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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE ENGLISH CONTENT IN A FRENCH FORM?

INTRODUCTION

Researches in cross-cultural communication gained importance in the twentieth century but the 'field' itself that is investigated is far from being the product of the same century. Communication is as old as human history itself since communication is an essential element of human existence. Among others it is the means of obtaining and providing new information, and although the means of communication have undergone significant changes from signs and oral expression through the appearance of writing to the age of printing and the computerized world, the desire to create something original from what is already in existence has always interested the human mind.

In this paper I would like to take the reader back into the Middle Ages where the dissemination of the information was extremely slow compared to our present meaning of fastness in the age of the information society. Written works only appeared in manuscript form and the dissemination of especially the longer works was immensely time-consuming since copying by hand was the only way of 'mass production'. No wonder that today's people are fascinated by these manuscript works and not just because their production took a long time but in many cases it is the beauty of the finishing that makes the manuscript an object of wonder.

I will investigate here the form and the content of a Middle English manuscript text that was possibly written at the beginning of the fourteenth century and is now preserved in the famous Auchinleck manuscript. The almost 10,000-line long poem *Of Arthour and of Merlin* came down to us in a romance manuscript and is nowadays regarded by some theorists as one of the main literary representations of the birth of English nationalism. But it is only the opinion of some of the theorists and others doubt that the work even has a place in the literary canon. In this paper I will focus on the possible causes of this scholarly debate, mainly on the romance form of the work and on its national content. On the one hand both the romance form and the national content played a significant role in the incorporation of the text into the major fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript, but, on the other hand, the authorial innovations on the form and also on the content resulted in the heavy criticism of the work. The expectations of two different cultures – a French- and an English-centred – clashed and even today it leads to fierce scholarly debates to appreciate the culture-specific innovations on a literary genre that, in fact, has no clear-cut boundaries.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANCE FORM

The first point to be investigated is the culture-specificity of the origin of the romance form. It is an intricate issue since the meaning of the word 'romance' has undergone significant changes through the centuries.

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The word at the onset of its use defined a group of works that were connected only by language. Etymologically "the word *romance* comes from a Latin adverb *romanice*, meaning "in the Roman manner" (*loqui romanice*, to speak in the Roman manner, i.e., speak colloquial Latin)"[1]. Later Vulgar Latin evolved into the various Romance languages, and to speak or write in the 'romance' language meant the use of the vernacular Romance languages as a way to differentiate them from the Latin language that was still prevalent both as the spoken language of the learned and the main language of any written text. The meaning further narrowed by time and due to the fact that "mettre en romanz" was meant to translate into the vernacular French, "many kinds of vernacular narratives were dubbed "romans" (and were also sometimes called "contes" [tales] or "estoires" [stories&histories])"[2].

The change of the meaning of the word 'romance' from the general to the more specific, from signifying a work written in the vernacular Romance language the content of which is a translation or adaptation of a Latin original to a more exclusive and definable group of similar works, can be shown, for instance, in the Anglo-Norman *Ipomedon of Hue de Rotelande*. The writer welcomes his audience in the prologue "with an assurance that he is translating from Latin (a common claim, and by no means necessarily true), since no one will understand the story unless he puts it 'en romanz' (l. 30); by the end, the phrase 'en cest romanz' (l. 10558) carries a full generic significance"[3]. The poem justifies that both meanings of the word 'romance' (language and literary form) existed side by side at the end of the twelfth century and they could be used interchangeably.

As a result of the original meaning of the word 'romance', it was an evident consequence that the number of the works that can be called 'romances', continuously increased. The eagerness on the part of the literary critics to define this term made it necessary to create subcategories and 'overflow tanks', otherwise, as DAVENPORT states, it would spill over (p. 130). Therefore, first, the boundaries of this special group of works were to be found or rather created. The first attempts in creating the categories used the romances written in French as the basis of the analyses. It is not surprising that the characteristic features of one type of romances, basically the type created by CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES, became the standard in the evaluation of romances, which meant that all of the romances – even the ones written in English two hundred years later than CHRÉTIEN's romances - were matched to this standard and if they failed to meet the requirements, they were labelled as inferior in quality.

BAUGH (1948), for example, argues that the etymological meaning of the word 'romance' entails that the French type of romance is the standard type and defines the romance genre on the basis of that group of works. BAUGH analysed therefore only the French romances and concluded his investigation with creating the following definition of romances: "The basic material is knightly activity and adventure, and we may best put the emphasis in the right place if we define the medieval romances as a story of adventure – fictitious and frequently marvelous or supernatural – in verse or prose." (p. 173) For him, similarly to several critics before and after him, romances are characteristically about adventure that knights seek in order to achieve a chivalrous deed.

Another possible way to find the boundaries of the romance genre – still based on the French extant pieces – was to compare them with the works of the other major genre of medieval France, namely the chanson de geste. The first scholar who made a seminal work in this field was WILLIAM PATON KER. KER tried to grasp the fundamental difference between romance and chanson de geste. He found that chanson de geste gradually disappeared in time and gave way to the evolution of a new genre, the romance. According to KER the essential characteristics of medieval romance are courteous sentiment and the succession of wonderful adventures. "Courteous sentiment, running through a succession of wonderful adventures, is generally enough to make a romance. … It is plain enough both that the adventures are of secondary value as compared with the psychology, in the best romances, of the best works of the 'courtly maker'." (pp. 328, 333-4) On the basis of

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[1] Baugh (1948), p. 173. See also Finlayson p. 430.
[2] Krueger p. 2.
[3] Cooper p. 11.

KER's definition, therefore, the basic characteristic features of romance are its courtly character, its emphasis on adventure and its use of the wonderful or magical elements.

The critical outcome of KER's comparison is that most of the romances cannot live up to the critical expectations that he himself created. He states that "it is a disappointment to find that romance is rarely at its finest in the works that technically have the best right in the world to be called by that name" (pp. 325-6). KER's main critical argument is that the romances are not 'romantic', although the amorous element is one of the major signs that differentiate romance from the chanson de geste.

KER's and BAUGH's definition of romance could not stand the test of time. Scholars investigating Middle English romances, for instance, soon realized the one-sidedness of these definitions. The fundamental problem was that KER and BAUGH based their assumptions solely on French examples, therefore, they were writing of the French romances and not romances as such which is a much broader category, including works in various languages. Romances written in languages other than French did not differ only linguistically, but there were major differences in their content and style as well. MEHL (p. 14) clearly stated, for example, that "KER's distinction between romance and epic is hardly applicable to English literature".

Recent scholarship has found a fundamental fault in the theoretical assumption on which BAUGH and KER based their analysis other than the ones mentioned above. The comparison of two distinct types of literary works might lead to the realization of their major topical or stylistic inclinations but in the Middle Ages, when the use of literary borrowing and topical or stylistic adaptation was almost a compulsory requirement of any vernacular work, there was no clear-cut difference between the genres in many cases. Moreover, since some works borrowed significantly from earlier works, while others considerably adapted the already existing themes, it is dubious whether the choice of one work within the 'genre' or the creation of a virtual ideal piece within the 'genre' and the comparison of the other works to this 'ideal centre' might facilitate the establishment of an objective critical view. BATT's and FIELD's recent critical standing against the Kerian type of analyses hopefully blocks the road before the pejorative evaluation of the romances based on their comparative analysis with other literary types or with an ideal image.

Critical opinion has long expressed the development and definition of romance in terms of contrast with epic, in particular, to the Old French chanson de geste. Thus epic can be seen to deal in wars, romance in quests. Epic promulgates loyalty to the masculine group or the nation, romance to the lady or the integrity of the individual. But recent work on the chanson de geste demonstrates the extent to which such distinctions may themselves be the product of a critical over-eagerness both to categorize and to privilege one form over another. We need to bear in mind that 'epic' and 'romance' are two modes, even moods, not sequential literary forms, and that Arthurian romance, with its historical shading, is one literary area where the two interpenetrate. (p. 60)

The conclusions that we can draw from the juxtaposition of earlier and more recent romance scholarship is, then, that firstly, we cannot expect the existence of clear dividing lines between some medieval genres, for example between romance and epic (chanson de geste, chronicle), and secondly, the evaluation of English romances on the basis of earlier French romances might lead to misleading conclusions since romance is not a 'monolithic genre' and the insular romances might differ significantly from the continental ones.

THE DIFFUSION OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

After proving that romance as a form has its own life, a life outside the French literary field, I turn to make a brief investigation into the culture-specificity of the Arthurian legend itself. I should claim that the Middle English romance borrowed as much from the French tradition as the French romance from the English tradition.

Concerning the birth of the Arthurian legend, I start with the extant Latin works leaving aside the Welsh works like Gododdin and Mabinogion for the sake of brevity. The first Latin work that should be mentioned in connection with the birth of the legend around King Arthur is the *De Ex-*

cidio Britanniae of the sixth-century British (Celtic) monk, GILDAS. It is an interesting start since there is no single explicit word in the text about a legendary hero called Arthur. The work gives a moral explanation of the causes of the cruel historical events: it is the general moral sloth of the people that is punished by military defeat. GILDAS only mentions one victory of the passing Romano-Christian-British civilisation among its various defeats, a victorious battle at Bath-hill.

"The poor remnants of our nation … being strengthened by God, … took arms under the conduct of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who of all the Roman nation was then alone in the confusion of this troubled period by chance left alive. His parents, who for their merit were adorned with the purple, kind been slain in these same broils, and now his progeny in these our days, although shamefully degenerated from the worthiness of their ancestors, provoke to battle their cruel conquerors, and by the goodness of our Lord obtain the victory. After this sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field, to the end that our Lord might this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Bath-hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes." (par. 25-26)

The description of the battle at Bath-hill – or Badon hill - was based on the historical fact mentioned also by the Venerable BEDE**.** It happened in A.D. 493. BEDE was a monk at Jarrow and he completed his work on the History of Anglo-Saxon England in 731. The work is the synthesis of earlier shorter, even fragmentary works of history about the spread of Christianity.

"When the victorious invaders had scattered and destroyed the native peoples and returned to their own dwellings, the Britons slowly began to take heart and recover their strength, emerging from the dens where they had hidden themselves, and joining in prayer that God might help them to avoid complete extermination. Their leader at this time was Ambrosius Aurelianus, a man of good character and the sole survivor of Roman race from the catastrophe. Among the slain had been his own parents, who were of royal birth and title. Under his leadership the Britons took up arms, challenged their conquerors to battle, and with God's help inflicted a defeat on them. Thenceforward victory swung first to one side and then to the other, until the battle of Badon Hill, when the Britons made a considerable slaughter of the invaders." (p. 64)

The Arthurian legend was in existence in the oral form in an unrecognisable age but certainly well before the ninth century when the first written references to a person named Arthur appeared or rather were preserved until our age. The *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* were the first written sources that commemorated the name of the ruler around whose personage the whole mythology was later built.

Two pieces of writing have come down to us which contain plausible information on an important figure of the fifth century called Arthur. One of these is the *Annales Cambriae* (The Annals of Wales) and the other is the *Historia Brittonum* (History of the Britons) by NENNIUS (?)[4]. Both are written in Latin and preserved in the same composite Welsh historical manuscript, British Library Harley 3859. The manuscript was written in Britain in the early 1100s.

The *Annals of Wales* contains a list of important dates in Welsh history. Arthur's name appears next to two dates: A. D. 516 and A. D. 537. First, we can see Arthur in battle. He is the commander at the Battle of Badon. He is the leader of a group of soldiers fighting against the Saxons. The battle was followed by forty-four years of peace, as we know it from GILDAS, which means that the victory of Arthur was of major significance.

The next instance we learn from Arthur in the *Annals* is when he died. Arthur together with Medraut fell at Camlann, says the inscription at the date A. D. 537. Here, his death was not surrounded by the mysterious voyage to the Isle of Avalon presuming that he had not really died, only waited for the time when he had to return again to save his people in need. The *Annals* seems to avoid hints to unhistorical beliefs like this.

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[4] Nennius's authorship of *Historia Brittonum* is disputed (See: Dumville, D., '*Nennius' and the HRB*. Studia Celtica X (1975) 78-94).

As we learn from NENNIUS (?), the ninth century Welsh monk-chronicler, Arthur is not just the war leader of a small band, but he is the chosen 'dux bellorum', having the whole British chieftaincy under him. According to NENNIUS, Arthur participated in twelve battles, one of them being the battle of Mount Badon mentioned by GILDAS (without Arthur's name) and the *Annals of Wales*. If Arthur was really 'dux bellorum', these victorious fights would have proved his ability to the post. However, it is dubious whether Arthur really fought in these battles.

Although the above Latin works were written not later than the ninth century, King Arthur's real 'career' on the isles, in France and across Europe was initiated by the chronicle-like prose writing of a twelfth-century priest born of Breton parents, GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH. *The History of the Kings of Britain* (henceforth *HRB*), written in Latin and finished in 1136, sums up two thousand years from the fall of Troy to the death of Cadwallader. In the *HRB* around fifty pages are dedicated to King Arthur, thus this is the first piece of writing that deals with King Arthur in such an extent. According to PEARSALL the purpose of Monmouth was "to supply England with the national history, the myth of national emergence, that it lacked" (Arthurian romance, p. 8)

The literary appearance of the Arthurian legend on the continent was partly due to the political circumstances of the age. On the accession, in 1154, of HENRY II, recently married to ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE, the Angevin realm stretched from the Pyrenees to Scotland with Wales and Brittany in significant proximity at its borders. It is then understandable that the matter of Britain appeared first in French rather than in English. The earliest vernacular romances were composed at the Angevin royal court of HENRY II and ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE in England. Many of these romances borrowed their material from the work of GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, therefore we can claim that "the larger story of romance begins with GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, and never quite leaves him behind" (COOPER p. 23).

The political circumstances again made it possible that in the fourteenth century the first English-language romances could appear and over the next three hundred years their number increased steadily. Many of these English romances had French antecedents – since borrowing was an indispensible characteristic feature of medieval literature –, still they took a characteristically different angle on the material. These works were "more compatible with orthodox Christian morality, they avoid the more extreme flights of fantasy of continental European romance"[5] and they also expressed a markedly English national identity.

To sum it up, it is evident that the material of the French romances is part of the literary heritage of the British Isles and with the appearance of the English-language Arthurian romances in the fourteenth century the story only arrived home. Moreover, it should always be taken into account that the English-language romances were underlyingly different from the French romances both in nature and function since the period when they were written raised new questions that the earlier French romances were not prepared to answer.

THE SOURCE OF *OF ARTHOUR AND OF MERLIN*

Many of the Middle English romances took their material from older French romances and adapted it to the calls of their own age. The romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is no exception to the rule in this sense. Its material might come from ROBERT DE BORON's twelfth-century verse *Merlin*.

ROBERT DE BORON himself followed the rules of his age and his works were based on the material of CHRÉTIEN DE TROYES's *Perceval*. CHRÉTIEN's work opened up new ways of expression in the romances since the correspondence between secular and sacred, the courtly and religious worlds, that he begins to explore in *Perceval*, is especially fruitful ground for later French writers who felt enthusiasm for the quasi-spiritual narrative context for Arthur. ROBERT DE BORON's verse Grail cycle *(Joseph d'Arimathie*, *Merlin* and *Perceval)* constructs a version of sacred history.

What has come down to us from BORON's works is not much since only a fragment of *Merlin* survives (the initial 504 lines), and none of the *Perceval*. Yet all three of ROBERT's works were re-

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[5] Cooper p. 30.

cast in prose by an unknown adapter soon after they were written. The prose versions, known as the Prose *Joseph*, the Prose *Merlin*, and the *Didot-Perceval*, were influential in the later composition of the Vulgate (or Lancelot-Grail) cycle of French romances. The Vulgate Cycle, composed by author(s) unknown, c. 1215-35, both appropriates the spirit of ROBERT DE BORON's Grail narratives and, in its huge sprawl of prose, accommodates Arthurian time within an overarching world-historical design encompassing both sacred and secular reference.

We can conclude the above description with the general statement that in the Middle Ages the literary life was not based on thoroughly original ideas but it was through the process of continuous literary borrowing and adaptation that the texts on the one hand joined an already existing literary trend and on the other hand they were also endowed with novel functions.

THE EXPRESSION OF ENGLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

The new function that the Middle English romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* was endowed with was its role in the formation of the English national identity that – some theorists claim – is also the main function of the whole Auchinleck manuscript. In this paper I will concentrate on the three most important elements in the text that contribute to the expression of the English national identity: the choice of the language, the place-names and the mythology of creation.

Language

There are various theories concerning the major constituents of nation formation. According to one of these theories the use of a common language that is specific to that nation is indispensible in the way of nation-formation. In medieval England three languages lived side by side: French (and even Anglo-Norman), Latin and English. These languages served the different cultural needs of the insular community. In the eleventh century it was rather only French and Latin that were used in the written form, especially for political and religious purposes. English had an inferior status and it remained only the spoken language of the lower classes that had already lived on the island.

Through time, however, and especially due to the changed political situation by the fourteenth century the English language – that underwent various changes through the three hundred years that had passed under the French rulership – English gained more and more importance. The language became the clear dividing line between the rivalling continental and insular French rulership. According to BATT and FIELD (p. 69) "it can be no coincidence that the appearance of English Arthurian literature accompanies the gathering strength of English as a literary language and the growing sense of national identity most sharply felt in relation to France".

Many English-language romances and historical works of the fourteenth century make an explicit reference to the importance of their choice to use the English language as a medium of communication. It appears in ROBERT MANNING's *Chronicle*, the *Speculum Vitae* or the romance *Richard Coer de Lyon (henceforth RCL)*. Manning makes a pun in his work which shows the conjunction between the nation, English history, and the English language. "His remark demonstrates a self-consciousness about language and an awareness of the implications of using English".[6] *RCL* begins by announcing its decision to narrate its tale in English because scarcely one among a hundred non-learned men can understand the tale in French (ll. 21-24). "It represents the choice of English as a populist move, a bid for the broadest possible address."[7] While *RCL* only refers to the unlearned population when it mentions that the people cannot understand French, the *Speculum Vitae* goes much further by saying that the learned class can neither understand French. According to SALTER not only the above mentioned texts "but a number of anonymous verse writers express, in crude but pungent English their pride in 'Inglis lede of Ingland'"[8].

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[6] Turville p. v.
[7] Heng p. 105.
[8] Fourteenth, p. 30.

Of Arthour and of Merlin also starts with giving an explanation to its choice of using the English language as the medium of communication instead of French, the earlier language of the romance works.

> Freynsche vse þis gentilman,
> Ac euerich Inglische Inglische can;
> Mani noble ich haue yseiȝe,
> Þat no Freynsche couþe seye (ll. 23-6)

By the time *Of Arthour and of Merlin* was written it seems that the proportional distribution of the people who could use French or English changed to the contrary compared to the situation three-hundred years earlier. English became the universal language across all classes meanwhile French became confined only to the gentry.

To sum it up, we can say that the references in the fourteenth-century romances and historical works to the importance of the use of English prove that English was spreading fast and the use of French declined even in the aristocratic circles. This change had primarily political causes but the use of English by time became synonymous with the eagerness to form a clear English nation which is separated from the other nations since one of the best means of expressing national identity was through an own language.

Place-names

Beside the use of English language, the choice of the place-names in the fourteenth-century Middle English romances is also a way of expressing national identity. There are various theories about the function of the place-names in the romances. Some theorists claim that the romance places are purely fictional and they have only relevance in the fictitious romance world while others claim that the choice of the place-names are culture and history specific. I would stand in between accepting the relevance of both ideas.

JOHN FINLAYSON regards the romance world a closed world with no connection to historical reality outside the literary field, therefore the space and time of the romance world has no relevance regarding the contemporaneous and actual operation of the non-literary world. He states that "paradoxically, in the romance there is little attempt to authenticate the story in terms of actual political, geographical, or economic conditions: the hero meets the giants and encounters miracles without ever seeming to find them disturbing or unnatural, and time and place are of little importance" (p. 444). This statement entails that the place-names mentioned in the romances have no meaning in contemporary reality. The names together with their descriptions can be anywhere and everywhere; they are purely fictional romance clichés. Contemporaneity for FINLAYSON is revealed in the romances only on the level of the 'props': the dress, the architecture and the manners. He claims that romance "may superficially contemporize, but it is not concerned to actualize" (p. 444). This statement about the space and time in romance might be justified on the basis of some romances but in itself this approach is not complex enough to make for and satisfy a general characterisation.

Another concept about the function of space in the romances approaches the question from the other side. It argues that the text should be investigated and analysed with having an eye to the contemporaneous culture in which the text was created and/or written down. CATHERINE BATT and ROSALIND FIELD state that "romance, to the twentieth-century reader, may suggest fantasy, love and escapism, but the origins of medieval Arthurian romance are culturally and historically specific and we need to relocate it in its time and place in order to appreciate its cultural frame of reference" (p. 59). In broad terms what I regard one of the most significant gaps between the cultural concept of the medieval audience and the audience of the twentieth- or twenty-first-century is the existence and, respectively, the lack of the multi-levelled conception of the world that facilitates or hinders the interpretation of the 'special meanings' that appear in the medieval texts.

If we take further the above concept that emphasises the importance of putting the text into its contemporaneous context, it might lead to its possible consequence: recognizing the appearance of references to contemporaneous places. BATT and FIELD claim that the resurgence of English place-

names in e.g. fourteenth-century Middle English romances implies that a nationalistic sentiment has been born against a prevailing French dominance. They realize that the time-gap between the appearance of the French romances and the Middle English ones entail that the underlying purpose of their creation is significantly different. The French regarded the Arthurian material in the twelfth century as material for pure fictional entertainment, but the English regarded the same material in the fourteenth century as part of their national history – a severe difference indeed. According to BATT and FIELD "from the fourteenth century onwards French romance is re-interpreted for an English audience for whom Arthurian material is inescapably historic and iconic. The legendary locations of French romance – Camelot, Logres, Astolat – become recognizable English places – Carlisle, Winchester, London, Guildford" (p. 70). It is exactly two towns mentioned in the above list – Winchester and London – that function as centres in the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. Beside their importance as being English towns, they also have other characteristic features that make them the central places of the first and the second part of the romance, respectively.

Mythology of creation

In this paper I will examine the function of the two central places in the first part of the romance: Winchester and Salisbury. Both of these places are existent territories that lie in close proximity to each other in the county of Sussex of Southern England. These places are the centres in the first part of the romance of two rivalling houses of rulers and the events occurring at these two places reinforce their position as mythical places.

The town of Winchester in the romance is the centre of the ruling royal house. This is the seat of the ruling king who at the onset of the plot is King Costaunce. The character of King Costaunce in the romance world of binary oppositions is endowed with the positive features of a romance ruler. He was noble, honoured, wise and also a conqueror, thus satisfying the roles of a king both in peacetime and at war[9]. His royal line is continued by the succession of two of his three sons on the throne: Costentine (under the name King Moyne) and Uther. Both Costentine and Uther held their courts at Winchester. All of the three sons of King Costaunce are endowed with positive characteristic features. The eldest of the sons, Costentine, was 'noble clerk and wise afine' (l. 50) who devoted his life to follow the life of Christ as a monk before being elected king. Uther was a knight of 'gret renoun' (l. 47) who fought on the side of his brother, Aurilis Brosias, against the Saracen invaders. Winchester is therefore the royal court of the blood descendants of King Costaunce and it is the centre of Christian rulers.

The town of Winchester in the romance figures from the onset as an ecclesiastical centre besides being a royal centre. The first appearance of the town of Winchester in the romance is connected to the character of Costentine, the future King Moyne. According to the plot, the eldest of the three sons of King Costaunce is a clerk who is inclined to become a monk at Winchester. The monastery in Winchester gains a significant position in the romance through the acceptance into its community of brethren a prominent member of the royal family. We learn from the plot that the heir to the throne joined the community of monks without obtaining the consent of his father, the king of England. Costentine's figure, therefore, is characterized from the onset as a faithful Christian who is eager to follow the life of Christ even in the face of obstacles caused by his royal lineage. According to ELIADE, monasteries and churches are places of theophany because these places are open to the world above therefore they make communication with the heavenly sphere possible. Costentine's closeness in the monastery to the world above and his inclination to use the special channel of communication the sacred place offers triggers a positive attitude on the part of the audience towards his character. To use a circular argumentation, it is not just the choice of the monastic life that emphasises the inner values of Costentine's figure, but it is also his positive character in the Christian world of romance that enhances the significance of Winchester as an ecclesiastical centre. Winchester's position as an ecclesiastical centre is further strengthened in the romance by being the future burial place of King Costaunce himself.

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[9] On the role of the king during peace and at war see Rosemary Morris, chapters IV and V.

On acquiring the crown of England, the usurper Fortiger, the earlier steward of King Costaunce, started to build another royal centre. His intention was to create the centre of his own at a new place. This building of a new royal centre signifies the break from the earlier dynasty and demonstrates the start of a new world. This event functions in itself as a small-scale creation myth, when a new world order is set up. According to ELIADE "every creation repeats the pre-eminent cosmogonic act, the Creation of the world"[10]. Since it is the imitation of a divine act, the whole construction work is divinely guided. It is also a common mythical feature of creation that "whatever is founded has its foundation at the center of the world (since, as we know, the Creation itself took place from a center)"[11]. Whatever happens during the foundation of a new building, it is done in accordance with the cosmic order.

Fortiger's aim is to build a castle that is without pair in the world. He is governed by pride and enmity towards the world of his predecessor. This prideful construction brings associations with the Biblical Tower of Babel where the tower is the symbol of pride. Fortiger's tower is demolished every night. According to ELIADE every building that is created is an axis mundi "which at once connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below (the infernal regions). Such a cosmic pillar can be only at the very center of the universe, for the whole of the habitable world extends around it." (36-7) As Fortiger cannot lay down this axis mundi, it might suggest that the place is not suitable for heavenly communication or that Fortiger himself is not allowed to communicate with the heavenly sphere. Fortiger is unable to bring order by creating his own habitable and known world in the middle of the chaotic, dark and unknown outside world.

It is revealed by the magician Merlin that the fall of the tower is caused by the fight of two dragons under the ground. The function of the dragons in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is more complex than merely that of being cliché romance elements. The dragon fight in the romance might remind the readers of various types of dragon representations other than the 'marvellous' romance dragons: the mythological dragons that appear in various creation myths, the Biblical dragons and serpents representing chaos and Satan, and also the dragon image representing Wales and also representing England through the figure of Saint George the dragon slayer. These mythical and national implications of the dragon symbol in the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* transform the event of the dragon fight from a mere romance cliché to a central image of the romance. Here the dragon representing the house of Costaunce destroys the dragon of Fortiger.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the work *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is the result of the literary communication between two rivalling cultures that adapted each other's literary form and material to their own needs that was defined by the geographical, political and cultural situation of their age and used these adaptations further on as their own.

Unfortunately the history and evaluation of medieval romance is customarily written from the perspective of one of the cultures, namely French, and it is misleading in some crucial respects when it is applied to insular traditions. The two traditions are interlinked and the cultural exchange brought force original creations, the appreciation of which has only just started in the scholarly world. KRUEGER is one of the advocates of this new approach:

"The story of medieval romance's evolution is one of translation and transformation, adaptation and refashioning, and fertile intertextual and intercultural exchange among the linguistic and political entities of medieval Europe. … Romances of all national origins are remarkable for their authors' capacity to remake their shared stories anew in different contexts and to reposition their ethical systems as they respond to particular audiences, in distinct geographic locations and social contexts." (p. 1)

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[10] *Myth of Eternal Return* p. 18.
[11] *Myth of Eternal Return* p. 19.

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