Spenser's Merlin

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In describing the "strange occasion" by which Britomart comes to see Artegall in Merlin's magic mirror, Spenser leads his reader to believe that he is following an earlier story "as it in bookes hath written bene of old."¹ While this is in a sense true of the account of Merlin's glass — we know similar devices in medieval literature — it is somewhat misleading in regard to Merlin himself. A comparison of Spenser's Merlin with the Merlin of chronicle and romance suggests that, in creating his magician, Spenser made use of the tradition he inherited without allowing himself to be bound by that tradition. Before Spenser, Merlin is a prophet, a magician, an artificer; he is all those things in *The Faerie Queene*, but he is also something more: a figure for the poet, and so of central importance to the treatment of art in the entire poem. This is what really engages Spenser about the Welsh magician; whatever else he is and does in the poem, whatever relation he bears to other magicians, Merlin is really of paramount interest as a poet-figure. As such, he illuminates the aesthetic and philosophical questions which are a central concern of *The Faerie Queene*, and so the explanation of Spenser's Merlin is to be found, not in old books, but in his function in the poem in which Spenser chose to place him.

Merlin's importance in the poem is all the more remarkable because he has what is apparently a very small role. He is the maker of Arthur's arms and armour (I, vii, 33-36; II, viii, 20-21), and of King Ryence's magic glass (III, ii, 17-21); he oversees Arthur's education and selects his tutor (I, ix, 5), commands demons to rear a wall of brass around Cairmardin (III, iii, 7), and is instrumental in bringing about the union of Artegall and Britomart, the fate of whose descendants he prophesies before disappearing from the poem forever (III, iii, 26-50). At first glance, readers of late medieval literature may find the general features of Spenser's Merlin familiar, if not derivative.

Such an impression of general familiarity is not without foundation. Of all the many and improbable powers attributed to Merlin in medieval romance, none is older than the power of prophecy. Though Merlin's

prophecy to Britomart is based directly on Bradamante's experience at Merlin's tomb in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (III, xviii-lix), rather than on anything in the medieval romances, prophecy is the first of Merlin's powers to be celebrated in literature. Merlin seems to have originated as *Myrddin*, a Welsh prophet believed in medieval times to have been the author of several mantic poems. The earliest known treatment of this figure in poetry, as *Myrddin Wilt* ("Merlin the Wild," perhaps an actual Welsh bard of the sixth century), may be as early as the ninth century,² and conflates the story of the prophet with a northern legend of Lailoken, a mad fugitive hiding in the forest. From this deranged *homme sauvage* evolves the prophetic hermit and magician of the romances.³

Even before the Merlin of Celtic folklore enters the romances, however, he is subjected to that process of accretion so characteristic of the romantic imagination. Nennius, in his *Historia Britonum* (c. 796), tells the story of King Vortigern (Guorthigirnus) and his tower, a tower which collapses overnight as often as it is rebuilt. The king's sorcerers (*magi*) tell him that only the blood of a fatherless child will establish its foundations securely. Such a child is found — his name is Ambrosius — and he has prophetic powers which confound the king's sorcerers.⁴ This account in Nennius was adapted by a twelfth-century canon, Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100-c.1154), at whose hands this obscure Welsh prophet is fitted to enter the mainstream of medieval romance and become famous from Sicily to Iceland.

Geoffrey wrote three works in which Merlin figures: the *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1135), the *Historia Regum Britannie* (c. 1136, into Book VII of which the *Prophetiae* were incorporated), and a poem in hexameters, the *Vita Merlini* (c. 1149). The *Prophetiae* are lush, and vague, and vehement; even a brief selection shows why they were destined for popularity: "In the days of the Ram there shall be peace and the harvests shall be plentiful . . . Women shall become snake-like in their gait and every step they take will be full of arrogance. The Castle of Venus will be restored . . . and human beings will fornicate unceasingly."⁵ In fact, though their entertainment value may have been considerable, these prophecies of Merlin were taken seriously and were very widely translated: "The chronicler Salimbene tells us that the sayings of Merlin enjoyed an authority equal to that of the Sibyl, Michael Scot and Isaiah in Italy . . . There was scarcely a cranny of Christendom outside the Eastern Church which did not recognize Merlin as a great seer."⁶

Geoffrey creates the Merlin of Romance at one bold stroke, by identifying Nennius' Ambrosius with the Myrddin of Celtic folklore.⁷ Geoffrey took from Nennius the story of Vortigern and his tower, and the boy-prophet who has no father. What he made from this unlikely

beginning — “the rest of the Merlin story seems to have been a child of his own fertile brain”⁸ — largely determined the treatment of the magician in European literature for the next three hundred and fifty years.

Most influential in its effect on later writers is Geoffrey’s account of the source of Merlin’s power. Geoffrey amplifies Nennius’ story of the fatherless boy by identifying Merlin’s father. According to Geoffrey, Merlin’s mother was a daughter of the King of Demetia. She lived in a convent and, apart from the boy’s father, had never known a man. One of Vortigern’s advisers, citing the *De Deo Socratis* of Apuleius, suggests that the boy’s father is an incubus.⁹ This connection with the *daemones* of Neo-Platonic pneumatology (and so with the fallen angels) is the source of Merlin’s occult powers.

Thus Merlin the prophet (and magician) enters the stage of European literature. Though many other powers and exploits are later attributed to him, though his story is richly and fantastically embroidered in the Vulgate cycle of the next century and in the works of later writers, he remains always the prophet created by Geoffrey of Monmouth, and so he passes to Ariosto and Spenser.¹⁰

But it is not simply as a prophet that Merlin attracts later writers. Though Merlin’s prophetic powers are always important, Geoffrey’s most fruitful addition to the story of Merlin is his account of Merlin’s paternity. Geoffrey’s main interest is in Merlin as a prophet rather than as a magician,¹¹ but in creating a magician who could know the occult arts without engaging in witchcraft or entering into any pact with devils, Geoffrey prepared the ground on which the great magi of Renaissance literature — and among them Spenser’s Merlin — would one day stand.

Geoffrey’s *Historia* enjoyed great popularity, and enriched several literary traditions. We know of at least three translations into Welsh before 1300. For Anglo-Norman and French readers, the Norman poet Wace completed his *Roman de Brut*, an adaption of the *Historia*, in 1155. Layamon’s poem of the same name (c. 1205) — the first work in English to mention Merlin — is basically a free paraphrase of Wace. Wace’s *Brut* also supplies the first part of Robert Mannyng’s *Chronicle of England* (completed, 1328).¹² It is not surprising that Geoffrey’s interest in Merlin should have been transmitted along with his text, or that other writers should have developed and embellished the figure of the magician according to their own inclinations and the insatiable appetite of romance for the marvellous.

Later writers adapted Geoffrey’s *Historia* in many ways, sometimes making Merlin the centre of interest. One such writer was Robert de Boron (? - 1210?), author of three Arthurian verse romances. Of his

Merlin, only a fragment of some 500-odd lines survives; we know the complete work only through two prose redactions of the early thirteenth century (the Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin*, and the Huth *Merlin* or *Suite du Merlin*).¹³ Robert's most significant contribution to the story of Merlin is his full reconciliation of the magician with Christian orthodoxy. Robert exempts Merlin from the traditional association of magic with the infernal kingdom in a rather ingenious way. In Robert's account, the devils are enraged by Christ's descent into Hell and his deliverance of the righteous Jews. They conspire to bring about the perdition of mankind by means of an infernal parody of Christ: a prophet half man and half demon.¹⁴ Their stratagem is simple: one of the devils bankrupts a wealthy man in order to seduce his daughters. Two of them are ruined; the third daughter's piety protects her, until one night when she forgets to say her prayers, and the demon mounts her as she lies asleep. The girl confesses, is shriven, and resumes a life of militant piety. When the child is born, he has a hairy body and the gift of prophecy, but the devils have no power over his will. The child is, of course, Merlin. His baptism, and his mother's exemplary life, sever the connection between his occult powers and the infernal kingdom. Merlin serves the cause of political stability, finds the infant Arthur a foster-father, and brings about his coronation as the rightful heir of Uther.

Robert de Boron's treatment of Merlin ends with Arthur's coronation. The story of Merlin is continued in the rest of the French *Estoire de Merlin* of the Vulgate cycle (1215-40), the most widely read and most influential of the Arthurian prose romances. Merlin's feats of magic proliferate in this account, in which he is a shape-shifter, a prophet, a psychologist (he also interprets dreams), an astute military strategist, a pander, a cynic (at times a kind of romance Democritus), head of Arthur's espionage network, a fabricator of storms, fog, and marvellous devices of all kinds, the onlie begetter of the Table Round, and, finally, a voice addressing Gawain from the tomb in which Viviane has imprisoned him.¹⁵

Through all his metamorphoses, Merlin remains a beneficent magician. So Robert de Boron and those who continued his narrative free Merlin from any taint of diabolism, thereby completing the elevation of the Welsh prophet into a white magician of immense power.¹⁶ The story of Merlin and his connection with Arthur became well known in England in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace and William of Malmesbury (the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, c. 1125), then in the French romances, and lastly in English versions of the French stories. The Latin chroniclers helped spread the reputation of Merlin as a prophet. Later versions of the story of Merlin all follow Robert de Boron and the *Estoire* and

Suite. There are four extant English versions of the Merlin story, all derived from French romances: *Arthor and Merlin* (c. 1260), Lovelich's *Merlin* (c. 1450), the prose *Merlin* (c. 1450), and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (pub., 1485).¹⁷

Merlin as he returns to England is a figure enriched and complicated by his transit through French romance. In the pages of Malory, he is a prophet, a shape-shifter, an artificer who fabricates a tomb for King Lot (II, xi) and a magic bed, sword, and bridge (II, 19), and is finally beguiled by Nimue (IV, i). Though he is the devil's son (IV, i), his magic is never infernal. The Merlin of the romances is a forerunner of the Renaissance *magus*, not the Renaissance sorcerer, and so he remains in Malory. While Malory merely sketches the magician of his French sources, and austere spurns the surfeit of magic in their pages, his Merlin is substantially the Merlin available to anyone familiar with the French romances of the thirteenth century.¹⁸

To what extent Spenser was so familiar, we do not know. We do know that he was familiar with Merlin as presented in Ariosto; a letter from Gabriel Harvey compares Spenser's "ELUISH QUEENE" unfavourably to the *Orlando Furioso*, which, Harvey tells Spenser, "notwithstanding, you wil needes seeme to emulate, and hope to ouergo, as you flatly professed your self in one of your last Letters."¹⁹ We recognize in Ariosto's Merlin the magician of the romances modified by the example of classical literature. The Merlin of the *Orlando* is once again a prophet and a demon's son.²⁰ In Ariosto, as at the close of the Vulgate *Estoire*, Merlin is reduced to a voice speaking from the tomb. He initiates the prophecy of the descendants of Bradamante and Ruggiero which Melissa continues (III, xviii-lix). Though prophecy is Merlin's oldest function, this incident also recall Aeneas' vision of the Julian line in the Elysian fields (*Aeneid* VI, 788). The voice from the tomb is apparently based, not on the *Estoire*, but on Ovid's account of the Sibyl of Cumae in the *Metamorphoses*. The influence of classical models is also shown in the description of Merlin's book of magic as

o fosse al lago Averno
O fosse sacro alle Nursine grotte (XXXIII, iv)

since both Avernus and Nercia are associated with the Sibyl of Cumae (*Aeneid* VI, 237 ff.). Ariosto's Merlin is really a kind of literary changeling; Arthurian in origin, he is shaped by Ariosto to do the work of the prophets and oracles of classical literature.²¹ So Ariosto confers the authority of Virgil and Ovid upon the magician of the romances, but he shrinks the role of Merlin in consequence. His Merlin is the maker of a fountain at Bayona (XXVI, xxx ff.; one niggardly acknowledgement of his many marvels in the *Estoire*) and commands demons to raise a

painted dining-hall for King Paramond (XXXIII, iv). The paintings in this hall are themselves prophetic, depicting

Le guerre ch'i Franceschi da far hanno
di là da l'Alpe, o bene o mal successe,
dal tempo suo al millesim'anno . . . (XXXIII, vii)

These paintings are far and away Ariosto's most interesting contribution to the story of Merlin, because they associate Merlin's prophetic powers with works of art. They are compared, most suggestively, to those of the great painters of antiquity and of Renaissance Italy (XXXIII, i-ii). Had he not set the yoke of prophecy upon Merlin's neck, Ariosto might have pursued this comparison, and developed Merlin as a figure for the artist, as Spenser was to do before the close of the century. Since Ariosto is primarily interested in Merlin as a prophet, he does not explore such possibilities. Merlin's artistry is dismissed as sorcery, and Ariosto closes the matter by informing his readers that the secret of Merlin's magic art has been lost forever.²²

We may now profitably return to the question which began this inquiry. What does Merlin in *The Faerie Queene*, Merlin the prophet of Britomart, the maker of Arthur's sword and armour, and of King Ryence's magic glass, owe to those books which "hath written bene of old"? The question remains difficult. While we can easily find general analogies, specific correspondences prove elusive. We are not certain of the extent of Spenser's acquaintance with the Arthurian material, and so must heed his advice to be wary wise in identifying his debts. Even so, his Merlin seems a composite, rather than a figure taken in whole or in large part from one particular work.²³ Furthermore, certain features of Spenser's Merlin suggest, not that he was faithfully following a source now unknown to us, but that he, like Geoffrey of Monmouth four centuries earlier, was indulging his own imagination while claiming to follow such a source. Spenser's interest in the Arthurian material is not grimly historical; as one critic has it, "Spenser's use of Brutus and Arthur does not imply credulity as much as it implies a thorough knowledge of the literary pabulum of his age" (Millican, p. 94).

Certainly we can agree that Spenser has added something to the gruel of the romances. He honours the tradition of Merlin's paternity —

men say that he was not the sonne
Of mortall Syre; or other liuing wight,
But wondrously begotten, and begonne
By false illusion of a guilefull Spright
On a faire Ladie nonne . . .

— but goes on to tell us that Merlin's mother

hight

Matilda, daughter to Pubidius
Who was the Lord of Mathrauell by right,
And coosen vnto king Ambrosius: . . . (III, iii, 13)

This genealogy, at once so precise and yet unconnected to anything else in the poem, is apparently Spenser's own invention.²⁴ Merlin's magic glass is unlike anything attributed to the magician in the romances which have come down to us. Merlin in these romances does occasionally make or produce swords, but the *Variorum*, after worrying the question of Arthur's arms and armour for five pages, concludes that "they are unlike any that Arthur ever had before."²⁵ Arthur's shield may owe something to the shield of Atlante in the *Orlando Furioso*, but the debt, if any, is slight.²⁶

Spenser makes a number of other alterations in the story of Arthur and Merlin, some — like Arthur's armour — apparently significant; others — like calling Arthur's tutor Timon — apparently not. For example, what, if anything, does it mean that Merlin had made his magic glass for King Ryence, who is, in both the Vulgate *Estoire* and Malory, Arthur's bitter enemy?²⁷

The truth of the matter seems to be that his Merlin is different because Spenser's handling of all the Arthurian material is different. Spenser's Arthur is both like and unlike the Arthur of Geoffrey and Chretien de Troyes and Malory, not because Spenser was following an unknown source, not because he was availing himself of the medieval license to present fiction as history, and not even because Spenser, like Ascham, found the Arthurian material morally deficient,²⁸ but because Spenser has set out to turn other accounts of Arthur to his own overriding purposes. The small changes he makes, such as the new names for old characters and the fabricated genealogy of Merlin, are little clues, perhaps playfully given, to a larger matter: Spenser's intention to re-fashion the material he inherits for his own ends, in conformity with the purposes he has set for himself in writing the poem. In his famous letter to Raleigh (*Variorum*, I, 167 ff.), Spenser states that "the generall end" of *The Faerie Queene* "is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Believing his work should be "coloured with an historicall fiction," Spenser "chose the historye of King Arthure as most fit for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes," and he laboured "to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a braue knight, perfected in the twelve priuate moral vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised . . ." Spenser names Homer,

Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso as his models; he does not name the medieval romances. Spenser was not interested in writing another romance of the sort found in "many mens former workes," and the minor alterations he makes in the Arthurian material seem to blazon his intention to recast their matter in his own mould. Over two centuries ago, Upton observed that "Spenser departs from Jeffry of Monmouth, and the more romance history of Prince Arthur, and indeed from all the stories of our old English writers, in many of the circumstances relating to this British prince, that he might make a heroe for his poem, and not a poem for his heroe."²⁹ This perceptive remark is equally true of Spenser's Merlin, for Merlin, like Arthur, is a hero made for Spenser's poem, not a hero borrowed elsewhere and somehow made to fit. Certainly Spenser's Merlin bears a general resemblance to other treatments of the magician, but, if we would fully understand his importance in *The Faerie Queene*, we must now turn our attention, not to the poem's sources, but to the poem itself.

We have seen that Spenser's Merlin most obviously resembles the Merlin of romance in his role as a prophet. Merlin's prophecy concerning the descendants of Artegall and Britomart (III, iii, 27 ff.) is strongly reminiscent of the conjuration of prophetic spirits in Merlin's cave in the *Orlando Furioso* (III, xviii ff.). But we should not be deceived by this similarity; the differences are of considerable import. Spenser's Merlin, though he is well able to command demons, does not resort to them for prophecy — Spenser seems less interested than Ariosto in reminding the reader that no magic is entirely above suspicion.³⁰ Nor is Spenser primarily interested in Merlin as a prophet to the detriment of other possibilities. His Merlin is not a voice from the tomb, but a living presence in the poem. As we have seen, Merlin is of real interest only as a prophet in the *Orlando Furioso*. Even his most famous creation, the fresco in Pharamond's hall, is a work of prophecy, and Merlin's art, as Ariosto pointedly informs us, is extinct. Spenser's Merlin, like Ariosto's, is a prophet, but it is as an artificer, and a figure for the artist, that Merlin is most important in *The Faerie Queene*; in this poem his most famous creation is a mirror which is also an image of the entire world. It is as the creator of this world of glass that Merlin illuminates the central concerns of the poem.

The significance of the mirror is indicated by something else that Merlin makes in the poem — Arthur's shield. This shield is fashioned, not of metal, "but all of Diamond perfect pure and cleene" (III, vii, 33), and seems to work by dazzling the opponent, "so exceeding shone his glistring ray" (III, vii, 34). In this, Arthur's shield resembles the shield of Ruggiero's tutor, Atlante — but, in his development of this device, Spenser has clearly fulfilled his promise to over-go Ariosto. Atlante's

shield simply blinds his opponents and throws them into a swoon (II, lv-lvi). Arthur's has powers far beyond these; of it we are told,

No magicke arts hereof had any might,
Nor bloudie wordes of bold Enchaunters call,
But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,
Before that shield did fade, and suddeine fall . . . (I, vii, 35)

Arthur's shield is proof against enchantment, and can distinguish the illusory from the real. In this it resembles Merlin's mirror, which shows all things truly:

It vertue had, to shew in perfect sight,
What euer thing was in the world contaynd,
Betwixt the lowest earth and heauens hight,
So that it to the looker appertaynd;
What euer foe had wrought, or frend had faynd,
Therein discovered was, ne ought mote pas,
Ne ought in secret from the same remaynd;
For thy it round and hollow shaped was,
Like to the world it selfe, and seem'd a world of glas. (III, ii, 19)

The resemblance is interesting. It tells us that the real significance of Arthur's shield is to be found, not simply in its relationship to anything in Spenser's known sources, but in its relationship to this mirror.³¹ The magician's art — an art apparently compatible with Christian orthodoxy — is the prince's shield. But it is also fitting that the shield call our attention to the mirror, for, if prophecy is the key to Ariosto's Merlin, this magic glass is certainly the key to Spenser's.

With the mirror, as with Merlin himself, the hunt for sources reveals many analogies but few close parallels. There are, to be sure, magic mirrors aplenty in Romance. Spenser read of them in the *Squire's Tale* of "Dan Chaucer, well of English undefyled" (IV, ii, 32), source of his story of Cambel and Triamond. Chaucer's mirror

Hath swich a myght that men may in it see
What ther shal fallen any aduersitee
Unto your regne or to youreself also
And openly who is youre freend or foo.³²

In medieval literature, magic mirrors were also ascribed to such famous magicians as Virgil and Prester John. But none of these mirrors is an adequate explanation of Spenser's mirror; all foretell the future, or show enemies at a distance — but none is a world of glass, an artifact at once mirror and microcosm.³³

The treatment of true and false mirrors in the verse of his contem-

poraries may also have influenced Spenser's presentation of the magic glass in *The Faerie Queene*, and its use as a symbol of the poet's art. Fulke Greville (1554-1628) utters a Renaissance commonplace in "A Treatie of Human Learning" (publ. 1633), when he praises poetry which

while it seemeth only but to please
Teacheth us order under pleasure's name,
Which, in a glass, shows nature how to fashion
Herself again by balancing of passion.³⁴

Equally original is Greville's use of the mirror as a symbol of illusion:

our delights, like fair shapes in a glass,
Though pleasing to our senses, cannot last,
The metal breaks, or else the visions pass (*Caelica*, no. 42)³⁵

This same contrast of true and false mirrors, while not systematically developed, is a prominent feature of the work of George Gascoigne, particularly in *The Steele Glas* (1576), the first long, original English poem in blank verse.³⁶ In this poem, there are two mirrors, emblems of two kinds of poetry. One mirror is of steel, and reflects the happy customs and example of the past, as well as a true picture of contemporary life. This mirror, of "steele both trusty . . . & true," "shewes all things in their degree" (ll. 184; 227). The glass mirror, by contrast, delights everyone who

will have a looking glasse
To see himselfe, yet so he seeth him not. (ll. 176-77)

His contemporaries, says Gascoigne, scorn "the poore glasse, which is of trustie Steele" (l. 217), preferring instead

The christal glas, which glimseth brave & bright,
And shews the thing much better than it is. (ll. 188-89)

Merlin's mirror obviously owes something to earlier writers, and to the satirical tradition in which Gascoigne places himself (*The Steele Glas*, 220 ff.). It is also indebted to the tradition, going back to Plato's *Phaedrus* and worn threadbare in Renaissance poetry,³⁷ of finding in the beloved a mirror of one's own soul ("his lover is, as it were, a mirror in which he beholds himself" — *Phaedrus*, 255D). But this is no adequate solution; Merlin's mirror, and Merlin's place in the poem, cannot be explained away by the energetic heaping up of sources and analogues.

Merlin's mirror is, to be sure, something like the magical mirrors of romance. It is also like Gascoigne's steel glass, in that it shows all things

truly, and is thus exempt from the deceit customarily associated with magic. As Kathleen Williams remarks, "in seeing Artegall in the armour of Achilles (III, ii, 25), Britomart sees not an illusion, as she supposes, but a truer vision of his essential quality than she could gain in a sight of the man himself."³⁸ In *The Faerie Queene*, as in the romances, Merlin's art serves the cause of truth and order.³⁹ This is made plain by an examination of the other mirrors and magicians in the poem, and it is such an examination that reveals why Merlin's world of glass is a major symbol of art and a clue to the way in which *The Faerie Queene* is to be read.

That the proper understanding of art is a recurrent concern in Spenser's major poetry is no surprise to the reader who has noticed Spenser's obsession with ambiguity and his abiding interest in the theme of illusion and reality. This interest finds expression in *The Faerie Queene* in that poem's pervasive concern with the ambiguous nature of magicians and of those who fashion images and "semblants sly" (II, xii, 49). The magician Archimago, a prominent member of this tribe, provides an instructive contrast with Merlin. He is associated on the one hand with Error and her brood through his "Magick bookes" (I, i, 36), and with Lucifera, who is advised by "six wisards old" (I, iv, 12). On the other hand, Archimago is repeatedly referred to as a maker, Sidney's favourite term for the poet. In his capacity as "the maker self" (I, i, 45), Archimago is a procurer of false dreams and visions, and is also associated with man's search for Protean transformation through his manipulation of language.⁴⁰ Through "his mightie science" and "might of Magicke spell," Archimago

could take
As many formes and shapes in seeming wise
As euer *Proteus* to himselfe could make. (I, ii, 10)

Spenser makes it clear that, despite his occasional reliance on other methods, the "diuelish arts" (I, i, 9) of Archimago are primarily the arts of language — and of the poet. His most notable act, the seduction of Red Crosse from Una, begins when, with "wordes most horrible" he "did verses frame" (I, i, 37). "Full of the makers guile" (I, i, 46), Archimago is at once an emblem of the Protean power of poetry, and also of its power to delude. Archimago's talents are so convincing that he himself is "nigh beguiled" (I, i 45) by them, so much so

That of himselfe he oft for feare would quake,
And oft would flie away. (I, ii, 10)⁴¹

Spenser's Archimago, as a black magician and poet-figure who creates

false images, deceiving himself as well as others, is balanced by that other magician who affirms the poet's ability to reveal the truth. Archimago "could file his tongue as smooth as glas" (I, i, 35). Lucifera's "mirrhour bright," wherein she "in her self-lou'd semblance tooke delight" (I, iv, 10), suggests the idolatry which Spenser continually associates with false art,⁴² but this delusive glass is countervailed by the magic mirror which is the central symbol of the "deepe science and hell-dreaded might" (III, ii, 18) of Merlin. For Merlin is Spenser's retort to the host of black magicians in *The Faerie Queene*. Where they display man's corruption of art and language, Merlin shows the proper use of man's gifts. The sorcerer Busyrayne, for example, writes "straunge characters of his art" in the "liuing blood" of Amoret (III, xii, 31). Our first sight of Merlin (in the Third Book, which he shares with Busyrayne), reveals him "writing strange characters in the ground" (III, iii, 14). The parallel is surely deliberate, and we see Merlin more clearly for the contrast.

The modern penchant for finding poet-figures under every bush should not prevent us from realising that Merlin, the maker of that world of glass, is one of Spenser's most powerful images of the true, god-like poet.⁴³ His shield and mirror — devices which protect and illuminate — show the essential nature of his art. It is the virtue of his mirror "to shew in perfect sight" all terrestrial things. While Archimago's art works to sunder Una and Red Crosse, and Busyrayne's to part Amoret and Scudamor, Merlin's mirror, in which Britomart first glimpses Artegall, serves the cause of union and harmony. This mirror is elevated by Spenser into an image of the great globe itself

For thy it round and hollow shaped was
Like to the world it selfe, and seem'd a world of glas. (III, ii, 19)

This world of glass is no ordinary crystal ball. Since it shows all things truly, the mirror is an image of prelapsarian Eden, of a world free of illusion and error, recalling Sidney's statement that Nature's "world is brasen, the Poets only deliuer a golden." Implicit in it is a pattern for living well and happily; we, like Britomart, can see in it what belongs to us and fashion our lives accordingly. Finally, Merlin's mirror is a symbol of true art since it suggests that Truth which is beyond time. The mirror shows everything "betwixt the lowest earth and heauens hight" (III, ii, 19); it does not claim to depict transcendental reality, for such a claim would be idolatrous. Unlike the works of the black magicians in the poem, the mirror is not to be confused with that which it reflects or imitates. In this it resembles that other great structure of glass in the poem, Panthea, the tower in Cleopolis, which Red Crosse finally understands truly when he beholds the New Jerusalem:

Till now, said then the knight, I weened well,
 That great *Cleopolis*, where I haue beene,
 In which that fairest *Faerie Queene* doth dwell,
 The fairest Citie was, that might be seene;
 And that bright towre all built of christall cleene,
Panthea, seemed the brightest thing, that was:
 But now by prooffe all other wise I weene:
 For this great Citie that does far surpas,
 And this bright Angels towre quite dims that towre of glas. (I, x, 58)⁴⁴

For all these reasons, Merlin's glass is central to our understanding of Spenser's view of art, and we best appreciate its significance through the contrasts which inform *The Faerie Queene*. Merlin tells Britomart that

It was not, *Britomart*, thy wandring eye,
 Glauncing vnawares in charmed looking glas,
 But the streight course of heauenly destiny,
 Led with eternall prouidence, that has
 Guided thy glaunce . . . (III, iii, 24)

Spenser is at constant pains to remind us that Merlin's art is free of diabolism, but what we make of Merlin's mirror depends on our awareness of the threat posed by a "charmed looking glas." Mirrors, as Spenser is continually reminding us, may work for good or ill. His treatment of Merlin's mirror is part of a larger design in which Spenser explores the proper function of art itself.

We may not always make the best use of the mirrors we have. Una, for example, is described as a "mirrhour rare" (I, vi, 15).⁴⁵ The Fauns and Satyrs, who do not understand the relationship between the ideal pattern and its earthly reflection, "made her th'Image of Idolatryes." When Una tries to restrain them, "they her Asse would worship fayn" instead (I, vi, 19). Spenser puts the case less comically in his Proem to Book Six, where he says "the trial of true curtesie" has been so distorted

That it indeed is naught but forgerie,
 Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas
 Which see not perfect things but in a glass:
 Yet is that glasse so gay, that it can blynd
 The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras. (VI, Proem, 5)

Instances of blindness and forgerie, of brass taken for gold, abound in the poem. All art, all the images man makes, are inherently ambiguous. But we cannot live without such images. In *An Hymne of Heavenly Beavtie*, Spenser praises the truth and love and wisdom of God; these qualities "that Highest farre beyond all telling, . . . daily doth display"

As in a looking glasse, through which he may
 Be seene, of all his creatures vile and base,
 That are vnable else to see his face . . . (11. 113-17)

The glass of art is essential to us; as fallen creatures vile and base, we need images of the transcendental and the divine.⁴⁶ This is emphasized in the Fourth Book of the poem, where, "Right in the midst" of the Temple of Isis, we find an artifact reminiscent of Merlin's mirror; "the Goddess selfe did stand/ Upon an altar"

Pure in aspect, and like to christall glasse,
 Yet glasse was not, if one did rightly deeme
 But being fair and brickle, likest glasse did seeme. (IV, x, 39)

This juxtaposition of a goddess and a substance "like to christall glasse" inevitably points us to the *Mutabilitie* cantos, inviting us to speculate on the connection between Merlin's magic mirror (which is first mentioned in the poem as "*Venus* looking glas") and a true sight of Dame Nature, the great goddess whose "face was hid, that mot to non appeare" (*Mut.*, vii, 5).

In the *Mutabilitie* cantos, we find ourselves in a landscape twisted and distorted — and familiar. The Christian sees a fallen world; the Neo-Platonist sees a failure of transcendental form to dominate terrestrial matter. Spenser's *Mutabilitie*

all which Nature had establisht first
 In good estate and in meet order ranged
 She did pervert and all their statutes burst
 And all the worlds faire frame (which none yet durst)
 Of Gods or men to alter or misguide)
 She alter'd quite, and made them all accurst
 That God had blest . . . (*Mut.*, vi, 5)

The divine pattern for earthly life has been all but forgotten. *Mutabilitie* bases her claim to universal dominion on the evidence of our senses, demanding "What we see not, who shall us perswade?" (*Mut.*, vii, 49). She appeals with confidence to the perfect tyranny of the visible,⁴⁷ nothing less will deter *Mutabilitie* than "to see that mortall eyes haue neuer seene" (*Mut.*, vi, 32). To fallen creatures like ourselves, *Mutabilitie* may indeed appear to be the goddess of the natural world. But Dame Nature demonstrates that *Mutabilitie* is herself part of the divine pattern, and that the triumph of *Mutabilitie* is apparent, rather than real:

all things stedfastnes doe hate
 And changed be; yet being rightly wayd
 They are not changed from their first estate,

But by their change their being doe dilate
 And turning to themselves at length againe
 Do worke their owne perfection so by fate. (*Mut.*, vii, 58)

So the poem gives us one final moment of true vision, a moment in which we comprehend something of the relationship of our world to the world of eternity. But such brief glimpses are all *The Faerie Queene* allows us, for we are fallen creatures; once in a lifetime may the veils be lifted for us, if at all. How shall we be persuaded of what we cannot see? Spenser reminds us that, when we cannot look upon the goddess, art preserves her lesson; Nature's face, like

the Sunne, a thousand times did pass
 Ne could be seene, but like an image in a glas. (*Mut.*, vii, 6)

These lines recall one of Spenser's favourite metaphors for sound art, Merlin's magic glass, the mirror that shows things truly. In the absence of the goddess, art reminds us that chaos is only apparent, and that Mutabilitie is "firmely stayd/ Upon the pillours of Eternity" (*Mut.*, viii, ii). Art can reveal this truth because, like man himself, art is a point of intersection between mutable time and eternity. So, in the midst of chaos, art affirms the unchanging, persuading us of what we cannot see, and so Spenser's final plea is to be granted "that Sabaoths sight" (*Mut.*, viii, 2). For only that which is beyond time can redeem the world of time; the most Merlin's glass can do is point to "that same time when no more *Change* shall be" (*Mut.*, viii, 2). Spenser would have us realize when it is we can do nothing, when, as she must, the goddess "selfe did vanish, wither no man wist" (*Mut.*, vii, 59). It is at these times that we most need Merlin's mirror, that we most need to see things truly and as they might be. So Spenser directs us back to the poem, this "continued Allegory, or darke conceit," and the true mirror Merlin has set at its heart. We shall not need his mirror forever; as fallen creatures, "now wee see in a glasse, even in a dark speaking: but then we shall see face to face."⁴⁸ But, until that same time when no more *Change* shall be, Spenser has left in our keeping his own "worthy worke of infinite reward" (III, ii, 21); until we see the face of God, we may, in the "fair mirrhour" of his poem, learn to see something of our own.⁴⁹

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Notes

- 1 Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (III, ii, 18). All citations to Spenser are to *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. E. Greenlaw, C. G. Osgood, F. M. Padelford, et al. 9 volumes (Baltimore, 1934-49; rev. ed., 1958).

- 2 See A. O. H. Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems," in the collaborative history *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 20-30, and also Richard Barber, *King Arthur* (Ipswich: Boydell, 1973), pp. 1-34.
- 3 Giraldus Cambrensis (c. 1146-c. 1223) in his *Itinerarium Cambriae* (c. 1216) distinguishes two Merlins – Ambrosius (the prophet of King Vortigern in the *Historia Britonum*) and Celidonius (or Sylvestrus), a recluse in the forests of Scotland. In the crucible of romance, this distinction soon disappeared.
- 4 See *Nennii Historia Britonum*, ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1838; rpt Vaduz: Kraus, 1964), XXXI-XLIII.
The child identifies himself as Ambrosius ("*Ambrosius vocor*") and says of his paternity only "*unus est pater meus de Consulibus Romanicae gentis*" (XLIII). The mystery of Merlin's begetting was to inspire fruitful speculation in many later writers.
- 5 *Historia*, VII, iv. See *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 176. The *Historia* was first printed at Paris, 1508.
- 6 J. J. Parry and R. A. Caldwell in *Arthurian Literature*, ed. Loomis, p. 79. It is a measure of their enduring popularity that the *Prophetiae* were put on the *Index* by the Council of Trent (1545-63), and that they were reprinted in Germany as late as 1608. They were also sufficiently prominent to be mocked by Rabelais in *Gargantua* (1534), chap. 58. Greene, in his "Epistle" to the prose romance *Perimedes the Blacksmith* (1588), mocks "mad and scoffing poets that have propheticall spirits as bred of Merlin's race . . ."
- On Merlin as a prophet, see F. Zumthor, *Merlin le Prophète* (Lausanne, 1943), R. H. Taylor, *Political Prophecy in England* (New York, 1911), and Barber, pp. 37-8.
- 7 "*Merlinus, qui et Ambrosius dicebatur*," *Historia*, VI, xix. See Thorpe, p. 169.
- 8 Loomis, p. 83. The suspicions of Polydore Virgil and others finally triumphed. Few now credit Geoffrey's claim that his principal source was a book in the Welsh (or Breton) tongue given him by Walter of Oxford, a fellow clerk. On Geoffrey's sources, see Loomis, p. 81 ff. ("the *Historia* as it stands . . . is Geoffrey's own creation"), Barber, p. 39 ff., and Thorpe, pp. 14-19.
- 9 *Historia*, VI, 18-19; Thorpe, pp. 167-68. The courtship of Merlin's mother recalls that of Cupid and Psyche in *The Golden Ass*.
- 10 Few medieval historians after 1150 do not show extensive traces of the influence of Geoffrey's *Historia*; he was not decisively discredited until late in the sixteenth century; v. Loomis, pp. 88-89.
The best single summary I know of the story of Merlin (marred only by its condescension to Mark Twain) is that of H.B. Wheatley and W. E. Mead, eds. *Merlin, or the Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1899), vol. I. See also G. S. Haight, "Tennyson's Merlin," *Studies in Philology*, 44 (1947), 549-66. Also useful is G. D. West, *An Index of Proper Names in French Arthurian Verse Romances 1150-1300* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).
- 11 In the *Historia*, Merlin performs only two acts of magic: he moves the Giant's Ring from Ireland to Salisbury Plain (VIII, xiii) and transforms Uter into the likeness of Gorlois (VIII, xx), after which he vanishes from Geoffrey's chronicle.
In Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini* (c. 1149), Merlin is a king who goes mad after seeing his three brothers killed in battle and flees to the woods. The poem recounts his family's efforts to persuade him to return to civilised life, and his eventual reversion to sanity. In this poem Merlin performs no acts of magic whatsoever. The *Vita* seems to have had little influence on subsequent accounts of the magician, though it may have contributed to the tradition of Merlin as a recluse, "*li homs saluages*" of the Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin*.
For text, see *The Vita Merlini*, trans. and ed. John Jay Parry, *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, X, no. 3 (August, 1925), 243-380.
- 12 Wace is the first known writer to mention the Round Table (II, 9747-60) – an addition elevated to prominence by Robert de Boron and later writers. His work is also the source of the thirteenth-century prose *Lancelot*, which presents Merlin as the victim of a woman who learns his magic and then imprisons him.
Except for one trifling detail (I. 23845), Layamon adds nothing to the story of Merlin. Robert Mannyng retells Wace's version of the Merlin story, vss. 12884-19961.

- 13 See Gaston Paris and Jacob Ulrich, eds., *Merlin, roman en prose de XIII^e siècle, publié avec la mise en prose du poème de Merlin de Robert de Boron d'après le manuscrit appartenant à M. Alfred H. Huth*. Two vol. Paris, F. Didot, 1886. Société des anciens textes français, no. 23.

For the surviving fragment of Robert's poem (Bibliothèque nationale, Ms. no. 20,047), see the editions of F. Michel (Paris, 1841) and F. J. Furnivall (1861).

Robert's *Merlin* ends with Arthur's coronation. The source of Malory's *Merlin* is the *Suite du Merlin* in some manuscript closely akin to the Huth *Merlin*. On Malory's sources, see Loomis, p. 544 ff.

- 14 For the influence of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and tales in oral circulation, as well as popular speculation pertaining to the coming of Anti-Christ, on Robert's treatment of Merlin, see Paris and Ulrich, pp. xii-xx.
- 15 For a text of the *Estoire de Merlin*, see vol. II of H. Oskar Sommer, *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances* (Washington, 1908; rpt New York: AMS Press, 1969), 8 vols. See also Jean Frappier, "The Vulgate Cycle" in Loomis, pp. 295-318.

So it is Robert de Boron, a lesser writer than Chrétien de Troyes (the Johnny Appleseed of Arthurian romance, who mentions Merlin only once, in the *Roman d'Erec et Enide*, the oldest Arthurian romance to have survived in any language) who gives Merlin his definitive shape. Working from a confused version of Geoffrey ("des souvenirs confus d'une traduction du livre de Gaufrei de Monmouth," Paris and Ulrich, p. xii), Robert creates a magician free of any taint of witchcraft. His accomplishment has a considerable influence on later writers, and is at least as important as his development of the Round Table mentioned in Wace.

The voice from the tomb recurs in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (III, 16 ff.), one of the primary sources of Spenser's *Merlin*.

- 16 Of Robert de Boron, Paris and Ulrich note that "Tout ce qui concerne la conception super-naturelle de Merlin lui appartient" (p. xii) and also that "toute l'histoire de sa mère, des circonstances de sa naissance de ses premières divinations, appartient à Robert de Boron" (p. xiv).

• Merlin's writ was soon extended beyond prophecy and magic. *The Prophetiae* were seriously cited in support of astrology; see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-58), 8 vols., IV, 586. On Merlin as an authority on alchemy, see Thorndike III, 99, 629.

- 17 On Malory's French and English sources, see Loomis, p. 544 ff. and Barber, p. 125. Vinaver thinks that the source of Malory's "*Tale of King Arthur* must have been a more authentic version of the French romance than either the Huth *Merlin* or the Cambridge Ms. of the *Suite du Merlin*" (Loomis, p. 549). "Authentic" is, in this context, a particularly unfortunate adjective.

For a detailed description of the fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman ms. in the Cambridge University Library (Add. 7071) discovered by Vinaver in 1945, see Eugene Vinaver, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory* (Oxford, 1947), III, 1277-80. On Malory's additions to his sources, see *idem*. III, 1267.

On the other versions of the Merlin story, and references to Merlin in the Latin chron-iclers, see R. W. Ackerman in Loomis, pp. 485-89 and p. 485, n. 2.

- 18 All references to Malory, unless otherwise noted, are to the Caxton text as rendered in *Sir Thomas Malory: Le Morte d'Arthur*, ed. Janet Cowen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 2 vols.

On Malory's scepticism, and his suppression of supernatural elements — his Merlin is a mere shadow of the Merlin of the *Estoire* — see Vinaver in Loomis, pp. 546-47.

- 19 *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford, 1904), 2 vols., I, 115-16. On Spenser's familiarity with other romances, and with Ariosto, see *Variorum* III, 401-02, and also note 26 *infra*. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, first published by Caxton in 1485, was re-printed four times within the century. During Ariosto's lifetime, the *Orlando* went through three editions: 1516, 1521, 1532.

- 20 "Demonio figlio," *Orlando Furioso*, XXX, ix. All citations to Ariosto are to *Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, I Cinque Canti e una Scelta delle Altre Opere Minori*, ed. C. Muscetta and L. Lamberti, 2nd ed. (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1962), 2 vols.

Ariosto prudently reserves judgment on the orthodoxy of Merlin's magic; Merlin's "vivo spirito" will remain in his tomb until the last trumpet "che dal ciel lo bandisca o che ve l'erga" (III, iii).

The best modern translation, with excellent notes and apparatus, is *Orlando Furioso*, trans. Barbara Reynolds (Harmondsworth: Penguin; vol I, 1975; vol. II, 1977).

- 21 On Merlin reduced to a voice, cf. Ovid's story of the Sibyl, *Metamorphoses* XIV, 132-53. Classical models also seem to influence the treatment of such figures as Atlante and Melissa. On this point see Reynolds, I, 65 ff.
- 22 The paintings are explicated in XXXIII, vi-xxiv; xxxi-lvii. According to Ariosto, no one should boast of such talents as Merlin's, for

e ceda pur quest'arte al solo incanto
del qual trieman gli spirti de lo'nferno. (XXXIII, iv)

Furthermore, such knowledge is now extinct:

Quest'arte, con che i nostri antiqui fêno
mirande prove, a nostra etade è estinta. (XXXIII, v)

- 23 On Spenser's knowledge of the Arthurian material, see *Variorum*, III, 402 et passim; C. B. Millican, *Spenser and the Table Round* (Cambridge, Mass., 1932; rpt New York: Octagon, 1967), and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of Double Senses: Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 53-63.
- 24 See *Variorum*, III, 226; C. H. Whitman, *A Subject-Index to the Poems of Edmund Spenser* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 154; James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton, 1976), p. 444.

Geoffrey's *Historia* identifies Merlin's mother as a daughter of the King of Demetia (VI, 18). Most writers follow the example of Robert de Boron and the Vulgate *Estoire* in leaving Merlin's mother nameless. In Layamon's *Brut*, Merlin's grandfather is "King Conaan," in the *Estoire*, "Merlinus."

- 25 *Variorum* I, 30-54. For possible sources in Virgil and Ovid, see *Aenid* VII, 785; XII, 87, and *Metamorphoses* IV, 782.

On Merlin and swords, see the *Estoire*, ed Sommer, pp. 81 ff., 251, and Malory, II, xix. None of these swords bears any marked resemblance to Arthur's sword in *The Faerie Queene*.

- 26 On Atlante's shield, see *Orlando Furioso*, II, lv-lvi; XXII, lxxxi-lxxxvii. R. E. Neil Dodge observes that, "Spenser has added a number of details to this, it cannot be said felicitously"; see Spenser's Imitations from Ariosto, *PMLA* 12 (1897), 151-204. The passage cited is on p. (188). See also D. C. Allen, "Arthur's Diamond Shield in *The Faerie Queene*," *JEGP* 36 (1937), 234-43.

On Spenser's debt to Ariosto, see Walters, I, 78-81; *Spenser: The Faerie Queene, A Handbook*, ed. Peter Bayley (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 58-101, and Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery*, ed. Thomas P. Roche Jr. (Princeton, 1966), Chap. V.

- 27 Spenser seems to follow Malory in some details, as in making Merlin's faithless lover one of the Ladies of the Lake (III, iii, 10; cf. Malory, IV, 1). But Malory identifies Arthur's tutor as Sir Ector.

It is unlikely that the original of "Timon, to whom he [Arthur] was by Merlin deliuered to be brought up" (Spenser's letter to Raleigh) was Timon, the celebrated misanthrope made famous by Plutarch. Spenser could have known Plutarch's Timon from his own studies, or from North's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579; see the Lives of Marc Anthony and Alcibiades) or the twenty-eighth novella of William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure*. Upton (1758 suggests that the name "Timon" signifies "honour" and is thus particularly appropriate as the name of Arthur's tutor (see *Variorum*, I, p. 264). This may well be, but the alteration still shows Spenser's independence of old books.

On King Rions, see the Vulgate *Estoire*, ed. Sommer, pp. 232-35, 412-19. Rions is the possessor of a magic sword made by Vulcan, a sword belonging formerly to Hercules and to Jason. This king is called Rience in Malory, as in Spenser (cf. Arthur's mother, who is Igrayne in Spenser and Malory, Ygerne in the *Estoire*). In both the *Estoire* and Malory (I, 26), Ryence wants Arthur's beard to trim his mantle. Spenser keeps the story of the mantle "with beards of Knights and lockes of Ladies lynd," but assigns it to one Briana, mistress of Crudor (VI, i, 13 ff.), not to Ryence.

- 28 Ascham's objection to the *Morte d'Arthur* on the grounds that "the whole pleasure of which book standeth in two special poyntes, in open mans slaughter and bold bawdrye" may have helped persuade Spenser not to make much use of Malory; see Millican, pp. 3-4, 194.
- 29 Quoted in *Variorum*, I, 251.
- Barber contends that "*The Faerie Queene* borrows only the person of Arthur and some few trappings from the world of romance . . . Spenser's sources are the Italians, and the whole concept owes much to the cult centred on Elizabeth herself as Gloriana, whose knight Arthur is. The use of this or that detail from romances, whether Malory, *Libeaus Disconus* or *Arthur of Little Britain* does not make it a true piece of Arthurian literature; rather, following the fashion for Arthurian references in pageantry, Spenser has borrowed the name of Arthur for his character Magnificence" (*King Arthur*, p. 138).
- Barber may well be right — though I believe he over-estimates Italian influence on Spenser. But this does not alter the fact that Spenser was not attempting to continue the romances in the same way in which the *Suite du Merlin* continues Robert de Boron.
- On Spenser's adaption of Ariosto in such a way as to create a situation "manifestly the exact reverse of Ariosto's," v. *Variorum*, III, 213. On the influence of the Italian poets in Spenser's decision to use the Arthurian material, see Millican, pp. 114-15.
- 30 Ariosto attributes Merlin's prophetic powers to his demon father (XXXIII, ix); Spenser seems to reflect the medieval romance tradition. In the *Estoire*, Merlin owes his knowledge of the past to demons, but his knowledge of the future to God; he also advises Vortigern's clerks to abandon necromancy (Sommer, II, 34).
- 31 We might say the same of Morrdure, the sword Merlin makes for Arthur. It will neither break nor bend; it too is proof against enchantment, and it may never be used against its rightful owner (ii, viii, 20-21). That the sword, shield, and mirror are all impervious to enchantment and deceit is, in the context of the poem's opposition of true and false magicians (and "makers," and poets), of considerable importance.
- 32 *The Squires Tale*, 131-35; see *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed., ed. F.N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).
- 33 On Virgil's mirror, see e.g. the ninth tale of the *Roman des Sept Sages*, ed. K. Campbell (Boston, 1907), or Gower's *Confessio Amantis* V 2031 ff. On Virgil's reputation as a magician, a reputation based in large measure on his "prophetic" fourth eclogue, see D. Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M. Banecke, 2nd ed. (London, 1908), and J. W. Spargo, *Virgil the Necromancer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934).
- For magic mirrors in the *Epistola Presbyteri Johannis ad Emmanuelem regem Graecorum* (c. 1165), as well as other analogies in Chaucer and Lydgate, and the general influence of popular knowledge of Arabic science, see Robinson, pp. 717-19. See also W. F. Bryan and G. Dempster, *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), p. 358ff; the *Variorum*, III, 216-17, and W. A. Clouston, *Magical Elements in the Squire's Tale* (Publications of the Chaucer Society, 1899).
- Another magic mirror is the "prospective glass" of Greene's *Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay* (publ. 1594, acted c. 1590) — but this too simply shows distant scenes. It is in no sense a microcosm and Bacon himself breaks it when he decides to renounce magic altogether. Bacon's mirror, unlike Spenser's, does not escape the general censure of magic.
- 34 Stanza 114. For text, see R. M. Bender, ed., *Five Courtier Poets of the English Renaissance* (New York: Washington Square, 1969), pp. 562-96. Subsequent citations to Fulke Greville are to this edition.
- 35 On the contrast of the "eternal glass" of Truth and "vantieis' false glass," see also *Caelica*, nos. 61, 87, 91, and *Treatie*, st. 10. Fulke Greville also tells one story of Merlin found in the Vulgate *Estoire* (pp. 29-30) in *Caelica*, no. 23.
- 36 For text see *The Anchor Anthology of Sixteenth Century Verse*, ed. R. S. Sylvester (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 275-315. On *The Steele Glas* and the use of mirrors in Gascoigne's other works, see C. T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne, Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier and Poet* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1942), esp. pp. 241-51.
- 37 The translations and commentaries of Ficino lent Plato's authority to this conceit and spread it throughout Europe. Ficino paraphrases the *Phaedrus* in his *In Convivium* (II, viii): "a lover imprints a likeness of the beloved one upon his soul, and so the soul of the beloved becomes a mirror in which is reflected the image of the loved one."

See Robert Ellrodt, *Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser* (Geneve: Droz, 1960; rpt. Folcroft, Pa. 1969), passim, esp. pp. 32-34, 49-50, 134. Ellrodt quarrels with Lotspeich's contention (v. *Variorum*, III, 217) that "the Platonic meaning of the mirror is intended," since Plato offered a theory of reminiscence, not foreknowledge. But this rather short-sighted view ignores the entire tradition of Merlin as a prophet.

On love and mirrors in Spenser, see *The Shepheardes Calendar*, "October," 93-94; *Amoretti*, XLV: *An Hymne in Honour of Love* (1. 196), and *An Hymne in Honour of Beavtie* (1. 224).

- 38 Kathleen Williams, *Spenser's World of Glass* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 94.
- 39 As it likewise does in the story of the brasen wall (III, iii, 10-11), which Spenser could have found in Giraldus Cambrensis or Camden; see *Variorum*, III, 224-26. In terms of the poem as a whole, this is a detail of minor importance — though it does help establish Merlin as a magician free of any suspicion of sorcery.
- 40 On Renaissance magic as a quest for Protean transformation, see W. Blackburn, "Heavenly Words: Marlowe's Faustus as a Renaissance Magician," *English Studies in Canada* (Spring, 1978), 1-14.
- 41 On Archimago as a type of the poet, see Giamatti, *Play*, pp. 118-19. On the poet as Proteus, see *idem*, pp. 118-33. Archimago as poet-magician is also suggested in the "charmed speeches" (I, ix, 30) of Despair, who disperses the manly powers of Red Crosse "as he were charmed with inchaunted rimes" (I, ix, 48).
- 42 Archimago "well could file his tongue as smooth as glas"; the monster ridden by Duessa (I, vii, 17 ff.) — an echo of Revelation 12. 3-4 — has eyes which "did shine as glas." On the mirror as an instrument of deceit (associated in E.K.'s gloss with Papist deception), v. *The Shepheardes Calendar*, 1.247 ff.
- 43 On Merlin as "no creator of false images, but of true reflections — from another perspective, the poet *par excellence*," see Giamatti, *Play*, pp. 119-20. On Merlin as a foil to Archimago, see Nohrnberg, p. 759. Merlin is also cited in "The Rvines of Time" as the creator of an earthly paradise (519 ff.).
- 44 The contrast of the two cities, in which the earthly city is seen as an image or reflection of the Heavenly City, is a Christian commonplace, but the fact that the tower is made of glass points directly to Spenser's mirror and to a Neo-Platonic view of art. Ellrodt's rather extreme contention that "the contrast of the two 'cities' is a Christian — and Augustinian — idea, without the slightest infusion of Renaissance Platonism" (*Neoplatonism*, p. 50), rather begs the question of Neo-Platonist influence on, among others, Augustine and Saint Paul.
- 45 Cf. Belpheobe as a "glorious mirrhour of celestiall grace" (III, iii, 25), and Elizabeth as "a mirror sheene" of "Princely curtesie" (VI, Proem, vi). See also C. G. Osgood, *A Concordance to the Poems of Edmund Spenser* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), *sub* Glass Looking-glass, Mirror, Mirrors.
- The implications are clear; the beloved is the earthly reflection of divine beauty. To confuse the reality with the image which reflects it is idolatry; cf. the "fowle Idolatree" of Cupid in the House of Busyrayne (III, xi, 49). Thanks to Merlin and his mirror, Britomart is not dismayed by the distorted view of love in Busyrayne's Ovidian glass.
- 46 A Humanist commonplace; cf. Ben Jonson: "Poesy is . . . the Queene of Arts: which had her originall from heaven, received thence from the 'Ebrewes, and had in prime estimation with the *Greeks*, transmitted to the *Latins*, and all Nations that profess'd Civility. The study of it . . . offers to mankinde a certain rule, and Patterne of living well, and happily; disposing us to all Civill offices of Society" (*Discoveries*, 2381-88).
- 47 Cf.

Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
 That nothing is, but that which he hath seen? (II, Proem, 3)
- 48 I Corinthians 13. 12, the Bishop's Bible (1568; rev. 1602); cf. the King James version: "For now we see through a glass dardly; but then face to face . . ."
- 49 II, Proem, 4; on the entire poem as a mirror, see II, Proem, 4, and III, Proem, 5.