

ANTICHRIST OR MERLIN?

A Problem Inherited from the Middle Ages

As C. G. JUNG HAS ATTEMPTED to demonstrate in his book *Aion*,¹ history is not only brought about by economic, geographically conditioned, and military power struggles, but also by spiritual and psychological changes that have their origin in processes of the collective unconscious. In relatively long periods of time (anywhere from one to three thousand years), certain archetypal collective images tend to emerge and recede again, probably in response to spiritual needs of humankind, but also to some *creative* evolutionary process. Insofar as this process shows a certain psychologically logical continuity, prophetic predictions have been made by intuitive "seers" as to the coming dominants in the future aeons. One great system of such predictions is astrology—which is in fact not mirroring "influences of the stars" (for this is probably only a projection) but transformations of archetypal constellations in the collective unconscious. Jung has shown how powerfully astrological speculation was linked with the rise of Christianity. Christ himself was not only symbolized as the slaughtered Lamb (the end of the age of Aries) but from the very beginning was associated with the Fish—thus initiating the age of Pisces.

The age of the Fishes was characterized by an extremely dual-

istic polarization between light and dark, good and evil. Around the year 1000 (and this was closely linked with astrological speculation) people expected the coming of the Antichrist, personifying the second Fish of Pisces, which—in the astrological image— swims in the opposite direction from the first one. Viewed psychologically this would mean an *enantiodromia* (turning over into the opposite), a complete reversal of collectively dominant values.

The figure of Antichrist coalesced from different sources: Jewish traditions of the coming of a pseudo-Messiah, New Testament sources, mainly the Apocalypse, Persian, and gnostic influences.² According to some legends the birth and life of the Antichrist were imagined to be a negative replica (*mimema*) of that of Christ. Satan too decided to become incarnate in the human realm and chose a virgin in Babylon as his vessel for this birth.³ Thus the Antichrist was either Satan himself or he already became possessed by Satan in the womb. Later he was educated by black magicians in Corozaim.

As a pseudo-prophet or political leader (or both) he will assemble around him a great multitude of Christ's enemies (deceiving them by "phantasms"), and at the end of time he will venture into a great battle. The *civitas Diaboli* (seen as the whore of Babylon) will stand up against the *civitas Dei*. Finally, the Antichrist will be overthrown and destroyed. The Antichrist is a Son of Satan *non per naturam sed per imitationem** He personifies lawlessness, arrogance, and idolatry. His life is a *mysterium iniquitatis*.

According to apocryphal and sibylline sources, Antichrist has power over nature, over the sun and moon, plants, water, and thunderstorms. He can cure illnesses, revive the dead, and even simulated his own resurrection after death.⁵ His country is in the north or he comes from the sea (like the beast or old dragon of the Apocalypse with whom he is identified), and he will erect a counterchurch and regulate all economies. Whoever does not carry his sign will be able to neither buy nor sell. Adso of Moutier describes him as a nature spirit capable of changing shape (*natu-ras in diversis figuris mutare*).⁶ He looks "wild" and monstrous and has horns. He wins people over to his side by terror, gifts, and

(false) miracles. Either Christ himself or the archangels Michael and Gabriel will kill him in the end. In later sources he is sometimes understood as an instrument of God's providence. The number 666 of the Apocalypse is an attempt to define by means of gematria his names in different forms: Antemos, Apnoume, Teitan, Diclux, Genshrikos, Armillus (Romulus), etc.⁷

Such an absolute opposition of good and evil, as Jung points out, characterizes the Christian era. This opposition probably has the important function of heightening man's moral consciousness and sharpening his moral conscience, but it can also lead to an insoluble conflict which brings life to a complete standstill. In practical psychotherapy, moreover, we can rarely state what is absolutely good or evil, since these concepts are to a great extent relative: "In view of the fallibility of all human judgment we cannot believe that we will always judge rightly. We might so easily be the victims of a misjudgment. The ethical problem is affected by this principle only to the extent that we have become somewhat uncertain about moral evaluations."⁸ Jung stresses that the validity of good and evil per se continues to exist but that in many situations we have to make an ethical decision against conventional rules so that such a decision becomes a *subjective creative act*. Jung differentiates between morality, which means obeying a code of collective rules, and ethics, which means following one's innermost conscience, or the voice of God in one's own heart. These two can collide (to which every dissident in Russia, for instance, could testify). What Jung calls the "fallibility of human judgment" is best shown by the fact that the Antichrist has been projected again and again onto rulers or groups: Nero, Henry IV, some popes, or the Jews, the Huns, heretics, and so forth. Antichrist, in fact, became a label for what or whom the various ecclesiastical writers disliked.

The harshness of this Christian moral dualism calls for a *ter-tium quod non datur*, for a symbolic solution through which life can continue to flow. One of the first such mysterious reconciling symbols is found in the emergence of the figure of Merlin in medieval literature.⁹ The story of Merlin's birth recapitulates ex-

actly that of the Antichrist. While Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* does not tell of his birth, Robert de Boron's "Merlin" describes how the Devil and his host in hell decide to nullify Christ's work of Redemption through a pseudo-prophet. One devil who possesses the capacity to assume different forms takes on the task. An innocent girl is selected to be the mother. One night when, against her confessor's advice, she forgets to keep a light burning, the devil sneaks into her room and as an incubus impregnates her. The girl then turns to her confessor who makes the sign of the cross over her and sprinkles her with holy water. He imposes on her a vow of lifelong chastity, which she keeps. Thus the devil's spell is broken. Because of her pregnancy the girl, Merlin's mother, is imprisoned and eighteen months later is condemned to death. The baby Merlin appears in court and proves that the judge himself does not know who his own father is either. Thus Merlin's mother is acquitted. Merlin inherits from his mother the gift of prophecy and from the devil the knowledge of the past. Before leaving his mother he dictates the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the Holy Grail: "And because I am dark and always will be, let the book also be dark and mysterious in those places where I will not show myself. "

Obviously Merlin is meant by the devil to become the Antichrist, but the positive Christian influences of his mother and the priest prevent this. He develops instead a strangely ambiguous third nature: he is usually good but sometimes also a trickster and a rather shadowy figure. He is nearly immortal, for it is said he will not die before the end of this world. In Jungian terms he represents the natural whole man, good and evil, mortal and immortal—a symbol of the human psychic totality which Jung terms the Self.

Merlin, like the Antichrist, has a special relationship to nature and possesses the gift of changing shape. Moreover, he personifies the archetype of the druid, the shaman and medicine man. Near Merlin's abode, for example, springs a well of water that cures madness. In addition, he is an astrologer, poet, and prophet in one. In him pagan traits unmistakably predominate; they bring

back from the depths of the unconscious a relation to nature that the Christian teaching had too harshly suppressed.

Among the later episodes of Merlin's life, I will comment on only a few. Merlin leaves his home because Vortigern, the illegitimate king of Britain, wants to build an impregnable tower, but the walls keep collapsing without reason. Astrologers advise the king to mix the blood of a fatherless boy with the mortar, so it is decided to sacrifice Merlin. When Merlin is brought before the king, he reveals that there is a large quantity of water under the foundation of the tower, and beneath this water two dragons—one white, one red—shake the walls with their continual fighting.¹⁰ As I have elsewhere shown,¹¹ the fighting red and white dragons are an *alchemical* motif. They represent in the symbolism of alchemy the opposites of male and female which after fighting and death become the partners of the alchemical conjunctio or Hierosgamos—the union of opposites. Merlin thus points to a conflict in the depth of the psyche, covered by water, that is, unconsciousness.

Later in his life, Merlin withdraws from human society into the forest. There he lives the life of a wild animal until emissaries of his sister Ganiada come to soothe him with song and lyre. But at the sight of men he breaks loose and disappears again into the forest. He gives consent to his wife Gwendolena to marry another man, but on the wedding day he appears riding on a stag, pulls off the stag's antlers, and using them as a weapon kills the bridegroom. He flees back to the forest but falls into a river and is saved only by his sister's servants. She tries to keep him with her, but he loses all joy in life, and so she agrees to his return to the forest and helps him to build a tower with seventy windows and doors for his astronomical observations. In winter he lives in the tower provided with food by his sister. In summer he roams about wild. In return for her care he teaches his sister prophecy. During this period Merlin becomes a "wild man of the woods. " He maintains a special relationship to the stag, a trait he shares with the Celtic god Kerunnus and with the Irish Suibne.¹²

For the remainder of his lifetime Merlin never mixes directly

the angels get rid of Mephistopheles at the end of *Faust*, Jung felt, was rather a cheap trick. Therefore Faust appears in the Beyond as an immature boy (which he had remained) who needed further instruction and help of the "Eternal Feminine."²⁷

There is one cluster of motifs around Merlin that deserves some attention in this connection: his ambiguous relationship to the feminine principle. In some versions he has nothing to do with the reign of Venus (his parallel in Wolfram's *Parzival*, Clinschor, is a eunuch!), and in later time he even becomes a model in misogynous literature. But in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita* and in Robert de Boron's description he is, on the contrary, married, and in the latter even has a daughter who helps Perceval with her advice. In this way he is also more complete than Christ or the Antichrist, neither of whom is married. In the legend of the Antichrist it is sometimes said that an evil woman will dominate at the end of time, and Bousset, in fact, has shown that the Antichrist himself represents in a way the old feminine dragon, Tiamat, the enemy of Yahweh.

Merlin, however, cannot keep up his marriage; his longing to live as an anchorite in the forest is stronger.²⁸ In old age Merlin finally lives in a group consisting of four people, one woman and two other men: his sister Ganiada, who gives up a love affair to be with him, the bard Taliesin, and the madman who had been cured by his spring and whom Merlin orders to make up his lost years of insanity in the service of God.²⁹ His relationship to the feminine is now characterized as the famous alchemical brother-sister incest. Finally Merlin disappears from the world, according to some versions, in the embrace of the fairy Morgana (Vivien and Muirgen, etc.). Under a hawthorn bush she entices him to reveal to her all his magical tricks, and with them she in turn bewitches him so that he cannot, nor does he even desire to, escape from her eternal embrace.³⁰ This disappearance of Merlin has been differently interpreted. Heinrich Zimmer, for example, praises it as a voluntary sacrifice of worldly power: "Insofar as Merlin knowingly surrenders himself to Vivien's bewitchment, to enchantment through the arts of enticement, knowing what he

is handing over to her bit by bit... he raises himself to the calm, untroubled heights of an Indian god, who withdraws unconcerned from the world into the stillness of the Self."³¹ On the other hand, some feel Merlin's bewitchment to be a catastrophe, representing a victory of evil feminine forces.

The hawthorn, a member of the rose family, is a revealing symbol in this context. In ancient Greece it served as a decoration of the bride on her nuptial day; the altars of Hymen, the god of marriage, were lit by torches made of its wood.³² In the cemetery of the Abbey of Glastonbury was a famous hawthorn tree, which came from a staff that Joseph of Arimathea planted at Christmas; it has been covered with flowers every Christmas night since. The crown of thorns of Christ was said to be made of hawthorn, and thus the hawthorn is called a *salutaris herba*. In almost all European countries the hawthorn served to banish or exorcise witches, sorcery, and all evil spirits.³³ This salutary aspect of the hawthorn seems to suggest that Morgana's spell is not to be understood negatively. Instead, it means that *love has overcome magic*. (The latter always contains an element of power, which is contrary to love.) Merlin's eternal conjunctio with Morgana is thus an image of the Hierosgamos, the supreme union of opposites.

The negative element comes only in the fact that the couple disappears into the beyond, that is, into the unconscious. They are *entombes* or *enserres* in their nuptial bed of stone forever, and only a few knights sometimes hear the famous *cry of Merlin* which calls them to some great adventure. Jung writes: "This cry that no one could understand implies that he (Merlin) lives in unredeemed form. His story is not yet finished, and he still walks around. It might be said that the secret of Merlin was carried on in alchemy, primarily in the figure of Mercurius. Then Merlin was taken up again in my psychology of the unconscious and—remains uncomprehended to this day! That is because most people find it quite beyond them to live on close terms with the unconscious."³⁴

Merlin, then, in Jungian psychology, is a figure that unites all opposites. The creative fantasy of medieval poets saw intuitively

(in the life of Merlin) a pattern according to which our Western cultural consciousness tends to evolve. Collective consciousness, however, limps far behind in its comprehension of this pattern. An important psychological event in the process of "catching up" occurred when Pope Pius XII made the official Declaration of the Assumption of Mary.³⁵ Mary, as the text runs, thus "enters the nuptial chamber" (*thalamos*) in Heaven. "The dogmatization of the Assumptio Mariae points, " as Jung stresses, "to the *hieros-gamos* in the pleroma; and this in turn implies, the future of the divine child, who, in accordance with the divine trend toward incarnation, will choose as his birthplace the empirical man. The metaphysical process is known to the psychology of the unconscious as the individuation process....,"³⁶ As Jung goes on to explain, "The central symbols of this process describe the Self, which is man's totality, consisting on the one hand of that which is conscious to him, and on the other hand of the contents of the unconscious. The Self is the *teleios anthropos*, the whole man, whose symbols are the divine child and its synonyms."³⁷ "Although he (the savior arising from the divine marriage) is already born in the pleroma,"³⁸ his birth in time can only be accomplished when it is perceived, recognized, and declared by man."³⁹ It seems to me that now we have to choose if we will do the works of the Antichrist or continue on the path of Merlin and listen to his cry, which calls us to the new adventure, the quest for individuation.

Notes

1. cw9/ii.
2. Cf. W. Bousset, *Der Antichrist* (Gottingen, 1895) and *Die Apokalypse Johannis* (Gottingen, 1906 [reprint 1966]), and H. D. Rauh, *Das Bild des Antichrist im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1979).
3. This is only one version: others assert his purely human descent or that he was generated "nefasto incesto." (See Rauh, *Bild des Antichrist*, p. 155). The Antichrist is then either Satan himself or his instrument (organon).

- 4 Haimo of Auxerre, *Patrol lat.*, vol. 117, col. 779.
5. Rauh, *Bild des Antichrist*, pp. 67f.
- 6 Adso, Abbot of Montier-en-Der, *Libellus de ortu et tempore Antichrist*, v. 950. Cf. Rauh, *Bild des Antichrist*, p. 153, and E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte* (Halle, 1898), p. 108. He sometimes appears as a child, a youth, or an old man.
7. Rauh, *Bild des Antichrist*, p. 219. Another interesting idea can be found in Honorius of Autun, who says that the (plant) Mandragora is a girl from the north without head. She symbolizes the followers of the Antichrist after his death, a mob without head. Then Christ gives this woman a new golden head—a symbol of her return to faith. (Cf. Rauh, *ibid.*, pp. 262 f.)
8. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p. 329.
9. Cf. Paul Zumthor, *Merlin le prophete* (Lausanne, 1943); also A. O. H. Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin* (Cardiff, 1960), and Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend* (London, 1971), pp. 347ff. and further literature cited there.
10. The red dragon signifies Vortigern, the white one the two brothers Pendragon and Uther, who will defeat Vortigern. After this happens, and once Pendragon is also dead, the other brother calls himself Uther Pendragon and becomes king. He is, of course, the father of King Arthur.
11. Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, pp. 375f.
12. Huth-Merlin I, pp. 158f.: quoted in Zumthor, *Merlin le prophete*, p. 208. The stag in medieval times is a well-known symbol of Christ because he owns the secret of self-renewal, and also of the Antichrist because of his Superbia. This one animal symbol, therefore, combines the traits of both extremes. In Alchemy it is Mercurius who is often called *cervus fugitivus*; in this form he represents the spirit of the *prima materia*, which is so difficult to obtain.
13. Cf. Helen Adolf, "The Esplumeor Merlin," *Speculum* XXI (1946), pp. 173 and 176, and "New Light on Oriental Sources of Wolfram's Parzival," *Publication of the Modern Language Assoc. of America*, vol. 42 (1947). Cf. also *Visio Pads* (Pennsylvania State University, 1960), *passim*.

14. *The Grail Legend*, pp. 361ff.
15. In later times, the erection of Stonehenge is frequently attributed to him.
16. Jung has shown that Elijah, in contrast to Christ's one-sided perfection, symbolizes the complete man, a total incarnation of Yahweh, of his light *and* dark side. In his obscurity he represents the *deus absconditus*, the Ancient of Days. In the legend he is called the metatron or "little Yahveh. " See Pere Bruno, "Elie le prophete, " *Etudes Carmelitaines*, Desclee de Brouwer 156, vol. II, pp. 15ff.
17. Cf. Zumthor, *Merlin le prophete*, p. 198. Elijah is closely related to the Antichrist because at the Last Judgment he will appear as a witness together with Enoch.
18. C. G. Jung, "Alchemical Studies, " cw 13, paras. 239-303.
19. Ibid., paras. 103, 105, and 111. The alchemists themselves realized the closeness of Merlin and Mercurio; in the Rosarium philosophorum a philosopher Mercurius (!) is quoted, and there also exists an alchemical *Allegoria Merlini*, an old text that describes the transformation for the "King. "
20. Ibid., para. 267.
21. Ibid, para. 284.
22. See above, pp. 3f.
23. For this, see C. G. Jung, "Answer to Job, " in cw 11, paras. 746-49.
24. For this, see P. Zumthor, *passim*. For the German literature see J. Vielhauer, *Das Leben des Zauberers Merlin* (a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*) (Amsterdam, 1978).
25. Ibid, pp. 90f.
26. M. L. von Franz, *C. G. Jung: His Myth in Our Time* (New York, 1976), p. 279.
27. Another variation is the strange figure of Gil Martin in James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. He seems to be just the Devil or Antichrist, but when the hero has done all the evil deeds he suggests, he shows him his disappointment. Probably, as Barbara Hannah shows, Gil Martin is ultimately more a Merlinlike personification of the Self than a personification of absolute Evil.
28. As earlier pointed out, he leaves his wife and even agrees that she may marry again but on her wedding day murders the rival. This

outburst seems not to be consistent with his usual wisdom, and indeed he then nearly drowns in a river. In this episode he becomes the stupid trickster, lacking in animal instinct. But "these defects, " as Jung points out, "mark his specially human nature, " with its capacity for further development.

29. Geoffrey, *Vita*, verses 1237ff.
30. In the *Vita Merlini*, Morgana is the sister of Arthur and one of the nine fairies of Avallon. She is also called Dame du lac.
31. "Merlin" in *Corona*, IX 2 (Munich-Berlin, 1939), pp. 150-52.
32. E. and J. Lehner, *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants, and Trees* (Tudor, N. Y, 1960), p. 59.
33. Cf. *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, ed. Hoffmann-Krayer (Berlin, 1918-1941), under "Weissdorn. "
34. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 228.
35. *Apostolic Constitution: Munificentissimus Deus...*
36. "Answer to Job, " in cw 11, para. 755.
37. Ibid, paras. 746-49.
38. The collective unconscious, **my note**.
39. Ibid, para. 748.