KWARTALNIK NEOFILOLOGICZNY, LXXI, 3/2024
DOI: 10.24425/kn.2024.152588 ISSN 0023-5911

PASIUT KAROLINA
(UNIWERSYTET JAGIELLOŃSKI)
ORCID 0000-0002-1490-2860

THE POWER OF LAUGHTER AND LAUGHTER IN POWER: THE PRESENCE AND PURPOSE OF MERLIN'S LAUGHTER IN THE ENGLISH MEDIEVAL ROMANCE *PROSE MERLIN*, AND THE FRENCH *ROMAN DE SILENCE*

ABSTRACT
The article deals with the figure of Merlin, most famously associated with the Arthurian medieval chivalric romances, who is a prominent representative of the high court as its important contributor due to his supernatural skills. However, amidst his numerous accomplishments as a prophet or royal advisor, his laughter constitutes a mysterious reaction that appears at surprising times. Represented in the two works, the thirteenth-century French *Roman de Silence* and the fifteenth-century English *Prose Merlin*, the scenes of Merlin laughing uncontrollably serve particular yet different purposes. This article aims to present, compare, and analyze the significance of Merlin's laughter arguing that these scenes should not be dismissed as mere entertainment, as its author contends, they contribute significantly to Merlin's roles within the narratives and his general portrait.

KEYWORDS: laughter, Merlin, medieval chivalric romances, power

STRESZCZENIE
„The Roman de Silence" oraz „Prose Merlin" to teksty wpisujące się w tradycję średniowiecznych romansów rycerskich, w których postać nadwornego maga Merlina spełnia szczególnie ważną funkcję królewskiego doradcy, stratega, czy jasnowidza. Zarówno francuski trzynastowieczny romans jak i angielska piętnastowieczna proza, opisują jak Merlin śmieje się w sposób niekontrolowany oraz początkowo nie zrozumiały dla innych. Jego śmiech jest reakcją często nie na miejscu oraz wywołuje skrajne emocje wśród innych bohaterów. Jednakże, wszystkie takie sceny spełniają specjalnie przez niego opracowane funkcje, różne dla obydwu prac. Artykuł podejmuję próbę przedstawienia oraz porównania scen śmiechu Merlina w dwóch utworach, argumentując, że nie należy traktować ich jedynie jako elementu humorystycznego. Autor twierdzi, że śmiech Merlina znacząco przyczynia się do jego ogólnej charakterystyki oraz ról przyjmowanych w dwóch narracjach.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: śmiech, Merlin, rycerskie romanse średniowieczne, władza

INTRODUCTION

The heightened importance of morality, bravery, honour and fellowship are elements that knights depicted in medieval chivalric romances should strive for. The values encapsulated within the code of conduct elevated the warriors within the medieval society, who admired listening about their adventures and great deeds. A definite tendency towards positive depictions can also be seen in one of the most renowned courts in the literary history, Camelot, where the Arthurian society bears the flower of chivalry. Among the famous knights and their king, Merlin may not be directly involved in knightly endeavors, but he participates in the civilization alongside Arthur, whom he aids. When this distinguished sage suddenly laughs, the ambiguous dissonance challenges his traditional image, even more so when the bursts of laughter appear in bizarre, sometimes inappropriate circumstances as presented in two medieval works. In order to analyze the relation between Merlin's roles and the function of the laughing scenes in these two-century-apart texts, the article explores how the works contextualize his laughter, which is, in fact, part of his profound knowledge beyond human comprehension.

The thirteenth-century French work and the fifteenth-century English romance portray Merlin to different extents. The later *Prose Merlin* places its focus exclusively on him, resulting in a much more extensive depiction compared to the earlier narrative, which devotes only its last part to Merlin. In the overall structure of the article, the two narratives are treated separately, with their comparison and conclusions in the last part.

THE *ROMAN DE SILENCE*

The narrative of the Old French romance *Roman de Silence* (later in the article reffered to as the RS) is the thirteenth-century work, attributed to Heldris of Cornwall. Preserved in the only extant copy, MS. Mi.LM.6 of the University of Nottingham (Roche-Mahdi 2007: XXIII), it is set in England, with some passages taking place in elsewhere, such as in France. The story focuses on the figure of a girl named Silence, who is deliberately brought up as a boy to retain the succession of the land available only for male descendants. Conquering various trials and tribulations, Silence encounters Merlin towards the end of the narration, who almost as deus ex machina (Roche-Mahdi 2002: 7), concludes the plot. While Roche-Mahdi claims that the main source for the *RS* has been De Boron's French *Lestoire Merlin*[1] (2007: XI), Pratt includes Geoffrey of Monmouth or Wace as Heldris of Cornwall's other

[1] *Robert de Boron's Cycle/ La Grant Estorie dou Graal/ Little Grail Cycle*, or *The Grand History of the Graal*. A complete trilogy consists of *Joseph of Arimathea* and its biblical matters, *Merlin* and its mythical British history, together with *Perceval*, a chivalric romance (De Boron 2007: 10).

inspirations, since the romancer was acquainted with Arthurian literature (Pratt 2002: 88). Some critics deny the romance a place within the Arthurian canon because it does not feature the famous court, King Arthur and his knights (Pratt 2002: 88);[2] however, it depicts Merlin in acts of the sardonic laughter of a demonic soothsayer (Thrope 1973: 338) and can thus be a point of comparison in the article.

THE *PROSE MERLIN*

The fifteenth-century late Arthurian romance the *Prose Merlin* places the eponymous hero among the famous knights of the Round Table, gathered around their beloved King Arthur, whose fame he partially owes to Merlin's workings. The *Prose Merlin* (henceforth, also reffered to as the Prose or the PM) is a complete account of Merlin's life, tracing his history in a biography-like manner back to the events preceding his birth until his imprisonment.[3] It is the last but not least Arthurian work, written in England by an anonymous author towards the end of the fifteenth century, but preceding Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which was published by Caxton in 1485. The *Prose Merlin* is a straightforward translation of de Boron's *Estoire de Merlin* that together with its Sequel forms one of the branches of the Vulgate versions of the Arthurian prose-romances, the Old French Vulgate *Estoire de Merlin* (Sommer 1909: vii).

The *PM* renders a complete history of Merlin's life, who endowed with a dual nature, embodies both human and supernatural traits. His initial mission planned by the devils was to challenge the Christian faith as their emissary, yet he is redeemed and later opts to engage in the benevolent service (Ben-Ezra 1991: 2) for God and swears not to make "*thynge that shal be ageyn the volente of oure Lord Jhesu Cryste*" (Conlee 1998: 33).

The *Prose* also describes the initial phase and development of the Arthurian civilization, evoking the events of the search for the Holy Grail and relating the history of King Arthur, from the beginning of the reign to his rise to glory. Throughout the story, Arthur successfully overcomes the challenges, always aided by "*maister counseller to Kynge Arthur of the Grete Breteyne*" (*ibidem*: 239), a knowledgeable guardian, a skillful magician, and a faithful servant in one.

Merlin's knowledge transforms him into a politician and a courtier, promoted to the managing maintainer of Camelot, "a grand vizier to the throne" (Knight 2016: 60). His role is emphasized as he controls the story throughout the narrative by patronizing and authorizing over patrilineages, planning the marriages, leading the

[1] The role of Arthur as a great sovereign is not completely neglected in the romance; he is mentioned as: "the sole exeption of King Arthur, there never was his equal in the land of the English" ("Fors solement Ie roi Artu N'i ot ainc rien de sa vertu Ens el roiame des Englois") (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 7).

[1] Preserved in the MS Ff.3.11. in the Cambridge University Library, the text lacks its final three folios.

military, legitimizing Arthur's accession to the throne, or shaping the genealogies (Looper 2002: 69). Thanks to his knowledge of the past, present and future, almost everything happens according to his designs. The unexpected eruption of laughter amidst his otherwise flawless performance initially bewilders and confuses those around him until its significance becomes evident.[4]

LAUGHTER

Even though the beginning of critical discussion and discovery of laughter as an essential part of human life did not begin until the Renaissance (Classen 2012: 23), its role in medieval literature should not be underestimated. On the one hand, John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus*, associated laughter with frivolity and foolishness, "Laughter is a mark of levity; and the more public it is, the more shameful and worthy of rebuke" (Of Salisbury 1927: 90). If one laughs too much he might be possessed or suffer from maniac attacks because laughter weighs upon the human soul, often associated with wickedness, cruelty and damnation if performed with excess. However, if attached to a form of intentionality, laughter remains a rational human feature (Classen 2012: 4), therefore acknowledged and approved especially in the quality of wit, a combination of the clever and the humorous.

Medieval people laughed at various things. Some found joy in stories of romance and desire, frequently sharing laughter over playful wordplay with suggestive undertones and Bayless (2012) indicates that many forms of medieval humor were present in comic drama, beast fables, fabliaux, carnival merriment, satire, jokes and riddles. When Chaucer describes the pilgrimage to Canterbury, his characters may be piously traveling to the shrine, but cannot conceal the flaws that shine through their devout practices; a religious yet worldly-oriented Wife of Bath who "Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve" (Chaucer 1993: 172), and a well-educated and devoted Nun who "Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe […] In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest" (*ibidem*: 139), parody traditional images. Humor in morality or mystery plays was a necessary element to facilitate their assimilation and so vice and sin are ostensibly ridiculed to prove the right point. When family members abandon Everyman at his deathbed, they as a matter of fact mock the values they should represent; Cousin leaves him only because she has "the cramp in my toe. Trust not to me, for, so God me speed, I will deceive you in your most need" (Rhys 1926: 11). Similarly, while Mak and Gill try to hide a sheep in a baby cradle, they ruse paradoxically involves telling the truth, "I vow to God so mild, If ever I you beguiled, That I will eat this child That doth in this cradle lie!" (Child 1910: 53), and one cannot but laugh at the parody of Christian values.

[1] Merlin also delights in playing pranks on the kings and the knights, which amuses his audiences; however, they are not part of the French work and hence are beyond the scope of this article.

Finally, humor in the "high-medieval courtly romances" triggered the protagonists to laugh out loud when the situation was different than expected (Classen 2012: 12). By laughing, a person recognizes a dissonance, disharmony, failure, something odd, unusual, or a transgression (*ibidem*: 4), not always suggestively indicated but hidden in the narrative.

Just like the division between laughter and humor was not obvious in the twelfth century (Jones 2019: 12), Bänninger-Huber and Salvenauer (2023) consider differences between smiling versus laughing as well: while smiling helps regulate negative emotions, laughter can significantly reduce a person's anxiety, stress, illness, or pain. Laughter acts as a 'safety valve,' enabling individuals to alleviate tension in a socially acceptable manner (Bänninger-Huber, Salvenauer 2023). It plays a vital role not only in self-regulation but also in maintaining interpersonal relationships. Those who laugh at the same things strengthen their bonds and are encouraged to act together, because laughter is contagious and can evoke positive emotions in those who share it (*ibidem*).

The analysis of the two texts considers three theories of humor that will be applied to the medieval settings. The theories of superiority, incongruity, and relief would help to understand and differentiate Merlin in the *RS* and *PM*. According to the first, laughter arises when someone recognizes their elevated position of the one in the know, which can instill a sense of superiority and "sudden Glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them" (Hobbes 2004: 37). Insight into secrets by the unaware is highly desired because it can impress others, aligning them with the individual who holds that knowledge.

The theory of incongruity suggests that something not natural has been recognized or suddenly comprehended. Any inconsistencies between the initial expectations and the subsequent understanding are the source of incongruity, which is peculiarly "funny" (Brown 2005: 11) and amusing. The one who notices the discrepancy gains knowledge, empowering him with supernatural authority until everybody else understands. Individuals are captivated by this type of laughter, as it suggests a sudden epiphany, the acquisition of knowledge that elevates the individual, requiring admiration from others. Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer or Søren Kierkegaard wrote that the theory deals with "laughter through the obvious incongruity between the perceived and the conceived" (Schopenhauer, Payne 1996: 87).

The relief or discharge theory allows the release of tensions arising from repressed or unspoken desires through physical, "comic amusement" (Lintott 2016: 347). Laughter can thus serve as a mechanism for venting these desires as well as past memories or traumas. The potential for discharge and a prerequisite for laughter may arise from the "liberated cathectic energy" (Freud 1905: 1737). During the act, some repressed desires surface, providing both a cleansing and a revelation to those who laugh and recognize the reasoning. Laughing can be cathartic for the person experiencing it, yet its effects on observers vary; it may aid or hinder.

MERLIN'S LAUGHS

The motif of Merlin's laughter evolved over time, just like the way the perception of his figure changed throughout the epochs. The laughter of a madman or man of the forest indicated not only his madness but also an insight into matters not available for laymen, which evinced in that bodily reaction. His laughter was a derivative of the madness caused by grief or leading to one as shown in early Welsh, Irish or Scottish legends. Merlin's heightened sensitivity, or second sight allowed him to perceive the world differently, enhancing his prophetic abilities, which were particularly cherished. The motif of Merlin's laughter was therefore connected with his authority, and power he could wield.

This is notably depicted in the twelfth-century representation by Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*. The madman has his moments of consciousness but his reactions are deemed dubious: he laughs suspiciously when he sees how the king Rhydderch removes a leaf from his wife's hair. After being forcefully pressed to reveal his reasoning, Merlin the madman informs the husband that

> The reason I laughed, Rodarch, was that (...) when just now you pulled out the leaf the queen unknowingly had in her hair, you were more faithful to her than she had been to you when she crept into the undergrowth, where her lover met her and lay with her. As she lay there, a leaf fallen by chance caught in her loosened hair. You plucked it out, unknowing (Clarke 1973).

Even though Ganieda tries to undermine these words, Merlin's maniac laughter turns into the symbol of his wisdom and testimony of truth. This is similar to Monmouth's examples of a beggar sitting on a treasure and a man buying shoes who drowns before using them.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries showed a waning interest in Arthurian stories, and as a vital part of these tales, Merlin underwent a transformation likewise. His magic took on a more sophisticated form, and he became the representative of powers that searched for the meaning of life or hidden treasures. Therefore, his role is expanded from the position of an alchemist into a scientist, magus, and natural philosopher (Riga 2008: 28). The trickery or shapeshifting abilities are no longer appreciated, and Merlin's magical skills diminished. He became more of a technician and scientist, useful for the royal power, but only symbolically, without significant impact on the ruling because skeptical and critical "European intellectuals also had little time for Merlin" (Knight 2016: 102). Edmund Spenser chose to display Merlin whose version is of a Renaissance magus, both as a prophet and an artist (Riga 2008: 28) in his epic poem *Faerie Queene*, 1590–1596. "Merlin (…) which whylome did excell All living wightes in might of magicke spell" (Spenser 1882: 125–6) combines magic with modern learning.

The skeptical atmosphere around Merlin's achievements rose, and he became more restricted and treated with caution. John Dryden employed Merlin to convey royal propaganda but did not share or transfer the power to the magician. In Dryden's

opera, *King Arthur*, 1691, he is more of a stock figure (Riga 2008: 28): he appears on stage "with Spirits, descends to Philidel, on a Chariot drawn by Dragons" (Dryden 2015: 15), in ostentatious entrances, and with theatrical symbols around him, but limited overall.

The eighteenth-century weakened Merlin's position even more. He was degraded to a propagandist tool, a servant to the powerful, "between scholarly doubt and political servility" (Knight 2016: 123–124). Acting at the court of King Arthur, Merlin is mocked in Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb-A tragedy.* This low tragedy and a satire, shows a small creature of low status, Tom Thumb, conceived with Merlin's help. Merlin, a conjurer, does not contribute a lot to plot but is the subject of ridicule, singing farcical songs "Hear then the mystick Getting of Tom Thumb" (Fielding 1776: 50).

In his trickster demeanor, Merlin returns in the twenty-first century BBC TV series *Merlin* (2008), as a teenage mage who almost accidentally arrives in Camelot. The screen version portrays a young magician who, though a sorcerer, must work in disguise and cannot reveal his supernatural abilities. Thus, he fulfills the role of a servant, later a squire to the young prince Arthur. Merlin has to perform menial, physical tasks using his body and brains rather than his supernatural powers. However, his wit, intelligence, and wide sense of humor soon not only highly entertain the audiences but also endear him to the prince. Merlin daringly jokes with Arthur, ridiculing his vices and making sarcastic comments. Ultimately, they share laughter, which makes them close friends and improves both of them in the process.

THE SAVAGE LAUGHTER IN POWER. THE *ROMAN DE SILENCE*

In the romance, a cross-dressed knight Silence begins her service at the court of King Even in the aftermath of unfavourable circumstances. She has been nurtured for the expedience of preserving the family lineage since women are victimized by the King's decree mandating the transfer of wealth exclusively to male offspring. They are refused the right to inherit after their parents because "the king, dear son, disinherited all the women of England on account of the death of two counts in a battle they fought over twin heiresses they had married" ("Toltes les femes d'Engletiere, Tolt par l'oquoison d'une guerre De .ii. contes ki en morurent Par .ii. jumieles ki dunt furent") (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 115).

In its structure, the French romance is shaped by the actions of two women: Silence, and Evan's wife, Queen Eufeme, the Norwegian princess. It is through Merlin's laughter that these two characters transform their roles. He appears towards the end of the story to interfere amidst the turbulent interactions between the handsome and virtuous youth and the lustful, vengeful queen, who actively seeks bodily pleasures. Queen Eufeme takes a special liking for the knight and pursues him relentlessly, not aware of the masquerade Silence has undertaken. The queen is

portrayed as a huntress, embodying a negative aspect of the goddess Diana who in the *Prose* serves as a divine protector over the goddaughter, Nimiane,[5] Merlin's lover. While Nimiane symbolizes magical knowledge and virtues in the Arthurian world, Diana represents the broader aspects of nature filled with feminine power (Kaufman 2007: 58), and caretakes for women in need. However, Diana's dubious character also encompasses death, infertility, the underworld and the struggles of labour and childbirth (Woods 1991: 290–292). Queen Eufeme, who promotes infidelity within marriage, embodies these darker overtones of the goddess, herself representing the oppression of women and challenging traditional feminine roles.

Silence keeps resisting the queen's advances but the humiliated and prideful queen cannot accept the rejections and, with unwavering determination, adopts a cruel plot "prompted by the Devil" ("Si com diäbles Ie fait faire") (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 216). It is Eufeme who introduces Merlin, a renowned for his dealings with Vortigern's tower, "No one could make the tower stand but Merlin-son of the devil, for he had no other father" ("La tor ne pot nus faire estable Fors sol Merlin, fil al diable") (*ibidem*: 271).[6] Eufeme uses the prophecy, which grants Merlin immunity until seized by a woman, well aware that it would lead either to Silence's demise or Merlin's disgrace, "But he could search a thousand years without ever being able to capture him. Either Merlin is no prophet, or Silence will never come back" ("Mais ille pora .m. ans quierre Anchois que ille prenge mie. U cho n'est mie prophezie leho que Merlins dist adonques, U cis ne revenra mais onques") (*ibidem*: 273).

Silence has to then prepare to capture Merlin, who is now hiding like a wild animal, covered with hair and eating grass. As an untamed beast, his current survival depends on the natural resources available in the woods, stripping him off the glory of a supernatural representative known from the body of Arthurian legends. Instead, the reader approaches a creature that "not been there for five days because the water he came for was lacking: the watering-place was all dried up" ("jors a voie n'i tint Car l'aigue i fait por quoi il vint. Li lius est ses, n'i a que boivre") (*ibidem*: 279). The food and beverages attract the wild man yearning to satisfy his cravings for a human meal that Silence stimulates with an extraordinary feast. In a beast like fashion, he ravishes meat, honey, milk and wine left in the roast, quenching his hunger and thirst, but the amounts of food damages his organism, "If you ever saw how his belly swelled up, expanded, inflated and dilated, you would burst out laughing!" ("Ki donc veYst ventre eslargir, Estendre, et tezir, et bargir, Ne lairoit qu'il n'en resist tost!") (*ibidem*: 287).

[1] The Old French Viviane, Niv(i)ene, the Damsel, Lady or Chief Lady of the Lake, referred to in Malory as Nynyve, Nenyve, Nymue, Nyneue (Saunders 2010: 239), is a well-known female representative of the male-dominated world of Arthurian wizardry, a distinguished representative of the court and the Otherworld.

[1] Interestingly, the great prophet was also responsible for the death of Silence's ancestor, Gorlain, during the devised scheme of the birth of king Arthur. The Duke of Cornwall died in the events surrounding Arthur's conception, in which Merlin aided Uther Pendragon (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 289).

Silence captures him when he falls asleep and during the escort to the court, Merlin retains the attitude of madness and laughs uncontrollably along the way. A peasant carrying a new pair of shoes, a leper begging for alms and a funeral procession, constitute a peculiar set of circumstances upon which Merlin bursts out laughing without justifying his reasoning. His laughter is even more so prominently noticeable because the onlookers cannot contain their violent reactions to his outbursts. They are perceived as a scornful commentary that he issues, pointing at his superiority which does not match the physical position of him as a wild man, now deemed a madman. The crowds who experience his frenzy, yearn to participate in the scenes. However, Merlin's refusal to speak deprives them of the basic need for fostering rapport and intimacy (Holt 2010: 1524) with each other. The abrupt outbreaks provoke frantic responses from the crowds, who excluded from insight into Merlin's visions, cannot properly interpret the scenes. The unawareness might trigger insecurities, vulnerabilities and a general sense of inferiority in those who do not laugh. Panicking, "they almost died of rage, they were so mad" ("Et cil muerent enaises d'ire") (*ibidem*: 291). Merlin laughs in a way that condemns everyone excluded from his reasoning and provokes hatred towards him, "A king named Ris was there. He couldn't force Merlin by asking or needling or thrashing him to confess the reason" ("Un roi i ot qu'ot a non Ris. Cil ne Ii pot ainc tant proier Si tangoner, ne si broier, Que I'oquoisons Ii fist gehir") (*ibidem*).

What is peculiar about Merlin's laughter is its uncontrollable nature, seizing him in fits as if he were mad, "Merlin laughed so hard at this he almost had a fit" ("Dont rit Merlins, por poi ne derve") (*ibidem*). Its frantic character shifts the attention from the glorious deeds in his past and the superiority of his knowledge to his lack of control over it. He "could scarcely restrain himself" ("Qu'il a moult grant painne se tient") (*ibidem*: 293) leaving the impressions of irony, disdain or even cruelty towards the circumstances. When during the mourning ceremony, Merlin laughs wildly at the praying priest and a man crying over the dead body, such reactions can only be justified according to his secret knowledge he does not want to share. He indeed notices something odd in the scenes but is unable to share it, which makes the situation not only inappropriate but also insults the feelings of others. People are rightfully outraged by what they perceive as disdain in Merlin's muteness. He acts as if superior. Consequently, they bring him in front of the king but even in the presence of the sovereign, Merlin continues to laugh, "to show he didn't care" ("qu'il n'en a cure") (*ibidem:* 293).

Unable to tolerate his demeanor and haunted by the possibility that he might be mocking their own secrets, the royal crowd transforms into a mob who firstly ridicule and threaten him, eventually knocking him down. He is stripped from any remaining of the past glory and in the eyes of the courtiers he is an impostor, "an old wine-bibber!" ("Cil doit boivre moult bien de vin") (*ibidem*), and "Sir Fool"[7] ("U tu diras, dant fol, U jo te trencerai le col") (*ibidem*: 295).

[1] In this context, there are no positive associations with the figure of a medieval courtly jester or fool.

In the *RS*, the laughter is issued from a superior position. It indicates incongruity, but also evolves around the spectrum of madness and the deterioration of the human body, exposing the torment and anguish of human consciousness. It contains overtones of violent despair (Brottman 2002: 405) in him who cannot communicate what he sees. However, paradoxically, when Merlin appears directly in front of the king, beaten and exposed, he regains control and starts taking "such great delight" ("Com plus l'enquierent plus se taist") (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 295) so that the power shifts on his side. With his voice reclaimed, Merlin starts issuing revelations that symbolize messages from "God who gives us good counsel" ("Sire, por Deu qui tolt conselle") (*ibidem*: 297). The "foolish peasant" ("Un fol vilain i encontrai") (*ibidem*) did not realize that the shoes he was buying would be of no use as Merlin saw him dying before reaching home. The beggar was pleading for the bare minimum from people passing him, whereas Merlin perceived his ignorance of a great treasure buried right under his feet. At first, the madman cannot do anything except laugh but when the dispatched messengers discover he was telling the truth, his words turn into testimonies of his wisdom. His "mechanical or quasi-mechanical series of brief, uncontrollable paroxysms of the diaphragm and thorax, accompanied by short intakes of breath and a succession of vocal intonations ranging from a gentle gasp to a clamorous yelp" (Brottman 2002: 406) help him prove the misconduct, ignorance, unawareness, and release the tension.

He, the savage man, can now temper eccentricities of those surrounding him who have to stay alert (Bergson 2013: 10). They understand that Merlin's pathological laughter might either become a solution to their problems or bring their condemnation (Brottman 2002: 408). Suddenly, Merlin becomes the one who "will reveal the truth and show that he is Merlin with such skill and such results" ("O croi bien qu'il devinera Huimais, et qu'il merlinera Par tel engien et tele entente") (Roche-Mahdi 2007: 299). His newly gained credibility transforms the laughter from hindering into accelerating the course of events, placing him in the middle of the action. Now that everything depends on him, the narrator describes the great tension that arose at the court, "The atmosphere became increasingly tense. I cannot find words to tell you what dreadful suspicions were aroused" ("Ki sevent bien qu'il sont copable. Or conmence mals a monter") (*ibidem*: 304, 305). Merlin is transformed into the oracle on whose verdicts the court depends, "Each was worried about his own deeds; all feared that Merlin would reveal everything" ("Cascuns s'esmaie moult de s'uevre: Criement que Merlins ne descuevre") (*ibidem*: 305). He is a teacher and a moral preacher, who "sees and knows everything" ("ki siet desos Ie lanbre") (*ibidem*: 301), but is especially engaged in the relationship between the two female characters who occupies opposite ends of the deception. Silence, who risks her life in a devotion to the kingdom, deceives everybody with her ruse, as well as Queen Eufeme, whose untamed desires sway her to act unreasonably and recklessly, both fear what Merlin can do. The first is afraid of losing "everything, for he will reveal what I have done that is contrary to nature" ("Car il fera descoverture De quanque ai fait contre nature") (*ibidem*: 303), whereas the latter is likewise "profoundly distur-

bed. She lowered her gaze, sighed profoundly, and broke out in a sweat" ("teste encline; Sue, sospire moult a trait") (*ibidem*: 301).

Merlin laughs to uncover their deeds but simultaneously indicates the discrepancy of the masquerade they created. Silence dresses manly to shield against the reality her family faces but uses her status to perform chivalrously and praiseworthy. She becomes the "darling of the court and the favorite of the king" ("De Ie cort al roi est moult bien. Li rois nen aime avant lui rien") (*ibidem*: 266). Merlin steps in to protect the young girl who represents a virtuous life of commitment, bravery, sincerity and chastity, which is a stark contrast to the treacherous, lecherous and badly-intentioned Eufeme, "the lady harlot" ("la dame fole") (*ibidem*: 295) dressed in great materials, adorned with rich jewellery to highlight her "round and smooth and soft" body ("roonde et tendre et mole") (*ibidem*: 179). Her companion, a nun, is a male in disguise who satisfies her bodily desires. The sinful drives lead the queen through the romance in which she plots, deceives and tries to get rid of those who do not comply with her wishes. The sinners suffer the appropriate consequences, "The king despised Eufeme. He had no wish to spare her, nor did anyone ask him to. In accordance with a royal decree, the nun was executed, and the queen was drawn and quartered" (*ibidem*: 313), ("Li rois ot Eufeme en despit. Onques ne volt doner respit, Ne nus nel quist ne demanda. Si com Ii rois Ie conmandal I fu la none done deffaite, Et la dame a chevals detraite").

Merlin's laugh in the romance can be classified as an unnerving factor of the story that heightens the tension and upholds it. It represents the uncanny that prompts its witnesses into self-reflection, an examination of conscience: it mocks, illuminates and warns (Roche-Mahdi 2002: 17). The wild man gradually reveals the layers woven by the heroes, as he battles through their different attires; he "liberate[s] and deliver[s] the fullness of the text" (Gilmore 1997: 116). His laughter has the ability to get into the human soul. Even though such exposure is not pleasurable and necessitates belittlement or the stripping away of titles, even ostracism, but all in all, it purifies (Classen 2010: 548), ensuring a new start. When Merlin is laughing, nothing remains as it seems, even though paradoxically, the marriage of Silence and Evan reaffirms patriarchy and hierarchy (Kinoshita 1995: 405).

POWER OF LAUGHTER. THE *PROSE MERLIN* AND THE VORTIGER'S TOWER

The English rendition of the story of Merlin uses similar laughing scenes, but extended over two chapters. First, we encounter a boy Merlin who gets involved in the dealings of the usurping king Vortiger, a vicious steward to Constance, the King of Britons, who takes over the throne. After the violent act of usurpation, Vortiger tries to escape the consequences by building a stronghold in the mountains. However, the construction keeps falling, so the counsel of wise men sends four soldiers to

find and kill "*a seven-year-old boy born without an earthly father*", whose blood sprinkled on the foundations will restore its balance (Conlee 1998: 35). Merlin, the miraculous boy, already awaits the messengers sent by the king. With the confidence unfitting the seven-year-old, "*He come ageyn them laughinge and seide, I am he that ye seche*" (*ibidem*: 36) unafraid. Such mighty attitude of the vulnerable figure awakes the feeling of incongruity among the soldiers who are abashed by the burst of confident laughter. Moreover, the ironical laugh directed at the messengers who act on behalf of king Vortiger, diminishes the monarchical power, in an uncanny and dangerous way. Thus, the tyrannical and hateful king is mocked (Brown 2005: 11). The audacious demeanour not only belittles the glory of the earthly sovereign, a usurper who rejects the righteous source of his power, but also saves Merlin's life by appeasing the assassins who recognize that "*this childe is merveilouse, and grete pite it were hym to sle*" (Conlee 1998: 36).

Merlin's laughter is neither contagious nor cordial as he does not seem to invite anyone to participate in the merriment only he has insight into (Holt 2010: 1521). The boy represents the supernatural foreknowledge, which compared to the power that issues the search party's, proves to be superior. The *PM* illustrates how the messengers are influenced by Merlin and instead of murdering, they safely escort him to the tower. The soldiers recognize his authority that mixed with humor, soothes their relationship and builds rapport of mutual respect, transforming their ascribed roles. They travel together and Merlin teaches them through other laughing scenes on their way.

Passing through the land, they stop close to the town market because Merlin unexpectedly bursts out laughing, struck by a flash of vision which nobody understands. They all see how a peasant buys himself a pair of "stronge shone, and also stronge leather to close hem with" (*ibidem*: 39). The English rendition shows Merlin imparting the message from his revelations straight away: "and I telle yow certeynly that he shal be dead before he com fully to his howse" (*ibidem*). The unexpected prophecy shocks the soldiers who have already experienced a sample of Merlin's attitude but still in disbelieve, seek to find if it is true. Indeed, his knowledge proves superior as "they hadde not followed the cherl half a myle that thei fonde hym deed […] and his shone aboute his nekke" (*ibidem*).

The scene portrays Merlin's laughter as an expression of his inner voice that fueled by the second sight, signifies his intellectual supremacy. He perceives the futility and irony in purchasing the shoes and shoelaces because they will ultimately contribute to the peasant's demise. The laughter has to suffice Merlin as he cannot change the future so has to release his emotions otherwise. This might also resemble a pathological reaction, apocalyptic in nature, that reveals momentary truths (Brottman 2002: 413–4). It does not ridicule nor show the scene to comedic effect but releases the whirlwind of negative backlash emotions that rise in Merlin.

While Merlin laughs, the soldiers who hear his teachings are startled but also awestruck upon experiencing such knowledge which surpasses Vortiger's wise men, who turn out to be "grete foles were the clerkes that so wise a man wolde have slayn"

(Conlee 1998: 36). An initial skepticism towards Merlin's words in the *PM* gradually evolves into reliability and trustworthiness that can be bestowed upon the boy. Even though nobody shares his laughter (Holt 2010: 1524), they desire to participate in the knowledge and his authority rises.

Merlin's greatness manifests through laughter during the journey to the court, analogously to the *RS*, when the travelers come across a funeral procession. Suddenly, he "*gan to laugh*" (Conlee 1998: 39) when due to his superior knowledge he discovers the deceit among "*the wepynge and […] the preste and the clerks*" (*ibidem*). By revealing the plot of adultery, he turns the outrage against the sinners, not his reaction.

The circumstances aren't the direct cause of his laughter, which he issues in the absence of any outlet to release his emotions. The relationships of the family are full of incongruities and the situation is not funny. His laughter does not convey a humorous scene but a sinister response to the hidden truth. The sin of hypocrisy is by no means amusing or entertaining, yet its discovery educates and warns against every evil deed that should not go unnoticed in the eyes of God. Merlin perceives the world that lacks love, hope, or faith in the future, leaving him with nothing but laughter, which soon becomes the most fitting response to the pain and suffering around him (Brottman 2002: 406). Merlin takes up the role of a censor of a sinful human nature, which he is sent to correct: as a moral educator he reveals human vices and flaws, reminding us about the importance of repentance and improvement (Speier 1998: 1389). However, being a humble emissary, he will not punish the family for lechery or adultery, which is only within God's scope, so the sin is not further discussed.

With his laughter, Merli warns, alerts and reminds others to strive toward righteousness because the sanctions after wrongdoing are unavoidable. A community that favours order would support such a course of events as an instinctive way to preserve balanced, natural arrangements in the world created by God (Classen 2010: 5). Merlin's "lawgh"/ "lowgh" (Conlee 1998: 111) indicates his advanced thought-processing in comparison to usual, normal patterns of thinking within a communal life (Classen 2010: 2). He is the first to notice breaches, discrepancies and deviations from the norm. Nobody laughs with Merlin, as the scenes are not the source of common entertainment. He externalizes his inner voices, translates the visions to release from their burden which in consequence leads people to observe and reflect on the fragility of human life. Revealing the truth would not prevent the peasant from a fatal accident, neither would it bring the boy back to life since his death already is the punishment for the parents who had sinned. As the moralist and Christian envoy, he does not interfere with fate, which is the domain of God but foreshadows and teaches. He recognizes the fatalism and articulates the tragicomic moment in a universally recognizable manner: through laughter.

LAUGHTER IN POWER. MERLIN AND GRISANDOLUS IN ROME.

The last point of reference between the two romances is partially analogous to the French *Silence*, but expanded in the *PM*. While in Rome, he immerses himself in conflicts of royal significance, affecting the entire city, "Than fill that the emperour fill into a grete stodye, wherfore all the courte was pensif and stille. And ther was noon that durste sey a worde, for sore thei dredde for to wrathe the emperor" (Conlee 1998: 225). He is therefore summoned in front of the emperor to alleviate the sorrow.

The character of a cross-dressed Grisandolus,[8] Silence's counterpart, is introduced towards the end of the *PM* because, according to the prophecy, only a woman can seize the old man hidden in the forest. She manages to trick everybody to believe in the ruse of a knight who performs chivalrously for the kingdom. Grisandolus competes with other people who seek Merlin in the forest and is the only one to prove her unwavering piety and bravery, seeking the Wildman relentlessly. Her pleadings are answered and she receives the exact instructions on how to hunt Merlin down

> Purchese flessh newe and salt, and mylke and hony, and hoot breed newe bake, and bringe with thee foure felowes and a boy to turne the spite till it be inough rosted. And com into this foreste by the moste uncouthe weyes that thow canste fynde; and sette a table by the fier, and the breed and the mylke and the hony upon the table. And hide thee and thi companye a litill thens, and doute thee nought that the savage man will come (*ibidem*: 227).

Like an untamed animal when captured, "*the savage man loked on Grisandolus that rode by hym, and began to laugh right harde*" (*ibidem*: 228) in a superior manner upon discovering the incongruous analogy between the knight's looks and his real gender. They begin the journey to the court and on their way Merlin laughs more; this time however, Grisandolus is not privy to the laughs as Merlin postpones his revelation until more than one person can be taught.

Merlin's fearless laughter, even when he laughs alone, serves as a testament to his strong spirit and unwavering confidence. His ability to find humor in the most solemn of moments, including in the presence of sovereigns, reflects his unique perspective on life and his willingness to challenge societal expectations. Superior due to his supernatural knowledge, his laughter thus becomes a symbol of resilience and refusal to be constrained. He is the moral crusader who by breaching the social norms of conformity and ignorance, replaces the old values. From the wilderness on their way to Rome, Grisandolus and Merlin come across a chapel where the old man laughs two times. First, he bursts out with laughter at the pitiful sight of beggars waiting for alms in front of the shrine. Later, when the pair enters the ongoing service, Merlin laughs at a scene where the squire uncontrollably strikes his master three times, then returns to his place (*ibidem*: 229).

[1] Grisandoles in *Estoire* (originally *auenable,* which means Lovely) (Lacy 2010: 303).

The beggar in front of the chapel deserved Merlin's laughter not out of contempt but because of the inability to properly exploit the treasure hidden underground. Gold and riches buried under the chapel could have relieved the poverty but the injustice in the society violates the fair distribution of goods. Merlin condemns the situation where "the riche wolde oppresse the pore under theire feet" (*ibidem*: 237) and his laughter on the one hand points out the issue but also indicates the overwhelming extent of it. People in power misuse their authority to attend to their ends instead of protecting those who depend on them. Merlin hints that the more powerful should react and prevent the less privileged from the damaging influence of deleterious materialism and greed. Similarly, the squire hitting his lord shows in the literal way the disregard of social issues in the city which should reproach avarice, greed and reprobation of the rich, "untrewe riche peple whan enythinge cometh to hem be myschaunce, thei swere and stare and sey maugré have God for His yeftes" (*ibidem*).

By laughing at the circumstances, Merlin aims at the critique of the lending practices that charge disproportionate interest rates, enabling the rich to accumulate even greater wealth, "And the userer so leneth hem litill and litill, that at laste thei moste selle theire heritage to hym that so longe hath it coveyted" (*ibidem*). The old man indicates superiority of the inner knowledge but also explains the importance of addressing these concerns to create a society where opportunities are accessible to all; otherwise, the system remains full of incongruities that visibly harm participants of the system. The final stroke symbolizes seeking personal benefits and corruption among of people attending the mass whose evil intentions neglect the purifying essence of the service, "false pletours, men of lawe, that sellen and apeire theire neyghbours behinde here bakke for covetise and envye of that thei se hem thrive, and for thei be not in her daungier" (*ibidem*). Thereby, the significance of the scene points to the moral conduct the old man tries to protect. He teaches about the sins of impiety, insincerity, cruelty and social injustices concealed behind the false appearances of the knight kneeling in front of the Holy Sacrament. Only the release of bad habits can bring relief and renewal.

When they finally enter the palace, Merlin is treated as a long-awaited guest, who even though attired as a wild man, is recognized for his prophetic abilities showcased before. The solitary figure from the woods becomes a seer the whole city have been waiting for. The condition of the kingdom is also mirrored in the way Merlin laughs at its court: upon seeing the barons, the empress, the emperor, Grisandolus, and finally at himself. At the heart of the palace lies a great secret, the root of all other problems. Just as the head of his realm, a body Politic, the emperor transfers the suffering caused by the disease of his organism, a body Natural that cannot rest nor sleep (Kantorowicz 1981: 9) when the royal spouse invites her lovers into their bedchamber, onto his subjects. Merlin must uncover and confront this deceit, laughing at the Romans who were unaware of the empress' adultery with her cross-dressed attendants, the twelve young men; additionally, he reveals Grisandolus' real identity he knowns since looking upon her in the forest because "for by woman is many a man disceyved" (*ibidem*: 236).

Just like Silence, Grisandolus/ Avenable is acting out of necessity dictated by the unfavorable circumstances she faces as a woman. Her overall conduct and faithful service distinguish her as "*the pris amonge alle other*" (*ibidem*: 225) and she deserves acknowledgement of her achievements. Her loyal service is worthy of applause as it constitutes a solid foundation for the well-being of Rome.

The empress repeats the history of queen Eufeme with other cross-dressed men, found in the emperor's "*chamber and in hir bedde*" (Conlee 1998: 234), who metamorphose to seek corporeal gratification, dishonouring not only the institution of marriage but also the royal union and human bonds based on fidelity and faithfulness. The laughter at the adultery in the royal house is a condemning reaction to the false appearances which promote bodily pleasures and pervasive depravity. The extramarital affair affects the whole family, destroying its unity and corrupting their offspring, "hadde I grete *despite, for I saugh that she was youre wif*, [whose example follows] *(...) youre doughter*" (*ibidem*: 238). By pronouncing the flaws, naming the wrongdoing, and calling for repentance, Merlin protects the familial unit of the whole city, whose current conduct will be transmitted to further generations. The empress turns out to be the "*moste lecherouse woman of all Rome*" (*ibidem*: 224) and together with her twelve lovers, they delight in the committed sins. Consequently, nobody pities their condemnation and a death sentence.

At Julius Caesar's palace, Merlin, the moral educator, appropriates his laughter to expose the flaws in the system. As corruption tightens its grip on Roman society, his mission is marked by scenes of laughter, doubling the chances of achieving the moral ideal; the laughter is superior, shows incongruities and brings the final relief, shielding people from "everlastinge deth" (*ibidem*). His laughter highlights consequences of the wrongdoing and serves as deterrents against similar crimes. In the end, it offers consolation and spreads merriment in the form of a wedding ceremony of the emperor and Avenable, according to Merlin's measures.

MERLIN THE JESTER

The medieval reality transformed laughter that evolved from a subject of suspicion to a powerful sign. Stemming from the associations with sanctity and kingship, particularly in the twelfth century[9] (Jones 2019: 2), laughter started to symbolize power. Specialists of humor at medieval courts, jesters, fools, tricksters, jokers or buffoons, were not mere comedians: they were capable of openly criticizing the

[1] As represented at the court of King Henry II by the king himself and Thomas Becket, the laughing king and saint, Jones claims that the English king was not only famous for his contributions to the legal reformation of the country but also for his sense of humor. On the one hand, his jokes resembled attacks, but on the other, if someone joked skillfully with him, the king's anger was deflated, and the monarch was appeased (Jones 2019: 1).

monarch without the risk of facing consequences that would fall upon others. They were granted the knowledge to realize that "truth has a genuine power to please if it manages not to give offence" (Southworth 1998: 9). Jesters were invited to perform, entertain and tease their patrons in front of people in order to ease the mental pressures for monarchs and the nobles. The connection between jesters and the king could be very close, even intimate, and in such situations, he might wield significant influence over the king's policies and decisions (*ibidem:* 2). They represented the difficult art of telling the truth but dressed up as silliness, which made them powerful and influential. By definition, they were people the king could favor without provoking jealousy or rival claims from competing courtiers (*ibidem:* 1).

Merlin takes a role of a jester due to his abilities to make light of social inequalities and represent the imperfection of the social order in a humorous manner, making the commentary more palatable to his addressees. He is the only entity capable of criticising the ruling class or laughing at his superior, veiling truth in comedy. Merlin' humor represents the highest form of thought and perception, making it essential for humans (*ibidem:* 9). With his talent, wisdom and sensitivity, he knew how to distract his master from his sorrows.

CONCLUSIONS

The two romances use the figure of Merlin and both employ his laughter for their own ends. It seems undeniable that the French and English perceive laughter as a powerful tool, and employ Merlin to prove various points. The fifteenth-century English prose is fully devoted to him as the main hero whose laughter is yet another sign of his wisdom. It is true that wherever he appears, the deception can no longer be and his renown for managing the plot is highlighted. The *PM*, which presents Merlin on a larger scale, shows his humor serving multiple functions: it smooths political tensions, educates, admonishes, preaches, moralizes, and ultimately refines. Thanks to his measures, more than one person converts to the path of righteousness. Merlin is a gentle teacher-moralist who combines caution and admonishment with laughter, which is his common reaction to deceit that he perceives with his supernatural vision. He does not laugh out wildly but meaningfully.

The French romance places its main focus on the female characters, with Merlin only featuring towards the end. His role is limited but ultimately concludes the plot. He does hint at social issues that should be corrected, but his laughter is primarily an expression of the general disdain towards women who cause the confusion. The laughing of the wild man might be as much a result of his neurosis stumbling upon discrepancies as of catharsis and relief, resembling the apocalypse more than a carnival (Brottman 2002: 401). When retrieved from his wilderness, Merlin laughs savagely because this is his only known method of communicating with the world he abandoned long ago. Therefore, his mocking, guffawing, or choking with laughter

evokes ambiguous reactions; his laughter is a sincere and sole response to the world around him.

Even though the two works use similar laughing scenes scenarios, they present Merlin differently. The French have him as a part of the Arthurian body, an addition to the main story which is not indispensable to the main plot. The audience did not see him as their main hero since their culture and literature had already been enriched by the champions from the Carolingian cycle. Charlemagne and his associates contributed enough to the glory of their chivalry. The English in the fifteenth century seemed to delight in the figure of a courtly sage and magician, upgrading his role. The anonymous author not only reworked but also extended laughter so that it spanned across two chapters. For the English, Merlin remains in the kingdom as long as it needs him to remain prosperous, whereas the French hero is ready to leave as soon as possible because the presence of people and their deceit seem to overwhelm him. Merlin and his laughter in the *PM* better, refine, and smooth, while in the *RS,* they first shock and then improve others. All in all, Merlin "laugh right harde" (Conlee 1997: 229) and best because he laughs last.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bänninger-Huber E., Salvenauer E. (2023): *Different types of laughter and their function for emotion regulation in dyadic interactions*, "Current Psychology", 42: 24249–24259.

Bayless M. (2021): *A Cultural History of Comedy in the Middle Ages a Cultural History of Comedy in the Middle Ages*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

Ben-Ezra I. (1991): *Merlin: The Medieval Embodiment of Overcoming the Devil*, "Binghamton Journal of History", 14: 1–13.

Bergson H. (2013): *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Courier Corporation, Chelmsford.

Brottman M. (2002): *Risus Sardonicus: Neurotic and Pathological Laughter*, "Humor-International Journal of Humor Research", 15/4: 401–417.

Brown D. (2005): *What Part of 'Know' Don't You Understand*?, "The Monist", 88/1: 11–35.

Chaucer G. (1993): *The General Prologue*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman.

Child C. G. (1910): *The Second Shepherds' Play: Everyman and Other Early Plays*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

Clarke B. (1973) (trans.): *Vita Merlini: The Life of Merlin*, <www.maryjones.us/ctexts/merlini.html> [ostatni dostęp: 18.07.2024].

Classen A. (2010): *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Conlee J. W. (1998) (ed.): *Prose Merlin*. Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo.

De Boron R. (2007): *Merlin and the Grail: Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, Perceval: The Trilogy of Prose Romances Attributed to Robert de Boron*, Bryant N. (trans.), D. S. Brewer, Cardiff.

Dryden J. (2015): *King Arthur; Or, the British Worthy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Fielding H. (1776): *The Tragedy of Tragedies; or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great: As It Is Acted at the Theatre in the Hay-Market. With the Annotations of H. Scriblerus Secundus*, London.

Freud S. (1905): *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 8, Jokes and Their Relation to the Uncoscious*, Vintage, London.
Gilmore G. T. (1997): *'Le Roman de Silence': Allegory in Ruin or Womb of Irony?,* "Arthuriana", 7/2: 111–28.
Hobbes T. (2004): *Leviathan*, Barnes & Noble Publishing, New York.
Holt E. (2010): *The Last Laugh: Shared Laughter and Topic Termination*, "Journal of Pragmatics", 42/4: 1513: 25.
Hugh M. (1992): *Images of laughter in old English poetry, with particular reference to the 'hleahtor wera' of The Seafarer*, "English Studies", 73/3: 193–204.
Jones P. (2019): *Laughter and Power in the Twelfth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Kantoriwicz E. H. (1981): *The Kings Two Bodies a Study in Medieval Political Theory*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
Kaufman A. S. (2007): *The Law of the Lake: Malory's Sovereign Lady*, "Arthuriana", 17/3: 56–73.
Kinoshita S. (1995): *Heldris de Cornuälle's Roman de Silence and the Feudal Politics of Lineage*, "PMLA", 110/3: 397–409.
Knight S. (2016): *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Through the Ages*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca.
Lacy N. J. (2010): *Lancelot-Grail: The Story of Merlin*, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, Martlesham.
Lintott S. (2016): *Superiority in Humor Theory*, "The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", 74/4: 347–58.
Looper J. E. (2002): *'L'Estoire de Merlin' and the Mirage of the Patrilineage*, "Arthuriana", 12/3: 63–85.
Of Salisbury J. (1927): *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury: Being the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books, and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books, of the Policraticus*, A. A. Knopf, New York.
Pratt K. (2002): *Humour in the Roman de Silence*, in: Busby K., Dalrymple R. (eds.), *Comedy in Arthurian Literature*, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, Mertlsham: 87–105.
Rhys E. (1926) (ed.): '*Everyman' with Other Interludes: Including Eight Miracle Plays*, Dent, London.
Riga F. P. (2008): *Gandalf and Merlin: J.R.R. Tolkien's Adoption and Transformation of a Literary Tradition*, "Mythlore", 27/ 1/2: 21–44.
Roche-Mahdi S. (2002): *A Reappraisal of the Role of Merlin in the 'Roman de Silence'*, "Arthuriana", 12/1: 6–21.
Roche-Mahdi S. (2007) (trans.): *Silence, a Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing.
Saunders C. J. (2010): *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*. D.S. Brewer, Cardiff.
Schopenhauer A., Payne E. F. J. (1966): *The World as Will and Representation*, Courier Corporation, Chelmsford.
Sommer H. O. (1909): *The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances*, "Internet Archive", Washington, <archive.org/details/vulgateversionof01sommuoft/page/n3/mode/2up?view=theater>. [last access: 17.07.2024].
Southworth J. (1998): *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Pub Ltd, Stroud.
Speier H. (1998): *Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power,* "American Journal of Sociology", 103/ 5: 1352–1401.
Spenser E. (1882): *The Faerie Queene*, Hazell, Watson and Viney, London.
Thrope L. (1973): *Merlin's Sardonic Laughter*, in: Rothwell W. (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages: In Memory of Frederick Whitehead,* Wyd. Manchester University Press, New York: 323–41.
Woods W. F. (1991): *"My Sweet Foo": Emelye's role in "The Knight's Tale",* "Studies in Philology", 88/3: 276–306.