

It has proven very difficult for Arthurian scholars to produce historicist or historically-situated readings of magic and supernatural elements for the simple reason that it is hard to historicize something that doesn't exist. Kathryn Walton accomplishes the impressive feat of analyzing the subtly shifting depictions of Merlin in different manuscripts of the same Arthurian romance, *Of Arthour and Merlin*, by grounding her analysis of the text's depictions of Merlin in each version to shifting social and political ideas about magic over the late medieval and early modern period. The detailed comparative analysis of the Auchinleck MS of around 1330, the early-fifteenth-century Lincoln's Inn MS 150, and Wynkyn de Worde's print of 1510, reveals that the changes in the Merlin image are connected to changes in the cultural and historical context: the medieval English society grows more wary of magic as it increasingly comes to be seen as the work of the devil. Wynkyn de Worde's print, for instance, functioned in the time of the first witchhunts. Walton combines careful consideration of small changes in the text with a well-argued discussion of how these changes fit a pattern not so well discerned before. More lines are used to describe Merlin's diabolic nature, with more details about the hairiness of this body as a baby, for instance; different metaphors are employed, and so on. The most striking element in the comparison is the fact that as he becomes more demonic, Merlin's Christianity and the way he will use his powers for the good of mankind is foregrounded as well. He becomes more powerful and possibly dangerous, yet also more strongly characterized as Christian and good. Walton's methodology yields a persuasive and important intervention that will help to shift how we read not only *Of Arthour and Merlin* but all Arthurian texts containing magic.

Brilliantly done and a great read, Kathryn M.M. Walton's 'Rewriting a Demon: Merlin's Changing Characterization in Three Versions of *Of Arthour and Merlin*', *Arthuriana*, 32.1, 55-81, is an important contribution to the body of Merlin scholarship.

A masterpiece. Fiona Tolhurst's 'Eradicating Victorian Backreading: Re-reading Malory's Gwenyvere through Gaynor and Isode', *Arthurian Literature XXXVIII*, eds. Megan Leitch and Kevin Whetter, pp. 193-230, provides a careful vindication of the often misrepresented Gwenyvere character in Malory. She uncovers how the a-moral image of this character ('Eve') resulted from persistent Victorian back-reading. The comparison with Gaynor in the Stanzaic *Morte Darthur* and Isode in Malory is very insightful and supports the positive Gwenyvere image: "a model of true earthly love and true commitment to earthly chivalry" (p. 230). In an exemplary way, the article takes issue with how we as Arthurian scholars are rooted in ideologies and values of our own times and of those of the scholars preceding us. Going back to the sources allows us to leave behind those anachronistic values and undo distorted images of characters like Gwenyvere. Where it might seem that, given the vast body of scholarship on this character, nothing new could be discovered, Tolhurst opens new perspectives and provides us with a quite relevant methodic mirror. This article not only provides important insights about Gwenyvere in the Stanzaic *Morte* and Malory, but it also provides thoughtful commentary on the course of Arthurian scholarship as a whole; the historical analysis yields important considerations about directions in Arthurian scholarship that can be applied to multiple avenues of Arthurian enquiry.

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