

Reviews

MARK ADDERLEY, *The Hawk and the Wolf: Book One, the Matter of Britain*. Marrero, LA: WestBank Publishing, 2008. Pp. xxii, 210. ISBN: 0-9789840-2-1. \$26.

The theme of the Matter of Britain is one of vast extent, ever-increasing complexity, and along with both, often unappreciated linguistic confusion. In date (and as retailed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, so that one cannot quite say, historically) it extends from the Fall of Troy to the domination of the English. To this twelfth-century formulation have been added the long development of the Arthurian romance, primarily by medieval French authors, with since the nineteenth century a rediscovery of Welsh and other Celtic sources, primarily the tangled tales of the *Mabinogion* and the doubtful witness of the *Gododdin* and the Merlin poems. Other contributions to the thick stew include Latin accounts of early Britain, such as Tacitus's, the evidence of archaeology, and perhaps dominant in the mind of any modern re-handler of the legend, the many more recent versions produced by novelists and historians, all of them straining for a new account which shall be at once comprehensive, coherent, and convincing. Does this abundance, or perhaps plethora, of available material make life easier or harder for the re-creator, caught also between the drive to discover 'the true story behind the legend' (as so many blurbs and advertisements have claimed), and the reluctance to let go of myth and magic?

Mark Adderley's new rendition of the Merlin legend (of which *The Hawk and the Wolf* is only volume 1) takes one bold step in re-dating the story not to the familiar fifth- or sixth-century setting now canonical for Arthurians, but to the first century just before and leading up to the Claudian invasion. A vital scene in it is the Council when the leaders of the Island of the Mighty, as Britain is repeatedly called, decide how to respond to the demands from Rome for arrears of tribute. It is a big scene in Geoffrey and in all his translators and imitators, but there it is Arthur who responds and who decides to launch the invasion of Rome eventually checked by the treachery of Mordred. Adderley has kept some features of the scene—including the name Lucius, here the ambassador rather than the procurator who initiates the demand—but the peace/war debate has become a clash between the two brothers Coroticos and Cymbeline. Their names embody the whole tangled tradition, for Coroticos is a reconstructed British form, derived by philologists from the Roman accounts of Caractacus, while Cymbeline stays in anachronistically, instead of being replaced by (I would imagine) British *Cunobelinos, presumably because Shakespeare has made it too familiar to leave out. Another person present at the debate is the queen of the 'Eicenni', Boudicea, and her name seems to be a split-the-difference form. Kenneth Jackson has shown that her name must have been *Boudica, with a long medial -i-, but Boadicea, pronounced as spelled, has become too familiar

in popular history to disappear entirely. Finally, one more example of the kind of anachronism that thickened tradition produces is the name of Adderley's central character, Emrys—otherwise Merlin, here so-called because of his totem animal, the 'hawk' of the title as Boudicea is the 'wolf.' Emrys, still familiar as a Welsh name, must derive from Latin Ambrosius, as in the fifth-century general Ambrosius Aurelianus whom Gildas credits with the first defeat of the Saxons. But if the setting is the first century before the *adventus Romanorum*, why would a British child be carrying a Roman name, especially a worn-down one? The answer is, I think, that Adderley very much wants the liberty to use the Celtic materials now so readily available, but to de-center them to a different historical period, which will also allow—but this is now guesswork as to future intentions—a much broader historical sweep, not excluding the transformation of the Island of the Mighty into the early modern Empire which, in its way, claimed to be the successor to Rome.

Turning from the setting to the foreground, Adderley's story is that of the child Emrys/Merlin, son of Viviane (from the French tradition) and grandson of Rhydderch (from the Welsh), growing into self-awareness of his powers as a seer, in ways which may well remind one of the completely non-Arthurian tale of Ged the Archmage as told by Ursula Le Guin. The military side of his story is the coming Claudian invasion, which ends in this volume with the storming of Mai Dun, or Maiden Castle outside Dorchester by Vespasian's legionaries—Adderley's tale relies heavily on the discoveries by Mortimer Wheeler in the 1920s of battle casualties and sling-stone arsenals by the eastern gate of the hill-fort, though doubt is now cast on his interpretation by the National Heritage placards on the site. The magical side of the story, however, is the struggle to prevent Morgana (Morgan the Fay) from gathering into her hands all the Seven Chief Treasures of the Island of Britain, such as the Siege Perilous, the Cauldron of Garanhir, the Chariot of Manawydan, and especially the long-lost Excalibur, the sign of sovereignty as dramatized in the eponymous Boorman movie. To do this Emrys has to become aware of his own power of the Sight, start his education as a druid in Afallach, but then break it off to join the fight against Rome, meanwhile beginning and pursuing his love-affair with Boudicea, who however—as in the Roman accounts—is married to the elderly and presumably historical Prasutagos. As with the names, so with the story: myth, legend, romance, and history are inextricably entwined. Emrys repeatedly sees his great contemporaries as dragons, and at the Council scene mentioned above comes out with perhaps the most famous of the prophecies of Merlin, the one about the warring dragons—though here the red and the white dragon do not seem to represent the Welsh and the Saxons (for the Saxons are not yet on the scene) but the warring brothers Coroticos and Cymbeline.

In his short 'Introduction' Adderley makes it clear that he is attempting a synthesis which is itself of a medieval kind, that is to say eclectic, for entertainment, unconcerned to disentangle truth from fiction—and when one considers the strange theses which have confidently been put forward in recent times as 'the true story' of Merlin, or Arthur, or whatever, that seems a very reasonable goal. He also mentions the influence of Nikolai Tolstoy's book *The Quest for Merlin* (1985), but another major

influence would appear to be (not least in their shared debt to the fictions of Robert Graves) Tolstoy's novel *The Coming of the King* (1988). That too was intended to be only 'the First Book of Merlin,' but the intention was cut short by events in much more recent politics. One hopes that Adderley has better fortune and can bring his intriguing and original story to a close.

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