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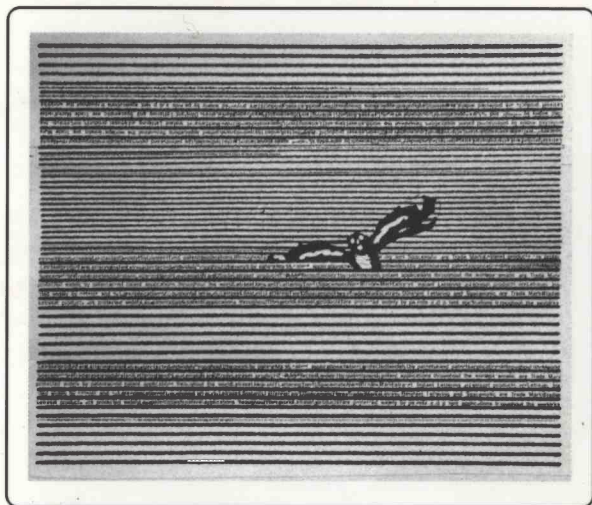
No. 1

Oto pierwszy numer FOLIO, pisma studentów anglistyki Uniwersytetu

Warszawskiego, wznowionego po kilkuletniej przerwie.

Niniejszy numer jest zbiorem referatów wygłoszonych na konferencji naukowej

"From Medieval to Medievalism: Student Approaches to Medieval English

Studies", które dowodzą, że zainteresowanie literaturą i kulturą średniowiecza

jest wciąż żywe.

FOLIO

No. 1

Spis treści/Contents

Słowo wstępne / Foreword

Drogi Czytelniku,

Niniejszy zbiór referatów, wygłoszonych na konferencji naukowej pt. From Medieval to Medievalism: Student Approaches to Medieval English Studies 14 marca 2008 roku w Warszawie, ma podwójną wartość. Po pierwsze udowadnia, że zainteresowanie literaturą i kulturą średniowiecza jest wciąż żywe. Po drugie, jest to pierwszy numer „Folio", pisma studentów anglistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, wznowionego po paroletniej śpiączce. Żywimy gorącą nadzieję i dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby, po tak szczególnej inicjacji, nastąpił równie udany ciąg dalszy, i kolejne numery regularnie pojawiały się w druku. Tymczasem zapraszam do podróży w Wieki Średnie, życząc pasjonującej lektury.

Bartłomiej Trośniak
(Instytut Anglistyki UW)

Dear Reader,

The following collection of papers, delivered at the conference From Medieval to Medievalism: Student Approaches to Medieval English Studies on March 14, 2008 in Warsaw, has a double value. First, it proves that the interest in Medieval literature and culture is still alive. Second, it is the

first issue of "Folio" – students' of the Institute of English Studies at the University of Warsaw magazine – renewed after years of coma. We cherish the hope and will make a great effort that, following such an exceptional comeback, successive issues will appear. In the meantime I invite you for a journey back into the Medieval Times. Have a gripping reading!

Bartłomiej Trośniak
(Institute of English Studies,
University of Warsaw)

Maria Frączek
University of Warsaw

A Perfect Knighting for a Perfect Knight
The knighting of sir Galahad
in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*

"At the beginning, it behooves a squire entering the order of chivalry to confess of his difficulties that he has done against God and ought to receive chivalry with the intention that in the same he should serve our lord God, who is glorious. And if he is cleansed of sin he ought to receive his saviour, for to make and to adoube a knight it should be the day of some great feast; Christmas, Easter, Whitsontide or some solemn days; because by the honour of the feast assemble many people in the place where the squire ought to be adoubed knight, and God ought to be adored and prayed to that he give the squire grace to learn well thereafter the order of chivalry"

Book of Knighthood and Chivalry
Ramon Lull

"...by the faith ye owe
Unto the God whose law ye know,
Now make me wise: for sore I crave
The right road straight-away to have,
And I have will to learn aright
In wat wise one is made a Knight."

Ordene de chevalerie
Anonymous

Sir Galahad, son of Launcelot and Elaine and the anointed achiever of the Sangreal, is the most perfect knight to ever grace the pages of literature. This paper presents an in-depth analysis of the ritual which elevated him into those particular ranks of which he was meant to be the most shining, ultimate example.

The Ritual of Knighting

Even though high birth is a requirement – and Galahad, although technically born out of wedlock[1], could boast an astonishing pedigree – a knight is not born, but made. The ritual by means of which a squire becomes a full-fledged knight occupies a prominent place in both the modern perceptions of chivalry as well as medieval literature itself. Even the most perfect among the knights had to undergo the rite which ordained – and that is not an accidental word[2] – him into the ranks of knighthood. It is worth to take a closer look at the history of this ritual, its development and the meaning it had to a writer of the late fifteenth century.

Pure intuition suggests that the dubbing of a knight has much in common with rites of initiation present in many varied cultures throughout history. Barber comments that "the ceremony of knighting was at the basis of both the simplest form of knighthood and the most elaborate form of chivalry", and goes on to add straightforwardly that "its roots lay in the initiation ritual, by which primitive societies marked the coming of age of adolescents" (Barber; *Knight*, 25). More precisely, the forerunner of a medieval "dubbing" seems to be the custom of German barbarians, who vested previously tested youths with a shield and a spear, thus welcoming them into the ranks of warriors. The ritual took on the form of a very literal equipping with arms, and "the investing of arms in public ceremony [is] commonplace of primitive societies in many parts of the world" (Barber; *Knight*, 8).

Jean Flori strongly disagrees with that thesis, stating that a factual continuity of meaning between the very same German custom, as described by Tacitus in *Germania*, that Barber cites, and the ceremony represented in various sources from the twelfth century onwards, is highly unlikely (Flori, 105). However, what seems more unlikely is that two rituals present in two social groups, both concerned primarily with warfare and both

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[1] The prophesied necessity of his birth and the role he was to play seemingly annulled this minor fact, although this is a matter for further analysis. It is enough to state that Galahad was the son of a King's daughter and a renowned knight, as well as directly descended from prominent biblical figures on both his parents' sides.

[2] In what Keen terms „the first systematic treatment of chivalry", the *Livre des manières* by Etienne de Fougères, chivalry is clearly defined as an "order". Written in the 1170s, this work had a profound effect upon the definition of knighthood and chivalry (Keen, 4). In the fourteenth century, the great theoretician of chivalry, Geoffrey de Charny, "compared knighthood and priesthood [to] two great orders" (Barber, 27). *Ordene de chevalerie* speaks of "ordaining" outright.

conforming to a code of conduct, should not be connected by a direct relation of descent. Keen supplies a careful, middle-of-the-road statement; he proposes that while the two rituals should not be considered as related too closely, a connection seems to exist (Keen, 66-67). This way or another, Southern authoritatively states that the first ceremonies which could be called knighting appear in sources dating from the eleventh century, and are linked to the appearance of the new way of fighting; they are, in fact, ceremonies of entering the ranks of mounted warriors (Southern, 132).

The ceremony of knighting that could have been witnessed – or, more to the point, undergone – by Malory himself still had the primordial character of arming a warrior, but it had in the course of centuries been imbued with many other elements. At the end of the fifteenth century, in the twilight of chivalry, it had been subject to many modifications, inspired by forces ranging from the influence of the Church to socio-economic changes.

In order to allow for a systematic discussion, and the further application to Malory's Galahad, it is useful to break the ritual down into several points of interest. The first of those is the knight's lineage.

It seems important to underline that nobility of birth was not only a prerequisite of knighting, but at one point even eclipsed the formal state of knighthood in its significance. "By [the late fourteenth century] the knights' descendants had fully adopted the nobles' insistence on birth as the great criterion, while abandoning the knighting ceremony which had once been their proudest title" (Barber; *Knight*, 13). Therefore, as we will see later, Galahad's birth is of utmost importance in his becoming a knight.

The second issue to be raised is that of money – many knighting rituals were especially designed to underline the fact that only wealthy people could become knights, for only wealthy people could afford to keep the horses and arms required of a knight – but this aspect has little or no relation to Galahad. It seems logical that when describing the paragon of spiritual knighthood, Malory does not deign to inform his readers about such simple, yet defining matter as Galahad's material resources. His wealth seems to be a given; after all, Galahad is the grand-son of a King and the son of Elaine, of whom Malory writes that "there was never no lady more richlier beseen"[3] (Malory, 531). Thus, we not only know that Galahad has no need of earthly treasure, being destined for spiritual

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[3] When Elaine ventures to visit Camelot, at the advice of her father she is apparelled so that she is not only magnificently attired, but also the fairest even in Launcelot's eyes.

achievements, but he also has more wealth at his disposal than many of his fellow knights[4].

Another feature of knighting is pinpointed by Barber; "Until a squire was knighted he was technically not able to lead troops in battle. Hence there were occasions when knighthood was associated with the opening of a campaign or an imminent battle" (Barber; *Knight*, 28). It could, of course, be stated that this facet bears no significance to the subject at hand – yet I would argue that this is, in fact, a very applicable statement. The Quest of the Sangreal was actually the greatest battle fought by Camelot's knights.

The term "dubbing" draws attention to itself. Flori states that the etymology of the French word *adouber* is unclear; scholars have tried to connect it to the German root *dubban*, meaning "to hit". However, the element of *la colée* was not an essential part of the knighting ceremony as well as introduced much too late to be considered a legitimate candidate for the source term[5] (Flori, 107-108). Yet in its older sense, *adouber* means as much as equip[6], and thus the link to the German rite is firmly established (Keen, 67; Flori, 108). Still, there is one unequivocal phrase which was used to signify the initiation ritual undergone by knights-to-be; that term, in spite of the varied shades of meaning and controversies surrounding the Latin words *miles*, *militia* or *militare*, was *militem facere*, plainly, to make [someone] knight. Barber points out that while earlier writers used translations of Tacitus, speaking of "girding on the sword" or "taking up arms", by 1250 "the idea of making a knight had become the usual one" (Barber; *Knight*, 30). In *Le Morte Darthur*, Malory uses both terms, and so in the title of the first chapter in book thirteen we find "… a damosel, and desired sir Launcelot for to come and dub a knight" (Malory, 563). He does seem to favour the direct translation of the Latin phrase; however, no scholarly argument can be made for either, save counting their occurrences. Thus, as a decisive factor I have chosen to use the words in which Malory describes the only time Galahad himself bestows the honour upon another. Therefore, I shall hereafter refer to the "making of a knight".

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[4] One is tempted to add that it is easy to disdain wealth when one has none, and much more admirable to denounce a fortune that is at one's fingertips.

[5] Flori places the first mentions of *la colée* in literary sources in the second half of the twelfth century.

[6] Flori cites examples of fortifying a tower or equipping a horse as instances, in which *adouber* could be used in its primary meaning.

Three Times a Knight

Just as is the case with both his birth and the later occurrences in his life, so the boy's knighting is unusual and unique. For Galahad is knighted thrice.

The three stages of his becoming a knight can be termed the word, the sword and the shield. They combine the concepts of lineage, offensive and defensive armament in three discrete steps, all of which are imbued with separate meaning. This separation can be construed as an intentional underlining of the uniqueness of each element, but it is also by their interplay that we arrive at several conclusions.

The knighting by Launcelot is symbolic of Galahad's lineage, and achieved by the causal power of the word in a pastoral setting emblematic of purity and innocence; moreover, it is bestowed upon him by another. The achieving of the sword is a symbol of Galahad's martial prowess, it is performed in supernatural circumstances and indicates his function as an active agent. The acquisition of the shield, conversely, signifies Galahad's passive level – since it is given to him by an unnamed knight via a squire – what is more, it represents his role as a defender and is granted to him in an aura of Christian mysticism. Therefore, all three levels – significance, setting, and instrument – of all three elements mesh together to form a perfect knighting for a perfect knight.

The Word

At the vigil of Pentecost, a young woman arrives at Camelot and desires to speak with Launcelot. She urges him to accompany her to a nearby abbey, where a young man desires to be knighted by the great warrior. He goes with a mixture of duty and apprehension; it is, so to speak, his job to knight young squires, as he had done with Gareth of Orkney[7], but at the same time, he decides to follow the lady only after he learns that she dwells with King Pelles. As she declares this, Launcelot probably remembers the resolute statement made by Elaine upon their parting; "at [the] feast of Pentecost shall your son and mine, Galahad, be made knight" (Malory, 556). It is thus a feasible assumption that Launcelot knows full well who awaits him at the abbey, and his apprehension may

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[7] At the time still known by the derisive nickname of Beaumains, bestowed upon him by Sir Kay.

be caused by equal parts of curiosity and fear. At the abbey, Launcelot meets with his cousins, Sir Bors and Sir Lionel, thus rendering Galahad's knighting a familial affair.

Launcelot's first sight of his grown son is also the first time the audience is introduced to the portended Grail hero in person. Galahad's beauty is the first feature to receive attention; he is "passing fair and well made, that unnethe in the world men might not find his match". His manners are also praised, for he is "demure as a dove" (Malory, 564), and his youth is underlined along with repeated extolling of his perfect form.

Once Galahad is presented to him, Launcelot asks of the boy whether it is his own wish and desire to become knight; upon Galahad's affirmation, the older man consents to grant the honour on the following morning, that is the feast of Pentecost, in accordance with the tradition of knighting on important holy days. Launcelot is so happy that night that Malory sees the need to highlight it; and on the following morning, he makes Galahad knight.

Launcelot's knighting of Galahad is remarkable insofar as it asserts the younger knight's lineage and honourable social status. When the nuns introduce their protégé to the great warrior, they say "we pray you to make him a knight, for of a more worthier man's hand may he not receive the order of knighthood"[8] (Malory, 564). This concept appears frequently in historical accounts and interpretations of the knighting ceremony. Keen states that "we encounter the idea that to receive knighthood from a lord of particular standing associated the recipient with honour and dignity" (Keen, 68).

This "conception of associative honour" (Keen, 69) is in this case strengthened by the acknowledgement inherent in the knighting of a son by his father. The blood of Joseph flowed in Galahad's veins, for a matrilineal inheritance is natural, but by the ceremony his patrilineal bloodline is also reiterated, and he is now a fully acknowledged descendant of both Joseph and Jesus.

Yet it is also worth noting that in the Middle Ages, it would have been the highest honour to be knighted by the king; and Galahad does have the

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[8] Personally, I also like to think that it was Launcelot's recognition which made Galahad into an unsurpassable fighter; while *Le Morte Darthur* prefers to ascribe it to divine grace – thus asserting that faith is of greater importance than training – I am fond of reading the knighting as a transmission of martial skills, which Galahad could not have learned at a nunnery.

greatest king of all times at hand. Regardless of the fact that Launcelot is Galahad's father, and therefore an obvious candidate, the Grail hero's foregoing of Arthur carries further implications.

Galahad is not governed by earthly law, neither does he conform to what the likes of Gawaine or Tristram would term acceptable codes of conduct. His entire existence takes place and renders meaning on a plane different than that of Camelot; therefore, Galahad is Arthur's subject only nominally. The relationship between the two verges on non-existent, as the good king and the perfect hero do not seem to co-exist within the same framework of reference. In the few moments when there is an indisputable interaction between them, Arthur exhibits a delicate kindness towards the young man, to which Galahad seems to respond with a reserved politeness. Yet Galahad never swears fealty to his nominal seigneur, neither does he participate in the life of the court or strive towards the bettering of the kingdom in material terms. There is no point of osculation between the two realms they represent, and neither is there a common ground for the two men, apart from simple human goodwill they manifest towards each other.

Therefore, it is Launcelot's word, not Arthur's, which is imbued with the causal power of knighting Galahad. But the process, as stated before, consists of three parts, and after having been pronounced a knight – which establishes his lineage as well as renders him socially acceptable at the Round Table – Galahad has still to achieve his sword and his shield.

The Sword

The sword had substituted the spear as the ultimate symbol of investing with arms, and therefore, a knight. Galahad's sword represents the magical component of his existence. This is, after all, a fantastical world, which draws heavily upon folklore, myths and fairytales. Even the perfect Grail knight, when appearing in such a world, must conform to its erratic catalogue of influences and cannot make do without coming into contact with magic, even if said magic is subjugated to Christianity.

The first appearance of the sword in the stone which floats down the river to Camelot is thematically interlinked with elements of Galahad's arrival at court, as it serves to underline several issues in the courtly framework, and as such will be not discussed at length here. But the sword itself as well as Galahad's drawing of it is symbolic within the framework of

his knighting; what is more, as Ronald R. Garet points out, "the sword-in-stone [carries] both a metaphoric message and a metonymic message"[9].

In its metaphoric sense, the sword in the stone is naturally significant of a combination of two elements; as Garet suggests, the stone "might be a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred"[10]. Such physical manifestations are not out of the ordinary in the world created by Malory, and this interpretation is very fitting in the case of Galahad. He does, after all, represent the perfect union of the earthly and the sacred; a knight possessed of the ultimate earthly prowess in arms employed in the service of divinity.

In a metonymic sequence of signs, Galahad's achieving of the sword needs to be juxtaposed with the two other instances of such a feat; Arthur's and Balin's. As is typical with Malory, all the events are interlinked. The contrast with Arthur's sword-in-stone display renders meanings in the courtly structure – it stands for an elevation to the most prominent position. But it is the contrast with Balin's acquisition of the sword that interests us at this point.

Admittedly, it was not a stone that Balin's sword was embedded in, but a scabbard girded around the waist of a maiden. However, two arguments stand strongly in favour of treating Balin's achievement as a metonymic element in what Garet terms a "larger sentence". The first of those is based upon the exceedingly similar circumstances – an analogous prophecy, the attempts by other knights and finally the success of an unexpected victor. The second is much simpler; the sword Galahad draws out of the stone in Camelot is the very same one Balin achieved and then tragically lost.

Many years before Galahad's birth, a damosel arrives at young Arthur's court. She is girded with a magnificent sword which causes her dreadful dolour, yet the only person who can draw the weapon and thus deliver the lady of her pain is a virtuous, unsoiled knight. Additionally, the lady stresses that he need be of impeccably pure birth – "a gentle strain of father side and mother side" (Malory, 43). Although many try to help the maiden, including the king himself, it is only the "poor and poorly arrayed" Balin who manages to accomplish the task, his pure birth, clean conscience

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[9] Ronald R. Garet, „Arthur and President Kennedy: The Myth of Kingship" *RAIN*, No. 57 (Aug., 1983), pp. 5-8

[10] Ibid.

and poverty thus rewarded. Yet Balin proves himself covetous and refuses to return the weapon; upon this, the lady prophesies that it will bring him grief and tragedy.

It is with this sword that Balin slays mindlessly, so as to suggest that the weapon he unrightfully wields has a mind of its own[11], and it is with "that unhappy sword" (Malory, 64) that he slays his own brother. Upon Balin's death, Merlin takes the sword, places it in its bed of marble and prophesies that it shall only be wielded by the best knight of the world; interestingly, he says "that shall be Sir Launcelot or else Galahad his son" (Malory, 66), for it is still before Launcelot's transgression. Also Balin's scabbard is laid aside for Galahad, who in the future wears it empty arriving at Camelot, knowing that the blade intended for this sheath awaits him there.

Thus, on top of being the marker of offensive armament and the main indicator of the newly achieved status of knight, the sword also seems to signify that purity of soul and/or deeds outranks purity of birth.

The Shield

Whereas his father's acknowledgement was granted in a bucolic setting, and the sword he was destined to wear arrived in a shroud of magic, the shield – what I term the attribute of defensive armament – is gained by Galahad in mystic circumstances, and completes both the triptych of his knighting as well as a tripartite setting, composed of serenity, the supernatural, and Christian mysticism.

While technically his first adventure during the Grail quest, I prefer to read Galahad's acquisition of the shield as the third, final stage of his knighting. On the fourth day since his departure from Camelot, Galahad comes upon a White Abbey[12], where he meets two other knights of the Round Table. They inform him that they have been brought to the abbey in search of an adventure; tales are told of a marvellous shield, which "no man may bear about his neck but he be mischieved outher dead within

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[11] For example, when he jousts with Sir Lanceor, Balin „drew out his sword, and wist not that he had slain [Lanceor]; and then he saw him lie as a dead corpse" (Malory, 48).

[12] The name is borne by many historical abbeys founded by diverse orders, ranging from the Norbertines to the Carmelites. I had not been able to determine so far whether Malory had a specific place in mind.

three days, or maimed forever" (Malory, 574). King Bagdemagus, one of the knights staying at the abbey, proclaims that he shall try to measure himself up to the adventure the following morning.

Certainly, Galahad's subsequent exclamation of "in the name of God" can be read as a blessing he conveys to Bagdemagus, but it appears to me as if Malory remembered the gentle disposition of his most perfect knight. Galahad is just told that a man whom he, as a knight of the Round Table, has every reason to call brother, means to try his hand at a deed which can only result in his death or severe injury. Maybe, then, his utterance is that of horror, fear even, for the safety of his fellow? It is not, however, in the nature of Arthur's oft-notorious knights to ever forsake an adventure so plainly presented to them, certain doom notwithstanding. Bagdemagus does not share the fear, but is more than realistic in regard to his own abilities, stating that because it is probable he will fail, he would like the infallible Galahad to complete this task. By the by, it is remarkable that regardless of the fate of the knight, no adventure can be left unfinished.

A monk leads Bagdemagus to the shield in the morn, yet warns the King that only the worthiest among the knights can claim it as his own. The adventurous knight admits he is not, but it seems that the adventure is too far gone to return, and decides to try nevertheless. It is with a sense of impending tragedy that he asks Galahad to wait for news of him, and he even takes a squire along, seemingly knowing full well that it will not be he who returns.

As is repeatedly the case, the sin of having taken what is not rightfully his catches up to Bagdemagus in form of a hostile knight. The King is unhorsed, and the knight who jousted him raises the shield, saying that it "ought not to be borne by but him that shall have no peer that liveth". He reaffirms the predetermined assignment of the shield, handing it to the fallen King's squire with the words "this shield behoveth unto no man but unto Galahad" (Malory, 575). The shaken squire reverently takes the shield to the waiting Galahad. Incidentally, King Bagdemagus does survive, albeit with great difficulties, after he reaches out for an item divinely intended for another. Yet, contrary to many other tales, death is not a prerequisite for the offenders on the path to the Sangreal.

The passive character of Galahad's reception of the shield lies in the fact that the knight who sends it to him embodies a distant, divine force, whose name is "not (...) to know for any earthly man" (Malory, 575), and additionally uses an emissary to deliver the item to the young knight.

Galahad's reaction upon the taking of the shield from the squire's hands is correspondingly passive; he blesses "the God and fortune" (Malory, 576), as if there had been no earthly agent, and certainly no action of his own.

The mystic character of the shield is elucidated in the two following chapters. Joseph of Aramathie, Galahad's great forebear, had arrived in the city of Sarras[13] in the middle of an on-going war. His son, also named Joseph, told King Evelake of Sarras that he would be slain if he should not accept the one true faith. Upon Evelake's agreement, Joseph had fashioned a shield, upon which was the image of a man on a cross, which caused the enemy great discomfort[14]. The shield was miraculous, for by touching it a warrior of Evelake's was able to regrow his chopped off hand[15]. But its power to work miracles vanishes along with the emblem of the cruci-fied man – Christ's miraculous offerings to his flock are often limited in their duration, as is the case with the Sangreal itself. In the company of his meanwhile dear friend Evelake, Joseph ventures to Britain. On his deathbed, asked for a token of remembrance by the disconsolate king, Joseph asks for the shield to be brought forth, "and there upon that shield he made a cross of his own blood"[16] (Malory, 577).

Joseph then makes one of the most important prophecies pertaining to Galahad; its exceptionality is based on that this is the single most powerful augury, because while it pertains to the shield alone, it is also uttered by the person of the greatest magnitude to ever make predictions about the Grail knight. The dying Joseph prophesies that Galahad, the last of his line, will be the only man to wear this shield, and that he will achieve great deeds.

Apart from the circumstances in which it is acquired as well as its history, another important issue is the device the young knight carries from now on. Discussing the development of various coats-of-arms among

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[13] Tentatively located somewhere in the vicinity of Egypt by the Lancelot-Grail cycle, the holy city of Sarras will play a great part in the final achieving of the Sangreal.

[14] Quite possibly because they were afraid of a similar fate.

[15] Much in the manner of Christ sticking the chopped off ear of a servant back on in the gardens of Gethsemane; Luke 22: 50-51.

[16] While Malory's penchant for sarcastic comedy has often been commented on by scholars, I still sincerely doubt that he intended to make a joke or deliver a slight at this point; yet I find it endlessly amusing that the cross on the shield of Christianity's greatest knight is not painted with the blood from a stigmata, or a festering sore sent by Satan, but from a nosebleed of all things.

medieval nobility, Kusiak notes that while in their infancy – the beginning of the twelfth century – emblems were used as signs of identification for the heavily armoured knights, and were initially chosen for the duration of a battle or campaign. But with time, they became symbols of much greater importance, attributed for life, and eventually turned into family crests (Kusiak, 266-7). Thus the emblem carried mostly on the shield – although helms, sword pommels, cloaks and even saddles were also often marked – stood for the allegiance of the knight and his lineage.

The shield Galahad carries[17] is "white as any snow, but in the midst [is] a red cross" (Malory, 574). This symbol carries with it two very strong connotations, the first of those being that it is reminiscent of the emblem of the Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar[18], also known as the Order of the Temple, are a significant addition to the divagations on Galahad for two reasons; they were the apogee of the uneasy marriage between the church and knighthood – just as he himself is the apogee of Christian values welded with chivalry – and the writings of their greatest apologist, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, supply many valuable interpretative hints.

But while the connections to the Knights Templar may be interesting and render noteworthy insights for the modern scholar, one must remember that by Malory's lifetime, they had already fallen into disgrace, their members tortured and subjected to a heretics' death. Therefore, while an analysis of the connection is useful, and while there is plenty of meaning one can read into Galahad's particular crest, it would seem that Malory's intention was a much more straightforward one; for Galahad's shield is emblazoned with nothing else but the so-called Georgian cross, the emblem of England's patron St. George.

The earliest references to this particular cross being used as an English flag date from as early as the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The legend of St. George was made popular by the *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend), a late thirteenth-century compilation of saints' lives, presented

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[17] In *The Once and Future King*, Arthur asks of Gawaine whether Galahad was bearing the vergescu – a uniformly white shield "carried by unfledged knights" (The T.H. White Glossary at the Camelot Project), i.e. by those who have not distinguished themselves enough to earn a coat-of-arms of their own. The lack of this transition period in Galahad's case is an interesting parallel to his lack of an apprenticeship.

[18] Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (*Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici*).

in an audience-enthralling way by Jacobus de Voragine. The *Legend* was very fashionable and often cited throughout the following centuries, so much so that William Caxton decided to set it in print two hundred years after it was written. More importantly, in this historical source we find the statement that "this blessed and holy martyr St. George is patron of this realm of England and the cry of men of war"[19], thus establishing George's supremacy among the heavenly host in the eyes of Englishmen as early as two centuries before Malory, and supplying evidence that the "white arms with a red cross"[20] would have been legible as England's banner. The patron saint, whose über-knightly exploit of battling the dragon naturally commanded more attention than his subsequent martyrdom – gained more and more popularity, until "in 1415, the year of Agincourt, Archbishop Chichele[21] raised St George's Day to a great feast and ordered it to be observed like Christmas Day"[22].

But the importance of Saint George as an interpretative tool in discussing Galahad reaches far beyond his eminent position as the martial saint or even patron of England. For George is a knight whose greatest battle is fought via renouncement of worldly strength and the reliance upon God's wisdom. The Caxton edition of *The Golden Legend* reads: "He was a pilgrim in the sight of the world, and he was cut and detrenched by the crown of martyrdom, and he was a good councillor in preaching." While Galahad was not martyred – unless, of course, we choose to read his entire life of deprivation in terms of basic human needs as prolonged martyrdom – the quest of the Sangreal is highly reminiscent of a pilgrimage, especially in the sight of the worldly knights who surround him, and he functions as an ethereal sort of authority on the matters of the soul.

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[19] All quotations from *The Golden Legend* are taken from *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*. Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275. First Edition Published 1470. Englished by William Caxton, First Edition 1483, Edited by F.S. Ellis, Temple Classics, 1900, to be found at the Internet Medieval Sourcebook.

[20] Ibid.

[21] The illustrious archbishop of Canterbury, in office 1414–1443.

[22] Quoted after an article on St. George by Michael Collins, to be found at the Britannia website.

The Second Sword

Barber notes that Galahad is „from the outset portrayed as physically and spiritually perfect, and there is no question of progression from innocence to maturity" (Barber; *Grail*, 56). This statement stands in a direct conflict with the definition of the quest as what Miller terms a "maturational sequence" (Miller, 166), moreover, it removes an entire layer of personal significance[23] from the Grail quest itself.

Why, then, is Galahad granted *two* magical swords where one would have been more than sufficient? It is my understanding that the entire quest of the Sangreal was, in fact, a lengthy process of the progression Barber denies him. Galahad was born perfect in regard to all the qualities one can be born with; but he still had to earn his spurs and collect experience in order to become the true ideal. Therefore, while the sword he pulled out from the stone made him a knight, it was the one he was girded with by Percivale's sister that made him a perfect one.

Let us, therefore, examine Galahad's second sword as a marker of mature and complete perfection within the scope of his qualities.

The audience is granted the first glimpse of the enchanted blade when Galahad, led by Percivale's sister, joins Bors and Percivale on the ship which signifies the beginning of the final leg of their quest, which will eventually take them to the Sangreal. In one of the ship's cabins, the three Grail knights and their theologian maiden guide find a marvellous sword, hung on a poorly fashioned hemp girdle.

Malory describes the blade in great detail, and it is worth to pause for a moment on the significance of several of its adornments. It has "all manner of colours that any man might find, and everych of the colour had divers virtues" (Malory, 642). Even regardless of the biblical allusion[24], which is too complex to discuss here, a modern reader can easily substitute "virtues" with "symbolics" and arrive at the conclusion that the sword is, in fact, of all the colours and their corresponding symbols at the same time, which renders it ultimately paramount in this realm of reference. Further, the hilt of the sword is a thing of utter temptation. It includes two bones, one of which saves the wielder from weariness and wounds,

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[23] As opposed to the wider, „national" significance it had for king Arthur's realm.
[24] „Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children (..) and he made him a coat of many colours." Genesis, 37:3, King James Version.

but is taken from the "Serpent of the fiend". The other stems from a fish living in the Euphrates, which causes the bearer of the weapon to forget about the path to salvation and live only for the sight of this sword, thus committing sins of covetousness and idolatry along with the worst, Faustian[25] type of transgression.

While the sword is thus described as far from a pure and godly weapon, it is nevertheless yet another vehicle of underlining Galahad's perfection and his achieving of an absolute; for a complete, mature knight not only accomplishes the positive, he is also capable of withstanding the negative.

The prophecy emblazoned in blood-red letters on the handle of the sword is much more complex than the ones pertaining to the two previously discussed objects. "Let see who shall assay to draw me out of my sheath," Galahad reads the grim warning, "but if he be hardier than any other; and who that draweth me, wit ye well that he shall never fail of shame of his body, or to be wounded to the death" (Malory, 642-43).

Incidentally, this is yet another of those minute occurrences, sprinkled throughout the entirety of *La Morte Darthur*, when Malory reverts to treating Galahad like a human being. "By my faith," says the young knight, clearly shaken by the dreadful augury, "I would draw this sword out of the sheath", he claims, rationally aware of his own supernatural skills, "but the offending is so great that I shall not set my hand thereto" (Malory, 643).

Percivale's sister, in her role as a guide, assures Galahad that the prophecy is valid for all men save him, once more underlining his uniqueness. It is also she who expounds the history of the blade; it had been the reason for both what is most commonly referred to as the dolorous stroke as well as an identical occurrence which had preceded it.

The first dolorous stroke had been dealt by King Hurlame – a "newly christened" Saracen – to King Labor, "father unto the maimed king" and additionally the greatest Christian of the lands (Malory, 643). When Labor falls dead from the mighty stroke, the land ceases to bear fruit or crops,

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[25] While not a legitimate inspiration, the Faustian exclamation of „Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:/Verweile doch! du bist so schön!/ Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,/ Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn!" (If to the moment I shall ever say: Ah, linger on, thou art so fair! Then may you fetters on me lay, Then will I perish, then and there!) is the possibly most famous rendition of the sin understood as an abandonment of striving towards God. Quotation after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* at the Project Gutenberg. Translation by G.M. Priest.

the fish die in the water, and men begin to call the area "the waste land". Hurlame himself also dies after having drawn the sword. The next wielder of the marvellous blade was Nacien, a forebear of Galahad's, who also suffered for having taken what was not meant for him. Yet the probably most important among the previous owners of the sword was King Pelles, the maimed king and Galahad's grandsire, who endeavoured to retrieve the blade from its sheath and was punished with a mysterious spear appearing out of nowhere and smiting him through both thighs[26].

Percivale's sister continues, backtracking the parallel lineage of the sword and the perfect knight meant to handle it. The fellowship also perceive two tricolour spindles hung above the bed where the blade rests; their history is intertwined with the sword's. The spindles are significant of the three stages of human history; they are white, for Eve had planted the tree from which they are made a maiden, green to signify new life, for Abel had been begotten under the selfsame tree, and red, for Caym (Cain) slew his brother under those very boughs.

The sword and the spindles were placed on the ship of marvels at the same time, by Solomon and his wife respectively. Disgruntled with his wife, Solomon believes that all women are equally wicked; yet the Holy Ghost allows him a premonition of the Virgin Mary, to which the king wishes to know whether she shall come of his blood. "Nay," replies the unearthly voice, "but there shall come a man which shall be maid, and the last of your blood, and he shall be as good a knight as Duke Josua, thy brother-in-law" (Malory, 674). The person alluded to here is clearly Galahad; he is the descendant of the most prominent biblical bloodline, running from Adam, through Noah and Abraham to David, his son Solomon[27] and Jesus.

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[26] Which seems rather strange in light of the fact that book two states that it was King Pellam who suffered the stroke to the thighs at the hand of Balin; book seventeen reiterates that by having Pelles leave the room before the maimed king is brought in. The possibility that Malory was a tad confused – and in turn, confused his readers – cannot be overlooked.

[27] Scholars note a discrepancy between the genealogies presented in Luke and Matthew; some claim that Luke, who followed the line through Nathan rather than Solomon, concentrated on the bloodline resulting in Mary, whereas Matthew presented the line ending with Joseph. For a detailed list of the genealogy, look to the Spirit Restoration resource site, to be found at www.spiritrestoration.org

Moved by the voice, and at his wife's advice, Solomon builds a great ship and places within it "King David's sword, your father, which is the marvelloust and the sharpest that ever was taken in any knight's hand" (Malory, 647). Solomon's wife is also the one who fashions the simple, humble girdle and prophesies that one day, a maiden will make a girdle more fitting for the exalted blade. To facilitate this, she also has a carpenter cut spindles out of Eve's tree, that they be fastened above the bed where the sword is lain.

The girdle is an important part of the sword – a type of belt specifically designed to keep the sword at its wielder's waist. The girdle appears frequently in literature and mythology; among others, it also plays a crucial role in the legend of Saint George. "Deliver to me your girdle," George says to the maiden who was meant to be sacrificed to the dragon, "and bind it about the neck of the dragon and be not afeard. When she had done so the dragon followed her as it had been a meek beast and debonair."[28]

Galahad's second sword has only a provisional girdle; it is the destiny of Percivale's sister to make one which will fully complete the marvel of the blade. She weaves the girdle out of her own hair, the object of her pride when she was a worldly woman, and therefore the symbol of her devotion to God, as she had cut it off when she became a nun. But apart from this already potent symbol, it is also important to note that Galahad is girded with the sword not by a king, a lord or a superior knight, but by a maiden. As is often the case with Galahad, also this event has a layered significance; in this instance, the two layers can be termed ritual and sexuality.

Girding with a sword was the pre-eminent element of the knighting ceremony and the equivalent to the earlier arming with a spear. It is symbolic of Galahad's attaining full knighthood, of becoming the fully perfect knight. Therefore, it is not only important *with what*, but also *by whom* he is granted this completion.

Sara E. Gorman observes that Percivale's sister is, in fact "[Galahad's] female virginal counterpart"[29]. The girdle is symbolic of femininity in juxta-

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[28] Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*

[29] Sara E. Gorman, „Thus he rode sorowyng": Travel Narratives and the Ethics of Sexual Behavior in Le Morte d'Arthur, College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, 2006

position to the masculine symbolic of the sword[30]. The combination of the two – coming from a female virgin and being bestowed upon a male one – renders the idea of a perfect, gender-transgressing kind of absolute chastity.

Also the idea of the dolorous stroke can be read in terms of sexuality. When Percivale is tempted by a fiend in an alluring, female form, in order to punish himself for the transgression that is the mere contemplation of succumbing, he drives his sword through his own thigh (Malory, 604-5). Scholars note that the penance is reminiscent of castration, and thus a fitting reprisal for sexual misbehaviour. If that be so, then the wound of King Pelles, and by association those of Nacien and Labor, are also significant of misdeeds on the field of sexuality, and Galahad's mastery of the blade denotes his excellence (i.e. complete abstinence) on that plane as well.

Galahad receives the sword which is the agent of dolorous strokes, and is girded with it by the hands of a maiden, and so it clearly equals his sexuality to that of a nun's. But apart from that, it also cements his friend-ship with Percivale's sister. Gorman notes that gender takes second place to virginity in the Quest of the Sangreal; she observes that "even the virginal *male* knights Perceval and Bors are designated 'maydyns'", and "it is as a (...) virgin, and not specifically as a woman, that [Percivale's sister] can join [the] fellowship" (Gorman, 5-6).

Yet Malory refers the reader back to the tradition of courtly love – and Galahad missteps slightly, addressing the maiden kneeling at his feet in a register which he had not used before. "Damosel", he says, "ye have done so much that I shall be your knight all the days of my life" (Malory, 650).

The statement is worded so that it constitutes a clear and unambiguous reference to the ideal of a knight's devotion to an unattainable lady – a rather secular concept, even if reflecting Marian veneration. It does not fit into the intended, preordained character of Galahad as the ultimate virgin, an embodiment of chastity, which constitutes the core of his success. It does not fit into the concept of the new, Christian knight, preoccupied with promoting the glory of the Church above seeking the earthly, vain glory of a lady's praise.

The statement – Galahad's last words before they leave the ship, and therefore his last words before his maturing into a conceptual perfection

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[30] Further corroborated by the fact that it was Solomon who placed the sword on the ship, and his wife who both made the original, hemp girdle and delivered the spindles intended for later use by Percivale's sister.

is complete – reflects in my view great longing for the times of chivalry at its best as well as a more personal acknowledgement of the wish to be completed by another human being, not only by an idea. What is more, if one considers that the Quest of the Sangreal ends with Galahad's death, and this fact must have been known to him, the words "all days of my life" become imbued with great melancholy; for this is a very young man who is perfectly aware that his life is indeed counted in days.

Concluding the matter of the second sword, it needs to be noted that apart from being the final marker of Galahad's achieving of maturity in terms of his personal qualities, the second sword also stands as a symbol of his status as the perfect knight. In order to illuminate this, let us turn to the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, whose many conceptual proposals permeate the symbols surrounding the Grail knight. Bernard writes:

> This is, I say, a new kind of knighthood and one unknown to the ages gone by. It ceaselessly wages a twofold war both against flesh and blood and against a spiritual army of evil in the heavens. When someone strongly resists a foe in the flesh, relying solely on the strength of the flesh, I would hardly remark it, since this is common enough. And when war is waged by spiritual strength against vices or demons, this, too, is nothing remarkable, praiseworthy as it is, for the world is full of monks. But when the one sees a man powerfully girding himself with both swords and nobly marking his belt, who would not consider it worthy of all wonder, the more so since it has been hitherto unknown? He is truly a fearless knight and secure on every side, for his soul is protected by the armour of faith just as his body is protected by armour of steel. He is thus doubly armed and need fear neither demons nor men.
>
> *In Praise of the New Knighthood* (Liber ad milites Templi: De laude novae militae)
> St. Bernard of Clairvaux trans. Conrad Greenia

Thus, not only is Galahad's second sword a closure to a process, and not only does it underline his crucial quality of virginity; it is also a symbol of his invincibility, for to his already impeccable martial prowess he has now added a perfect faith.

It can be said that the intricate construct of Galahad's prolonged knighting, laden with references and symbols, in fact encompasses all elements which form the crux of both his introduction into the world of chivalry as well as his subsequent quest. It is, however, indisputable that this ritual of utmost importance is carefully arranged so as to be worthy of the perfect knight, and that Malory did indeed give Galahad the ulti-mately perfect knighting.

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From 'a Staunch Soldier of Christ' to a Lady-Lover: Metaphors of Battle and Defence in Medieval English Texts for and about Women
(*The Life of Christina of Markyate, Ancrene Wisse* and the *Katherine* Group)

*Thou therefore endure hardness
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*

(2 Tm 2:3)

*You are staying on the battlefield of this darksome
life in restless struggle against your enemies.*

Catherine of Sienna, Letters

1. Introduction

Battles, wars, sieges were traditionally and culturally associated with the male role in society. With the translation of this role into religious experience, the representations of saints or the Fathers of the Desert as struggling with demons in visionary reality came as no surprise. Striking are, however, all these examples when a woman – recognized, after all, as constitutionally inferior to man – is invited to 'join in open combat and in clear battle against the demons' (Savage and Watson 1991, 19) and, thus, to perform a military office. Strangely enough, such depictions of women were not rare in medieval literature. St. Ambrose, in his treatise *De Virginibus*, compared virgins to soldiers and preserving chastity to militarism; in *The Benedictine Rule* anchorites are described as "wise veterans in the fight against the devil" (Savage 1997, 70). The best examples are, however, the lives of early Christian women saints who through their struggles, both physical and spiritual, gained the position of spiritual athletes and soldiers of Christ. Heroic feminine spirituality found a fertile ground in the Anglo-Saxon warrior society in which the

traditional concept of *comitatus* together with the newly coming Christian ideals gave rise to Christian heroic poetry. Ninth century epic *Judith* as well as Cynewulf's *Juliana* and *Elene* are regarded to be most prominent examples of the representation of women in arms. Under the Norman influences, however, the essential change of cultural patterns took place and, as a result, a holy warrior was replaced by a courtly lady.

Interestingly, the representations of holy women as either militant maidens or courtly ladies use the same 'donor field' (Cowling 1998, 15) in their metaphorical narration; that is to say, they draw on the semantic field of military terms. What is different, however, is the focus and purpose. While in heroic narrations a woman is depicted as taking an active part in – real as well as metaphorical – battles, in courtly representations she is passive, often compared to a castle under siege and hence totally dependent on Christ the lover knight.

The aim of this paper is twofold: to analyse the metaphors of battle and defence occurring in the chosen medieval texts for and about woman and to point to the **possible** influences of the current literary traditions on the choice of the militaristic imagery ranging from the depiction of militant maidens fighting for their spiritual crown, the architectural metaphors of defence to the allegories of Christ the lover knight and his lady lover.

2. Women saints – between a warrior and a lover

Apart from the militant heroines of the Old Testament (e.g. Judith), these were female saints who were most often depicted as heroes in the Old English literature. It is thus reasonable to discuss at the outset the transformation of the metaphors of battle and defence in the passions of three saints. Anne Savage underlines that 'saints Katherine, Margaret and Juliana are exempla of heroic feminine spirituality, dramatically and publicly expressing the ideals of the anchoritic life: virginity, fidelity to Christ, the rejection of materialistic worldly marriage in which their role as woman would be utterly determined by their husbands' (Savage 1997, 67). Indeed, all three passions have the same pattern: a young innocent girl of exceptional beauty has to face a pagan tyrant who wants to force her into a marriage. As a result of her courageous profession of faith, the girl is subjected to most terrifying tortures which she bravely endures in the name of Christ and finally she is condemned to death. Paradoxically, this is but the girl's final victory as she is taken straight to heaven by

the hoards of angels. In that respect, Juliana, Margaret and Katherine represent truly heroic model of femininity. The chastity that they guard so bravely is not perceived as a passive virtue but, on the contrary, this is the very core of their militant spirit. All three then, Juliana, Margaret and Katherine, are presented as strong women taking on traditional male role: Juliana and Margaret, literary, fight a battle with personified devil, whereas Katherine challenges – what we could call – a battle of wits.

Juliana seems to be given the most superhuman physical strength. When she recognizes the enemy who comes to her in the likeness of an angel, she, literary, wrestles him with her fists:

> She seized a great chain that she was bound with and bound both his hands behind his back so that every nail wrung him with pain and darkened with blood and she tossed him backward down to the ground, and, standing over pestilent creature, took her own bonds and then began to beat Belial from hell (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 315)

The Devil acknowledges Juliana as a truly militant maiden when he addresses her: 'O, the power of maidenhood, how you're armed to make war against us!' (315).

Margaret is given a militant background within the very first lines of her passion. The author claims that she is one of the "famous champions [who] overcame and cast down their three kinds of foes – the devil, and this weak world, and their body's lusts" (288). When Margaret prays to see "the cruel demon who makes war" (293) on her, she encounters a demon in the shape of a hideous dragon. Her battle with the devil is not as spectacular and aggressive as Juliana's. Instead of using her fists, Margaret prays and worships Lord. Her prayers, however, occur to be the most powerful weapon against devil: "you're making me die with the strength of your prayers" (296), he says, "these are the weapons that wounds me worst" (298). The fatal blow was delivered by yet another weapon: "she drew on herself (...) the precious sign of the beloved cross (...) for the sign of the cross which she was armed with quickly rescued her and was his instant death" (295).

Katherine is engaged in the most curious metaphorical battle, the battle of wisdom. This is the author himself who describes the argument between saint and the men of wisdom in military terms: 'a messenger came and told her that she must come forth in the morning to fight – one against fifty' (267). Katherine decides "to undertake the battle" and to "put enemies to flight". She boldly "shoot out some words" and was

"strengthen against [the learned masters] in this battle" and the masters "throw a word against her in war" (268-270). Katherine, equipped with a peculiar kind of weapon, her words, takes initiative in the battle and hence not only does she win the laurel of the heroine but also the souls of the masters who, after her speech, recognize Christ as their Lord and God.

Frances Beer argues, that the three passions, even though they retain some instances of the active behaviour of militant maidens, show the gradual process of departing from the Old English heroic vision of femininity (1996, 91). There is also the process of turning the actual battles into metaphors. As a result the recognition of female corporeality and heroism is carefully avoided and lost between a number of metaphorical presences. The preference of love relationship over the lord-warrior relationship gives way to new courtly culture. In Juliana's passion, there is a well recognized motif of being 'wounded deep in heart with the darts shot by love' (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 306). The "wounded" one is Elesius, who falls in love with Juliana just as he catches a glimpse of her. Margaret's relationship with Jesus is presented as that of the lovers. Margaret addresses Christ: "Lord, my life, my love, my lover" (293).

It seems that the passion of Katherine, which – to all probability – was written twenty years later than the lives of Juliana and Margaret, employs the ideals of the new culture even to a larger degree (Beer 1996, 95). The idea of mystical marriage, together with the popular at that times sermons on the Canticles constituted a fertile ground for the courtly influences. Katherine frequently addresses Jesus as her lover: "sweet soft Jesus, sweetest of all aromas" (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 267), "my Lord, my precious lover" (268). Just before her death, a comforting voice comes from heaven: "Come my dear lover, come my dear spouse, dearest of women" (283).

3. Maidens upon the battlefield

Similarly, in *The Life of Christina of Markyate* and *Ancrene Wisse* the active role of militant maidens is limited and changes from active to passive.

In devotional literature there are usually three adversaries whom one must struggle with in order to gain the state of spiritual perfection. These are: the world, the body and the devil. Christina of Markyate is exposed to combat with all three. First, she is to fight the battle against world in defence of her virginity. She stays alone on the battlefield, betrayed by her parents, clergy and even her spiritual leader, Sueno. Surprisingly, even

though efforts to preserve chastity are often depicted in hagiographies in terms of battles, in the *Life* of Christina the reader usually sees her passive defence:

> She prepared a suitable defence against both attacks. Against the favours of human flattery she fixed in her memory the thought of the Mother of God (...) [she frequently looked out on the monastery of the blessed Mother of God reciting the Hail Mary. Against the urge drunkenness, she opposed her burning thirst (*The Life of Christina of Markyate* 2005, 49).

Christina stands firm against every kind of abuse that is supposed to force her into the marriage or sexual intercourse. Thomas Renna notices that "in part one Christina is lauded less for her virginity than for her tenacity in preserving that condition" (1985, 86). Even though such picture of Christina differs very much from the representation of heroic saints, the girl is, nevertheless, honoured by the appellation of "a staunch soldier of Christ (*The Life of Christina of Markyate* 2005, 85). This is hermit Roger who recognizes the hardship Christina went through and praises her as a militant lady. It is only when the virgin escapes from home that the predominantly static battle against the world turns into the battle against the devil and temptations. This new tribulations are marked with more significant use of the military diction. The demon is said to be launching into various kinds of "warfare" against Christina, using 'new and more elaborate weapons of temptation' to "win the fight" (131), "terrorizing the friend of Christ with horrible apparitions" (131). Christina fights against "toads [which] invaded her cell to distract her attention by all kind of ugliness" (99). She is constantly attacked by "the demon [who] employs every stratagem in his bold and ruthless warfare" (170). The virgin has to be vigilant and protect her body and soul from "darts of Satan" (172) or the "lance of envy" (175).

The most combative image occurs when Christina and some unknown cleric are tempted by "the devil, the enemy of chastity" (115). The whole event is described in terms of regular battle. Devilish weapon is described as "fiery darts", his temptation as "pressing attacks". Christina "herself was struggling with the wretched passion". Even though "the man resistance was overcome", devil "could not wrest consent from the maiden" (115).

Even though Christina is undoubtedly heroic in her perseverance, she lacks the militant touch of the saint-warriors. Among her weapons there are steadiness and steadfastness as well as her prayers since "nothing

repelled [devil's] attacks so effectively as the prayer and tears of the lowly ascetic maiden" (117). The metaphors of battles clearly depict Christina as passive rather than active, sometimes fearful and trembling rather than valiant.

In *Ancrene Wisse*, militaristic discourse, applied to present the hardship of spiritual struggles, is well-developed. There are statements defining the identity of the enemy, descriptions of the weapon used by the devil as well as the accounts of armament of an anchoress. The scenes of temptations are often described in terms of battles or sieges. "They fight faithfully who, however they are attacked by these three adversaries [the world, the flesh, the devil] fight back harder the worse things get" (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 135). The devil is often described as the deceiver, the traitor of hell or "the warrior from hell [who] shoots more bolts at one anchoress (...) than at seven and fifty ladies in the world" (70). Indeed, unlike average religious people, recluses are in the greatest danger of being challenged into the battle: "holy men and women are tested most often with every kind of temptation (...) for through fighting against them, they win the joyful crown of the champion" (119). The weapon of adversary from hell is numerous and often described in details:

> And just as men war with three kind of weapon – with arrows shooting, and with spear's point, and with sword's edge – with the same weapons – that is with arrows from the eyes, with the spear of wounding words, with the sword of deadly handling – this stinking whore lechery wars with the lady's chastity (...) First she shoots arrows from wanton eyes which (...) stick in the heart. Next she shakes a spear and advances on her, and with stirring words gives the spear's wound. The sword's blow (...) is final, for it (...) gives the death-blow (70).

This powerful description makes evident that anchoresses are in mortal danger. They are not, however, without a weapon. Quite the opposite, their armoury is of great variety so they could efficiently withstand the enemy. Interestingly, the anchoress' resistance may be either active, that is when a girl is invited to face the danger and fight with the fiend upon the battlefield or it may be passive, when anchoress does little more but endures the attack and seek refuge. The reader may find in the text calls for action, as for example when the author urges: "Do not turn your back, my dear sisters, but withstand the enemy's army full in the face (...) with firm faith" (174). Sometimes these urges take even more violent form when they force a girl to, literally, wrestle the devil: 'do not lie still, or sit either (...) but seize the staff of the cross right away (...) And lay it into

him with hard blows fiercely on the back (...) lift up the staff of the cross and swing it in four directions against the hell-dog' (154). Anchoress is even given an instruction on how to keep her armour:

> A shield in a fight must be held above the head or against the breast, not carried behind. In the same way, if you want the shield-cross and God's powerful passion to deflect the devil's weapons, do not carry it behind you, but lift it on high above the head of your heart (...) Hold it up against the enemy, show it to him clearly (155).

Among many others, confession is also described as a powerful weapon in an active stand against the forces of evil since it "crushes the devil, hacks off his head and drives away his army" (158). What is more, confession is likened to the stand-bearer as well as to the army of Canaan who throws Judah out of its land (159). It is hard to avoid the obvious conclusion that with such powerful weapon, anchoress is invited to strive for a high command in the battle. This conclusion becomes the more apparent when we take into consideration the textual references to Judith[1]: "an anchoress must be Judith through a harsh life and through true confession, and slay, as Judith did, this evil Holofernes. Let her tame her flesh very well as soon as she feels it becoming to wilful" (99). In this respect, it may be argued that the above examples of military metaphors with clearly established role of women as belligerent heroines stand as the inheritors of Anglo-Saxon tradition.

4. Architectural metaphors of defence

The allegories of castle, or edifices in general, as well as metaphors of defence have a long tradition. As early as in the 3rd century Tertullian likened virginity to a citadel (Whitehead 2000, 120). The metaphor of castles and towers gained its significance in 12th century from the commanding position of the real castle in actual life. They seem to point to new cultural influences and give way to more defensive and hence passive representation of women: "religious allegories of defensive architecture, whether they relate to virgin or to an individual believer adopt the perspective of the defenders maintaining physical and spiritual integrity by keeping the devil, the world, or temptation out" (Cowling 1998, 29). On the one hand, the very choice of metaphors of defence already puts

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[1] an icon female hero, presented as a Germanic warrior in the 9th century epic.

woman in the militaristic environment which is predominantly male, on the other hand, such metaphors emphasise passive humility rather than a combat spirit.

In the *Vitae* of Christina, the architectural metaphors are not frequent. If they however appear they refer to the body of virgin as fortified against temptation. In her resistance to parents and temptations, Christina resembles a fortified castle. When her friend Helisen attempts to sooth Christina through constant flatteries, it is noticed that she "left no stone unturned in her efforts to undermine her friend's resistance" (*The Life of Christina of Markyate* 1991, 45). Amidst all the sufferings that she was going through, Christina was "fortified by the protection of Jesus Christ" (173). It was her beloved Lord who kept the guard over the castle of her body: "Be not afraid of these horrible temptations, for the key of your heart is in my safe keeping and I keep guard over your mind and the rest of your body. No one can enter except by my permission" (133).

There is yet another interesting architectural metaphor in the *Life*, namely, Marian metaphor in which it is the Virgin who is envisaged as a protective fortress. Being in a great distress, Christina was granted a vision, in which she was allowed to take refuge in the chamber of the Mother of Christ: "the maiden looked closely in front of her, and saw an upper chamber, lofty and quite, which could be reached only by a series of steps, steep and difficult for anyone wishing to climb (...) the queen whom she had seen just a short time before helped her (...) and she sat there enjoying the beauty of the place" (77) This vision was to console Christina and invite her to follow Mary's example and construct in her own person a castle so strong and beautiful that Christ may come and live there. Whitehead underlines that "the Marian fortress and the history of representation of virginity as a fortress are not one discourse and (...) the architectural realization of virginity emerges as potentially earlier" (2000, 120). The features of Marian metaphor are the result of 12th and 13th century merging of devotional and courtly literature.

In *Ancrene Wisse*, time and time again, the chaste body of an anchoress is architecturalized and placed in a siege situation: "every good person against whom the devil makes war is a castle. But if you have the deep moat of deep humility and wet tears around it, you are a strong castle" (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 137). Five senses, which are the heart's guards, are urged to be locked well in order to defence "this precious stone that is Jesus Christ" (155) against the assailants from hell. The anchoresses are constantly reminded about the danger: "and is not most reckless

and foolhardy, who holds her head out boldly over an exposed battlement, when someone is attacking the castle with bolts from outside?" (70). Some images seem to owe something to contemporary techniques of siege warfare: "when a castle is assailed, those within pour scalding water out, and so guard the walls. And you should do just the same as often as enemy assails your castle (...) with heartfelt prayers, pour out scalding tears" (137).

Often the boundaries of the flesh which the anchoress is exhorted to retain intact are fused with the stone boundaries of her cell. The author warns his reader not to lean out of window in order to avoid temptation: "the battlements of the castle are her house's windows". Similarly "through the window of the eye, death has her entrance into the soul" (70). Windows and eyes both became the sealed entrances to the metaphorical stronghold.

Since in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries towers became an important element of the landscape, they also grew in popularity as elements of architectural metaphors, the more that they pronounced the architectural isolation of women. Commenting on the dangers of the solitary life, the author says: "Whoever stands in sublimity of life is sure to be tempted (...) You yourselves are a tower, my dear sisters. But do not be afraid, while you are so truly and so firmly cemented with the cement of steadfast love" (131).

5. Towards lady lover and Christ the lover knight

The discourse of Christ the lover knight takes its language from the Canticles and from the body of 12th century Cistercian ideas of bridal mysticism as well as from the cross-fertilization between devotional literature and French courtly romance. Woolf notices that "from the end of the twelfth century onwards there developed a perfect parallelism between the theological stress upon Christ's display of love on the Cross and the conception of chivalric romances, wherein a knight by brave endurance and heroic encounters would save the lady whom he loved from treacherous capture" (1962, 2) Whereas "previously the nature of the Redemption had been defined as a conquest of the devil, this stress upon personal and emotional relationship between God and man was new in the twelfth century" (Woolf 1962, 1).

Many critics agree that the influences of new literary tastes are visible in Christina's love-relationship with Christ. Ever since she made a vow of

virginity, Christina is referred to as "His [Christ's] spouse". There is one particularly interesting example when Christina warns Burthred: "Beware then of taking to yourself the spouse of Christ, lest in his anger He will slay you" (*The Life of Christina of Markyate* 1991, 73) Christ is thus said to behave as a lover envious of his bridegroom. Christina is ensured of Christ's affection in a vision, in which three youths "placed on her head a crown (...) adding: 'This has been sent to you by the Son of the Most High King. And know that you are one of His own'" (129).

Ancrene Wisse shows even greater influences of new literary conventions. Christ is repeatedly depicted as a lover trying to gain the love of his chosen one: "at the beginning it is all courtship to draw you into love" (*Anchoritic Spirituality* 1991, 128). The most evident example is to be detected in chapter seven of the treatise which is devoted to love. There is a story of a helpless and destitute lady surrounded by her enemies in an "earthen castle" (190). A mighty king turned his love passionately to the lady. First, "by way of courtship he sent his messengers" (191), then "many beautiful presents". The lady, however, kept on refusing his help, but finally the king came himself and decided to take the fight upon himself in order to win lady's heart: "In the end he came himself (...) and wrote with his own blood salutations to his beloved, love greetings with which to woo her and win power over her love" (190). Christ is not only presented here as a lover but most of all as full blown aristocrat, anxious to compete with would be earthly husbands for the attention of his lady: '[he] did everything just so: he rid her of all her enemies and was himself cruelly abused and finally killed' (191). The author explains the parable: "the king is Jesus, God's Son (...) who came to prove his love, and showed through chivalry that he was worthy of love, as knights were at one time accustomed to do" (191). There is also a particularly interesting description of a shield likened to the Cross: 'after a brave knight's death, his shield is hung high in church in his memory (...) to bring to mind Jesus Christ's chivalry, which he performed on the cross' (192). Bella Millet underlines that at this point "*Ancrene Wisse* draws effectively on the conventions of contemporary secular literature for the evocative image of Christ as knight, proving his love by chivalric deeds as was the custom of knights once upon a time in the imaginary past of courtly romance" (1990, xxxiii). What is interesting, is the contrast between the king who has the power to act and the helpless lady whose only power is her will: she may either accept or reject the deeds of chivalry king. How different is this picture of a lady lover in comparison to the image of militant maiden courageously defending her

castle or taking part in an active combat upon the battlefield. An anchoress is no longer expected to perform charismatic acts of faith but she is invited to accept the love of Jesus, the chivalry knight, who will, in turn, protect her.

6. Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, I have attempted to present the transient character of *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, *Ancrene Wisses* and the *Katherine* Group and to point to the influences of Christian heroic literature as seen in Anglo-Saxon period and the influences of the new courtly culture, in which militant female spirit reappeared as defence and stasis and active combat upon the battlefield gave way to metaphors of castles and enclosure. The instances and metaphors of battle and defence in this works, present women as torn between two roles: that of *militia Christi* and a lady lover, a warrior and a fragile being protected by her might spouse. Due to the limited length of this article it was not possible to discuss in detail gender and cultural issues, nor the possible direction of influences between devotional and secular literature.

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Beowulf – Christian propaganda in the Dark Ages

During the 6th century Anglo-Saxon England went through the process of christianisation. Heathen beliefs were replaced by a new religion, which changed not only the faith of the people but gradually also their customs and rituals. Religious conversion is an arduous process and it is not possible to adopt a new outlook on life in just a few years, as it is a gradual change. In order to help communities accept new customs and ways of thinking, poets, or scops, created new legends and sagas, or they rebuilt the old ones to make it easier for the people to adopt the new way of perceiving the surrounding world. As Branston has it, "after the English were converted, Christian poets still sang about gods and heroes, but the Gods of the old religion became the devils of the new" (52).

Beowulf, "the oldest of the great long poems written in English, was probably composed more than twelve hundred years ago, in the half of the eighth century" (Abrams 25), i.e. in the period when most of England was finally christianised. In this essay I would like to focus on Beowulf as a poem whose aim was to propagate the new faith among the not fully christianised tribes of Anglo-Saxon England. I would like to explore the ways in which this project is carried out in the text and see whether it is done in a consistent, transparent way. In addition, I should like to suggest that the poem's depict story illustrates the moral values inherent in the text and presents us not only with the epic poem as such, but also with a manual of how to be God's servant in Middle-Earth.

First of all, the poem divides human life into three stages. The course of existence which every human being is to take comes from God Himself, as the soul is brought upon the Earth by God's will, this being an element of Christian dogma.

> Afterward a boy-child was born to Shield,
> a cub in the yard, a comfort sent
> by God to that nation. (Beowulf, ll. 12-14)

It can be observed that the new life comes directly from God and thus it is clear that the newborn comes to the Danish nation by the Almighty's consent.

Every life is led by a certain purpose and each man is supposed to strive to fulfill a duty entrusted him by the Maker. It should be stressed that the legacy of the Danish kings begins much earlier than the proper action of the poem.

> So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
> and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness
> We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns. (Beowulf, ll. 1-3)

The task of the kings is clearly appointed in the above fragment; as the lords and sovereigns are sent to reign upon the earthly kingdoms, their task is to lead their people and to obtain great glory and fame through brave deeds.

It is noticeable that everything that is good comes from God. Though he is a Judge who observes man's deeds and delivers his doom, the Almighty actually favours those who live by his name and his commandments and brings prosperity upon them. The following excerpt proves that Beowulf completely relies in his faith on God, and that is why he is rewarded with powerful attributes such as great strength.

> ...but Beowulf was mindful of his mighty strength,
> and wondrous gifts God has showered on him:
> he relied for help on the Lord of All,
> on His care and favor. (Beowulf ll. 1270-73)

Each man has his own particular role to play during his life in Middle-Earth. As far as the character of Hrothgar is concerned, his role as a king was to build the centre of human civilisation, where Christian society could flourish.

> [Hrothgar's] mind turned to hall-building...
> ...a great mead-hall [which]
> meant to be a wonder of the world...
> ...and there he would dispense
> his God-given goods. (Beowulf, ll. 67-72)

The mead-hall may represent the centre of Christianity, but at the same time it may stand for the superiority of the Christian faith over any other religion, as, literally speaking, it is supposed to be the greatest building in the world.

Apart from constructing the hall, Hrothgar is also a good and just king as he rewards those who are courageous in battles, and at the same time he is a brave man, being much of a warrior himself. The figures of a king and a warrior have one common feature, namely that they are both expected to be an example for the people, as they are chosen by God to perform great deeds. Beowulf, a warrior, has a clearly appointed task, too. His role is to be one of the greatest men across the Earth, and indeed he manages to vanquish the most dreadful enemies. While reading Beowulf, it is important to notice that at a first glance the poem is a classical struggle of Good against Evil. The main hero is naturally brave and relentless in battles.

> It was hard-fought, a desperate affair
> that could have gone badly; if God had not helped me,
> the outcome would have been quick and fatal. (Beowulf ll. 1656-58)

Still, at the same time Beowulf can also be seen as a missionary, whose main aim is to spread the new religion, for he is in fact a pious character, deeply devoted to God and full of faith.

Both Beowulf and Hrothgar are marked with archetypal features of a good king and a great warrior and their deeds should be taken as an example of how to act properly as followers of the Christian creed. That is why the poem may be seen as a manual or a profile of human behaviour, whose main role is to introduce Christian values into the world. The poem hints at several principles which are to govern man's life, and at the same time it provides a warning against threats which should be avoided in order to win God's grace and favour.

> His rise in the world brought little joy
> to the Danish people, only death and destruction.
> He vented his rage on men he caroused with,

Killed his own comrades, a pariah king
who cut himself off from his own kind,
even though Almighty God had made him
eminent and powerful and marked from the start
for a happy life. But...
he grew bloodthirsty, gave no more rings
to honor the Danes. He suffered in the end
for having plagued his own people...
his life lost happiness. (Beowulf ll. 1711-22)

The story of one of the Danish kings, presented in the above-cited fragment, shows that living by God's principles may be highly profitable. As soon as those rules are broken, one instantly loses all the happiness and eminence given by the Maker.

The last stage of life and the event which concludes the circle of the soul's journey is death and the subsequent funeral.

Shield was still thriving when his time came
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping...
... Shield died at his fated hour,
His people carried him to the sea,
In the harbor stood
a well-built ship,
They laid Shield there,
propped him against the mast
surrounded by gold -
and treasure from distant lands.
I've never heard
of a more beautiful ship,
filled with shields, swords,
and coats of mail. (Beowulf ll. 26-40)

As the people send their dead king, or hero, in a ship filled with treasures and goods of everyday life, the human soul is bound to return to its Maker, provided, of course, that the man's earthly path of existence was marked with honourable deeds and the praising of God's name. Thus, it can be observed that the circle of human life is controlled by the Almighty, since the soul returns to the place where it originated.

Even though the poem contains several ideas whose aim is to propagate the new faith, it may be observed that at some points it lacks coherence and consistency. The message and whole didactic purpose discernible in the contents of Beowulf is marked with several inconsistencies. The main

problem occurs in determining what kind of reality is presented in the poem. Beowulf's world is a blend of Christianity and remnants of pagan rituals, customs and ancient lore. One of the examples of the old traditions is the ritual of raising a funeral pyre after the death of a king or hero. As the pyre is built, people assemble earthly riches, which are left with the dead one to accompany him in his last journey. It is a purely pagan custom, for, as Leyerle observes: "the treasure is associated with monsters, fighting, the death of kings, and funerals" and it had an important, symbolic "force in heroic society" (150). At the same time the idea of the so called "good death" (death in battle) is a part of Scandinavian or Germanic beliefs as well: after death, the soul was meant to travel to Valhalla, the realm of the gods. As Lyle puts it: "Honor in death was above all to be won by death-dealing valor in armed struggle against the foe: this is the notion of heroism championed by Beowulf" (117). Weapons with runic inscriptions and presumed magical properties are yet another element of heathen beliefs. The history of such items is deeply rooted in the ancient times and their origin is very often connected with the craftsmanship of supernatural creatures. This may be seen in the following lines:

...He examined the hilt,
that relic of old times. It was engraved all over...
...In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards
there were rune-markings correctly incised,
starting and recording for whom the sword
had been first made and ornamented
with its scrollworked hilt. (Beowulf ll. 1687-98)

As pagan and Christian motifs coincide, they are at the same time in antagonistic relations. The contrast is shown every time when a struggle with a monster occurs. It is very often the case that the term pagan is equated with evil, or the devil.

[Grendel] with his death upon him, he had dived deep
into his marsh-den, drowned out his life
and his heathen soul: hell claimed him there. (Beowulf ll. 849-51)

It may be noticed that when Grendel's mother is slain by Beowulf, the warrior uses a heathen sword forged in the days of old. In this way, the pagan element is used in order to vanquish another pagan element and after the victorious battle both the monster and the weapon are no more, as the sword melts.

But the Lord of Men allowed me to behold-
...an ancient sword shining on the wall,
a weapon made for giants, there for the wielding.
Then the moment came in the combat and I struck
The dwellers in that den. Next thing the damascend
Sword blade melted; it bloated and it burned
In their rushing blood. (Beowulf ll. 1661-68)

The mutual destruction can symbolically represent the triumph of Christianity over pagan relics and artifacts.

It is worth mentioning that the presence of God can constantly be felt in the poem. He is omnipresent and everlasting and every action as well as its implications are part of God's masterplan.

Much as [Wiglaf] wanted to, there was no way
he could preserve his lord's life on earth
or alter in the least the Almighty's will.
What God judged right would rule what happened
To every man, as it does to this day. (Beowulf ll. 2855-59)

The will of the Maker is unchangeable: the Almighty establishes the way of the world, its order, the beginning of things and their end.

God is also depicted as a superior power to any other force in the world. Hence, the Almighty struggles with Cain's apparent offspring, which is presented as creatures that are part of the Germanic and Scandinavian folklore. Elves, ogres and other supernatural beings are identified with evil forces mentioned in the text – forces Christianity sees as evil – but they are still a part of the pagan world.

Cain got no good from committing that murder
because the Almighty made him anathema,
and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
ogres and elves and evil phantoms
and the giants too who strove with God
time and time again until
He gave them their reward. (Beowulf ll. 109-14)

Hence, as far as the origin of evil creatures is concerned, it may be noticed that the consistency of the text is distorted. Cain's descendants are shown not as part of a different faith, but as adversaries whose origin lies in the same religion, i.e. Christianity. Grendel, his mother and the dragon, are in fact interchangeably called devils and heathens.

As far as Seamus Heaney's translation of Beowulf is concerned, another inconsistency may be observed with respect to the interpretation of the following two fragments.

Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed
offerings to the idols,
swore oaths
that the killer of souls might come to their aid
and save the people. That was their way,
their heathenish hope...
...The Almighty Judge
of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,
Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,
Was unknown to them. (Beowulf ll. 175-83)

This passage may be understood in two different ways. One is that people did not know the Christian God at all, and that is why they paid tribute to the pagan gods. Another explanation may be that people turned back from God when he did not immediately free them from Grendel's atrocities. If the first interpretation is to be adopted, though, one cannot help noticing that it stands in contradiction to the scene in which Beowulf approaches Hrothgar for the first time.

Hrothgar, protector of Shieldings, replied:
...Now Holy God
has, in His goodness, guided [Beowulf] here
...to defend us from Grendel. (Beowulf ll. 371-83)

Hrothgar speaks here about the mercy of God who had sent Beowulf to slay Grendel, which actually proves that the Christian God was already known to the Danish sovereign and his people.

No matter whether one takes Beowulf for a successful piece of propaganda or not, it is still indisputable that it carries a clear message which has a didactic and moralizing purpose. Apart from being a poem in which heroes fight with monsters and in which a traditional clash of good and evil takes place, the epic is also a manual of behaviour and a panorama of Anglo-Saxon values. It generates a simple message to the reader: that anyone who is obedient to the will of God and devotes his life to the Christian faith may achieve as much as Beowulf.

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The ekphrasis in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Cynewulf's Elene*

The two Anglo-Saxon poems, *The Dream of the Rood* and Cynewulf's *Elene*, both found in the Vercelli manuscript, are concerned with the themes of signs and interpreting signs. In both poems, the cross receives the greatest attention and it appears that its function shifts from merely being a relic to constituting an object of contemplation that would lead the characters to conversion and recognition of the Christian vision of history. The cross appears before Constantine and the dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood* as a marvellous and richly decorated object that invites not only religious contemplation but also a reception of it as an object of art. Apart from the symbolic associations it evokes, it also appears as an object of religious art that aims to elicit contemplation not only from the characters of the poems, but also from their audiences. There is an essential connection between the religious and representational facets of the crosses in the two Anglo-Saxon poems. The aim of the paper is to examine the representational aspects of the crosses in *Elene* and *The Dream of the Rood* and to demonstrate the ekphrastic nature of both crosses.

The link between *The Dream of the Rood* and the Crosswell Cross has received a considerable attention as a vivid instance of the relationship of art and literature and its implications. The two ekphrastic visions of the cross are essential part of the two narratives on the battle for salvation in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*. Pictures, images and other art objects were central not only to imagination in the Middle Ages, but also directly contributed to and stemmed from the religious thought. Art and thought

could complement one another. In *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought*, Barbara C. Raw points out that

> Art and literature express religious truth in different, but complementary ways. Whereas the written text is linear, presenting points in sequences, the picture involves spatial relationships; the first is better suited to the definition of theological truths, the second to an intuitive and direct grasp of some truth. (...) Moreover, the non-linear nature of the picture allows several ideas to be present simultaneously, and therefore integrates them (Raw 1997: 4).

In the early history of medieval church art held the central place in the expression of religious thought in a way that caused a strong contention and controversy when it comes to ideas on the role of art in conveying the religious truth. The ability of pictures to be a valid expression of religious concepts was questioned. In the East, two Iconoclasms took place and they should be considered to be a contributing factor as far as the development of the cult of the cross is concerned; the cross and the image of the cross partly replaced pictures and icons that tended to cause a significant controversy. Iconoclasts of the first Iconoclasm, led by the two great Emperors Leo III and Constantine V, were convinced that the devotion of images was sinful and a breach of the second commandment. The Second Iconoclasm differed from the first one substantially and was partly responsible for changes in art. Peter Brown claims that:

> The "Second Iconoclasm" was the product of cultivated men. It was much less raw and more reflective than were the emergency-driven policies of Leo III and Constantine V. (...) As the product of a mere human artist, the icon was doomed to be an unreliable guide to the supernatural realities which it claimed to represent. (Brown 2003: 395)

Taking all this into consideration, however, it is worth noticing that, rather than diminishing the importance of art in religious life, Iconoclasm, in fact, contributed to its further development. Similarly, much as in the Islamic art the representation of the human beings was forbidden, the Islamic shrines were decorated with mosaics (Brown 2003: 390). In Christian art, the object of artistic representations shifted from Christ to the Cross under the pressure of Iconoclasm. As Peter Brown pinpoints:

> Iconoclast emperors and their advisers claimed to offer to their subjects something better than icons. They upheld the image of the cross. The abstract sign of the cross was a symbol which every Byzantine Christian shared, and which every Muslim was known to despise. It had the weight of the past behind it. The Cross had been

the "victory bringing sign" under whose auspices Constantine was believed to have won his battles and to have founded the Christian Empire (Brown 2003: 391).

The cross began to serve as a representation of the Passion of Christ and became a symbol of redemption and salvation. The legend of the Emperor Constantine who won his battles against pagans under the guidance of the cross also contributed the idea of the cross as a sign of victory to such an extent that it became the central motif in Christian art.

It would be all the more interesting to consider the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* as well as that in *Elene* as a description of an art object and consider the implications of their ekphrastic nature for the reading of the two poems. In *Museum of Words*, James M. W. Heffernan defines ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Heffernan 1993: 3). Thus the description of the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* and the urn in Keats' *Ode on the Grecian Urn* bring us into a close contact with art and this contact is the objective of an ekphrastic text. Ekphrasis describes the artistic creation. It is essential to point out that the purpose of ekphrasis in literary works is not merely decorative. The description of decorative designs does not exist for its own sake, but it often becomes part of a larger design within the structure of a work of literature. The shields in *Iliad* and in Virgil's *Aeneid* as well as the Grecian urn are indeed representations of artistic designs. However, their design also provides the reader with a narrative. Thus the shield that Hephaestus is asked by Thesis to make for Achilles, representing various stories engraved on the shield and similarly the shield made by Vulcan for Aeneas in the eighth book of *Aeneid* offers to the reader a coherent narrative prophesying the future glory of the Roman Empire. In the light of what Heffernan points out to be the central feature of the European ekphrasis which is "a coherent narrative about the picture it describes" (Heffernan 1993: 76), the cross may stand out as possessing a stronger iconic or symbolic dimension. Indeed, the cross does not represent the biblical narrative on Christ's suffering, death, Resurrection and the miracle of salvation in a way that is typical of symbols, which is by association of the signified with the signifier; the story of Christ's battle for salvation is not engraved on the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*. The crosses in the poems are also not embellished with the figure of suffering Christ, which would, otherwise, be considered as an attempt at a representation. It seems, however, they are linked to narrative in the two poems in yet another way. The adoration of the cross is central to the revelational aspects of both poems.

The vision of the cross in *Elene* is central to Constantine's conversion. Also, the text of *Elene* employs a figural reading of Emperor Constantine's victory over Huns and Goths that takes place within the eschatological context of the Anglo-Saxon idea of Christ's battle for salvation. In *The Dream of the Rood* the prosopopeic cross retells the story of Crucifixion in terms of the Germanic heroic code and vision of the cross represents the glory and victory that result from Christ's sacrifice as well as convey the pain and horror of the crucifixion.

In *Elene*, the vision that comes to Constantine the night before the battle with the enemy presents the rood not as the instrument of torture and suffering inflicted on Christ, but rather as a "sigores tacen", the sign, or symbol, of victory.

þurh þæs halgan hæs—	He wæs sona gearu
up locade,	hreðerlocan onspeon—
fæle friðowebba;	swa him se ar abead,
wliti wuldres treo	geseah he frætwum beorht
golde geglenged;	ofer wolcna hrof,
wæs se blaca beam	gimmas lixtan;
beorhte ond leohte,	bocstafum awriten,
on þam frecnan fære	'Mid þys beacne ðu
geletest lað werod.'	feond oferswiðesð,
up siðode,	þa þæt leoht gewat,
on clænra gemang.	ond se ar somed,
ond þe sorgleasra,	Cyning wæs þy bliðra
on fyrhðsefan,	secga aldor,
	þurh þa fægeran gesyhð. (*Elene*.85-98)

On the holy command—	He was soon ready
Looked up,	he opened his heart—
The true angel;	as the messenger told him,
The beautiful tree of glory	he saw, fair with adornment,
Decorated with gold;	above the roof of clouds,
The shining beam	the gems shone
Bright and full of light,	had letters engraved
On the terrible expedition,	'with this beacon,
Withstand the loathful enemy.'	you will overcome the fiend
Soared towards the heaven,	Then the light departed,
Among the pure crowd.	and the messenger,
And more joyful,	The king became happier
	the prince of men,
	On mind, through the fair vision[1].

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[1] All translations of Old English poetry into Modern English are my own.

During the vision, the cross appears covered with gold ("golde geglended") and shining with gems ("gimmas lixtan" – the gems shone). However, the rood is accompanied with written messages saying that by means of this sign that Constantine overcome the enemy ("feond oferswiðesð") and hinder the loathful people ("geletest lað werod") during the impending battle. What is striking here is that the message seems to refer solely to the context of the political conflict between the Roman Empire and the tribes of Huns and Goths, which are about to invade Romans; this is because Constantine can now understand only the literal meaning of the cross as a sign of victory. The former feeling of anxiety, concerning that fact that his forces have virtually no prospect of overcoming Goths and Huns, leaves him. The vision that interrupts Constantine's sleep in the poem is introduced by a messenger from heaven, an angel, who orders that the Emperor should look up to the sky in and see the sign of victory.

on wuldres weard,	þu to heofenum beseoh
sigores tacen.	þær ðu wraðe findest,
	(*E.*83-85)

Towards glory,	Look to the haven,
The sign of victory.	there you will find help,

When on the next day, Constantine defeats the forces of the enemy, as he has fought under the banner of the "sigores tacen", shaped according to what he saw during the vision, he still does not manage to decipher the proper dimension of the event on his own merits. Being a pagan, he does not possess the knowledge of Christ's death and Resurrection. After the enemy is made to withdraw and fall into an immediate defeat, the Emperor is so fascinated with the cross and his divine power that he asks men of learning, who possess the knowledge of the ancient records ("fyrngewritu"). The knowledge of the real meaning of the cross is revealed to him through instruction. Only later on in the poem does it turn out that Constantine has to conceive his victory in figural terms. In the poem, the revelation of the meaning of the cross is gradual. Constantine, as well as Judas, have to work out its significance to undergo their conversions.

The symbolic nature of the cross, which is strengthened through its ekphrastic qualities, not only means, therefore, that the cross is an expression of glory and victory. It is important to point out that the ekphrastic

aspect of the cross in the vision that takes place in the first part of *Elene* brings us to the idea of the cross as the object of religious devotion and adoration. For Constantine, the seeing of the rood is an experience that involves contemplation. The text says that just before the Emperor looks towards the sky and sees the vision, he "hreðerlocan onspeon", which means that he opened his heart. P. O. E. Gradon, the Exeter editor of the text points out that "in *Christ* 1055 *hreðerloca* is the part of the body containing the thoughts" (Cynewulf 1977: 29). However, after the victory, learning about the basic precepts of Christianity and the eventual baptism and, just before he dispatches his mother on the mission of finding the cross, Constantine is said to have the picture of the cross forever in mind:

þa wæs Cristes lof   þam casere
on firhðsefan,   forð gemyndig
ymb þæt mære treo (E.212-214)

Then of the praise of Christ   the Emperor was,
In his mind and heart,   mindful,
Of the tree of might.

This is interesting, of course, within the context of early medieval art and its role in the religious life. As Barbara C. Raw writes in *Trinity and Incarnation*, "[c]ontemplation of the Trinity, a sharing in the worship of heaven and in the divine life, constituted the focus of the religious life of prayer" and the significance of the early medieval art relied on the fact that pictures enabled that contemplation, because "[c]ontemplative prayer, unlike vocal prayer involves receptiveness, a silent standing before God. It is here that art becomes open to what it says: the picture speaks, as though it were a text" (Raw 1997: 169; 172). It is also the contemplative aspect of art that the cross from the vision acquires that causes the Anglo-Saxon ekphrasis to stand out from the classical examples. Heffernan points out that Virgil's *Aeneid* contains the sole example of a character's reaction to an ekphrastic description, as "besides converting the scenes on the shield into narratives, as Homer did, Virgil represents Aeneas's response to the scenes—even though he cannot understand what they signify" (Heffernan 1993: 23).

Such vistas
The God of fire [Vulcan] forged across the shield
That Venus gives her son. He feels with wonder—
He knows nothing of these events but takes delight

In their likeness, lifting onto his shoulders now
The fame and fates of all his children's children.
(*Aeneid*.VIII.853-858)

Aeneas is filled with wonder at the sight of battle of Actium, Anthony triumphant in Egypt and the triple triumph of Julius Caesar at the gates of Rome. The ekphrastic shield is linked with the following narrative that tells how Aeneas withstands the Volscians and kills his enemy Turnus, thereby winning the land in which Rome will be established by the future generations. What is really striking about the ekphrastic existence of the cross in *Elene*, however, is its importance as the object of contemplation and gradual revelation of the religious truth[2]. The characters negotiate the difficult ways of salvation through their attempts to grasp the meanings of representations they see.

If the strength of ekphrastic elements in *Elene* lies in the combination of the narrative and contemplative function of the cross, *The Dream of the Rood* uses ekphrasis not only to elicit the receptiveness and therefore contemplation. In *The Museum of Words*, Heffernan points to the prosopopeic quality of a number of ekphrastic representations in literature that according to him begins with Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in *Iliad*.

Homer's protracted account of Achilles' shield includes one other element that will become increasingly conspicuous in the ekphrastic literature to come: *prosopopeia*, the dramatic personification or more precisely the *envoicing* of a mute, inanimate object. No speeches are actually quoted in Homer's passage, (...) the poet mentions a variety of sounds emanating from the figures on the shield, beginning with the nuptial song of the wedding party in the first city (493) and ending with the song led by the acrobats and—in a disputed line—by an inspired minstrel playing the lyre (Heffernan 1993: 21-22).

What Heffernan refers to in his observation as "envoicing of a mute, inanimate object is a feature which makes it possible for the vision of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* to be considered as one of the most outstanding examples of ekphrasis. The *prosopopeia* in the poem establishes the relationship between the ekphrastic cross and the narrative that it tells in the vision. Also, the reactions and emotions it stirs in the dreamer are presented with greater attention to detail by the author of *The Dream of the Rood* than by Cynewulf in *Elene*.

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[2] As Jackson J. Campbell points out, "[t]he cross, both as a literal object and symbolic idea, grows in meaning through the poem" (Campbell 2001: 231).

wædum geweorðode,
gegyred mid golde;
bewrigene weorðlice
Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold
earmra ærgewin,
swætan on þa swiðran healfe.
forht ic wæs for þære fægran gesyhðe.
wendan wædum ond bleom;
beswyled mid swates gange,
(*The Dream of the Rood*.15-24).

Geseah ic wuldres treow,
wynnum scinan,
gimmas hæfdon
wealdendes treow.
ongytan meahte
þæt hit ærest ongan
Eall ic wæs mid sorgum gedrefed.
Geseah ic þæt fuse beacen
hwilum hit wæs mid wætan bestemed,
hwilum mid since gegyrwed.

Clothed with jewels,
Adorned with gold;
Worthily,
But I, through that gold,
An ancient warfare,
Bleeding from the right side.
I was afraid for the glorious vision.
Was changed with colour,
Wet with sweat,

I saw a tree of glory
shining with joy,
gems covered it
saviour's tree.
could spot
when it suddenly began
I was all in fear.
I could see the doomed beacon
at one time it appeared drenched with blood
at the other it was treasure-adorned.

In *The Dream of the Rood* the cross in the vision is a symbolic represen-tation of the Crucifixion in the sense that it suggests and evokes feeling of fear and terror as well as the glory of the crucifixion. In the poem, the ekphrastic cross receives a revelational dimension. In contrast to *Elene*, where Constantine negotiates a long and tedious way of instruction and reflection to achieve understanding and the vision does not project much prominence through the rest of the poem, the revelation aspect of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* is explored in the poem more profoundly owing to its prosopopeic utterances to the dreamer. The jewels that embel-lish it and the light that exposes its cosmic resplendence to the dreamer bring all the essential Christian wisdom to one focal point in the same way as the shield in *The Aeneid* overwhelms Aeneas with the future of glory of the Roman Empire.

It appears that the ekphrastic aspects of the vision in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene* should be considered from the perspective of the role and function of the cross in the early medieval art. The way both crosses are treated visually in the poem stems from the medieval fascination with art treating art objects as tools helpful in religious experience and education. It can be linked to the contemplative nature of the religious life in the

middle ages. The unique nature of the ekphrasis in the Anglo-Saxon poetry consists in a complex use of prosopopeia. The ekphrasis in the poems evokes the tension between the image and the reality to which it is supposed to provide access. The crosses that we find in the two Anglo-Saxon poems are, to a certain degree, under pressure of the legacy of criticism that the religious art received in the Middle Ages. For instance, the absence of Christ from the two examples of ekphrasis cannot be taken for granted. It seems that the crosses do not exist as self-contained expressions of religious truth. In *Elene*, the vision requires the interpretation of wise men and, similarly, *The Dream of the Rood* employs prosopopeia in order to provide an explanation of the holy matters. As a final remark, it seems that the Anglo-Saxon ekphrastic representation, in contrast to the rather self-contained art objects found in *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, are interwoven with the text and the themes and meaning the text produces and evokes.

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There's something about Mary... Magdalene: A Renaissance appropriation of the saint's vita in Thomas Robinson's *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*

> „*What would our tradition look like*
> *if it had made Peter a converted pimp?"*
>
> Moltman-Wedel[1]

The search for the true Mary Magdalene has a long tradition in the Western ecclesiastical history. Theologians, church historians and exegetes struggled to reconstruct the saint's historical and legendary identity. The confusion stems from the New Testament which presents different accounts of Magdalene's life and sometimes links her with other named or unnamed characters from the Bible.[2] Gregory the Great became personally involved in the exegesis and in 541 AD gave Mary Magdalene a fixed identity. The Gregorian fusion of Scriptural women substantiated Mary Magdalene as the world knows her today. Christian mythology added to the complexity of the saint's image. All modern versions of her legend are said to be founded on the celebrated *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, and on Osbern Bokenham's *The Life of St. Mary Magdalene*. These two hagiographies show her as a converted sinner but what really matters, especially to Bokenham, is her role as a female apostle in Marseilles and her contemplative life as a desert hermit, thus adding to the biography an apostolic and eremitic aspect. The paradoxical composition of the holy and the vulgar/unholy fascinated artists of

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[1] Elisabeth Moltman-Wedel. 1982. *The Women Around Jesus.* (translated by John Bowden.) London: SCM.

[2] As found in Luke (chapters 7 and 8), Mark (chapter 16), and John (chapter 19 and 20). There are five women named Mary in all four Gospels.

every epoch, and they turned Magdalene into an art object which can be remodeled and reinterpreted. Despite the finalist interpretation of her vita, the favoured incarnation of the saint depended on the prevailing theological and aesthetic ideologies. This paper deals with the early seventeenth-century poetic rewriting of Mary Magdalene's biography. Taking Thomas Robinson's *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* (circa 1620) as the source text, I wish to show how this Protestant saint's vita diverges from its medieval miracle/mystery/morality original.

By the late Middle Ages authors celebrated Mary Magdalene as: firstly, "beata peccatrix" (Jansen 2001: 18-134), a sexual sinner[3]; secondly, as one of the three Maries from the liturgical *Quem Quaeritis* trope, and as the Apostle to the Apostles (apostolorum apostola) turned preacher. The Magdalene cult was popular in England, particularly in East Anglia (Coletti 2004: 56), which is proven by Bede and later also recorded in the *Old English Martyrology*.[4] Apart from that Magdalene features in medieval poems, ballads, legendaries and homilies. Most importantly, however, the life of the saint is appropriated for the mystical/miracle tradition of medieval drama. She appears in all medieval English dramatic cycles but the complete, full-length presentation of her holy life is found in only three mysteries (Chauvin 1951: 9).[5] Worth mentioning is the Digby *Mary Magdalene* play (*MS Digby* 133)[6], a triple generic conflation of a mystery/miracle/morality play. This dramatized version

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[3] Jansen (2001: 146) notices that nowhere in the Bible Mary Magdalene's sin is specified but the medieval interpreters of the Scriptural stories judged it of sexual nature. Moreover, Mary Magdalene's life was often likened to the one of Mary of Egypt, a converted prostitute.

[4] It was the first evidence of the cult in the West (Jansen 2001: 35).

[5] The earliest treatment of Mary Magdalene's life is by a Cornish miracle play from the fourteenth century, *Passio Domini Nostri* (Prosser 1961: 113). Wholly concerned with Mary Magdalene are: *Ludus de Maria Magdalena in gaudio, Della Conversione di S. Maria Maddalena* and *Di un Miracolo di Santa Maria Magdalena* (Chauvin 1951: 9; Donovan 1977: xxxiv).

[6] All quotations from the Digby version of *Mary Magdalene* come from Furnival's edition (1967), and will be henceforth quoted as *Mary* followed by part, scene and verse numbers. Furnival (1967: x) suggests that Miles Blomefulde was the author of the play. This play seems to be the best presentation of Magdalene's vita in terms of its faithfulness to the previous sources (Scriptural, legendary, Gnostic). It is also suspected that the author of the Digby *Mary Magdalene* knew Bokenham's version, even though his variations in the legend-part are not included in the play (Donovan 1977: xliii).

contains the most complete medieval account of Magdalene's vita: she functions as an almost exemplary repenting sinner-turned-saint, consequently becoming Christ's apostle and a female hermit.[7] This apostolate episode in Mary Magdalene's life seems to be the most controversial in her medieval biography. By the late Middle Ages female preachers were not accepted in the Western Church; therefore all discussions concerning an active apostolate of women were usually supported by the legendary and Gnostic precedent of Mary Magdalene.

The advent of Reformation and the Protestant assault on Catholic saints did not severely affect Mary Magdalene's status. Because she was seen as a sinner who devoted her life to penitence, she was appropriate to serve as a mirror for Protestants. However, not the whole of her hagiography fitted the Protestant ideology. Jansen (2001: 335) notices that "[h]er role as *apostola,* legendary as it was deemed to be, dropped out of sight altogether as Trent worked to excise all representations of the saints that were based on legend rather than history".[8] As a result, Mary Magdalene was re-established and re-written by Protestant *male* authorities. She is

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[7] In the Digby play, Magdalene of Magdala leads a comfortable life, disregarding Christian obligations. Satan and his infernal council send earthwards the personified Luxuria/Lechery and Curiosity, a handsome gallant. The sin Magdalene commits soon after is the result of the lust for flesh. The play implies that Magdalene's sinning is not an isolated instance. Like in every morality, this overt sinfulness requires a divine intervention. Magdalene's good angel appears to chastise her. From then on the conventional morality play-pattern is realized: Magdalene is suffering from a guilty conscience, allegorized as seven devils accompanying her; and seeks Jesus in a nearby house. She asks for forgiveness, washes Christ's feet and wipes them with her hair. After Christ death and Resurrection the saint is summoned to public ministry. Mary Magdalene becomes the teacher to the heathen king and queen of Marseille. Magdalene's miracle leads to their conversion, and they are sent to Jerusalem for baptismal to a "legitimate" male Apostle. In the penultimate scenes Magdalene is already shown "in herimo", in her desert cave. The legendary vita speaks about "inedia" (Jansen 2001: 281) during those thirty contemplative years, rewarded with manna from the angels just before her death. The miracle/mystery part of the play finishes with a priest witnessing Mary Magdalene's ascension to heaven, thus making him the only transmitter of her legend.

[8] Despite the fact that after Reformation the legendary vita became separated from the sacred words of the Bible, in the non-liturgical dramatic context, there are still some hagiographic additions to the Gospel story. A good example would be Lewis Wager's play *The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene* (1566) which is a Protestant answer to the *Digby* mystery/miracle/morality but still contains the apostolica-eremetica episodes completing Magdalene's penitential life.

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still beata peccatrix but the evangelic mission is consciously omitted. The post-Crucifixion suffering of the mourning Magdalene (still safely within the framework of the New Testament) becomes a prevailing theme. Her passion for Christ, her extremely emotional lamentations and the corporeality of the love between the saint and Christ are investigated, explained and sometimes chastised.[9] Artists, especially poets, continue to praise her mystical beauty[10] and add to the significance of the saint by putting her next to the Holy Virgin on the ecclesiastical pedestal.

There is, however, a peculiar poetic rendition of Mary Magdalene's life that seems to neglect the most of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century patterns of the saint's presentation. Around 1899, H. Oskar Sommer reintroduced the public to a little-known stanzaic poem by Thomas Robinson, entitled *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene*.[11] The poem comes from around 1620 but little is known about the author himself. If one agrees with the editor that Thomas Robinson may have been a minister, this rendition of the saint's vita seems even more exceptional (Sommer 1899: 76). On the surface, the most important elements of Magdalene's biography run according to the Scriptural scenario. The saint is presented as a sexual sinner who, having realized her sins, seeks Jesus to have her sins absolved; and after his death, she is the first witness and announcer of his Resurrection. This is where the similarity with the previous versions of Magdalene's vita ends. Robinson seems to disregard the earlier tradition, even though it is suspected that he was acquainted with, for example, the medieval miracle/morality versions of the saint's story (Carpenter 1904: XI). In his poem, Magdalene's biography is retold by an omniscient speaking person, who witnesses some events from the saint's life. The poem begins with a description of the Palace of Pleasure in which goddess Aphrodite lives. This unusual location for a biblical saint's vita already translates the miracle tradition into the classical aesthetics. To make the categorization even more nebulous, the goddess of Pleasure is surrounded by her two Ladies-in-Waiting, the allegorized Luxury and Pride, which points back to the medieval morality convention. Among other attendants

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[9] Such a poetic psychoanalysis of Magdalene can be found in Robert Southwell's „Marie Magdalene's Funerall Teares" (1595).

[10] Robert Crashaw's „Saint Mary Magdalene, or the Weeper" tells of the mystical union of the saint and Jesus.

[11] All quotations from Robinson's *The Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* will be henceforth indicated as *Life* followed by the part, strophe and verse number.

are Flattery, Wantonness and Idleness, who are catered for by the mythical Bacchus himself. Mary Magdalene is one of the inhabitants of this somewhat Ovidian location.[12] Just like other servants of Pleasure's "wanton courts" (*Life* I.44.383), she is naked.[13]

Despite the insistence on beauty and charm of Mary Magdalene, the speaking voice warns immediately that she is inwardly decayed, and her soul is "deglorious" (*Life* I.26.241). He says:

> [a] breast so white, yet so black a heart;
> Her worst the best, her best the worser parte. (...)
> So white a wall inmure such worthlesse stones?
> So beauteous a sepulchre, such rotten bones? (*Life* I.26.242-246)

Just as any female in the palace, she is introduced to a young man who has to win her in a duel. The youth then becomes her lover. Their affair alludes to the romance convention, with courtly wooing and seducing. As a woman, Mary Magdalene is stereotypically prone to flattery and amorous affection. In contrast to the medieval versions, however, it is not the primal sin of superbia that makes Magdalene an easy target for a lechery instigator. She is more of a socially inexperienced ward/nurseling of Aphrodite's court than a promiscuous woman. Yet the poem treats Mary Magdalene's behaviour as an exact equivalent of the Scriptural prostitution. Her passion is both carnal and spiritual but the speaker of the poem definitively and accusatorily states that "the *harlot* had her selfe undon" (*Life* I.48.418; emphasis mine, KB). Robinson implies that contrary to the medieval legendary biography, this Renaissance Magdalene does not need much incitement or temptation from any external infernal envoys. The decision 'to sin' is her own, and not as inevitable as in the pessimistic moralities.

What may seem quite sudden though generically accurate is the appearance of a psychomachian agent. Magdalene is physically assaulted by personified Conscience, also called Nemesis, who literally flies into the saint's heart and pierces it with a sharp dart. The physically painful pangs of conscience are evoked not by scaring Mary with eternal, infernal pain but by making her feel guilty for being too happy (in comparison to other

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[12] Sommer (1899: xvi) recognizes also allusions to Chaucer (praised by Robinson in his verse dedication) and Vergil.

[13] According to Jansen (2001: 335) nakedness of saints is a medieval remnant the Protestants found too alluring to be discarded. It remained the external symbol of human sinfulness.

mortals), and her being overtly ungrateful to Christ. Furthermore, the speaker of the poem makes her realize that she is predestined for something else than wantonness. This somewhat soft chastisement has a mild and rather short-lived effect on the sinner, which the narrator blames on women's instability and propensity for vanity. It literally takes an earthquake and a solar eclipse to frighten the sinner.

Magdalene's punishers are allegorized as Furies turned into snakes that creep onto her body. She loses control over her limbs and is transported, quite violently, in front of a cave cell in which a deathly-looking man, named Melancholy, dwells. The appearance of this character is most probably the result of the general interest in mental states and psychological disorders that had begun long before the poem was written. But Robinson's direct inspiration is unknown. If he did indeed write his poem around 1620, this allegorized personification could have been inspired by the writings of Richard Napier, an Anglican clergyman and a doctor who dealt with mental effects of spiritual mania.[14] The melancholy Napier touches upon is religious in nature, caused by a guilty conscience, so it would fit the characterization of Robinson's Magdalene (although, initially, she is not really obsessed or fearing damnation). The introduction of the male personification of Melancholy may signify Magdalene's acknowledgement of the need for a moral change. The two odd companions begin an aimless pilgrimage, being thrown from one hell-like location to another. This enforced journey is observed by Nemesis who is enraged by the melancholic procrastination of Mary Magdalene, now called "Melancholie's Ape" (*Life* I.82.687). Angry that the sinner is idle and apathetic rather than repenting and suffering for her past life, Justice evokes seven "hideous fiery sprights" (*Life* I.88.736) and orders them to torment Magdalene. Not once is she threatened with death or the hellish pit in the afterlife. In Robinson's version there is a clear indication that she is to suffer physically during her lifetime. The mental pain afflicting medieval sinners is, therefore, substituted with physical torture caused by evil spirits. The speaker of the poem describes Magdalene's possession:

> But then ye haplesse maide (unhappy tide!),
> Incited by ye monsters huge within,
> Runs maddinge up and downe ye cite wide (*Life* I.94.783-785).

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[14] Richard Burton also mentions Napier's ideas in his 1621 *The Anatomy of Melancholy.*

This brutal haunting affects Magdalene's brain, and she is said to live out "fictions of infernal paynes" (*Life* I.99.826). Anywhere she goes, or is thrown into to be precise, she is taken for a madwoman.

This theatre of possession is Robinson's answer to the medieval performances of contrition and penance. It also brings to mind all the mad (Renaissance) heroines suffering from persecutory delusions, psychotically raving on stages with their hair disheveled. Contrary to them, however, Magdalene is silenced by the possession. Her speech is literally reduced to shrieks and wallowing. The suffering is so great that the speaking person voices his compassion and openly pities Magdalene. In Robinson's poem this is the moment when he turns to overt Protestant moral didacticism. The poetic narrator says:

> Unhappy Magdalene! Unhappy I!
> Unhappy all under ye azure skie,
> Had not heav'n pity'd earth, and life been pleas'd to die (*Life* I.103-107)
> (...) Witnesse distressed Maries sad estate,
> Who erst with worldely happinnesse was blest (*Life* I.860-888).

It is worth noticing that not once is it mentioned that Mary Magdalene regrets her former life. It is only the physical pain that occupies her thoughts, and she wishes for it to stop. Her body and mind are abused, not her conscience. Magdalene is trapped within her flesh, not being able to move or think on her own. Eventually, the demons throw her to the feet of Christ who happens to be passing by. There occurs a verbal confrontation with the spirits about the function of the harbingers of heaven's ire, but throughout this short polemic Mary is numb and silent, becoming only a vessel for the powerful demonic/satanic maleficence. Finally, Christ carries out peculiar exorcisms, telling the demons they should find themselves some other body to occupy. This way Mary Magdalene retrieves her voice and is returned to her Syneide.

This allegorized Conscience tells Magdalene to seek the Palace of Wisdom, in which Lady Repentance lives. Thus, the poem returns to the morality play convention, and the sinner is sent on a proper, dangerous penitential pilgrimage. The Tower of Wisdom stands on a rocky hill; its walls are covered with thorns and thistles, and the labyrinths that lead to it hide all kinds of beasts. The two motifs of pilgrimage and the tower bring to mind earlier morality plays, but this is also a reference to Mary Magdalene herself. Her name translates as 'tower' (Jansen 2001: 157) so the pilgrimage in search of the dwelling of Repentance is a process of

a much deeper self-examination. This is why the question of Mary Magdalene's purity needs to be solved here. As a reformed sexual sinner, or indeed a prostitute, her virginity may only be spiritual, not physical. However, it is suggested in the poem that Christ values the "honorary virginity" (Coletti 2004: 177) much more.[15] In Robinson's poem, Wisdom, the female sentry of Lady Repentance, claims that it is only Magdalene's humility and her unremitting contrition that matter for her absolution. After convincing Repentance of her true intentions and contrition, Magdalene is allowed to wash her eyes with water which is flowing inside the tower, and this ritual begins her 'proper' repentance. With "teares, as thicke as showers" (*Life* II.150.1234), Mary Magdalene declares herself the chief of sinners. Her lamentations are increased by Conscience's lectures on vanity, inconstancy of pleasure and youth. After that the new-born penitent and Repentance set off on the third pilgrimage, which helps Magdalene understand that she is "dead in sin" (*Life* II.170.1391). This is also the point when she finally takes the "penitential" initiative.

Even though Christ already purged her of her sins, Magdalene is very much determined to make a sovereign decision about the need for further exculpation. This is a significant choice. When the first encounter with Christ took place, it was His decision to exorcize Magdalene. Now, she is in charge of her fate; finally, she actively seeks her absolution. What causes her to doubt her resolutions is not the fact that her soul is too polluted but that she is a woman. Standing at the door of Simon's house, where Christ was to dine, Magdalene laments: "Women defiled with a fluxe of blood, Maye not amonge ye hallowed apppeare: I am unclean, and leprous ev'ry where" (*Life* II.174.1424-1427). Eventually, she does barge into the house, and performs the ritual ablution of Christ's feet, drying them with her hair. While describing this symbolic act Robinson digresses, touching upon the subject that interests most of the XXI-century writers – the physicality and eroticizing of the love between Magdalene and Christ. Critics of both medieval and post-medieval tradition of Magdalene literature offer various explanations for Christ's special attention paid to Magdalene, ranging from courtly tradition on which the relationship is modeled in written (non-Scriptural) accounts, to a mystical union between the Godhead and the saint.[16] Robinson does not offer his own interpreta-

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[15] Female mystics, like Margery Kempe, used this argument whenever their purity was questioned or undervalued.

[16] For example in Jansen (2001) or Coletti (2004).

tion but he seems to reduce the ambiguous biblical or Gnostic fragments to a Protestant minimum.[17] Still, in his poem Magdalene is said to be lovesick, and has a "desire to touch her louer in each part, And closely steale his body, yt hath stole her heart" (*Life* II.180.1475-1478).

Jesus accepts and admires Magdalene's persistence, and confirms his blessings for the second time. She then becomes his pupil and a faithful servant, though not an apostle. After the crucifixion, when Christ returns from the grave, he summons her as his servant, choosing her to be "the messenger of heau'[n]ly newes" (*Life* II.198.1620). The announcing of Resurrection finishes the poem, and the narrator congratulates Mary Magdalene on outrunning the other legitimate Apostles, Peter and John. Unfortunately, by dismissing the subsequent legendary missionary episodes, the poem contributes little to the democratization of female spiritual authority or women's apostolic capabilities.

This poetic biography of Mary Magdalene omits many significant details. Nothing is said about Mary Magdalene's familial background, her legendary role as the female apostle or her final thirty contemplative years in a desert cave. The title of the poem suggests that the saint's death will also be mentioned but her legendary ascension to heaven is disregarded. Protestant ideology must have effected such a selection of fragments from the hagiography but there is little of the severe overt didacticism one could expect. The discourse of doctrine is also compromised herein, and Robinson seems to be opting for aesthetic effects instead of preaching. His authorial additions to the medieval biography of the saint should be appreciated. Firstly, the classical colouring adds a new quality to the old topos of a repentant sinner. Secondly, Mary Magdalene's progressive yet time-consuming acceptance of the need for repentance is also a novelty. And, thirdly, the dramatic possession by demonic beings transforms the medieval, Scriptural exemplum of a penitent sinner into a truly Renaissance performance, making it a poetic rendition of the theatre of possession.

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[17] Quite indicative seems to be the omission of the infamous *noli me tangere* (Jansen 2001: 54) / „towche me natt, Mary!" (*Mary* II.25.1074) scene when, after his resurrection, Jesus tells Mary not to touch him. Some critics like to seek for intimate undertones in this scene.

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Tolkien's influence on contemporary reading of *Beowulf*

Since 1815, when the first translation of *Beowulf* was published, the Anglo-Saxon heroic poem has been widely discussed and analysed by many scholars. Curiously enough, a vast number of literary works was not only inspired by *Beowulf* but also reshaped the poem by their own way of perceiving it. The concern of this essay is to focus on Tolkien's interpretation of *Beowulf* and to examine it in detail. The reason behind this choice is that Tolkien's opinion on the Old English text seems to be the most influential one. More precisely, the aim of this essay is to find out whether Tolkien's interpretation is still valid and to what extent it has influenced contemporary interpretations[1], and adaptations of this Anglo-Saxon literary work, such as Robert Zemeckis' film.

Tolkien's most important essay on *Beowulf*: "The Monsters and the Critics"[2] was delivered in 1936 as a lecture during which Tolkien argued with the scholars who treated *Beowulf* solely as a source of Anglo-Saxon heritage in terms of language, culture and history. Many of those scholars emphasized that the weakness of *Beowulf* runs to the surface in the fantastic

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[1] Most generally: all interpretations which analyse *Beowulf* as a piece of literature.

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The monsters and the Critics" in: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The monsters and the critics and other essays*. New York; London: Harper Collins, 1990. The numbers of pages given in brackets refer to this publication.

elements of the poem and in some inaccuracies regarding history. According to those critics the poet pays too much attention to the less significant events (that are fights with the monsters: Grendel, his mother and the dragon) and places them in the spotlight of the poem whereas the most crucial events, that is, historical events are left behind and become the background.

Tolkien's main idea introduced in the essay is that the critics should analyse the poem primarily as a work of art and that the poem should be interpreted essentially as poetry. Such a point of view enables the author to reverse the judgment about *Beowulf* since from this perspective the theme and structure that was chosen by the anonymous author makes the text much more valuable than an unpretentious, historical account that was expected by many scholars. Tolkien's manifesto may be undoubtedly considered a breakthrough in the reading of the poem. Nevertheless, there are many other, equally important points in his essay that still deserve attention. The task undertaken in my study is to analyse four of them: the coexistence of paganism and Christianity, the role of the monsters, the way in which history is represented, and the problem with defining the theme of *Beowulf*. Furthermore, it is already important to notice that Tolkien's comments may be referred not only to the Anglo-Saxon poem but also to Tolkien's own later works, especially to *The Lord of the Rings*.[3] Tolkien's ideas concerning *Beowulf* to some extent impose a comparison between his interpretation of the poem and his novel. Therefore, the underlying assumption behind the present analysis is that the main issues that Tolkien considers most important in *Beowulf* constitute the core of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The first issue worth mentioning is the coexistence of pagan legends and Christianity, which is one of the most characteristic features of *Beowulf*. Firstly, Tolkien points out that there is a similarity between the Northern and the English pre-Christian mythology. In both of them a common theme is to be found, that is "hostility of the gods and heroes on the one hand and the monsters on the other" (p. 21). According to Tolkien, the uniqueness of those myths lies in stressing the importance of monsters "It is the strength of the northern mythological imagination that it faced this

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[3] The Anglo-Saxon literature, especially *Beowulf*, are often considered to be the main sources of Tolkien's literary output. One example of this approach is Clive Tolley's essay: 'English influence on *The Lord of the Rings*' published in: *Beowulf and Other Stories*, ed. R. North, J. Allard. Pearson Longman, 2007.

problem, put the monsters in the centre, gave them victory but no honour"(p. 25). Secondly, Tolkien considers the fact that on the English ground the imagination concerning monsters is brought into touch with the Scripture. This leads to a situation in which the creatures that connote evil attributes become opponents of God himself. That is why on the one hand the monsters are directly associated with the Bible but on the other hand they cannot be disconnected from the creatures of Northern myths.

This coexistence of pagan legends and Christianity is to be found also in *The Lord of the Rings*. The "monster", that is Sauron and the Great Ring[4], is put in the centre and the very title of the book gives evidence to the fact. There are also references to Scripture in Tolkien's novel. The most visible proofs are some characteristic motifs derived from the Bible, like the resurrection of Gandalf, or Frodo carrying the heavy burden of the Ring who may be compared to Christ carrying the cross. What is important here is that the references to God concern only the enemies of Sauron, therefore the Dark Lord becomes an enemy of God whose attributes are assigned to several characters[5]. However, the dispersion of His attributes is contrasted with accumulation of evil represented by the Ring and therefore the role of the monster is emphasised.

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[4] It is a problematic issue to establish who or what plays the role of the 'main' monster in *The Lord of the Rings*. On the one hand, it is Sauron that the creatures of the Middle-Earth fight with. On the other hand, this is the Ring considered the personification of the greatest evil that must be destroyed. What seems to justify such an interpretation is the very title: *The Lord of the Rings* referring possibly not to Sauron but to the Great Ring since without the Ring Sauron cannot rule the others. Another example of it, is that if anyone defeated Sauron using the Ring he would become another Dark Lord, as it is stated for instance during the 'Council of Elrond' described in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, p.349). Nevertheless, what seems to be the best solution is interpreting Sauron and the Ring as a unit. It is the way of Peter Jackson's interpretation since in his film Gandalf says that the Ring and Sauron 'are one'. One example which seems to justify this approach is what Elrond says: 'We cannot use the Ruling Ring (...) it belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil.' (J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. 348.

[5] At least three: Gandalf, Frodo and Aragorn. The latter because, like Christ, he is the one foretold by legends and who is expected to bring restoration. Moreover in *The Return of the King* he is shown as the one whose hands bring cure to the wounded ones. (J.R R. Tolkien: *The Return of the King*, London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, chapter: 'The Houses of Healing' pp. 1123-1140)

What seems to be Tolkien's most important idea is that monsters are crucial and should be put in the centre. "The monsters" he says "are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem" (p. 19). Tolkien asserts that the unnatural, fantastic thread which is introduced in *Beowulf* by the very appearance of the monsters indicates a symbolical dimension of the poem. From this point of view the inhumanity of Beowulf's foes is fundamental since these opponents connote "malice, greed and destruction" (p. 17). In fact, they represent "the evil aspect of all life" (p. 17) and are depicted for instance as "strange"[6] or as "enemies from hell"[7] Such a way of introduction of those creatures makes them the symbols of a "hostile world (p.17) which is different from the world of men and for this reason unfamiliar to human beings. This is similarly represented in Gunnarsson Sturla's adaptation of *Beowulf*[8], for instance when the witch called Selma says to Beowulf: "be careful with what you do not understand." This representation of monsters suggests that they connote many more meanings than may be revealed in a single interpretation. It is the reason why Tolkien was against calling *Beowulf* a 'folk-tale' (p.15) but he insisted of treating it as a myth.

An analogical situation may be found in *The Lord of the Rings*. It is the monster (the Ring or/and Sauron) that is the core of the whole story and that denotes, among others, the attributes assigned by Tolkien to the dragon in *Beowulf*, that is: "malice, greed and destruction" (p. 17). Its malice is beyond question as the Ring wants to join its master in order to rule Middle-Earth at the cost of its inhabitants. It is tied with the destruction which such a rule entails. The Ring is also strictly connected with the greed it arouses in those who desire it.

Another question raised by Tolkien in "The Monsters and the Critics" refers to the role of history in *Beowulf*. It is an issue of great importance in the face of the fact that up until Tolkien's times the poem was considered purely as a historical document. Tolkien's position on this topic is entirely different from the point of view of other scholars of his day. He

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[6] The epithet 'strange' used in the poem refers mainly to Grendel. The importance of the adjective in the description of Beowulf's opponents delineated A. Orchard in his essay 'Myth and Legend' published in: *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004.

[7] *Beowulf*, trans. by M. Alexander, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p.54.

[8] G. Sturla, Beowulf and Grendel, 2005, Canada/U.K./Iceland.

stresses that the background of the events described in *Beowulf* is rather a historical fiction than history itself. "The illusion of historical truth and perspective" says Tolkien "that has made *Beowulf* such an attractive quarry, is largely a product of art" (p. 7).

And it is Tolkien's own novel that provides the greatest manifestation of what he called an "illusion of historical truth"(p. 7). Tolkien created the whole history of Middle-Earth, which in *The Lord of the Rings* becomes just a background because what is brought to the forefront is fight with the monster. The novel is also a demonstration of the importance of legends. When Gandalf tells Frodo about the Dark Tower of Mordor, he says that this name is to hobbits "like a shadow on the borders of old stories."[9] All the crucial truths, the information about the Ring[10] or the prophecy concerning Aragorn[11], are a part of the legends told by the inhabitants of Middle-Earth. Moreover, the stories about old heroes and ancestors, similar to those in *Beowulf*, show that the story described is just a part of the whole.

Last but not least, there is the issue of the theme of *Beowulf*. Tolkien refers to this topic several times in the course of his essay but his attitude toward it is always the same and he expresses it very clearly. "Defeat is the theme", says Tolkien, "Triumph over the foes of man's precarious fortress is over, and we approach slowly and reluctantly the inevitable victory of death" (p. 30). That is the reason why Tolkien was so reluctant to use the term "epic" and maintained that if any Greek term must be assigned to *Beowulf* it should be "elegy" (p. 31). This issue seems to be strictly connected with the previous one since the account of the dynasties, noble houses and the legends about the heroes from the past are the best illustration of the transitoriness theme in both *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Although in Tolkien's novel the death of the main characters is not described directly, melancholy and sadness do accompany the apparently happy ending. Frodo is so hurt (physically and spiritually) that he has to leave Middle-Earth, which may be compared to death. Also those who stay experience the sad feeling of transitoriness. When Aragorn finally dies, Arwen becomes "cold and grey"[12] as it is described in the appendix. This

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[9] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p.67.

[10] Ibidem, p.66.

[11] Ibidem, p.322.

[12] J.R R. Tolkien: *The Return of the King*, p. 1394.

story also states that "each man and all men, and all their works shall die" (p. 23). According to Tolkien, what is depicted in *Beowulf* is "the great pagan in the threshold of the change of the world" (p. 24). What is described in his novel is also the threshold of a new world: "the Third Age was over" one may read at the end of the story "and the Days of the Ring were passed and an end was come of the story and song of those times."[13]

This necessarily general study of the analogies between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* leads to two important issues. Firstly, that it was Tolkien who initiated the reading of the Anglo-Saxon poem as a work of art. He proved its literariness by analysing its most significant motifs which turned out to be literary rather than historical. Secondly, Tolkien's comments reveal that his own works were to a considerable extent affected by *Beowulf*. It is worth noting that Tolkien's works, especially *The Lord of the Rings*, are well known and very influential, particularly among fantasy writers, many of whom claim Tolkien to be their literary father.[14] In view of this, it may be stated that because of Tolkien *Beowulf* has become one of the most substantial sources of this genre which nowadays enjoys significant popularity; and paradoxically, it is the popularity of the genre, that is the main reason why nowadays *Beowulf* is so eagerly reread. The interrelation between the Anglo-Saxon poem and fantasy as a contemporary literary genre is visible in the very definition of the latter, for example the one from Wikipedia: "The genre is usually associated with the overall look, feel and t h e m e s of the E u r o p e a n   M i d d l e   A g e s, while the actual setting is often a fictional p l a n e or planet where magic and magical beings are commonplace"[15] This description emphasises a fundamental feature of *Beowulf*: the combination of medieval tradition with magic and magical beings. Tolkien himself, in turn, relocated the actual setting of such stories to a fictional world.

Nevertheless, what distinguishes *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings* from many other fantasy novels is its mythological character (p. 15), whose manifestation is, for instance the role of the monsters so emphasized by

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[13] Ibidem, p.1347.

[14] For example the most famous Polish fantasy writer Andrzej Sapkowski in his book devoted to the description of the genre: A. Sapkowski: *Rękopis znaleziony w smoczej jaskini: kompendium wiedzy o literaturze fantasy*; Warsaw: superNOWA, 2001.

[15] Fantasy, Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy.

Tolkien. As he says, we may discover that "there can be an interest for us (...) in ogres and dragons; we then perceive its puzzlement in face of the odd fact that it has derived a great pleasure from a poem that is actually about these unfashionable creatures". Later on Tolkien says "A dragon is no idle fancy. (...) the dragon in legend is a potent creation of men's imagination, richer in significance than his barrow is in gold." It seems that this approach is shared by the present adaptations of *Beowulf* which focus on the somewhat secret place of monsters in this story, and the very fact that each of them visualises the monsters in a different way is already a proof of their symbolism. This is conspicuous especially in Robert Zemeckis' film[16] where the monsters are in fact shapeless since their form is variable. Moreover, *these* monsters seem to have much in common with *The Lord of the Rings*. One evidence of that is a close connection between Grendel's mother and "the Royal Dragon Horn" which brings into mind the connection between the Ring and Sauron. Possessing the horn is inevitably connected with a curse. Moreover, although the demons are claimed to come from "the depth of hell", the evil that they awaken comes from a human being as it was greed and pride of the Zemeckis' Beowulf which was the cause of his disaster. Similarly in Tolkien's novel, the Ring awakens greed within particular creatures such as Gollum, Boromir and Frodo. The greed entails more significant consequences. The evil somehow replaces the real identity of a given creature. "You are not yourself"[17] says Frodo to Boromir when he is trying to grasp the Ring. And Beowulf in Zemeckis' film, a long time after he had lain with the witch, says: "I died many, many years ago". The very temptation of Beowulf is also interesting since it resembles the temptation of Aragorn visualised in Peter Jackson's movie. Apart from all the delusive promises, there is similarity in the ways of addressing those heroes. Aragorn hears his name *Elessar* which is unused by his friends. Grendel's mother in turn asks: "are you the one they call Beowulf? The Bee-Wulf, the Bear?"

Not only the significance of the monsters but also the importance of stories is stressed in Robert Zemeckis' movie. They seem to signify immortality since Grendel's mother tempts Beowulf by saying: "the man like you could own the greatest tale ever sung, your story would live on when everything now alive is dust". The stories appear also as an equivalent of

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[16] R. Zemeckis dir., *Beowulf*, Paramount Pictures: 2007.

[17] P. Jackson, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, New Zealand, 2001.

truth: "You killed Grendel's mother long time ago" says Wiglaf "they sing of it". It may thus be stated that the very fact of singing about it confirms the authenticity of the event. Tales play a similar role in Tolkien's novel. Sam once tells Frodo: "What a tale we have been in Mr. Frodo, haven't we? I wish I could here it told"[18].

The last similarity to be mentioned concerns the changing of the world discussed by Tolkien. Robert Zemeckis has explicitly shown the moment of passing from paganism to Christendom. "We men are the monsters now", says Beowulf in the movie "the time of heroes is dead, Wiglaf, the Christ God had killed it". Even more symbolical is the utterance of Beowulf's concubine: "Your day when the song of Beowulf is told of how you lifted the darkness of the land. And the day after they celebrate the birth of holy Christ". On the one hand there are the monsters and the heroes who fight for the sake of immortal glory and on the other hand, there is Christianity. The two, however, do not come together and the presence of one entails the absence of the other.

The argument has demonstrated that there are significant similarities between Tolkien's interpretation of *Beowulf*, his own works, and the present adaptations of the Anglo-Saxon poem. All of them appear to be myths since in all of them the struggles between the monsters and the heroes are symbolical. There are also other common themes such as the significance of old stories and the transitoriness of all beings, and above all, the transitoriness of the time of heroes and the glorious struggles that is replaced by another age, by another religion and by another culture. However, nowadays, after so many years, the longing for the old stories of those times has come back.

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The Development of the Embassy Motif in Selected Examples of Arthurian Literature

The popular image of the knight has the potential to at once elucidate and obscure the nature of the medieval political system. The knight is, after all, primarily a man-at-arms, and history tends to treat the man-at-arms as a servant of a lord and the foundation for the lord's power. The knight is no exception to this rule; however, he is often a lord himself, ruling over his own domain and commanding a number of other men-at-arms, some of whom may also be knights. This fact partially accounts for the political decentralisation and splintering of medieval Europe. The political status of a territory would be determined by a complex network of vassal-seigneur relations, a phenomenon probably best illustrated by Capetian France. In such an environment conflicting claims to lands and titles were a common occurrence. Such quarrels tended to escalate into armed conflicts, a fact that often found its way into the literature of the period. A prime example is the narrative of the war waged by the character of king Arthur against the Roman emperor Lucius. Presented as the two most powerful rulers in the medieval world, suzerains over countless other lords and their armies, the war between the two men is effectively a war between all peoples, a veritable world war. The account of this fictional conflict is found in several works, among which are Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, *Roman de Brut* by the 12th century poet Wace, Layamon's *Brut* from the early 13th century, and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* written by an unknown poet towards the end of the 14th century. The latter text explores

the literary potential of that account to the fullest, not least because it focuses almost exclusively on that very war and on the one Arthur waged against his treacherous kinsman Mordred.

Critics such as William Matthews and Jean Ritzke-Rutherford see the duality of Arhtur's triumphant war against Lucius and the disastrous one against Mordred as an example of the symbolism of the Wheel of Fortune (Matthews 1960, Ritzke-Rutherford 1981). As the basic narrative is passed down from Geoffrey of Monmouth to subsequent authors, this general duality becomes mirrored in and supported by other dualities, such as Arthur's two prophetic dreams foretelling good and ill fortune or the duel between Gawain and Priamus, introduced by the *AMA* poet as if to counterbalance both the earlier and better-known duel between Arthur and the giant of Mont St Michel, as well as the abundant scenes of mass warfare, all of which constitutes the macrostructure of the poem (Ritzke-Rutherford 1981). Another instance of duality that gives shape to the narrative of the war is the basic opposition between the two rulers, Arthur and Lucius. It seems obvious that this opposition is necessary for Fortune to do her work; the moment one of the monarchs ascends the top of her Wheel, the other will plummet to its bottom. However, following the requirements set by the medieval theme of battle, combat proper has to be preceded by a challenge or message informing of the need to take up arms (Ritzke-Rutherford 1981:85). The challenge, delivered in the form of an embassy from the Roman emperor, is later reciprocated by Arthur, also by means of an embassy. It is this duality of two embassies that serves as the point of departure for this paper. Whereas structurally the embassy motif is part of the larger and more significant theme of battle, and is virtually absent from the narrative of Arthur's war against Mordred, it serves the medieval authors as a useful tool for revealing the inner workings of a royal court, as well as for highlighting the similarities between the arch-rivals Arthur and Lucius. The similarities seem to point towards the fate shared by the two rulers; even though Arthur defeats Lucius and gains Fortune's favour, his end is as inevitable as Lucius' was. Moreover, a reading of the embassy scenes makes it possible to trace probable threads of inspiration handed down from author to author, inspiration which tends to result in the creation of vivid ironies. The accounts I will focus on here differ in the quality and quantity of details with which they describe the embassies exchanged between the two monarchs. The general trend is to lengthen and complicate the scenes of embassy, and the *AMA*, not least due to its relatively limited focus, seems to be the fullest realisation of this tendency.

The *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Layamon's *Brut* and the *AMA* seem to agree on the following course of events: Lucius, the Roman ruler, sends his envoys to Arthur, demanding that the king recognises him as his overlord. Arthur receives the envoys, listens to the message, summons a council of his most trusted lords and sends the messengers back with a claim mirroring Lucius' demands – it is the emperor that must acknowledge the king as his overlord. Lucius receives Arthur's response and prepares for war. When both monarchs are well on their way to meet each other in battle, Arthur sends his own envoys to Lucius to persuade him to accept vassalage and return to Rome. Not surprisingly, the Roman refuses the offer. The embassy ends in bloodshed, as Lucius' relative insults the envoys and is subsequently killed by one of them.

The first section of the above summary is also the essence of the Roman embassy to Arthur in the *Historia*. The pattern is fairly simple, as it seems to constitute a basic communicative situation in the Jakobsonian understanding of the phenomenon. The two rulers exchange messages, the content of which is not distorted in any way through any outside influence. The requirement for envoys seems to be a purely formal one. It is as if they did not even exist as individual persons, as they do not in any way stray from their assigned role as a mouthpiece for their lord.

However, it seems significant to point out that the envoys are venerable men bearing olive branches – a traditional symbol of peace – and that the message itself is in the form of a letter, a fairly solid proof of its genuineness. While the olive branches are a traditional gesture, they could also be a symbolic means of ensuring diplomatic immunity – protection against possible aggression. The letter, read aloud by the ambassadors, is Lucius' own word, a substitute of his personal presence at Arthur's court, and, indirectly, a means of drawing attention away from those that read it. Consequently, this embassy can be referred to as a model embassy, perfectly fulfilling its intended function of a reliable means of communication between two men separated by a great physical distance.

The contents of the letter are a highly provocative ultimatum on the part of Lucius. The emperor expresses his contemptuous wonder at Arthur's audacity to withhold the payment of tribute he owes to the Romans on the grounds of ruling Britain, an erstwhile province of the Roman empire. He is also outraged by the king's annexation of lands belonging to Roman vassals. He demands, under the threat of war, that Arthur appears before the senate, makes amends for the damage he has caused and accepts whatever sentence is passed on him.

Upon hearing the message, Arthur holds a council, and asks the Roman ambassadors to deliver his answer. Maintaining that Rome was once a part of the realm held by his ancestors, he makes a claim mirroring Lucius'; it is the Roman ruler and senate that owe tribute to Arthur, not the other way around. The Briton king is ready to retrieve by force what he considers his rightful property. This is what the ambassadors tell Lucius, whereupon he makes preparations for war.

Somewhat later, when the opposing armies are on their way to meet in battle, Arthur takes the opportunity to send his own ambassadors to Lucius. Even though the Briton king's army is gravely outnumbered, he calmly makes the necessary preparations and the message he sends is simple and uncompromising: either the Romans retreat from Gaul, or they will have to prove themselves on the battlefield. Arthur entrusts three messengers with the delivery of the ultimatum to the Roman emperor. Yet before the three can leave, they are persuaded by some young courtiers to provoke a quarrel with Lucius' men. They find the opportunity to do so when they are insulted by the emperor's nephew, who states that Britons are better at boasting and threatening than at fighting. The reckless youth pays for the insult dearly, as one of the messengers beheads him.

The Briton embassy differs from the Roman one in two important details. Obviously, it comes to an abrupt end as the envoys turn into aggressors and have to flee. But the cause of this turn of events seems more important – Walgan, the killer of Lucius' cousin, seems to have acted not as much on Roman provocation but on the advice of Arthur's knights, whose personal fame and fortune depends on the certainty of a battle. The Briton embassy is hardly the simple, seamless, and almost direct act of communication between Arthur and Lucius its Roman counterpart was. The ambassadors are neither unarmed old men, nor, more importantly, mere mouthpieces or puppets for their lord. They act of their own accord and in their own interests. The implication seems to be that Arthur's royal authority has little actual substance. Even at the height of his power, the king is incapable of exercising true control over his knights, who do not hesitate to sabotage, out of self-interest, the act of communication between two of the most powerful men in the world. However, this is not to imply that the Roman emperor's authority is devoid of such flaws. While the inner workings of his court are not revealed to the reader, it seems sensible to assume that his cousin's ill-fated provocation was the fruit of a plot mirroring that of their Briton brethren. It is questionable whether proper behaviour on the part of nobles from both realms could have prevented

bloodshed, yet ultimately it seems that they share with their lords the responsibility for the ensuing war.

The latter example of the embassy motif appears to set the tone for its handling in subsequent texts exploring the war between Arthur and Lucius. This does not come as a surprise, since Geoffrey's Briton embassy is the more dramatic of the two, and therefore holds a greater literary potential. This potential seems to have been noticed by Wace and realised in his *Roman de Brut*. As Margaret Houck noted, the 12th century Anglo-Norman poet's style manifests itself, among others, in "frequent additions of realistic circumstances not mentioned by Geoffrey" (Houck 1941:167, cf Matthews 1960: 3) The most significant change introduced by Wace in his account of the Roman embassy seems to be the violent reaction of Arthur's knights to Lucius' message and their threats of physical violence directed at the envoys (who, as in the *Historia*, are men of advanced age bearing olive branches). This seems to echo Arthur's lack of true authority, hinted at in Geoffrey's version of the Briton embassy. However, Arthur saves his personal prestige by commanding his knights to restrain themselves and explaining that the envoys are only mouthpieces for their lords, which, again seems to hearken back to the model embassy of the *Historia*.

The anger of the knights is easily explained. In Wace's hands, Lucius' ultimatum sounds even more provocative and insulting than in Geoffrey's. The emperor marvels at Arthur's audacity in conquering France and refusing him tribute. He compares the king's alleged weakness with fragility of dust. He judges the Briton ruler's imperial ambitions as sin, since Arthur refuses to render unto Caesar that which is the Caesar's own (this should obviously be taken quite literarily). He even goes as far as to state that Arthur's aggression against the lands of Rome's vassals is as unnatural and as unlikely to succeed as trying to make a lion flee from a lamb (this is the first, but not the last time the figure of a lion appears in the context of the theme of embassy). Again, the emperor supports his claim to Britain by calling upon its past status as a Roman province. And again he demands that Arthur appears before the senate to make restitution of what he has taken and to respond to any other accusations levelled against him. Should Arthur resist, the emperor vows to personally deliver him bound before the senate.

After holding his council, Arthur asks the Roman ambassadors to inform Lucius of his intentions to come to Rome with his army to seek tribute from the eternal city. The basis for this claim is again the erstwhile

occupation of Rome by Briton lords, ancestors to Arthur. Wace is also the first to provide a connection between the scene of the embassy and the splendour of Arthur's court. It is the Roman envoys who recount to their master the riches of the king's estate and his numerous personal virtues.

Wace's version of Arthur's embassy to Lucius largely follows Geoffrey's blueprint, yet elaborates on certain interesting points. But first it is worth to present an overview of the strategic context of the war, as seen by Wace. The Anglo-Norman poet dwells longer on the fact that Arthur is significantly outnumbered by the Roman emperor. When hearing of Lucius' advantage, the Briton king goes as far as to hastily construct a fortification on a hill; a decision that, ironically enough, puts him in a position very similar to that of a vassal rebelling against his much stronger seigneur, the very person the Romans see him as. Moreover, the sudden halt to Arthur's advance resulting from Lucius' overbearing numerical advantage seems to reflect the logic of one of the Roman emperor's mocking accusations: Arthur's resistance is as absurd as a lion fleeing from a lamb. As a result, the tone of the fortification scene is somewhat comical. This kind of treatment is absent from Geoffrey's account. While the *Historia* mentions Lucius' superiority in numbers, Arthur's reaction is merely to set up camp and secure routes of reinforcement and retreat, therefore balancing the king's valour and strategic sense, as opposed to seeming cowardice, no matter how justified.

All of this serves as a fitting background for Arthur's counter-embassy to Lucius. Taking the cue from Geoffrey, Wace seems to place some emphasis on the Briton knights' responsibility for the ensuing war. As in the *Historia*, they coax the envoys into provoking the Romans to give battle. The poet even makes their request appear more insistent. Another important addition is the mention of the envoys carrying concealed swords to the meeting with the emperor: a stark contrast with the olive branches of the Roman ambassadors. The remaining details of the scene do not differ significantly from its equivalent in Geoffrey. The envoys, led by Gawain this time, do not show any courtesy to Lucius, save for keeping the tone of their message relatively civil: if the emperor does not retreat from France and acknowledge Arthur as his overlord, he will have to meet him on the battlefield. Again, Lucius refuses to comply with Arthur's demand, claiming the right to visit the land he considers his own whenever it pleases him. It is then that his nephew accuses Britons of being capable solely of talk. Gawain kills the reckless lord and flees the Roman camp.

It is interesting to note that through his development of the embassy motif, Wace endows the characters with an awareness of the structure of a proper embassy. Arthur reminds his knights of the ambassadors' function as mouthpieces for their lord. Gawain tells Lucius that he can only speak the words that his master put in his mouth. In view of Gawain's agreement to provoke the Romans, the sincerity of the latter statement is, obviously, somewhat suspect. And even though Wace's rendering of the knight's speech to the emperor is civil and void of overt provocation, the explicit mention of the proper function of an ambassador, missing from Geoffrey, is enough to put its effectiveness in question. Geoffrey's Roman envoys came, delivered their message, accepted Arthur's answer and left. They were indeed little more than mouthpieces. At this point the quarrel was mainly between Arthur and Lucius, their vassals were out of the author's primary focus. Only later, through their acts of provocation, did they materialise as active characters and seal the inevitability of the war, changing its image from a quarrel between two men into a conflict between two factions encompassing the population of the entire world. By reminding the reader of the model embassy (found in Geoffrey), Wace elaborates on how it was deviated from, highlighting the share of responsibility for the war that the nobles hold.

On Layamon's expansion of Wace's poem, J. S. P. Tatlock states that "He (Layamon – G. B.) almost never inserts wholly new episodes or incidents, except amplifications or explanations of what he has found in Wace." (1950:489, cf Matthews 1960:4) The Roman embassy motif seems to largely follow this claim. Interestingly enough, however, Layamon appears to have toned down the pride and provocative arrogance of Lucius' ultimatum; the emperor still expresses wonder at Arthur's actions and demands overdue tribute on the basis of Rome's former ownership of Britain. He still summons Arthur to appear before him in Rome, as a seigneur summons his vassal, and threatens with war should the king refuse to comply with his demands. Yet there is no more talk here of the sinfulness and unnaturalness of Arthur's actions. On the whole, Layamon's version of Lucius' message seems less provocative and scathing than Wace's. However, other changes introduced by the later poet seem to compensate for this reduction. Firstly, he replaces Rome's elder statesmen ambassadors with knights. In view of the fact of the impending, unavoidable war the change appears to be little more than a cosmetic one; still, it remains a telling and direct one. The forceful threat of the emperor's message acquires a reflection in its bearers. A further alteration is the spoken and mnemonic form of the

Roman ultimatum, which is more conducive to deformation than the original, written one. Moreover, the letter, the word of the emperor and a symbol of his presence, can also potentially serve its reader as a shield against the wrath of its addressee. Without it, the distinction between the lord and his human mouthpiece becomes tenuous. This accounts for the violent reaction of Arthur's knights, who go as far as to tear the messengers by the hair and push them to the ground, only to be stopped by their king[1]. As in Wace, Arthur states that a messenger must not be harmed for the words of his lord, as if quoting the equivalent scene from Geoffrey. This leniency towards the ambassadors is not echoed in Arthur's reply to Lucius, however. Without even attempting to justify his claim to Rome by quoting its erstwhile possession by his ancestors, Arthur bluntly states that instead of paying tribute to the emperor, he will bind him and hang him, destroy his lands and kill his knights. This he writes in the letter that he gives to the Roman ambassadors; he also presents them with rich clothes, gold and silver in abundance. Back in Rome, the ambassadors repeat his answer to the emperor, and describe Arthur's great wealth and power.

The backbone of Wace's handling of the embassy motif is clearly visible here. The outrage of Arthur's knights, the king's intervention and the report to the Roman emperor – three significant additions introduced by Wace to the blueprint of the *Historia* – can also be found in Layamon. However, the later poet takes these additions further: the reaction of the Briton knights to the message is more visibly more vehement; Arthur's intervention to protect the ambassadors more decisive, and, finally, the report of Arthur's wealth and power to Lucius is made more credible by the gifts they received. Moreover, Layamon introduces his own alterations, namely Arthur's aggressive reply to Lucius, the changing of the Roman ambassadors from olive branch-bearing venerable men into knights and the spoken form of the emperor's ultimatum.

It is the latter two elements have formed the basis of the Briton embassy since its initial appearance in the *Historia*. Layamon's version of the embassy proceeds along familiar lines. Before leaving, the envoys are coaxed into provoking the Romans. Led by Gawain, they arrive before the

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[1] It is worth noting here that Layamon compares Arthur's decisiveness in defending the ambassadors to that of a lion. The figure of a lion features prominently in the embassy motif variations in Wace, Layamon and the AMA, being the source of multiple ironies.

emperor and deliver their lord's message to him, but fail to persuade him to abandon his plans of confrontation. They are then insulted by the emperor's cousin, whom they kill, and escape from the Roman camp.

In his recounting of the scene Layamon seems to place additional stress on the attempts of the envoys to provoke violence. This is a development of a tendency already visible in Wace – no greetings are offered to the emperor in *Roman de Brut*, and neither are they here. Interestingly, Layamon's Lucius seems more reluctant to start the war than Wace's. The emperor does not answer the envoys but keeps his silence, which forces Gawain to resort to a more direct provocation. The knight wilfully abandons his role of his lord's mouthpiece, by speaking in the first person plural, reminding the emperor of the formal insult he expressed by withholding greetings, presenting Arthur's claim to France and, finally, by stating explicitly that the emperor can only recover that land through battle. Though angered, Lucius presents an offer of peace, on the condition that Arthur withdraws from France and recognises Lucius as his overlord. The emperor even goes as far as to state that Arthur's rule over Britain is unlawful, due to the island's past as a province of the Roman empire. Nevertheless, he is ready to allow Arthur to retain his title and continue ruling the island. This may at first glance seem a noble gesture, yet it is an inherently provocative one, since it confirms Arthur's status as Lucius' servant – it is, in essence, the granting of land by a feudal lord to his vassal. Gawain's reaction is to remind the emperor of the Briton conquest of Rome, and thereby to make a claim on behalf of Arthur that mirrors Lucius': it is the Briton king who is the rightful overlord of Rome, and it is him that Lucius should pay tribute to. At that moment the inevitable occurs: a cousin of the emperor accuses Britons of being strong only in talk, and he is killed by an enraged Gawain, who then turns to flight.

The changing of venerable men into knights and the spoken form of the ultimatum – these two major alterations introduced by Layamon into the depiction of the Roman embassy seem less striking when confronted with the Briton embassy. Even in the *Historia*, these two elements made the Briton embassy the more dramatic of the two, and therefore the more attractive from the literary point of view. Hence it does not seem surprising that they also found their way into the Roman embassy, expanding its potential for creating additional meanings and introducing more character dynamism. A more subtle alteration is the relative softening of Lucius' ultimatum, and the increased aggressiveness of Arthur's reply. Lucius' reluctance to begin the actual warfare also contrasts with the

persistent provocations on the part of Arthur's messengers. All of these points seem to have been picked up by the *AMA* poet, in whose hands the Roman-Briton and Briton-Roman embassy scenes attained their fullest realisation.

Whereas it is acceptable to treat the *Historia Regum Brittaniae* as the primary source for the *Roman de Brut*, and to see the basis for Layamon's *Brut* in Wace's poem, the question about the chief foundation for the *AMA* is more difficult to answer. Maureen Fries notes that among the works that the *AMA* poet knew are the *Brut* and the 13th c. French *Mort Artu* (1981:37). The latter work is of some interest here, as it seems to have supplied the poet with certain ideas concerning the treatment of the embassy motif. The Roman embassy in the *Mort Artu* is a curiously altered throwback to Wace and Geoffrey, with the Roman ambassadors presented again as venerable men with olive branches. Even though the ultimatum they quote to Arthur is equally, if not more, insulting as the one crafted by Wace, they are neither assaulted nor threatened by the king's knights. It is only the king himself that exhibits any sort of emotional reaction to the errand, and this reaction seems to be equally anger and shame, the latter due to the presence of his nobles. He remains courteous, however, and invites the messengers to dine with him, which they scorn as depraved and unnatural. After hearing Arthur's defiant response to their master's demands, they assure the king of the might of Lucius' army and leave. The arrogance and haughtiness of the venerable men is echoed by the behaviour of Gawain and Bedivere, who act as Arthur's messengers to the emperor. Gawain presents his lord's message in a most insulting manner, which provokes one of the Roman legates to utter the well-known accusation that Britons are only good at boasting. In response, Bedivere kills the lord. Judging by all the other works discussed in this paper, the Briton messengers should flee at that point. This is not the case here; before they even try to escape, Gawain kills an additional eight knights, the emperor's nephew among them.

The Roman embassy in the *Mort Artu* focuses on the interaction between the Roman messengers and king Arthur to the almost total exclusion of his lords. The Briton embassy is centred around the figure of Gawain, who is responsible for delivering Arthur's ultimatum and who performs a veritable slaughter of Roman knights. This focus is maintained in the *AMA*. The anonymous poet adopts Layamon's messenger knights, and has the senator who leads them deliver a spoken ultimatum reminiscent of the one found in Wace. The speech portrays Arthur as a beast

which cannot run or hide from its hunter, the emperor Lucius. The king's wrathful reaction and the ensuing exchange with the messengers is a masterpiece of multiple ironies. Terrified by the sight of the enraged Arthur, one of the Roman knights begs to be forgiven the insult, since he and his comrades are nothing but mouthpieces for their lord and should not suffer for his words. The knight is basically adopting the same line of defence that Wace's and Layamon's Arthur used to protect the messengers from the anger of his own nobles. Hearkening back to the initial, model embassy found in Geoffrey, the Roman is trying to as if vanish from the king's sight by hiding behind the name and words of Lucius, his lord. In an ironic twist, Arthur denounces the knight as a coward for trying to do so, thus challenging the messengers' immunity, the immunity which he personally protected in the poems by Wace and Layamon. In terror at sight of Arthur's anger, the Roman senator proceeds to compare the king to a lion, which gives rise to additional ironies. First of all, the senator's words put his earlier comparison of Arthur to a beast and Lucius to its hunter in a new light; a lion hunter may become a lion's prey. Given the emperor's inevitable death at the hands of Arthur, the senator's words sound strangely prophetic. And secondly, the lion is the beast Layamon compared Arthur to when he came to the aid of the ambassadors in *Brut*; in the *AMA* Arthur the lion is the beast that the ambassadors need protection from. It is also worth noting that just as in the *Mort Artu* the king's nobles are absent from the scene.

Soon, however, Arthur seemingly regains his typical courtesy, and has the ambassadors looked after and prepared for a feast. Still, the feast itself and Arthur's false modesty are only meant to humiliate the Romans; the luxury of foods on display is a testament to the king's wealth (or extravagance), and the numerous lands these foods hail from point to the range of his political and commercial influence. Bearing in mind the Arthur – lion simile, one could also suggest that the Romans are not so much guests at his meal, as part of the meal themselves. After all, considering Arthur's imperial ambitions, Rome would eventually become one more land that supplies food to his table.

Arthur's ironic play with the immunity of the messengers does not end here. Having formally declared war on their master, the king issues them with precise instructions on leaving his lands. They are to keep to one road only and leave within eighteen days, otherwise they will be drawn, beheaded and left for dogs to gnaw on, like criminals. The instructions resemble those issued as part of a banishment sentence in 14th c. England

(compare Coulton 1976:382-383). Upon returning to Lucius, his ambassadors inform him of just how powerful a ruler Arthur really is.

The differences between the treatment of the Roman embassy in the *AMA* and in the preceding texts are quite striking. The violent response to Lucius' ultimatum is transferred from Arthur's knights to Arthur himself; the ambassadors are invited to a somewhat humiliating feast; and their departure is even more humiliating, as they are told exactly when and how they are to leave. All of these alterations become justified, however, when they are treated as devices for conveying irony, or for anticipating Arthur and Lucius' inevitable falls from Fortune's grace, not least due to their cruelty and greed.

The comparison between the *AMA* poet's and Layamon's Briton embassy also yields significant differences. The *AMA* poet does not include other knights urging the Briton messengers to provoke a battle. Yet this does not influence the end result. Gawain quotes the Briton claim to Rome and insults Lucius repeatedly, calling him a heretic and cuckold, which makes for a particularly vivid irony if one considers Arthur's wish to control papal lands and Queen Guinevere's affair with Mordred. Lucius' angry response is to threaten with the total eradication of Paris. Furthermore, while the *AMA* repeats the scene in which Gawain kills the emperor's relative, the relative in question is the emperor's uncle, rather than his nephew. Maureen Fries is correct to point out that the effect of that change is the greater seriousness of the offence, since it was committed against a senior member of the family (1981:36). In general, the foundation for this handling of the Briton embassy scene should be sought for in the equivalent scene in the *Mort Artu* rather than in Layamon, with the killing of the emperor's uncle introduced as a more subtle way of echoing the seriousness of killing eight knights in the French text.

The motif of embassy, embodied in the duality of the Roman and Briton embassies described in various accounts of the Briton-Roman war, exhibits an increasing degree of sophistication. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, the Roman embassy is a basic act of communication, serving as little more than a catalyst for more important events, and presented with the bare minimum of necessary realism. However, due to the dynamics of the text, the later Briton embassy displays significantly more dramatic potential, thanks to its more meaningful and realistic background exemplified by the behind-the-scenes plotting of Roman and Briton knights, as well as to the increased possibility of endowing certain characters with more functionality. The fullest realisation of this tendency is visible in the *Alliterative Morte*

Arthure. Moreover, the tensions between the elements constituting scenes of embassy found both within the same work as well as within different works, yield certain striking ironies, as is the case with the question of the traditional immunity of ambassadors or the lion/beast figure. Finally, the duality of the embassy motif supports the general duality of the Arthur versus Lucius – and the Arthur versus Mordred wars, which, in turn, imbues those texts with the symbolism of the Wheel of Fortune.

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The Middle Ages as the Source of Horror in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

It would be a truism to state that mankind fears what it does not understand. Most of the horror and the uncanny in the early gothic novels came from the fact that their setting was unfamiliar to the reader, submerged in a world far removed from the classical ideas of ancient Greece and Rome. Yet as time passed, the genre remained popular, but underwent some changes and modifications. The following essay will argue that, while the late-Victorian novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker included many medieval themes and elements found in the first gothic novels, they were modified to fit the Victorian frame of mind.

To use the crutch of an encyclopedic definition, provided by Encyclopedia Britannica, the term *Gothic* was coined by classicizing Italian writers of the Renaissance, who attributed the invention (and what to them was the ugliness) of medieval architecture to the barbarian Gothic tribes that had destroyed the Roman Empire and its classical culture in the 5th century AD. To people who considered the Greek ideas the pinnacle of human achievement, the times between the fall of the Roman Empire and the Enlightenment were indeed the Dark Ages. We must remember that for the contemporaries of Horace Walpole, the author of *The Castle of Otranto* which is considered the first of the gothic novels, the Middle Ages were a time of barbarism, superstition and anarchy (Cleary). The Enlightenment, which revered reason above all, could not be farther from the medieval times. Another important aspect is the criticism of the Catholic church

included in the gothic novels. Those who owe their loyalty to the Holy See are seen as superstitious, idolatrous and cruel. Mathew Lewis' *The Monk* is a perfect example. Not only the protagonist Ambrosio is a twisted monk prone to fall into temptations, but he is tempted by Satan himself, who effortlessly takes on the guise of a nun. The anti-Catholic element was especially important for the English, who turned to the Reformation, seemingly more intellectual and full of reason. To them, the idolatrous Christianity of the Middle Ages seemed almost as paganism. Superstitions, witch hunts and the Inquisition were all part of the evil England has cut itself away from. A reader who took all his knowledge from Greek and Latin texts could only frown at such things in revulsion.

Yet the writers of the first gothic novels wanted to achieve just that. They dismissed the rational, classical themes and filled their novels with elements of the supernatural. Walpole, Lewis or Radcliffe filled their works with terror, madness, eerie ruins and mystery that clouds reason. Their vision of the Middle Ages had nothing to do with history, it was rather used as a reaction against the strict conventions of classical and Augustan sensibility.

Bram Stoker's work conforms to the said rules, but in a quite twisted sense. We must remember that it was written almost a century after the "fashion" for gothic novels started. We have the ruins, damsels in distress and madness, yet the source of horror lies in something more than just fear of unknown centuries past. Coming after almost a century and a half after *The Castle of Otranto*, Stoker's work had to adapt to the contemporary sensibility. For this reason, some modern scholars go even as far as to set *Dracula* apart from the gothic genre.

The problem was that unlike the 18th century, the Victorian Era did not resent the Middle Ages. It is hard to see the image of this age as a long lost time of barbarism when churches and other buildings around you are resembling gothic architecture. The neogothic Houses of the Parliament, designed and rebuilt after the fire in 1834 by Charles Barry and Adolus W.N. Pugin are but one, albeit most famous, instance of the so-called "Battle of the Styles" in which the neoclassical and neogothic vied for architectural supremacy. William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement, with its focus on hand made objects, a guild-like system of production that rejected modern manufactures and the heavy use of medieval imagery, is yet another of the numerous examples, as are the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Therefore, medieval themes were not as repulsive for the Victorians as they were for the people of the Enlightenment.

The tolerance of Stoker's contemporaries for the supernatural was also far greater. Unlike in the 18th century, they happily applied all science to describe any seemingly supernatural phenomena. Thus, fairies became a pre-Aryan race or semi-intelligent insects who made flowers beautiful, while the matter that ghosts were made of became the quite tangible ectoplasm. The study of the esoteric and the occult was not only acceptable, but even fashionable.

In the 19th century Reason changed into Progress. Transylvania was so unlike Victorian England because it did not move on. Medievalism itself was not bad for the Victorians, the Gothic Revival Movement attests to that. But the 19th century took what was "best" from other ages and tried to make a new "Golden Age" out of them. What could frighten Victorian readers is the danger of degeneration, a reverse social evolution, which would force them to embrace the most negative aspects of the past ages. One could even argue that there are in fact two "Medievalisms" in *Dracula*. The first involves the aforementioned backwardness and stagnation embodied by both the Count and his land. They represent the elements of the Middle Ages that the Victorians resented and believed they had risen above them. Even though some 19th century art movements revered the Middle Ages, they were only one part of the bigger picture. And according to this bigger, "mainstream" view the Victorians have outgrown the Middle Ages more than any other epoch that preceded them (Houghton:2). The second would be the idealized version, promoted by a number of the epochs artists, as well as a part of the Church of England.

Most of the novel is built around the opposition of the modern England and the medieval Transylvania. Dracula's homeland is as if frozen in time. That stagnation is its greatest sin. The Middle Ages of Transylvania are nothing bad in themselves, but were backward, lacking both reason and progress.

One of the most obvious elements that sets *Dracula* apart from the 18th century Gothic novels is the fact that it is set in contemporary times. The reader is not safely separated from threat by the many centuries. The said barbaric, anarchic and superstitious time is not at all that distant, and threatens to invade the cradle of progress itself – Victorian England.

To quote Dracula's own opinion on the contrasting countries "We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things" (32). He indeed was right. For a Victorian, the "land beyond the woods" could really be a setting for a gothic novel. Its medieval elements are strangely similar to those

presented in 18th century gothic novels – ruins, graveyards and vaults; all the macabre and gloomy objects of morbid fascination (Botting:146). The land is literally brimming with superstitions and the supernatural. Harker's journey to Castle Dracula is like a carnival joyride, with eerie lights, frightening sounds and ghastly inhabitants assailing him from every side. To use the words of Fred Botting, "the castle is mysterious and forbidding, its secret terrors and splendid isolation in a wild and mountainous region form [a] sublime prison" (146). As Harker himself eloquently notes "Every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians" (10). He travels both through space and time. The farther he is from the rational Victorian England the more he becomes concerned with, and immersed in, the uncanny and irrational. He starts to have queer dreams, people around him react in hysterical ways, as Harker himself calls it.

The inhabitants of Transylvania seem like an almost grotesque vision of a medieval peasant. They are fearful, superstitious and totally irrational. Even Dracula sees that, as he disdainfully comments "(...) your peasant is at heart a coward and a fool" (33). To Harker, who travels among them, they are alien. And the problem does not lie solely in the language barrier. They know some English, while Harker has some mastery of German. The problem lies in the mindset. While the common Transylvanians can be identified as vaguely Catholic, the small cross the Englishman is given points to that, Dracula's servants, the gypsies, are presented almost like a pagan tribe that worships its blood-drinking idol. Harker notes, that they are "without religion, save superstition". For him a reserved, British, and above all rational man, the people of Carpathia are behaving irrationally, to the point of hysteria. In the end, Harker, just like his predecessor Renfield, succumbs to this infectious madness. He is the first character in Stoker's work who does that. But definitely he is not the only one. This irrationality will later on infect other male characters of the novel (Elbarbary:120). Even Abraham van Helsing loses the "stiff upper lip" and instead of being cool and reserved, the model Victorian man, the pinnacle of social evolution, he succumbs to the madness of Transylvania.

The Count himself is not only a monster from fairy tales. Dracula is a foreign prince, *boyar* as he calls himself, quite like the antagonist of Anne Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho, Montoni, who posed as an Italian nobleman. He is not, however, a completely mundane person who only has an air of mystery about him, but a "real" supernatural threat. The Count can be seen as a final aristocrat, an embodiment of feudalism, who

calls himself a "house", and frequently uses the royal we, "like a king speaking" (40). He boasts to Harker that his lineage is far superior to that of the kings of the Enlightenment "(...) that mushroom growths like the Habsburgs and the Romanoffs (...)" (42). The metaphor of the "immortal", old noble houses that feed on peasant blood is evident, even more so when he abducts Mina Harker. His words "And you (...) are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin" are very reminiscent of a rite of formal adoption into a noble family. This lies in stark contrast to the late Victorian bourgeois protagonists, for whom the old feudal order was replaced with the new capitalistic order of the Industrial Revolution. The symbolic notion of blood also started to fade, as medicine became more and more advanced and as aristocratic families began to lose their symbolic influence. While of course vast dynasties still existed in the 19th century, their power was a far cry from the absolutist monarchs of the Middle Ages, more so in the parliamentary Britain. While Dracula stands for lineage and dynasty, the protagonists stand for family, a concept much more important and close to their middle class society. Even Queen Victoria posed herself as the mother to the nation.

Nobility is not the only medieval aspect of the Count. He is also closely connected with disease and pestilence. His breath reeks, its smell makes even the urban-dwelling Harker frown in disgust. London, even in the 19th century, did not smell good, as horses were still widely used in the city. Dracula commands bats, wolves and rats, animals often connected with spreading plagues (Carroll:54). This ability was splendidly portrayed in Herzog's *Nosferatu*. In the movie, the sailors from *Demeter* the ship that carries Dracula to Wismar, which takes the place of London in the plot, die of some strange sickness, and after the ship arrives in the city, literally a flood of rats pours out of it. After Mina is bitten by the Count, she herself as well as the other characters react as if they had contracted a Black Plague. "He have infect you," (380) Van Helsing explains to Mina in his somewhat broken English and she herself describes her state in terms of a disease: "Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh!" (353).

What is even more frightening in Dracula himself is the fact that he, quite literally, invades modernity, again represented by England. Van Helsing very often uses almost a military language, as well religious one, when describing Dracula's presence in on the British Isles. The reason for the Count's invasion is simple – he needs progress. Without it, he would die, as the blood of his peasants can sustain him no longer. He sees his

stagnation and the need to go on, out of his castle to England, the land of progress. His fascination with technology is visible in some Dracula movies, especially in Coppola's version, when he visits a cinema with Mina. Yet he knows that modernity is alien, and potentially dangerous, to him. The house that the Count buys in London is old, dating back to the medieval times. This is much to Dracula's contentment, for he claims that, "to live in a new house would kill me" (35). Probably for the same reason he needs to transport the soil of his land into England.

Still, he remains a monster, a part of the Middle Ages that does not fit the Victorian Golden Age. He is a dangerous old superstition, an atavism, that has no place among Victorians. All in all, Dracula is "man-that-was" (287), a remnant of the social evolution of humankind. He embodies the social order that is unable to develop and, more importantly, which corrupts the modern one.

While the influence of the Count is insidious and harmful, the protagonists had to draw something from it. For the superstition can only be defeated according to its own laws. To accomplish this, the protagonists need to step willingly into the medieval world, into its more positive aspects. The perfect example is, of course, professor van Helsing. He combines in himself the best both worlds have to offer. He is a scientist, a man proficient in medicine, philosophy and criminology. At the same time he is versed in folklore and occult knowledge, the ways of the *nosferatu*. Other characters, like Dr. Seward for example, who disbelieves even that a vampire bat can live "in London in the nineteenth century"(231), are concerned with reason and science alone. Van Helsing, on the other hand, combines the scientific and the supernatural. As he himself claims, he has the faith that allows him to "believe things which we know to be untrue"(232).

The failed attempt to save Lucy Westerna involves rather complex, for that time, blood-transfusion machinery, but while the protagonists make heavy use of other modern inventions like the telegraph, phonograph or photography, as well as the latest advances in psychology and medicine, the un-dead miss Lucy is laid to rest as a vampire should be – through grotesque decapitation and a stake in the heart. To quote Jonathan Harker, "the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own modernity cannot kill"(49).

It is also characteristic that the Count is defeated on his own territory. In this intriguing move, Stoker, consciously or not, summarizes one of the biggest paradoxes of Victorian England, where occult went hand-by-hand

with complex engineering. The attempts to vanquish the Count through science, chiefly by transfusions that were meant to save Lucy Westerna, have failed. It was only through religion, holy wafers and symbols that Dracula is driven out of England. The chase after him into the heart of Transylvania changes the protagonist's ways even more.

It changes them, however, in an acceptable "neogothic" manner, even though while following the Count to his lair the protagonists still sob hysterically more often than a Victorian should. In comparing the group to a band of "old knights of the Cross" (381) and the fact that, apart from Winchester rifles, they wield sword-like machetes, weapons that are the cause of the Count's ultimate downfall. There area allusions to the Arthurian imagery, so loved by the Victorians. Their quest to finally defeat the vampire is both a crusade and a Grail-like quest for redemption, in this case Mina's. Similarly, when Lord Godalming drives a stake through the heart of Lucy, he is compared to the Nordic god Thor. This comparison has nothing to do with paganism, but rather with mythology. After all, Odin was one of the heroes enumerated by Thomas Carlyle in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* as a being worth to be imitated.

Dracula, like many other late Victorian texts and works of art, strips the closing age of its naiveté. It shows clearly that the idealized vision of the Middle Ages was just that, the need to see and hear about questing knights in shining armour, myths, and folk tales devoid of their original, darker side. Transylvania's superstition and the Count's affinity with disease, as well as the "primitive" feudal and dynastical system are the chief reasons why the Middle Ages are seen as evil. Dracula embodies all those elements of the Middle Ages that the Victorians had outgrown. All of those problems were "cured" by the end of the 19th century and they did not fit the idealized vision of the Middle Ages held by many Victorians. Probably aware of that, van Helsing states, after Dracula's final defeat in the note following the novel, "(...)we ask none to believe us!"

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Silent Storytellers: Artefacts and Artefication in Arthurian Lore

Who would Arthur be without Excalibur? "What Arthur?" could be a legitimate reaction to this question. Simply put, a character like Arthur would not exist without the sword Excalibur since it is **the** sword that makes him who he is. Now then, what would Excalibur be without Arthur? This one is a little harder. My opinion is that nothing would change. Why? Because it is the sword that creates Arthur and not Arthur that creates the sword. Of course, the two are inseparable, but, if separation of the two were to come, Excalibur, in my opinion, would still be able to function on its own. So then, why does the term "Arthurian legends" function instead of "Excaliburian legends"? Of course, it is not only Excalibur that could be read in this way. There are a few more artefacts in Arthurian lore worth discussing but since space is the issue here I shall focus on the one closest to the person who is in the centre of the legends.

As can be clearly deduced from the above, the following paper will deal with the importance of artefacts in Arthurian lore, or rather one artefact – Excalibur, and its relation to Arthur, as well as other heroes of the stories. I will start with presenting the very relation between Arthur and Excalibur and move towards strengthening the position of the latter as the real storyteller or initiator of stories to finally make a full circle and arrive at presenting the concept of artefication, or turning into an artefact, on the example of Arthur and thus explaining his core role in the legends. To achieve this I will turn to works of Chrétien de Troyes, Layamon and

Sir Thomas Malory, as well as the essays of Hilda Ellis Davidson, John Darrah and Roger Sherman Loomis.

The connection between Arthur and Excalibur seems not only that of ownership and belonging. Both the King and his sword could be read as possessing the same features and behaving similarly to each other, as if they were two versions of the same entity. Among the similarities, the birth of both of them can be pointed out. Both births could be found in *Brut*, a Middle English poem written about 1190 by the English priest Layamon, or Lawman. There, Arthur's birth is presented as follows:

> Sone swa he com an eorðe; aluen hine iuengen.
> heo bigolen þat child; mid galdere swiðe stronge.
> heo 3euen him mihte; to beon bezst alre cnihten.
> heo 3euen him an-oðer þing; þat he scolde beon riche king.
> heo 3iuen him þat þridde; þat he scolde longe libben.
> heo 3ifen him þat kine-bern; custen swiðe gode.
> þat he wes mete-custi; of alle quike monnen.
> þis þe alue him 3ef; and al swa þat child iþæh.

> The moment he came on earth, fairies received him:
> They enchanted the child with a very strong spell:
> They gave him the power to be the greatest of all soldiers;
> They gave him a second thing: that he would be a noble king;
> They gave him a third thing: that he should live long.
> They gave to him, the royal heir, the most excellent gifts:
> That he was the most generous of all living men.
> These the elves bestowed on him, and so the child throve.[1]

This in turn could be contrasted with the short description of Excalibur (here Caliburn) when Arthur prepares for war, whereupon it is written that: "Caliburn his sword he strapped by his side – / It was made in Avalon and endowed with magic powers."[2] Avalon here could be portrayed as a forge in which both Arthur and Excalibur were born, thus bringing Arthur closer to being an artefact-like figure.

It is not only the similarity of their birth or origin that Layamon uses as a marker of their bond. Arthur's character and behaviour, shown

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[1] Lawman, *Brut*, trans. Rosamund Allen (London: Dent, 1993) Lines 9608-9615. Original text available at http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=LayBruC. sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/lv1/Archive/mideng-parsed&tag=public&part=10&division=div1

[2] Ibid. Lines 10547-10548.

differently in every version of his legend, can also be compared with the sword.

One of the sword's main features is its aggressive and belligerent character. This of course could be said about any sword, since, after all, it is a tool made for fighting, but that is not the real point here. What is important, however, is that Arthur is just like the sword he wields. He is aggressive and easily engages in battle, just as in *Brut* where he "caught up his shield, covering his breast, / And began rampaging like the rime-grey wolf, / When it comes loping from the snow-laden woodlands / Intending to savage such creatures as it fancies."[3] In Layamon's poem he is not a passive ruler either, like the Arthur in the French romances by Chrétien de Troyes: in *Brut*, a big part of the story is concerned with Arthur's international reputation and his conquering of neighbouring lands. Scotland, Ireland, Iceland, Scandinavia, Norway, France all crumble under his power and become his suzerainties.[4]

The aggressive side, however, is not the only important aspect here. The defensive function of the sword is of the same importance. It is just as Hilda Ellis Davidson in her study of Anglo-Saxon swords mentions that swords were "the weapons on which the survival not only of individuals but of families and communities depended"[5]. In the same way Arthur does not only attack but he also keeps his kingdom safe and defends it against attackers such as the Romans when they threaten to attack Britain. In *Brut* Arthur refuses to pay homage to the emperor of Rome. Instead, in order to defend his lands he does not wait for the attackers to come for them but he advances with all his men and destroys the aggressors[6].

If, looking at the above examples, we assume that Arthur and Excalibur possess the same qualities, then another question arises, namely, whether both of them had those qualities from the beginning or whether one was influenced by the other and, if so, who was it and how he (or it) did it. What is worth noting as a side observation here is the fact that it was not only Arthur that had the privilege of wielding Excalibur. Gawain, Arthur's nephew, was able to wield the sword several times in the French romances. An example of that could be seen in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* when

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[3] Ibid. Lines 10040-10043.

[4] Ibid. Lines 11100-12070.

[5] Hilda Ellis Davidson, *The Sword In Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archeology and Literature* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1962), p. v.

[6] *Brut*, Lines 12343-13970.

Gawain needs to defend yet another maiden in distress and the poet says that: "henceforth, whatever might happen, he [that is Gawain] felt he could defend the doorway and entry to the tower, for he had Excalibur strapped to his side, the best sword ever made, which cut iron as if it were wood."[7] It looks here as if the sword has granted Gawain strength, courage and the will to fight. I am not claiming that he lacked any of those but it could be interpreted as if Excalibur has further expanded those virtues and as if passed his qualities onto Gawain. Excalibur, then, could be read as already possessing all the above mentioned qualities and transferring them to whoever wields it thus acting as a container marked by a certain pattern. That paradigm might be called "arteficized Arthur" since it gives the wielder all the features that are characteristic of Arthur the King. What does it make of Arthur then? This question will be tackled further in this paper.

There is one more role Excalibur takes on apart from being the attacker, defender, and container of an artefication pattern. As I mentioned earlier, Arthur and Excalibur are separable, but an interesting phenomenon can be observed in connection with Gawain's story above where the two are separated. The story revolved around Excalibur and the one wielding it at that moment, Gawain and not Arthur. It might be interesting to search for more of such examples in Arthurian legends. Could the sword be interpreted as a kind of spectator then? I would read it differently. A spectator is someone passive that does not engage in the events and just lets things happen. Excalibur is not like that. A more suitable description then would be an initiator since it is because of the sword itself that many events take place and the heroes in the legends behave in certain ways. The fact of pulling the sword forth off the stone could be read as the very trigger initiating the whole Arthurian lore since, after all, it created Arthur, the King of Britain at that time. The simple act of knighting is also a clear example of initiation: every time Arthur chose a knight to be dubbed a new story began.

My main aim up to this point has been to present the importance of Excalibur in Arthurian lore. By contrasting the sword with Arthur I tried to point out its importance and the role it plays in the legends. Now,

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[7] Chrétien de Troyes, "The Story of the Grail (Perceval ou le Conte du Graal)", *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London, New York, Ringwood, Toronto, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 453.

however, I will focus on Arthur and upon his example present the idea of artefication.

After presenting the importance of Excalibur and its seemingly central role in the legends a question could be posed. Why is Arthur the central element of the legends? Why not Excalibur, or any other artefact (the Holy Grail for instance)? At the beginning of this paper I stated that artefacts should occupy the central position in Arthurian lore. Bearing that in mind, if one started perceiving Arthur not as a human being, but as an artefact, then his positioning in the stories would make more sense.

If we were to treat Arthur as an artefact, what kind of artefact should he be? According to what was stated earlier, he should possess the same features as Excalibur did, but then, in *Brut*, it is said that he was endowed with all his powers at birth and then I also presented a possible interpretation that his features could have been passed onto him by Excalibur. This, then, could lead to an assumption that Arthur could be read as a kind of container since he does not acquire the above mentioned qualities through experience or hard work, but he is endowed with them, filled as if, either by Excalibur or by the magical forces resting on the isle of Avalon. If the one who pulls the sword forth of the stone becomes Arthur, the King of Britain, then the said person could be interpreted as so to speak entering a container named "arteficized Arthur" and thus becoming him, with all his features. And if Excalibur holds the pattern (as mentioned earlier), then Arthur (the one in the French romances and understood now as an artefact) would act as a form to be filled with it. The idea of the container may be supported by what is written at the very end of Arthur's story found in Layamon's *Brut* when again one of apparent Merlin's prophecies is recounted:

> Þa wes hit iwurðen; þat Merlin seide whilen.
> þat weore uni-mete care; of Arðures forð-fare.
> Bruttes ileueð ȝete; þat he bon on liue.
> and wunnien in Aualun; mid fairest alre aluen.
> and lokieð euere Bruttes ȝete; whan Arður cumen liðe.
> Nis nauer þe mon iboren; of nauer nane burde icoren.
> þe cunne of þan soðe; of Arðure sugen mare.
> Bute while wes an witeȝe; Mærlin ihate.
> he bodede mid worde; his quiðes weoren soðe.
> þat an Arður sculde ȝete; cum Anglen to fulste.

> And so it had happened, as Merlin said before:
> That the grief would be incalculable at the passing of King Arthur.

The Britons even now believe that he is alive
And living in Avalon with the fairest of the elf-folk,
And the Britons are still always looking for when Arthur comes returning.
The man has not been born of any favoured lady,
Who knows how to say any more about the truth concerning Arthur.
He spoke his predictions, and his sayings were the truth,
Of how **an Arthur** once again would come to aid the English."[8]

The use of an indefinite article in Rosamund Allen's translation could not be a mistake here since it is the same in the original. With this it could be read that, as I mentioned before, it is not the Arthur (with definite article meaning Arthur the King of Britain) but an Arthur (someone that enters the container called "Arthur the King of Britain" and then becomes one leaving his or her old life behind). Therefore I would propose to read the name not as Arthur – a person – but "Arthur", an artefact, a container waiting for someone to choose and make him or her as if "another" Arthur.

When reading through different versions of Arthurian legends, all the time we see him surrounded by other artefacts, be it Excalibur, the Holy Grail or the Round Table they all revolve around Arthur. Keeping in mind that we started reading Arthur himself as an artefact this leads to an interesting phenomenon of an artefact attracting other artefacts or an object that is dependant on other objects. Layamon's *Brut* provides a fitting example to account for this dependency. It is again the fragment when Arthur prepares for war and dresses up in a set composed of the following artefacts:

> þa dude he on his burne; ibroide of stele.
> þe makede on aluisc smið; mid aðelen his crafte.
> he wes ihaten Wygar; þe Wite3e wurhte.
> His sconken he helede; mid hosen of stele.
> Calibeorne his sweor[d]; he sweinde bi his side.
> hit wes iworht in Aualun; mi[d] wi3ele-fulle craften.
> Halm he set on hafde; hæh of stele.
> þer-on wes moni 3im-ston; al mid golde bi-gon.
> he wes V[ð]eres; þas aðelen kinges.
> he wes ihaten Goswhit; ælchen oðere vnilic.
> He heng an his sweore; ænne sceld deore.

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[8] *Brut*, lines 14288-14298, emphasis mine, original text available at http://etext. lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=LayBruC.sgm&images=images/ modeng&data=/lv1/Archive/mideng-parsed&tag=public&part=15&division=div1

his nome wes on Bruttisc; Pridwen ihaten.[...] ·
His spere he nom an honde; þa Ron wes ihaten

[...] mail-coat fashioned from steel mesh
Which an elvish smith had made with his excellent skills:
It was called Wygar, which Wiseman had smithied. [...]
Caliburn his sword he strapped by his side –
It was made in Avalon and endowed with magic powers;
His helmet he set on his head, high and made of steel:
On it was many a gem and it was all bound with gold –
It had once belonged to the noble King Uther –
It was known as Goosewhite, among all others quite unique.
He hung around his neck a shield which was precious:
Its name in British was entitled Pridwen;
[...] In his hand he took his spear which bore the name of Ron.[9]

To this, one could also add a mantle and the dagger Carnwennan.[10] This "dressing up" in artefacts shows Arthur's (an artefact itself) dependency on other relics, with Excalibur being the most important.

Let us now again turn to Chrétien's romances in order to present yet another of Arthur's roles or features as an artefact, the role of a 'perron'

Arthur in the French romances differs significantly from the one in *Brut* or *Le Morte D'Arthur*. He is not active, he does not take part in the quests and challenges, in fact, the romances actually concentrate more on his knights than on him. Nevertheless, he is still in the centre, he is the initiator but he also could be read as a kind of magnet that pulls all the heroes towards him since all the knights in the legends sooner or later hear about Arthur and ride to him in order to serve him, to be knighted by him, to join his ranks and to witness all the miracles and events that happen in his court. Examples of such instances can be found in Chrétien's works. In *Cligés*, we read how both Alexander and some time later his son, Cligés, after hearing stories about Arthur from their fathers, arrive at the King's court and ask for knighting. Since both knights were splendid fighters and of noble lineage, Arthur did not hesitate to welcome them into his ranks and knight them properly.[11] A similar story appears in

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[9] *Brut*, Lines 10543-10557, available at http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=LayBruC.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/lv1/Archive/mideng-parsed&tag=public&part=11&division=div1

[10] I. L. Foster "*Culhwch and Olwen* and *Rhonabwy's Dream*", p.33.

[11] Chrétien de Troyes, "Cligés", *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler

Perceval: when the youth hears of the great King Arthur, he seeks him and asks for knighting, and receives it immediately after Arthur hears about his deeds of honour and courage. He is accepted to the court and treated as one of the best knights[12]. In this respect Arthur might resemble a Perron, which is described by John Darrah in his *Paganism in Arthurian Romance* as follows:

> 'Perron' means a block of stone, often a pillar, not necessarily worked, but visually important and, in the context of Arthurian legends, usually significant in some social context. A perron may be merely a marker at a parting of the ways, often inscribed with a warning and perhaps nothing more than a narrator's device to convey that warning to any knight errant who happens to pass close to an 'adventurous' site. But a perron may also be the most important place in the kingdom, where the people gathered to witness the crowning of their queen and the combats that led to the selection of her consort.[13]

This description perfectly fits Arthur as a silent storytelling artefact since just by existing he empowers the whole machinery of stories and keeps it operating by acting as a signpost and sending more and more adventurers on quests to later gather them again in order to collect the stories they created through his influence.

One last example in the light of which Arthur could be read as an artefact container is found in *Brut* and is in the form of one of Merlin's prophecies:

> þat a king sculde cume; of Voere Pendragune.
> þat gleomen sculden wurchen burd; of þas ki[n]ges breosten.
> and þer-to sitten; scopes swiðe sele.
> and eten heore wullen; ær heo þenne fusden.
> and winscenches ut teon; of þeos kinges tungen.
> and drinken & dreomen; daies & nihtes.
> þis gomen heom sculde i-lasten; to þere weorlde longe.

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(London, New York, Ringwood, Toronto, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 126-128, 180-185.

[12] Chrétien de Troyes, "The Story of the Grail (Perceval ou le Conte du Graal)", *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler (London, New York, Ringwood, Toronto, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 392-397.

[13] Jon Darrah, *Paganism in Arthurian Romance*, (Woodbridge: The Boydel Press, 1994), p. 171.

> Saying that a king would come from Uther Pendragon
> Such that minstrels should make a board for food from the king's own breast
> And at it would be seated really splendid poets,
> Who would eat away their fill before they fared away;
> And they would draw draughts of wine from the king's tongue And be drinking and delighting by day and by night;
> This sport was to endure for them as long as this world lasts[14]

In this example, Arthur could be compared to the Holy Grail rather than to Excalibur but still the main focus is looking at his figure as a container, an object which is filled with something, in this respect with stories and legends (some of them good, but many a failure) that the poets create through feasting on the King.

The aim of this article was to turn the general attention to the artefacts of the Arthurian lore, more specifically, to the place they occupy in the stories. I have chosen as my main example the sword Excalibur since, along with the Holy Grail, it plays (or rather it should be seen as playing), an important role in the legends concerning king Arthur and his court. I started by showing the apparently obvious importance and central role of the sword in the legends and then moved to contrasting it with Arthur as having similar, if not the same features. This lay ground for presenting my idea of artefication, or in other words, turning into an artefact. I showed it on the example of Arthur, whose central position in the legends becomes more reasonable once he starts to be looked at as an artefact. He is an artefact that not only acts as an initiator of everything around itself but also as a container, keeping in itself the pattern of "Arthur, the King of Britain", "the wielder of Excalibur" and "the keeper of stories", as was shown in the last example from *Brut*. Why the preoccupation with artefacts in particular? The fact of their marginalisation is not the only reason they should be placed centrally. Even though most artefacts or relics could be catalogued as imaginary or nonexistent objects they are still treated as real and are nevertheless sought after. Their apparent durability compared to the "normal" heroes of the legends, obvious as it may seem, is also the case here. While knights, kings and warriors disappear and only a memory remains after them, an artefact "lives on". Even if it is said to be "lost forever" or to be "only a legend", it is still something worth questing for

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[14] *Brut*, Lines 11493-11499. Availabe at: http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=LayBruC.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/lv1/Archive/mideng-parsed&tag=public&part=12&division=div1.

and devoting one's life to. Furthermore, it might be said that artefacts are the foundation or base for all, or at least most of the legends. An artefact is a good starting point for any kind of story since by just being there (or not being and needing to be found) and remaining silent it makes others create stories and developing them all around the artefact and all the time as if controlled by it. Thus, it could be said that it is not the heroes of the legends that are surrounded by artefacts but artefacts that are surrounded by the characters. Of course it is just one of the many interpretations, but in my opinion, one worth pointing out since it does not only apply strictly to Arthurian lore but to other mythologies and even our own times as well.

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