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PILLARS OF THE NATIONAL POETRY: GÉRARD DE NERVAL'S VOICE IN THE ROMANTIC DEBATE ON THE ORIGINS OF FRENCH LITERATURE**FILARY NARODOWEJ POEZJI: GŁOS GÉRARDA DE NERVALA W DEBACIE O POCZĄTKACH FRANCUSKIEJ LITERATURY**

Słowa kluczowe: trubadurzy, truverzy, literatura narodowa, romantyzm, Gérard de Nerval, poezja francuska

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Polish researchers, who at various stages of their education come across the book *Manifesty romantyzmu 1790–1830. Anglia, Niemcy, Francja* [Manifestos of Romanticism 1790–1830. England, Germany, France], comprising, among others, Victor Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*¹, become acquainted with the French battle for a new theatrical form. The discussion corresponds with the specificity of Polish Romanticism, which abounds in dramatic productions. However, another French dispute which inflamed national sentiments in the age of Romanticism, is less well known. It forms part of a broader European search for sources of national literature, which may be illustrated on Polish grounds with the works of Kazimierz Brodziński, *O klasycyzmie i romantyzmie* (1818; [On Classicism and Romanticism, as well as on the Spirit of Polish Poetry]), Maurycy Mochnacki, *O duchu i źródłach poezji w Polsce* (1825; [On the Spirit and Sources of Poetry in Poland]) and famous preface to Adam Mickiewicz's first volume of poems, *Poezje* (1822; [Poetry]). It arose among French writers and historians and concerned establishing the origins of French poetry. Recalling two typical figures of medieval poets – the troubadours and trouvères

¹ *Manifesty romantyzmu 1790–1830 (Anglia, Niemcy, Francja)*, edited by A. Kowalczykowska, Warszawa 1975. If not stated otherwise, translations to English are mine.

– the Romantics considered whose heirs they considered themselves to be and which of the two corresponded better with the postulates of “littérature originale, nationale”² [original, national literature], a theme that was important in Gérard de Nerval’s critical essays. The aim of my paper is to provide a clear, though necessarily simplified, view of the early Romantic reception of the troubadours and trouvères and to discuss Nerval’s attitude reflected in his prefaces from 1830 to two poetry selections: *Choix des poésies de Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf, Belleau, Du Bartas, Chassignet, Desportes, Régnier* [Choice of poems of Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf, Belleau, Du Bartas, Chassignet, Desportes, Régnier] and *Poésies allemandes* [German poems]. In both, different types of medieval poets appear in a context which suggests that they complemented each other. The unequivocal categories used by him – such as the North and South, Old French and Old Occitan language, national and regional identity, chivalry or love themes – were not aimed at sharpening the profile of the dispute.

In general terms, troubadours are poets of the Occitan language whose works begin in the eleventh century. The main theme of their poetry is courtly love. The compositions of the trouvères were written later in Old French; love was also their main theme, though did not entirely dominate their poetic universe, which also incorporated war, politics, and knightly adventures. The growing interest in the troubadours and their age dates back to the end of the eighteenth century; hence in the first half of the nineteenth century the public had access to many editions of troubadour verse³. The phenomenon of “revanche des trouvères”⁴ [trouvères’ vengeance] at the beginning of the nineteenth century should also be noted. The publisher Arthur Dinaux had been working on the series *Trouvères, jongleurs et ménestrels du nord de la France et du midi de la Belgique* [Trouvères, Jongleurs, and Minstrels of Northern France and Southern Belgium], initiated in 1834 by publication of *Les Trouvères Cambrésiens* [Cambresian Trouvères], and which continued up to 1863. The oldest surviving monument of Old French language, *Cantilène de sainte Eulalie* [Canticle of Saint Eulalia], was published in the second volume of the series in 1839. It is important to note that intense research on the troubadours continued to be conducted during this period. With the purpose of representing the variety of attitudes, we will quote here only a few fragments from the famous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editions of medieval poetry:

On avoit été jusqu’à présent dans la persuasion, que nous tenions notre Poésie des Provençaux, qu’ils avoient été les Inventeurs de nos Chansons, [...] mais on verra que c’est à la Normandie que nous sommes redevables des premiers Poèmes François, que l’on connoisse; qu’il y a eu parmi nous des Chansons en Langue Vulgaire, avant celles que la Provence nous a montrées, [...]⁵.

² G. de Nerval, *Introduction aux « Poésies allemandes »*. In: *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, Paris 1989, p. 263.

³ Cf. *La Réception des troubadours au XIXème siècle*. Eds. J.-F. Courouau and D. Lacroix, Paris 2020 (forthcoming).

⁴ S.-A. Leterrier, *Troubadours et trouvères – un dialogue nord-sud?*, „Revue du Nord” 2005, n° 2, p. 446.

⁵ P.-A. Levesque de la Ravalière, *Préface*. In: *Les Poésies du roy de Navarre*, vol. 1, Paris 1742,

Il n'y avoit que l'auteur des *Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie*, qui pût arracher les troubadours du tombeau [...]. Ce respectable académicien, [...], aux recherches les plus profondes sur nos antiquités nationales, est parvenu à découvrir tout ce que l'on pouvoit raisonnablement désirer [...]. Pour connoître les troubadours, ces anciens poètes provençaux, les peres de la littérature moderne, il falloît trouver & expliquer leurs ouvrages⁶.

L'origine de la littérature moderne est donc en Provence, c'est-à-dire, dans les provinces méridionales de la monarchie française⁷.

Quelle fut ma surprise, lorsqu'en parcourant ces Troubadours si vantés, ces Troubadours qu'on nous représentait comme les Précepteurs de la Nation, je ne trouvai chez eux que des poésies tristes, monotones, insipides & illisibles; tandis que les Rimeurs de nos Provinces septentrionales, inconnus & dédaignés, m'offraient, [...] des productions pleines de gaieté, d'esprit & d'imagination. [...] ce à quoi je ne m'attendais pas, c'est la chaleur que certaines personnes ont mise à me combattre. [...] parce que j'ai dit que les Poètes qu'avaient produits autrefois les Provinces méridionales n'étaient pas à beaucoup près aussi admirables qu'elles le prétendent⁸.

[...] dans le siècle dernier, une lutte s'engagea sur les divers mérites des trouvères et des troubadours : Barbazan, Legrand d'Aussy, La Curne de Ste.-Palaye, les abbés Papon, Millot et de Fontenay, Mayer et Berenger, ont rompu des lances à la plus grande gloire poétique du nord et du midi ; [...]. L'opinion de ces savans consciencieux [authors of *Histoire littéraire de la France* (1824) – M.K.] est d'un poids immense dans la balance ; [...] voici leur impartial jugement sur nous trouvères: « A notre avis, disent-ils, ces chansons françaises soutiennent *avantageusement* le parallèle avec les chansons provençales du même temps : les idées y sont plus ingénieuses; l'expression des sentiments y est plus simple, et par conséquent plus vraie »⁹.

p. XII. [Until now, we were convinced that we owe our poetry to the Provençals, that they were the inventors of our chansons, [...] but we will see that it is the Normans who we owe the first known poems in French, that we had chansons in vernacular language before these, which the Provençals showed us [...].

⁶ C.-F.-X. Millot, *Avertissement*. In: *Histoire littéraire des troubadours*, Paris 1774, p. v. Cf. the English translation in: *The Literary History of the Troubadours*, transl. by S. Dobson, London 1807, pp. V–VI: “[...] it was owing to the immense labours of the author of the *Memoirs on Ancient Chivalry*, that they were at last raised from the tomb. This respectable academician, Mr. de St. Palaye, was almost wholly occupied in researches into the antiquities of nations; [...]. Troubadours were the ancient Provençal poets and the fathers of modern literature”.

⁷ J.-B. de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, *Discours préliminaire*. In: *Histoire littéraire des troubadours*, pp. LXXV–LXXVI. [The origins of modern literature are then in Provence, namely in the meridional provinces of French monarchy].

⁸ P. J.-B. Legrand d'Aussy, *Observations sur les troubadours par l'éditeur des « Fabliaux »*, Paris 1781, p. 2, 7. [What was my surprise when, when leafing through the pages of these praised troubadours, those who were introduced to us as the nation's tutor, I found only sad, monotonous, tasteless and unreadable poetry in them, while rhymes from our northern provinces, of unknown and despised poets, presented me the works of gaiety, inspiration and imagination. [...] what I did not expect was the enthusiasm with which some went to fight me, [...] because I said that the poets of the southern provinces were not as delightful as they thought they were].

⁹ A. Dinaux, *Les Trouvères Cambrésiens*, Paris 1837, pp. 37–38. [...] in the last century, the

The above quotations call into question the national level of the debate: the authors indeed referred to “les inventeurs de nos Chansons” [inventors of our chansons] and “les Précepteurs de la Nation” [nation’s tutors], but the medieval poets are also called “les peres de la littérature moderne” [fathers of modern literature]. The controversy about the predecessors of the Romantic writers also proved to be important for the representatives of European Romanticism¹⁰, who eulogised one group of poets, while neglected or finding fault with the others. From this short overview of opinions we may draw the conclusion that the opposition between the troubadours and trouvères entails a series of other literary divisions: sorrowful or joyful, expressing true emotions or sophisticatedly describing simulated feelings, focused on military or amorous conquests. Which of these coheres better with the national character of French poetry? Sophie-Anne Leterrier argues that even in the midst of the fierce debate in the second half of the eighteenth century, the poets were not opposed: “[...] troubadours et trouvères sont tous présentés comme les pères de la littérature nationale, les premiers poètes et compositeurs individualisés, pas forcément opposés, mais au contraire collectivement valorisés dans le mouvement de retour au Moyen Âge”¹¹. However, she admits that the language of their poetry constitutes an area of scholarly tensions. In the above quotations, it is only Sainte Palaye who considers Provence to be a part of France, whereas other authors demonstrate not the French, but the Provençal identity of troubadours.

One of the works which addresses this dispute is entitled *Tradition nationale et clivages régionalistes: la querelle des trouvères et des troubadours dans le roman-*

struggle for various merits of the trouvères and troubadours arose: Barbazan, Legrand d’Aussy, La Curne de Ste.-Palaye, the abbots Papon, Millot and de Fontenay, Mayer and Berenger ran a tilt against the greater poetic glory of the North and South; [...]. The opinion of diligent scholars [authors of *Histoire littéraire de la France* (1824) – M.K.] is of great importance for maintaining balance; [...] here is their impartial assessment of our trouvères: ‘In our opinion, these French songs stand up to comparisons with Provençal songs from the same period, and even have additional advantages, ideas are better, and expressing feelings simpler and therefore truer’].

¹⁰ The dispute also spread across the Atlantic, as evidenced by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s sketch *The Trouvères*: “It is a remarkable circumstance in the literary history of France, that, while her antiquarians and scholars have devoted themselves to collecting and illustrating the poetry of the Troubadours, and early lyric poets of the South, that of the Trouvères, or Troubadours of the North, has been almost entirely neglected. By a singular fatality, too, what little time and attention have hitherto been bestowed upon the fathers of French poetry, have been so directed as to save from oblivion little of the most valuable portions of their writings; [...] Among the voluminous remains of Troubadour literature, little else has yet been discovered than poems of a lyric character. The lyre of the Troubadour seems to have responded to the impulse of momentary feelings only, to the touch of local and transitory circumstances. [...] On the other hand, the great mass of the poetry of the Trouvères is of a narrative or epic character”. In: *The Complete Prose Works*, Houghton 1883, p. 1054.

¹¹ Leterrier, “Troubadours et trouvères”, p. 445 [Troubadours and trouvères are both presented as fathers of national literature, first individual poets and composers, not opposed, but, on the contrary, collectively valued in the Middle Ages return movement]. The contribution of Louis-Élisabeth de la Vergne, comte de Tressan (1705–1783) is significant, as he edited works to which the epithet ‘chevaleresque’ may be applied (*Corps d’extraits de romans de chevalerie*, Paris 1776–1782), without clear inclination to trouvères or troubadours.

tisme français (1813–1830) [National Tradition and Regionalist Cleavages: Dispute between Trouvères and Troubadours in the French Romanticism (1813–1830)]. As the main subjects of our analysis are two articles by Nerval from 1830, we may presume that these articles were written at the very end of this period of impassioned debate. It would be more accurate to say, however, that this year marks the closing of one of its stages, as other essential contributions to the debate, including those by Claude Fauriel and Jean Bernard Marie Lafon¹², are published later, in the 1830s and 1840s.

The theme of the crusades allows Nerval to discuss the German chivalric works inspired by troubadour poetry:

Le temps des croisades changea un peu la face des choses. Les chevaliers allemands, dans leurs voyages, traversèrent la Provence, les champs poétiques de l'Orient, et, à leur retour ou pendant les loisirs de la guerre sainte, s'occupèrent de littérature, et composèrent un grand nombre de chants dont une partie est venue jusqu'à nous.

Tout cela est une pâle contre-épreuve des poésies romantiques de nos troubadours; les croisades, les tournois, la galanterie chevaleresque, sont les éternels sujets de ces poèmes, bizarrement enluminés des couleurs vives et joyeuses du Midi et des sombres peintures du Nord; imitations lourdes et sans génie, parce qu'elles étaient imitations [...]¹³.

The northern German spirit clashes in this picture with the South, symbolized by Provence, which becomes a transitional land to the East shrouded in poetry. The journey to the Holy Land, speaking precisely, each stage of this journey (“dans leurs voyages”, “à leur retour”, “pendant les loisirs de la guerre sainte”) is also the stage of becoming a poet¹⁴. This mosaic is not assessed by Nerval as an artistic achieve-

¹² Cf. the bibliography of publications related to troubadours and trouvères also in the 1830s and 1840s: P. Martel, *Les Félibres et leur temps. Renaissance d'oc et opinion (1850–1914)*, Bordeaux 2010, pp. 54–56, including works of Jules Michelet, Claude Fauriel, and Jean-Jacques Ampère, among others.

¹³ Nerval, *Introduction aux « Poésies allemandes »*, p. 271 [Crusade times slightly change the picture of this phenomenon. The German knights travel through Provence, the poetic fields of the East and, after returning or as entertainers during holy wars, turn to literature and compose many songs, some of which reached us as well. All this is a pale reflection of the romantic poetry of our troubadours; crusades, tournaments, knightly gallantry are the eternal themes of these poems, bizarrely illuminated by the lively and cheerful colours of the South and the sullen paintings of the North; clumsy imitation – without spirit, being just the imitation].

¹⁴ Nerval tries to weigh the arguments and gives voice to all interested parties. It is evident from even a cursory reading that he uses long quotes from other works to that extent that their boundaries are lost and the polemics with the quoted views are not particularly well developed. In the selection of quotations from the book *Germany* of Madame de Staël, we can observe that Nerval emphasizes the genius that unites the North and South: “Nous avons souvent parlé de ce qui caractérise les poètes du Nord, la mélancolie et la méditation. Goethe, comme tous les hommes de génie, réunit en lui d'étonnants contrastes; on retrouve dans ses poésies beaucoup de traces du caractère des habitants du Midi” (Nerval, *Introduction aux « Poésies allemandes »*, p. 267); cf. also the quotation from Friedrich von Schlegel related to Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock: “touchant d'une main au christianisme et de l'autre à la mythologie du Nord, comme aux deux éléments principaux de toute culture intellectuelle et de toute poésie européenne moderne” (*ibidem*, p. 272).

ment of great value, as in the succeeding lines he applies to it the epithets “ridicule” [ridiculous] and “grotesque”¹⁵. More importantly, the sources of vividness of German poetry were to be found in this period and in this heterogeneity: “il y avait là les éléments d’une régénération”¹⁶ [there were the elements of regeneration]. Some of the cultural notions mentioned by Nerval do not reflect the nature of the Germans, that is the East and South, as their national poetry is, as he describes it in the beginning of the preface, composed from “chant des vieux bardes Saxons” [songs of old Saxon bards] and is totally immersed in the spirit of “vieille poésie du Nord”¹⁷ [old poetry of the North]. Therefore, the troubadour-inspired poems could only be the imitations.

In the beginning of the preface to the selection of poetry, that of Ronsard and of other poets of La Pléiade, Nerval recalls an important institution from the Southern France, a kind of revival center for poetry in *langue d’oc*: *Académie des Jeux floraux*. Surprisingly, in this initial part of the preface, he establishes clearly and ironically an opposition: twice he repeats that this important discussion took place in the provinces (“une académie de province” which was traced by “un journal de province”), whereas he emphasizes his current location in the statement: “à Paris nous ne le voyons guère”¹⁸ [we rarely notice it in Paris]. This separation between capital and region will not, however, be maintained in the following parts of Nerval’s text. He mentions treatise which was awarded in 1830 by *Académie des Jeux floraux* which raised the question of whether the study of French poets until the seventeenth century can be beneficial to contemporary romantic poetry. Seeking an “original” and at the same time a “national” literature, Nerval points out that to meet this challenge, what is needed is not the imitation of foreign authors, but rather the advanced study of early poets:

Car toute littérature primitive est nationale, n’étant créée que pour répondre à un besoin, et conformément au caractère et aux mœurs du peuple qui l’adopte; d’où il suit que, de même qu’une graine contient un arbre entier, les premiers essais d’une littérature renferment tous les germes de son développement futur, de son développement complet et définitif¹⁹.

¹⁵ Arno Krispin calls it “l’union des contraires”, *L’Occitanie et la création poétique de Gérard de Nerval: du souvenir à l’invention, de l’histoire à la vision*. In: *L’Occitanie romantique*. Edited by C. Torreilles, Bordeaux 1997, p. 89.

¹⁶ Nerval, *Introduction aux « Poésies allemandes »*, p. 271.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 263. Cf. also p. 271: “Le saxon ou bas-germain plaisait davantage au peuple, et c’est en saxon que furent composées les premières poésies vraiment nationales de l’Allemagne”.

¹⁸ G. de Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf, Belleau, Du Bartas, Chassignet, Desportes, Régnier*. In: *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, Paris 1989, p. 281. Cf. the beginning of *Sylvie* in the interpretation of Valérie Dupuy: “Le mot de « province » apparaît en fait dès les premières pages, et c’est lui qui déclenche le va-et-vient de la mémoire entre les divers plans temporels dans lesquels se déplace le récit et où le Valois occupe toujours le premier plan” (*Province et mémoire: l’espace et le temps dans « Sylvie » de Gérard de Nerval*. In: *Province / Paris. Topographies littéraires du XIXe siècle*. Eds. A. Djourachkovitch and Y. Leclerc, Rouen 2000, p. 146–147).

¹⁹ Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, p. 283 [Each original literature is national, being created to respond to the need and being in accordance with the nature and customs of the people who adopt it; this is where it comes from, just as the seed contains a tree, the first literary attempts encapsulate the sources of future development, the overall and final growth].

The remark of adherence of different types of medieval poets to this branch of “national poetry” is present in the fragments which start with two similar questions. Firstly, Nerval asks: “Mais avions-nous en effet une littérature avant Malherbe?”²⁰ [Had we had in truth the literature before Malherbe?]. This question permits him to give an affirmative response, but he suggests that the reception of this literature demands courageous readers who are not afraid of “un mot vieilli” [an obsolete word] and “une expression triviale ou naïve” [naïve and trivial expression]. In the second question Nerval insists: “Nous dirons donc maintenant: existait-il une littérature nationale avant Ronsard?” [Let us say now: had national literature existed before Ronsard?] and specifies:

Mais une littérature complète, capable par elle-même, et à elle seule, d’inspirer des hommes de génie, et d’alimenter de vastes conceptions ? Une simple énumération va nous prouver qu’elle existait : qu’elle existait, divisée en deux parties bien distinctes, comme la nation elle-même, et dont par conséquent l’une que les critiques allemands appellent *littérature chevaleresque* semblait devoir son origine aux Normands, aux Bretons, aux Provençaux et peut-être aux Franks (la noblesse s’en empara), dont l’autre, native du cœur même de la France, et essentiellement populaire, est assez bien caractérisée par l’épithète de *gauloise*²¹.

From the opening of this quotation, it would seem that the division of the national literature into two parts would undoubtedly imply a division similar to the separation of trouvères and troubadours. Nevertheless, listing the Provençals along with the Franks or the Normans, Nerval does not follow in the steps of historians who were at pains to emphasize their distinctiveness. In fact, the distinction which Nerval draws is that between noble and folk literature, one which is the product of chivalric culture unifying many groups and the other which does not include a large part of the nation but which goes deeper into it and is more emotional in its expression²². It is only the

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 284. The questions about importance of early French poetry are crucial part of the later debate about the French national poetry, cf. Leterrier, “Troubadours et trouvères”, p. 454: “La recherche du génie national dans la poésie médiévale permet, au XIXe siècle, d’évacuer l’hypothèse arabe, courante au siècle précédent, et encore chez Sismondi, mais réfutée catégoriquement par Schlegel. Elle fait un enjeu de la continuité de la poésie nationale du Moyen Âge à l’époque contemporaine, via Malherbe et la langue classique. [...]. Quinet revendique pour l’artiste contre le primitif. Il discrédite la poésie médiévale, parce que l’art, selon lui, n’existe que contre la liturgie, à condition de se séparer d’elle. C’est ce divorce avec la tradition qui donne sa spécificité à la poésie française. Le siècle de Louis XIV incarne son génie, qui nous sépare irrévocablement du Moyen Âge”.

²¹ Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, p. 284 [The complete literature, though, capable by itself and for itself of inspiring geniuses and provide great ideas? A simple enumeration will prove to us that it had, divided into two distant parts, just as the nation itself, and the first part, which the German critics call the *knightly* one, seems to have its origins with the Normans, the Bretonians, the Provençals and possibly the Franks (the nobility knew that), and the second part, born in the heart of France, is deeply popular and quite well characterized by the epithet: *Gallic*].

²² Cf. Krispin, *L’Occitanie...*, p. 88: “Nous retrouvons l’opposition nord-sud dans la théorie poétique de Gérard. Elle s’y ajoute à celle entre poésie populaire et poésie savant, conformément aux idées contemporaines. Il s’agit de réhabiliter la poésie vernaculaire de la Gaule, la poésie

epithet “gauloise” which betrays the inspiration of the theme in the debate of various races in the French nation²³.

The works which according to Nerval belong to the first type of French national literature are:

[...] les poèmes historiques, tels que les romans de *Rou* (Rollon) et du *Brut*, la *Philippide*, le combat des trente Bretons, etc.; les poèmes chevaleresques, tels que le *Saint-Graal*, *Tristan*, *Partenopex*, *Lancelot*, etc.; les poèmes allégoriques, tels que le roman de la *Rose*, du *Renard*, etc., et enfin toute la poésie légère, chansons, ballades, lais, chants royaux, plus la poésie provençale ou romane toute entière²⁴.

In turn the second type encompasses:

[...] les mystères, moralités et farces (y compris *Patelin*); les fabliaux, contes, facéties, livres satiriques, noëls, etc.: toutes œuvres où le plaisant dominait, mais qui ne laissent pas d’offrir souvent des morceaux profonds ou sublimes, et des enseignements d’une haute morale parmi des flots de gaieté frivole et licencieuse²⁵.

Searching for the category which could be the basis for this division, the problems of literary genres, language and theme should be discussed. Patrick Labarthe argues that the distinction proposed by Nerval does not concern the division between prose and poetry:

Le double registre qui préside à ce classement ne recoupe en rien, on le voit, un partage entre le récit et la poésie en vers: dans la première rubrique avoisinent les premiers « romans » français (dont le *Brut* de Wace), nourris d’une

romantique. [...] A cette littérature populaire et gauloise s’oppose une littérature aristocratique, comprenant la poésie provençale ou romane [...]”.

²³ Cf. M.-F. Piguët, „Observation et histoire. Race chez Amédée Thierry et William F. Edwards”, *L’Homme*, 2000, p. 94: “Cette thèse enracine l’origine de la noblesse dans la conquête franque de Clovis, faisant ainsi des nobles les descendants des Francs tandis que les roturiers seraient issus des Gaulois et des Gallo-romains réduits en servitude par ces intrépides conquérants. Élaborée au XVIIIe siècle pour légitimer les pouvoirs politiques de la noblesse face à l’absolutisme royal, la théorie des origines germaniques de la noblesse française a été retournée contre l’aristocratie et utilisée pendant et après la Révolution par les défenseurs du tiers état.” Cf. about the relations of Franks and Gallic in *Angélique*: G.R. Humphrey, *L’Esthétique de la poésie de Gérard de Nerval*, Paris 1969, p. 87; K. Pomian, “Francs et Gaulois”. In: *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Edited by Pierre Nora, vol. 3: *Les France*, vol. 1, *Conflits et partages*, Paris 1992.

²⁴ Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, pp. 284–285 [The historical poems, like the roman de *Rou* and roman de *Brut*, Le Combat de Trente Bretons, La Philipide, etc.; chivalric romance like *Saint-Graal*, *Tristan*, *Partenopex*, *Lancelot*, etc.; allegorical poems like Roman de la *Rose*, Roman de Renart, etc., last but not least light poems, songs, ballades, lais, chants royaux, and Provençal, or speaking generally, whole *Romanesque* poetry].

²⁵ Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, p. 285 [(...) mysteries, moralities, farces (including *Patelin*), fabliaux, tales, facetiae, satire books, Christmas carols, etc.: these are all the works in which this what entertains dominates, without ceasing to present deep and sublime fragments, as well as teach a high moral level among the waves of frivolous and promiscuous gaiety].

réflexion sur la chevalerie et l'amour, ces contes et nouvelles en vers que sont les « lais » (de Marie de France), le Conte du Graal de Chrétien et le Lancelot-Graal en prose²⁶.

However, it is significant that in the first type there is no drama²⁷, while the second does not include epic poems about historic or legendary rulers.

The role of language in the above-mentioned division is unclear. The first type includes works in Old French and Occitan. The status of the second is more complex: mystery and miracle plays were originally written in Latin, for example, though the role of vernacular languages in their texts is also significant. To give an illustration, *Mysterium fatuarum virginum* [Mystery of Foolish Virgins], an excerpt from which was published in François Just Marie Raynouard's work in 1817, begins in Latin, but later Gabriel addresses the virgins in Old Occitan²⁸. In fact, using the various epithets in italics, like "chevaleresque", "gauloise"²⁹, and "romane", Nerval refers to different registers: "chevaleresque" applies to one aspect of medieval noble culture, "gauloise" to the civilization which contributed to the shaping of the French nation, and "romane" is the only adjective which concerns the language³⁰.

We may safely say that one major factor influencing Nerval's division was the diction of comedy emphasized in Gallic literature³¹. In the idea of Romantic poet, comedic values should dominate, though not reign sovereignly in the represented world, which should also include moral teaching and combine the sophisticated ideas with

²⁶ P. Labarthe, „Nerval ou le « prosateur obstiné »”, *Le Genre humain* 2008, n° 1, p. 346 [The second register in this classification does not impose a division between the story and the poems: the first column is adjacent to the first French 'romans' (like de Brut by Wace), filled with reflection on knighthood and love, tales and novellas in verse like in 'lais' (of Marie de France), the Story of the Grail of Chrétien de Troyes and the prose Lancelot-Grail.]

²⁷ Cf. the image of medieval French theatre created by the eighteenth century publications: J. Koopmans, D. Smith, "Un théâtre français du Moyen Âge?", *Médiévales* 2010, <http://journals.openedition.org/medievales/6055> [21.03.2020]. These remarks are important due to the fact that many editions of medieval works comes from the second half of the nineteenth century, thus from the later period than this when Nerval prepares his prefaces. To give an illustration, *Pathelin* mentioned by Nerval is published in 1723 and 1762 as *La Farce de maistre Pierre Pathelin, avec son testament à quatre personnages* (Paris) and for another edition the readers had to wait until 1853: *La farce de maistre Pierre Pathelin précédée d'un recueil de monuments de l'ancienne langue française, depuis son origine jusqu'à l'an 1500, avec une introduction, par M. Geoffroy-Chateau* (Paris).

²⁸ *Extrait du mystère des vierges sages et des vierges folles*. In: *Choix de poésies originales des troubadours*, F.J.M. Raynouard, Paris 1817, pp. 139–143.

²⁹ Cf. G. de Nerval, *La Bohême galante*, VIII: *Musique*. In: *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, Paris 1993, p. 278: "[...] je crois, qu'il faut distinguer toujours ces deux styles et ces deux genres – chevaleresque – et gaulois, dans l'origine, – qui, en perdant leurs noms, ont conservé leur division générale."

³⁰ The notion of "langue romane" was ambiguous in the period when Nerval's prefaces are written, for instance, according to Raynouard, firstly it was a synonym for the language used by troubadours, in the later period, "la langue intermédiaire que Raynouard appelait auparavant «langue romane» est désignée comme «langue romane rustique» et la langue des troubadours est désormais dénommée «langue romane provençale» (D. Fabié, "Un romaniste romantique: François Raynouard", *Lengas* 2008, p. 28.

³¹ M. Liouville, *Les Rires de la poésie romantique*, Paris 2009, pp. 89–90.

ribald ones. Although the poet lists the farces³², facéties³³, and fabliaux³⁴ – the most popular medieval genres, of drama, narrative, and poetry, intended to amuse, aiming for sophisticated wordplay and bawdy humor – the presence of other genres in this list may provoke questions if the mystery or morality plays were indeed intended to be humorous? As a matter of fact, morality plays are undoubtedly an important example for Nerval, as they combine the religious with the profane and, to maximize the didactic effect, satire was also used³⁵.

Nerval's position towards the national literature has the appearance of a joke, an attempt to surprise the readers: of all the many branches of medieval French literature, whose representations are highly appreciated *romans* and sophisticated lyric poetry, the poet chooses works that are simple in their message, whose authors are unknown and whose language is expressive and blunt, as well as some less popular occasional genres, to put them as the examples of literature “from the heart of France”, “capable to inspire” and “to supply great ideas”. But we may also describe these works in a different way: a more detailed analysis of these genres shows that in his list Nerval encompassed the sacred and profane, the multilingual, the seriousness of spiritual themes along with pure comedy. It appeals to many genres of dramatic art, in which both simple people and saints spoke and in which music, decoration and costumes played an important role³⁶. Only with the participation of all these elements, can

³² *Pathelin* which is mentioned by Nerval is one of the most popular French farces, known for example because of the scenes in which one protagonist, Le Bergier, responds “Bée” to every question asked at the court.

³³ Nerval is himself author of *Contes et facéties* (1852). Florence Bistagne defines the genre of *facétie* in the following words: “Le genre de la facétie s'épanouit en latin au XVe siècle puis en langue vernaculaire au XVIe. Au croisement de la fable médiévale, de la nouvelle et de la tradition latine des recueils de bons mots, il est aussi influencé par la redécouverte des comédies de Plaute.” (“Relire Plaute dans la facétie du Quattrocento”, *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 2016, n° 32, p. 175). Facéties can also be performed at the scenes: J.-C. Aubailly, “Facétie narrée et facétie jouée. Discussion”, *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance*, 1977, n° 7: *Facétie et littérature facétieuse à l'époque de la Renaissance. Actes du colloque de Goutelas 29 septembre–1er octobre 1977, sous la direction de V.L. Saulnier*, 19. About the farce and facétie cf. also J. Koopmans, „La Farce, genre noble aux prises avec la facétie?”, *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 2016, n° 32, pp. 147–163.

³⁴ Research on *fabliaux* at the beginning of the nineteenth century was at quite an advanced stage: to mention three volumes of *Fabliaux et contes de poètes français des XII, XIII, XIV et XVe siècles* published in 1756 and republished in 1808. The editor, Étienne Barbazan, characterized in the preface the French people as “naturellement gais, légers & badins” (É. Barbazan, *Préface*. In: *Fabliaux et contes de poètes français des XII, XIII, XIV et XVe siècles*, vol. 3, Paris 1808, p. xvii) and explained that in the *fabliaux* “une heureuse simplicité”, “des narrés intéressants, des images vives, des pensées fines, des réflexions justes, des expressions énergiques, une agréable variété” can be found (*ibidem*, p. xxxiii). Another edition comes from 1826: *Livre Mignard, ou fleur des fabliaux*. Edited by Ch. Malo, Paris.

³⁵ A.J. Wirth, *Dulcis et utile: The literary traditions of satire in the French morality play*, Tretaux 1980, n° 2, pp. 17–22; J.-P. Bordier, *Satire traditionnelle et polémique moderne dans les moralités et les sotties françaises tardives*. In: *Satira e beffa nelle commedie europee del Rinascimento*. Edited by F. Doglio, Roma 2002.

³⁶ Nerval, *La Bohème galante, VIII: Musique*, p. 272: “[...] les mystères aussi du Moyen Âge étaient des opéras complets avec récitatifs, airs et chœurs [...]”

the national literature be assessed as “aussi forte, aussi variée dans ses éléments” [so strong, so varied in all the elements]³⁷. These poetical traditions may give strength to the literature of Nerval's epoch to become truly romantic, in accordance with the idea of poetry, which “should poeticize wit and fill all of art's forms with sound material of every kind to form the human soul, to animate it with flights of humor”³⁸.

To conclude, Nerval was not the only writer to propose a division between folk and chivalric or aristocratic literature, nor one between Franco-Provençal and Gallic, regarding the character of French national poetry. He reveals instead a crucial element of the French national spirit which is laughter, so gorgeously animated in, for instance, the work of Rabelais. Furthermore, an important change introduced by Nerval to the debate is its tone: what Nerval does is to cast off the pathos of several above-mentioned phrases, like the “fathers of literature”, the “national literature”, etc. His classification of French literature bears the mark of hierarchy à rebours. A few of the most famous mystery or morality plays such as *Le Mystère de la Passion* of Arnoul Gréban and *La Moralité de l'aveugle et du boiteux* of André de la Vigne are sometimes read by the scholars and students of French medieval literature, but this literature as it is seen for instance by foreign readers consists of *Tristan*, *Lancelot*, *Roman de la Rose* and examples of the lyrical ballades of François Villon and the chansons of Charles d'Orléans. This official branch of French medieval literature is dominated by the noble works of courtly and chivalric themes. The “low-register” and comical character of the second type established by Nerval situates itself close to the heart of nation. Nerval's solution is to propose a counter-model of a national literature—an eccentric, but not a surprising solution, on the condition, it is proposed by Nerval, a separate poet, the one associated rather with bohemian groups and not “official Romanticism”, the example of isolation and eccentricity.

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³⁷ Nerval, *Choix des poésies de Ronsard...*, p. 285.

³⁸ F. Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften*, Munich 1958. Transl. by J. Skolnik. In: *German history in documents and images*, vol. 3: *From Vormärz to Prussian Dominance, 1815–1866. Romanticism: Friedrich Karl Wilhelm von Schlegel: Excerpts from Selected Works (1798–1804)*, p. 37, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/11_LAM_Schlegel_Excerpts%20Selected%20Works.pdf [21.03.2020]. Marta Kawano discusses the possibilities how Schlegel's idea of “progressive universal poetry” inspired the analysed works of Nerval in: „A arte da leitura e a excelência do comércio das musas: Gérard de Nerval e os poetas do século XVI”, *Carnets* 2013, pp. 103–118.

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Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia głos Gérarda de Nerval'a w dyskusji o źródłach i początkach francuskiej literatury narodowej. Przedmiotem analizy są dwa artykuły z 1830 r., wstępy do *Choix des poésies de Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf, Belleau, Du Bartas, Chassignet, Desportes, Régnier* oraz *Poésies allemandes*. W kontekście sporu o wyższość truverów lub trubadurów jako „ojców współczesnej literatury” i „wychowawców narodu”, który toczył się ostatnich dziesięcioleciach XVIII i na początku XIX wieku, stanowisko Nerval'a jawi się jako budujące mosty między zwaśnionymi stronami, oryginalne i wyzbyte niepotrzebnego patosu. Nerval przypomina, że w średniowiecznej literaturze francuskiej można dostrzec dwa prądy: „rycerski”, na który składają się m.in. powieści, poematy alegoryczne, ballady, oraz „galijski”, który przejawia się np. w misteriach, moralitetach, farsach i facecjach. Taka literatura, łącząca sacrum i profanum, różne języki, śmiech z nauką, oddaje zdaniem Nerval'a ducha narodu i w niej tkwią źródła odrodzenia francuskiej poezji.

Summary

The article discusses the Gérard de Nerval's voice in the debate on the sources and origins of French national literature. The main subjects of analysis are two of his articles from 1830, the prefaces to choice of poems of Ronsard, Du Bellay, Baïf, Belleau, Du Bartas, Chassignet, Desportes, and Régnier, as well as to selection from German poetry. In the light of the dispute in the second half of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century over the greater importance of trouvères or troubadours as the fathers of national literature, Nerval's position is less rigid and lacking pathos. He recalls the medieval noble and folk literature, one which is the product of chivalric culture unifying many groups and the other, “Gallic” which does not include a large part of the nation but which goes deeper into it and is more emotional in its expression. In the second type he mentions less popular occasional genres, for instance farces, fabliaux, facetiae and puts them as the examples of literature “from the heart of France”, “capable to inspire” and “to supply great ideas”. This type encompasses the sacred and profane, the multilingual, the seriousness of spiritual themes along with pure comedy. All these qualities according to Nerval reflect the French spirit and may be the sources of revival for true French romantic poetry.

Biography

Magdalena Kowalska – has graduated with a Master of Arts (2009) in Polish Studies and Ph.D in Humanities (2013) from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (Poland). She is the author of two books: *Prowansja w pismach polskich romantyków* (2015) and *Litania Verse III: Francia* (2018). She has presented her main research topics of Polish reception of Provençal culture at the international conferences in Toulouse and Paris. Her publications (in Polish, French and English) concern the romantic travel writing and French religious poetry.

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