

Summary

THE FIRST OLD CZECH BODY AND SOUL DEBATE AND THE IDEA OF SALVATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVOTION TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Debates between body and soul were a very widespread genre in Medieval Latin and vernacular literature. Three independent disputes were written in the Czech language in the fourteenth century. The first of these poems, composed at the earliest in the 1320s, is the most peculiar one in several senses. To the best of my knowledge, it is the only example within the European corpus where the body and soul debate is followed by an account of the soul's judgement in the presence of the Virgin Mary and the four allegorical attributes of God (Justice, Truth, Mercy, Peace). Unfortunately, part of the judgment scene is seriously corrupted in the manuscript and the end of the poem is missing. With no other manuscript witness, it is of course difficult to draw any firm conclusions. The study argues, however, that the source of this scene was the so-called "Mascaron-redaction" of the *Processus Sathanae* where a similar compositional structure is found.

The Virgin Mary's involvement in the first Old Czech body and soul debate distinguishes this composition from most others in the genre. Indeed, while short invocations of Mary were inserted in some of these debates, in no other is her agency so powerful as to act in favour of the sinner's soul against Jesus' view (he points to the afflictions it caused him and does not show any mercy to it). Both Jesus and the soul seek refuge in Mary's motherhood putting her in a difficult situation. Mary also makes reference to the physical bond which connects her to God, but does so in order to protect her "worshipper", that is the soul, against the devils who claim it. Thus, the analysis of Virgin Mary's agency shows a close similarity to miracle stories which were to manifest her supreme powers. As well as with other poems of this genre, the first old Czech body and soul debate is formulated in an eschatological sense as a *memento mori*. At the same time, however, the possibility of salvation is not situated within the power of either of the disputing party, but is instead relegated

to the intercessory powers of the Virgin Mary whose ability to intercede supplies the absence of a sinner's repentance.

The poem is characterized by lyricism and an emphasis on emotionally charged speech. It could function then as an invitation for the public to identify with the sinner's adoration of the Virgin Mary. We do not know in which milieu the poem was composed and for whom it was originally intended. The only extant copy (Prague, National Library, XVII A 18) dates from the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century and was included in a codex aimed at a female audience. The present study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the literary and ideological connections of this poem with other genres of Medieval literature (especially miracle stories) and demonstrate that this motivic familiarity, as well as the emotional perspective linked with the vernacular language, were supposed to strengthen the Virgin Mary cult in Bohemia.

Keywords: Body and soul debates; *Processus Sathanae*; Virgin Mary; intercession; emotions

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