen before, and the Grail, covered with red samite. Many angels are about the table. Before the holy vessel is a good man clothed as a priest, apparently at the "sakerynge" of the mass.

And hit semed to sir Launcelot that above the prystis hondys were three men, whereof the two put the yongyste by lyknes betwene the prystes hondis; and so he lyffte hym up ryght hyghe, and hit semed to shew so to the peple.

And than sir Launcelot mervayled nat a litill, for hym thought the pryste was so gretly charged of the vygoure that hym semed that he sholde falle to the erth. And whan he saw none aboute hym that wolde helpe hym, than cam he to the dore a grete pace and seyde,



"Fayre Fadir, Jesu Cryste, ne take hit for no synne if I helpe the good man whych hath grete nede of helpe."

Ryght so entird he into the chambir and cam toward the table of sylver, and whan he cam nyghe hit he felte a breeth that hym thought hit was entromedled with fyre, which smote hym so sore in the vysayge that hym thought hit brente hys vysayge. And therewith he felle to the erthe and had no power to aryse, as he that was so araged that had loste the power of hys body and hys hyrynge and syght. Than felte he many hondys whych toke hym up and bare hym oute of the chambir doore and leffte hym there semyng dede to all people.  
(1015-1016)

He is eventually moved to another room, but he lies in his paralysis for twenty-four days and nights. When he awakes and learned this,

Than hym thought hit was ponyshemente for the four-and-twenty yere that he had bene a synner, wherefore oure Lorde put hym in penaunce the four-and-twenty dayes and nyghtes. (1017)

When he recovers, King Pelles (owner of Corbenic) comes to see Lancelot and tells him that Elaine, Galahad's mother and Pelles's daughter, is dead. Lancelot stays with the king for four days, and then returns to Camelot.

At the beginning of the final section of the Grail quest, Galahad quenches the burning well and the burning tomb, as we have seen, and then goes to Corbenic, where he meets Percival and Bors. Other knights gather there too, saying that they have ridden hard in order to meet with him; three



are from Gaul, three from Ireland, and three from Denmark (East, North, and West). With Galahad are King Pelles and his son Eliazar "which were holy men," and a maiden, Pelles's niece. Thus there are twelve knights and the girl assembled. As they sit, four gentlewomen bring in a bed on which is "a good man syke, and had a crowne of golde uppon his hede." The sick king welcomes Galahad, praying that he will now be cured. A voice then announces that two persons are present who are not in the Grail quest, and orders them to leave. Pelles and his son depart. Four angels then enter bearing a chair on which sits a man identified as Joseph, "the firste bysshop of Crystendom." Other angels bring in a spear from the point of which blood runs continuously.

And than the bysshop made sembelaunte as thoughe he wolde have gone to the sakeryng of a masse, and than he toke an obley [wafer] which was made in lyknesse of brede. And at the lyfftyng up there cam a vigoure in lyknesse of a chylde, and the vysayge was as rede and as bryght os ony fyre, and smote hymselff into the brede, that all they saw hit that the brede was fourmed of a fleyshely man. And than he put hit into the holy vessell agayne, and than he ded that longed to a preste to do masse. (1029)

The bishop then vanishes, and the others sit astonished at the table.

Than loked they and saw a man com oute of the holy vessell that had all the sygnes of the Passion of Jesu Cryste bledynge all opynly, and seyde,



"My knyghtes and my servauntes, and my trew chyldren which bene com oute of dedly lyff into the spirituall lyff, I woll no lenger cover me frome you, but ye shall se now a parte of my secretes and of my hydde thynges. Now holdith and resseyvith the hyghe order and mete whych ye have so much desired."

Than toke He hymselff [sic] the holy vessell and cam to sir Galahad. And he kneled adowne and resseyved hys Saveoure. . . .  
Than seyde He to sir Galahad,

"Sonne, wotyst thou what I holde betwyxte my hondis?"

"Nay," seyde he, "but if ye telle me."

"Thys ys," seyde He, "the holy dysse wherein I ete the lambe on Estir Day, and now hast thou sene that thou moste desired to se. But yet hast thou nat sene hit so opynly as thou shalt see hit in the cité of Sarras, in the spirituall paleyse. Therefore thou must go hense and beare with the thys holy vessell, for this nyght hit shall departe frome the realme of Logrus, and hit shall nevermore be sene here. . . . For he ys nat served nother worshipped to hys ryght by hem of thys londe, for they be turned to evyll lyvyng, and therefore I shall disherite them of the honoure whych I have done them. And therefore go ye three to-morne unto the see, where ye shall fynde youre shippe redy, and with you take the swerde with the stronge gurdils, and no mo with you but sir Percivale and sir Bors. Also I woll that ye take with you off thys blood of thys speare for to anoynte the Maymed Kynge, both his legges and hys body, and he shall have hys heale." (1030)

Christ, too, vanishes. Galahad touches the sick king with the blood from the lance, and the man is cured. The



three knights find their ship, and in it are the silver table and the samite-covered Grail, magically transported thence from Corbenic. Galahad falls asleep on the bed, and when he awakes, they are at Sarras. They find the ship with the body of Percival's sister, and give her proper burial. As they enter the city, Galahad tells a lame man to come and help him carry the silver table, and, as the man rises to do so, he finds himself healed.

Estorause, king of the city, learns of their presence and forthwith throws them in prison, because "thys kynge was a grete tirraunte, and was com of the lyne of paynymes." The knights are in prison for a year, sustained by the Grail, and when the king dies, Galahad is made king of the city. Shortly thereafter, on a Sunday, as the three knights approach the palace, they see, as they saw in Corbenic, a bishop kneeling before the holy vessel with a fellowship of angels about him. The mass is held in the same way as at Corbenic, but just before the Host is served to him, Galahad raises his hands toward heaven and says, "'Lorde, I thanke the, for now I se that that hath be my desire many a day. Now, my Blyssed Lorde, I wold nat lyve in this wrecched worlde no lenger, if hit myght please The, Lorde'" (1034).



At the end of the mass, Galahad kisses his fellows,  
commends himself to Lancelot,

And therewith he kneled downe tofore the table,  
and made hys prayers. And so suddeynly departed  
hys soule to Jesu Cryste, and a grete multitude  
of angels bare hit up to hevyn evyn in the syght  
of hys two felowis. (1035)

Percival then doffs his armor for a hermit's weeds, and  
Bors stays with him. Percival dies after a year and two  
months, and when he has been buried, Bors returns to Camelot.

There seems to be a mystical connection between the  
silver table of the Grail and the Round Table. When the  
former is taken from England because it is not worshiped  
properly, that is the end of the Grail search; and it is  
after all this happens that we see the frictions and bicker-  
ing at the Round Table which are to lead to its end also.

The city of Sarras is to Galahad what Rome was to  
Aeneas, or Ithaca to Odysseus, or the Round Table to the  
earthly knights: the home port, where existed the holy of  
holies, the object of every search and every journey through  
the dark soul of man. Malory makes this clear, not only by  
leaving the location of Sarras unidentified, but by the odd  
phrase "the cité of Sarras, in the spirituall paleyse," which  
he uses several times. If the city is in the palace, rather  
than the other way around, then it itself is the holy of



holies. After the struggles, and occasionally death, suffered by all the knights to reach this point, the reward is given to the three Grail knights, and how they react to it represents a cross-section of the reactions of all the Round Table knights. Galahad gives up the world and elects to die, as in quite another way Gawain is to do also. Percival enters a hermitage, as Lancelot is later to do. Bors returns to the Round Table, and eventually joins Lancelot in the hermitage.

Galahad's request to be taken to heaven amounts to a "refusal to return," which Campbell comments upon:

When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds.

But the responsibility has been frequently refused. Even the Buddha, after his triumph, doubted whether the message of realization could be communicated, and saints are reported to have passed away while in the supernal ecstasy. Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being. (Campbell, p. 193)



Thus we see that Galahad's abnegation is also related to Arthur's departure from the world to Avalon, where he is to be cured and from which he may return. But it is to Arthur's glory that, while he could, he stayed and fought. Galahad was given everything, right from the start: a lineage reaching back to David and Solomon; beauty, strength, invulnerability, and all the rest. But Arthur was merely human; strong in youth, weak in old age, but still of mighty heart. It all was easy for Galahad; his path was mapped. It was Arthur who had to stay behind and take the heart-breaks and betrayals; and to watch his creation crumble around him, so that before he went to Avalon, he had tasted the full spectrum of human experience, which Galahad never did. Galahad was heaven-oriented from birth, and when his job was done, he simply went home. Arthur, so to speak, had to fight his way home.

Campbell tells the story of an Indian king, Muchukunda.

[He] grew to be such a king among kings that when the gods, at one period, were suffering defeat in their perpetual contest with the demons, they called upon him for help. He assisted them to a mighty victory, and they, in their divine pleasure, granted him the realization of his highest wish. . . . King Muchukunda, so runs the story, was very tired after his battle: all he asked was that he might be granted a sleep without end. . . .



The boon was bestowed. In a cavern chamber, deep within the womb of a mountain, King Muchukunda retired to sleep, and there slumbered through the revolving eons. Individuals, peoples, civilizations, world ages, came into being out of the void and dropped back into it again, while the old king, in his state of subconscious bliss, endured. Timeless as the Freudian unconscious beneath the dramatic time world of our fluctuating ego-experience, that old mountain man, the drinker of deep sleep, lived on and on. (Campbell, p. 194)

So, we hope, with Arthur.



CHAPTER VIII FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A picture caption associated with von Franz's article states: "The Grail itself symbolizes the inner wholeness for which men have always been searching" (von Franz, Man and His Symbols, p. 215).

<sup>2</sup>M. W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins (Lansing, Michigan, 1952), p. xiv, passim.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Moorman, The Book of King Arthur (Nashville, 1965), p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, tr. J. J. Parry (New York, 1963), pp. 40-41.

<sup>6</sup>Pantin mentions an anonymous mystical treatise known as Poor Caitiff, dating from the late fourteenth century, which contains a tract called "Horse and Rider, or The Rule of Man's Body" (Pantin, p. 250).

<sup>7</sup>D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1963), p. 408.

<sup>8</sup>Regarding the use of a woman to depict an aspect of the warring soul, the following is interesting, and possibly pertinent.

The representation of the conflict between virtues and vices received its decisive impulse from the Psychomachia of Prudentius, an early fifth century work. In a graphic and telling manner the author depicts the battle for man's soul; he develops the Pauline thought that the Christian must arm himself with spiritual weapons in order to face successfully the forces of evil (Ephes. VI, 11 ff.), and deepens and expands the well-known parable of Tertullian,



of the victory of the virtues over the vices, into an allegorical epic.

True to classical tradition, Prudentius personifies the opposing forces of the soul as female figures. In so doing, he lends the vices the character rather of mortal sinners than of inescapable demons and thus, using the wealth of everyday experience, he lessens the fear of the power of evil. (Adolf Katzenellenbogen, Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art [New York, 1964], p. 1.)

<sup>9</sup>H. D. F. Kitto, The Greeks (Edinburgh, 1956), pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup>H. J. Weigand, Three Chapters on Courtly Love in Arthurian France and Germany (Chapel Hill, 1956), p. 30.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE SUMMATION

How closely does Le Morte Darthur, taken as a whole, conform to the archetypal monomyth: the story of a hero who goes into a dangerous land and returns (or fails to return) with a boon to his community?

At first glance, it does not seem close at all. Arthur rises and subsides early in the story; then Lancelot gains and keeps the ascendancy until Galahad appears. After Galahad goes, we are left with Arthur and Lancelot, but they are somehow diminished, and tarnished. Who, then, is the hero, and what is the boon?

The hero, of course, is Lancelot. Malory never misses an opportunity to stress his superiority. He is the biggest, best, most triumphant, and most courteous man in the kingdom, and he is looked up to by everyone. Even the fact that Guinevere consents to a liaison, and finally leaves Camelot with him, is indicative of his status: the heroine will always choose the best man for her consort.

And what is the boon that Lancelot brings back? It is his ability to heal Sir Urry.



Urry is a young Hungarian knight who has been wounded in a battle in which he killed his Spanish opponent. But the Spaniard's mother is a sorceress, and in revenge for her son's death, she has cast such a spell upon Urry that his wounds, which are grievous, cannot be cured except by the best knight of the world. For seven years Urry's mother has been escorting him from court to court across Europe, trying to find the perfect knight who can heal her son. England, she tells Arthur, is her last resort; if she fails here, her son is doomed to perpetual pain. Arthur therefore gathers every knight of his realm, and all of them "handle" the young knight, including Arthur, but none can cure him. Lancelot, at this point, rides in from a mission, and, while he is diffident (perhaps fearful) about trying to cure the boy, Arthur commands him to try. Lancelot prays silently, touches Urry's wounds, and they are instantly healed. Lancelot "wepte, as he had bene a chylde that had bene beatyn!" (Works, III, 1152).

No source has been found for this episode (1578), which leaves us free to conjecture why Malory used it at all, and why he placed it where he did, halfway between the end of the Grail search and the beginning of the Round Table's dissolution. The primary reason for both, I think, is that



Lancelot's position needed to be re-stated. He had failed in the Grail search, and while he had performed his share of knightly deeds since then, demonstrating that he had lost none of his worldly prowess, a reaffirmation was needed of his position as the knight who had been almost good enough to achieve the Grail. By the time Urry comes to England, the Round Table knights have largely forgotten what it was like to ride daily in the heady air of incipient miracle, as they did during the Grail search. This is also true of Lancelot, and the index of that fact is that he has forgotten his Grail vows, and has resumed his attachment with Guinevere. But this healing, this funneling of supernal power through his hands and into the torn body of the young man, causes a violent reaction; he cries like a child. Even we as readers can feel how suddenly tawdry and unimportant the activities of the knights and their women are when compared against this magical act. It is a sharp reminder of what all the knights missed, and it is a measure of their failure.

Campbell talks about the "double focus" possessed by the hero at the height of his powers, when he can see both sides of the Veil at the same time. The relative acuity of this vision was made particularly clear during the Grail search, where Galahad, Bors, and Percival were able to pierce



the Veil entirely; Lancelot could approach and see through it dimly, and Gawain and the others could not see it at all. It is this double vision that Lancelot possesses when he bursts into tears after the healing of Urry. He can survey his past life with its weaknesses, strengths, and fruitless pursuits; at the same time he can see his present, and how it has dropped into the old channels; and he can see beyond these-- not into the future, but sideways, across the time-space warp, to what he might have been, and how great the rewards could have been, if his paths had been chosen differently. We all must weep when such moments of vision come to us.

The healing story serves another function also; it re-establishes Arthur's relative position. After his initial drawing of the sword from the stone at London, he has never been able to draw another; now he is challenged again to do what only the best of men can do, and he fails as readily as the least of his knights.

Therefore, of all the people in Le Morte Darthur who strive for this goal or that, only Lancelot returns with a gift viable for society as a whole. Arthur returned from his first journey into the unknown with the concept of the Round Table, but the talisman he brought back was a sword, the symbol of force and death. From that time forward, the



Round Table survived only by being stronger than any combination that could be brought against it. Therefore Arthur's "boon" was essentially destructive and was one from which only a particular stratum of society could benefit. Lancelot's gift was beneficent. It is true that he did not understand his power, and that he was able to call upon it only once, but on this one occasion, he gave renewed life to another. Galahad's curing of the lame man was no greater an act, and few heroes return from the other side with a boon as great.

It is part of the tragedy of Lancelot, as of most heroes, that he is deprived of the fruits of his own gift. As the hermit pointed out, he is the fruitless fig-tree. None of his prowess availed him in the Grail search, and he must live with the knowledge of that failure. He has also failed in another sense--with Guinevere. Here, according to the monomyth, is the reward he should have got:

The hegemony wrested from the enemy, the freedom won from the malice of the monster, the life energy released from the toils of the tyrant Holdfast--is symbolized as a woman. She is the maiden of the innumerable dragon slayings, the bride abducted from the jealous father, the virgin rescued from the unholy lover. She is the "other portion" of the hero himself--for "each is both": if his stature is that of world monarch she is the world, and if he is a warrior she is fame. She is the image of his destiny which he is to release from the prison of enveloping circumstance. But where he is ignorant of



his destiny, or deluded by false considerations, no effort on his part will overcome the obstacles. (Campbell, p. 342)

The final line summarizes Lancelot's faults, and his tragedy. To him Guinevere was the femme fatale, the anima of destructive illusion. Because she existed, the Round Table was destroyed. She was Eve, the eternal temptress, complete even to the forbidden fruit.

The first tale in the book after the Grail quest is entitled "The Poisoned Apple." Gawain, it appears, is especially fond of fruit. Guinevere, disappointed at Lancelot's distant attitude after his return from the Grail quest, gives a dinner party for all the knights of the Round Table, and, to please Gawain, has apples served. But a knight named Pinel le Savage dislikes Gawain, and decides to kill him by poisoning some of the apples. Unfortunately, another knight, named Patrice, also likes apples. The first one he chooses is poisoned, and he dies in agony at the table (Works, III, 1049). The knights, convinced that the poison was Guinevere's idea, turn against her. Their spokesman, Mador de la Porte, informs the king that the queen, in the judgment of the knights, must die at the stake for treason unless a trial by combat proves her innocent. Champions are chosen for both sides: Mador for the accusers, Bors (in



Lancelot's absence) for Guinevere. But Lancelot returns from his mission just in time to take over the defense, and Mador is beaten. Not only is Guinevere shown, by Lancelot's victory, to be innocent, but the ubiquitous Nineve, the lady who buried Merlin, happens by, learns of the knights' mistrust of Guinevere, and exposes the real murderer (1059). Pinel flees to his own country, Mador apologizes to the queen, and the court settles back to a brief and troubled equanimity.

Thus the archetypal Apple of Discord becomes part of the Round Table's memories. It is a symbol, perhaps, of the self-destructive elements in Arthur's court. Eventually it is not Arthur alone, but the society itself, that is punished because of it. The chain of causality is easily traceable: Lancelot's defense of the queen in this just cause lays the groundwork for his defense of her in a second, only nominally just, cause; and both form the background for his third defense of her, which was totally unjust, and which reft the Round Table forever. This progression, born as it is from his earthly prowess as a mighty fighter, leads to the point where his entire society suffers for his injustice--just as, in the Grail quest, when he sided with the black knights but was subdued by the white, "all the felyship of the castell were overcom for the defaughte of hym."



And so, self-betrayed and isolated therefore from the society which gave him his identity, and betrayed also by Guinevere, who by her collusion in his sin kept him from the Grail, he ends up as does everything else in the book: frustrated, fruitless, his every noble effort blunted. The one exception is the healing of Urry, the victory that highlights, but does not ameliorate, his losses. The emptiness of this life is underscored and symbolized by his pursuit of the barren Guinevere, who in the end hies herself to a nunnery, the dead end of worldly hopes. And Lancelot, for all his towering deeds and phenomenal strength, has no better recourse at last than to follow her example.

Arthur, as we have seen, completes his quest early in the book, with the conquest of Lucius and the attaining of the emperor's crown. From then on, he merely consolidates his gains and acts as overseer for his knights, with only an occasional foray into a jousts to retain the tone of his sword arm. From the rising hero, he changes to become the Guardian of Things as They Are. His magical expeditions with Merlin are over, and Merlin is dead. There are no more usurpers or rebels to challenge him, at home or abroad, and so he rests--and that is what a hero must never do.



No longer referring the boons of his reign to their transcendent source, the emperor breaks the stereoptic vision which it is his role to sustain. He is no longer the mediator between the two worlds. Man's perspective flattens to include only the human term of the equation, and the experience of a supernal power immediately fails. The upholding idea of the community is lost. Force is all that binds it. The emperor becomes the tyrant ogre (Herod-Nimrod), the usurper from whom the world is now to be saved. (Campbell, p. 349)

This is the light in which Arthur now appears. The unnameable power that dictates the patterns that men live by now says, "Arthur's striving is over; he no longer travails. He must be overthrown so that change can continue." The instrument chosen is Lancelot. But he fails as challenger. His sword is turned outward, along with Arthur's, to defend the status quo; he becomes, as discussed earlier, an extension--a projection--of Arthur. So another challenger must be found, and it is, of course, Mordred. As a challenger, he, too, fails, because he finds only death; but his function is fulfilled: he ends the reign of the tyrant. All the activities of Arthur's enemies, including Morgan's, are warnings to Arthur that the primeval life-force, recking nothing of societies or high ideals, is anxious to move on.

For the mythological hero is the champion not of things become but of things becoming; the dragon to be slain by him is precisely the monster of the status quo: Holdfast, the



keeper of the past. From obscurity the hero emerges, but the enemy is great and conspicuous in the seat of power; he is enemy, dragon, tyrant, because he turns to his own advantage the authority of his position. He is Holdfast not because he keeps the past but because he keeps. (Campbell, p. 337)

We have seen Arthur's almost childish feeling for the Round Table, as expressed at the moment of its dissolution. He is so identified with it that nothing and nobody else--his champion, his relatives, his wife--matters to him as much. However much normal sentimentality may account for this feeling, it is clearly identifiable, as seen from the frigid heights of the governing powers, as pride. This is another of the characteristics of Holdfast.

The tyrant is proud, and therein resides his doom. He is proud because he thinks of his strength as his own; thus he is in the clown role, as a mistaker of shadow for substance; it is his destiny to be tricked. (Campbell, p. 337)

Arthur does indeed think of his strength as his own; he can say "my Rounde Table" (Works, I, 244) and "my trew felyshyp" (Works, II, 867) and "For there was never Crysten kynge that ever had so many worthy men at hys table as I have had thys day at the Table Rounde" (868). But others have a slightly different view: Lancelot's knights, in proclaiming their loyalty to him after the rift with Arthur,



say, "For by the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table was kynge Arthur upborne, and by their nobeles the kynge and all the realme was ever in quyet and reste" (Works, III, 1204). Thus, as proud Holdfast, Arthur is ready to be tricked.

The pathetic aspect of Arthur's tragedy is that he is tricked by the man he trusts most, and upon whom he counts to hold his beloved Round Table together: Lancelot. All the time that the Round Table is at the height of its glory, and Arthur is basking in its fame, his authority and strength are being silently eroded behind his back. Even after he has a faint idea ("a demynge") of the liaison with his queen, he prefers to say nothing--because to say something would endanger the existence of the Round Table. It cannot be argued that it was wrong for Arthur to do this, but it can be said that both the Table and Arthur were foredoomed from the beginning, because of this and other human frailties that were built into both the king and his society. Balin's only piece of luck was that his doom followed fast upon him, so that his tenure in pain was short, but for Arthur, who bore the same curse, it took years for the same inevitability to work itself out.

Something of the measure of Arthur's personal failure is given in two occurrences at opposite ends of the book.



In Arthur's first battle with the rebel chieftains of his kingdom, as soon as the people around him saw his valor, "thenne the comyns of Carlyon aroos with clubbis and stavys and slewe many [rebel] knyghtes. . . ." But as the final battle nears, it is a different story:

Than cam there worde unto sir Mordred that kynge Arthure had areysed the syge frome sir Launcelot and was comynge homwarde wyth a greate oste to be avenged uppon sir Mordred, wherefore sir Mordred made wryttes unto all the baronny of thys londe. And muche people drew unto hym; for than was the comyn voyce amonge them that with kynge Arthur was never othir lyff but warre and stryff, and with sir Mordrede was grete joy and blysse. Thus was kynge Arthur depraved, and evyll seyde off; and many there were that kynge Arthur had brought up of nought, and gyffyn them londis, that myght nat than say hym a good worde.

. . . . .

And so fared the peple at that tyme: they were better pleased with sir Mordred than they were with the noble kynge Arthur, and muche people drew unto sir Mordred and seyde they wold abyde wyth hym for bettir and for wars. And so sir Mordred drew with a greate oste to Dovor, for there he harde sey that kyng Arthur wolde aryve, and so he thought to beate hys owne fadir fro hys owne londys. And the moste party of all Inglonde hylde wyth sir Mordred, for the people were so new-fangill. (1228-1229)

And at the end, when the final battle is over, these people make themselves known once more. Darkness is falling over the battlefield, and on its edge are three men: the



wounded Arthur, his dying butler Lucan, and the faithful Bedivere.

Than harde they people crye in the fylde.

"Now go thou, sir Lucan," seyde the kyng,  
"and do me to wyte what betokyns that noyse in  
the fylde."

So sir Lucan departed, for he was greuously wounded in many placis; and so as he yode he saw and harkened by the moonelyght how that pyllours and robbers were com into the fylde to pylle and to robbe many a full noble knyght of brochys and bees [bracelets] and of many a good ryng and many a ryche juell. And who that were nat dede all oute, there they slew them for their harneys and their ryches. (1237-1238)

Part of Malory's intention here is to show the fickleness and untrustworthiness of the common people. There is also an implication that when lions fall, jackals gather to feed. But an accusation against Arthur is also implied. When Arthur's career was on the upswing, he was glad of the help of the people, and they helped him because he was the hero; from his mission into the unknown, for which he was preparing, they had a right to expect a reward. But when he returned, he brought only a destructive token. When the people turn against him, therefore, they are only acting as indices of the ebb of larger fortunes.

Just as in the history of the universe, so also in that of nations: emanation leads to dissolution, youth to age, birth to death, form-creative vitality to the dead weight of inertia. Life



surges, precipitating forms, and then ebbs, leaving jetsam behind. The golden age, the reign of the world emperor, alternates, in the pulse of every moment of life, with the waste land, the reign of the tyrant. The god who is the creator becomes the destroyer in the end. (Campbell, p. 352)

Yet there still remains the question of inevitability.

The particular thing called tragedy that happens to the tragic hero does not depend on his moral status. If it is causally related to something he has done, as it generally is, the tragedy is in the inevitability of the consequences of the act, not in its moral significance as an act. . . . The exposed position is usually the place of leadership, in which a character is exceptional and isolated at the same time, giving us that curious blend of the inevitable and the incongruous which is peculiar to tragedy. The principle of the hamartia of leadership can be more clearly seen in naive high mimetic tragedy, as we get it in . . . tales based on the theme of the wheel of fortune. (Frye, p. 38)

So at last we see that it might not have mattered what Arthur did, or failed to do. The important motivator was the inevitability itself. This was the idea that Balin was beginning to crystallize into words when he plaintively asked, "Why was I given a strange shield, and thus led to death?"

And so Le Morte Darthur cannot really be called a hero-myth that started right but ended wrong; those are value-judgments. The ending was dictated by the situation, which was essentially that of birth, death, and rebirth. This



particular story happens to terminate at death, that is all.

The apocalyptic and demonic worlds, being structures of pure metaphorical identity, suggest the eternally unchanging, and lend themselves very readily to being projected existentially as heaven and hell, where there is continuous life but no process of life. The analogies of innocence and experience represent the adaptation of myth to nature: they give us, not the city and the garden at the final goal of human vision, but the process of building and planting. The fundamental form of process is cyclical movement, the alteration of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death which is the rhythm of process. (Frye, p. 158)

So the end of the story comes, and the dark queens, Morgan and the others, are waiting to take Arthur to Avalon. The weeping Bedivere stands on the littoral, the symbol of mankind lorn of its hero, watching hope vanish in the mists. He cries, "'A, my lorde Arthur, what shall becom of me, now ye go frome me and leve me here alone amonge myne enemyes?'"

There are two answers to that question. One is inscribed on Arthur's tomb: "HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS (Works, III, 1242). But this answer is written by others who hope as Bedivere hopes.

Arthur's own answer, from the deepest moment of insight in his entire life, is quite different, and strikes the full chord of all the meaning in Le Morte Darthur, from Balin to Galahad:



"Comforte thyselff . . . and do as well  
as thou mayste, for in me ys no truste for to  
truste in." (1240)

The outdated hero has now himself become the sick king  
in the waste-land.



APPENDIX



## THESEUS: AN ARCHETYPE OF ARTHUR?

As has been pointed out (supra, p. xxi), William Matthews believes that the figure, or at least the adventures, of Arthur in the alliterative Morte Arthure--the source of Malory's "The Tale of the Noble King Arthur and the Emperor Lucius"--are based upon those of Alexander. In a passage quoted from Vinaver (supra, p. 58), the names of Charlemagne and Henry V are also mentioned as comparatives. Leaving aside the fact that any hero will have archetypal resemblances to any other hero, I would like to place another name among the possibilities; I believe that the Arthur shown in Malory, up through the Roman campaign, is based in general outline upon an archetype represented by both Hercules and Theseus, but more specifically the latter. I find the following points of correspondence:<sup>1</sup>

1. Aegeus, while drunk and at the same time under a spell by Medea, sleeps with Aethra, who is not his wife, but who is also under Medea's spell, and breeds Theseus. Uther, under a spell by Merlin so that he resembles Igraine's husband, breeds Arthur upon Igraine.

2. Theseus is reared in secret by a woman who is not his mother. The newborn Arthur is taken by



Merlin from Igraine and given to the wife of Ector to be raised as her own.<sup>2</sup>

3. As the only patrimony he can leave his son, Aegeus hides a sword and a pair of sandals under a rock that only Theseus can move. The sword is proof of Theseus' right to the throne of Athens. The sword that Arthur, and only Arthur, can draw from the stone is similar proof of his right to the throne. (The sword is not a patrimony from Uther, but the Round Table is; it was given to Guinevere's father by Uther, and came to Arthur as part of Guinevere's dowry.)

4. On his way to claim his inheritance (the throne at Athens), Theseus, who is noted as a wrestler, has to fight two giants: one he throws into the sea from a mountain-top; after defeating the other, he takes from him a brass-bound club which becomes his identifying symbol. When Arthur invades France to wrest from the Roman ruler the empire that he considers his by inheritance, he fights the giant of Mont St. Michel. In the fight, the giant uses a club, and Arthur uses weapons, but ultimately he wrestles the giant down the mountain-side to



the edge of the sea. He comments that it is the toughest fight he has had since he fought another giant "in the mounte of Arrabé" (Works, I, 205). He tells his aide, Bedivere, that the only souvenirs he wants from the fight are the giant's curtle, or coat, and his iron-bound club.

5. Among Theseus' battles is one with Procrustes, a giant who either stretches his victims on a rack, or, if they are too tall, cuts off their legs, until they fit his bed. In the fight with the forces of the Roman emperor, Arthur encounters a giant named Galapas, and here is how he deals with him:

He toke there oute Excalyber and gurdys  
towarde Galapas that grevid hym moste.  
He kut hym of by the kneis clenly there  
in sondir: "Now art thou of a syse,"  
seyde the kynge, "lyke unto oure ferys,"  
and than he strake of his hede swiftly.  
(Works, I, 221)

6. Theseus arrives in Athens unknown to anyone except Aegeus' wife Medea. He is riding in a cart, a demeaning method of travel for one of royal blood. Arthur arrives in London as a young squire, his identity unknown to anyone except Merlin, who, like Medea, is a magician.



In an earlier section we discussed Lancelot as a projection of Arthur: Lancelot is known as "The Knight of the Cart" after an adventure in which his horse is killed and he rides in a forester's wagon to rescue Guinevere (Works, III, 1126-1127).

7. After Theseus becomes king of Athens, his greatest feat is for the first time to unite the fractious demes of Greece into the federation of Attic states. To accomplish this he has to defeat the fifty sons of his uncle, Pallas. Much of Arthur's fame results from his unification of England, which he is able to do only after defeating a coalition of eleven kings led by his cousin, King Lot. Theseus is never able to subdue the Peloponnesians, who remain his enemies throughout his life. While Arthur finally subdues the kings of Wales and the Welsh Marches, they are his most persistent enemies, and in all the tournaments in Le Morte Darthur, are always on the side opposing Arthur.

8. Here are some details on Theseus' battle with the Pallantids:



Pallas and his fifty sons, who even before this had declared that Aegeus was not a true Erectheid and thus had no right to the throne, broke into open revolt when this footloose stranger [Theseus] threatened to baulk their hopes of ever ruling Athens. They divided their forces: Pallas with twenty-five of his sons and numerous retainers marched against the city . . . while the other twenty-five lay in ambush. . . . But Theseus, informed of their plans by a herald . . . sprang the ambush and destroyed the entire force. Pallas thereupon disbanded his command, and sued for peace. The Pallantids have never forgotten. . . .<sup>3</sup>

As a comparison, here are some of the incidents in Le Morte Darthur connected with Arthur's rise to power:

The kyngs . . . said they had no joye to receyve no yeftes of a berdles boye that was come of lowe blood, and sente hym word they wold none of his yeftes, but that they were come to gyve hym yeftes with hard swerdys betwixt the neck and the sholders . . . for it was grete shame to them to see suche a boye to have a rule of soo noble a reaume as this land was. . . . (Works, I, 17)

When King Lot, leader of the rebel kings, sees that his party is being beaten in the fight, he proposes an ambush:

"We fyve kyngis woll have ten thousand men of armys with us, and we woll go on one party whyle the six kynges holde the medlé with twelve thousand. And whan we se that ye have foughtyn with hem longe, than woll we com on freysshly." (Works, I, 31)

As Theseus defeated the forces of his uncle, so Arthur defeats the rebels under his cousin Lot; but



. . . sire Brastias was maade wardeyn to wayte upon the Northe from Trent forwardes, for it was that tyme the most party the kynges enemyes. But within fewe years after Arthur wan alle the North, Scotland and alle that were under their obeissaunce, also Walys; a part of it helde ayenst Arthur, but he overcam hem al as he dyd the remenaunt thurgh the noble prowesse of hymself and his knyghtes of the Round Table. (Works, I, 16-17)

9. Theseus' wife, Phaedra, falls in love with Theseus' son Hippolytus, whereupon Theseus banishes Hippolytus from Greece. Arthur's wife Guinevere falls in love with Lancelot, Arthur's "projected" son, and eventually Arthur banishes Lancelot from England.
10. Theseus' friend Peirithous wishes to steal Persephone, Hades' wife, from Tartarus. In his early years, Theseus had promised to accompany Peirithous on any major venture he undertook; now Peirithous invokes that promise, and Theseus unwillingly accompanies his friend into Tartarus. While he is thus absent from Athens, Spartan rebels place Menethus on the Athenian throne. Menethus, the first demagogue, controls the people initially by spreading the rumor that Theseus is dead, after which, by various devices, he is able to attract both the commoners and nobles to his standard.



In a strikingly similar way, Arthur's friend and chief baron Gawain persuades Arthur, against his will, to invade France and besiege Lancelot at Benwick. While Arthur is thus absent from England, Mordred siezes the throne, having spread the rumor that Arthur is dead (see Works, III, 1227), and is able by one means or another to attract both nobles and commoners to his standard (1228-1229 passim).

\* \* \* \* \*

In addition, there is at least one other parallel between Theseus and Arthur, but it occurs in a portion of Arthur's story which does not appear in Malory. After Theseus has been killed on the island of Scyros, he is buried in an unknown spot. When the grave is discovered years later, it contains a stone coffin, inside of which is a tall skeleton, with a bronze lance and a sword. The skeleton is brought back to Athens and re-interred in a special place.

In the De Principis Instructione of Giraldus Cambrensis is given the following story:

Now the body of King Arthur, which legend has feigned to have been transferred at his passing, as it were in ghostly form,



by spirits to a distant place and to have been exempt from death, was found in these our days at Glastonbury deep down in earth and encoffined in a hollow oak between two stone pyramids erected long ago . . . and it was afterwards transported with honour to the Church and decently consigned to a marble tomb . . . the body was placed so deep and hidden away . . . that it might not by any means be discovered by the Saxons who occupied the island after his death. . . . You must know that the bones of Arthur thus discovered were so huge that . . . his shank-bone, when placed against that of the tallest man in that place . . . reached . . . a good three inches above his knee. And the skull was so large . . . as to be a . . . prodigy; <sup>4</sup> for the eyesocket was a good palm in width.

As I have said earlier, it is not our business here to trace linear relationships between Arthur and his forebears, and perhaps simple coincidence accounts adequately for the parallels shown here.

At the same time, we must keep in mind the principle of the monomyth. In addition to there being a general resemblance between the lives of heroes, arising from the apparently universal pattern of their behavior, there may well be a group of characteristics that all heroes within a given culture-delta will tend to share. Because the delta that nurtured Europe had its roots in Greece and the Near East, it would really not be surprising if Arthur, Theseus, Hercules, Alexander, and Charlemagne--all parts of the same delta--should share certain attributes.



FOOTNOTES TO APPENDIX

<sup>1</sup>The following information was gleaned from Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. I, chiefly 323-370, but also 264 and 294; Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans, mainly 341-343, but also 239, 339, and 340; and Ovid, The Metamorphoses, 199-200 (dealing mainly with Theseus' arrival in Athens).

<sup>2</sup>This theme of the double mother is an archetype. Jung comments: "Freud has shown . . . how Leonardo da Vinci was influenced in his later life by the fact that he had two mothers. The fact of the two mothers, or of a double descent, was real enough in Leonardo's case, but it plays a role in the lives of other artists as well. . . . Generally speaking, it is a mythological motif. Many heroes in legend have two mothers. The fantasy does not arise from the actual fact that the heroes have two mothers; it is a widespread 'primordial' image belonging not to the domain of personal memory but to the secrets of the mental history of mankind" (Jung, p. 65).

<sup>3</sup>Graves, The Greek Myths, p. 334.

<sup>4</sup>Given in Brengle, Arthur King of Britain, pp. 9-11.



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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Philip L. Mead was born January 15, 1922, in Manchester, New Hampshire. He attended grammar and high schools in New Hampshire and Florida, and was in military service from 1942 to 1946. He received his B. A. degree from Hiram College, Ohio, in June, 1949, with honors in English, and a minor in languages. After working toward an M. A. in English at New Mexico A. & M. (now New Mexico State University) in Las Cruces, he transferred to Albuquerque, where he enrolled in 1957 at the University of New Mexico. He was a teaching assistant at that institution from 1957 to 1960. Business commitments took him to California, and upon his return to Albuquerque in 1965, he resumed his studies, obtaining the M. A. degree in English from the University of New Mexico in June, 1968. His doctoral program, also in English, was completed in June, 1969, at the same university.