



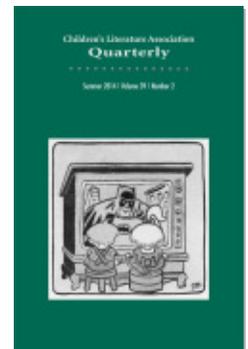
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Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Volume 18, Number 3,
Fall 1993, pp. 120-125 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/chq.0.1001



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Merlin's Fathers: The Sacred and the Profane

by Terri Frongia

Merlin the magician has long provided authors a figure with which to explore the relationship of man to nature, society, and history. Contemporary authors of children's literature have joined in this exploration by producing tales about Merlin's childhood and youth. In so doing, they have not only filled in biographical details omitted by earlier writers less interested in the experiences of childhood, for example Geoffrey of Monmouth and Sir Thomas Malory, but, more importantly, they have offered a welcome perspective on the contribution of father(s), present and absent, actual and surrogate, divine and human, to a figure with the archetypal powers that the Merlin of legend possesses.¹

The adult Merlin exemplifies fully the Jungian archetype of the wise old man who appears in dreams in the guise of magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any other male possessing authority. Essential to that archetype is its personification of "Spirit."² Spirit may be construed in psychological terms, as in Jungian theory; in anthropological terms, as when it denotes a "mana personality" (a holder of extraordinary supernatural or magical powers); or in religious terms, as a "Holy Spirit," to which one is connected or by which one is possessed. The image of Merlin most familiar to us, that of wonder-worker and mentor, contains both the shamanic and psychological elements of the concept of Spirit; in some versions, he is also at times God-possessed. It is this spiritual dimension of the adult Merlin's personality that offers perhaps the most fertile background against which to read the father/son relationships explored in contemporary reworkings of the legend for children. Merlin cannot become the Wise Old Man and carry out his responsibilities to King Arthur and the British people until he has established during his childhood his connection with the world of the spirit.

Further, the religious dimensions of Merlin's legend are not to be understood only from within the context of religious history—that is, as an expression of specific belief systems such as Druidism or Christianity—but more importantly from the broader perspective of religious philosophy. I will therefore draw upon the work of the religious philosopher and historian Mircea Eliade to help illuminate the character of Merlin and the nature of his relations with the father-figures scripted for him by the contemporary authors Peter Dickinson, Pamela F. Service, Rosemary Sutcliff, and Jane Yolen.

While motives for selecting Merlin's early years as the storyteller's narrative ground no doubt vary from author to author and from story to story, the consequences of that selection appear remarkably consistent: that is, in rendering the numinous and extra-ordinary figure of Merlin as a child in the world, the author consciously or inadvertently conjures two different—and frequently conflicting—modes of being. While these two modes are commonly identified as the supernatural and the human, Eliade's designations of the sacred and the profane are equally applicable and will be used here.

Even from earliest times these widely divergent categories have been yoked in order to express the wizard and his story; we find them inextricably joined in Geoffrey of Monmouth's famous

introduction of the character in his *The History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136). Because Geoffrey's report of Merlin's origins not only exemplifies these two modes of being but also provides the basis for many modern retellings like those of Yolen and Service, a brief review is perhaps in order.

Geoffrey, a medieval Christian who nonetheless is influenced by ancient pagan traditions, identifies Merlin's mother as a cloistered nun, the virgin daughter of a petty ruler. When the girl is questioned by King Vortigern about her child's father, she indicates that she has no idea who he is, for she was repeatedly visited and embraced by a mysterious, invisible lover. The king calls in a wise man to see if such a thing is indeed possible. Citing Apuleius' *De deo Socratis*, the scholar asserts that is certainly is; he goes on to add that the phantom lover is no doubt an "incubus demon." Instead of describing a devilish imp, the scholar offers an unexpected gloss on the word *demon*: the "incubus demon" possesses "partly the nature of men and partly that of angels" (168).³ By introducing the positively-charged word *angel*, Geoffrey not only substitutes the image of a radiant, prelapsarian Lucifer for that of a dark, satanic figure, but also alludes to the mythic import of the union: Merlin is the direct issue of a *hieros gamos*, a sacred marriage. Since Merlin is the product of the union of human and supernatural, earth and sky, it is understood that his character will not be like that of other men; from the moment of his conception, his being is endowed with sacred value.

The young Merlin's numinous nature and consequent special status in the world may be illuminated by Eliade's analysis of the nature of the sacred in *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade opens with a summation of Rudolf Otto's definition of the sacred as "something 'wholly other' (*ganz andere*), something basically and totally different. It is like nothing human or cosmic" (9-10). While Eliade agrees with Otto, he argues that the sacred is nonetheless humanly accessible: although "it is *the opposite of the profane*" (10)—that is, the usual, normal, or "natural"—it may nonetheless paradoxically manifest or "show" itself "in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world" (11).

By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A *sacred* stone remains a *stone* . . . [but] its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. . . . The *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy. . . . Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power. (12-13)

Geoffrey's account of Merlin's paternity establishes an essential—and genetic—reason for the wizard's being "saturated

with power," and for his preternatural ability to divine reality. Merlin, as the son of an "incubus demon," has been endowed with the gift of prophecy, and, more importantly within this context, with the ability to see through earth and stone—that is, he can perceive the otherworldly *reality* underlying natural phenomena, for example, the two dragons lying under the water who make the foundations of Vortigern's tower unstable (169). It this sacred vision of Merlin's which Jane Yolen—taking her cue from Geoffrey—translates into concrete terms in the short story "The Confession of Brother Blaise." Interpreting literally the human/devil/angel admixture in Geoffrey's version, Yolen portrays the birth of Merlin as the advent of a truly portentous child. Physically "part human and part imp," the newborn babe is endowed with "the most beautiful face, like an ivory carving of an angel, and eyes the blue of Our Lady's robe"; it also possesses, however, a slashing, whipcord tail and "claws instead of fingers" (15).

This paradoxical image is readily translated into the mythico-religious terms used by Eliade: the hierogamic union has produced not only a new being, the child, but also an *ontophany*—that is, a revelation of the being's origin and essential nature. As Eliade remarks: "Every myth shows how a reality came into existence. . . . To tell *how* a thing was born is to reveal an irruption of the sacred into the world" (97). Yolen's depiction of Merlin's ontophany, like Geoffrey's, furthermore displays a distinctive Judeo-Christian cast, for both call attention to Merlin's "pure" (religious) and "impure" (satanic) bloodlines.

Father Blaise, unexpectedly confronted with this monstrous birth (or, rather, ontophantic irruption), responds in an appropriately mythic and religious manner: he instinctively confronts spirit with Spirit. Taking up the holy oil of consecration, the priest forms the cross on Merlin's forehead, belly, genitals, buttocks, feet, and hands. The grotesque baby's "imp aspect" immediately is transformed, and he is "suddenly and wholly human." The child's transfiguration expresses a metamorphosis not only of body, but of identity, for he has just received the rite of baptism, which Yolen uses here as a ritual of initiation into both the Christian and the human community. This device, too, is a literalist interpretation of tradition, as we recognize when we view her account from Eliade's perspective: "When a child is born, he has only a physical existence; he is not yet recognized by his family nor accepted by the community. It is the rites performed immediately after birth that give the infant the status of a true 'living person'" (184-85).

Blaise's intervention has even greater mythic import, however, for immediately after his baptism and transformation, the babe proclaims in words of fire, "*Holy, holy, holy.*" He then proceeds to reveal more fully his divine aspect: declaring himself the fruit of a "sinless" womb, he announces that he "shall save a small part of the world." He will be "prophet and mage, lawgiver and lawbreaker, king of the unseen worlds and counselor to those seen" (16). By performing the initiatory rite of holy baptism, Father Blaise makes Yolen's infant Merlin attain what Eliade would term "a radical change in ontological and social status" (184). Thus the child's existence alters from one of mere ontophany (a revelation of his imp/human being) to one of *hierophany*, a revelation of the sacred. It is the type of sacredness that Eliade talks about toward the end of his life: "The sacred is always the revelation of the real, an encounter with that which saves us by giving meaning to our existence" (qtd. in Spivey xx).

Here Eliade emphasizes the soteriological—that is, salvational—capacity of the sacred, a capacity clearly at the forefront of Yolen's narrative. Blaise, a spiritual father-figure and a man of power in his own right, uses his numinous force to check and direct the essential nature of the child he has helped to bring into the world. By converting Merlin from a demonic human to a humanized savior, Blaise enacts not only the requirements of his personal faith, but the broader hopes of society at large. The gravity and nobility of the parental role—two dimensions seriously undermined both by and within contemporary Western society—are thus affirmed by the mythic structures of the narrative.

While Yolen has Merlin's demonic father confer the power that his surrogate father Blaise directs, the historical novelist Rosemary Sutcliff offers a different interpretation of the father(s)' role and its impact upon the formation of the individual. In *The Sword and the Circle*, her adaptation of Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century *Morte d'Arthur* for young readers, she presents Merlin as the product of neither a sacred marriage nor a profane union between two individuals. Rather, she carefully coordinates various components of his legend to direct attention to the fact that Merlin represents the amalgamation of diverse peoples, cultures, and times. She therefore defines his parentage broadly and inclusively:

Three strains of power ran deep within Merlin; from his mother who was of the Demetii he had the herb-skills and the ancient half-lost wisdoms of the Old People, the Little Dark People; and from the old Druid, almost the last of his kind, who had taken and reared and trained him after his mother entered her nunnery, he had star-knowledge and the skills of shape-shifting and art-magic; and both these he could use at will. But from his father he had the power to look into the future as other men look into the past; and this came not at his own will but at the will of the power itself, that was like a great wind that snatched him up into some place where past and future were one. (14)

Implicit in Sutcliff's vision are not only the constants of human experience—the intimacies of mother and child, the mutual dependencies of mentor and student, the mysterious legacies of one generation to the next—but the harsh realities of time and history as well. The people of Merlin's mother, like their skills and wisdoms, have been marginalized, half-lost: they are now "Old," "Little," and "Dark." The elderly Druid too belongs to an ancient, vanishing world; with the migration of new peoples and the influx of new types of knowledge, his shape-shiftings and art-magics will no longer be carried on by the new generation. Although he tutors the greatest mage of them all, the old master is obsolete, a relic. The sacred values of both mother and Druid are passing away in a world concerned with other values, other modes of being. In describing Merlin's identity, Sutcliff is clearly also portraying the phenomenon of a culture's increasing allegiance to profane values.

The sacred values Merlin inherits include the gift of the past, deriving from his mother; it is his in the form of cultural memory. From his mentor, the old Druid, he has the gift of the present represented by his practical skills and his ability to take action or

to impose his own will on the world. But the most ambiguous and volatile gift comes from his father: it is the gift of the future, or, more accurately, of the ability to experience that "place where past and future were one." Although this gift is most readily interpreted as the gift of prophecy or second sight, it may also be construed as the ability to inhabit momentarily a different world. In reality, such a place is what Eliade calls "sacred time," a time "neither homogeneous nor continuous . . . indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable" (68-69).

What is at stake is a vision of the self as integral part of a larger whole; that is, by inhabiting sacred space even momentarily, the child is able to perceive himself as the result of a long line of individuals who have lived the cycles of their own lives on the same planet. Also at stake, though, is the child's participation in those values associated with the sacred—values that are clearly passed from parent to child down through the centuries but that just as clearly fall prey to the vicissitudes of history and cultural change, as Sutcliff's description makes clear. Through memory, practice, and vision, Merlin is able to remain associated with the vital forces informing his world, the world of the *homo religiosus*. Thus his father's gift aids him to understand and to transmit a spiritualized vision of a world that is threatened with extinction.

In her picture book *Wizard of Wind and Rock*, Pamela F. Service casts just such a cosmic vision in terms concretely related to Merlin's legendary wonder-working abilities.⁴ These special powers—the ability to understand wind and see into stone—are indicative of the character's capacity to perceive what Eliade calls "the very structures of the world" (117); that is, the sacred essence present in even the most common phenomena. It is this gift and Merlin's timely ability to use it that provide the dramatic crux of the story. Like Yolen in "The Confession of Father Blaise," Service turns to Geoffrey of Monmouth for inspiration in her retelling of Merlin's perilous meeting with King Vortigern and his counsellors. Here again Merlin's parents are both human and otherworldly: his mother is a human princess and his father is an "eldritch lord," a spirit-king of the forest. Rather than expressing their relationship in religious terms, as Geoffrey does, or in mythic ones, like Yolen, Service chooses instead to present it from a distinctly sociological perspective: the couple's union is frowned upon, for society cannot accept the intermingling of the two races. The young princess must therefore keep the identity of Merlin's sire a secret from all, especially the villagers with whom she and her illegitimate child live. A bastard, the acknowledged child of no father, Merlin is reviled and taunted by his peers.

Laura Marshall's vividly colored illustrations portray, as does the text, how the young Merlin is first ostracized because of his illegitimate birth and then threatened with death because of the fear and jealousy aroused by the uncommon powers inherited from his eldritch father. By juxtaposing these two motivations for Merlin's ostracism—the one profane and the other sacred—Service effectively reveals the clash of values that provides the theme of the story. Merlin's earthly vision—for example, his ability to gaze through soil and stone and see the dragons causing Vortigern's castle to shift its foundations—delivers him from the evil that King Vortigern and his false priests intend him, while his prophetic vision reveals his mission, the glorious destiny that he has come to fulfill. As those familiar with the legend know, this destiny is joined with that of Arthur, a king symbolically associated (by way of the image of the Grail evident in the illustration)

with the divine order. Unlike Yolen, Service portrays a Merlin whose dual powers, profane and sacred, do not stem from two fathers, but from an earthly mother who is present and a supernatural father who is absent.

Yolen returns again to the intersection of the sacred and the profane in "The Wild Child" and "Dream Reader," two other stories about Merlin's youth from *Merlin's Booke*. While the sacred mode of existence is still central in these two short stories, Yolen emphasizes the role of the mentor or spiritual guide within the context of this existence. Furthermore, by opening both stories with a situation in which the child Merlin is an exile without home or family, Yolen introduces another factor into the sacred/profane context: circumstance. In so doing, she subtly invites reflection upon the status of both child and the sacred in our culture.

In "The Wild Child," Merlin is an elfin eight-year-old who lives alone, like an animal, in the woods. Although he is feral, he is no dumb beast, for the natural world communicates with him in ways it does not with others; that is, he reads his surroundings and relates to them in non-human ways. These ways include not only the instinctive and animal, but also the totemic and sacramental. Accidentally discovered by Master Robin, a falconer, the feral boy is captured and taken to be raised in normal human society, but he remains as untamed as one of the falconer's prize birds, the *passager*. One day Master Robin perceives the child's intense interest in a particular bird, the same bird that caused Master Robin to happen upon the lad in the first place. In a gentle attempt to connect with the withdrawn child, Robin observes in a low voice, "You like my merlin best, then?" The boy's reaction to these words is so frightening that the man gathers the boy into his arms. Only when the child, rocking back and forth like the agitated bird he is mimicking, mutters "Name. . . . Name," does Master Robin understand: "I see. . . . You are as small and as fierce and as independent as my *passager*. And for some reason his name is yours. So I baptize you Merlin" (35).

The child's salvation occurs in that instant. Once Master Robin pronounces that magic word, "merlin," the boy's human nature is paradoxically restored, for his "memory . . . had come flooding through him when he was given back his name" (36). Robin's naming is a kind of christening, like the baptism performed by Yolen's Father Blaise, and represents a rebirth, a second beginning and a new identity. Significantly, both christening and rebirth are made possible through Merlin's identification with a totemic creature, the falcon. As both tradition and literary convention assert, this identification is more than metaphor, for the wizard is a master shape-shifter; see, for example, Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, or T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*.

The author's representation of speech as much more than a physiological act is also consistent with the story's representation of personhood partaking of the sacred. Indeed, Yolen provides insight into the human implications of language and memory when she observes in "The Gift of Tongues," that, "all children are born feral. They are *taught* to be human. . . . The wild child or feral child, lacking language, also lacks true memory, and thus lacks the basis of thought" (*Touch* 87). Eliade further illuminates these capacities from the perspective of the meaning that they hold for *homo religiosus*:

The abyss that divides the two modalities of experience—sacred and profane—will be apparent when we come to describe . . . the relations of religious man to nature and the world of tools, or the consecration of human life itself, the sacrality with which man's vital functions (food, sex, work and so on) can be charged. . . . For modern consciousness, a physiological act . . . is in sum only an organic phenomenon, however much it may still be encumbered by tabus. . . . such an act is never simply physiological; it is, or can become, a sacrament, that is, a communion with the sacred. (14)

Speech—especially naming—has always been laden with tabus, for words themselves have long been considered numinous. Naming is not merely a referential act but an ontological one, for to name a thing is to identify its being. And this signifying is precisely what Master Robin does when he names Merlin. Because of Robin's own profound connection to his creatures, the falcons, he is able to perceive their reflection in the boy; it is this reflection, or rather revelation of shared being, that provides him with insight into Merlin's real identity. In "The Wild Child," then, adoptive father and chosen son discover that they share the same sacred values; both are examples of *homo religiosus* living in a sanctified world.

But in another of Yolen's stories, "Dream Reader," no such harmony is present, for in this tale the teller relates how surrogate father and the son who chooses him may stray from the very values that have brought them together in the first place. Merlin, initially known as Merrillin, is no longer an eight-year-old wild child, but rather "almost a man" and used to homelessness, floggings, and virtual starvation because "he was always being sent away from place to place for lying" (*Merlin* 38). Calling himself Hawk because he dreams of "becoming a hawk, fiercely independent and no man's prey" (39), Merrillin realizes that he sees "truth differently from other folk. On the slant." This "gift," and the fact that "he's no mother's son," are at the root of his unhappy existence. This existence is soon altered irrevocably, however, when Merrillin meets up with a greying wise man and prestidigitator, Ambrosius the Wandering Mage. Patient and quietly observant like Master Robin, the canny Ambrosius is always on the lookout for what he calls "oddities"—especially human marvels, like the voluptuous and talented bard, Viviane. Merrillin, an oddity and a needy one at that, is invited to join the peripatetic players. The three travel together, gradually forging the complex bonds of family: Ambrosius, the surrogate father, teaches Hawk more than he realizes about the many ways of the mage, while Viviane, both archetypal mother and mistress, alternately stimulates and enrages his adolescent being.

It is during a royal performance at the castle of Carmarthen that the divergence of the youth's values from his mentor's first manifests itself. This revelation is prompted when Ambrosius asks Merlin to recount his dream of red and white dragons:

"Do not be afraid. Tell the dream and I will say what it means."
 "Will you know?" asked Merlin.
 "My eyes and ears know what needs be said here, whatever the dream. You must trust me." (56)

Merlin relates his dream, and Ambrosius interprets it to the satisfaction of his royal audience. But the explication is wrapped in a lie designed to authenticate Merlin, both in the lad's own eyes and in the eyes of their audience. Ambrosius concocts a story that Merlin is indeed his own son, the gifted issue of himself and a dream reader who died in childbirth. The cooperation of father and son is almost immediately dissolved by dissension, for upon their return to camp Merlin challenges Ambrosius's incomplete (and therefore to the boy's mind, untrue) interpretation of the dream. The older man justifies his actions with a certain cynicism: "To tell a prince to his face that you have dreamed of his doom invites the dreamer's doom as well. . . . The greatest wisdom of any dreamer is to survive in order to dream again. . . ." (59). It is clear that even though Ambrosius knows the truth and his responsibility to it, he also understands that the sacred values the truth embodies must often be compromised because of the profane nature of the world in which such truth is revealed.

Merlin's recognition of the secular reality at the base of Ambrosius' words and actions causes the boy to pause at the "abyss"—to borrow Eliade's term—that the older man has so unexpectedly exposed. Their next exchange reveals not only an existential shift in the boy's thinking, but a profound psychological shift in the older man's as well:

Merlin had closed his eyes then, and when he opened them again, they were the clear vacant blue of a newborn babe. "Father," he had said, and it was a child's voice speaking.

Ambrosius had shivered with the sound of it, for he knew that sons in the natural order of things o'erthrew their fathers when they came of age. And Merlin, it was clear, was very quick to learn and quicker to grow. (59)

While these words effectively crystallize the Oedipal undercurrent present in Yolen's tale, they more importantly direct attention to the placement of this ancient conflict within a different mythico-religious context; thus the conflict may be interpreted as one occurring between two value systems—one endorsing pragmatism, the other eschewing it—rather than between individuals or even generations. The young, idealistic Merlin represents the allegiance to a pure vision and application of the sacred, while the realistic Ambrosius represents a compromised, profaned allegiance to the sacred and its requirements.⁵

"Dream Reader" presents the opposition between pragmatism and idealism. Peter Dickinson, on the other hand, offers a vision of their harmonious balance in his beautifully crafted volume of linked short stories, *Merlin Dreams*. Here a masterful interweaving of material and spiritual, past and future, father and son, focus on Merlin the great leader and mentor. Perhaps the most haunting of these visionary glimpses of Merlin the adult is the one presented in a brief narrative symbolically wedged between the two tales "Sword" and "Hermit." The scene portrays an incident from the mage's childhood which illustrates how Merlin, "king of the unseen words and counselor to those seen" (to borrow Yolen's resonant phrase), first exercised his spiritual authority. Significantly, it is also the instant of Merlin's *kairos*—a term that Robert Bly defines as the "exactly . . . right

moment for what was lying hidden in one's fate to be revealed" (126). Dickinson convincingly conveys the yearning of the boy to be immersed in the sacred in that twinkling of *kairos*, when past, present, and future collapse to become one. As the solitary young Merlin gazes down into a chasm filled with wheeling birds, he senses the sacred, transcendent reality of nature:

The ravens. Something in their flight, a secret, a key—key to a truth that lay all around, invisible energies, powers to be met and mastered This master-knowledge was not for teaching [by the priests of the oak-grove]. But it was there. He could feel it at this holy moment, an intense, waiting presence. So near. The whole landscape glowing with its power. His soul seeming to swell, seeming to want to burst out of his body, to float like a bubble up into the secret. There, waiting for him. (64)

The evocative illustrations by Alan Lee embracing the text not only reinforce the holiness of the moment, but also inform us more completely about Merlin and his own relationship to this vital, protecting presence. On the lower right-hand page we see the boy Merlin from behind, stretched out on the rocky earth as he gazes intently into the depths of the precipice, while drifting above him on the upper left-hand page is the adult Merlin, ancient, weary, and unsubstantial. Dickinson's words illuminate the scene: "Time has looped back and is crossing over close above that exact moment. If he could reach down as the child reached up, their fingers would almost touch. But the child does not stir, does not understand the presence above him" (64). Words and image combined cause us to perceive that the knowledge the boy seeks is not only a matter of mastering the material world or understanding the invisible energies and powers active in that world, but also of realizing in full his own being, his own nature and sacredness. Thus, in the brief space of two facing pages, Dickinson reveals to the reader both the epiphanic moment when the child chooses the kind of being he will be—what he will dedicate his life to attain—and the ultimate consequence of that choice.

It is the youth's death to the old, profane life and initiation into the new, "real," sacred life that the ancient, ghostly Merlin paradoxically both remembers and oversees in this dream vision; he has, therefore, in a mysterious but nonetheless real sense, become his own father. Dickinson employs not only visual and poetic methods, but important mythico-religious structures, for example ritual death and rebirth in initiation rites, in order to weave together form and content into an articulate, organic whole. Merlin's connection with the world of the spirit is shown here to be complete: wonder-child and wise old man meld and are one.

It is important to note that in Dickinson's work the connection, unlike that posited by Geoffrey centuries ago, is one not of genetic predisposition but of intentional selection. In the case of the young Merlin's moment of revelation and affirmation, the author shows him making a choice consistent with his own nature and temperament. This decision forms the defining relationship of Merlin's life, his embracing of the cosmos. Dickinson summarizes the legend, and the course of Merlin's life it reflects, by using the fateful choice as a point of departure. Because of his decision to embrace the sacred, this Merlin is able to take part in the "open" or "transhuman" existence identified

by Eliade and described here by Dickinson:⁶

There had been a boy who watched the ravens. There was a man who slept under rock. Between that starting and this ending he had walked many paths, he had been the wolf in the forest, the salmon in the flood, the raven on the cliff. He had been the woman at the hearth also. . . . It had been no punishment and no shame, but rich years giving knowledge and power. (149)

The texts considered in this study reveal that, at least for contemporary authors, the "knowledge and power" Merlin needs to fulfill his own life and to discharge his destiny as a savior of the British people have, like Merlin himself, a dual origin. The first consists of the *interpersonal*: the various fathers, teachers, and spiritual parents who provide the guidance which enables him to become in his turn the guide and mentor of others; the second consists of the *intrapersonal*, most evident in the selection of his life's path. Because as a boy he chooses the sacred and dedicates himself to its values, he comes to participate fully in the transhuman, supernatural dimensions of the world and becomes, as may be seen in Dickinson's version, both enduring spirit (165) and Jungian Wise Old Man, "the sleeping mage . . . buried in minds fresh born" (167). Whether portrayed as newborn child or wizened adult, Merlin remains a profound spiritual and symbolic presence in a weary, profane world.

NOTES

¹For a contemporary version for adults of Merlin's enigmatic paternity, see Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave*, which has proved popular with adolescent readers.

²For examples of archetypal criticism applied to the figure of Merlin, see James Gollnick and Terri Frongia.

³This is Lewis Thorpe's translation (see Geoffrey 168) of Geoffrey's "*incubos daemones. . . . Hic partim habent naturam hominum, partim vero angelorum. . . .*" Merlin's supernatural paternity is both sanctified— or sanitized, at least for medieval readers— and made more consonant with his immaculate Christian maternity, a strategy which permits Geoffrey to use Merlin as a Christian allegorical figure.

⁴For those interested in the work of Robert Bly, *Wizard of Wind and Rock* offers an illustration of the archetypal "King in His Three Realms" identified in *Iron John*. In Service's story, the Eldritch lord, Merlin's father, is a manifestation of the Sacred King, what Bly calls "a King in the imaginative or invisible world" (106). Appearing only at the beginning of the story, he represents both God the Creator (as father of Merlin) and God the Sustainer (as the ruling spirit of the Forest). Vortigern, on the other hand, is an aspect of the political or earthly king. Merlin exemplifies the third, or inner (personal) King. Looking at Service's narrative in the light of Bly, then, the negative hierarchy—which derives its destructive power from the "Poisoned" or "Twisted" King—would include: Priests (ax-wielding sacred king), Vortigern (despotic political king), and sacrificed child (destroyed inner king). The positive hierarchy, on the other hand, would be: Merlin's father (sacred king), Arthur (nurturing political king), and Merlin ("whole" or affirmed inner king).

⁵Another mythic perspective on the dynamics of the father/son relationship occurs in "Dream Reader." Interpreted against the conceptual ground of rites of passage, Ambrosius may be seen as initiating the adolescent Merlin into adulthood (a knowledgeable, post-lapsarian state) and into the secret society of mages and dreamers. "As for initiatory rituals proper, a distinction must be made between puberty initiations (age group) and ceremonies for entrance into a secret society" (Eliade 186).

⁶See especially the chapter on "Human Existence and Sanctified Life," in which Eliade describes the "existential situation of one for whom all these homologies [e.g., as when a sterile woman cries, 'I am like a field where nothing grows'] are *experiences* and not simply *ideas*. Clearly, his life has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is at the same time cosmic, since it has a transhuman structure. It could be termed an open existence, for it is not strictly confined to man's mode of being" (166).

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Illustration by F. D. Bedford for Peter and Wendy, 1911.