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“Cinemagicians”: Movie Merlins of the 1980s and 1990s

BARBARA D. MILLER

Merlin the enchanter is a unique yet universal Arthurian figure, as recognizable as the king himself. Nevertheless, the multifaceted sage is not easily defined. As the shape-shifter whose iconological spectrum encompasses not only the familiar wise elder, but also diverse other entities from miraculous child to otherworld stag,¹ Merlin seems to choose how, when, to what degree, and even whether to reveal himself. The shamanistic origins of this shrewd and enigmatic being far predate the time when Geoffrey of Monmouth drew him into Arthur's legendary orbit as the striking boy-prophet of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1136). Merlin's prehistoric roots align him closely with enchanter types from Shakespeare's Prospero to García Márquez's Melquíades, Roddenberry's Data, and endless others.² Both research scholars and students of popular culture view King Arthur's chief counselor as the prototypical wizard³ who, although frequently called by the name of "Merlin," is also likely to enter a filmic or a literary scene incognito.

Textual meanings, of course, may be expressed just as well through a disguised or altered Merlin as a completely traditional one. In some cases, modification of the sorcerer's image may improve his suitability to a work. For these reasons, King Arthur's chief prestidigitator easily lends himself to a survey of varied appearances in five highly contrasting motion pictures. These films—*Excalibur* (1981), *Knightriders* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), *The Fisher King* (1991), and *First Knight* (1995)—in

which Merlin or Merlin analogues materialize—range from dramatic works of customary idealized medieval settings to wild popular adventure and reconfigured comedic treatments.

The Paradoxical Merlin of Excalibur

In some texts, Merlin's importance may rival that of his kings. As a sacerdotal figure he seems to become more powerful with each progressively Christianized medieval epiphany. For instance, Jeff Rider argues convincingly that in Layamon's *Brut* Merlin actually shapes history while the kings, like puppets, merely play it out.⁴ *Excalibur* presents us with a Merlin worthy of such mighty forebears, yet plagued by a disturbing ambivalence. His ironic power, as molded by director John Boorman, results in a magnificent puissance of frustrating limitations. The enchanter's godlike force is implied even before the film's first scene, when the introductory titles, like remnants of the medieval *conte* which purports to tell itself, inform us that "Out of those lost centuries rose a legend ... of the sorcerer, Merlin, of the coming of a king, of the sword of power." Hence, although the sword of kings furnishes the title motif, the first component of its legend is Merlin.⁵

As the film opens, indistinguishable knights arrive to do battle over a darkened landscape. The only light emanates from their flickering torches and fiery arrows. Meanwhile a lone figure in silhouette ascends a hill to oversee the playing out of history. When this judgeliike spectator has taken his place, the warriors begin the action. Viewers who may not have identified this important personage through the shadowy details of a walking staff and billowing robes will know the wizard as the camera moves to a close-up headshot. Seconds later *Excalibur's* Merlin, the first recognizable character to appear, exercises the divine prerogative of naming, as he utters the first word of dialogue. Uther and Merlin call to each other in a double antiphon suggesting the mythic symbiosis binding prophet and king. Thus, Merlin's declaration of the name legitimizes a sovereign who, without that authorization, would seem only to epitomize the uncivilized warriors joining him in his ritualistic bloodbath.⁶ Intimation that the seer alone can create a monarch intensifies when Merlin, procuring the sword of power for a childish rash Uther, is obliged to explain the armament's proper use, "to heal, not to hack!"

Nicol Williamson portrays a Merlin of expressly humorous inclinations. The wise man's drollery suggests a convention of pre-Arthurian myth basic to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, that of the prophet's *fou*



Nicol Williamson as Merlin in John Boorman's 1981 film *Excalibur*.

rire.⁷ This laughter is associated with shamanistic magic partly because it may be read as a sign of otherworldly knowledge. In *Excalibur*, Merlin's fetching little chuckles punctuate several of his most telling comments and asides. He endears himself to the audience by a willingness to acknowledge when the joke is on him, as in the scene where he falls into a stream, outsmarted by a beautiful silver fish that slips through his fingers. "Remember," he wryly observes, "there's always something cleverer than yourself."

However supernaturally powerful this Merlin may be, such scenes as that of the enchanter's unsuccessful fishing attempt make it clear that he is also vulnerable. Although Sir Ector tells us that he originally agreed to adopt the baby Arthur only because he feared the necromancer, the Duke of Cornwall's partisans, by contrast, regard Merlin with suspicion for his part in the deception by which Uther stole the duchess. Reference to this sorcerer as "godlike," then, must be qualified with care. In a film connected more closely by critics to a fertility myth along the lines of the famous *Golden Bough* than to properly Christian Grail histories, it is almost inevitable that Merlin should become a pagan conjurer. The point is made more than once by the wise man himself that he represents a waning polytheistic order and that he has no place in the new monotheistic one.⁸ Divinity,

pagan though it appears to be, does contribute significantly, therefore, to the personality and the authority of *Excalibur's* prophet.

In fact, a truly immortal type of potency surfaces at certain crucial junctures (for instance, when Merlin names the kings, or when he proclaims the meaning of the Round Table).⁹ Despite his precognition of most defining occurrences, as well as numerous outcomes effected by him, the sorcerer's capacity to control is inconsistent. This underlying weakness becomes evident on a few occasions when he is taken by surprise. When Uriens suddenly abandons his reservations about the young king's legitimacy, knights Arthur, and then humbly relinquishes *Excalibur* to his new liege, Merlin looks on in astonished fascination. When Arthur's prideful rage breaks the indestructible blade during his first encounter with Lancelot, Merlin's despair matches that of his king. Yet (as Morgana is to discover too late), the magician's power should never be discounted. For as king and wizard stand hopelessly confronted with the broken sword, the Lady of the Lake comes into view, and Merlin instantly knows that Arthur must avail himself of the miraculously restored armament without delay. The enchanter also inspires the king to commission the Round Table when he urges the knights to remember that they are joined under the stars in a circle of righteous victory.¹⁰ Both these Arthurian milestones are marked by evidence of Merlin's talent for discerning and seizing a unique moment. Although he is less than perfectly omniscient, Merlin's triumphs are extraordinary. His flawed yet supernatural wisdom is what makes him "more, but also less, than human" (Yakir 50).

Defects in Merlin's might may also be perceived when he fails to modify the future, despite foreknowledge of it. For example, the wizard resigns himself to the predetermined outcome of Lancelot's and Guinevere's destructive love. When Arthur orders his magician to heal Lancelot's wound, he obediently, if reluctantly, invokes the "charm of making." He neither hesitates nor protests. Nevertheless, a mature Arthur perceives a sign of danger in Merlin's uncharacteristic sighs and terse responses. When the king asks, "Will I ever have a son?" the reply is a flat "Yes." When Arthur observes that this stark monosyllable worries him, he receives only the world-weary intonation: "But a king should be afraid, Arthur ... always." Responding to the king's anxiety about the fate of the wizard himself, Merlin alludes once again to his divinity, yet admits to its decreasing force in the material world. "The gods of once are gone forever. It's a time for men."

The bitter Morgana soon uses Merlin's ultimate charm to imprison him among the stalactites and stalagmites of the dragon's coil. She is, however, not solely responsible for his demise. Other elements contributing

to the kingdom's annihilation are brought to bear as well. When Arthur drives *Excalibur* into the earth between the sleeping Guinevere and Lancelot, whom he has found locked in a lovers' embrace, the parallel underground world into which the enchanter has led Morgana reverberates with the fatal blow. Merlin has told the boy Arthur that the dragon is everywhere, and now we see that it is in the wizard. When the blade is thrust into the "dragon's spine" of earth, it impales the sorcerer, thus foreshadowing the death of the king. Arthur's emotional reaction to Guinevere's and Lancelot's betrayal also becomes a portent of regicide, as an imitation of King Uther's furiously possessive dying stroke, by which the sword was originally embedded in the stone. The violent actions of the different kings have opposite immediate results, however. The regal blade paralyzed in cold, hard stone at the death of Uther promises a "fair time" to follow, with the coming of Arthur as the one ordained to release it. The sword driven between the lovers, into the life-supporting soil and into the flesh of the enchanter, forms a diametrical contrast by presaging the end of the fragile Eden of Arthur's kingdom. The particular biblical metaphor is actually communicated by the very Edenic setting in which the queen and her champion have consummated their love.

As in the case of Merlin's indirect influence on the founding of the Round Table, the motif of the sword driven by kings, instead of by the magician, sets this filmic text apart from those of most medieval versions.¹¹ Arthur's jealous sword thrust echoes Uther's final act, thereby underlining both his royal sonship and the special union of all kings. But Boorman's interesting image of Merlin's impalement by his beloved ward also reiterates the enchanter's symbiotic relationship to the monarchs by drawing him into the temporal core between the two symbolic sword thrusts of royal father and son. This is appropriate, in part, because the sorcerer is the one who initially placed the sword into the first king's hand.

Moreover, the vision of Merlin's impalement by his ordained and trusted "second son" simultaneously foreshadows the mutual murder of Arthur and Mordred. Thus it becomes the fulcrum for a counterpoint between past and future regicides. The impaled Merlin (whom Morgana has called "mother and father" of Arthur) becomes the intermediary between Arthur and his biological father on the one hand, and between Arthur and his incestuously begotten son on the other. In fact, the precise narrative positioning and means of Merlin's fatal weakening make him the fulcrum around which the entire story and life cycle revolve.

Morgana's hubris misleads her to an exaggerated opinion of her role in Merlin's death and also of her ability to control the outcome of her vengeance. As she abandons him to his crystalline prison, she mocks his

apparent helplessness: "You're not a god; you're not a man. I shall find a man and give birth to a god."

Jacqueline de Weever perceptively underscores the injustice wrought by Merlin when his engineering of Arthur's birth robs Morgana of her inheritance. As the critic describes it, "The unintended point is that a world created upon a deliberate exclusion of a rightful claimant is just as doomed as the world it is intended to replace" (155). The sorceress of *Excalibur*, however justifiable her anger may be, nevertheless fatally miscalculates Merlin's defeat. Neither her turning of Merlin's sacred charm against him, nor even Arthur's sword thrust has really killed the indomitable sage. That would be impossible. Morgana has only been capable of exiling Merlin to an otherworld. And the fog, created by the irrepressible wizard from the element of her tainted breath, ensures that her downfall, and that of Mordred, will accompany the devastation of Arthur's realm.

Boorman's originality is exemplified once more by his version of Merlin's death.¹² In contrast to the Vulgate and Post-Vulgate narrative dynamic, for instance, wherein that death may be interpreted as the metaphorical burial of a fertility god, heralding the rise of the messianic Grail knight,¹³ here, with a few words of clever rhetoric, Morgana seems to have buried Merlin in prelude to the creation of her antigod, Mordred. But her deception will exact an even more terrible price than that which she has extracted from the one who tricked her mother and hastened the death of her father. The birth of Mordred proves a transitory victory, the prerequisite to the death by impalement projected through the image of the wounded Merlin just before Morgana captures him. Merlin's weakness in this case results as mere illusion. The enchanter's power is just as elusive as his ontology. He may seem to have been frozen away in subterranean ice, as Excalibur once seemed petrified in stone. However, far from eliminating him, an exile from one world has only facilitated his potency in another (overlapping) one. When the necromancer is converted by his enemy into a dreamlike shade, those to whom he has become a nightmare cannot touch him. Kay and Arthur each experience dreams in which they are visited and encouraged by the prophet. Paradoxically, a nervous giggle replaces Morgana's previous triumphant jeering, when her allegedly vanquished foe returns to her. Death, or sleep, has released Merlin from the corporeal state. Morgana's overconfident hatred and Arthur's nostalgic love have brought him back to them, in correspondingly nightmarish and dreamlike forms.

Merlin's death as seen in both medieval chronicle and romance is typically followed by an emphatic repetition of his prophecies. Such citations have the hermeneutic effect of conjuring up his presence from beyond the grave because they reinforce his word beyond the confines of his earthly

lifespan. During Merlin's nightmare return to Morgana before the final battle, he seduces her into a self-destructive use of the charm of making. As the sorcerer appears, disappears, and eludes her grasp, there occurs a haunting moment when he peers at the enchantress from the other side of a kind of grid. This impression mirrors a telling image from the early part of the story, that of the menacing child Morgana as voyeuse to Uther's sin.

Merlin also takes a pragmatic part in the last battle when he elicits the occluding dragon's breath from Morgana. Just as Merlin's awakening of the dragon mist expedites the entry of Uther into Tintagel to lie with Igrayne, so the sorcerer manipulates the enchantress into diffusing a fog that will accord Arthur a strategic advantage. Mordred's army cannot accurately discern the direction from which his father's knights approach, nor see how few they have become. Merlin's responsibility for the mist is underscored when his shade exits on foot and passes through the middle of the fog-enveloped camp, right past Mordred himself, unimpeded and unperceived.

Merlin's final departure prefaces the great battle between father and son. Yet, his essence lingers. The penultimate vision of the sword returning to its origin reminds us of the wizard who first summoned its emergence and recognized that source as the only hope of redemption for the special blade once sundered by pride.¹⁴ A bloody Excalibur is brandished once more by the Lady of the Lake, whose enigmatic arm, clothed in gleaming metallic scales, rises from tranquil water in consummate cleansing power. To the viewer who remembers Merlin's supernatural mediation, the reception of the sword from this mythic entity followed by its deliverance to the Pendragon kings, his overt presence here is unnecessary. The film begins with Merlin ascending a hill. It ends with Arthur's funeral barge sailing off to the horizon. The pivotal image immediately preceding this open ending presents us, however, with the mysterious emblem of the magician's esoteric wisdom, the unseen Lady's hand pulling the sword of power back down to its primordial source.

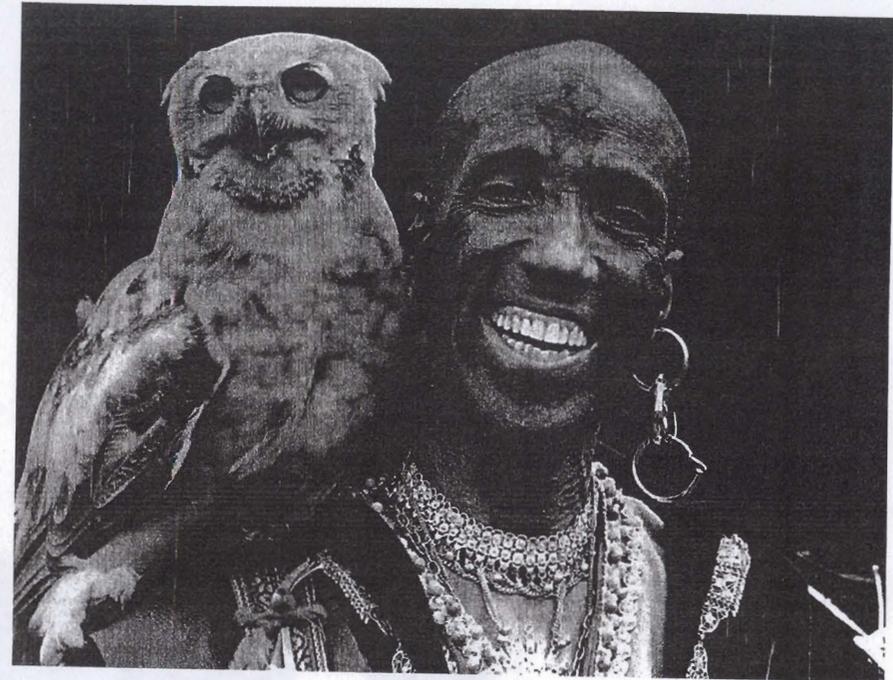
Knightriders and the Funky Merlin

Trouble between King Billy's motorcycle-riding knights and a corrupt small-town sheriff prompts Merlin's entrance on the scene of George Romero's film *Knightriders* (1981). The presence of the villainous sheriff, and of a self-indulgent courtier who dresses up as a monk and calls himself "Tuck," pertain not to the legend of King Arthur, but to that of the

commoners' hero, Robin Hood. There is a method to the legendary meld, however, since a roving troop of mostly merry wanderers comprises this king's "court," a bohemian Camelot whose constituents subsist on the scant profits afforded through performances at country fairs. Only modestly sized audiences made up of common folk are approved by the king for his champions' feats of derring-do. Billy's code of honor rests on a premise of motorcycle acrobatics as an art form, rendered for love and exclusively supportable through a lifestyle of freedom and integrity. Although a lack of money poses certain practical difficulties, the rules of Billy's unorthodox chivalry preclude commercialization on any terms. This maverick sovereign believes that the slightest compromise will set in motion the inexorable corrosion of his idyllic kingdom.

Within this sixties-style emotional ambience, a super-cool Merlin emerges from a hippie van. This enchanter, a drop-out physician, works his wonders through alternative medicine, dubious pills, and poetry. His otherworld incantations, spoken in tricksterlike African American slang, and punctuated by the symbol of his spirit-totem animal, the butterfly, provide the means for his sports-medicine wizardry. Merlin's shamanistic tradition comes into play when the wounded king confides a fatal dream. The sorcerer validates the dream's epistemology when he explains that the belief in magic behind his own nonconformity "got to do with the soul" which "got wings." In fact, an important intimation of the Arthur-Merlin symbiosis may be read in the emblems of Billy's raven and Merlin's chrysalis-breaking insect. According to Cornish folk tradition, the raven symbolizes the imminent "once-and-future king." Although the more literary versions of Arthur's ambiguous death portray the king carried off to the Isle of Avalon for healing, the representation of the dormant king in the form of a bird influences many treatments of the legend.¹⁵ The choice of the comparable butterfly sign for Merlin follows the Celtic convention associating shamans with animals, from antler-shedding stags to skin-shedding serpents, who cyclically "resurrect" themselves. The definitive and parallel feature of the king's and the enchanter's alternate ontologies is that of wings, which suggest ascent to a spirit realm.

Merlin acts as the ancient bard when he communicates his vision through storytelling. Yet this twentieth-century druid debunks any superstitious reliance on synchronicity by asserting that prophecies are usually self-fulfilling. People do have choices but intuitively embrace their appropriate fates. There is a rationally explicable cause behind the effect. An ideology combining science and myth is thus woven through this Merlin's stories, which (as in cases of archetypal deities related to the enchanter figure) are distinguished by lively wit and accompanied by charming



Brother Blue as Merlin in George Romero's 1981 film *Knightriders*. (Still courtesy of the British Film Institute.)

music.¹⁶ In this case, the hip sorcerer has transformed the lyre or pipe of mythology into a blues harmonica. All these bestiary and musical motifs, which are associated with the Merlin of *Knightriders*, relate in some way to an ontology of the spirit.

Knowledge of Merlin's mythic signs assists the viewer to understand why, despite his profound love for the uncompromisingly idealistic king, the medicine man will not intervene to prevent Billy's death. Merlin's final gesture of farewell, the raising of his butterfly-inscribed palm over the king's grave, underscores the enchanter's stoicism. He has only allowed destiny to use him as an agent of release for Billy's true essence, from its earth-bound vessel. Merlin has refused to interfere with his friend's escape from the wicked sheriff, abused brother-knights, and media promoters as well as from the jealousy of rival Sir Morgan. Billy, a "king" as reminiscent of James Dean as of Arthur, has even struggled to free himself from the true love of Lady Linet because of her controlling attempts to protect him from the dangers of stunt riding. Merlin has allowed Billy's liberation through death because as a prophet he understands the need to live

authentically, the nature of time, the inevitability of change, and the glorious possibilities of otherworld existence.

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade's *Professorial Wizard*

In Steven Spielberg's comical 1989 action adventure, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Henry Jones, professor of medieval literature and Grail-lore enthusiast, functions as a disguised Merlin. References to the professor's position as a supernatural hero's mentor surface near the beginning of the film. The introductory flashback sequence shows the young Indy rushing breathlessly into his father's study, antagonists close upon his heels in an effort to wrest from him a bejeweled medieval cross, which the boy plans to see safely to a museum. Rather than leap to his aid, the off-camera professor forces the boy to count for him, in Greek. The delay created by this unwelcome assignment gives the villains time to close in and trick Indiana into surrendering the relic. In his exasperation, the juvenile Indy, destined for greatness in the sciences, is thoroughly unable to appreciate the arts and esoterica stressed by his oblivious master.¹⁷ Moreover, Indiana's humorous frustration toward his father in this scene establishes the playful antagonism which characterizes their relationship and comically impacts their adventures throughout the film. The maddening yet loving relationship illuminates major themes, such as those of identity and the power of faith. The nature of Henry's role as a sorcerer is further implied during the early scene, when the camera teasingly reveals only the scholar's hands passing over his beloved books. This failure to show us Henry's face creates a type of temporary invisibility, thus suggesting the stock-in-trade of the illusionist.

Apropos of the book motif, the central parallel between Professor Jones' modus operandi and the purposes of medieval Merlins is the quest-account convention linking the wise man to a Grail book. The Vulgate and Post-Vulgate Merlins dictate a record of the quest to a confessor. In some cases the Grail books may end as metatexts, the implied readers' narrative sources. In *Last Crusade*, the form indicating this theme is altered slightly when the history dictated by the magician reemerges as the professor's private Grail diary, a journal composed of research notes accumulated over a lifetime as Grail aficionado. Henry's hope of finding the chalice of Christian myth is scorned by the proponents of scientific academe (represented by his grown son, now a famous anthropologist), who have long since discounted its existence. Nevertheless, the old professor's

epistemology, pursued through art and sustained by faith, proves superior. Despite his comic eccentricity, Henry's ultimate vision prevails and belies the words of Professor Jones, Jr., that fact supersedes truth and that "X never, ever, marks the spot."

The traditional wizard's role of quest-hero teacher and special guide, however lightly it may be treated in this film, rests on substantial precedent.¹⁸ The affectionate Round Table patriarch of the Vulgate behaves as father figure not only to Arthur, but also to several of the celebrated knights.¹⁹ Merlin's place as Grail-quest advocate may actually be traced at least as far back in time as the era of Robert de Boron's romance series (ca. 1200).

The last crusade begins its consummation when Indiana is informed that the scholar on whom the Grail expedition depended has "vanished" and that his own father "is the man who's disappeared." This ambivalent rhetoric, suggestive of a magical act, accomplishes tentative identification for the Merlin analogue of *Last Crusade*. Moreover, it designates the professor as the Grail-quest catalyst, the one whose mystery sets the entire plot in motion. Until he finds out that his father is missing, the skeptically smug Indiana has rejected the invitation to become involved in an archeological Grail hunt, which he views as a senselessly quixotic undertaking. However, when Indiana becomes aware that Henry may be in danger he instantly reverses his decision. Thus the close conventional association of the enchanter with the Grail is enhanced. Although he has frequently been depicted as the power behind the Round Table and the one who motivates the quest, here as the object of the search, the wise man is transformed into the hero's de facto Grail. Following an action-packed boat chase worthy of James Bond, Indiana shouts to the Turkish Grail-guardian, "I didn't come for the cup of Christ; I came to find my father!"

A personality facet which adds interest to this particular Merlin analogue is his humorous apparent ineptitude. Although it may be argued that the character of the sidekick, Marcus, provides the main comic relief, Henry's errors also add levity. His bungling, by and large, eventually contributes to heroic progress, even though initially it may cause comedic chaos. When he drops a lighter with which he was trying to free himself and his son from rope bonds, the ensuing fire seems to trap them. True to the Rube Goldberg-style sequences of events characterizing much of the adventure, however, one thing leads to another until Henry falls at just the right time in just the right place, triggering the opening of a secret escape tunnel. Thus Henry may be identified as an enchanter partly because even his unplanned actions and apparent mistakes result in fortuitous twists and turns. The power which works for him may seem to do so in spite of him.

But his unruffled lack of surprise when things come right in the end (sometimes in droll contrast to Indiana's expressions of alarm) suggests magical foreknowledge.

One moment of Henry's sheer and deliberate wizardry occurs just when all seems lost. A Nazi fighter pilot has father and son at his mercy. The two unarmed but dauntless heroes must resort to a seemingly hopeless on-foot escape attempt. They appear to be completely vulnerable as they run along the unsheltered beach. But as the plane passes over, peppering the ground with shells, the older professor receives sudden inspiration from his knowledge of Charlemagne. Opening his umbrella (which conflates Merlin's wand with a James Bond-style secret gadget, oddly reminiscent of Mary Poppins' parasol), the gleeful sage shoos a flock of birds toward the plane, thus obliterating the pilot's vision and equilibrium and causing him to crash. The wise man's true armament, creative intelligence, has saved the day. The shaman's power over nature is integrated since living creatures have become transformed into ammunition. The aviary symbolism associated with spirit, as well as with both Arthur and Merlin, is invoked in a triumph of natural flyers over technological ones.²⁰

In addition to Henry's quest initiation and Grail personification, during the film's last segment he comes to represent the Fisher King. He is the one whom the Grail serves, and ultimately, the one capable of transcending the material symbol to comprehend its numinous essence. Indiana is originally drawn into the adventure by the apparent kidnaping of his father. When Henry is shot by a Nazi agent, Indiana is motivated to complete the quest, as no one has been able to do before, in order to procure the Grail for its healing capacity. Indy is aware that the Grail stands as his father's only hope of survival. But even when he has retrieved the healing carpenter's chalice and unleashed its magic, the story remains unfinished.

Although indications of the professor's analogy to King Arthur's wizard are numerous, the functions of Grail-master and hero-namer epitomize these parallels. Friction over the name of the protagonist becomes a running joke throughout *Last Crusade*. Naturally, Indiana finds his father's persistent reference to him as "Junior" enervating. In fact, it begins to seem that his reasons for taking the exotic nickname, which acquires the aura of a nom de guerre, may include reaction to this irritating parental habit.²¹ As the hero, Indiana must claim a strong separate identity, rather than accept the condescending sobriquet which casts him in his father's shadow. Through most of the film, the professor's affectionate teasing has the viewer smiling, perhaps empathetically, at the hero's indignation. Still, the point of the son's subordination to the older, wiser man—a standard feature of Merlinian typology—is made.

If Professor Jones' onomastic patronization seems disrespectful, happily he redeems his peccadillo through his understanding of the Grail and his fundamental paternal wisdom. After curing his father, Indiana finds himself hanging from the edge of a chasm in the Grail cave that is created by an earthquake set off when the villains attempt to carry the relic away. In their greed they have objectified what is really a spiritual gift, contained only symbolically in the cup of Christ. The Grail itself teeters precariously, just out of Indy's reach. In his determination to preserve the chalice for posterity, the hero begins to behave just as Elsa (this movie's "wiley" Vivien) had, moments before she fell to her death, by straining to reach it. Although his incentive is much more enlightened than hers, he is similarly charmed by the dangerous idea of possession. He cannot let the cup go and will surely suffer Elsa's fate unless he returns to his senses. The senior professor shouts to his son to give him his hand so that he can be saved from falling.²² But the glamour of the Grail is irresistible, and the hero is all but lost.

It is then that the naming power of a Merlin is put to its rightful use. When Henry Jones respectfully and lovingly calls to his son by the true hero's name of "Indiana," the treacherous spell is broken. The sagacity born of this Merlin's love supersedes that which derives from his intellect. By saving the hero in this manner, the wizard simultaneously determines the fate of the Grail. The material emblem must be sacrificed for the sake of its spiritual meaning. The film ends on a lighter note as the Jones boys ride off into the desert sunset. Nevertheless, they have taken an undeniably Arthurian adventure, and in so doing they have taken on quasi-Arthurian identities. The wise old man has guided the Grail hero to complete the quest, of which enlightenment born of faith and love is the real power, truth the proper goal, and identity the shining reward.

The Fisher King and the Spirit of Myrddin²³

Terry Gilliam's motion picture *The Fisher King* (1991) presents a montage of heavily masked Arthurian motifs and phrases, more likely to be consciously perceived by scholars than by members of a general audience.²⁴ Several of these motifs originate in Celtic Arthurian source material that predates Geoffrey of Monmouth. An ancient and sacred pagan otherworld creature is evoked, for example, during the introductory sequence when radio-cult personality Jack Lucas (whose name probably derives from that of the pagan god and Merlinian precursor Lugh)²⁵ is chastised by an insulted on-air guest with the words "you're a pig, Jack."²⁶

Although the insult is common enough, Gilliam's knowledge of Arthurian myth makes it unlikely that such apparently coincidental references are really accidental. In this particular case, the word *pig* is used to describe people at two other telling junctures. Jack himself applies it to people in general when he is about to enter his second home, Anne's apartment over the video store. The third time, a disabled war veteran who begs for a living announces that a mutual acquaintance of his and Parry's has been arrested for defiling a bookstore. This unlikely street sage, or as he refers to himself, "moral traffic light," remarks that the mischief maker is a "pig" and that such behavior augurs approaching "social anarchy." These references, along with the porcine hero-identification during the introductory segment, imply that the choice of *pig* as an epithet may well be in deliberate allusion to the Celtic sacred animal associated with kingship.

Other hints of Merlin-related myth and conventions loom similarly throughout *The Fisher King*, from Parry's comical come-on when he invites Anne to "behold his magic wand and free her golden orbs" to the question posed by a certain television producer to Jack's agent about whether Jack is doing "another disappearing act." In this film, no one so obvious as a bearded wise old man appears, although such a personage is implied by Parry's gruff, middle-aged landlord, who becomes the keeper of the hero's secret identity. The supporting role of the kindly curmudgeon typifies the mythic allusions, most of which seem to correspond more perfectly to the legend of the sixth-century mad Scottish bard Myrddin²⁷ than to that of Merlin, chief adviser to Uther and Arthur.

Although a direct Merlin analogue cannot be identified in this film, the shamanistic spirit of Myrddin, the sorcerer's essential prophetic forbear, regularly animates one or the other of the two protagonists and seems to hover constantly around them. For example, the viewer who seeks an enchanter in Gilliam's postmodern wasteland may note in the introductory radio show setting (and mantralike, thereafter) Donna Summers' voice-over chanting Jack's theme song "The Power." In fact, Jack's tragic flaw, before his involvement with Parry begins raising his social conscience, is that he has not made himself worthy of wizard status. He's "got the power" but abuses it in the manner of a sorcerer's apprentice.

The surrounding Merlinian presence manifests in a variety of ways, in addition to incantations broadcast over airwaves. For instance, the ontological instability of the shape-changer becomes articulated when Jack explains to his self-absorbed girlfriend the importance of his audition for a television sitcom: "For the first time in my life I'll be a voice with a body!" This significant "visitation" of Merlin over Jack is extended when he prepares for this mystic corporeal-vocal integration. His act of bathing

at the foot of an omphaloslike geometrical channel suggests baptism and the shamanistic connection between spiritual and physical worlds. In the course of this ritual bath, Jack transforms himself into the primordial witch doctor by smearing on a mask made from a mud pack. His hair streams over his shoulders, freed from the deejay's trendy ponytail. To complete the image, Jack dons his robe and whirls barefoot before the triplistic icon of his own face, which emanates from a row of television sets. Throughout this conjurer's dance the penthouse-dwelling shaman chants what he does not yet recognize as an awful self-condemning prophecy, the impudently delivered line from the comedy script, "Forgive me!"

The shamanistic omphalos or prophetic oracle exemplifies the motifs repeated throughout the movie in numerous and highly varying ways. A viewer who watches for oracular symbols might perceive a world-navel in the cell-like broadcasting studio at the center of which Jack first emerges or in the name of Anne's store, "Video Spot." Parry's prophetic channels include a particular rock in Central Park on which he positions himself as an eastern yogi, as well as the main green where, in a hilarious wild-man-of-the-woods imitation, he strips himself naked so as to properly "diffuse the psychic energy," jumps up and down howling at the moon, and invites Jack to "get back to his roots." The fact that the final scene shows both heroes lying nude in this *locus amoenus* by moonlight underlines its importance.

Parry takes on the persona of Myrddin the wise as he sees through Jack's phony image to his destined role as "the one." The only truth Parry cannot confront is that of his own horrifying loss. Parry's situation mirrors that found in ancient Welsh, Irish, and Scottish stories of wild bards pushed past the margins of civilization and salvation by battle trauma. The original versions, centering on distraught warrior-heroes, are implied in the presence of the marginal ex-Vietnam veteran who decries the defilement of bookstores. They are further suggested by the ironic comparison to another street character, the stage-musical, actor-drag queen, that the horrors he has endured by "watching all his friends die" make him a kind of veteran.²⁸

Some renditions of the basic Myrddin myth are marked by symbiosis between the wild man and a holy redeemer. As critics such as Nikolai Tolstoy have indicated, there is more than a little in this of the single Manichean figure,²⁹ a soul split in two by ruthless fortune and in desperate need of reintegration. Parry, once a happy young professor giving lectures on the Fisher King legend, becomes the suffering madman, so like the Arthurian Merlin's ancient traumatized precursor. Although Parry's original wilderness is the indifferent city and the battle in which he

becomes a spontaneous victim is undeclared, the results are the same for the young professor as for the ancient prophet. The modern hero is driven insane when a disturbed gunman enters the restaurant where he is having dinner with his beautiful wife. When the perpetrator opens fire, the young woman's blood is splattered grotesquely over the face of her devastated husband.

Jack's involvement in this wild man/redeemer dynamic attests to the ingenuity of the screenplay. For Parry to acknowledge his true identity and the extent of his suffering, he needs Jack, the one who inadvertently set the tragedy in motion by a thoughtless remark to an unstable member of his radio call-in audience.³⁰ For meaningful redemption to occur, Jack must experience a remorse leading to fundamental learning and change. If Parry is to achieve real forgiveness, he must first own the awful damage done him by his friend. The Grail symbolizes the potential fulfillment of both these needs.

The objective nature of the silver trophy cup sitting on a library shelf in a Fifth Avenue millionaire's mansion becomes more poignant than ridiculous. The story's "rich fisher" turns out to be as vulnerably mortal as the homeless derelicts among whom Parry lives after his catastrophe. The sentimental quality of Langdon Carmichael's loving cup highlights a value which is purely emblematic. One of the main themes characterizing *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, then, is also central to *The Fisher King*. God's divine grace, rather than its symbol, holds the saving power.

The screenplay, completely faithful to the ancient Myrddin myths, rests on the alternating savior/victim roles taken on by the two protagonists until they must solve their separate dilemmas by acting on their fundamental unity. Each can save himself only by rescuing the other. This concept of a split-off persona, associated with the idea of polar opposition, while basic to the primitive Myrddin type, becomes absorbed into the identity of the Arthurian Merlin in due course.³¹ Hence, although no literal wise old man takes a central part in *The Fisher King*, ancient meanings of Merlin form the plot foundation and define the crucial relationship between its protagonists.

The Queen's Counselor of First Knight

In Arthurian texts where love takes precedence over martial or quest objectives, Merlin is apt to be diminished in some way.³² Put succinctly, if the lover knight is brought to the fore, the enchanter is likely to be relegated to the background. The title of Jerry Zucker's 1995 motion picture,

First Knight, indicates a focus on the fatal love interest of Queen Guinevere. Based solely on this sign, the enchanter's reduced presence in the film is predictable. In fact, true to this educated speculation, *First Knight* (at least technically) has no Merlin. There are actually several reasons which logically support Merlin's absence. In addition to the emphasis on the personal domain of love versus the normally public place of a prophet and political adviser, the film's cause-and-effect plot rationale counters the usefulness of a magician per se. The type of Merlin analogue who does appear, as well as the manner in which Zucker employs him, is shaped by a third important factor—the sage's unique attachment not to Arthur, but rather, to Arthur's queen.

A suspiciously feminist-seeming Guinevere, who excels at a kind of medieval soccer and actively participates in her own rescues, becomes crucial to the characterization of the wise man who takes Merlin's place. The personage of Oswald, as chief counselor to Camelot's *female* sovereign, becomes marginal yet significant in his supporting role. A literally marginal aspect of that role may be found in the placement of his appearances, mostly at the beginning, and once, briefly, near the ending.

The unusual alliance of the Merlin figure with the queen becomes clear during the scene when—in line with the conventional association of the ancient sage with the arrangement of Arthur's marriage—Oswald expedites the royal nuptials by prevailing upon Guinevere to accept the king's proposal. The movie's sympathetic treatment of the queen is enhanced by the filial-paternal relationship between her and the benevolent wise man. The first encounter between Oswald and the audience occurs when Guinevere, the Lady of Leonese, turns to him in distress over the evil Prince Malagant's attacks. Oswald's singular importance among the lady's advisers is shown through her treatment of his word as the last before making her decision.

An interesting signal of Oswald's analogy to Merlin is his essentially realistic, yet nearly magical, appearance on camera. Two advisers have communicated the details of Malagant's most recent crimes. They defer to Guinevere because she bears responsibility for her deceased father's domain as his sole heir. She follows these men to the gates of her estate, where she receives the besieged villagers under her protection. Up to the point when she finishes giving orders that her people's immediate needs be addressed, the space to her right has been completely vacant. But when the camera pans back from a brief close-up, she turns to find Oswald standing alongside her, holding his walking staff like a shepherd's crook and smiling serenely. She has called him by name even before turning to find him there, as if she were confident that he would instantly materialize at

her summons. Although everyone behaves as if he had been part of the scene from the beginning, there has been neither verbal nor visual reference to the chief sage up to the moment when the lady calls upon him.

The fatherly nature of Oswald's relationship to Guinevere is established when she dismisses her other counselors in order to consult him in private and he mentions his pride to have held her at her birth. His remark that he shall be prouder still to see her wed and his repeated mode of addressing her as "my child" reinforce his position as a kind of godfather or foster father to the lady. Since this conversation is bound up with Guinevere's imminent accession to the throne, her analogy to the traditional young Arthur becomes evident. The similarity of her filial position relative to the wise old man contributes substantially to this parallel. The uniquely close connection between the paternal Oswald and his royal ward (as well as his stance for the Arthurian magician) is also signaled through the first words he speaks, namely that she "already knows what he thinks." Their intimacy is practically telepathic.

In fact, every single appearance of Oswald somehow refers to his role as queen's counselor and substitute father. When he escorts her on the perilous journey to meet Arthur, and then retreats from the scene, Oswald is essentially giving away the bride. Before they are parted, however, she ultimately entrusts the safety of Leonesse to the old man by enjoining him to send her any news, good or bad, immediately. Oswald appears for the last time much later, first locked in a paternal embrace as Guinevere sheds tears of relief that he has survived Malagant's culminating raid. The final glimpse portrays the ancient sage exchanging the double kiss of kinship with Arthur. Guinevere stands at their side to complete a kind of familial triangle.

Perhaps the most important question regarding Oswald is how his untraditional primary association with a woman plays into the level of his power and presence. While it is true that Oswald is a consequential supporting personage, it is also true that he is absent from the scene during most of the film and that his meaning derives almost exclusively from his ties to the queen. Actually, although this Merlin avatar is significant in his way, he has a much less prominent and less active role than those of all the filmic enchanters discussed previously. The elemental factor of *First Knight's* relative verisimilitude must be taken into account. Less fantastic stories naturally depend less on figures identified with magic. The normally central place of the prophet and king's counselor in works emphasizing quest or battle versus his questionable relevance and usefulness in connection with the love theme clearly influences the peripherality of Oswald's place in *First Knight*. This motion picture differs substantially, however, from



Julia Ormond as Guinevere and John Gielgud as Oswald in Jerry Zucker's 1995 film *First Knight*.

pseudo-realistic medieval chronicles such as Waces' *Brut* and from early courtly romances such as those created by Chrétien de Troyes. The likelihood of new elements impacting the characterization of Merlin in this filmic text, which notably recasts other main figures (and, in fact, the entire legend), must be considered seriously.

Since the pivotal difference relative to this Merlin-type is his link to a very different kind of Guinevere, it stands to reason that she holds a key to his treatment. This Guinevere is distinguished as an unusually active queen. Although her passion for Lancelot develops and influences the story in a predictable manner, similar to its effects in an abundance of texts beginning with Chrétien's *The Knight of the Cart*, her role is not limited to that of the adulterous courtesan. Moreover, in spite of the love story's prominence, whether her love is really adulterous even becomes a subjective matter. It is stressed that Guinevere's love for Arthur is true. Her honor is emphasized so consistently that her character begins to resemble that of the faithful Igrayne of medieval works. Her honorable nature even has a deciding influence among her motivations at the unique moment when she kisses Lancelot. Guinevere only gives in to the passion, which she has controlled with iron determination up to that late point, because Lancelot is about to depart from Camelot forever and because, following an elaborate and publicly supported justification accompanying their second meeting, technically she owes him a hero's kiss.

In addition to her nearly perfect integrity, this Guinevere shows courage, athletic prowess, and the resourcefulness and strength to assist her rescuers; she gallops alongside the men over a battlefield and even kills an enemy. It might be surmised that as a strong feminist hero Guinevere would naturally empower such a figure as Oswald, whose identity is so dependent upon his relationship to her. Instead, however, a different logic presents us with a Merlin analogue whose importance to this Camelot is rather indirect and is exclusively moral and not in any sense physical.

Because Guinevere becomes a very real partner to a strong Arthur, in a sense she takes Merlin's place. Her youth and vitality contribute to her adeptness as a leader for her people. Oswald, whose body is old and frail, becomes physically passive, although his wisdom and reliability make him summarily important to the queen as her closest confidant.

A greatly enhanced role for the leading lady distinguishes *First Knight* among the films discussed in this article, and indeed among Arthurian films, with the exception of Jud Taylor's made-for-cable-television *Guinevere* (1994). But when *First Knight's* queen emerges from the margins reserved for most female characters of medieval texts and more traditional Arthurian motion pictures, her "Merlin" makes a seemingly compensatory

retreat into the narrative recesses. Oswald influences Guinevere's essential strategic and personal move when he gently encourages her marriage to Camelot's king. But this is the wise man's sole prominent act. Interestingly, Oswald's chief accomplishment issues from a secondary position, comparable to that conventionally inhabited by courtly ladies. Yet even such feminine foils may wield impressive power, albeit of a restricted kind. It should be remembered that the imposition of a lady's will over one single devoted knight may be supremely forceful. By comparison, the Merlin of this film holds fundamental sway over the most influential of royal ladies. Ultimately, as the subtle power behind an Arthurian throne, this sage may appear not to be so different from his traditional counterparts after all. In *First Knight* the wise man's exclusion from the halls of power and the central action seems to restore some mysterious equality to the royal couple so that at last a queen may accede to heroic and active sovereignty.

Conclusion

Merlins of various kinds appear throughout Arthurian, and even non-Arthurian, film. The wizards explored in this essay, although connected through shamanistic roots and medieval literary prototypes, may fail to resemble one another in obvious ways. Although a Merlin sighting can entail the merest observation of a story's bearded guide or a hero's precocious sidekick, the meanings of the enchanter may be expressed in widely divergent ways.

The magical capacities of cinema enhance this potential for innovation. A filmic Merlin may cryptically animate the personage of a quest hero or communicate his message through a disembodied voice. Merlin's might may assert itself through mythic patterns of action and interaction in the absence of a figure directly representing him, or conversely, through multiple wizards in a single film. The sage's genius may be projected through a knowing chuckle or an offhand remark. But whether he dominates the action through a showy progression of magic tricks or offers only quiet insight, whether he wears a star-spangled robe or a shirt and tie, he is ever a narrative organizer and a quest catalyst.

Movie directors, who control the action, become the meta-Merlins of all filmic texts. They determine thematic emphases and may express such choices through the altervoices of their sorcerer characters. Every cinematic Merlin considered here becomes a medium for comment on identity issues. Yet each director and screenwriter elevates certain qualities over others.

John Boorman's necromancer underlines the director's concept of the pre-historically divine force of nature. Whereas George Romero reinforces the value of freedom and the virtue of integrity through the agency of a Merlin who is both hip and savvy, Terry Gilliam diffuses the magician's power in order to underscore the importance of its proper use. Steven Spielberg brings to the fore the combined forces of faith and love and challenges us to claim our unique identities without yielding to a self-serving way of life. Jerry Zucker weaves together the spiritual and intellectual potency of the wise man with the energy and idealism of an unusually heroic young queen. Heroism itself becomes redefined in circumstances where the hero may be young or old, woman or man.

A Merlin by any name and in any guise may fulfill the role of the parent, the namer, the savior, the intermediary, the teacher, the prophet, the sovereignmaker. The Merlins of film can dazzle their viewers through the wizardry inherent to their medium. Nevertheless, these cinematic magicians have in common with the wizards of other textual venues, and the sages of all times, the endless possibilities of the wise and powerful hero behind the hero.

Notes

1. Contrasts in Merlinian imagery, including medieval illuminations and nineteenth-century photographs, are explored by Donald L. Hoffman in his article, "Seeing the Seer: Images of Merlin in the Middle Ages."
2. Peter Hampton Goodrich treats a fascinating range of popular wizard figures in the chapter of his dissertation on Merlinian iconology (397-443). His wizards of television and the silver screen include *Star Wars*' Ben Kenobi as well as Darth Vader, the original *Star Trek*-series' Spock, and some less obviously related characters such as Superman. In the course of my own exploration of Merlin's relationship to women, unsuspected parallels surfaced between the sorcerer's pre-Arthurian "sister" and Guinan, the female sage-bartender of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Miller 86-89).
3. R. J. Stewart, in a variety of books and articles, has repeatedly emphasized Merlin's "transpersonal" and "transcultural" qualities.
4. Specifically, Rider notes Layamon's tendency to "increase Merlin's status and importance at the same time that he makes him more elusive" (4). He concludes that a power shift toward the enchanter and away from the kings naturally results from Merlin's controlling aloofness. The assault-on-Tintagel scene in *Excalibur* includes Uther's complaint that Merlin will not present himself when called, even though the king knows that he is there hiding. The wizard's angry response demonstrates his self-confidence in this battle of nerves. Similarly, when the sorcerer arrives to claim the infant Arthur, Uther accuses him of coming unbidden, yet ignoring the king's summonses during all the months of the child's gestation. These comments and behaviors place Boorman's Merlin directly in line with that of Layamon, according to Rider's interpretation.

5. Strick informs us that Boorman originally intended to call the film "*Merlin Lives*," but was obliged to consider alternative titles when he encountered copyrighting problems (168).
6. Critics including Norris J. Lacy (122), Martin B. Shichtman (141), and Muriel Whitaker (137) indicate *Excalibur*'s debt to the theory in Jesse L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* that the Grail legends represent narrative versions of ancient fertility rites.
7. See, for instance, Arlene Ladden's interesting explanation of the prophet's crazy laughter and talmudic sources (87).
8. Merlin's comments to Morgana as they wander apart from Arthur's Christian wedding ceremony include a particularly apt example. Says the necromancer to his temptress, "The days of our kind are numbered. The one God comes to drive out the many."
9. Although one of *Excalibur*'s differences from most medieval literary renditions is the formation of the Table by Arthur rather than Merlin, the magical glamour of the movie scene begins with the enchanter's fiery staff as he enjoins the knights to savor the moment, rejoice in it and, most importantly, remember it. "For," he warns, "it is the doom of men that they forget."
10. Scholars frequently interpret the Round Table as a zodiacal circle. Astrological significance continues its association with the enchanter in this version, even though technically he does not create the Table.
11. Gaston Paris, for example, was emphatic that Merlin must have been the one to arrange for the sword in the stone as the proof of Arthur's divine right (xix).
12. For other specific examples of Boorman's considerable divergence from Malory (which has provoked negative criticism for its contradiction of the director's assertion that *Le Morte Darthur* constitutes his source), see Lacy (122-123).
13. See my dissertation (68-71 and 336-37).
14. In Yakir's interview, Boorman indicated the pivotal importance of this image to his concept of the legend, and even more, as a driving cinematographic challenge, when he stressed the amount of effort invested to produce it (49).
15. The diversity of representations alluding to the connection between the raven and the messianic king is broad. For instance, Cervantes has Don Quixote explain with pedantic certainty that because Arthur was turned into a raven by magic art in prelude to his return "no Englishman can be proved ever to have killed a crow" (Cohen 97). A more contemporary example would be Jeremy Burnham's and Trevor Ray's choice of *Raven* as the title for their British television series of the mid-1970s and subsequent fictional work based on the screenplay (1977). See Lacy, *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (61 and 446).
16. See Macdonald (55). Also see Ashe's connection of Merlin to the "British Apollo" (38).
17. Jung's definition of the wise old man archetype—in which he specifically cites the Merlin persona as a conscious manifestation—stresses transcendent agelessness (209). The psychologist insists that a precocious youth, a wise elder, or a juxtaposition of the two figures comprise equally valid symbols for his concept. This is extremely relevant to Merlin because he does traditionally appear as a boy-wonder in the tale of King Vortigern and because he is frequently paired with a special child—for example, when he is portrayed as Arthur's tutor or foster father.
18. Joseph L. Henderson identifies the assistance of "strong tutelary figures" as essential to hero myths, both Arthurian and otherwise (101).
19. See Macdonald (109).
20. See Nikolai Tolstoy regarding the connection among Merlin, shamanism, and

birds (231). Nancy Marie Brown (127) discusses Merlin's *esplumoir* (bird's nest). Merlin's name designating a type of bird has also been pondered by scholars. See Miller (390).

21. The ostensible and somewhat humorous reason behind the nickname, as a tribute to a favorite pet dog, may also be read in mythic terms. This dog may carry similar totem-spirit or alternate ontology connotations to those associating Merlin with birds, for instance.

22. The Sistine Chapel image of the Father God reaching forth to infuse Adam with life is driven by the same dynamic as that of the movie scene in which Professor Jones saves his son from the pit. Both images represent the juxtaposed youth and elder cited by Jung when describing the wise old man archetype (209), which is fundamentally identified with Merlin.

23. The name of the mad Scottish bard is generally cited as the original from which Geoffrey of Monmouth derived his "Merlinus." Most critics surmise the replacement of the double "d" by the letter "l" in Geoffrey's Latinized spelling to have been prompted by a wish to avoid scatological jokes based on potential similarity between the enchanter's name and the French euphemism for excrement. See Lacy's article "Merlin" in the *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (322).

24. For example, the famous sign of the two dragons undermining King Vortigern's tower in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which only Merlin can read, emerges as backdrop to the scene of Jack and Parry's double date in the Chinese restaurant.

25. Although the Irish deity's name is spelled "Lugh," its various cognates include the Welsh "Lleu" and Gaulish "Lugos."

26. See Rees and Rees (39 and 178).

27. Scholars from Nikolai Tolstoy (29, 84, and 194-98) to Geoffrey Ashe (28-29) and Peter H. Goodrich (9-10 and 17) cite the Scottish Myrddin, Welsh Lailoken, and Irish Suibhne Geilt stories for their influence on the Arthurian Merlin. Although the names differ and a certain amount of historical documentation indicates the existence of three separate personages, their legends follow a single, fundamental narrative pattern. A warrior traumatized by battle atrocities retreats to the wilderness, where he utters unceasing lamentations and doom-filled prophecies. A redeeming holy man becomes his only hope of salvation in tales such as that of Lailoken (whom Ashe identifies as Myrddin) and Saint Kentigern.

28. The question of sexual ambivalence, from androgyny to homosexuality, represented most graphically by the desperate musical actor, is referred to numerous times both through dialogue and image. For example, Jack expresses his own homophobic tendencies repeatedly. Sexual ambivalence is extremely relevant to Merlin, as a sacerdotal entity, who must achieve a kind of sexual neutrality as a channel for divine communication. Moreover, androgyny relates to the psychological-wholeness ideal which Merlin and all ancient shamans theoretically embody.

29. See Tolstoy (199).

30. A practically metafictional expression of the identity-crisis theme may be perceived in the TV-news description of the murderer-suicide victim as someone so quiet that his neighbors hardly knew he was there.

31. As Goodrich explains it, Merlin is "not wholly angel, devil or human: he is both libidinal drive and superego; he is a figural matrix prevented from flying apart precisely by the mutual attractions of his opposing sides" (154). This definition almost identically parallels the lines spoken by Anne, Jack's true love, when Jack asks what she knows about the Holy Grail and whether she believes in God. After comparing women to God because of their creative nature as potential mothers and men to the Devil as

the attractive opposite, Anne concludes that "the whole point of life is for men and women to get married, so that God and the Devil can get together and work it out."

32. My own observations and theories regarding this phenomenon, especially as it applies to the romances of Chrétien de Troyes, are explained in my dissertation (145-155). Other theorists who have touched on Merlin's characterizations as influenced by the love theme include Linda K. Hughes (2-3). C. Scott Littleton and Linda A. Malcor have addressed similar thematic causations.

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