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SOME CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE "BRETON LAYS" AND THE TALE OF MAGIC

The term "Breton lays" is far from being clear and unequivocal since medieval writers were none too careful in using it. According to A. B. Taylor: "Before long the term Breton lay was applied so indiscriminately as to become entirely meaningless".[1] Similarly A. Baugh asserts that:

> [...] it has become customary to segregate a small number of such short pieces and give them, with not too much warrant, the distinctive name of Breton lays[2],

though he adds immediately that:

> It is conceivable that their shorter tales were distinguished by a particular musical form, that they showed a predilection for love and the supernatural in subject matter, and that many of them had their setting in Brittany.[3]

A more elaborate definition is to be found in D. Mehl, who writes that:

> Breton lays were a form of prose narrative, told between songs on certain heroes or local traditions, and designed to inform the hearers about the details of the story which could not be gathered from the songs alone, especially as these were probably in the Breton language, while the prose explanation was given in French. Out of these story outlines Marie de France developed a most refined and subtle form of tale in verse. These lays usually tell a concise story in which a knight undergoes a strange adventure and which often ends with a surprising turn of plot.[4]

The above definitions seem to establish two cardinal points which help us to grasp the nature of that somewhat elusive genre, the first point is the Breton lay being firmly rooted in the tradition of the

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[1] A. B. Taylor, *An Introduction to Medieval Romance*, London 1930, p. 52.

[2] *Literary History of England*, A. C. Baugh ed. vol. 1, London 1967, p. 195.

[3] *Loc. cit.*

[4] D. Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, London 1968, p. 40.

folktale, in this case the Celtic folktale, and the second one is their preoccupation with the problem of erotic love. Consequently we have to do in the Breton lays with the characteristic combination of an erotic dimension with a supernatural one. The same combination can readily be found in the folktale itself and particularly in the so called "tales of supernatural husbands and wives", which is a section of the "tale of magic" as defined by A. Aarne and S. Thompson [5].

The degree and the nature of the Breton lays' indebtedness to the folktale is, however, another largely unresolved question, over which scholars seem to differ quite considerably. According to D. Mehl:

> the tales of Marie de France have been very appropriately called "problem fairy tales" and it has been noted that a very important part is played by certain symbolic objects in them. The plot usually includes a discussion of problems of courtly love and is often completely subordinated to the symbolic meaning.[6]

Thus it would seem that in the Breton lays the folktale material has been adapted to the way of thinking characteristic of the courtly love doctrine. A. B. Taylor, on the other hand, seems to suggest that a reverse process has in fact taken place, namely that in the Breton lays the courtly love doctrine has itself undergone a number of far-reaching changes under the influence of the folktale tradition. Thus it would be exactly the vividness of the folktale tradition within the Breton lays that differentiates this genre from other romances or romantic tales: "the simple charm of old folk-tales is preserved in the lays of Marie de France far more closely than in the romances" and

> in spite of changed ideals, Marie's lays still retain their interest, because they so deeply reflect the romantic charm of medieval popular traditions, a charm which, though inherent in the legends on which most medieval romance is based, is rarely reflected in the romances themselves. They present simple direct stories of passion, and eface the baundary between real life and fairyland. There is no ulterior motive such as duty to King or Faith, no seeking for adventures for adventure's sake, but simply an idealization of honour and of love set in a dream world of faerie and romance.[7]

Talking about the quality of love shown in Marie de France's lays A. B. Taylor states that:

> Marie was a skillful narrator who knew the value of suspense in telling tales of idealistic love — not conventional courtly love so prevalent both in life and romance during this period, but passionate love which triumphs over all barriers of duty and social life, love in which the woman makes the sacrifice, and therefore best portrayed by a woman [...] Marie's tales offered a peculiar appeal to women, because romance too often represented the lover as undergoing

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[5] See A. Aarne, S. Thompson, *The Types of the Folk-Tale—A Classification and Bibliography*, Helsinki 1923.

[6] D. Mehl, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[7] A. B. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

all the hardships and making all the sacrifices. Marie's lays reversed the position; she made women the active agents, willing to accept any hardships in the name of love.[8]

As a result we may think of the Breton lays either in terms of their being a symbolical or allegorical exposition of the problems of the courtly love, or we may treat them as an expression of a spontaneous rebellion against the stale conventions of the courtly love. In the former approach the folktale element in the Breton lays is regarded as a mere husk that covers a refined and thoroughly aristocratic way of thinking, while in the latter one the folktale element becomes all-important and determines the nature of the Breton lay as contrasted with conventional courtly love romances.

In order to judge whether any of those approaches is closer to the truth than the other we have first to find out whether and to what extent the tradition of the folktale, and of the tale of magic in particular, is in opposition to the tradition and the basic premises of the courtly love. Contrary to what A. B. Taylor seems to suggest, the two traditions have certainly a good deal in common. In L. A. Hibbard's authoritative book on medieval romance we find the following remarks concerning the appearance of the folktale motif of the supernatural wife or mistress in medieval romances:

> To minds filled with the precepts of the courtly love, the fée's command (not to discover her identity to anybody) was completely in accord wtih the insistence of courtly love doctrines on the necessity for secrecy in love. It become a test of love, its breaking by the hero being a failure in love for which the direst hardships, love sickness running even to madness, were but rightful expiation. ... After adequate suffering the true lover regains his fairy love in accord with the current understanding of *folk-lore and romance* that no true lover should go for ever unrewarded. It was also in harmony with the Cupid and Psych story.[9]

Since the Cupid and Psyche story is a literary version of one of the narrative types included in the "tales of supernatural husbands and wives"[10], we are now faced with the suggestion that the folktale roots of the Breton lays and their hypothetical leaning towards the courtly love culture need no be opposed to each other and may be in harmony with each other. Such a position is different from either that of D. Mehl and that of A. B. Taylor; here it is neither the courtly love ideology that transforms the folktale material, nor the other way round, but it is rather both traditions, that of the folklore and that of the courtly love, that support each other and co-operate to produce the final result. It is signi-

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[9] L. A. Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England — A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances*, New York 1924, p. 209.
[10] See A. Aarne, S. Thompson, *op. cit.*

ficant that L. A. Hibbard's remarks quoted above are voiced in connection with the romance of *Partenope of Blois*, which is based on virtually the same narrative pattern as the English Breton lay of *Sir Launfal* and Marie de France's lays of *Lanval* and *Graelent* [11].

There are, however, certain problems which prevent us from an unqualified acceptance of L. A. Hibbard's attractive proposition. In the tale of magic, namely, there is nothing that could even remotely resemble the cult of femininity and the adoration of woman as a woman, which is so characteristic of courtly love. In order to show it, it is enough to say that the type of the "tales of supernatural husbands and wives" in which we come across the offended and demanding fairy lady and the penitent hero—AT 400 (The man on a quest for his lost wife) appears in the folklore side by side with a complementary type—AT 425 (The search for the lost husband) where the roles of both sexes are completely reversed and where a penitent heroine goes through numerous hardships in order to placate her supernatural, male partner [12]. It is natural to draw the conclusion now that the medieval romance draws, in its own fashion, on both types of the tale of magic. It uses AT 400 (The man on a quest for his lost wife) and related types and adapts them to the standards of the courtly love where the man is the one to make all the sacrifices and the woman's role is largely passive. And it makes use also of AT 425 (The search for the lost husband) and of similar types where the active role belongs to the female heroine. It would be naturally the latter type of the tale of magic that dominates the Breton lay as it is seen by A. B. Taylor, that is as a genre where female characters come to the fore, and where they make the sacrifices which the orthodox courtly love doctrine reserves for male heroes only. Thus the conflict between the Breton lays and the "courtly love romances" would be resolved, at least partly, on the common ground of the tale of magic from which both types of romances seem to stem.

In practice, however, the situation is much more complex. There is in fact nothing like a one to one correspondence between the folktales about supernatural wives and the "courtly love romances" on the one hand, and the tales about supernatural husbands and the Breton lays on the other. For example Marie de France's *Lanval*, as well as its analogues including the English *Sir Launfal*, are quite obviously based on the motifs typical of the tales of supernatural wives, and it would be difficult to claim that for this reason they are unrepresentative members of the Breton lay family, especially as the motif of a supernatural wife or mistress is more or less clearly discernible in most, if not in all,

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[11] See L. A. Hibbard, *op. cit.*
[12] Cf. S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, Berkeley 1977, pp. 355, 356.

romances commonly regarded as Breton lays[13]. And yet A. B. Taylor is undoubtedly right in his emphasizing the active role of the Breton lay heroines—they are indeed a far cry from the model of the passive and inaccessible heroine that typifies the folktales belonging to the pattern of tales of supernatural wives.

Sir Launfal is again a good example on which we can see the way in which this process of "activating" the supernatural heroines takes place. One of the most striking differences between *Sir Launfal* and the tales of fairy wives (AT 400) is the course the action takes after Launfal's breach of a taboo, which in AT 400 normally triggers off the hero's perilous quest for the lost and offended fairy. Instead of that, however, we see Launfal imprisoned by the jealous queen, Guenevere, and helplessly waiting for deliverance at the hands of the finally relenting fairy mistress, Dame Tryamour. This means, as a matter of fact, a reversal of the sexual roles in comparison with the orthodox pattern of AT 400, where it is the youth who, having set out in search of his beloved, delivers her at the last moment from an unwanted marriage[14]. Here it is the lady who has to find and deliver the youth not only from a shameful liaison with the hateful queen, but ultimately also from the perspective of a miserable death[15]. It may be added that the lady, even before her rescue mission, is shown as enterprising and mobile. She accompanies the hero in his visit to native country after his first stay in the fairyland. As the hero's companion she hides her identity and acts as a sort of a guardian angel repeatedly providing the hero with comfort and advice[16]. While the motif of the hero's dependence on the help of the fairy wife is not unprecedented in the folktale tradition, it should be viewed here as an element of the general tendency to put the female partner of the hero to the foreground of the action. Another symptom of this tendency is the stress that is laid on the active role of the fairy lady in the opening of her amorous relationship to the hero. In the folktale tradition it is normally the hero who seduces the fairy lady, e.g. by snatching away her swan coat and thus giving her a human form[17]. Equally significant is the fact in *Sir Launfal* that it is the hero who finally follows his supernatural mistress to her land of origin, and

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[13] Among the Middle English romances I regard as Breton lays the following ones: *Sir Launfal, Sir Degaré, Emaré, Lay Le Freine, Sir Orfeo*, and with certain reservations also *Sir Gowther, Havelock, the Dane* and *King Horn*.

[14] See A. A a r n e, S. T h o m p s o n, *op. cit.*

[15] In *Sir Launfal* we find the Potiphar's Wife motif with the queen accusing the hero of an attempt to seduce her.

[16] There is in fact a similar motif in a variant of the tales about supernatural wives, AT 402 (The mouse as bride).

[17] This is a stock motif in the so called *Swan Maiden* tales, which are a classic form of tales about fairy wives.

not the other way round as is the usual practice in this type of the tales of magic. Consequently, although *Sir Launfal* preserves some basic traits of AT 400 (The man on a quest for his lost wife), it may be said to have been considerably "feminized" in comparison with its presumable folktale prototypes. The same holds true of the Breton lays analogous to *Sir Launfal*, such as *Lanval*, *Graelent* or *Desiré*.

It seems that the Breton lays generally prefer modified patterns of AT 400 and the directly related types to the contrasting type of AT 425 (The search for the lost husband), even though it is in the latter type that the female protagonist is, by definition as it were, the most active character. One of the few Breton lays in which the motif of the supernatural and lost lover is conspicuous enough is Marie de France's *Yonec*. In accordance with the standards of AT 425 the heroine of this romance actually follows her lost supernatural companion to fairyland, which in itself is a very rare occurrence in the Breton lays. However, in *Yonec* there is no taboo for the heroine to break, which makes her expedition to the fairyland a disinterested act of love, and not a means of expiating her faults, as in the tales about supernatural husbands. In Marie's *Tydorel* the heroine actually breaks a prohibition imposed on her by a supernatural lover, which causes the estrangement of the lovers, but she does not take the trouble of restoring the severed relationship, which is finally re-established by her son. The son as a mediator between the separated lovers appears also in the English Breton lay of *Sir Degaré*, although there is no taboo breaking on the part of the heroine.

It seems that what precluded a more frequent utilization of the model AT 425 (The search for the lost husband) in the Breton lays was the fact that the heroine of this type of folktales, even though she may be active and enterprising, is nevertheless put into a considerably lower moral position than her male partner. Hence the tendency to "activate" the heroines of those types of tales of magic where the heroine, though normally rather passive, has, at the same time, a superior moral, if not social, position in relation to her lover or husband. Another example of this phenomenon is the popular English Breton lay, *Emaré*, where the vheroine, showing certain clearly supernatural features, does not deputize for her husband in undertaking the task of the quest, as it is the case in *Sir Launfal* but she helps him considerably in achieving this task. Besides she also turns out to be a successful navigator of a boat, though she is put there against her will, and an amateur seamstress [18]. As a result of these complex transformations the heroines of the Breton lays are

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[18] The motif of manual work, even if it is not professional, is a little odd in a highly aristocratic romance, but the aristocratism of the Breton lays is substantially modified by their link with the "feminine" fairy tales, the heroines of which are normally much less adventurous and more humble than their male counterparts.

frequently able to achieve both seemingly contradictory goals: they have a lot of opportunity to show their activity and the sacrificial spirit, without resigning their position of supreme and venerated creatures. It is characteristic that, as a rule, if the separation of the lovers in the Breton lays is caused, at least partly, by one of them, then the culprit is normally the male hero, and not his mistress, even though it is frequently she who has to bear the hardest consequences of the separation and to make great sacrifices on this account, cf. the English Breton lays of *Sir Degaré, Emaré*, or Marie's *Lai le Freine* or *Guigemar*. Thus the Breton lays are not opposed to the code of the courtly love insofar as this code is truly feminist, but they certainly are opposed to it insofar as it is only a conventionalized feminist cover for a cult of male prowess and male heroism. The feminism of the Breton lays does not then grow entirely out of the spirit of the courtly love, or out of that of the tale of magic, it is rather an original blend of the two traditions combining the cult of the female heroine with an emphasis on her spontaneous activity.

This blending was naturally due to the already indicated fact that the tradition of the courtly love and that of the folktale have some important points of convergence, even though they remain at the same time fundamentally different. Those points of convergence include not only the occasional appearance in folktales of the taboo of secrecy between lovers or the elevated position of female characters in folktales if those characters happen to be supernatural. According to M. Lüthi, the spirit of feminity dominates the classic tale of magic, the best proof of which is that nearly all of the most popular protagonists of the European tale of magic, such as Cinderella, Snow White, or Red Riding Hood, belong to the fair sex [19]. Most of those heroines, contrary to what A. B. Taylor seems to believe, are notorious for their passivity, lack of initiative, and dependence on various helpers and donors of magical objects. It is only some of those heroines, such as Gretel in AT 510 (Hansel and Gretel) or the heroines of *Cupid and Psyche tales* (AT 425) or *Maiden without hands* (AT 709), that show any degree of daring and initiative. On the other hand, the passive heroines of the tale of magic only partly resemble the equally passive heroines of the conventional courtly love romances. The main difference between them is the high degree of misfortune and suffering to which the heroines of the tale of magic are usually subject before their troubles are happily resolved. At the same time it should not escape our notice that this suffering has little in common with the spirit of conscious sacrifice to which A. B. Taylor rightly points out in connection with the Breton lay. In this respect the Breton lays again occupy a position that is divergent both from the mainstream of the tale of ma-

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[19] See M. Lüthi, *Es war einmal*, Göttingen 1933, p. 103.

gic, or from the conventions of the courtly love. The heroines of the
Breton lays are normally neither supreme beauties hardly deigning to
stoop to the level of simple mortals, nor humble sufferers waiting quietly
for help and deliverance.

The proposition that there could have been a link between the courtly
love culture and folk literature certainly deserves a separate study and
some careful attention. It would be easy to dismiss it altogether on the
ground that the refined and aristocratic courtly culture of the late Middle
Ages is radically different from the simple and primitive cultural notions
expressed in the folktale. Such a dismissal would be based on the assump-
tion that there is an almost insurmountable barrier between the popular
and the aristocratic. M. Lüthi, however, clearly indicates that this assump-
tion may not be necessarily correct, at least with respect to the tale of
magic. He claims, namely, that, though the simple people are in most
cases the main carriers and cultivators of the tale of magic, the genre
as such is so complex and so abstract is its style that it must have had
its roots somewhere else than among the common countryfolk:

> Das Volk ist Märchenträger und Märchenpfleger, kaum Märchenschöpfer. Das
> Märchen ist, will mir scheinen, ein Geschenk seherischer Dichter an das Volk.
> Wer die ursprünglichen Märchenbildner sind, entzieht sich unserer Kenntnis.[20]

M. Lüthi shrewdly refrains from any conjectures concerning the iden-
tity of his mysterious "visionary poets", who could have been responsible
for the creation of the tale of magic, known also as the fairy tale, or the
wondertale. It would be easy to reject M. Lüthi's hypothesis as unwarran-
ted and far-fetched, or perhaps even smacking of a supercilious snobbish-
ness. However, there are certain highly interesting coincidences between
the structure of the fairy tale and the aristocratic ethos which make us
pause and consider carefully M. Lüthi's original proposition.

First of all we have to mention the principles of isolation and subli-
mation which, not only in M. Lüthi's opinion, pervade the world of the
tale of magic.[21] Let us have a look at one of M. Lüthi's descriptions of
the existential situation of the fairy tale hero, a description which is
highly pertinent to our question:

> Gerade dann, wenn die Märchenhelden ganz isoliert handeln, stehen sie, ohne
> es zu wissen, im Schnittpunkt vieler Linien und genügen blind den Forderun-
> gen, die vom Ganzen aus an sie gestellt werden. Sie denken nur an ihren eige-
> nen Weg—und erlösen dadurch andere. Sie denken nur an den anderen—und
> erreichen so das eigene Ziel. Der Märchenheld gleicht denen, die den Gral fin-
> den, gerade weil sie ihn nicht suchen. Eine zielbewusst und umsichtig durchge-
> führte Unternehmung lässt das Märchen gerne scheitern: Der Uriasbrief wird
> unterwegs von Räubern in sein Gegenteil umgeschrieben. Der arme Bauern-
> bursch aber, der ohne Hilfsmittel, ohne Vorbereitung und ohne jede spezifische

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[20] M. Lüthi, *Das Europäische...*, p. 92.
[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 37—76 passim.

Befähigung auszieht, um die unlösbare Aufgabe zu lösen, dem wird geholfen, den führen die Mächte zum Ziel.[22]

The basic features of the fairy tale hero, as described by M. Lüthi: his isolation, lack of strong social or national bonds, his tendency to flee the established and the familiar world, his amateur and improvised activity characterized by a liking for "adventures", and a very weak sense of purpose, are at the same time part and parcel of the chivalric and gentlemanly ethos of the Middle Ages [23]. The fact that fairy tale heroes are usually of humble origin is not a serious counterargument here since the behaviour of the fairy tale hero is expressly opposite to the rules accepted in his social surroundings:

> [Der Held] braucht nicht moralischer zu sein als seine Brüder oder Gesellen; er behandelt den Jenseitigen vielleicht gerade unbarmherziger als sie, er kann wortbrüchig sein, oder er ist ein ausgemachter Faulpelz—aber gerade ihm verrät ein Fisch den Zauberspruch, der ihm ohne Arbeit alles verschafft was er will.[24]

The most important distinctive feature of the fairy tale hero is his being chosen, singled out of his or her environment, both in the sense of being underprivileged in his familiar milieu, and in the sense of being "over-privileged" in his contacts with the more ideal world of the miraculous and the supernatural. Thus we may say that the hero of the tale of magic is always, by nature if not by birth, an aristocrat, and it is small wonder that he or she often turns out to be in the end a disinherited nobleman or noblewoman in humble disguise. Even if this does not happen to be the case, the fairy tale hero or heroine normally join the ranks of aristocracy by marriage.

All the evidence adduced above does not of course prove that the tale of magic is of aristocrati origin. It shows rather that the spirit of so called popular literature need not be so far apart from that of so called aristocratic literature as it is sometimes made to appear, though certainly it would be too hasty to conclude that the tale of magic is responsible for the aristocratic spirit of medieval romances. The aristocratism of the romances, and of the Breton lays in particular, goes in fact much further than that of the tale of magic. For example the protagonists of the Breton lays do not have to confirm their heroic status by a show of friendliness or kindness towards others, which happens so frequently in the tale of magic. It is also highly significant that the Breton lays are based precisely on those types of the tale of magic in which

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[23] See M. O s s o w s k a, *Ethos rycerski i jego odmiany (The Chivalric Ethos and its Variations)*, Warszawa 1986, particularly chapters V and VI.

[24] M. L ü t h i, *Das Europäische...*, p. 54.

the protagonist's success is identified primarily with the resumption of a severed relationship rather than with the establishment of completely new ones. In other words, the success there is connected with the regaining of a high position that was lost, rather than with winning a high prize from the position of an underling. Even if not all folktale antecedents of the Breton lay heroes and heroines have to be aristocratic, they all are either thoroughly supernatural, or have a love affair with a supernatural being, or have a supernatural parent, or combine all those traits. Characteristically enough, supernatural features in the Breton lays' characters are normally combined with noble bllod, so that the former are an indication of the latter, cf. *Emaré*, or *Havelok the Dane* or *Sir Degare*. This combination of the aristocratic and the supernatural seems to be one of the characteristic, identifying features of the Breton lay. In practice nearly all characters appearing in the Breton lays are aristocratic, though only some of them have a close relationship to the supernatural world.

With respect to the aristocratic and courtly culture there is an obvious difference between the French Breton lays and the English ones. The latter, namely, are practically devoid of the motif of adultery, which plays such an essential role in the tales by the French poetess. In all Breton lays the responsibility for having broken an amorous relationship, which in folktales frequently lies with the heroine, is put on the heroine's partner, or on some other person from her entourage. In the French Breton lays this person is normally the lady's jealous husband (who should not of course be confused with her lover). In the English Breton lays it is usually the heroine's wicked mother-in-law, or her lover's counsellors as in *Emaré*, *Lay Le Freine*, or *The Earl of Toulouse*. It seems significant that the only adulterous character in the English Breton lays, the queen Guenevere in *Sir Launfal*, is shown as thoroughly wicked and unworthy. Since the wicked mothers-in-law and false counsellors do appear in tales of magic in much the same way as in the English Breton lays, and since the motif of the jealous husband seems to be unknown in the folktale, the natural conclusion would be that the English Breton lay stands closer to the folktale tradition, at least in this respect, than the lays of Marie de France. Such a conclusion is a little surprising given the earlier date of Marie's lays, and their apparently intimate link with the oral tradition of the Celtic folklore.

In the present article I tried to outline and explore certain selected problems that arise in the attempt to derive the medieval romance, and the Breton lay in particular, from the folktale tradition. I was concerned in particular with the form that the ideals of courtly love and courtly behaviour take in the Breton lays, and with the possibility of detecting the origin of those ideals in the form and nature of the tale of magic. As a result it seems possible to define the Breton lay as a genre in

which the aristocratism of the medieval romance is wedded to strong feminism with both of them having close links with the world of the tale of magic, without, however, being reducible to the tale of magic.

NIEKTÓRE ASPEKTY KULTUROWE ZWIĄZKÓW POMIĘDZY ROMANSAMI SREDNIOWIECZNYMI Z GATUNKU „PIEŚŃ BRETOŃSKA" A BAŚNIĄ MAGICZNĄ

STRESZCZENIE

W pracy tej autor starał się zarysować i przebadać pewne wybrane problemy, które powstają przy próbach wyprowadzenia romansu średniowiecznego, a w szczególności tzw. „pieśni bretońskiej", z tradycji ludowej, a zwłaszcza z tzw. „baśni magicznej". Szczególnym przedmiotem zainteresowania autora są formy, jakie tzw. „miłość dworska" oraz etos rycerski przybierają na gruncie „pieśni bretońskiej", oraz możliwość przynajmniej częściowego wyprowadzenia tych form z tradycji „baśni magicznej". W rezultacie badań autora wydaje się możliwe zdefiniowanie „pieśni bretońskiej" jako gatunku, w którym charakterystyczny dla średniowiecznej kultury dworskiej arystokratyzm i feminizm występują w ścisłym związku z poetyką „baśni magicznej", tak iż widoczne są transformacje typowych elementów „baśni magicznej" w duchu kultury dworskiej, jak również znacząco selektywne podejście autorów „pieśni bretońskiej" do tradycji baśniowej. Autor sugeruje również przydatność badań nad „baśnią magiczną" do poznania źródeł kultury dworskiej i etosu rycerskiego w ogóle, a to ze względu na szczególny „arystokratyzm" jaki wyróżnia „baśń magiczną" pośród innych rodzajów opowiadań ludowych.

Autor dokonuje swych analiz przede wszystkim na średniowiecznych romansach angielskich takich jak: *Sir Launfal, Sir Degaré*, czy *Emaré*, uwzględnia jednak również „pieśni bretońskie" autorstwa francuskiej poetki Marie de France. W odniesieniu do „baśni magicznej" autor opiera się przede wszystkim na dorobku szwajcarskiego teoretyka baśni, Maxa Lüthiego.

Andrzej Wicher