

# Classical Influences on Arthurian Arcadia<sup>❖</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The thirteenth-century *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle, also called the Vulgate Cycle, is an outstanding Arthurian literary achievement. One of the contributions of the Cycle is a detailed *Bildungsroman* of Lancelot of the Lake, who was raised by the Lady of the Lake in an idealized environment, the “Lake of Diana.” The Vulgate writers skillfully merged geographical and topographical features with supernatural elements in depicting the Lake, thus producing new literary effects not seen before in the Arthuriad. Not only does the idyllic setting of the Lake evoke the pastoral imagery of classical Arcadia, the name of the Lake itself also alludes to a classical association with Artemis/Diana and to her image as the deity of nutrix and the “Lady of the Lakes.” Furthermore, Diana is associated with historic Arcadia via her connection with Pan. This article argues that the geography, topography and imagery of the Lake episode aim at representing the Lake as an Arthurian Arcadia, and that the characterization of the Lady of the Lake employed significant aspects of the classical figure of Diana.

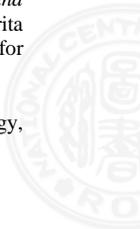
**KEYWORDS:** Lake of Diana, Lady of the Lake, Arthurian Arcadia, classical and historic Arcadia, geography, topography

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<sup>❖</sup> I wish to thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers of *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture* for their insightful comments and suggestions for revisions. I am especially grateful to Emerita Professor Ellen Mary Mylod, O.S.U., Emeritus Professor Francis K. H. So, and Dr. Hui-Chu Yu for reading different parts of my earlier drafts and giving me advice.

<sup>\*</sup> Received: March 31, 2020; Accepted: March 19, 2021

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## I. Introduction

Ever since Lancelot of the Lake made his *début* in the French poem of Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1130-80/90), the knight's life has been linked to a magical body of water. In the thirteenth century, the composers of the *Lancelot-Grail Cycle* (or the *Vulgate Cycle*) of Arthurian romances presented a detailed description of Lancelot's *Bildungsroman* in an imaginary milieu called the "Lake of Diana." This pastoral setting shapes a medieval interpretation of Arcadia, an area not yet prominent in critical studies.<sup>1</sup> In the narratives of this Arthurian Arcadia, the young Lancelot comes under the guardianship and care of a mysterious figure, the Lady of the Lake, who is variously named Niniane (Ninianne), Niviene, Nymue, Nimüe, Nyneve, Viviane, and Vivien in different texts. The characterization of the Lady is never easy to pin down because many opposing characteristics have been attributed to this very figure in the development of her story over time. Carolyn Larrington declares the Lady one of the "most influential enchantresses of the Arthurian world within the ranks of authorial representatives" (64). The image of an enchantress is only one key to understanding her role. She is also a loving mother, who educates the young Lancelot in the Lake where she reigns as a sovereign lady.

This article aims to examine how the Lake of Diana evokes imagery of classical Arcadia by exploring classical influences on the role of the Lady of the Lake as well as on the Lake and its parallels to Arcadia. The analysis focuses on three French romances written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart, or Lancelot* (c. 1176-81), *Lancelot* of the anonymous Vulgate Cycle (1215-35), and *The Merlin Continuation* of the anonymous Post-Vulgate Cycle (1230-40). Since the Vulgate Cycle consists of immense volumes of texts, the Arthurian Arcadia here is representative only for

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<sup>1</sup> The image of Arcadia seemed to come to a halt in the medieval period. Gerald J. Rubio contends that the "pastoral eclogue form remained all but dormant between antiquity and Jacopo Sannazaro's adaptation of [Virgil's] themes and techniques to the vernacular with his *Arcadia* (Naples, 1502)" (27). On the contrary, Marsha S. Collins asserts that Arcadia "remained a constant presence in Western literature throughout the Middle Ages, assuming diverse forms in the continuing tradition of Latin eclogues . . . by Petrarch [and] Boccaccio" (14). For instance, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), influenced by his predecessors such as Theocritus, Virgil and Petrarch, creates the setting of an Arcadian space in his Latin Eclogues, though relatively unknown (cf. *The Latin Eclogues*, trans. by David R. Slavitt, 2010, and *Eclogues*, trans. by Janet Levarie Smarr, 2019). Rubio's and Collins' observations suggest the value of further investigation into the medieval concept of Arcadia.

early Arthurian culture and the first parts of the *Lancelot* proper.<sup>2</sup> To facilitate discussion, “Arthurian Arcadia” is defined here as a medieval representation in time and space of the classical concept of Arcadia embodied in the Lake of Diana.

## II. The Background to Arcadia

Within the extensive literary and cultural history of the Arcadian archetype, three salient notions emerge: the pastoral lifestyle with its atmosphere of idyllic beauty and benign nature, the concept of a superior existence lived in an imaginary space, and the nature of Arcadia as a highly adaptable symbol.

Firstly, the context of an idyllic life in a pastoral setting sets the tone for Arcadia. The classical vision of pastoral life began with Theocritus’ *Idylls*, while the term *Arcadia* was first mentioned by the Roman poet, Virgil (70-19 BCE).<sup>3</sup> In the poems of Theocritus (c. 300-260 BCE), the mythical Golden Age is linked to a pastoral landscape. The world of shepherd-poets was governed by Pan, a pastoral god believed to dwell in the mountains and forests of historic Arcadia. Charles Segal comments on Theocritus’ texts as follows: “The bucolic fiction, with its implicit contrast of country and city, the simple and the elaborate, signifies something beyond itself, a desiderated ideal of calm and harmony with self and with nature” (210). Similarly, Richard Jenkyns highlights the pastoral atmosphere in Virgil’s texts: the pastoral landscapes “contain woods and bushes, mossy springs and shade and greenery by flowing streams, beeches and elms, myrtle and tamarisk” (35). Both the ancient Greek and Roman writers present their idyllic dreams of perfect harmony with nature.

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<sup>2</sup> After the publication of the Vulgate Cycle, anonymous writers reworked it into the Post-Vulgate Cycle. The later version is an attempt to create a greater unity in the romances and to omit secular love affairs in favor of the quest for the Holy Grail. The translation by Professor Norris J. Lacy and other scholars used here includes both the Vulgate and the Post-Vulgate Cycles. Lacy’s edition of the Vulgate Cycle consists of five romances: *The History of the Holy Grail*, *The Story of Merlin*, *Lancelot*, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, and *The Death of Arthur*. His edition of the Post-Vulgate Cycle consists of three parts: *The Merlin Continuation*, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, and *The Death of Arthur*. The *Lancelot* proper, the focus of this article, is the longest romance by far out of the five in the Vulgate Cycle.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Snell asserts that Virgil came across a passage by the historian Polybius (the third century BCE) which recorded the Arcadians practicing the art of singing and love of organizing contests, thereupon Virgil decided to locate the lives and the poetic contests of his shepherds in Arcadia in his *Eclogues* (281).

Secondly, Arcadia, though existing as an actual region in Greece, conventionally refers to an imaginary setting, even if it is a nowhere celebrating a superior quality of life. Within this space, the Arcadian way of life is, according to Gilbert Highet, characterized by elements such as simplicity of love and manners, music, and a carefree way of living—in sharp contrast to the anxiety and corrupt existence in cities and courts (162). The coarseness of country life is counterbalanced by its purported purity, which creates a superior existence preferable to the life of the city. Patricia A. Johnston and Sophia Papaioannou also explain that the natural setting symbolizes a pastoral landscape associated with simple delights and “shepherds and individuals seeking to retreat from the pressures and complexities of urban life” (136). In classical representation, Arcadia as a “spatial concept” is often combined with the temporal vision of the Golden Age, culminating in an undisturbed, idealized life. Charles Fantazzi asserts that the lifestyle idealized in Arcadia is a “a spatial concept, although the space it defines is illusory, while the Golden Age is imagined in a temporal sense” (289). What appeals to Virgil is “the ideal historically-grounded location for a purely poetic realm divested of all sense of time and place” (290). Fantazzi concludes that for Virgil, Arcadia “no longer designates a land or a landscape, but a quality and way of life” (291). This is a life lived without disturbance and characterized by a finer quality of life in an imaginary space.

Lastly, Arcadia has appeared since antiquity in multivalent symbolic representations. Giuseppe Gerbino indicates the broad application of the concept of Arcadia: “Arcadia has become synonymous with a world of the imagination that has been variously recreated, in contrast with the real world, as a world of lost innocence, ancient values, sweet nostalgia, spiritual rebirth, contemplative withdrawal or artistic communality” (58). Its diverse forms also find expression in the following observation: “Arcadia could be construed as the site of a nostalgic retreat in a past forever lost, or just as easily as the emblem of a utopian faith in the return of a new Golden Age” (58). The notion of Arcadia can be combined with any time and space, emotion and belief. Fantazzi elaborates on the golden age of Arcadia evoked in Virgil’s *Eclogues* and concludes that, in a pastoral context, “Arcadia takes on the characteristics of Eden” (293). As a multivalent archetype, the concept of Arcadia is compatible with any imaginary pastoral landscape that depicts a superior quality of life.



Compared with the classical vision of Arcadia described above, the Vulgate writers represent an Arthurian Arcadia that becomes transformed by contemporary features. The following section examines how these writers construct the foundations of Arthurian legends by building on the classical concept of Arcadia.

### III. The Lake of Diana: A Storied Space

The history of the Lake of Diana can be traced from three major French sources: Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart, or Lancelot*, the *Lancelot* proper of the Vulgate Cycle, and *The Merlin Continuation* of the Post-Vulgate Cycle. When the figure of Lancelot first appeared in Chrétien's poem, the Lake was already inextricably linked with his characterization. Initially, although he was referred to as "Lancelot of the Lake," Chrétien's text hardly provided any details about the Lake itself (cf. 252). Later, in the Vulgate Cycle, the setting of the Lake was developed in a medieval context as both a natural and supernatural milieu with pastoral features. The Lake is described as being near "a beautiful stretch of open country" (*Lancelot* 5, 10), and "at the other end of the heath, at the foot of a high hill" (5).<sup>4</sup> The environment is represented as a place of natural abundance: "Farther down in the valley flowed a stream teeming with fish" (12); the Lake is said to be situated near "a beautiful, broad meadow" (43). These concise phrases sketch a pastoral and idealized scene.

The following passage provides specific geography, the exact measure of the Lake's size, and the classical influences on the Lake:

Ever since the time of the pagans, the lake had been called *the Lake of Diana*. Diana was queen of *Sicily* and reigned in the time of the good author *Virgil*. . . . She loved the delights of the forest more than any other woman in the world and would spend every day hunting, and so the pagans called her the Goddess of the Woods. *The forest* where the lake was [situated] was the largest small forest in *Gaul* or *Brittany*; it was *only* ten Welsh leagues

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from the *Lancelot* proper in this paper refer to *Lancelot-Grail*, volume 2, of Lacy's edition.



long and six or seven wide, and it was known as *the Woods in the Valley*. (*Lancelot* 5; emphasis added)

The Lake is located in a Gallic or Breton forest, called “the Woods in the Valley.” The modifier “only” indicates that this is not a vast forest, but rather a relatively small one off the beaten track and perfect for a hidden abode at the bottom. The delineation of the realistic measurement of the Lake reveals the readers’ prior familiarity with the environment surrounding the Lake because the text mentions that King Ban, Lancelot’s father, used to frequent the location while alive: “a beautiful stretch of open country where King Ban had been many times before” (5). The reference to Diana, Sicily and Virgil evokes classical culture and history, which enriches the medieval narrative frame and setting. The exotic aura of Diana of faraway Sicily is incorporated into a more local story about the Lake of Diana based in Gaul.

The Vulgate writers’ portrayal of the Lake recalls the legacy of Diana, and the Post-Vulgate Cycle takes up this issue and elaborates on it. The later version includes a more detailed history of the Lake and its relationship with Diana, and Merlin’s magic in transforming the Lake into a home for himself and Ninianne. Merlin tells her the following story:

When [Diana] had roamed and hunted through all the forests of France and Britain, she found no wood that pleased her so much as this one did, and she stopped here and made her home on this lake, so that she went to hunt in the wood by day and at night returned to this lake. . . . [And] because the place pleased her, she made a rich, beautiful home on the lake.

(*Merlin Continuation* 247)

So the whole picture becomes clearer now: the history of the lake dates back to Diana’s reign in Sicily in the first century BCE; the goddess visited Gaul, fell in love with the “lakescape,” and finally decided to make the Lake her home. Her migration from Italy to Gaul is an interesting move because it introduces a new cultural and mythical backstory to the geography of the Lake. The Vulgate writers’ portrayal integrates both classical and medieval elements in a common text.



The references to Sicily and Virgil further evoke an intriguing association with the classical pastoral traditions. The allusion to Sicily, the homeland of Theocritus, draws the readers' attention to Greek culture, while the allusion to Virgil recalls Roman culture. Jenkyns notes that Servius Auctus, the famous fourth-century commentator on Virgil, "knows that [in Virgil's texts] allusions to Sicily are allusions to pastoral" (27). Though not dominant compared to those of other Greek divinities, rituals of the cult of Artemis/Diana were practiced in Syracuse, the major center in Sicily, to worship the goddess. As Tobias Fischer-Hansen asserts, the "most significant increase in the diffusion of the cult of Artemis takes place from the end of the 5th and through the 4th century [BCE]" (246). The allusions to Sicily and Diana the huntress by way of Virgil bring the pastoral conventions of the ancient world into the story of the Lake.

In addition, Artemis/Diana is associated with the historic Arcadia via her connection with Pan. At least two scholars have provided textual analysis and archeological evidence that show the intriguing relationship between these two Arcadian-related mythical deities. In his analysis of Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis*, Andrew Faulkner observes an unusual encounter between Diana and Pan in the Arcadian mountains, where Pan gave a number of dogs as gifts to Artemis/Diana. Elsewhere, Pan was depicted as making an offering, possibly to Artemis, in some works of art (Faulkner 224-25). Using Callimachus' *Hymn to Artemis* and the *Homeric Hymn to Pan* as intertexts, Faulkner reminds his readers that "*Et in Arcadia Diana* [Artemis, too, has been in Arcadia]" (233). Olga A. Zolotnikova examines the evolution of myths and rituals associated with Artemis in various regions of Arcadia in ancient Greek religion from prehistoric to late historic times. Zolotnikova states that Arcadian Pan was believed to live on Mount Maenalos (eastern Arcadia), where there was "a sanctuary of Artemis Lykoatis at the foot of Mount Maenalos"; its ruins were found at Arachamites (near Ancient Lykoa in eastern Arcadia) and dated from the seventh century BCE (17). Zolotnikova notes further: "The goat-like god-shepherd Pan, who may have evolved from the Divine Goat of the Great Goddess, became a companion of Artemis in cults and myths. The case of Arcadia is characteristic in this regard: it was believed that Arcadian Pan . . . provided Artemis with hunting dogs, when she visited him there" (17). Through



these intertexts, the figures of Artemis/Diana and Pan are shown to be closely interwoven within historic Arcadia.<sup>5</sup>

Backed up by literary and archaeological evidence, Faulkner's epigraph "*Et in Arcadia Diana*" explains well the relationship between Diana and historic Arcadia. So the Lake of Diana created in thirteenth-century France has two levels of associations with Arcadias—both literary and historical, thus enriching its cultural heritage with more profound significance.<sup>6</sup>

#### IV. Marvelous and Topographical Hallmarks of Arthurian Arcadia

The marvelous element of the Arthurian Arcadia that characterizes the Lake is mostly due to Merlin's magic. After the masons and carpenters building the handsome mansions had left, Merlin said to Ninianne: "Now this dwelling is worth nothing to you unless I make it so well hidden that no one can see it but those who live in it" (*Merlin Continuation* 248). She marveled at such a "clever concealment," and then Merlin "closed in the house on all sides so marvelously that nothing was visible but water" (248). He intended to keep Ninianne in the Lake so that he could have his will with her, although he eventually failed. Robert David Sack describes the human-geography relationship in the following manner: "our earth-transforming and landscape-creating capacities are basic qualities of our human nature: we are geographic beings" (*Geographical Guide* 3). Merlin's appropriation of Diana's wild lakeside "property" into a space he can utilize, as seen in *The Merlin Continuation*, illustrates the workings of human nature.

The most supernatural element of the Lake—its magnificent houses concealed by water on all sides—may be analogous to modern Augmented Reality (AR) technology. With the lake as one reality and an estate as the other, the body of water is not so much an illusion, a delusion, or a hallucination as a quasi-AR environment. Despite the modernity of the term, AR well explains

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<sup>5</sup> Diana and Pan, in fact, share some similarities. As Apostolos N. Athanassakis remarks: "Much as Artemis, the goddess of woodland and beast, goat-footed Pan is both a hunter and a patron of hunters" (88). So it is not surprising when the two are juxtaposed in the same scenario.

<sup>6</sup> The classical association with Diana distinguishes the French version from an earlier German narration, *Lanzelet*, by Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (fl. 1200). Ulrich, too, included a narrative of Lancelot's *Bildungsroman*, in which a water fairy "carried [the infant Lanzelet] with her into her land"—the Land of Maidens (29). In Ulrich's rendering, Lancelot grows up in a fairy land, the "Land of Maidens," not in any marvelous lake, like the "Lake of Diana." In the German version, one can discover no traces of the classical heritage associating Diana with the place where Lancelot grows up.

the overlapping space by the seemingly solid-liquid mixture. For the Lake's inhabitants, Merlin's magic superimposes the virtual body of water onto the real world of the mansions in the Lake. Yet, the Lake is also a physical body of water to outsiders. On the other hand, the narrative interweaving of the Lake with Diana and Merlin's magic transforms the Lake into a "mythical-magical space."<sup>7</sup> Sack declares that "myth and magic impart significance to place," and this type of cultural transformation is a critical function in the development of human attachment to place (*Conceptions* 151). Although the comparison to AR technology may lack mythical aspect and depth, it facilitates an exciting understanding of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural in the Lake. The medieval Vulgate writers, through literary craft and the magic of Merlin, surpass modern AR technology by generating an imaginative metamorphosis that projects a watery screen over the physical landscape.

In addition, the element of the vertical reality of the Lake of Diana is integrated with the marvelous aspect, most evident in the Vulgate presentation of the natural and supernatural features of the Lake. An investigation into the topography of the Lake may bring forth new insights about the text. The final depiction of the "lakescape" in the *Lancelot* proper strikes a pastoral note while reinforcing the idea that in King Ban's tumultuous world Arcadia must be isolated, protected and hidden. The Vulgate writers reveal the lake to be

an *enchanted* lake; it was in the flat land **below a hill much lower than the one** on which King Ban had died. In the area where the Lake seemed to be broadest and **deepest**, the lady possessed several beautiful and splendid houses. **Farther down in the valley** flowed a stream teeming with fish. The whole estate was so *hidden* that no one could ever find it, for the apparent lake so *masked* it that it could not be seen.  
(*Lancelot* 12; boldfaces and italics added)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This is a term borrowed from the geographer Robert David Sack (*Conceptions* 148). Sack remarks that the Greco-Roman worldview reflects mythical-magical components, and this mode of thinking passed down to the late Middle Ages and Renaissance (129). As a result, this mode of thought as a continuum also influences the twelfth- and thirteenth-century French texts covered in this article.

<sup>8</sup> The anonymous *Lancelot do Lac* (c. 1215-20) was the earliest non-cyclic Old French prose version of the Lancelot story and was "soon incorporated into the vast Vulgate Cycle" (Lacy, *New Arthurian Encyclopedia* 271). Elspeth Kennedy's edition of *Lancelot do Lac* contains an almost identical topographical detail of the "lakescape" (cf. 1: 24).

The description of the natural beauty invites readers to wonder at its serenity. Topographic and environmental features such as flat land, hill, lake, valley, stream, and the previously mentioned country and meadow, are deployed as scenic elements that compose a pastoral milieu. The stream teeming with fish suggests abundant self-sufficiency in an unspoiled region of bountiful natural splendor. There is a harmonious bond between humanity and nature, and humans cherish the appreciation of natural beauty. Nevertheless, Aron J. Gurevich reminds us that “for a long time there was no clear differentiation between the real and the imaginary” until later generations attempted to separate one from the other (38). The merging of the waters and the land recalls the ancient convention of the Icelandic skald kennings, in which the sea is constantly identified with the land and the land, with the sea (79). The italic adjectives in the lake passage—“enchanted,” “hidden” and “masked”—again evoke the realm of the marvelous, where the ordinary presumptions of everyday reality are challenged. As Tzvetan Todorov indicates,

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

When a reader “decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous” (41).<sup>9</sup> The lake obviously oscillates in Todorov’s fantastic mode, provoking hesitation between uncanny and marvelous.

The three explicit layers of verticality, as shown in the boldfaced phrases in the lake passage, shape a contour of how the Vulgate composers envision the depth of space. The gradation of the topographical verticality conceptualized

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<sup>9</sup> The element of the marvelous also corresponds to one of the generic features of medieval romance. For instance, King Arthur often expects something marvelous to happen in his court so that he and his knights can set off for spectacular adventures. At the beginning of Chrétien’s *Erec & Enide*, King Arthur was ready to hunt the white stag with his knights (37). Similarly, in *The Knight of the Cart* by the same author, King Arthur “did not stir from among his companions” after the meal, a sign of waiting for entertainment or marvelous events (207). Therefore, the marvelous element embedded in the Lake reflects the generic trait of medieval romance and also merges itself into the Vulgate representation of Arcadia.

the spatial attitudes of the medieval people. As the Romanian historian of religion and philosopher Mircea Eliade contends, verticality was usually associated with patriarchy, the sky and sky gods. The vertical conception of space, prevalent in the Middle Ages, reflected a belief in the sky and sky gods, which symbolized transcendence and changelessness because they are “high, infinite, immovable, powerful” (*Patterns* 39). Following the same line of thinking, the Swedish historian Dick Harrison indicates that if one had the vertical conception of space, one believed in “more than one spatial dimension,” which is “full of symbolical meanings” (11). Although not being portrayed in an upward direction, the space of the Lake symbolizes transcendence, which derives from its verticality and absolute reality.

The different spatial concepts about the Lake adopted by Merlin and later by the Lady signify that the Lake undergoes a gendered transformation. The Post-Vulgate writers make explicit that Merlin originally intended to make the Lake into a “bower” for himself and Ninianne.<sup>10</sup> Arthur C. L. Brown revisits Robert de Boron, who named Merlin’s abode, *esplumoir*, with a reference to the meaning of *merlin*, “a falcon” or “a hawk,” and adopts for *esplumoir* a meaning “cage” or “mew” (426). Merlin’s abode, a falcon’s mew, thus conveys masculine imagery. Anne Berthelot observes that “the Merlin-Niviène contest has its roots in a mythological pattern of gendered oppositions” (170). The gendered opposition also plays a role in male-female conception of space. The Lady’s perception of the space of the Lake is an example of women’s spatial attitudes that were different from those of men during the Middle Ages. Once the Lady takes over the Lake, she transforms it into a hidden land, comparable to a woman’s womb, to raise the children who lose their parents’ protection. According to Erin Chandler, the transition demonstrates the process of taming Ninianne into a concerned mother, skirting the more ambiguous and often malevolent aspects of this fairy figure. The more sublime use of the space from the feminine viewpoint replaces the masculine use of the space by Merlin to his own interest, and the operation strongly appeals to the medieval Christian audience. Despite the domestication, the Lady is able to simultaneously retain the interplay between patriarchal symbolism of a new, ordered world and maternal imagery of the waters.

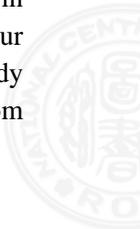
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<sup>10</sup> “Bower”: Old English *būr*, meaning “dwelling, inner room,” of Germanic origin; related to German *Bauer* “birdcage.”

Moreover, the Lake is endowed with sacrality. In Celtic and Germanic mythology that predated the Middle Ages, pantheism was a characteristic notion. For instance, the Celts believed in symbolical landscape: trees, stones and lakes were sacred. This common pre-Christian belief of the sacredness of nature continued to permeate in the medieval period. Nigel Pennick explicates that the Lady of the Lake is the spirit of the Lake, and the veneration of lakes renders the water space holy (64). Places such as forests and valleys continued to hint at ideal places, and forests to imply holy refuges, though forests also reflected other negative meanings (Harrison 12). As mentioned earlier, the forest where the Lake of Diana was located was called “the Woods in the Valley” (*Lancelot* 5), and would have been considered sacred according to medieval spatial imagination. Both the marvelous aspect and the vertical dimension of the lakescape correspond to what Harrison terms “space as a qualitative concept” (11). The Lady’s benign and just actions of coming to the rescue of the three French princes contribute to a deep, qualitative difference with regard to conceptualization of space.

The Lake of Diana thus participates in the founding of a new cosmos, organized, cosmicized and consecrated. Eliade enunciates as follows:

One of the outstanding characteristics of traditional societies is the opposition that they assume between their inhabited territory and the unknown and indeterminate space that surrounds it. The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of “other world,” a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, “foreigners” (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead). At first sight this cleavage in space appears to be due to the opposition between an inhabited and organized—hence cosmicized—territory and the unknown space that extends beyond its frontiers; on one side there is a cosmos, on the other a chaos. But we shall see that if every inhabited territory is a cosmos, this is precisely because it was first consecrated, because, in one way or another, it is the work of the gods or is in communication with the world of the gods. The world (that is, our world) is a universe within which the sacred has already manifested itself, in which, consequently, the break-through from



plane to plane has become possible and repeatable. It is not difficult to see why the religious moment implies the cosmogonic moment. The sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence *it founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.

(*The Sacred* 29-30)

The Lake is an example whose sacrality “founds the world in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.” By natural laws of development or regeneration, the Lake can be seen to re-enact what is the new cosmos for the inhabitants. This is, in Pennick’s terms, an “artificial enclosure,” a sacred and “formal setting, protected both on the physical plane and also magically by excluding harmful psychic influences that are abroad in the profane outer world” (115). This echoes the idea of Arcadia as a spatial concept embracing a superior quality of life. Transforming from an otherworld to a new, organized cosmos, the Lake represented as Arcadia corresponds to Arcadia’s malleable form and to Eliade’s emphasis on the primal malleability or potentiality of the waters.

In this new cosmos, the sanctifying powers of the water initiate and nurture new life, as experienced by Lancelot. A stream teeming with fish runs through the Lake, abounding in the imagery of sources of all life, fecundity and a Water-Mother. The Vulgate writers inherit the tradition of water symbolism that has existed since the Paleolithic times. Eliade explicates that “woman, water, fish, all belong essentially to the same symbolism of fertility” (*Patterns* 189). Like the classical image of Arcadia as a better, purer place, the hidden lake offers the hope of a safe existence. This enclosed Arcadia, in its role as a refuge, is notable as the safe and noble haven where the Lady raises Lancelot. It is pitiable to see how Queen Elaine loses her infant son right before her eyes. Yet, it is clear that, alone, she has no power to protect her infant son, and even a convent is not a safe place from the threat of King Claudas, an enemy of King Ban. In contrast, the Lake is analogous to a womb, a hopeful location to nurture the infant, which serves as an ideal solution to Elaine’s chaos. As Carol Dover well sums up the situation, the Lady’s love “has removed the suffering of his parents from his experience as a child and replaced it with joy” (263). Inheriting the Celtic fairy motif, the Lady abducts Lancelot in order to raise him in a new cosmos.



The healing power of water also manifests itself in the Lake. “Immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth,” as noted by Eliade (*Patterns* 188). The Arthurian Arcadia proves to be an ideal retreat against the land under King Claudas’ power. The first section of the *Lancelot* proper relates how Claudas seized King Ban’s land, imprisoned Lancelot’s cousins Lionel and Bors, and plotted to wage war on Arthur. Claudas’ barren, hostile realm, called the Land Laid Waste, is associated with wars and violence (*Lancelot* 3). Being a small good place in the middle of a vast bad place, the Lake represents the purity of Arcadian life not found in Claudas’ land. King Claudas’ realm is analogous to Hell, while the Lake, to Heaven. The Lady takes Lancelot into the Lake to be both protected and soothed by nature’s beauty and the powers of water in the new cosmos.

The quality of life in the Lake symbolically suggests a moral dimension in geography. Shepherds, nymphs, satyrs, and demigods under the rule of Pan in classical Arcadia are replaced by Lancelot and his two cousins, the Lady of the Lake, and the ladies, knights, gentlemen and gentlewomen in her service (*Lancelot* 12). By practicing courtly culture in the Lake, the Lady focuses on what Sack terms “geography’s role in morality” (*Geographical Guide* 5-6). Sack promotes the idea that “geography helps illuminate what is universally, essentially, or . . . *intrinsically*, good” (6). For the Lady, part of the essence of the intrinsically good is to keep the children safe and happy in the Lake. She sent a messenger to rebuke Claudas for holding Lionel and Bors in prison and arranged for their release and ultimate safe arrival at the Lake (*Lancelot* 25). Sack states that

our place-making and earth-transforming activities should be guided by the *joint* application of two criteria that draw upon this intrinsic good: *we should create places that expand our awareness of reality*, and *we should create places that increase the variety and complexity of reality*. In doing so we would be creating better places and a better world, and would be moving in a moral direction. (*Geographical Guide* 6)

The new cosmos founded by the Lady forms absolute reality because the fertility and new life consecrate the space. She creates the Lake that expands an awareness of reality, and she creates the place that increases the variety and



complexity of reality by the teaching of the ways of knighthood in a Christianized context. In this way, the Lady's creation of the Lake is both geographical and moral in the sense that Sack describes.

## V. The Lady of the Lake as a Reincarnation of Diana

The relationship between the Lady and the classical huntress has a long tradition. For instance, Sir Walter Scott wrote in his poem "Lady of the Lake": "while in such guise she stood / Like fabled Goddess of the wood," obviously referring to Diana (76; canto 2, XXIV). Scholars have researched into the connection between the Lady of the Lake and Diana, too. Brown offers some foreign origins to demonstrate the connection between Ninianne and Diana: "Breton, *Ninnian* [Viviane being a possible misreading of Ninnian]; Welsh, *Rhiannon*; Irish, *Niamh*; Latin, *Diana*" (430).<sup>11</sup> Berthelot discusses Ninianne in connection with the myth of Diana the Huntress: "Niviène, the Damsel Huntress, who is cast as Merlin's victim and eventual killer in this dark retelling of the story, is clearly related to a goddess Diana-archetype" (170). Yves Vadé also makes the comparison that "the unfortunate love affair between Merlin and Vivien . . . is reminiscent of that of Diana and Faunus" (709). The analysis in the previous parts of this article has established the classical heritage of the Lake via Diana's association with Pan and the historic Arcadia, in addition to the marvelous topography of the Lake. It is now time to examine the characteristics of Diana that passed down to the Lady of the Lake so as to bring the human-location relationship to the fore. Zolotnikova observes that besides being the goddess of hunting, the moon and virginity, Diana was adored as "Great Mountain-Mother-Goddess, mistress of nature, provider of fertility, and guarantor of the continuity of life," according to the cults of Diana in the real Arcadia (13). From the cults of the deity found in the same city, Diana was also the goddess of lakes, trees, birth and "Child nurturer [*nutrix*]" (Zolotnikova 14, also cf. 13-18). Some of these characteristics resonate in the Vulgate writers' portrayal of the Lady, particularly after she undertakes the task of raising Lancelot. The Vulgate Lady is distinctly portrayed as the goddess Diana in three

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Louis Backés also mentions the link between the *Lancelot* narrative and Diana, although she wonders about the "link between the name Diana and the Vivien or Niniane" (133).



aspects: similar character and personality, the role of “the Lady of the Lakes,” and the role as the deity of *nutrix*.

Firstly, the Lady of the Lake and Diana share some similarities of character. They are both virgins, and like Diana, the Lady is a “young huntress” (*Merlin Continuation* 245). As the Post-Vulgate narrator revealed, Ninianne was very much attached to her “idol”: “Anything of Diana’s would please me, and I would gladly see it, for all her life she loved the pleasures of the forest as much as I do or more” (246). The two ladies both enjoy the pleasures of the forest and embrace a spirit of independence. When Ninianne met Merlin, she was only fifteen. While Merlin loved her passionately, she “hated nothing else so much as she hated him” (245). Both Diana and the Lady dislike the company of someone not compatible with them. As Tuan Yi-Fu explains, “Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other” (3). The Lady does not want to be bound by Merlin, so she ensnares him using the magic learned from him. She is then not only attached to that place but entitled to that lake; she enjoys the freedom of that space.

Secondly, by living in the mythical-magical space, the Lady of the Lake inherits Diana’s image as “the Lady of the Lakes” and governs the Lake. Zolotnikova’s research discovers that Artemis was widely worshipped as the “Lady of the Lakes” in the area of the historic Arcadia from the eighth century BCE (16). Sharing the same epithet, the medieval Lady considerably advances the use of space: the “lakescape” functions as a harbor and a home to one of the most valiant knights of the Arthurian world. The Lake is under her sole governance. Like Diana, the Lady is resourceful in remaking the space to her advantage and, later, to the advantage of Lancelot and his two cousins. That is to say, the Lady re-discovers an Arcadia and takes full advantage of the independence offered by the Lake.

Finally, Diana, as the goddess of *nutrix*, is an extremely powerful model for the figure of the Lady of the Lake. The Lady’s relationship with Lancelot was first mentioned in Chrétien’s *The Knight of the Cart*: “This lady was a fairy, who . . . had cared for him in his infancy” (236). She undertakes the role of Lancelot’s adoptive mother. The image of the Lady as the protector of children is later remarkably projected in the *Lancelot* proper: she found a wet-nurse and a tutor for Lancelot at different stages (*Lancelot* 12); motivated by her sense of morality and justice, she rescued Lancelot and his two cousins respectively from Claudas to live under her protection (27-29); and she herself taught the

adolescent Lancelot the meaning of knighthood when he was about to leave for King Arthur's court (57-61). Surprisingly, Lancelot seems to inherit the personality trait of independence and the spirit of freedom from his adoptive mother. Once Lancelot made gifts of a horse and a roebuck without his tutor's permission, and thereupon the tutor gave him a slap that knocked him off his mount. The tutor's brutal treatment pushed Lancelot to determine that he was no longer interested in the company of a tutor. Through her son's reasoning, the mother realized that her prince had acted out of generosity and nobility when he gave gifts to those in need; therefore, she consented to his plea.<sup>12</sup> This episode exhibits the Lady's trust in Lancelot and the considerable extent of independence and freedom Lancelot enjoys. The Vulgate writers do not seem to worry that the Lady's decision would raise the question of whether she "spared the child and spoiled the rod," as observed by Dover (263). She nurtures Lancelot in her own way that complies with the chivalric values.

While classical Arcadia deals with fully-grown adults and their dreams, the Arthurian Arcadia is more interested in issues affecting children, and especially in various aspects of Lancelot's education. The hope of Lancelot's future as a well-bred youth and qualified knight resides in the ethos of his neighborhood, the Arthurian Arcadia. The independent space featured in the Arthurian Arcadia enables the Lady to launch her projects of child-rearing and education. The Vulgate writers further elaborate on the growth and evolution of Lancelot's personality and character through chivalric and moral education in the Arthurian Arcadia.

The sense of place and identification newly developed in the Vulgate writers firmly establishes Lancelot's rootedness in the Gallic soil. From the Lady's viewpoint, she brings Lancelot to a hopeful place where he can take root and flourish. For Lancelot, the Lake is like a secure home and a mother. Tuan

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<sup>12</sup> When this incident was brought to the Lady, she "made a show of being extremely angry" and scolded Lancelot for the sake of his tutor by saying, "What! Do you think you can give away your horses and my property just like that, and give a beating to the tutor that I have put in charge of you to keep you out of trouble and teach you proper conduct?! I don't want you to do such things!" (*Lancelot* 21). Instead of crying, Lancelot was determined to assert his independence by arguing that: "a man cannot attain great honor if he lives too long under the orders of a tutor or guardian, man or woman. . . . I have no further interest in a tutor" (21). This bold assertion of his awareness of selfhood implies that he has probably thought about this for a while. The Lady said later in private to Lancelot: "I want you to make gifts of horses and whatever, and you will have no lack of things. Even if you were forty years old, you would have been right to give away the horse and the game as you did. From now on I want you to be independent and in charge of yourself, since you can judge very well by yourself what is proper behavior for a young man" (21-22).

best explains the sentiment of attachment to a place: “If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the mother is the child’s primary place. . . . [S]he is recognized by the child as his essential shelter and dependable source of physical and psychological comfort” (29). This sentiment is found earlier in Chrétien’s story. Already an adult knight, Lancelot was once trapped and locked up during an adventure. He prayed for help with the aid of a magic ring given by the Lady, an amulet which could free people from the power of enchantment. Holding the ring before his eyes and gazing at it, Lancelot said, “Lady, lady! By the grace of God, I greatly need you to come now to my aid” (Chrétien 236). The narrator added: “he was certain that she would come to succor him wherever he might be” (236). In other words, the Lady is Lancelot’s omnipresent protector and refuge, regardless of where he might venture beyond the realm of the Lake. Lancelot would be “adrift—placeless—without the supportive parent” (Tuan 29). Though he loses his birth mother, destiny dispatches the unexpectedly qualified and resourceful Lady to bring him up on the Gallic “lakescape.”

Like its classical predecessor, Arthurian Arcadia is not a place without sadness. Gerbino states that “[love] is the only cause of suffering” for the inhabitants of classical Arcadia (58). If in ancient Greece the Arcadians only suffered over love and romance, the Arthurian version also allows residents to suffer for love, but not necessarily the sensual love between women and men. What tortures the Lady of the Lake is the sadness she suffers from losing Lancelot when he has to leave at eighteen for King Arthur’s court. She once said to Lancelot: “I have devoted to you all the love that a mother could devote to her child, so that I don’t know how I can possibly do without you: it will be a heavy burden for my heart” (*Lancelot* 61). Yet, she does not treat Lancelot as her possession; she allows him to leave because she believes that she will not have been distressed for nothing. As she said: “I would rather endure my own suffering than keep you away from the high and honorable order of knighthood” (61). Like any brave mother, she takes pain into her heart, however great it may be.

## VI. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated how the Vulgate composers remodel the Lake of Diana as a medieval Arthurian Arcadia and how they channel the



Greco-Roman legacy into the corpus of medieval French thought. While Western pastoral literature associates classical Arcadia more with Pan, the Vulgate writers recall another dimension through its connection with Diana. The background presence of Diana, who sanctifies the space of the lakescape, is integral to the Vulgate writers' representation and transformation of the Lake as Arthurian Arcadia. Although the conventional imagery of classical Arcadia develops along a line closer to the fictional Arcadia, the historic Arcadia, to one's surprise, also has a role to play in association with Diana. The name of the Lake tells a story, and feeling for this place is influenced and strengthened by the knowledge of classical and medieval cultures.

What makes this Arthurian Arcadia essentially valuable is that it is a land of symbols—water as the source of life and growth; verticality associated with the sky and a new cosmos—far distant from the wars and violence of its day. The Lake of Diana is not a mere nominal term: this Arcadian space is also a locus where human-location relationship is revealed. The heritage of Diana's many benign aspects finds expression in the Lady of the Lake, following the goddess's footprints as huntress, Lady of the Lakes, and protector of children.

The Arthurian Arcadian world chronicled here is a hermeneutic achievement that has a dual purpose: the text synthesizes the classical and medieval sources from which it arose and also creates a novel understanding of the Lake of Diana. The Vulgate writers' literary innovation both sustains and diverges from the classical tradition. Arthurian Arcadia is thus a peculiar poetic synthesis of existing classical and medieval elements.



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