

# marvels of reading



Essays in Honour of Professor Andrzej Wicher



WYDAWNICTWO  
UNIwersYTETU ŚLĄSKIEGO  
KATOWICE 2015

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Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego  Katowice 2015

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## Preface

The present volume celebrates the sixtieth birthday anniversary of one of Poland's most prolific and significant professors of English literature, Andrzej Wicher. His work and his persona are being honoured here by authors who are all either Professor Wicher's long-time friends and collaborators, or students and disciples who, with time, gained his appreciation and friendship. Each and every person who contributed to *Marvels of Reading* extends their gratitude for his scholarly achievement and their heartfelt wishes to Professor Wicher. In their individual ways, the contributors of the volume celebrate his academic achievement by texts whose themes share Professor Wicher's manifold interests and undertakings.

It is since the late nineteen-seventies that Andrzej Wicher has marked his academic presence, first in Polish studies of English literature and then worldwide, in the studies of English medieval literature in particular. He graduated from the University of Silesia in 1978 and since then the scope of his research and writing has been on the one hand vast, on the other it has consistently shown his distinctive style that, in its attention to detail and remarkable erudition, may be likened to the style of the old school of scholars of English, the likes of J. R. R. Tolkien and Nevill Coghill. As a young academic, Andrzej Wicher researched supernatural elements of fairy tales and his most recent book is devoted to the fathers of fantasy literature – Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. One may be tempted, therefore, to say that his career has come full circle, but given the productivity of Professor Wicher and given what is another of his characteristic traits, his ceaseless ability to find wonder in matters literary, this circle is far from being completed.

If one were to categorise and catalogue Andrzej Wicher's research over the nearly forty years of his university career, one can see several distinc-

tive areas marked by the milestones of his scholarly books: *Archeology of the Sublime: Studies in Late-Medieval English Writings* (Katowice 1995); *Shakespeare's Parting Wondertales: A Study of the Elements of the Tale of Magic in William Shakespeare's Late Plays* (Łódź 2003); and *Selected Medieval and Religious Themes in the Works of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien* (Łódź 2013). Aside from these publications, he has authored some seventy articles published in Polish and international learned journals, as well as collections of essays. Particularly worthy of note is Andrzej Wicher's translation of Tolkien's rendition of the *Gawain*-poet's works into English. It was published in 1997 as *Pan Gawen i Zielony Rycerz, Perta, Król Orfeo* and remains an unparalleled example of Professor Wicher's skill in transposing alliteration and fourteenth-century English rhyming schemes into Polish, a language to which they are essentially alien.

Professor Wicher's journey through English literature began with the fantastic worlds of Tolkien in his works on Tolkienian utopias and mythology of the *Silmarillion*. This gave natural rise to a broader interest in tales of magic as well as in folk and fairy tales which Andrzej Wicher studied not only in the works of Tolkien, but increasingly also in Middle English literature, most notably in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Middle English romances and drama. In this relatively early period of Professor Wicher's work one may notice marks of the intellectual environment of friends and collaborators from the then Institute of English Philology, University of Silesia: what is discernible there is a degree of fascination with theoretical approaches to literary studies, which Andrzej Wicher shared with Wojciech Kalaga, Tadeusz Sławek, Tadeusz Rachwał, the late Emanuel Prower, and Ewa Borkowska. Yet it is also around this time that Professor Wicher's interests in the Renaissance would manifest themselves, first in his research of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Several years later these interests led him towards working with Shakespearean drama. Before Andrzej Wicher became pre-occupied with Shakespeare, however, he completed a pioneering work on the category of the Sublime in the Middle Ages, very favourably reviewed by one of the greatest authorities on Chaucer and the fourteenth century, Piero Boitani. *Archeology of the Sublime* may be, perhaps, considered a culmination of Andrzej Wicher's research to its date (1995) – a work



that discussed, among other issues, medieval dream visions which, by their very nature, resorted to the supernatural elements.

From then onwards, in the second half of the nineteen-nineties and early two thousands, Professor Wicher, by then already invested with his habilitation, moved, as it were, forward in time in terms of the works and authors he studied. This move coincided with leaving his native Silesia and settling in the University of Łódź, in the Department of Studies in Drama and Pre-1800 English Literature where Professor Wicher works to date. He made several excursions into the works of Adam Smith, Joseph von Eichendorff, Johann von Goethe, but his chief concern then was with William Shakespeare. It was, however, a concern which organically developed from his earlier academic passions: what Professor Wicher researched were Shakespeare's "tales of magic," which he aptly called *Shakespeare's Parting Wondertales* (2003). Andrzej Wicher's study of Shakespeare was by no means limited to the plays he probed into in his book; he discussed other Shakespearean dramas and the Renaissance in general, as well as Old Polish poetry and fourteenth-century English mysticism.

Professor Wicher's long-term fascination with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, perhaps stemming also from a certain affinity between souls and ways of thinking, resurfaces in the most recent research undertaken by him. In a manner that is both scholarly and personal, Professor Wicher carefully discusses a range of themes present in the writings of both of these authors, becoming one of Poland's most important scholarly authority on the writers who continue to shape contemporary popular imagination and the fantasy genre. Professor Wicher, in his distinctively erudite manner, approaches them and the literary, philosophical, moral, and religious contexts of their novels and short stories.

Professor Andrzej Wicher is not only one of the most accomplished Polish scholars of English literature; he has also been an important organizer of academic life, coordinating numerous international conferences, seminars, and workshops, collaborating in this with internationally-renowned scholars. Furthermore, one may be tempted to claim that Professor Wicher has also created his own school in medieval, drama, and fantasy studies. He supervised a great number of M.A. dissertations; several of his M.A. students as well as his Ph.D. students have success-

fully completed doctoral dissertations and now work independently in leading Polish academic institutions. They are profoundly grateful to Professor Wicher not only for the supervision of their dissertations, but also for the peculiar scholarly sensitivity that they learnt from him. *Marvels of Reading* is indeed what he instilled in many of this volume's contributors.

The volume comprises texts that deal with Middle English, Old English, and Germanic literatures, various versions of medievalism, Shakespearean, Miltonic, and folk-tale inspirations, and with Andrzej Wicher's translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* into Polish. In the medieval studies section Liliana Sikorska traces the relationship between medieval travelling and purgatorial perspective in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and its contextual sources. Bartłomiej Błaszkiwicz deals with the *Prose Merlin* in the manner that exposes the text's preoccupation with magic, but also places it side by side with *Of Arthour and Merlin* and Malory's work. Rafał Borysławski probes into the meanings of wealth in Old English gnomic poetry, while Łukasz Neubauer attempts a close reading of Old Saxon *Héliand*, looking into the cultural and religious amalgam that it is.

The part devoted to medievalisms starts with Ewa Borkowska's discussion of the idea of the "enchanted world" as opposed to the disenchanted, secularized, one in Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetry and Charles Taylor's philosophy. Anna Czarnowus focuses on the concept of ethnic difference intersecting with the gender one in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* and its BBC adaptation.

In the next section Tadeusz Sławek situates the vision of a community as a melancholy-based entity in its philosophical context only to proceed to the exploration of the vision in *As You Like It*. Maria Błaszkiwicz discusses the farcical potential of Miltonic epic and its position of the predecessor of mock-heroic poetry, and Jacek Mydla analyses the structure and focalizations of Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol*.

The final section, devoted to Andrzej Wicher's seminal translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo* sees Barbara Kowalik delving into the miraculous elements of *Sir Gawain* and Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*, whereas Piotr Spyra focuses on the interpretative potential of Professor Wicher's translation of the Arthurian romance.

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May this congratulatory and laudatory tome be a mark of friendship, gratitude, and appreciation shared by its contributors towards Professor Andrzej Wicher. *Ad multos annos*, Dear Andrzej! *Ad multos annos*, Dear Friend!

*Rafał Boryśtański,  
Anna Czarnowus*

## **List of Publications by Professor Andrzej Wicher**

### **Monographs**

*Archeology of the Sublime: Studies in Late-Medieval English Writings.* Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1995.

*Shakespeare's Parting Wondertales: A Study of the Elements of the Tale of Magic in William Shakespeare's Late Plays.* Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003.

*Selected Medieval and Religious Themes in the Works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.* Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkiego Towarzystwa Naukowego, 2013.

### **Translation**

J. R. R. Tolkien, *Pan Gawen i Zielony Rycerz, Perła, Król Orfeo.* Translated by Andrzej Wicher. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Amber, 1997.

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**Book review**

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Cover and title pages design: Daniel Czarnowus  
Copy editing: Gabriela Marszołek  
Proofreading: Krystian Wojcieszuk  
Typesetting and text make-up: Beata Klyta

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**ISSN 0208-6336**  
**ISBN 978-83-8012-426-4**  
(print edition)

**ISBN 978-83-8012-427-1**  
(electronic edition)

**University of Silesia Press**  
**ul. Bankowa 12B, 40-007 Katowice**  
[www.wydawnictwo.us.edu.pl](http://www.wydawnictwo.us.edu.pl)  
e-mail: [wydawus@us.edu.pl](mailto:wydawus@us.edu.pl)

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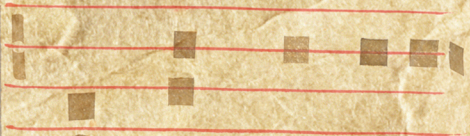
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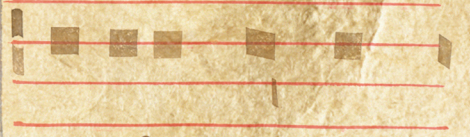
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