

Idalia Smoczyk-Jackowiak

Forest as inspiration for literature created at the court of Henry II Plantagenet

Polilog. Studia Neofilologiczne nr 4, 195-204

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

**FOREST AS INSPIRATION FOR LITERATURE CREATED
AT THE COURT OF HENRY II PLANTAGENET**

Idalia Smoczyk-Jackowiak

*Akademia Pomorska
Słupsk, Polska
idaliasmoczyk@wp.pl*

Key words: *courtly literature, Henry II Plantagenet, forest, wilderness, desert, supernatural creature, shapeshifting, hermit*

Henry II Plantagenet managed to build an empire stretching from the Pyrenees to Ireland, encompassing the kingdom of England, the duchies of Normandy, Aquitaine, Gascony and the counties of Touraine, Poitou, Anjou and Maine. Politically and geographically, the Angevins were indisputably a power, threatening the position of the Capetians on the Continent. In fact, also culturally the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine seems to have been “the most glittering court of the day” [Echard 2005: 2], attracting illustrious scholars, jurists, historians, poets and troubadours. It was the place where literary culture was fostered and disseminated [Lejeune 1954: 5-53; Bezzola 1963; Legge 1963]. The English king was widely praised as *litteratus*. When he was young he was tutored by Peter of Saintes, one of the most distinguished grammarians of the day [Warren 2000: 38]. He was also instructed by William of Conches, the eminent Norman scholar who dedicated to him a treatise on moral philosophy, the *De Honesto et Utili* [Warren 2000: 39, 208; Génicot 1964: 176]. Henry retained his reputation for learning throughout his life; he was famous for his love of reading and fervid discussions with intellectuals. Peter of Blois, one of Henry II’s courtiers, notes that “with the king of England it is school every day, constant conversation with the best scholars and discussion of intellectual problems” [Peter of Blois 1846: 193f]. Walter Map praises the king for the knowledge of all the languages “from the coast of France to the river Jordan”, though he seemed to use only French and Latin [Walter Map 2002: 476]¹. The learned men remaining in the orbit of the Plantagenet court, such as Gerald of Wales, John of Salisbury, Johannes

¹ “litteratus ad omnem decenciam et utilitatem, linguarum omnium que sunt a mari Gallico usque ad Iordanem habens scienciam, Latina tantum utens et Gallicia”.

de Hauvilla, Walter Map or Wace were figures of the twelfth-century renaissance, prolific writers of legal works, philosophical and religious treatises, chronicle history, but also of satire, anecdotes, poetry and courtly romance.

Intellectual pursuits of those men of letters were to a certain extent influenced by the current policy of the House of Plantagenet. Thus, the preoccupation of Henry II with administrative and legal reforms of his vast empire, found its reflection in painstaking work of his jurists: Ranulf de Glanville, Hubert Walter or Richard Fitz Neale. What is more, the concern of the English monarch with finding unquestionable legitimation for his power, resulted in appropriating the Arthurian legend for the purposes of propaganda [Johanek 1987; Mason 1990: 121-137], which was the reason for the immense popularity of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the courtly circles, and its subsequent translation into Anglo-Norman verse by Wace (d. 1183), an educated cleric enjoying royal patronage.

The learned men remaining in the closest milieu of Henry II Plantagenet were sensitive not only to matters of state, preoccupying the English king, but also to his private interests. In fact, it was commonly known that the king's love for books and intellectual discussions was rivaled only by his passion for the forest and hunting. The Plantagenets were so notorious for their immense taste for the woods, that Wace explains the etymology of their family name referring to their woodland pursuits [Wace 2002: 316]. The poet says that Geoffrey the Fair (1128-1151), Henry II's father and count of Anjou, planted wild flowers ("Plante Genest", *planta genista*, or *Cytisus scoparius*, commonly known as broom) in order to extend the forest and indulge in his passion for hunting [Wace 2002: 317]. Henry II followed in his ancestors' footsteps. According to William of Newburgh, "He delighted in the pleasure of hunting as much as his grandfather, and more than was right" [William of Newburgh 1884: 280]². Gerald of Wales adds that "He was addicted to the chase beyond measure (...). At crack of dawn he was off on horseback, traversing the wilderness, plunging into woods and climbing the mountain tops" [Gerald of Wales 1867: 302]³. William Fitz Stephen notes down an interesting episode when king Henry was on his way to meet Thomas Becket at Northampton. Despite the fact that it was one of the most dramatic crises of his reign, Henry II chose to spend the whole day hunting and hawking on the streams and rivers which lay along the route [*Materials for the History...* 1875-1885: 49; *The Life and Death...* 1961: 76]. Walter Map also notices Henry II's skill as a huntsman and falconer. He says that the king "was most knowledgeable about dogs and birds, and a very keen follower of hounds" [Walter Map 2002: 476]⁴. In fact, Henry's name is linked with one of the earliest scientific treatises on falcons [Haskins 1925: 76].

The king's liking for the chase was one of the principal reasons why the vast areas of the royal forest were restricted to the king's advantage alone. In *Dialogus de Scaccario* Richard Fitz Neale explains: "It is in the forests (...) that 'King's cham-

² "Venationis delicias aequae ut avus plus justo diligens, in puniendis tamen positarum pro feris legum transgressoribus avo mitior fuit".

³ "Venationi namque trans modestiam deditus summo diluculo equo cursore transvectus, nunc saltus lustrans, nunc silvas penetrans, nunc montium juga transcendens".

⁴ "canum et auium peritissimus et illusionis illius audissimus".

bers' are, and their chief delights. For they come there, laying aside their cares now and then, to hunt, as a rest and recreation. It is there that they can put from them the anxious turmoil native to a court, and take a little breath in the free air of nature. And that is why forest offenders are punished only at the King's pleasure (...). The King's forest is a safe abode for wild animals, not all of them but only the woodland ones, and not everywhere, but in particular places suitable for the purpose. That is why it is called 'forest' (*foresta*), as though the *e* of *feresta* (i.e. a haunt of wild animals, *ferarum statio*) were changed into *o*. (...) It makes no difference to whom the woods belong, whether to the King or the nobles of the realm; in both alike the beasts wander free and unscathed" [Richard, son of Nigel 1950: 60].

It seems that at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, royal forests occupied almost one third of the whole country [Barber 2003: 58; Warren 2000: 391]. They were scattered across England: in the south in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Berkshire, then more to the north in the woods of Oxfordshire and Rockingham up to the Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, and to the east, taking up almost the whole territory of Essex. It appears that only Norfolk, Suffolk and Kent, all situated on the east coast of England, were free of the Forest; all other English counties had significant forest areas.

It was in the forest that the king spent his most pleasurable time. Therefore, his favourite residences, such as the ones at Clarendon, Woodstock, Geddington or Clipstone, were, at least originally, hunting lodges. All of them were surrounded with beautiful parks where wild animals, such as deer, lions and leopards were kept. The royal residence at Woodstock with its labyrinthine park went down in history as the setting of passionate love affair of Henry II Plantagenet with his beautiful mistress Rosamund Clifford [Gerald of Wales 1891: 165], who according to popular legend, was to be poisoned by Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry's jealous queen. Rosamund's long years of seclusion in the royal residence in the midst of Oxfordshire forests, inspired poets, who, as years passed by, started to present the king's liaison as an example of *bon amour*, embellishing it with dramatic, but purely fictional motifs⁵.

The purpose of this paper is to prove that the forest had great significance for both, the king and the courtly society. Being a part of the untamed wilderness, it proved to be a rich source of inspiration for courtly poets and educated clerics attached to the court of Henry II Plantagenet. Areas of woodland, still untouched by human activity and unaffected by civilization had rich symbolic meaning, deeply rooted in Celtic myths and legends. It was believed to be a territory free from limitations imposed by civilization. Strict rules of moral conduct enforced by Christianity did not hold there. As Higounet points out, the forest, thus understood, served as a refuge for old, pre-Christian gods, for various pagan cults, for myths and legends [Higounet 1966: 343-398]. It existed in the realm of the imagination, forming a kind of barrier for the civilizing trends of Christianity, as its area delineated an elusive frontier behind which lay unknown and wild territory where rationality and traditional morality did not apply. Therefore, as Roupnel observes, the medieval forest evoked man's "legendary fears" rooted in the ancient, primeval nature of the woods [Roupnel 1974: 91-116]. Those fears found their poetic expression in courtly litera-

⁵ See, for example Elizabethan poets, such as Thomas Deloney (*Ballad of Fair Rosamund*) or Samuel Daniel (*Complaint of Rosamund*) [cf. Boyd 2004: 173].

ture (drawing heavily on oral folk tradition), with its notion of the supernatural, otherworldly nature of the forest, the place inhabited by ephemeral fairies, whimsical apparitions, mysterious underground creatures and half-human, half-animal beings.

Those old pagan beliefs were gradually supplemented with various elements of Christian tradition, enriching it with new possibilities of interpretation. Jacques Le Goff stresses the importance of wilderness, associated with the desert and uncultivated, wild areas, in the tradition of early Christian mysticism of the East [Le Goff 1992: 47-51]. It was an abode of unclean spirits (Mathew 12:43) and the place where Jesus was tempted by the devil (Mathew 4:1). Therefore, in the desert/wilderness one could encounter Satan and his demons. In the culture of the Christian West, eastern desert had its counterpart in the idea of forest-as-wilderness, which was perceived as desert or barren wasteland. Such associations were still present in the 12th century when forest was described by the adjective *gaste*, meaning empty, barren, desolate [Le Goff 1992: 54]. The woods were a place of retreat, where far away from human habitation, hermits and monks found their refuge. By means of prayer and ascetic practices they were striving to regain that menacing, devilish territory for God and his followers. Figures of austere hermits, living deep in the forest thickets can be often found in courtly literature. Paradoxically, the forest, being a synonym of the wild, the primordial, the dark and the untamed, and by forming an antithesis of the orderly world of courtly culture, offered an interesting alternative for that culture.

In literary works created at the court of the early Plantagenets, both abovementioned motifs can be detected: pagan legends and beliefs and elements of Christian tradition, which were interwoven with each other, creating an interesting synthesis. The forest presented by courtly poets is the place of hallucinations, magic and sensual temptations, where beautiful fairies lure brave knights who have lost their way in the woods. In the *lais* of Marie de France, a poet who lived and wrote at the royal court of Henry II Plantagenet, and, according to one of theories was Henry's half-sister⁶, graceful fairies abide picturesque meadows, nearby forest streams. In the *lai* of *Lanval* a poor knight of king Arthur's court meets a wood nymph, who offers him her love and infinite riches: "Never might Lanval be desirous of aught, but he would have according to his wish. He might waste and spend at will and pleasure, but in his purse ever there was to spare. (...) the more pennies he bestowed, the more silver and gold were in his pouch" [Marie de France 2003: 64]. The courteous knight, who had fallen into disfavour with king Arthur was soon in serious financial trouble. "He was of the king's household, but since Arthur gave him naught, and he was too proud a mind to pray for his due, he had spent all that he had" [Marie de France 2003: 61]. The fairy, however, provides the noble knight with riches sufficient to live a life of luxury. From now on he can be generous for his knights and for the poor, he can maintain a splendid retinue and hold magnificent feasts. His mysterious fairy lover seems to be the embodiment of the young knight's dreams and fantasies: enjoying with her sensual pleasures, he does not need to worry about material goods. She re-

⁶ Marie de France appeared at the court of Henry II c. 1160. Her family background is unknown, but she might have been Geoffrey the Fair's natural daughter [see: Fox 1910: 303-306]; Marie de France dedicated her collection of *lais* to Henry II Plantagenet [see: Haskins 1925: 76].

sembles a fairy from Celtic myths, as she personifies positive values, such as abundance, affluence and beauty [Wood 1992: 56-72]. What is more, her otherworldly nature and unique, supernatural origin is constantly emphasized. At the end of the story, with Lanval by her side, she disappears from king Arthur's court which symbolizes the sphere of Christian civilization. "The Bretons tell that the knight was ravished by his lady to an island, very dim and very fair, known as Avalon. But none had had speech with Lanval and his fairy love since then, and for my part I can tell you no more of the matter" [Marie de France 2003: 76]. The lovers run away from the clear, regulated world into a mysterious territory, into the unpredictable world of magic, idyllic adventure, dream and fantasy.

The forest, presented in courtly literature created at the court of Henry II, is a territory pervaded with the marvelous, which has its roots in both: pre-Christian, Celtic beliefs and in the tradition of Antiquity. It is an area where supernatural creatures find their abode, not only demonic fairies, but also mysterious half-human, half-animal beings: werewolves and hawks taking on human form; various neutral beings, astonishing people with their otherworldly looks, like the Pygmy king Herla ruling his underground land, or green children, found in Suffolk [William of Newburgh 1884: 82-84]⁷. Itinerant minstrels and poets, visiting the royal court, seemed to believe in the actual existence of those marvelous creatures. Surprisingly enough, also the learned men of twelfth century England, shared these superstitious beliefs. The process of shape-shifting of humans into animals is brilliantly illustrated in a manuscript of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, depicting Ulysses' men turning into beasts⁸.

Gervase of Tilbury, English scholar and courtier, expressed an opinion that English forests were the hiding place for werewolves: "in England we have often seen men transformed into wolves at the changing of the moon. The French term this kind of man *gerulf*, while the English say *werewolf*" [Gervase of Tilbury 1707: 895]. Similarly, Marie de France also refers to the etymology of the word in *The Lay of the Were-Wolf*: "Amongst the tales I tell you once again, I would not forget the Lay of the Were-Wolf. Such beasts as he are known in every land. Bisclavret he is named in Brittany; whilst the Norman calls him Garwal" [Marie de France 2003: 83]. The poet takes up the topic which fascinated her contemporaries, of human beings being transformed into brute beasts. A brave Breton baron must spend three days a week deep in the woods. Feeling the call of the wild, he must escape into the forest, where he hides in the thickets, takes off his clothes which connect him with the orderly human world and changes into a werewolf. "Werewolf", the poet explains, "is a fearsome beast. He lurks within the thick forest, mad and horrible to see. All the evil that he may, he does. He goeth to and fro, about the solitary place, seeking man, in order to devour him" [Marie de France 2003: 83]. His clothes are his gateway back to humanity. Treacherously betrayed by his wife, he has to remain in animal form until the king solves the mystery and punishes his wicked wife who had hidden his clothes, and as a rightful widow took over his lands and estates. Bisclavret is presented by Marie de France with

⁷ Translated by J. Stevenson in: *The Church Historians of England*, vol. 4, p. 2, London 1856, p. 397-672.

⁸ It is reproduced in *English Romanesque Art 1066-1200*, ed. G. Zarnecki, 1984, no. 32, p. 102 [cf. *Boethius...* 1981: 296f].

great gentleness, evoking the reader's sympathy. When he dwells in the forest, he turns into a bloodthirsty beast; devoid of any aspect of humanity he becomes a quarry, chased by hounds and royal hunters. Far away from the world of men, he loses human sensitivity towards good and evil and as a cruel beast, he indulges his primitive, predatory instincts. However, when he meets the king, he shows human feelings, filling the monarch with awe: "'Lords', cried he, 'hasten hither, and see this marvelous thing! Here is the beast who has the sense of man'" [Marie de France 2003: 87]. When the king lets him stay in his castle chambers, Bisclavret regains his humanity and finally also human form.

Marie de France returns to the subject of shape-shifting in *The Lay of Yonec*, in which she tells the story of a gallant knight who takes the form of a hawk in order to meet a beautiful lady imprisoned in a stone tower by her jealous husband. "This falcon flew straightway into the chamber, jessed and hooded from the glove, and came where the dame was seated. Whilst the lady yet wondered upon him, the tercel became a young and comely knight before her eyes. The lady marveled exceedingly at this sorcery" [Marie de France 2003: 127]. She observes the mysterious transformation in fear and amazement, wondering whether the young knight is a treacherous demon. Therefore, before she agrees to become his lover, she insists that he take the communion. Yonec, the tercel-knight, a marvelous being placed somewhere on the borderline between the world of humans and brute beasts, proves to be essentially good, having his rightful place in the divine order of things.

Similarly, simplistic categorization of king Herla, the protagonist of one of Walter Map's courtly anecdotes, is not an easy task. The king of the ancient Britons is a little creature, with a fiery red beard, hairy belly and legs declining into goats' hoofs. He is described in the same terms as Pan, the Greek god of forests, fields, groves and wooded glens. In Walter Map's story, Herla's palace is situated in a spacious cave, somewhere deep under ground, behind a strip of impenetrable darkness. Only after going through a maze of shadowy underground corridors may one enter the spacious chambers of Herla's mansion, lit with unearthly light "which seemed to proceed not from the sun or moon, but from the multitude of lamps" [Walter Map 2002: 29]⁹. A certain noble king, who had been invited to Herla's wedding feast, had a chance to experience the perverse hospitality of the forest faun. Herla presents the king with generous gifts, implying the promise of unlimited hunt. Thus, the king leaves the palace laden with "presents of horses, dogs, hawks, and every appliance of the best for hawking or fowling" [Walter Map 2002: 29]. The king, having accepted the gifts, turns into a victim of the faun's vicious trick. He is taken out of human time and forced to wander almost eternally on horseback along forest tracts. Herla, the legendary forest god, is presented as a half-human, half-animal creature, seemingly generous for the chosen ones, but also vicious, insidious and whimsical. What's interesting, Herla's kingdom is described metaphorically as a tenebrous underground land, having little in common with life-giving greenery of the forest.

Thus, in the context of courtly literature of twelfth century England, the forest was synonymous with the territory free from limitations imposed by the systematizing aspirations of reason, it was the sphere of unrestrained play of the imagination, drawing extensively on pre-Christian beliefs and Celtic folklore. Marvelous beings

⁹ For an alternative look on Herla, as the king of the dead [see: Bernstein 2009: 135-137].

inhabiting that fantastic, primeval forest, exposed its unreal, fabulous nature. Identifying the forest with a tenebrous, underground realm, blocked from the sunlight, highlighted its pre-Christian, and sometimes even anti-Christian dimension. In the woods man could become one with the primordial wilderness and expose his deeply hidden animal instincts. Therefore, a noble baron – hunter transformed into a fierce beast, and a comely knight Yonec changed into a young hawk satisfying his carnal desires. A vivid picture of human beings shapeshifting into animals, illustrates the power of the most basic instincts, impulses and repressed drives, coming to the surface and taking hold of man.

First of all, however, one should emphasize the role of the forest as the structural device of literary works created at the court of early Plantagenets. As Jacques Le Goff points out, “in courtly literature (...) the forest played an important narrative and symbolic role as the setting of the chivalric adventure story” [Le Goff 1992: 55]. Plunging into the forest thickets usually served as a starting point of chivalric adventure. Entering the path leading both into the dark depths of the forest and into the depths of one’s own nature, struggling with external adversities and overcoming one’s own weaknesses, served as a graphic illustration of a hero’s initiation, of his gradual development and finally of the moment of reaching maturity. It was in the woods, during the hunt, when a great adventure of valiant Gugemar began.: “[he] summoned his prickers and his squires, and early in the morning rode within the forest. Great pleasure had Gugemar in the woodland, and much he delighted in the chase. A tall stag was presently started, and the hounds being uncoupled, all hastened in pursuit – the huntsmen before, and the good knight following after the quarry, a varlet riding beside, bearing his bow, his arrows and his spear (...). Gazing about him he marked, within a thicket, a doe hiding with her fawn (...). Gugemar bent his bow, and loosed a shaft at the quarry. He wounded the deer a little above the hoof, so that presently she fell upon her side” [Marie de France 2003: 5]. The dying doe puts a curse on the knight. The wound which he acquired during the hunt can only be healed by lady’s love. Mortally wounded, the sets off in search of a damsel whose patient love and suffering will cure his wound. This is how his marvelous adventure begins, in effect of which he experiences humiliation and suffering but is finally rewarded with the bliss of love.

Similarly, in Walter Map’s story, *Of the Frienship of Sadius and Galo (De societate Sadii et Galonis)* [Walter Map 2002: 211-247], the valiant knight, burning with the fever of love, sets off from the castle to test his strength in the forest. He loses his way in the woods and reaches a fantastic city full of magnificent palaces and rare works of art. Thus, plunging into the forest appears to be a starting point of his adventure, triggering a chain of unexpected events, such as an encounter with three ladies: a lustful queen of Asiatics, a powerful, mysterious lady who rejects his advances and with a courteous, polite maiden, who personifies his sublime desires and expectations. The story culminates with Galo’s combat with a marvelous giant Rivius, in effect of which the knight saves his honour, humiliates the wicked queen and wins love of the maiden.

In addition to providing the background for chivalric adventure, the forest offered a place of refuge for unhappy lovers. The motif of lovers’ escape into the

woods was frequently used by troubadours who extolled the forest as “the desert of love”. Bernard Marti says: “I want to live as a hermit in the woods, provided my lady comes with me. There we shall sleep beneath a coverlet of leaves. This is where I wish to live and die” [Bernard Marti, cited by Le Goff 1992: 58]. Marie de France in *The Lay of the Honeysuckle*, a short version of Tristan and Isolde legend, made the forest the main structural device. Tristan, having returned to Cornwall, “hid privily in the deep forest, withdrawn from the eyes of men” [Marie de France 2003: 102]. The queen “hastened within the wood, to come on him whom more she loved than any living soul (...). Was it not with them as with the Honeysuckle and the Hazel tree she was passing by! So sweetly laced and taken were they in one close embrace, that thus they might remain whilst life endured. But should rough hands part so fond a clasping, the hazel would wither at the root, and the honeysuckle must fail” [Marie de France 2003: 103]. The forest in this story, being a part of untamed nature, is opposed to the organized society of the city, the court, or the castle. This is a territory where traditional norms of conduct are not valid. Lovers are free to follow the law of nature, which allows them to enjoy their love, unrestrained by the strict rules of courtly conduct.

The forest, apart from being the place of lonely wanderings, of trial and adventure and a hiding place for lovers, served also as shelter for pious men who sought solitude. In the woods, as in the desert of the East, one could be tempted by Satan and experience deceptive hallucinations. Therefore, as it was mentioned above, the forest as a kind of refuge, attracted hermits who wanted to fight with the fiend. As Coulton points out, “Forest and wilderness were haunted by devils: and monks had come to molest their ancient solitary reign” [Coulton 1949: 105]. In the literary works of the period, one can often find images of hermit’s retreat built deep in the forest. In *The Lay of Eliduc* the main protagonist in the most dramatic moment of his life seeks the help of a holy monk. “He called to mind that in his realm there was a certain great forest, both long and deep. Within this wood there was a little chapel, served by a holy hermit for forty years” [Marie de France 2003: 50].

A curious variation of this topic appears in Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium*. The first distinction ends with an interesting anecdote about three hermits: a Frenchman, an Englishman and an Irishman, who came to the woods to do penance and “be followers of old fathers”. The Frenchman attained such perfection that his life cannot even be described. The Irishman is a wild man of the woods, his body covered with hair is “uncouth to see” and makes him look barely human. Finally, the Englishman – almost an angel – represents the Golden Mean. He wears an iron chain around his ankle and he carries an iron hammer and a stake. Every Saturday he moves to a different place, where he stays for the whole week, his movements limited by a seven-foot-long chain: “He fixes his chain in the ground every Saturday, and within that small compass prays for a week, absorbed in hymns and rejoicing, never complaining or sad. He eats what he finds there, and moves his camp on the Saturday” [Walter Map 2002: 131]. The Englishman symbolizes deliberate self-restraint. The hermit comes to dwell in the forest in order to fight with evil spirits and to expand the territory of Christian civilization. He realizes, however, that it is no easy task. Being aware that he might be exposed to irresistible temptations lurking in the woods, he

gets chained to the ground. Thus he makes sure that his wild, unpredictable nature, still unsubdued by Christian morality, is not unleashed.

To sum up, the chosen literary texts written at the court of Henry II, illustrate the ambivalent attitude of courtly poets towards the symbolism of the forest. Lively interest in oral folk traditions, preserving the belief in mythical creatures living in the woods, intermingles with frequently expressed fear regarding the very nature of those fantastic beings. The external beauty of wood nymphs and their irresistible primeval charm is juxtaposed with vivid images of half-demonic, half-animal carnality, shadows of the night and impenetrable darkness of the gloomy underworld. Therefore, a desperate attempt at systematic, rational categorization of those wild territories is being made. As a result, protagonists of courtly literature, by facing the ancient woods, are elevated to a higher level of development and become conscious participants of courtly culture. While brave knights discover love and adventure, pious hermits find meditation and an opportunity to civilize new territories and win new lands for God.

References

- Barber R., 2003, *Henry Plantagenet*, Woodbridge.
- Bernstein A.E., 2009, *The Ghostly Troop and the Battle over Death*, [in:] *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions*, ed. Mu Chou-Poo, Leiden.
- Bezzola R., 1963, *Les origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident (500-1200)*, vol. 1, Paris.
- Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence*, 1981, ed. M. Gibson, Oxford.
- Boyd D., 2005, *Eleonora Akwitańska, królowa Francji i Anglii*, transl. M. Nowak-Kreyer, Warszawa.
- Coulton G.G., 1949, *Medieval Panorama*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne.
- Echard S., 2005, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, New York.
- Fox J.C., 1910, *Marie de France*, "The English Historical Review", vol. 25, no. 98.
- Génicot L., 1964, *Powstaje nowy świat*, transl. J.S. Łoś, Warszawa.
- Gerald of Wales, 1867, *Expugnatio Hibernica*, [in:] *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. J.F. Dimock, vol. 5, London.
- Gerald of Wales, 1891, *De principis instructione*, [in:] *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, vol. 8, ed. J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock, G.F. Warner, RS, London.
- Gervase of Tilbury, 1707, *Otia imperialia*, ed. G.W. Leibnitz, vol. 1, Hannover.
- Haskins Ch.H., 1925, *Henry II as Patron of Literature*, [in:] *Essays in Medieval History, Presented to Thomas Frederick Tout*, ed. A.G. Little, F.M. Powicke, Manchester.
- Higounet C., 1966, *Les forêts de l'Europe occidentale du Ve au XIe siècle*, [in:] *Agricoltura e mundo rurale in Occidente nell'alto medioevo*, Spoleto.
- Johanek P., 1987, *König Arthur und die Plantagnets: Über den Zusammenhang von Historiographie und höfischer Epik in mittelalterlicher Propaganda*, Berlin.
- Le Goff J., 1992, *The Medieval Imagination*, transl. A. Goldhammer, Chicago, London.
- Legge M.D., 1963, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background*, Oxford.
- Lejeune R., 1954, *Le Rôle littéraire d'Aliénor d'Aquitaine et de sa famille*, "Cultura Neolatina", no. 14.

- Marie de France, 2003, *Medieval Lays and Legends of Marie de France*, ed. and transl. E. Mason, New York.
- Mason E., 1990, *The Hero's Invincible Weapon: An Aspect of Angevin Propaganda*, [in:] *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, Woodbridge.
- Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1171-1185*, ed. J.C. Robertson, vol. 3: *William FitzStephen; Herbert of Bosham*, Rolls Series 67, London.
- Peter of Blois, 1846, *Petri Blesensis Archidiaconi Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, ed. J.A. Giles, Oxford.
- Richard, son of Nigel, 1950, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, transl. Ch. Johnson, ed. Thomas Nelson, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto, New York.
- Roupenel G., 1974, *Histoire de la campagne française*, Paris.
- The Life and Death of Thomas Becket, Chancellor of England and Archbishop of Canterbury*, 1961, ed. and transl. G. Greenaway, London.
- Wace, 2002, *The Roman de Rou*, transl. G.S. Burgess, Jersey.
- Walter Map, 2002, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and transl. M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford.
- Warren W.L., 2000, *Henry II*, New Haven, London.
- William of Newburgh, 1884, *Historia rerum anglicarum*, [in:] *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, vol. 1, RS, London.
- Wood J., 1992, *The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales*, "Folklore", vol. 103/1.

Summary

Forest as inspiration for literature created at the court of Henry II Plantagenet

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the ambivalent attitude of courtly poets attached to the court of Henry II Plantagenet, towards the symbolism of the forest. Their fascination with Celtic myths and legends emphasizing the otherworldly, pre-Christian nature of the woods, results in their conscious effort to turn the forest into a kind of antithesis for the orderly world of courtly culture. Thus, the forest, inhabited by devilish fairies, and various half-human, half-animal creatures, serves as a refuge for old, pagan cults. Elements of Celtic beliefs, however, intermingle with early Christian tradition presenting wilderness as desert, creating in effect, an interesting synthesis of both Christian and pre-Christian motifs. Thus, the forest is also presented as a shelter for hermits who seek solitude to fight with the fiend and to regain that devilish territory for God. Finally, one cannot forget about the role of the forest as a structural device of the chivalric adventure story, and about its role as a place of refuge for unhappy lovers.

Key words: *courtly literature, Henry II Plantagenet, forest, wilderness, desert, supernatural creature, shapeshifting, hermit*