

MERLIN AND THE WESTERN MAGICAL TRADITION

By Adrian Rogers

Abstract

This most ancient tradition has long been ignored by the powerful, due to the Church's influence to the end of the Middle Ages, and thereafter that of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and an industrializing 19th century. Yet in memory and custom it has never died out, and as the Aquarian age gets underway amidst rapid change and the threat of war it is experiencing a tremendous revival.

I trace the tradition back to the last Ice Age, and its ending in the floods and earth movements said to have destroyed Atlantis, and dispersed its survivors to neighbouring continents, particularly Europe and North Africa. It is to a great extent focussed around Merlin, whether that name refers to a particular person or is the title of a traditional office. I trace his influence from the far distant past until the present day, even projecting forward into the future.

Introduction

Who and what was Merlin; King Arthur's wizard and close advisor, therefore presumably a Druid? When did he live? Sometime in the late fifth or early sixth century AD, if he existed at all; at least that's what is generally assumed. If you ask a culturally informed person who Merlin was, this is the answer you will usually get, though some may add that he had something to do with the Grail. However, if one thinks about it, such an answer raises more questions than it answers.

For instance, if Merlin was a Druid then he must have been part of a long established tradition, so where did this tradition of Druidism come from? The answer here will probably be that Druidism belonged to Britain and mainland Western Europe, but this is no answer at all, because archaeology and history have established that Britain and the rest of Europe were inhabited long before Druidism arrived. Stonehenge, Avebury, and Newgrange in Ireland for instance—to name but three examples, are acknowledged by mainstream scholarship to be much older than the Druids. Moreover the Celtic peoples who, in the minds of many are assumed to have been Druidic in their religion, were not the first peoples to inhabit Europe. I suggest that answers to this question are likely to generate more questions as one seeks to find the roots of Druidism, and then begin to consider Merlin, not in isolation but as an ongoing part of an ancient tradition. Yet only by such questioning may we come to a more satisfactory conclusion, and leading on from that perhaps ask; was Merlin a proper name, an official title, or a traditional office?

We can then ask ourselves what exactly Druidism was, and how it relates to magic, with which it always seems to be associated. This is something I will come back to later, but I first wish to outline what set me thinking about this very complex subject. To begin with, I experienced a series of very vivid dreams about Dark-Age Britain on and off for much of my childhood. These however did not by themselves make me question the origins of the Merlin tradition as such. That did not happen until my adult years, when I read a book by the Christian scholar C.S. Lewis, a fantasy/science fiction novel entitled 'That Hideous Strength.' Ironic is it not, that it took a Christian writer to set my mind to really examining a pagan

magical tradition? A quote—the first of several, in which two of the book’s characters are discussing this very issue, will illustrate the point.

“...And where would Merlin be?”

“Yes...He’s the really interesting figure...Has it ever struck you what an odd creation Merlin is? He’s not evil: yet he’s a magician. He is obviously a Druid: yet he knows all about the Grail. He’s ‘the devil’s son’: but then Layamon goes out of his way to tell you that the kind of being who fathered Merlin needn’t have been evil after all.

“You remember: ‘There dwell in the sky many kinds of wights. Some of them are good, and some work evil.’”

“It is rather puzzling. I hadn’t thought of it before.”

“I often wonder...whether Merlin doesn’t represent the last trace of something the later tradition has quite forgotten about, something that became impossible when the only people in touch with the supernatural were either black or white...”

So here is a Christian scholar in the mid-twentieth century realizing that there is something unsatisfactory about the way in which the (basically pagan) Merlin stories are presented to our imaginations. In other words he is beginning to outgrow the habit of seeing him as an isolated phenomenon. Then, like the good scholar he was, Lewis goes on to ask himself what exactly Merlin represented, and what was meant, or at least implied by his use of ‘magic’. Here is another quotation speculating about what exactly Merlin had been doing...

“...What exactly he had done they did not know; but they had all, by various routes, come too far either to consider his art mere legend and imposture, or to equate it exactly with what the Renaissance called ‘Magic’...that a good critic could, by his sensibility alone detect the difference between the traces which the two things had left on literature. ‘What common measure is there...between the ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago, with their midnight studies, their forbidden books, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results by simply being Merlin?’”

Here is something else to consider, and refer to further on in our consideration of this topic. Lewis has detected the fact that the ‘Western Magical Tradition’ actually consists of two distinct strands, firstly what the novelist Alan Garner—whom I shall quote from later, calls the ‘old magic’, i.e. what appears to be implied by “...Merlin, who seems to produce his results by simply being Merlin...,” and ‘high magic’, of the Faustus, and Prospero kind, the magic of ritual, spell, and invocation. All of which brings us back to the consideration of Merlin as the exemplification of a tradition rather than an isolated individual. Another quotation will make the point.

“...Merlin’s art was the last survival of something older and different, something brought to Western Europe after the fall of Numinor, and going back to an era in which the general relations of mind and matter had been other than those we know. It had probably differed from Renaissance Magic profoundly...it had certainly been more effective...”

The implications here are enormous, for Numinor, as we know is but an alternative name for Atlantis. I am not yet concerned with where exactly Atlantis was, or might have been; we should not be diverted at this point by arguments concerning geographical locations. What does concern me is the age implied. If Merlin’s ‘art’ went, or goes back to Atlantis, then what is obviously implied is a tradition of such great age as to reinforce the idea that ‘Merlin’ might be the designation of a traditionally held office, rather than the name of an individual. Could it be that the Merlin of King Arthur’s time was but the last of an incredibly long line? Here is one more quote by way of elucidation...

“...What we have here...is not, as you see, something from the fifth century. It is the last vestige, surviving into the fifth century, of something much more remote. Something that comes down from long before the Great Disaster, even before primitive Druidism; something that takes us back to Numinor, to pre-glacial periods...”

A small diversion might now be in order. C.S. Lewis goes on to speculate as to whether Merlin’s magic could be revived today. Perhaps it has been, but this is not precisely the issue because the author is primarily concerned with its moral implications, though quiet

broadmindedly; as one who sees, not too judgmentally what is wrong with our modern world. He has presented a situation through his novel in which evil people are seeking to use Merlin-like powers, blended with modern science to enslave humanity, and he speculates thus to make a comparison...

“...They thought the old magic of Merlin, which worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with the new ‘goeteia’, the brutal surgery from without...No, in a sense Merlin represents what we’ve got to get back to in some different way. Do you know that he is forbidden by the rules of his order ever to use an edged tool on any growing thing...?”

Food for thought, is it not? The Western Magical tradition still has possibilities, and isn’t dead yet.

The author then goes on to claim that Merlin was a Christian and a Druid at the same time. Of course there is no evidence for this if one imagines Christianity as it exists today. If a Merlin-like figure had any links with the Christianity of fifth and sixth century Britain, it would surely serve only to demonstrate what thinking people are realizing in ever greater numbers, namely that the old Irish and British Celtic churches were quite unlike the Christianity of today, Catholic or Protestant. Evidence for this is to be found in traditions both pre-Christian, and early Christian; such as the Glastonbury folk traditions, the Welsh Bardic—Taliesin tradition, in old chronicles such as the ‘Mabinogian’, to name but a few, and in our own time through the writings of such authors as Laurence Gardner, in books like ‘The Magdalene Legacy’, and ‘The Realm of the Ring Lords’.

Of course one can sympathize with the Dark Age, and Mediaeval Chroniclers who wrote down these tales mostly, though not entirely from the varied oral traditions. Men like Nennius, Geoffery of Monmouth and Giraldus Cambrensis, all clerically trained Welshmen, and working in monastic libraries where all the best, and especially the forbidden books were to be found. They must have thoroughly enjoyed these tales of magic, mystery, disguises, seductions, battles and kings etc., but I expect they felt a bit guilty. One can imagine them thinking something like... “What great stories they are, much more interesting than some of

those boringly improbable lives of saints we get, served up at dinner...But we shouldn't be thinking like that should we? After all, it was paganism, wasn't it, and hasn't Christianity superseded all that?"

So they found a solution; they baptized them, in particular Merlin. They isolated him from the origins of his tradition, implying that he was somehow both Christian and a Druid, at the same time. How one could be both at once, in the way they understood Christianity is never really explained, but at least it served, from their viewpoint, the useful purpose of enabling them to portray him as repenting of his sinful 'magic', while allowing him to keep just enough of it going not spoil their enjoyment of the stories. As we know they also did the same thing to the Grail, in the process mixing up several traditions in a way that makes it very difficult for modern scholars to sort things out.

Well, it's easy to criticize, or laugh at their efforts, but surely we should be thankful that they did preserve and record at least some parts of the Western Magical Tradition, when, out of religious prejudice they might well have ignored, or simply tried to suppress it. So I think, when considering the way in which some of their forebears had treated the great Library of Alexandria, and its distinguished librarian Hypatia, that we owe them a debt of gratitude.

I propose now to return to the matter of origins, by focusing on the migrations of peoples, for are not catastrophe and migration the principle means of cultural dispersion? This obviously brings us to the Great Flood, what has been referred to in one of our C.S. Lewis quotations as 'the Great Disaster', and other catastrophic traditions, which is where Atlantis obviously fits in. At the end of the last Ice Age, between eleven and ten thousand years ago there must have been catastrophic and very widespread flooding, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and all sorts of terrestrial disturbances, as our planet reacted to sudden changes in weight, mass, and temperature as the ice withdrew. This leads us straight into the Atlantean story, which should also make us reflect on what part of the very long history of Atlantis is relevant to the dispersion of the Western Magical Tradition, but to understand this we have to consider timescales.

J.S. Gordon, in his recently published book 'The Rise and Fall of Atlantis' illustrates this by using, not the usual Evolutionary timescale we are accustomed to, but what, for want of a better term might be called the 'Theosophical timescale'. I have chosen this designation because the founder of Theosophy, Helena Blavatsky, in her seminal work 'The Secret Doctrine' first brought this 'timescale' into Western European consciousness. It is an interpretation of origins that blends in with the major mystery and magical traditions, similar to mainstream evolution in being cast over an immense time-span, but different in emphasis and method. Whereas mainstream scientific thinking sees life, after the Big Bang presumably, as evolving upwards from the simplest primordial beginnings of matter, the 'Theosophical tradition' portrays life originating in the opposite direction, not upwards from a primordial soup, but downwards from a descent of the spirit into matter. In other words, mind comes before matter in this tradition, and not the other way around. It is this method I suggest that will help us to better understand the growth and dispersion of the Western Magical Tradition.

Gordon, in 'The Rise and Fall of Atlantis' presents a saga going back millions of years, in the process telling the story of a humanity in Atlantis, whose consciousness was slowly, but continuously evolving over vast time-spans. He presents the changes taking place in self-conscious beings as mirrored by the changes constantly endured by the land itself. For him Atlantis, beginning as part of some super-continent is in a state of constant break-up and division; in which Plato's 'Atlantis', that maritime island empire centred upon its circular capital Poseidonis forms but the last part, coming at the end of an already very long history. So perhaps it is not surprising that Plato, though focused on this last stage of Atlantean decline and fall, implies in his narrative that Atlantis had already experienced a very long historical time-span.

This brings us directly to that series of catastrophes which I believe have been so formative of the Western Magical Tradition, but before I list them let us remember one thing about Plato and his narrative writing, namely that he was an initiate of the Mysteries. So when writing, he is not merely chronicling events, but also teaching elements of the 'mystery tradition'; therefore his work contains at least as much symbolism as it does material fact. This point is

also made by Gordon in his book, but it is one which, alas has been overlooked by many authors writing on this contentious subject, which may be one reason why it has become so discredited in mainstream scholarship.

Now for those most formative catastrophes, listed as follows—

- 1) The very rapid ending of the last Ice Age between 11,000 and 9,000 years ago, producing massive, worldwide effects as the planet adjusted to new conditions in every conceivable way, not merely as regards to flooding and climate change. It is here, I suggest that we must locate what C.S. Lewis called ‘the Great Disaster’. It is the only scenario which makes sense as far as Atlantis is concerned.
- 2) The much lesser, but still very severe flood that Laurence Gardner, in his book ‘The Genesis of the Grail Kings’ puts at 4000 BCE. He is using information provided by the great British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley, regarding his excavation of Ur of the Chaldees in the Fertile Crescent. A quote from Gardner’s book will illustrate—

“...Beneath the great thickness of waterborne clay was yet another settlement, and when the clay was analysed it was found to contain fossils of marine life from a time when the sea had flooded the whole area...The bed of clay had been laid down over the old settlement in about 4000 BCE. Woolley sent over a telegram to London; ‘We have found the Flood.’”

Of course this latter flood covering merely the Fertile Crescent, and despite being the Biblical Flood, could hardly have been what must be seen as the almost worldwide disaster that overwhelmed Atlantis. But there is one more catastrophe to consider, namely the destruction of the island of Thera brought about by the eruption of its volcano, generally reckoned to have been somewhere between 1500 and 1300 BC.

This, reckoned by science to have been probably the largest single explosion in human history virtually assured the end of the great Minoan civilization, and since its effects were felt all over the eastern Mediterranean one can imagine how much forced migration it must have engendered.

Some have equated Thera and the Minoan civilization with Atlantis, but that, I suggest is nonsense. The island volcano probably erupted about nine hundred years before Plato's time, which has given rise to the suggestion that Plato, and the Egyptian priests from whom he, through his mentor Solon got their information, mistook nine hundred for nine thousand, Plato having dated the fall of Atlantis 9000 years before his time. But to believe that, you have to assume that the greatest philosopher of the time, one who has virtually given rise to the Western Philosophical Tradition, along with Solon, and the Egyptian initiates who informed them couldn't tell the difference between 900 and 9000. Personally I find it far easier to believe that Plato had the intelligence to record events accurately, even if he did use them to encode mystery tradition data, rather than that he was innumerate. To assume otherwise is surely intellectual arrogance.

Now we come to consider the nature and impact of migration over millennia, an area of great interest to, among others, speculative novelists, a subject that led me to write a fantasy trilogy wholly based around Merlin and the Western Magical Tradition. This work I have named 'The Hidden Kingdom'. It illustrates what I believe may have happened, by taking the Merlin tradition right through time, from the last days of Atlantis up to 2012 in our era, with its looked for fulfilment of Mayan and other prophecies. However, we are getting a little ahead of ourselves.

Migration, as we know has gone on throughout human history. I think we could safely say that none of the world's peoples today are living exactly where their first forebears started those self-conscious journeys through time we call being human. It is as if migration, like the winds of heaven encircled, and still encircles the globe many times over, from east to west, north to south, and back again. In this great human movement Atlantis has played but one part, but one which is to us the most important, in that, through dispersing the Western Magical Tradition it has shaped and dispersed our own forebears, leading us eventually to where we are now.

So at last we can address, if only briefly the matter of location. I believe many authors have over-emphasized this, spending so much print and paper in proving their pet theories as to 'where' Atlantis was; that they often failed to ask exactly 'what' it was. It is this last question which is surely the most important, because if we do not know what Atlantis was, or at least what it represented, then how can we discover if it influenced, or formulated the Western Magical Tradition?

Regarding location, I am assuming it would have been somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean region, otherwise the name Atlantis makes no sense. Where exactly is perhaps not of too much concern, unless one wants to make a name for oneself as a marine archaeologist by finding it, because wherever Atlantis, in its final days was located one can see that its refugees, being dispersed in all directions would have been bound to end up, either in the Americas north and south, in Africa, or Europe. They would presumably have fanned out like the results of the volcanic explosions said to have overwhelmed their homeland.

My preferred location, the one used in the first of my 'Hidden Kingdom' novels is the Bahamas island archipelago, as made famous by the visions of Edgar Cayce, but I am not for one moment suggesting this location to be better than others. The Azores, the Canary Islands, further north in Ireland, or just outside the straits of Gibraltar as Plato seems to imply; all these are possibilities. Atlantis appears to have been located everywhere, according to each author's taste, from Antarctica (see Rose Flem-Ath's book 'When the Sky Fell') in the south, to Greenland in the north. But wherever it was, let us ask the more important question; what was Atlantis?

There are some points of agreement here. Everyone assumes that Atlantis would have been a wealthy maritime empire, very militaristic and oppressive in its latter days. Also that it must have become as Plato says, very corrupt, or corrupt enough at least to allow the self-righteous of every generation to enjoy imagining all sorts of probable, and luridly improbable kinds of vice being practised; while picturing the fire and brimstone that must have descended on its unfortunate inhabitants. No doubt justifying these unpleasant fantasies with the thought 'well, they brought it upon themselves, didn't they?' However there is nothing particularly

controversial about a power being militaristic and materialistic; it is what else Atlantis might have been that has the greater bearing on our subject.

The most controversial ideas here are those expressed through the visions of the great American psychic, Edgar Cayce, whose revelations contain amazing descriptions of an advanced science blended with black occultism. The trouble with visions of course is that a visionary, being in an altered state of consciousness is functioning temporarily outside our time constraints. Moreover Cayce, who was in any event no scientist, working between the 1920s and 40s did not have the technical terminology available to us today, to say clearly what he was seeing. But he was not alone in claiming there was more to Atlantis than materialism and oppressive military might. Claims like those of Cayce are made in Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine, in very different, but also in what we would call pre-scientific language, claims that there was far more to Atlantean corruption than degeneracy, vice, and crime.

But whether we look at the writings of Blavatsky, Tolkein in his saga 'The Silmarillion', C.S Lewis, J.S. Gordon, Joseph Campbell, Edgar Cayce, Rudolf Steiner, or a host of others, what seems to emerge is the picture of a fast degenerating, divided society. Hints abound, even if obliquely of what sounds like genetic manipulation. Rudolf Steiner, as reported by Trevor Ravenscroft in his book 'The Spear of Destiny', claimed to have found out by his own visionary means that 'monsters had been created'; that good and evil, black and white were in a state of conflict, that 'The Children of the Law of One', were in opposition to 'The Children of Belial'.

What seems to be implied is a civilization in which material and military power are combined with a corrupted religious system, with magic—black and white, and an out-of-control level of scientific knowledge in which almost anything might appear to be possible. But how much of all this could have filtered through to the Western Magical Tradition? Educated guesswork should help us here. Atlantis, whatever it was really like, would have been a society in which good and bad were to be found in all classes of people, and one assumes that refugees from its downfall would have represented all those qualities and classes. Those taking the moral

high ground might like to imagine the good escaping its destruction and the bad perishing, but we know that reality is never that simple. Representatives of all classes must have survived, taking their knowledge, though very little of their technology with them since, in the circumstances engendered by any catastrophe, technology is vulnerable both to loss, or simple wear and tear, and the more sophisticated it is the less likely to be replaceable in new surroundings.

We must also put ourselves in the position of those refugees, arriving among strange peoples, finding themselves a minority in sometimes hostile surroundings, aware of being different, but, over time having to marry into, and so merge with their new hosts. The interpretation of this tradition I adopted in 'The Hidden Kingdom' was to show the main Merlin character as one of a circle of initiates I called 'The Astari of Numinor'. I pictured them as operating after the fall of Atlantis from a sanctuary at Thule in the far north, with the Merlin sent to act as their representative in the Britain of those days, that I have renamed Albion.

Coming back to the nature of the Western Magical Tradition; the peoples among whom the Atlantean refugees came to reside would obviously be living with their own, deep rooted traditions, onto which new forms of knowledge and practice would be grafted over time. This brings me back to C.S Lewis's suggestion that the Western Tradition consists of two strands, 'old magic', and 'high magic.' The best descriptive writing about the 'old magic' I can think of is by Alan Garner, in his novels 'The Weirdstone of Brisingaman', and 'The Moon of Gomrath'. The fact that these are novels rather than examples of scholarship works, I think in their favour, because a novelist's imagination can empathize with situations existing in this magical world, as they would have presented themselves at this far distant time, in what must still have been a state of pre-history. A novelist can visualize how a people living completely in tune with, and dependent on their environment would have interpreted, and responded to challenges and dangers of all kinds.

I will use Garner's 'The Moon of Gomrath' to illustrate. In this novel, two twentieth century children find themselves drawn into a world of magic, both old and high, which they find still existing alongside the modern British scene, yet totally separate from it; a world with its own

rules, a world in touch with the ancient powers of earth, air, water, and fire. So what is the 'old magic'? It is 'The Wild Hunt,' 'Herne the Hunter', all those spirits and elementals resident in the earth herself, a world in which animals, birds, reptiles and fish have totemic relationships with humanity. It is the ancient 'ley line' tracks linking all the primeval sacred sites, and let us remember these are not limited to Europe. 'Ley lines', for instance are just as real in Arnhem Land as they are in Britain. It is instinctive, rather than contrived, ultimately subject to control by those with knowledge and power, i.e. the practitioners of 'high magic'. In Garner's story, the children have inadvertently released the 'old magic' from its confinement by lighting a wend fire (i.e. rowan wood) on the Eve of Gomrath. The following quotation will illustrate the situation in which they find themselves—

"...Albanac, who is the Hunter? And what did we do?"

"He is part of the Old Magic," said Albanac. "And though Cadellin may not agree, I think that what you did was not brought about by chance. The Old Magic has been woken, and it has moved in you, and I think it led you to the Beacon.

"In the time before the Old Magic was made to sleep, it was strongest on this night, the Eve of Gomrath, one of the four nights of the year when Time and Forever mingle. And wend fire was lit at the Goloring, which is now the Beacon, to bring the 'Einheriar' from the 'Mounds', and the Hunter from Shining Tor. For the Old Magic is moon magic and sun magic, and it is blood magic, also, and there lies the Hunter's power and his need. He is from a cruel day in the world. Men have changed since they honoured him."

"You keep saying the Old Magic has been woken," said Susan, "but if it's as strong as this, how did it ever come to die out?"

"That is the work of Cadellin," said Albanac. "To wizards and their High Magic of thoughts and spells, the Old Magic was a hindrance, a power without shape or order: so they tried to destroy it. But it would not be destroyed: it would only sleep. And at this season called Gomrath, which lasts for seven nights, it sleeps but lightly."

"So there's nothing bad about it all," said Susan. "It just got in the way."

"Yes. You may even say the wizards acted without right. But then, as ages pass, the world changes; so it is true that the Old Magic is wrong for these times. It does not fit in with the present scale of good and evil."

So there you have it. In the earliest times distinctions between black, and white magic had not yet arisen. The Old Magic was neither good nor bad according to present day standards; it was just there, part of the planet itself. So, if the Merlin tradition represents one who achieves results, as C.S. Lewis put it "...by simply being Merlin," then what must be implied is one in whom power, and empathy with the earth are almost indistinguishable from each other, though there may also have been a hereditary element; in other words, 'The Old Magic'. But that cannot be the whole story, because Lewis's representation of the Merlin tradition is very incomplete. Geoffrey of Monmouth for instance, in his 'Historia Brittonum' credits the Merlin of King Arthur's time, with rebuilding the 'Giants Dance' through music.

The 'Giants Dance' is Stonehenge, which had presumably, by the time the Dark Ages had superseded a Western Roman Empire fallen into ruin. Now if a Merlin-like character re-erected Stonehenge through music, that demonstrates, or at least hints at a scientific knowledge of the acoustic effects and properties of sound. On the other hand, if Merlin re-erected the 'Giants Dance' by more normal means, somehow lifting the stones, that surely implies a knowledge of mathematics, rather than a reliance on mere brute force. Obviously neither of these qualities fit in well with the idea of one limited to the practice of Old Magic.

Moreover the Merlin of King Arthur's time was his counsellor, almost in fact a king-maker; an initiate who had schemed to put Arthur on the throne for the sake of unifying Britain, to give it a chance of successfully resisting invasion. One can hardly imagine a practitioner of the Old Magic fulfilling such a role, in a society which had blended old British ways with the culture of Rome, to produce a high civilization in its own right. Merlin's reputation for manipulation through disguises might represent some partial throwback to the Old Magic tradition, if what is implied is an empathetic ability to shape-shift, or merge one identity with another, but that can only be a small part of the story.

To find a credible answer to what the Merlin tradition represented, and perhaps still signifies, let us refer again to our refugees from Atlantis. Whether many or few in number, they would have been, though no doubt unwillingly seen as representatives of a highly advanced

civilization obliged to make their homes among far more primitive peoples, to whom, of course the Old Magic would have been central to their very localized world view. Being what they were, it is surely inevitable that ensuing conflicts would lead to colonization, with Atlanteans, imposing wherever possible their ideas upon the local populations. The magic of Atlantis would, by virtue of its being a high civilization constitute 'High Magic.' Because civilization itself implies the imposition of order upon chaos, High Magic is inevitably a thing of order. A matter, as Garner points out, of deliberate thought and spell, and we might add to that, of ritual and invocation, of understanding and working with energies, of the controlled use of willpower. And this sense of order would bring with it distinctions between white and black, as High Magic developed alongside evolving Mystery Traditions, such as are also found in all great civilizations.

On the other hand the Old Magic would not, as Garner well understood die out. High Magic could restrain, as he puts it "...make it sleep...", but it could not be obliterated. Perhaps it was this enduring ability of Old Magic to survive, even if forced underground that, as the Age of Pisces superseded Aries enabled many Pagans to resist all attempts to obliterate their customs for a long time.

I think it is reasonable to conclude that the Merlin tradition, and therefore the Western Magical Tradition itself represents a blend of Old Magic and High Magic, because the highly civilized and educated know, in their hearts that the old ways have stood the test of time for a reason. They may not suit the new way of doing things, they may seem out of place in a changing world, but the wise will admit, if they are honest with themselves that they have a value in their own right. Indeed the truly wise are bound to realize in the end, that the best way forward is to learn from, and where appropriate adopt the best of the past, blending it with newer forms of knowledge and magic; to produce in fact a synthesis, and it is just, I suggest this Atlantean inspired synthesis which has given the Merlin tradition its power of survival, its appeal, its enchantment, and its enduring beauty.

Now before we draw the threads of our topic together, I must come back to Druidism. I reflected near the beginning upon what Druidism actually was, because I suspect that many

people lump Druidism, ancient religion, and magic together as if they were all much the same thing; they are not, because 'mystery' and 'magic' are not the same thing. At one level Druidism must have been a form of religion, because the Celtic peoples venerated the Druids, and relied upon them for guidance in all aspects of life; to that the writers of the Ancient World bear witness. However Druidism was also a secret, oral tradition. Now exoteric, everyday religion is not, as we know secret, it is not intended to be, but if, under its umbrella name a secret, esoteric tradition exists alongside the exoteric, then we know we are dealing with the Mysteries. Again, the ancient writers, including the Roman enemies of the Druids bear witness to the reality and strength of their secret tradition, but because of its almost entirely oral nature, and because secrecy was so faithfully observed by its initiates, exactly what Druidism taught is not easy to determine.

Since the 'Merlin' of King Arthur's time is portrayed as basically good, i.e. working for the forces of light against the 'dark side', even if some of his methods are controversial, I think we must conclude that, if he was truly a Druid then Druidism as such must have been a force for good. Many ancient writers, including such luminaries as Pythagoras venerated the Druids. The Romans of course didn't, but that means nothing. After all, the Romans in Gaul and Britain were fighting wars against the Druids, because these initiates always stood for the independence of their peoples, and as we know, truth is always the first casualty in any war. But there is one more thing we must do before drawing our threads together; we must determine the relationship between Magic, and The Mysteries.

As already remarked, great civilizations have a 'Mystery Tradition', by which we mean a tradition of knowledge that explains the inner mysteries of life, death, the hereafter, and the reality of personal transformation, in other words 'The Great Work'. The Mysteries, both lesser and greater comprised, and still comprise a vast field of study, but at their heart is a 'way' by which the initiate may become transformed inwardly and outwardly, transcending first the fear, and then the power of death, until he or she becomes one with the Eternal Light, at its Source. That is the goal of all great Mystery traditions, and when manifesting as Alchemy this tradition becomes a search for the means of transmuting mortal matter into an immortal form. That of course is the real secret of Alchemy, not the making of gold as a

source of wealth, by which a true Alchemist would set no store, but the transmutation of material life itself. Such teachings had to be kept secret, because they did, and still do not coincide with the official dogma in any governing establishment, and because some of the knowledge involved could do great harm if it fell into the wrong hands.

However, all great civilizations also have a 'Magical Tradition', by which is meant a 'High' magical tradition, frequently blended with some elements of 'old magic', and existing alongside the 'Mystery Tradition'. The boundaries between the two traditions often overlap, yet each is, in itself a separate thing. A good definition of High Magic is 'the art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will.' That however says nothing about the motives of the operator. An initiate of the Mysteries, of the High and Holy Grail Mysteries of Light seeks to bring about the inward change which will transform him, so that, as result of this personal, transforming process he/she may help to transform their world. Magicians on the other hand, might not be interested in personal transformation at all, but simply be seeking to cause changes in their surroundings, circumstances, or in other people with whom they are involved, for good or evil. In both traditions however, the motive is everything. A person may be an initiate in both traditions, but if they are true to their Obligations they will know that their progress in the Mysteries is not dependent on their skills in the practice of High Magic

Finally, we can draw our threads together. Yet even now this is no simple matter, because the Atlantean refugees, as we noted must have fanned out in all directions after the final destruction of their homeland, in the process picking up all sorts of influences from the many, and varied traditions of the peoples among whom they settled. However, not all these influences would have contributed to the Western Magical Tradition. For instance the Atlanteans who fled westwards would obviously have reached the Americas, but I am not labelling them as part of our tradition because, as we know, the great Pre-Columbian civilizations descended from that time were very different from their European counterparts. I am not of course implying there was no contact between them, far from it; we well know in our own time that contact existed across the Atlantic long before Columbus. It is just that I do

not see those ancient contacts as having been very influential in a lasting way, unless, that is someone definitively establishes that Egyptians taught the Mayans how to build pyramids.

So the Western Magical Tradition seems to be an amalgam of the traditions of Europe and its island offshoots blended with Atlantean refugee influence, including a comprehensive input from all the ancient cultures of the Fertile Crescent, and Egypt, and marginal influences from the eastern borderlands of Europe, and the far north. This is surely what those of us descended from a European background may acknowledge as our tradition. So what part then did, and does Merlin play in all this?

If Merlin truly represents an almost impossibly ancient tradition originating in Atlantis, of which he was the last exponent as some authors have maintained, then I suggest his part is crucial to an understanding of the Western Magical Tradition, because, whether as an individual figure or a representation of this tradition his role has become crystallized. Merlin stands out in literature, particularly that of the Celtic peoples, where he, or whatever is represented by the name 'Merlin' cannot be ignored.

No doubt the European establishments, clerical and otherwise would have long ago consigned him to the dustbin of history and myth if it had been possible for them to do so. But after all the centuries that have passed since his last appearance in the world of King Arthur; after the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the imperial and romantic nineteenth century, and the twentieth century itself, Merlin is still with us, still intriguing, still able to challenge our scepticism. He still can't be laid to rest.

So where, now that Atlantis has long gone is the heart of this tradition to be found? Largely, though not exclusively in the British Isles, and France—ancient Gaul; yet if

one takes into account the Grail tradition the net must be spread much wider, for Germany has a strong Grail tradition, and that links us with Nordic themes. However, I am not going into detail about the Grail here, because that is a mystery, as much as a magical tradition, pre-Christian in origin, but onto which Christian influences have been grafted. Personally, in

view of what has been chronicled about him over time, I see the Merlin character (or characters) as being initiates of both the Grail Mystery, and Western Magical Traditions, with perhaps the Grail Tradition purifying its magical counterpart.

In my trilogy ‘The Hidden Kingdom’ I brought Merlin, or what he represents, from Atlantis to Britain (renamed Albion) in the first two books, before taking him in the last book to Hyperborea—at the highest, i.e. seventh level of manifestation, yet with a prophetic promise of his returning to the lower worlds, as we enter the Age of Aquarius. My books have been written thus because I believe both the Western Magical, and Western Mystery Traditions to be relevant today. I believe, as C.S. Lewis said, through one of his characters that Merlin represents “...what we’ve got to get back to in some different way...” One thing upon which we all can agree is surely that the Western Magical Tradition is inseparable from a love of, and reverence for Nature and all her processes from within, a love that transcends religious, or philosophical affiliations and assumptions, and which should certainly transcend politics. It is this love which can enlighten us as we explore a great tradition, a love that can purify our motives, a love that must transform us in the Age of Aquarius, if humanity is to move even one step closer to fulfilling its divine potential and purpose.

References

The following have been quoted from directly –

- ✚ C.S. Lewis – That Hideous Strength, published by Bodley Head
- ✚ Alan Garner – The Moon of Gomrath, published by Fontana
- ✚ Laurence Gardner – the Genesis of the Grail Kings, published by Bantam Press

The following have been referenced without being directly quoted –

- ✚ Trevor Ravenscroft – The Spear of Destiny
- ✚ The ‘Mabinogian’ Chronicle
- ✚ Geoffery of Monmouth – Historia Brittonum
- ✚ J.S. Gordon – The Rise and Fall of Atlantis
- ✚ Helena Blavatsky – The Secret Doctrine
- ✚ Plato’s writings on Atlantis

✚ A.C. Rogers – The Hidden Kingdom trilogy (published by Double Dragon)

✚ Rose Flem- Ath – When the Sky Fell

Bio

Adrian Cedric Rogers was born in England, trained as a teacher in Ireland, teaching in that country, then in Scotland, The Shetland Islands, England, Australia, and Papua New Guinea, before retiring in 2005, thereafter devoting much of my time to writing. He has six fantasy novels in print, four published by Double Dragon in Canada, and two by Mountain Mist in Australia. He also have two novels issued (also by Double Dragon) as e-books. He has contributed poetry, articles, and short stories to numerous periodicals and anthologies. He has two collections of poetry published by Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide, Australia, plus a third collection just issued, to be launched in October.