Stephen Knight's *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Through the Ages* opens with a sketch of Merlin the icon, a sketch realized on the cover in Howard Pyle's illustration of Merlin as an old man with a pointed hat and long grey beard, a figure who, by the end of the book, has become an eccentric, an "educationally transgenerational grandfather figure" (221) and trope for "the way in which the power of the modern individual controls through irony the force of knowledge which it so patently lacks" (222). Knight seeks to track the development of this icon through 1500 years of literary history, from the Iron Age to the global present. Central to his thesis, articulated in a brief introduction, is that the figure of Merlin has functioned in the West as a figure for an age-old conflict between knowledge and power. Knight seeks to repudiate Foucault's contention that knowledge and power are thoroughly imbricated, arguing that "when knowledge is most important, most close to taking control, that is when it is most vulnerable to some form of limitation or repression by power" (xii). Knight understands Merlin as "a figure of knowledge separate from power: the distance between the two energizes the mystery that empowers his knowledge" (xvii). Of course, in both of these sentences the very words that conjure up the desired dialectic between knowledge and power deconstruct it at the very moment of its making. Each term is implied by the other. For knowledge to be at all effective it must "take control," that is become powerful at which point it is repressed by power. Merlin is set apart from power as a means of, ironically, empowering his knowledge. The resulting aporias between knowledge-as-power and power-as-knowledge play throughout the book, which makes the descriptions of various Merlin through the ages all the more compelling, despite the book's sometimes breathless pace.

Though the book's organization is chronological, as the geographical focus widens, moving from Wales and southern Scotland in the first chapter to a broader global stage by the end, the figure of Merlin shrinks from powerful advisor of a world-conquering monarch to children's tutor. In part to understand this process of diminution, Knight has organized his odyssey through Arthurian history in a way that highlights four aspects of knowledge that Merlin has at various times and for various audiences represented: wisdom, advice, cleverness, and education (which as Knight points out in the introduction "through some tricksterish force," spell out initially the name of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman Arthurian chronicler Wace [xvi]). Each of these brands of knowledge suggests something about the configurations of knowledge and power at a particular historical moment; they are "major formations in the sociocultural apprehension of the value--and accordingly the threat--of knowledge at different times and in different contexts" (xv).

In the first chapter, wisdom is used to represent the Cumbrian Myrddin, whose retreat from the court into nature critiques the warrior values of an earlier presumably pan-Celtic culture, and the Celtic Myrddin, who defends these same Celtic warrior values from Anglo-Norman incursions. Both are only hinted at in maddeningly tantalizing fragments first recorded in much later manuscripts. Knight's commentary on these fragments attempts to tease apart a tradition that might represent a hegemonic early Celtic culture that extended throughout the island from a post-conquest Welsh tradition that sets itself against
colozing Normans. The chapter culminates in an analysis of the prophetic Merlin in the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth, both Historia Regum Britaniae and Vita Merlini. Knight sees Geoffrey as a colonized intellectual whose works are hybrids wedding the ancient traditions of Celtic Britain to the interests and ideologies of the Norman conquerors (21).

As Merlin moves out of the Celtic ambit and is appropriated by the continental French aristocracy, Merlin becomes the type of the grand vizier, the advisor to a powerful king. Chapter two explores Merlin in the great French and French-inspired English Romances of the high Middle Ages, from Robert de Boron to Malory. This group of romances adds two new twists to Merlin's characterization. First, his prophetic powers are much reduced. In the romances, Merlin's prophecies are efficacious only within the narrative; he does not, like Geoffrey's Merlin, prophesize about the future of a historical England. An admonitory figure of the advisor to a world-conquering leader, his role is nonetheless limited to a fictional world and contained by it. The other twist Knight notes is structural: whether the sage survives to the end of the text or is made to disappear indicates the extent to which knowledge is complicit with or in conflict with power. This theme returns throughout the remaining chapters.

By the Renaissance, "classicism and science" began to replace "medieval magic," necessitating yet another shift in Merlin's narrative function. By the sixteenth century Merlin has become "the image of a new cleverness" (101), sometimes representing the new learning, sometimes old, irrelevant, and discarded forms of knowledge, and by the nineteenth century, the dangers of mere cleverness. Chapter three follows the vagaries of Merlin's reputation through four centuries of British literature, culminating in Tennyson's Idylls of the King which Knight argues looks forward to modern uses of Merlin as "a positive instrument of individual" rather than state development (152). Chapter four examines the modern view of Merlin as an educator: as the ideal of natural knowledge in Germany, as the child Arthur's tutor in T.H. White's Once and Future King, as the artist-educator of the American Transcendentalists, as Disney's addled scholar in the animated version of The Sword in the Stone, as Nicol Williamson's "English master" in Excalibur, as a "totem of psychic self-improvement" for new age fantasy writers.

The above summaries, however, can offer only a glimpse of the erudition and encyclopedic sweep of Knight's work. The sheer number of works included militates against easy summary. Knight's primary bibliography alone runs to fourteen pages, containing over 400 entries written between the twelfth and the twenty-first centuries, all of which are mentioned in the text (and still Knight apologizes for what he could not include [xv]). Critics and scholars these days seem to be faced with two unhappy choices: to write a comprehensive monograph that covers everything written about one's subject (and be accused by our reviewers of superficiality) or to focus in depth on a few exemplars of said subject (and be accused of incompleteness). While Knight's first two chapters set a leisurely pace, the second half of the book becomes positively breathless: Malory gets three and a half pages, Tennyson eight, T. H. White four and a half, all of Arthurian film 2 pages. Because the book is meant to appeal to popular (or at least student) as well as academic readers and because many of the works cited are reasonably obscure, Knight must spend as much time describing these texts as he does in advancing his thesis about Merlin's relationship to knowledge and power.

With in most cases only a few paragraphs to devote to single works, especially in the last two chapters, it is difficult to test out Knight's theoretical assumptions against specific texts. While Knight clearly understands that the relationships between power and knowledge are complex and shifting, behind his characterizations of Merlin through the ages, one senses a desire to imagine a place in our culture, especially in academic culture, where individuals can and do use knowledge to speak truth to power. But these days Merlin is as likely to be a corporate logo as a hero or sage. He just as frequently represents knowledge in the service of power, even in the academic world, as in electronic library catalogues (University of Michigan's Mirlyn); or the power of science and technology in the name of a software company (Merlyn Software System Inc, "home of software wizardry"); or even the knowledge necessary to perpetuate and legitimate military might, as in MERLYN, the Military Education Research Library Network. It is not clear in the end that even the most arcane and irrelevant of medieval knowledge can escape entanglement and corruption. But it was Foucault's genius to see that power is not merely destructive; it is also productive. If Knight's appreciation of Merlin as an unstable, continuously fluid sign makes his work so very compelling, it is the nature of this instability, this fluidity, that leaves us unfulfilled, relentlessly asking questions about power and knowledge that can never be entirely answered, always wanting more.
Merlin (Legendary character) in literature Merlin (Legendary character) Knowledge, Theory of, in literature Power (Social sciences) in literature. Click here to see similar releases: Hanguk sahoe i sinbun kyegp kwa sahoe pyndong [chja Hanguk Sahoesa Ynguhoe].

Managing with power: politics and influence in organizations Jeffrey Pfeffer. by Jeffrey Pfeffer. ISBN: 087584314X (alk. paper) ISBN: 0875844405 (pbk) ISBN: 9780875844404 (pbk) Author: Pfeffer, Jeffrey. Article excerpt. STEPHEN KNIGHT, Merlin: Knowledge and Power through the Ages. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009. Pp. xvii, 275. isbn: 978-0-8014-4365-7. The challenge of generating a plan adequately to cover Merlin's guises through the ages is partially redressed by one of the book's most endearing traits-genuine respect for previous scholarship and steady application and acknowledgment of it throughout. … SUBSCRIBE TODAY! Subscribe to Questia and enjoy 'Merlin' Profile: Knights of the Round Table. Do you like this video? The Knights of the Round Table are a sub-order[citation needed] of the Knights of Camelot, created by the King of Camelot, Arthur Pendragon. The Knights of the Round Table are loyal to their leader and ruler, King Arthur, as well as to the people of Camelot. They are especially loyal to the three non-knight members of the Round Table: the incognito sorcerer Merlin, whom they treat as a beloved but foolish younger brother, Queen