

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

From the Devil We Came: Reimagining Female Agency with the Monstrous Mélusine

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

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University of California San Diego

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DEDICATION

To my family,
for their infinite patience.

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Lastly, to my children, we made it through. Everything I do, I do for you. Ich liebe Euch.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From the Devil We Came: Reimagining Female Agency with the Monstrous Mélusine

by

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Professor Nancy Caciola, Chair

Hybrid, demonic women have shown up in various literary forms since ancient Greece; however, in the twelfth century, a particular form of serpentine woman was linked to the House of Plantagenet by medieval authors and the family itself. Over the course of two hundred years, the story of this hybrid woman, Mélusine, would be adapted and linked to another prominent French noble house, that of Lusignan. The conflicts between the Plantagenets, or Angevins, and

the Lusignan are well documented. They span geographical, chronological, and literary boundaries, but in the fourteenth century, when the House of Valois was attempting to consolidate its territorial holdings in France, the Mélusine character was taken up again by Jean d'Arras. He was commissioned to craft a pseudo-historical narrative that linked her to the ruling house in France, thus granting them legitimacy in the region, both politically and in the eyes of the local population. The result, the *Roman de Mélusine*, should be read as an attempt to legitimate the House of Valois in a region that was historically linked to the Angevins and the Lusignan. By tracing the evolution of this character and her contextual relationship to all of the above families, it is possible to not only explain the way she was utilized as a type of genealogical referent that allowed them to use collective memory to pursue competitive aims, but also to examine the fears and anxieties present in medieval thought as it related to women, mothers, and monsters from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Do you know that this is the property naturally instilled and implanted in us, like a hereditary right, from our grandparents and great-grandparents, that not one of us should love the other, but that always brother should strive with all his might against brother, son against father, and vice versa? Therefore do not deprive us of our hereditary right, nor labour in vain to drive out nature.

--Geoffrey, Count of Britney, *De principis instructione*¹

She founded many a noble stronghold in the territory of Poitou and the duchy of Guyenne that they then possessed. She also had the castle and city of Parthenay built; these were of a strength and beauty beyond compare. She erected, as well, the castle and the towers of La Garde de la Mer in La Rochelle and began construction of part of the city. There was a huge tower three leagues from there that Julius Caesar had built . . . The lady had that tower surrounded by other great

¹ Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, British Library, Cotton MS Julius B XIII, f. 165r. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_julius_b_xiii_fs001r. “Numquid ignoras hoc nobis naturaliter proprium et quasi iure hereditario ab auis et attauis insitum et insertum, ut nullus ex nobis alterum diligat, sed ut semper frater fratrem, filius patrem, et e diuerso, totis nisibus infestare contendat? Noli ergo hoc iure nostro hereditario nos priuare, nec frustra ut naturam expellas elaborare.” This source will be referred to in the future as MS Julius, along with its folio numbers.

towers and mighty walls, and she gave it the name of *Chastel Aiglon*. Then she built Pons in Poitou, and Saintes which was at that time called Linges. Then she constructed Talemont in Talemontois, and many other cities and fortresses. Raymondin acquired so many lands that there was no prince in Brittany, Guyenne, or Poitou, nor any lord of the region who did not fear to arouse his wrath.

--Jean d'Arras, *Roman de Mélusine*²

² Jean d'Arras, *Le Roman de Mélusine*, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 3353, f. 41r.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b550081732/f54.item>. This d'Arras source will be referenced as MS 3353, alongside the folio demarcations. “En ce temps fist fonder maint noble lieu par le pays que ilz avoient es membres de la conté de Poitou et duchié de Guienne. Elle fist faire le chastel et bourg de Partenay, si fort et si bel que sans comparoison. Puis fonda a la Rochelle les tours de la garde de la mer et le chastel, et commença uine partie de la ville. Et avoit une tour grosse, a trois lieues prez, que Julius Cesar fist faire. Et l'appelloit l'en pour lors la Tour Aigle, pour ce que Julius portoit l'aigle en sa banniere, comme empereur. Celle tour fist la dame avironner de grosses tours et de fors murs, et le fest nommer le Chastel Aiglon. Et depuis ediffia Pons en Poictou et Saintes, qui pour lors fu nommee Linges. Puis fist Talemont en Tallemondoiz, et moult d'autres villes et forteresses. Et acquist tant Remondin que, en Bretagne, en Guienne, ne en Gascoingne, n'avoit prince nul, ne homme qui marchesist a lui, et qui ne le ressoignast tres fort a courroucier.”

Foundational fiction was a widely used genre in the medieval period to legitimize rulers, or in some instances, to delegitimize and diminish the prestige or authority of other houses or persons. Described variously as she-devils, hold-over fertility goddesses, or fairies, the many iterations of women of unknown origins that enter into trysts with humans and establish a noble lineage are many; however, the most controversial, adaptable, and ambiguous is that of Mélusine.³ Known alternately as “comitessa quedam Andegauie, forme conspicuous sed nacionis

³ Although the terms are often used synonymously, the distinction between folklore, myth, and legend should briefly be made. In the context of this paper, folklore refers to beliefs stemming from oral traditions that include human characters (as opposed to fables, which generally contain animal characters) and are meant to teach some form of lesson. Myths are traditional stories based in the ancient past with no real historical facts. They are largely meant to explain natural phenomena and answer questions about the human condition. Legends are based on the more recent historical past and generally contain real people and events; however, they are only semi-true with more emphasis being placed on the meaning and symbolism behind the story than the accurate representation of historical events and are awash with “mythical qualities” or are extremely romanticized. It is important to note that Mélusine’s mention in *De principis* should technically be classified as “legend” as per the definition listed because, unlike the d'Arras romance, *De principis* can be categorized as both a “mirror for princes” and a history, placing the Mélusine event within the recent historical past and linking it to actual historical figures. d'Arras attempts these connections by insisting on its historical truth and referencing historic figures like Gervase of Tilbury and certain members of the Lusignan family with the same name as

ignote” (“a certain countess of Anjou, remarkable in form but of unknown descent”) in her earliest mention and as the fairy who gave birth to the lineage which would reign “jusques en la fin du monde” (“until the end of the world”), Mélusine demanded the attention of readers from her first literary appearance in *De principis instructione* by Gerald of Wales to her fully formed transformation in Jean d'Arras's *Roman de Mélusine*. These two texts, along with the intentions and beliefs of the authors and families that created and relied on them, are the subject of this dissertation.

Though Mélusine is never given a name in *De principis*, her description would have been recognized by contemporary readers of the time, as would the diabolical story itself. Gerald of Wales describes her as beautiful, chosen as the wife of the count of Anjou solely because of the “elegance of her body.”⁴ She sporadically attended church; however, even when there, she showed very little interest and always left before the Secret Canon of the Mass. Eventually, four knights attempted to keep her from leaving, at which point, she abandoned her two children standing at her right, grabbed the two at her left, and flew through the window of the church. *De principis* was released in its final form in 1216, and by 1393, Mélusine was being completely reimagined by Jean d'Arras as a fairy, desirous of being a good Christian, who marries Raymondin, the nephew of the Count of Forez, and produces the House of Lusignan.

She is of noble and supernatural stock, being one of three daughters born to a fairy named Pressine and King Elinas of Albania, often translated as Scotland. Pressine and Elinas have

characters in the book and their exploits in the Outremer; however, it is largely fictional as a whole.

⁴ MS Julius, f. 165r.

agreed to a pact, that he will not see her in childbed; however, in a scene that echoes Mélusine's later predicament, Elinas breaks his promise. As a result, Pressine and her three daughters are forced back into the land of the fae, Avalon. Angry with her father, Mélusine influences her sisters to lock Elinas in a mountain, where he wastes away and dies. Pressine curses all three girls, whom she explains could have become fully human because of their father's human state and the power of his seed. Mélusine's curse is to change into a serpent from the navel down every Saturday, unless she can find a human who will promise never to watch her bathe. If she can find such a man, she may become a natural woman and die a Christian death. If she cannot, will be doomed to remain in her serpent state. She enters the pact with Raymondin, a young knight whom she finds in the woods. He is distraught, having just accidentally killed his own uncle, the Count of Forez, in a hunting accident. Mélusine proposes a plan in which she will help conceal his act and make him richer and more powerful than he could ever imagine; all he must do is agree to not see her in her bath on Saturdays. He agrees to the pact and the two are wed, Mélusine's beauty and largesse impressing everyone in the region. During the course of their marriage, the couple have multiple sons, many of whom "rescue" nearby kingdoms in need of help or go on crusade, and who bear what is known as a "mother's mark" or some type of deformity that sets them apart from their peers. These are meant to be understood as being the result of having a fairy mother, one who also sends them on their escapades with magical rings that ensure their protection and prosperity. Accused of being a cuckold, Raymondin is unable to resist the temptation of seeing his wife in her bath on a Saturday. Mélusine is revealed as a hybrid creature, able to transform from a beautiful woman into a monstrous serpent from the

waist down.⁵ When the couples' child, Geoffrey, flies into a rage and burns down the monastery his brother had entered, Raymondin exposes Mélusine's secret, publicly accusing her of being a serpent and demon, an act which results in her dismissal from the castle. Additionally, after having to flee Lusignan after Raymondin breaks their agreement, d'Arras states that Mélusine was said to return to the fortress three days before it changed ownership and that it could not remain in anyone's possession longer than thirty years if they were not descended from her noble lineage on either their mother's or father's side.⁶

Within a timespan of less than two hundred years, Mélusine evolved from being the *uiciosa* (vicious) root from which the Angevin house originated to being regarded as the noble

⁵ d'Arras specifically uses the term "serpent" throughout the *Roman de Mélusine*, which should also be taken as referring to a dragon form. If understood only as a snake-like figure, as she is described initially when Raymondin first spies on her, there is no explanation for the many references of her taking flight or for the artistic depiction of her in Jean de Berry's *Tres Riches Heures* where she is shown flying in dragon form around the castle of Lusignan.

⁶ MS 3353, f. 164r, 164v. d'Arras only partially quotes the legend here. In fact, the local legend Mélusine would appear to the person she had chosen as master of the fortress whenever it was contested by armed conflict, which was why the Duke of Berry's armies refused to attack it—at this point in the romance, Mélusine appeared to the English Creswell, which according to her contract, *should* have meant that he was the chosen master of the castle. d'Arras changes the local legend slightly to indicate that Mélusine's appearance to Creswell was meant to frighten him into handing it to its rightful owner, the Duke of Berry. Francoise Lehoux, *Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions A. et J. Picard, 1966), 335-343.

and honorable forebear of the House of Lusignan.⁷ Both of these tales emerged from similar regional backgrounds. Gerald of Wales studied in Paris and entered the service of Henry II in 1184, thirty years after the thoroughly French Henry had ascended the English throne. He and contemporaries like Walter Map, another University of Paris alumnus, were well-versed in not only the standard textual material taught in the university, but also in the popular folklore and courtly literature traditions prevalent in England, France, and their native Wales. As men of the court, they were also a part of the Angevin's inner circle, having access to both the private conversations of the English kings, as well as being privy to plenty of gossip. Gerald of Wales wisely published his final edition of *De principis instructione* after the death of Henry II and his sons.⁸ His scathing critique of the Angevins, linked back to that beautiful demon woman of

⁷ The name designation for this noble house is arguable. Some historians refer to this line as the house of Anjou or the Angevins, while some only use the designation for Henry II and his sons, referring to the kings afterward (starting with Edward I) as the House of Plantagenet. The broader designation of Plantagenet was not used by the family itself until it was claimed by the Lord Protector of England, Richard, Duke of York in 1460, the father of Richard III. I will use both, Angevin and Plantagenet, interchangeably, as the Plantagenet sobriquet supposedly was derived from Henry II's father, Geoffrey of Anjou, and the term "Angevin" is actually used contemporarily by Gerald of Wales in *De principis* ("Andegauensium," f. 136v).

⁸ Robert Bartlett's latest edition of *De principis instructione* provides a dizzying chronology of the order in which Gerald's work was published and explains why certain aspects of the piece were edited or removed between the years 1190 and 1216. I will discuss these changes and their relevance in Chapter Three, which concentrates on Gerald of Wales and the context in which he

unknown origin, was nothing new. He was merely building on a tradition that was well known by his contemporaries. Some historians are of the opinion that this reference is not directly relatable to the character of Mélusine in Jean d'Arras's later *Roman de Mélusine* and that instead she should be read as a stereotypical amalgamation and reiteration of various fictional "she-devils" of the time. I concur with historians such as Jacques Le Goff and Laurence Harf-Lancner that the similarities in both the character and the purpose of writing more than imply that both characters are one in the same. The obvious caveat must be made, however, which is that the later work has a significant increase in depth and intent, the latter of which was largely based on the historical context and the patronage of Jean de Berry. It also seems hard to deny the connection, considering both houses were deeply involved with one another throughout the period in question.

Comparatively little is known about Jean d'Arras. Aside from the *Roman de Mélusine*, he is often credited with collaborating alongside Antoine du Val and Fouquart de Cambrai on a collection of stories entitled *L'Évangile des Quenouilles*, or *The Distaff Gospels*.⁹ What is known

was writing. For this chronology of publication, see: Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*, ed. and trans. by Robert Bartlett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). John I, the last of the kings who may properly be referred to as an "Angevin," died in the same year as Gerald's final publication, 1216.

⁹ Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay, ed. and trans., *The Distaff Gospels: A First Modern English Edition of Les Évangiles des Quenouilles* (Orchard Park: Broadview Editions, 2006), 23. There are three separate manuscript versions of the *Distaff Gospels*. Antoine du Val, Fouquart de Cambrai, and one "Jehan d'Arras called Caron" are listed as the authors of the Chantilly

with certainty is that Jean d'Arras himself claims that he was commissioned by Duke Jean de Berry to write *Mélusine* using the “vrayes croniques” (“true chronicles”) at the insistence of de Berry’s sister, Marie, the duchess of Bar.¹⁰ Using sources he claims to have received from Berry and the count of Salisbury in England, as well as consistently referencing Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia imperialia*, d'Arras’s story of the doomed lovers and their progeny show clear signs of a familiarity with local traditions and Celtic folklore motifs.

The historiography surrounding foundational fiction typically centers on a single text and views it politically, attempting to dissect the aims and intentions of both the writer and the subject. As will be discussed, these fictions, although touted by their authors as being historically accurate, are generally linked back to a specific time or person as an archetype with many twists and turns in chronology in order to make the necessary connection. When examining these origin stories, historians draw comparisons between the text as exempla and the historical situation to which it is being affixed, in order to discern what the author was trying to represent by making

manuscript, housed in the Musée Conde (MC 654, f. 15r), the original from which all other extant copies were redacted. The work is considered a “framing story” and can be categorized in the literary tradition of the fabliaux genre due to its reliance on “popular” themes, such as folklore, bawdy humor, and traditional jokes focusing on women and priests. There is also the sense that the authors were well-educated: despite sarcastically referring to the female characters of the story as “evangelists” and “doctors,” the authors mimicked the usual rhetoric of didactic literature when framing their responses. Many of the themes included in the *Distaff Gospels*, such as power, magic, and infidelity, are noted also in *Mélusine*; however, the social status of the females in each are on opposite ends of the social spectrum.

¹⁰ MS 3353, f. 1r.

that comparison. Mélusine and the tales surrounding her lineage do not necessarily fit into such a neat model, an issue that can only be accounted for by looking at a variety of texts which refer to her and then tracing the use of her character over time. There is a political angle to it—it is impossible to read *De principis instructione* without sensing Gerald of Wales’s distaste for the Angevins, or Jean d'Arras’s *Roman de Mélusine* without considering the Duc de Berry’s urgency in reclaiming the Poitou region and the drama of the Hundred Years’ War. The character of Mélusine herself, however, defies a stable interpretation, being used for negative and positive ends respectively, while also spawning an entire cult-like following among various writers and genres.

Rather than using simply one textual reference to Mélusine, my aim is to fully contextualize her by examining not only *De principis instructione* and the *Roman de Mélusine*, but also the cult of personality that grew around her character thanks to other authors. Most importantly, I trace how these adaptations and evolutions became a type of propaganda for two extremely influential medieval houses, as the authors of their “histories” built on the social memory surrounding them.

I: Founding Fiction, Social Memory, and the Creation of the Past

If we want to see how and why authors molded Mélusine to suit the ends of their employers, we must look at the substructure of why “founding fiction” became so popular—why it was created and pursued by elite families and groups. These later authors would build on these early substructures so a recognition of their genre and historicity is a necessary endeavor.

Founding fiction is a fairly recent term, although the concept itself is certainly not. It is in and of itself performative, a story intended to create and serve as a backstory for a people. Most often

ted to politics or the creation of a state or specific social set, it serves what Gabrielle Spiegel refers to as a “political utility,” crafting an imagined past that becomes almost real through repetition.¹¹ Marc Bloch explained the technique succinctly: “The very authority that was ascribed to tradition favored [the] change. For every act, especially if it was repeated three or four times, was likely to be transformed into a precedent—even if in the first instance it had been exceptional or even frankly unlawful.”¹²

Not only were founding fictions imperative in laying the groundwork for interpretations of the Angevins and the House of Lusignan, but the works that succeeded them in various forms, such as the *chanson de geste* and others, served to perpetuate the myths. By doing so, they built up a type of reputation that proved useful for each of these noble families in different ways—and particularly against each other. Linking the Angevin house to a demon countess somewhere in the vaguely traceable past was one thing. The proclivity for other authors to pick up the theme and extend it by memorializing it in further writings before being adapted and reassessed by the House of Capet in order to claim land from the English was quite another. Claiming a similar ancestor was not unusual. In the medieval period, it was considered highly advantageous to be able to claim legitimacy or distinction via a glorious past; however, the original incarnation of Mélusine was far from glorious or honorable and veered greatly from those members of the

¹¹ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch,” *History and Theory* 14, no. 3 (Oct. 1975), 315.

¹² Marc Bloch and L. A. Manyon. *Feudal Society, Vol. 1: The Growth of Ties of Dependence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 114.

nobility that tied their genealogy to esteemed ancient cultures or people, like Brutus or the Romans.¹³

¹³ Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum britanniae* recreates a similar story, explaining how later in life, Trojan military leader Brutus would set sail, find an island, and after offering sacrifices to Diana, would name the island "Britain" after himself (Gaufridus Monemutensis, *Historia regum britanniae*, f. 2r, 4v, 5r, 6v, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Latin 6040, Paris, France, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105420808>).

Monmouth also is credited with the popularization of the story of Arthur, the legendary King of Britain, whom he claimed conquered Rome and the rest of the known world in the 6th century. Most of *Historia* is largely based on the author's imagination, and Monmouth was openly mocked by contemporaries like William of Newburgh and particularly by Gerald of Wales. The latter author recounted a story in his *Itinerarium kambriae* that portrayed Monmouth's work as attracting unclean spirits due to all its falsities: "If the evil spirits oppressed him too much, the Gospel of St. John was placed on his bosom, when, like birds, they immediately vanished. But when the book was removed, and the *History of the Britons* by Geoffrey of Monmouth was substituted in its place, they instantly reappeared in greater numbers, and remained a longer time than usual on his body and on the book" (Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Penguin Classics Books, 1978), pg. 116-117). It was not necessarily the fact that he presented a brazenly fictional narrative that flew in the face of conventional histories that was the problem. Geoffrey's lack of *auctoritas* ripped his narrative from any potentially accurate or recognizable historical precedents and was cut loose from the moorings of any type of referentiality, whether based on authoritative writing or collective memory. What he lacked were

A similar type of foundational fiction is present in some of the histories of Capetian France, in which they link their origins to a fabled Trojan past.¹⁴ According to Gabrielle M. Spiegel, this framework was necessary in order to draw connections to past events, allowing it to be explored and employed for guidance and legitimization.¹⁵ These types of fictions, although presented as historical in nature and based on what were considered to be textual “documentary” sources, lent a sense of authority and validity to events. According to Monika Otter,

Auctoritas, the prestige and cultural acceptance of major texts, carries a greater weight for them [medieval authors] . . . whatever is reported in Bede, for instance, will be accepted unquestioningly by English historiographers of the high Middle Ages. So does collective memory and oral tradition, local or national. But there is also a kind of authority conveyed simply by the rhetorical and literary conventions of historical narrative.¹⁶

sources considered “credible” in the period, typically various ancient pagan or biblical authors, to strengthen the claims. Regardless of the factual nature of the work, or rather, the lack thereof, the *History* was extremely popular and influential, surviving in over 250 manuscripts.

¹⁴ According to Spiegel, there are two traditions linking the House of Capet to the Trojans. The first comes from the Chronicle of Fredegar, and the second from the *Liber Historiae Francorum*.

¹⁵ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch,” 325.

¹⁶ Monika Otter, “Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing” in *Writing Medieval History* ed. Nancy Partner (New York: Hodder Education, 2005), 110.

More importantly, such founding fictions could be used by monarchs to construct socially relevant beliefs and traditions. As explained by James Fentress and Chris Wickham:

. . . any understanding of the historical value of a written text—i.e., its capacity to represent matters that predate the text in time—must proceed from an understanding of the rules of narrative through which that text was written, whether it is a document, a chronicle, a vernacular epic, an oral account, or, indeed, a modern historical monograph. These rules are part of the structuring of social memory.¹⁷

That social memory contributed to creating founding fictions in medieval historiographies and other types of writing is undeniable. Between 950 and 1050, a “new and more useful memory” was crafted by European communities through a “process of transmission, adaptation, and suppression” which allowed a “wide spectrum of texts to be restructured and transformed in the process of creating a useful past.”¹⁸

Both *De principis instructione* and the *Roman de Mélusine* pulled from social memory and combined elements of folklore, history, and themes from popular literature to create justification for the actions and territorial holdings of the families involved. That a collective memory should emerge between England and France, and be familiar among chroniclers and

¹⁷ James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 162-163.

¹⁸ Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, ed., *Medieval Conceptions of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111.

historians of the nobility, is to be expected in this period. What is interesting however, and what this project argues, is that the collective memory surrounding a character like Mélusine was accepted, adapted, and put to use by members of the nobility in order to justify their aims and legitimize territorial claims in a much more particular way. The use of one specific character by three closely tied yet separate houses implies a competition, one that does not necessarily require or even pertain to the larger society as a whole, but that is distinctive only to the noble houses involved. This type of social memory and its particular nature is something that I have classified as “competitive memory,” a much more exclusive and distinct form of social memory.

Defining social memory requires an association between social identity and historical memory. Typically, this allows members of diverse groups to think of themselves as having a shared past, something also referred to as “collective memory.”¹⁹ The use of social memory as a category in historical writing is fairly new; it is uncommon to see it outside of fields such as psychology or sociology prior to the late 1980s, unless one considers the range of social cohesion affected by nationalist histories of the nineteenth century within this framework. Excluding the latter on the basis that the desired end result is entirely different and frequently nefarious, the theoretical justification behind applying the category of social memory to historical study allows historians to explore how people and organizations “selected and interpreted identifying memories to serve changing needs.”²⁰ Within that structure, one can study how people work together within that memory framework to not only recognize the memory itself, but also to agree, disagree, or negotiate its meaning. Once that is established, the process of understanding

¹⁹ Scot A. French, “What Is Social Memory?” *Southern Cultures*, Volume 2, Number 1, Fall 1995, 9.

²⁰ Scot A. French, “What Is Social Memory?”, 9.

how the founding fiction for the memory is absorbed and maintained can be examined. Often this is applied to more modern history, as many more sources of varying types have survived, making it easier to understand a greater number of the individual components making up a shared social memory; however, work of this kind, pioneered by Jacques Le Goff, is becoming more prominent in the medieval field as well. This is particularly noticeable in foundational fiction because when a story is repeated often enough to carry some cultural significance or weight, it implies that it was, first, built on a broader tradition that preceded it, and second, disseminated widely enough to the point that it became recognizable and accepted. There is the necessity for clarification here, however, about what is meant by “accepted”: one must proceed with an abundance of caution when applying modern terms to other time periods. There is no way of exactly understanding how these myths or fictions were accepted by the people reading or hearing them. Are we specifying that acceptance means the society *believed* these histories and myths? or that they *recognized* the larger themes and storylines? It is not my intention to show an uncomplicated belief in the Mélusine myth and its various incarnations. I am interested primarily in how the myth sprang out of social memory and how it was used, not just its singular purpose, but its larger implications and what can be gleaned from the reception of these works.

II: Historical Writing as Genre

Medieval historical writing in the high Middle Ages was balanced with stories reported earlier by weighty authoritative authors like Bede or Eusebius and heavy doses of classical rhetoric, while simultaneously crafting a political and social program regarding how to interpret past events. Where there were gaps in the textual historical record, these historiographers, like Walter Map or Roger of Hoveden, simply filled in those gaps with a narrative that seemed to

“fit.” History itself was not regarded as a separate academic discipline, but as a subsection of rhetoric, much like poetry or narrative fiction.²¹ For this reason, when assessing medieval texts, it is important to distinguish between common usage and scholarly practice when referring to terminology. In modern or medieval usage, the necessary difference of “history and fiction” as a terminological pair cannot be assumed to be the same as being synonymous with “true and false.”²² As repeated by many chroniclers and poets, “History is a mirror of life (*speculum vite*)” and many medieval historical works were dedicated to specific members of noble families, particularly to princes as a type of *speculum principum* (mirror for princes) that would elaborate how one might profit from the lessons of the past.²³ This lack of a medieval term comparable to our modern determination of “fiction” leads us to the belief that medieval readers did not recognize “fiction” in a static or clear-cut fashion, leading some historians to refer to the lack of category as a marker of medieval “alterity.”²⁴

Thus, my use of the term “historical writing” requires clarification. Customarily, annals and chronicles have been schematically understood as being within the primitive and intermediate stages of the evolution of medieval historical forms and therefore, an imperfect

²¹ Monika Otter, “Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing”, 109.

²² Monika Otter, “Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing”, 111.

²³ *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, vol. XVII, edited by Dom Martin Bouquet (Paris: Palmé Imprimerie royale 1734-1904), 423.

²⁴ Hans Robert Jauss, “The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature,” *New Literary History* 10 (1979), pg. 188.

form of historical writing.²⁵ These distinctions, however, were not made by medieval authors. Contemporarily, chronicles and annals, which were minimalist in form and configured to follow an unbroken sequence of time numbered since the Incarnation, were distinguished from proper *historia*, which were expected to offer moralizing analyses of the past. According to Sarah Foot, “the conventional tripartite division between annal, chronicle, and history is thus not particularly helpful; the prolix annal is hardly to be distinguished from the laconic chronicle entry, even if both were thought to serve a different literary (and moral) purpose from *historiae*.”²⁶ Despite the form and style differences of these genres, and the obvious differences between other genres I will be using that are clearly outside the bounds of these “historical” forms, for the purpose of this work, I will consider all three types to be legitimate forms of “historical writing” and treat them as such, using them interchangeably. Genre distinctions were permeable and that is largely how I will treat them.

In many ways, the assimilation of past and present created a seamless tradition that allowed legitimacy to be found through that continuation. Gabrielle Spiegel has argued that that continuous stream explains the use of historical legends and myths in medieval political life and the stories written to legitimize it.²⁷ The shaping of a mythical past could serve to supply justification for the present. This was undoubtedly the driving force behind the chroniclers of the *Reditus regni ad stirpem Karoli Magni* who used Carolingian types to foreshadow the return of

²⁵ Sarah Foot, “Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles” in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (New York: Hodder Education, 2005), 89.

²⁶ Sarah Foot, “Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles,” 90.

²⁷ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch,” 316.

French lands to the House of Capet in the thirteenth century. By tracing Carolingian lineage and characteristics from the Trojans through the ruling houses of France and connecting it to the Capetians, they were able to assign teleologic importance and legitimization to Capetian rule.²⁸

It described a political future which would unfold as the realization of the potentialities of the past and thus implicitly legitimized the political programs and policies to which Capetian efforts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were directed as an acting out of the dictates of history . . . in such a scheme, the past was prophetic, determining the shape and interpretation of what was to come and binding past, present, and future into a single, comprehensive historical matrix.²⁹

²⁸ The *Reditus regni ad stirpem Karoli Magni* is actually part of a larger work, the multivolume *Grandes chroniques de France* written by the monks at Saint-Denis. Work on the *Grandes chroniques* started in 1274 and was continually revised and added to until the fifteenth century. Because of its popularity and the monastery's connection to the house of Capet, it can be seen as a form of propaganda aimed at legitimizing Philip II and his successors. The program of *mutatio regni* that the work urged followed the guidelines for a typical medieval *reditus*. It was divided into three parts: an abbreviated genealogy leading from the Trojans to the Merovingians on through the Carolingians before arriving at the Capetians, a "prophecy" dictating the rise of a member of the house of Capet, and finally, a detailed linkage of descent to the current king (Louis VIII) to the line of Charlemagne, proving its heritage and thus providing justification for Capetian rule.

²⁹ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Political Utility in Medieval Historiography: A Sketch," 322.

An important distinction to make when looking at these sources is the difference between typology and figurism, as well as between allegory and symbolism. In the writing of medieval histories, the use of typology and figurism allow an historical event to be sprinkled with religious determinants or mythical elements, while still maintaining a literal and historical reality. These interpretations allow the authors to stress historical accuracy, while still situating events around the eternal wisdom of God, making strict chronological precision largely irrelevant and reinventing past events as being essential foreshadowing for the future. In the 1950s, Erich Auerbach explained this phenomenon of interpretation as entirely different from our own. Modern historians look at events as a chronological timeline, a continuous development in which we can see a clear cause and effect. Medieval writing, on the other hand, was full of figurism, leaving the writer (or “interpreter,” as Auerbach refers to him) to “take recourse to a vertical projection of an event on the plane of providential design by which the event is revealed as a prefiguration or a fulfillment or perhaps as an imitation of other events.”³⁰

Oftentimes this interpretation tends to see in the histories a development or reinterpretation of God’s divine plan, laid out on top of current events, reconfiguring contemporary characters as biblical ones. There are generally significant repeated patterns, and when read in conjunction (rather than as separate, unrelated entries that seem to follow an ahistorical conception of the past), a skillfully engineered and orchestrated presentation of the past laid out within a universal frame appears. Sometimes, rather than biblical figures,

³⁰ Erich Auerbach, “Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature” *Yale French Studies: Symbol and Symbolism*, no. 9 (1952), 5.

contemporary characters may find themselves interpreted as past figures who embodied the medieval ideals of glory and power, much like the comparison of Philip Augustus and his heirs to Charlemagne and his *imperium*³¹.

In describing the use of political structure and writing strategies, Philippe Buc, referring to ninth-century political structure, although poignantly relevant here, urged that:

. . . in the quest for propagandistic efficacy, the medieval historiographer had to draw on the most meaningful forms available in the political culture to which he

³¹ In addition to the *Reditus regni ad stirpem Karoli Magni*, there are other examples of the use of Carolingian typology for justifying the aims of the house of Capet, a major one being the copy of the *Song of Roland* located at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, typically referred to as the “Oxford *Roland*.” Explained by Adrian McClure: “It is a discursive universe that overlaps strikingly with the Trinitarian-inflected narrative of the Oxford *Roland*, a discursive universe in which Christian salvation history and Capetian/Dionysian propaganda have been harmoniously welded together and set ablaze with mystical sublimity, with the glorious victories of the First Crusade audaciously appropriated and reglazed in French royal colors.” Adrian McClure, “In the Name of Charlemagne, Roland, and Turpin: Reading the Oxford *Roland* as a Trinitarian Text” *Speculum* vol. 94, no. 2 (April 2019), 457. Further uses of mythical origins and exaggerated genealogies for the house of Capet may be found in Anne A. Latowsky’s work which traces the use of Charlemagne as a political and historical figure in medieval historiography. Anne A. Latowsky, *Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800–1229* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

belonged. These narrative proclivities are an indirect but trustworthy index of what agents in the political game measured and valued—and therefore of the horizons of their actual action.³²

Although the genres are vastly different—*De principis instructione* falls under the mixed category of a history and a *speculum principum* while the *Roman de Mélusine* could be characterized as a historical prose romance—the aims are as similar as the Mélusine character herself: to justify and legitimize the actions of her heirs, for better or worse, almost as though it were fulfilling prophecy. The unnamed Mélusine in Gerald of Wales’s work, though mentioned in a scant 182 words toward the end of Book Three, serves to provide justification and absolution for the bad deeds of the Angevins. Her story is nestled between tales of Henry II and his inevitable downfall, as though to serve as both a reason and a warning. Gerald recounts:

. . . how he [Henry] falls to the bottom of the wheel and his obstinate malice finally meets a shameful end. From what has been set out here the human mind may find cause to be relieved and have hope, as long as hope is entertained of a kind of conversion and correction. But impiety to the end may also find cause

³² Philippe Buc, “Text and Ritual in Ninth-Century Political Culture” in Gerd Althoff, Johannes Fried, and Patrick J. Geary, ed., *Medieval Conceptions of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, 138.

here to tremble and to fear; reprobate perversity, I say, may find cause to fear downfall and ruin.³³

Between admonitions, tales of misdeeds, and various ill-received omens, the purpose of Mélusine in this context is very clear: she is necessary to explain the origins of the Angevins in order to denigrate them in the present. The combination of this “comitessa quedam Andegaue” (“certain countess of Anjou”) with accusations of adulterous liaisons on the parts of both Henry’s father Geoffrey and Eleanor were meant to explain with no room for doubt the “radice filiorum omni ex parte viciosa” (“totally corrupt root of their sons”) and the entire Angevin line.³⁴

That a similar character should be used by Jean d’Arras nearly two hundred years later for the exact opposite purpose is paramount. The Mélusine of Jean d’Arras is desirous of being a good Christian. She urges her sons to be devout, upright, and chivalrous men. Her children are—for the most part—virtuous and honorable. As she tells her soon-to-be husband, Raymondin:

³³ MS Julius, f. 141v. “. . . qualiter ad ima rote descendit et ignominiosum denique sortitur exitum obstinata malicia. . . Habeat igitur ex premises, unde respiret et unde spirit, mens humana, quamdiu siquidem quasi de conuersione spes concipitur et correccione. Habeat hic autem, unde tremat ac timeat, finalis impietas; habeat, inquam, unde casum formidet atque reinam, reprobata peruersitas.”

³⁴ MS Julius, f. 165r, f. 164r.

I know well that you believe my deeds and words are a phantasm or the work of the devil, but I assure you that I am on God's side and that I believe everything a true Christian must believe.³⁵

Her descendants, although destined for failure because of a broken covenant, are promoted as everything the Angevins were not. This is not only relevant for the Duc of Berry who commissioned *Mélusine* in the late fourteenth century as a way of legitimizing his claims in Poitou against the English; it also builds on tensions between the House of Lusignan and the Angevin royal family that had survived since long before John stole Hugh of Lusignan's twelve-year old fiancée, Isabella of Angoulême, in 1200.

By reading these texts together and closely regarding the broader historical context of conflict between not only England and France, but the Angevins, Capet/Valois, and the Lusignan nobility specifically, one may then see the process of competitive memory at work. The amalgamation of cultures allowed for a stereotype or motif of the Mélusine-type to form, making it recognizable for all readers and thus a type of social memory. However, historical contingency

³⁵ MS 3353, f. 25v. "Je scay bien que tu cuides que ce soit fantosme ou euvre dyabolique de mon fait et de mes paroles, mais je te certiffie que je suiz de par Dieu et croy en tout quanque vraye catholique doit croire." See also: Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine, roman du XIVe siecle publie pour la premiere fois d'apres le manuscrit de la Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal avec les variantes de la Bibliotheque nationale*, ed. Louis Stoff (Dijon: Publications de l'Universite de Dijon, fasc. 5, 1932; repr., Geneva: Slatkine, 1974). Stoff combined the six extant manuscripts, located in Paris, into a comprehensive edition using the original French.

makes this tale more than simply a literary device—it makes Mélusine a useful tool for authors, each backing different sides in a long conflict with varying levels of success.

III: Historiography

Historically, fairies, demons, and witches have been largely understood to be non-academic topics, not seriously taken into consideration by scholars until the 1970s because they were assumed to be no more than the fantasies and delusions of superstitious and ignorant peasants. With the cultural turn of that era, there was a newfound interest in taking stock of broader swaths of society and incorporating them into the larger historical picture. Loosely speaking, Mélusine falls into all the above categories, depending on the source. She is interchangeably referred to as a fairy and as a demon, and her magic may be regarded as a type of witchcraft. Despite this, she does not accurately fall under the classification of a character made fashionable by the popularity of the “people’s history” approach. This is largely due to the types of sources in which she is found. They are the works of highly educated, literate men of means, despite having themes and motifs common to popular folklore and myth. Additionally, Mélusine was associated with powerful people in privileged positions. The Mélusine tale has also been reworked a number of times, not only in the medieval and early modern periods, but by composers and playwrights well into the 20th century.

While her pervasive popularity has led to her repeated metamorphoses throughout the centuries, the basic storyline in those stories has remained intact. The same is not true for the ways in which academics have approached the study of that storyline, whether including in its examination the excerpt from Gerald of Wales or solely concentrating on her fourteenth and fifteenth century iterations by Jean d'Arras, Couldrette, and Thüring von Ringoltingen,

respectively. Scholarly attention toward Mélusine has not been constant either, going through a series of peaks and valleys, although she has currently come back en vogue in recent works of scholarship.

Early Scholarship

The first scholarly analyses of the Mélusine character began in the late 19th century. For the most part, these studies were done by folklorists and concentrated on the myth's origins. Assertions were made as to whether or not the ancestors of the Mélusine myth could be traced back to Celtic folklore, classical Greek or Roman mythology, or monsters from the Near or even Far East. In 1886, Marie Nowack published her thesis that Mélusine was actually a descendant of the Apsara Urvashi, a water nymph from the Hindu tradition, because of the similarities between their animal shape-shifting abilities, trans-species marriage, and broken injunctions.³⁶ This led to further studies by scholars like Julius Köhler who argued that Mélusine and other stories of this nature belong under the classification of “totemistic beliefs.”³⁷ Others contrasted Köhler's argument by contending that the myth was more in line with Mediterranean traditions surrounding primitive “vetita” or rules forbidding men to witness certain female rites.³⁸ Because

³⁶ Marie Nowack, *Die Mélusinensage* (Freiburg, 1886), 25-28.

³⁷ Julius Köhler, *Der Ursprung der Mélusinensage* (Leipzig, 1895), 51-59.

³⁸ Both Jules Baudot and John R. Reinhard argued that there was no need to trace the myth back to prehistoric origins when it could justifiably be linked with fairly common and traditional Roman and Greek festivals. For further information on this connection, see Jules Baudot and John R. Reinhard.

there is no definitive answer to Mélusine's origins in regard to type, scholars largely concentrated on how and when the story made its way to the Poitou region in France.

Jeremie Babinet concluded that Mélusine should be seen as a descendant of the myth of Echidna, making its way to France via the Romans in the time of the Germanic invasions, while others like Leopold Favre argued that because of an absence of recorded history, the myth was virtually unknown outside of Lusignan and the immediate surrounding region but gained development first through oral storytelling.³⁹ Other authors, like Leo Desaivre, concluded that more than oral folk tradition, Mélusine was essentially a hold-over character from the pre-Christian Gallic world. According to Desaivre, motifs ranging from her wailing, her generosity, or her association with water could all be linked to local pagan folklore.⁴⁰ Opening the discussion to pre-Christian regional influences allowed for assumptions to be made as to whether or not

³⁹ Francois Nodot, ed. *Histoire de Mélusine*, rev. Leopold Favre (Paris, 1876), xiii, xliii.

<https://archive.org/details/histoiredemelusineprincessenodo/page/n111/mode/2up>. “C’est ni la mystérieuse Milushi de l’Inde, ni une deesse de la Scandinave, ni une ondine de l’Allemagne; c’est une chatelaine du Poitou, belle, intelligent, puissante et ayant frappe l’imagination du peuple par ses nombreuses edifications d’églises et de chateaux . . . L’imagination lui a donne un caractere feerique; peut-etre une drame de famille s’est-il passe dans le chateau des Lusignan; le recit empreint d’un certain mystere aura circle de bouche en bouche, le soir a la veillee”.

⁴⁰ Leo Desaivre, “Le Mythe de la Mère Lusine (Meurlusine, Merlusine, Mellusigne, Mellussine, Mélusine, Meleusine): Étude Critique et Bibliographique” from *Mémoires de la Société de Statistique, Sciences, Lettres et Arts des Deux-Sèvres* (1883).

<https://archive.org/details/LeMytheDeLaMereLusine/page/n79/mode/2up>.

Mélusine was, as the famous folklorist Jacob Grimm argued, a more “modern” example of a *merimenni* from Teutonic mythology.⁴¹ Desaivre’s focus on Mélusine’s wailing was picked up by another prominent folklorist, Sabine Baring-Gould, who used it to classify her as a type of banshee, flying and shrieking to warn others of an impending death, thus having a distinct Celtic background.⁴² It is important to note that while attention was being paid by these scholars to the myth, it was not necessarily viewed as anything more than “heathen,” lacking in beauty until infused with elements of salvation, although that possibility of redemption was never discussed as an extension to the fairy herself; these folklorists considered her role as outside the bounds of Christian narrative.⁴³

Still concentrating on the origin of the Mélusine myth, Jules Baudot was another to promote the idea, around the turn of the twentieth century, that it was of Celtic origin. He also

⁴¹ Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology, Volume One* (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein and Allen, 1880), 434.

⁴² Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1867), 373-374. “Among others there are death portents, but not, that I am aware of, spirits of women attached to families, by their bitter cries at night announcing the approach of the king of terrors.”

⁴³ Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, 226-228. Notably, Baring-Gould was an Anglican priest, which explains his tendency to lump Mélusine and other creatures like her under rather pejorative terms. Also worth noting is his apparent condescension for those people he acknowledges as responsible for the evolution of these types of myths: “It has been said that the common people never invent new story-radicals any more than we invent new word-roots; and this is perfectly true.”

was the first to look at the direct link between Lusignan and England, a point further argued by E.S. Hartland, who noted Jean d'Arras's use of the Earl of Salisbury as a provider of essential sources in the construction of the fourteenth-century version of the text.⁴⁴ While folklore featured prominently in these early discussions, another focus on origins began to creep in—Mélusine's demonic roots. Concentrating on her generative powers, scholars like Witold Klinger and E.S. Hartland argued that she was more closely aligned with demonic fairies of the earth, rather than having distinctly aquatic characteristics. Hartland took this a step further, linking Mélusine to specific goddesses like the Babylonian Derceto and others from the Near East, who despite having fish-like tails, were associated with specific taboos, hidden natures, and procreative abilities.⁴⁵ In the 1930s, Richard Kohl developed what he called the "Mélusinenmotiv": a specifically Poitevin creation from ancient folk beliefs related to the traditional, allegorical interpretation of the Greek sirens. Characters of this type are seen as temptresses leading men to damnation and ruin.⁴⁶ Kohl argued that alongside sirens and furies, those characters of the Mélusine-type were demonic; however, because of her role as a mother, she could also exhibit characteristics of roles such as "all-mother Nature." Further, Kohl linked this demonic

⁴⁴ Jules Baudot, *Les Princesses Yolande et les Ducs de Bar de la Famille des Valois* (Paris: 1900), 45. Also, E.S. Hartland, "The Romance of Mélusine," *Folklore* XXIV (July 1913), 190.

⁴⁵ E.S. Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London, 1904), 313.

⁴⁶ Richard Kohl, "Das Mélusinenmotiv," *Niederdeutsche Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* XI (1933), 183-227.

background and the adaptations to her later story by Jean d'Arras as evidence of attempts by the Church to condemn such beliefs as heretical.⁴⁷

The next phase of early historiography concentrates on the idea that the *Roman* by Jean d'Arras and Couldrette's *Roman de Parthenay*, (the latter of which had largely been considered as a truncated, rhymed version of the former), were actually two completely different stories whose similarities could be chalked up to an earlier, no longer extant version of the basic motif. This line of argumentation was taken up by Louis Stoff and Leo Hoffrichter. As opposed to the previous research done by folklorists, both were historians, which explains the shift in research motive, as both attempted to use historical context to link up specific characters within the texts to actual historical events. These attempts concentrated largely on the travels and adventures of the sons of Mélusine and Raymondin in an attempt to link them with other powerful personages, as well as various chronicles and romances of the crusader period. In his *Essai sur Mélusine*, Louis Stoff pointed to two portions of the story that have distinct historical parallels: first, Geoffroy au Grand Dent's journey to Jerusalem, which is based on the story of Peter of Lusignan's travels in 1361; as well as the father-son duo, Hugh le Despenser and Hugh the Younger, two Englishmen who served as the inspiration for characters Josselin du Pont de Leon and his son Olivier during the episode in which they attempt to thwart Raymondin's acceptance of his patrimonial inheritance.⁴⁸ Hoffrichter, in his attempt to argue for an earlier version, suggested Guillaume de Mauchât was the initial author because of his chronicle *La Prise*

⁴⁷ Kohl, "Das Mélusinenmotiv," 217.

⁴⁸ Louis Stoff, *Essai sur Mélusine* (Dijon, 1930), 110, 114.

d'Alexandrie, which concentrated on the travels of Peter of Lusignan extensively.⁴⁹ Hoffrichter draws distinct political parallels using the networks of patronage between John of Luxembourg, who employed Mauchart, and Bonne of Luxembourg, wife to Jean II of France, whose protection he later enjoyed. Mauchart was later given a pension by Jean II, a pension which could be seen as recompense for such a glowing endorsement via the romance. As explained by Algernon Tudor-Craig, this could explain the strange and seemingly out-of-place inclusions of Luxembourg and Bohemia in the story.⁵⁰

Research on the Angevins, Capetians, and the House of Lusignan continued throughout the mid-20th century; however, focus on the Lusignans waned, and Mélusine, when she was mentioned at all, was noted almost as a quaint, eccentric afterthought, summed up in a single sentence. The concentration on these nobles was largely political: the wars they waged against each other, the territories they gained or ceded, and of course, the Crusades. The perfect example of this would be American medievalist Sidney Painter, whose career revolved around the Angevins, as well as tracing the rise and fall of the House of Lusignan. Painter wrote ten books and countless articles on Angevin England, chivalry in France, feudalism, and medieval society; however, on the subject of Mélusine, he was relatively quiet, noting only that specifically literary

⁴⁹ Leo Hoffrichter, *Die Alttesten Französischen Bearbeitungen der Mélusinensage* (Halle, 1928), 75. Peter of Lusignan was the King of Cyprus and pretender to the kingship of Jerusalem until he was assassinated by three of his own men in 1369.

⁵⁰ Sir Algernon Tudor-Craig, *The Romance of Mélusine and de Lusignan* (London, 1932), 4. Tudor-Craig also points out that the House of Luxembourg actually altered their pedigree in the 15th century to include Antoine, Mélusine's fourth son.

historians may take the Lusignan attachment to such a character as a subject of interest, as though a discussion of Mélusine did not necessarily belong alongside more important “factual” histories.⁵¹

Modern Scholarship

The scholars who perhaps deserve the most credit for bringing Mélusine back into the spotlight are Annales historians Jacques Le Goff and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Their seminal article, “Mélusine Maternelle et Défricheuse” published in 1971, in which Le Goff treated the medieval portion, and Le Roy Ladurie was responsible for the modern scholarship, reinvigorated interest in the myth and its various iterations. Examining the character through a lens typical of the later Annales school of thought with its emphasis on culture, varying social groups, and *mentalités*, Le Goff and Le Roy Ladurie used a blending of fields and methods to reiterate the importance of the Mélusine myth and its relation to multiple themes that are at once historical, literary, and mythical.⁵²

With this influential article came a veritable boom in research on Mélusine, both as a medieval literary character and in her various contemporary incarnations. Le Goff himself examined Mélusine in no less than three books throughout the 1980s. In *History and Memory*, Le

⁵¹ Sidney Painter, “The Lords of Lusignan in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,” *Speculum* vol. 32, no. 1 (January 1957), 27.

⁵² Jacques Le Goff and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Mélusine Maternelle et Défricheuse,” *Annales Histoire, Sciences, Sociales* vol. 26 no. 3/4, Histoire et Structure (May - Aug. 1971), 587-622.

Goff associates Mélusine solely with the Lusignan family, writing that in this case, it is very simple to trace the historical conditions under which the myth was born and eventually became a part of history: “When noble families, nations, or urban communities become interested in giving themselves a history, they often begin with mythical ancestors who inaugurate the genealogies, with their legendary founding heroes.”⁵³ Reprinting his portion of “Mélusine Maternelle et Défricheuse” in his book *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Le Goff reiterated the similarities between many stories in England and France of a “diabolical spirit” who marries into various noble families and produces children. Among the authors he mentions are Gervase of Tilbury, Walter Map, and a summary by Vincent of Beauvais of a lost story from Helinand of Froimont, all of which are produced around roughly the same time. Le Goff draws a specific correlation between these earlier stories of what he calls “erudite literature” to the works of Jean d'Arras and Couldrette.⁵⁴ In recalling the d'Arras version of the story, Le Goff notes that the author claims to use oral tradition which he argues “prevents him from subjecting tradition to too great a distortion, and, consequently, he notes and includes elements which had been misunderstood or neglected by the clerics of the late twelfth century and rediscovers the previously effaced meaning of the marvelous,” making any analysis of Mélusine reliant on the ability of the historian to open their interpretive skills to include folklore, oral tradition, and anthropology, as opposed to overtly and solely relying on the methods of traditional literary history.⁵⁵ According to Le Goff:

⁵³ Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 134.

⁵⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 208.

⁵⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 210.

The study of popular culture or phenomena, or works impregnated with popular culture, brings the historian into contact with a disconcerting “historical time.” Slow rhythms, flashbacks, losses, and resurgences are not easily reconciled with the unilinear time in which he is at most accustomed to detecting “accelerations” or “retardations.” This is yet another reason to rejoice that the broadening of the historical horizon to include folklore will result in calling this inadequate notion of time into question.⁵⁶

Despite acknowledging the political significance, Le Goff also mentioned Mélusine’s older usage when he noted in *The Medieval Imagination* that the French King Philip Augustus used the myth of demon origins against the Angevins and John I in particular.⁵⁷ The main interpretation of Mélusine at this point is that she was “probably a survival of some fertility goddess” who “was claimed as an ancestor or a sort of totem by various noble families, of which the Lusignans were the most successful,” referring to her specifically as the “fairy of medieval economic growth.”⁵⁸ Interestingly, in his catalog of marvels, Le Goff does not include Mélusine with other historical personages who have become figures of legend, but as a *Mischwesen*

⁵⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 351.

⁵⁷ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 33.

⁵⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 33, and *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 219.

because of her hybridity, alongside other fantastical creatures like werewolves and griffins.⁵⁹ He does, however, argue that the story of Mélusine belongs under the category of “legend,” as opposed to “tale”:

The difference between tale and legend was carefully noted by the brothers Grimm, authors, as everyone knows, of a famous collection of *Marchen* and a no less important collection of *Deutsche Sagen*: “*the tale is more poetic, the legend more historical.*” Is it not true that the medieval stories of Melusina correspond exactly to their definition: “The legend, whose colors are less iridescent, is also peculiar in that it establishes a connection with something consciously familiar, such as a place or a genuine name from history.” Instead of regarding the tale and the legend as two parallel genres, as the Grimms did, it may be that the legend should often be considered a possible avatar of the tale When a tale falls into the sphere of the upper social strata and high cultural circles and passes into a new spatial and temporal setting with a more definite geographic location (a certain province, city, castle, or forest) and a quicker tempo, when it is snapped up by the more hurried history of “hot” social classes and societies, it becomes legend.⁶⁰

The popularity of Mélusine continued, particularly with the growth of gender and monster studies in the 1980s and 90s. A collection of essays compiled by Donald Maddox and

⁵⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 37.

⁶⁰ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 213.

Sara Sturm-Maddox attests to its prevalence. In *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, twelve essays originating from an international colloquium entitled “Mélusine at 600,” look at the newfound interest in the character on topics ranging from domestication of the marvelous, her reproductive biology, and her hybrid body.⁶¹

Another important study, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age* by Françoise Clier-Colombani, looks at the images and iconography of the Mélusine stories, attempting to envision how people of the Middle Ages imagined or represented her. Acknowledging “la nature ambivalente de la fee, être surnaturel, sinon diabolique,” Clier-Colombani concentrates on images that she says condense notions of transgression and communication with the “beyond.”⁶²

Nona C. Flores’s essay, “‘Effigies amicitiae ... veritas inimicitiae’: Antifeminism in the Iconography of the Woman-Headed Serpent in Medieval and Renaissance Art and Literature,” discusses the prevalence of dracontopedes, dragons or serpents with a woman’s face, in art as running parallel to tales of the serpent of Eden. Over time, she argues, images of these dracontopedes or mermaids came to take on the same symbolic meaning, one of moral duplicity, however, it became more common for artists to use the mermaid imagery. What it was meant to invoke based on the Bible and Christian iconography, whether in the form of a snake-woman or otherwise, was Satan and the Antichrist. The idea is that a serpent’s tail represented all the qualities associated with the devil: deceit, temptation, lust, and became instantly recognizable as

⁶¹ Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France* (University of Georgia Press, 1996).

⁶² Françoise Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au Moyen Age: Images, Mythes, et Symboles* (Paris: La Leopard d’Or, 1991).

something wholly negative and sinful. Starting with Peter Comester's *Historia* and the insistence in his commentary on Genesis 3:1 that "similia similibus applaudant" ("like favors like"), hybrid serpent women were recognizably coded as demonic, evil, and temptresses.⁶³ Given the popularity of the *Historia*—it became a required textbook at the best universities of the time and was translated into nearly every known European vernacular language—it is unsurprising that its influence can be traced on various art forms throughout the period.

Scholarship Since 2000

Since the turn of the millennium, scholarship on Mélusine has only expanded. Two noteworthy translations, one by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox and the other by Matthew W. Norris, have been published, both containing lengthy and informative forwards and introductions. That being said, most work on Mélusine, with the exception of authors such as Tania Colwell, has been done by medieval scholars specializing in literature, as opposed to medievalists specializing in history in particular. Their studies have produced fascinating analyses pertaining to Mélusine's body, her hybridity, her role as a monster and a woman, and to some extent, politics. However, these studies are primarily about the romance itself and the work it does within that genre. They also largely concentrate on the more complete and expanded version by d'Arras, counting it as the premier starting point for studying the Mélusine character in later early modern and modern media.

⁶³ Nona C. Flores, "'Effigies amicitiae ... veritas inimicitiae': Antifeminism in the Iconography of the Woman-Headed Serpent in Medieval and Renaissance Art and Literature" in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nona C. Flores (Garland Publishing, 1996), 168-169.

Jeffery Jerome Cohen largely defined the field of monster studies with the creation of monster theory, as well as his work on what he refers to as “difficult middles,” a category that encapsulates not only the fictitious characters in the Mélusine texts, but also the historical ones too.⁶⁴ Dana Oswald’s *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval England*, though also not about Mélusine specifically, gives grounding to some of the more complex postmodern theories surrounding gender and monstrosity in a way that is invaluable to understanding the presentation of the Mélusine character in its various forms.

Lydia Zeldenrust’s monograph, *The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe: Translation, Circulation, and Material Contexts*, impressively weaves together two-hundred years’ worth of material on Mélusine, looking at how the tradition expanded and changed over time from its French versions by d’Arras and Couldrette, to those later in German, Castilian, Dutch, and English. Her study brings the character into the early modern period of print, while also showing elements of the effect that regional cultures had on the traditional story—what was emphasized, what was agreed upon, and what was changed.

Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination by Angela Florscheutz comes closest to breaching disciplinary categories by pulling together thematic strands relating to literature, theology, culture, and medicine. For the Mélusine story specifically, Florscheutz makes two important interventions. In the chapter “Forgetting Eleanor: Richard Coer de Lyon and England’s Maternal Aporia,” Florscheutz looks at the fourteenth-century poem “Richard Coer de Lyon” in terms of its replacement of Eleanor with the demon

⁶⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 77-108.

Cassadorien, a small change from the Gerald of Wales version to make it more contemporary. The purpose of the text is to show that women, mothers in particular, have a maternal impact on their children that poses a threat to social and political structures and therefore, cannot be acknowledged without risking a radical disruption of social and community identity. Further, in “Monstrous Maternity and the Mother-Mark: Mélusine as Genealogical Phantom,” she argues that:

Mélusine points to the power of contemporary discourses that constructed maternal bodies as sites of danger and contamination to in effect create monsters not only out of mothers, but also out of the compromised products of their monstrous hybridizing bodies. This romance suggests that the evident fictionality of a strict model of patrilineal genealogy and the concomitant marginalization of maternal influence ultimately endangers the genealogical project altogether by marking all lineage as monstrously hybrid, and thus, according to its own logic, illegitimate and unstable.⁶⁵

Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth, edited by Misty Urban, Deva Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes, all of whom are important within the field of medieval gender, the supernatural, and monster studies, is an interdisciplinary compilation of essays that very accurately presents where the field of Mélusine research is currently. The

⁶⁵ Angela Florscheutz, *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance: Mothers, Identity, and Contamination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 155.

contributors, many of whom have already been mentioned, bring together international investigations using art history, alchemy, literature, and medievalisms, showing Mélusine's various meanings across cultures. Many are prominent feminist scholars, assessing the fairy's body in terms of its hybridity and ability to procreate. Some concentrate solely on the discourse of the medieval and early modern romance genre and the effect that has on our reading of Mélusine's body and her meaning. All are focused on Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* as a starting point for the tale, giving deep, thorough literary analyses without much consideration of the historical context of the earlier period or the interactions between the real families involved.

IV: Historiographical Interventions/Debates

It is in the context of these literary efforts that I wish to make my intervention in the historiography. My conviction regarding the Mélusine character throughout my research has consistently been that she is *bigger* than the tradition that came from the writing of Jean d'Arras, that there was more at play—and at stake—when one considered the families involved, their interactions, and their fates. It is imperative that we look at the context that produced the d'Arras version of Mélusine and what that says about the culture of the time, as it relates to important, key historical figures. When we broaden our scope, this becomes a narrative that is more than a simple bid for territorial legitimacy, and the character herself becomes more than just her body. She becomes a coded notion meant to encapsulate emotive, human characteristics, internalized fears about corrupt bloodlines, anxieties about a world that felt like it was changing at a break-neck speed, and questions about the unknown. But none of this is overtly clear unless we take a step back.

The triangulated experiences between the Angevins, the Capets/Valois, and the Lusignan become inescapable aspects of a real-life drama that spans nearly two hundred years and covers not only issues of inheritance and conquest, but also large-scale social problems about the female human body and the power of women. Mélusine as a legitimizing figure loses her teeth if we do not view her in the historical context of why those Poitevin lands were so difficult to tame and why Jean of Berry needed a character like her to do it. She is no longer a popular method of propaganda if there is no long-standing tradition built behind her, whether in a literary or historical context.

My job, then, is to show how and why we arrive at the *Roman de Mélusine* in 1393 from *De principis* in 1215, and why that matters. To do this requires an interdisciplinary approach that crosses multiple fields of study ranging from the history of science and medicine to politics to anthropology. The backdrop is set in the late twelfth century with the interactions between the Angevins and the Lusignan, as the House of Capet, first Louis VII then Philip Augustus, attempts to play both families off each other.

Competitive Memory

Early folklorist and Mélusine specialist, Léo Desaiivre, traced the beginning of the myth of Mélusine to its early Gallic origins, where she appeared as an agrarian divinity, a point agreed upon by Jacques Le Goff. Desaiivre's origin story provided far more detail, however. Based on its etymology, Desaiivre concluded that Lusignan had long ago been a Roman camp named "Lucinius" and that the Gauls had constructed an *oppidum* on top of it because of its strategic

location.⁶⁶ Desaivre posited that the Gauls who were originally in the location already had fairies associated with water, and when the Romans arrived, they took the opportunity to take an autochthonous deity and link it to Egeria, their own water spirit. In order to gain local approval, they renamed the creature “mater Lucinia” or the “mère Lusine.” Through barbarian invasions and eventually to the construction of Lusignan castle in the tenth century, each successive group of inhabitants accepted the fairy and added their own local traditions to her lore.⁶⁷ The story of this being would have been recognizable to all Poitevin nobles, both the House of Lusignan and Eleanor’s Ramnulfid ancestors who had lived and ruled in the region since well before the turn of the millennium.

Both the Angevins and the Lusignan had crafted genealogical ties to the female character as the foundress of their lines. We know this because Gerald of Wales and multiple other authors reference Henry and his family’s evil ancestor, as well as a mention by d’Arras that the people of Lusignan had considered themselves “Merlusins” long before Jean of Berry showed up.⁶⁸ We also know that conflict between the families stretched back nearly as far. Eleanor’s family, the

⁶⁶ Léo Desaivre, *Mère Lusine ou Mélusine dans la littérature et les traditions populaires* (Arbre d’Or, 2004), 18-19. The idea that the site might have been used consecutively by successive rulers fits with the practices of the time. The concept of an *oppidum* could be in reference to a fortified non-Roman town or one that had been transferred into a provincial town under Roman control—and then back again.

⁶⁷ Léo Desaivre, 19.

⁶⁸ Françoise Lehoux, *Jean de France, Duc de Berri*, vol. 1 (Editions A. et J. Picard, 1966), 335-343.

Ramnulfid dukes who ruled Aquitaine before it was married into the Plantagenets' realms, had difficulties with the lords of Lusignan stretching back at least to the *Conventum Hugonis* of 1030. The anonymous *Conventum* details a disagreement between Lord Hugh IV of Lusignan as he struggled to bring his family out of obscurity, and William V of Aquitaine who attempted to keep his powerful, warlike vassal in check, despite the assistance of another notable name, Fulk Nerra, Count of Anjou, distant relative of Henry II.⁶⁹

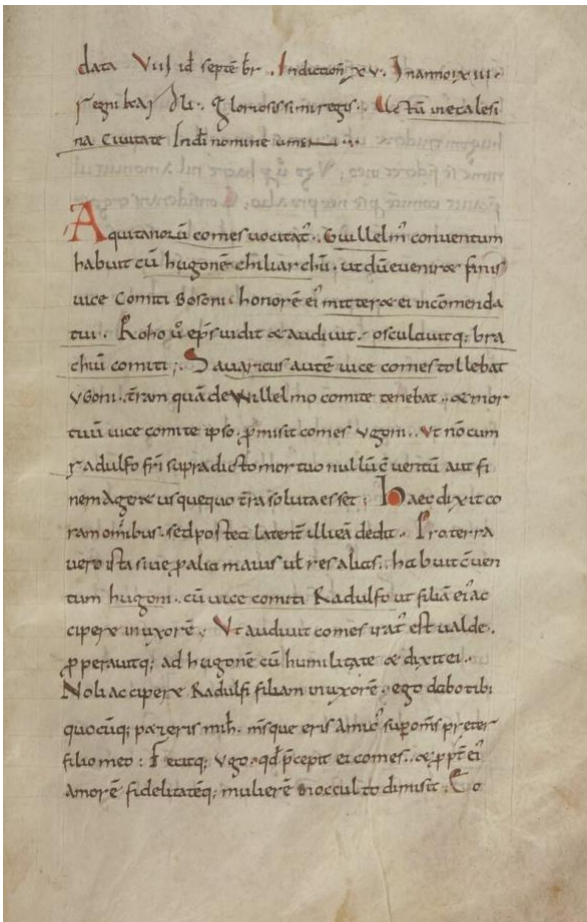


Figure 1: Opening page of the *Conventio inter Guillelmum Aquitanorum comitem et Hugonem Chiliarchum*. From the *Chronicon* of Adémar de Chabennes, 1081-1100, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Latini 5321, f. 136r.

⁶⁹ Fulk Nerra's diabolical reputation will be discussed at length later in Chapter Three.

Often, we consider Henry II to be an *English* king, and indeed, he was. He inherited England from his uncle Stephen after a fifteen-year civil war known as the Anarchy between Stephen and Henry's mother, Matilda. But it would be more accurate to regard him as thoroughly French—he came from a long line of French counts and dukes. He never learned to speak English and only spent about fourteen of his thirty-five years as king on the island. Though Norman by way of his mother and born in Le Mans, Henry spent most of his younger life in the county of Anjou and his later years after his marriage to Eleanor in Aquitanian lands, meaning he would have been familiar with local traditions and legends. Even more so would have Richard, whom, despite actually being born in England, preferred and spent most of his time in Aquitaine, particularly Poitou, when he was not crusading in foreign lands.

It is no stretch to assume that so popular a legend would be known by both families given their proximity, or that they would have used it to suit their own ends, although it is more difficult to draw conclusions about the intent of using the fairy for the earlier House of Lusignan. Since the primary link that we have is a fourteenth-century romance that was made to aid the Duke of Berry, not the Lusignans, the most we can do is make inferences. Based on contemporary sources, I believe that Mélusine was used initially by the House of Lusignan in much the same way as it was used by the Angevins—to gain respect with fear and justify questionable behavior. As will be discussed later, the twelfth-century Lusignans had their own ambiguous reputations. They could be good and pious. But they could also be greedy, selfish, and cruel. With a questionable reputation similar to that of their Angevin neighbors, it seems a point proved by the sobriquet of Hugh VI, “le Diable” and the twelfth-century addition of an apsidiole on the eleventh-century Église Notre-Dame et St. Junien in Lusignan bearing a sculpture of the demon fairy. Given the prevalence of the myth in the region, it would make

perfect sense for Jean of Berry to co-opt it in the throes of the Hundred Years' War against the Plantagenets, neutralize it, and claim it as his own. It is this back and forth, the conscious application of the same character, between the nobility involved that I refer to with the term "competitive memory." It is more than the construction of social memory, more than the creation of a collective belief system. It is the active use of a particular character within an exclusive group of people as they attempt to wrest the same territories from each other.

V: Organization

Would this creature have been as attractive to these nobles had she been male? Based on a long history associated with the region, as well as a developing body of literature surrounding the female body and what it could do, I do not believe that to be the case. It was incumbent upon this being to carry all of the weight of a growing ideology around women, monsters, and lineage in such a way that it would have been impossible for a male character to be as useful in its ends. To show this requires tying together multiple disparate themes, fields, and approaches. Beyond literary analyses, there is the anthropological issue of how figures like Mélusine are constructed and utilized, as well as the backstory of that construction based on religion and medical philosophies. And of course, the important changes in social patterns, cultural transformations, and political and genealogical structures during the "long twelfth century" must also be taken into account. As such, I have organized this work around a series of themes to show what markers within those categories the medieval authors who crafted the Mélusine story and legend would have been working from and how their creation was meant to be seen by readers.

First, I begin my work with a discussion of archetypes. In order to understand the symbols and typologies that would have been recognizable in these narratives, we have to

examine where they came from and how they influenced people's worldviews. I have split this into three major categories: monster archetypes, the typologies inherent in myths, marvels, and folklore involving serpents, and the influence of Christian ideology on both material culture and misrepresentations of women. I then discuss the influence of these on the Mélusine excerpt from *De principis* and in the *Roman de Mélusine*.

Chapter **Two** takes a deeper look at hybridity and monstrosity as they were understood in the period, thanks largely to Christian exegesis. It examines how religion functioned as a means of helping people explain processes that they did **not** understand, how they read deformity as a means of God's power and, in some cases, the outward, physical proof of sin. Certain deformities were signs of moral laxity or depravity, just as specific hybrid parts were ciphers of specific sins that were typically associated with the female sex. With society changing, nothing so readily could represent transformation as the female body, which changed multiple times throughout the course of one life and was seen as the ultimate secret. When combined with literary devices about hybridity, it became dangerous in its earliest incantations, ambiguous in its later ones.

Genealogy is the subject of Chapter **Three**. The strength of the Mélusine character is that she is the foundress of two formidable noble houses. She was made responsible for their creation, their natures, and their reputations. Had there not been a distinct change in the way that nobles traced and defined their genealogies, emphasizing their lineage in order to consolidate and claim more and more land, she would not have remained an important character throughout the period. Yes, she makes for a good story, a fun myth. But she was specifically linked to some of the most powerful houses of the period, who were from the same region, and who very carefully sketched out their connection to her in order to emphasize it. Jean of Berry went to great lengths

to link himself to her because of her importance to those specific families, the propaganda that went along with her, and the region she was so closely associated with. But by the end of the fourteenth century, cultural influences had advanced in such a way that it was more advantageous, if not necessary, to neutralize the negative aspects of the fairy by removing the demonic characteristics so emphasized earlier in the period. There also had to be a negation of connections to a past associated with the Plantagenets in order to exert dominance and possession of the myth itself. By looking at the propaganda associated with the Plantagenets and the earlier, historical house of Lusignan, we can trace how genealogical concerns changed over time by examining what was emphasized in the earlier period versus what was emphasized by Jean d'Arras at the bequest of Jean of Berry.

As mentioned previously, a hybrid, borderline-demonic ancestor would not have been effective had it been a male, largely because of presuppositions about women, their supposed predisposition toward sin, and the power they wielded over lineages through their roles as mothers. Motherhood is the subject of **Chapter Four**, and it explains important concepts related to how medieval people viewed the female body and its ability to create life. Inherent to those concepts are ideas from natural philosophy, as well as classical philosophy, about the process of procreation, gestation, and imprinting of traits, and the role of women within each category. With a general understanding of these concepts, we can then look at the two versions of the narratives themselves, the first by Gerald of Wales and the second by Jean d'Arras, and apply them individually to **determine** the effect the narratives were seeking to have with their descriptions of mother marks and botanical allegory.

Finally, **Chapter Five** examines all of these findings together, pulling together the themes to see them within their historical context, reading them as a complete story—the consummation

of a form of specialized social memory and its effects. What we find is a specialized, regional memory used by very specific groups of local nobles in a competitive way to serve distinct aims. They played on propaganda, social norms, and the broader epistemologies of the day to battle over the same swath of land, using words instead of swords. When we do this, we open up a far more contextualized narrative that is infinitely more historically relevant than simple folklore turned medieval romance.

Chapter 2 ARCHETYPES

2.1 Monster Archetypes

The literary creations of both Gerald of Wales and Jean d'Arras must be seen within the context of a larger preoccupation with mythical creatures and folklore from ancient stories that survived throughout the Middle Ages, and which influenced courtly literature and the fascination with mirabilia.⁷⁰ Many of the creatures found in these “Books of Marvels” were based on much older traditions, and although indirect, similarities may be found between Mélusine and various female figures in Greco-Roman mythology. Homer’s Greek sirens are typically posited as hybrid bird-women, luring sailors to their demise, or as “otherworld enchantresses.”⁷¹ Georg Weicker, the historian who urged the hybridity of the sirens as a type of “soul-bird,” what he calls the “Musen des Jenseits” aspect, links these female creatures’ homes with the grave and the Underworld, essentially categorizing them as a form of what is referred to as “Todesdämon.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Mirabilis or mirabilia are described as “wonders,” “miracles,” or “marvels.”

⁷¹ Gerald K. Gresseth, “The Homeric Sirens,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 101 (1970), 203. In this article, Gresseth discusses the various historiographical interpretations of the Greek sirens by tracing them back to two historians of the early 20th century, the first posited by Goerg Weicker (the “soul-bird” approach) and the other by Ernst Buschor (the “otherworldly enchantress” approach).

⁷² Gerald K. Gresseth, “The Homeric Sirens,” 204. Interestingly, Homer himself never describes these women as “bird-like” or gives any kind of description about where they live; these details

The other interpretation, that of the “otherworldly enchantress,” was put forward by Ernst Buschor who stressed the anthropomorphic element of the sirens, which separated them from their bird-like aspects and concentrated more on their actions, while also freeing them from any association with death or demonization by categorizing them under the far more neutral term “Himmelssirenen.”⁷³ This closely parallels other ancient Greek stories regarding flying women who are typically seen as harbingers of doom or strife to men, such as the legend of the strix, also known within Roman culture, that more closely resembles the medieval stereotype of a witch.⁷⁴ In relation to sirens, however, Romans were far more likely to link them to *nereids*, half-fish, half-human sea nymphs considered to be the daughters of Nereus and Doris whose mischief included pulling sailors down to the depths of the ocean: “nor yet is the figure generally attributed to the nereids at all a fiction; only in them, the portion of the body that resembles the human figure is still rough all over with scales.”⁷⁵ These creatures appear to also have a shape-shifting ability, allowing them to take on purely human characteristics , “a perfect resemblance to

are typically gathered from art inspired by his writings or inspired by other writings on sirens, such as that of Euripides. *Todesdämon*: “death demons” or “demons of death.”

⁷³ Gerald K. Gresseth, “The Homeric Sirens,” 205. *Himmelssirenen*: “sky sirens.”

⁷⁴ Samuel Grant Oliphant, “The Story of the Strix: Ancient,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 44 (1913), 135.

⁷⁵ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), <http://www.masseiana.org/pliny.htm#BOOK%20IX>.

a human being.”⁷⁶ The figure of a mermaid associated with a siren was specifically referenced in the seventh or eighth century *Liber monstruorum* and firmly established by the twelfth century.⁷⁷

What, then, do collections of popular fables over centuries about winged or fish-like women have to do with the Mélusine myth in elite culture? Although a precedent had been set to regard these creatures as negative—and quite often, demonic—in various penitential and religious collections, their very mention in these sources spans four hundred years, implying a resistance within popular culture to eliminating them. Ironically, the denunciation of these beliefs likely had the effect of disseminating them to a literate culture. It also contributed to what Jacques Le Goff identified as, not a literary genre or intellectual construct, but a world of objects labeled under the term *mirabilis*. The root of the word, *mir*, implies something visual; however, Le Goff does not necessarily interpret this as simply things “upon which they gazed with eyes wide open,” so much as “a whole world of the imagination, a whole series of visual images and metaphors is implied.”⁷⁸

Tradition exists; it is not created. Yet tradition presupposes a collective as well as individual effort of appropriation, modification, or rejection. This is particularly true in Christian societies, for Christianity embraced a diversity of ancient cultures, and more than other aspects of culture and folklore the

⁷⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*.

⁷⁷ *Liber monstruorum*, British Library, Royal MS 15 B XIX, f. 103v-104r.

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_15_b_xix_f103v

⁷⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 27.

marvelous drew upon these ancient strata. . . Medieval Christians developed a concept of marvels because an influential tradition of the marvelous already existed. . . The roots of the marvelous are almost always pre-Christian. . . In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the marvelous suddenly makes an appearance in high culture.⁷⁹

This sudden appearance has been linked by Erich Köhler to the rise of a courtly literature that attempted to oppose the culture of the Church and the aristocracy by creating an alternative culture that was more unique and amenable to its ends, drawing strongly from the stockpile of oral culture which contained the marvelous as one of its most important components.⁸⁰ In addition, Le Goff identified an interesting aspect of these stories of changelings and fairies: “What is perhaps most troubling about medieval marvels is precisely the fact that they merge so easily with everyday life that no one bothers to question their reality.”⁸¹ Further, Dana M. Oswald argued that the incorporation of these monstrous and transformative women into narratives speaks also to the reflection of the internal anxieties about women’s bodies, as they

⁷⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval*, 28-29.

⁸⁰ Erich Köhler, *Ideal and Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik*, 3rd Edition (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2002).

⁸¹ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 33.

can be seen disrupting the patriarchal order, which in essence is the order of humanity for the medieval reader.⁸²

This discussion of the medieval propensity toward marvels leads to one of its most interesting examples, the *Otia imperialia* of Gervase of Tilbury, an encyclopedia thought to have been compiled at the beginning of the thirteenth century, although largely considered to have been based on an earlier work intended for Henry the Younger, Henry II of England's son.⁸³ Gervase is also the author whom Jean d'Arras claims as an authority at the beginning of the *Roman de Mélusine*. The work is broken into three books. The first explains the creation and history of the world, the second a description of the world, and the third is a collection of marvels. Although the work is meant to be largely recreational, hence the name, it still contains an effort to intellectualize the "wonders" of the world. Here we find multiple examples of fairies, changelings, and hybrids, an example of which is the description of the "Sirens of the British Sea"; its characteristics paralleling its ancient predecessors, as well as the later descriptions of Mélusine: "They have a female head, long, shining hair, a woman's breasts, and all the limbs of the female form down to the navel; the rest of her body tails off as a fish."⁸⁴

⁸² Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Ontario: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 127.

⁸³ H.G. Richardson, "Gervase of Tilbury," *History* vol. 46 no. 157, (1961), 105.

⁸⁴ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, Digital Vatican Library, MS Vat. Lat. 933, f. 71r. "Ad hec in mari Britannico serene scopulis insidere uidentur, que caput femineum, capillos lucidos et proceros habent, ubera muliebria, omniaque feminee forme

The survival of miraculous, hybrid creatures in later literature must also be seen alongside a pagan, Germanic influence that can be loosely compared to the earlier Celtic mythology, primarily because of its pagan emphasis on wood and water cults and a concentration on nature as a place of holy or mystical resonance, water of all forms apparently being the most favored.⁸⁵ The primary difference between these two religions is that Germanic paganism flourished despite Christian influence, which makes it an appropriate secondary area to search for the precursor to the stereotypical characteristics of Mélusine. Because of the nature of the culture, much Germanic folklore does not show up in sources until much later. One of the earliest mentions of this watery figure comes from Martin of Braga's 6th century *De correctione rusticorum*:

Many of these demons who were expelled from heaven preside over the sea, the rivers, the springs and the forests, and men, ignorant of God, worship them as if they were gods and sacrifice to them. And in the sea they are called Neptune, in the rivers Lamia, in the springs Nymphs, in the forests Diana, and they are all no

membra usque ad umbelicum; cetera in piscem finiuntur. He cantu dulcissimo sic nautarum transeuntium corda penetrant quod, suaui aurium pruritu admodum patiuntur.”

⁸⁵ Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 33.

more than evil demons and wicked spirits who harm and harass unfaithful men who do not know how to defend themselves with the sign of the cross.⁸⁶

Interestingly, St. Martin uses the same word, *lamiae*, to reference these creatures—the same word Jerome had used in the fifth century to reference succubi who bred hybrid offspring.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Claude W. Barlow, ed. *Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis Opera Omnia, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome*, XII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0434/_P8.HTM. “Praeter haec autem multi daemones ex illis qui de caelo expulsi sunt aut in mare aut in fluminibus aut in fontibus aut in silvis praesident, quos similiter homines ignorantes deum quasi deos colunt et sacrificant illis. Et in mare quidem Neptunum appellant, in fluminibus Lamias, in fontibus Nymphas, in silvis Dianas, quae omnia maligni daemones et spiritus nequam sunt, qui homines infideles, qui signaculo crucis nesciunt se munire, nocent et vexant.”

⁸⁷ Isaiah 34: 13-16. “Et orientur in domibus ejus spinae et urticae, et paliurus in munitioibus ejus; et erit cubile draconum, et pascua struthionum. Et occurrent daemonia onocentauris, et pilosus clamabit alter ad alterum; ibi cubavit *lamia*, et invenit sibi requiem. Ibi habuit foveam ericius, et enutrivit catulos, et circumfodit, et fovit in umbra ejus; illuc congregati sunt milvi, alter ad alterum. Requirit diligenter in libro Domini, et legite: Unum ex eis non defuit, alter alterum non quaesivit; quia quod ex ore meo procedit, ille mandavit, et spiritus ejus ipse congregavit ea” (“And thorns and nettles shall grow up in its houses, and the thistle in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be the habitation of dragons, and the pasture of ostriches. And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another, there hath the

In Judaism, the archetypal succubus figure that appears is Lilith, who also very closely parallels the bird-like sirens in physical characterization.⁸⁸ In Jerome's Vulgate Bible, the term *lilit*, which had been associated both with the character and with the definition "screech owl" or "of the night," was translated as *lamia*, "an evil being that killed infants and seduced sleeping men . . . clearly associated with evil, night, and flight."⁸⁹ Eventually, the name "Lilith" in itself became a synonym for "succubus" within oral Jewish tradition, discovered by incantation bowls from around 600 CE with inscriptions for protections against "Liliths."⁹⁰ In the Talmud, Lilith is

lamia lain down, and found rest for herself. There hath the *lamia* had its hole, and brought up its young ones, and hath dug round about, and cherished them in the shadow thereof: thither are the kites gathered together one to another. Search ye diligently in the book of the Lord, and read: not one of them was wanting, one hath not sought for the other: for that which proceedeth out of my mouth, he hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.").

⁸⁸ Isaiah 34:14. "And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another, there hath the lamia lain down, and found rest for herself".

⁸⁹ Shelley R. Adler, *Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body Connection* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 38.

⁹⁰ "Incantation bowl," Museum number 136204, British Museum. Translation by J.B. Segal of the British Museum. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1974-1209-2. "You are bound and sealed, all you demons and devils and liliths, by that hard and strong, mighty and powerful bond with which are tied Sison and Sisin....The evil Lilith, who causes the hearts of men to go astray and appears in the dream of the night and in the vision of the day, Who burns

described with wings and partly human in appearance. Aside from physical traits, Lilith, or the succubi modeled after her, was also understood to breed demonic offspring while strangling or sucking the blood of wholly mortal infants.⁹¹ These earlier interpretations of Lilith were exceedingly more terrifying than the prelapsarian Lilith tale described in the later medieval “Alphabet of Ben Sira,” who appears mournful and apologetic for her sinful, cursed state.⁹²

and casts down with nightmare, attacks and kills children, boys and girls. She is conquered and sealed away from the house and from the threshold of Bahram-Gushnasp son of Ishtar-Nahid by the talisman of Metatron, the great prince who is called the Great Healer of Mercy....who vanquishes demons and devils, black arts and mighty spells and keeps them away from the house and threshold of Bahram-Gushnasp, son of Ishtar-Nahid. Amen, Amen, Selah. Vanquished are the black arts and mighty spells. Vanquished the bewitching women, they, their witchery and their spells, their curses and their invocations, and kept away from the four walls of the house of Bahram-Gushnasp, the son of Ishtar-Hahid. Vanquished and trampled down are the bewitching women -- vanquished on earth and vanquished in heaven. Vanquished are their constellations and stars. Bound are the works of their hands. Amen, Amen, Selah.”

⁹¹ Shelley R. Adler, *Night-mares, Nocebos, and the Mind-Body*, 39.

⁹² Ben Sira, “The Alphabet of Ben Sira,” trans. Norman Bronznick, Mark Jay Mirsky, and David Stern, *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narrative from Classical Hebrew Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 183-184. “After God created Adam, who was alone, He said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone’ (Genesis 2:18). He then created a woman for Adam, from the earth, as He had created Adam himself, and called her Lilith. Adam and Lilith immediately began to fight. She said, ‘I will not lie below/ and he said, ‘I will not lie beneath

Descriptions of *aquaticae* and *silvaticae*, translated as water-nymphs or “wild women,” contain much of the standard characteristics of the medieval fairy that Mélusine would eventually represent: a minor deity or creature that has a love encounter with a human, bringing together concepts of eroticism and destiny, as their union is typically based on a form of secret

you, but only on top. For you are fit only to be in the bottom position, while I am to be in the superior one.’ Lilith responded, ‘We are equal to each other inasmuch as we were both created from the earth.’ But they would not listen to one another. When Lilith saw this, she pronounced the Ineffable Name and flew away into the air. Adam stood in prayer before his Creator: Sovereign of the universe!’ he said, ‘the woman you gave me has run away.’ At once, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent these three angels to bring her back. “Said the Holy One to Adam, ‘If she agrees to come back, fine. If not, she must permit one hundred of her children to die every day.’ The angels left God and pursued Lilith, whom they overtook in the midst of the sea, in the mighty waters wherein the Egyptians were destined to drown. They told her God’s word, but she did not wish to return. The angels said, ‘We shall drown you in the sea.’ ‘Leave me!’ she said. ‘I was created only to cause sickness to infants. If the infant is male, I have dominion over him for eight days after his birth, and if female, for twenty days.’ “When the angels heard Lilith’s words, they insisted she go back. But she swore to them by the name of the living and eternal God: ‘Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I will have no power over that infant.’ She also agreed to have one hundred of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred demons perish, and for the same reason, we write the angels’ names on the amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers her oath, and the child recovers.”

agreement or promise that is later broken.⁹³ Further parallels with creatures commonly referred to in early medieval English, Germanic, and Scandinavian mythologies as *necker*, *nixe*, or *nikke* may also be made and are described as human-fish hybrids that are able to become wholly human, wholly fish, or wholly serpentine.⁹⁴

The previously mentioned Anglo-Saxon *Liber monstruorum*, from the late seventh or early eighth century, also contains the influence of Roman conceptions of sirens in which they have abandoned their bird-like features and taken on mermaid characteristics:

Sirens are sea-girls, who deceive sailors with the outstanding beauty of their appearance and the sweetness of their song, and are most like human beings from the head to the navel, with the body of a maiden, but have scaly fishes' tails, with which they always lurk in the sea.⁹⁵

The association of Greco-Roman sirens, mermaids, and succubi with the medieval Mélusine myth may seem far-fetched; however, it serves to establish an archetype that she would later

⁹³ Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures*, 81.

⁹⁴ Bernadette Filotas, *Pagan Survivals, Superstitions and Popular Cultures*, 312.

⁹⁵ *Liber monstruorum*, f. 103v-104r. "Sirenae sunt marinae puellae quae navigantes pulcherrima forma et cantus decipiunt dulcitudine, et a capite usque ad umbilicum sunt corpore virginali et humano generi simillimae, squamosas tamen piscium caudas habent, quibus in gurgite semper latent."

embody. In different versions, Mélusine was considered to take on a serpentine quality, sometimes a winged body, sometimes both. Similar characteristics from these ancient myths are clearly seen in Germanic mythology about succubi and water-sprites and considering the migrations and acquisition of the latter Germanic peoples of a broad, Gallo-Romanic geographical territory, it seems natural to assume some level of influence, which was only further expanded by the eventual invasions of the Normans, bringing a uniquely Scandinavian element to the fold. The pure migration of multiple different peoples over a significant span of time would have resulted in the diffusion and amalgamation of beliefs about the mythical. The houses of Plantagenet and Lusignan would have been able to (or at least would have attempted to prove they could) trace their lineages back prior to the ninth or tenth centuries, a time when Catholicism was powerful, yet still finding itself constantly battling pagan superstitions, practices, and traditions. When combined alongside the medieval fascination with mirabilia, these elements fed into the very stereotype of women as harbingers of trouble in courtly literature, a characterization that Mélusine would come to embody.

2.2 Myths and Marvels

Tracing the origins of a myth or a specific mythical creature inevitably leads one on a wild goose chase; however, there are various similarities that lead to a desire to hypothesize about a larger, more interconnected continental European mythology that not only blended, but built on itself. We could consider the mythical, hybrid figure of Mélusine in the same way. She is a hybrid not only physically but also in oral and literary form, a conglomeration of various folkloric and mythical traditions, stretching back in various forms for over two thousand years. As discussed, her primitive characteristics may be found in the Homeric sirens, the Roman strix,

or the early medieval lamia. She was a water sprite, a mermaid, an aquatica, a succubus, but more than that, she was feared because she was a powerful female figure with an evil nature. All these attributes are clearly visible and related in the Mélusine character and were eventually wedded with various later Anglo-Saxon and Germanic tales and courtly literary tropes.

Although her closest and earliest iterations clearly fall within the realm of myth, the Mélusine of Gerald of Wales and Jean d'Arras is difficult to classify. There are clear mythical elements; however, both texts clearly cross back and forth over the boundary of fiction and the recent historical past, making reference to actual historical figures. As previously mentioned, Jacques Le Goff agreed with the Grimm brothers' doxa on the distinctions between *Märchen*, *Sagen*, and *Mythen*, that "the fairy tale is more poetic, the legend more historical" but with one caveat: that "tale" or "myth" and "legend" should sometimes be read, not as parallel genres, but as avatars of each other.⁹⁶ Le Goff's analysis of the various thirteenth-century accounts of her by Walter Map, Gervase of Tilbury, Vincent of Beauvais, and Helinand of Froimont, as well as the late fourteenth-century romances by Jean d'Arras and Couldrette, identified three core problems with the texts. First, he asked what was the importance of transgressing the taboo, meaning,

⁹⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture*, 213. Apparently, in the field of folklore studies there is a pushback against what Joann Conrad refers to as the Grimm Brothers' "mythologized legacy." She notes the "reflexive turn" in the 1990s that led to a reevaluation of the brothers' legacy based largely on the underlying role of Romantic Nationalism. Because I am not in that field, I am not qualified to pass judgment in this area, although Conrad's article makes for an interesting and enlightening read: Joann Conrad "The Storied Time of Folklore," *Western Folklore* vol 73, no 2/3 (Spring 2014), 327-328.

despite the fact that Raymondin breaks his oath, isn't he inherently less culpable because of Mélusine's natural character? Second, can *any* positive be read into Raymondin and Mélusine's relationship when in Christianity a union between a man and half-beast is automatically considered degrading? And third, regarding marvelous women, how are we to differentiate between white and black magic, fairies from witches?⁹⁷ Despite the Christian elements in the stories, Le Goff posited that any issues regarding demonology and Christian interpretations were relatively unimportant. Mélusine is considered by all of the authors to be a demonic succubus or a "fairy as a fallen angel;" however, the core of the interpretation hinges on Mélusine's nature which emerges through her function, hence her connection to previous mythology.⁹⁸ Because she brings prosperity, Le Goff referred to her as a "medieval avatar of a mother-goddess" or a "fertility fairy" who disappeared when her task was complete.⁹⁹ Rather than the issue being who Mélusine is, Le Goff marked her purpose and the purpose of her type by identifying two issues with her that represented the changing social structure of the day: a willingness to disregard orthodox Christian thinking and replace it with a form of totemism when necessary, and a connection between literature and society that allows for an examination of why these tales were repeatedly reworked and reused. Specifically, Le Goff saw Mélusine as the symbolic and magical incarnation of the middling aristocracy's social ambition. This class was not necessarily close to the Church, according to Le Goff, and therefore did not care to distance themselves through the use of an arsenal of folklore, marvels, and epics that created marvelous, demonic, or

⁹⁷ Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture*, 212.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

pagan-influenced stories.¹⁰⁰ This argument, however, only considered Mélusine as a literary device. Can she be seen as an incarnation of the “middling aristocracy” when we consider that the patron of the work was the brother of the king of France? Nor does it seem like there is a disregard for Christian thinking, if one considers that the main character would have automatically been coded as negative and there seems a very concerted effort made throughout to, at the very least, neutralize that negativity.

To some extent, scholars have to put in the historical leg-work to show where the Mélusine tale departs from the typical marvelous tale, simply because of its unique aspects, as well as compare it to earlier ethnological works that have pointed to similar characters in Greek antiquity, ancient India, and Celtic and Amerindian myths, respectively.¹⁰¹ In their book *Medieval Romance*, James F. and Peggy A. Knapp analyze d'Arras's *Mélusine* as a “trans-world heroine” who shows the difficulty between romance writing and “real world” history, while comparing the same plot threads, alternative worlds, and ethical issues that appear in both *Mélusine* and the tales told by Chaucer's Wife of Bath, the Franklin, the Clerk, and the Canon's Yeoman in *Troilus and Criseyde*.¹⁰² There is also, in all of these tales, the issue of magic—the feats in each are not simply illusions, they are actual supernatural instances that form the core of the stories, particularly the Breton lays and other parallel genres.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 220.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 215. Jacques Le Goff draws parallels to ethnographers J. Kohler, Marie Nowack, and Jean Karlowicz.

¹⁰² James F. and Peggy A. Knapp, *Medieval Romance: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 98.

The formation of identity is an integral part of any examination of the Mélusine character, most of which concentrate on later iterations of the fairy within the context of medieval romance. These studies typically separate out the distinct parts as normative within the genre in terms of the supernatural, concentrating on Mélusine's identity as a woman and/or mother, her identity as a hybrid or transformative creature, and her identity as a fairy or demon. As mentioned above, Le Goff interpreted Mélusine as a fertility goddess of sorts, concentrating primarily on her ability to bring prosperity and an abundance of children.¹⁰³ In her article, "Nourishing and Lineage," Catherine Leglu compares the narratives by d'Arras and Couldrette to show how a seemingly small difference—whether or not Mélusine breastfed her children or hired wet nurses—had far different repercussions for how contemporary viewers would have regarded her monstrous aspects.¹⁰⁴ During the time of writing, the hiring of wet nurses was already popular among the nobility and was growing in popularity in urban settings; however, it was understood that maternal feeding directly passed lineage identity, social rank, as well as religious doctrine, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. Because milk was considered to have been transformed from blood, the nursing mother strengthened the transmission of her own bloodline as well, making Mélusine's passage of monstrosity particularly potent in the Couldrette poem, though questionable in the prose romance. Drawing on Dyan Elliott's medieval division of the female body, Leglu further posits that concerns regarding maternal feeding, particularly in the Mélusine case, could also be linked with ideas about animal milk causing bestial imprinting, a

¹⁰³ Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture* 218

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Leglu, "Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French Versions of the 'Roman de Mélusine.'" *Medium Ævum*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (2005), 71.

repercussion of which could surely come from a creature with the “good” top half of the female body and the “bad” lower half that doubles as a serpent.¹⁰⁵ The implication of these narratives in a real-world context shows the fear surrounding the power of female influence on processes that were not very well understood and that their blood, regardless of form, was polyvalent. Further, in linking fears about blood passed through women with beliefs that were central to medieval Christian ideas about what it meant to be a human, it is a short trip from looking at what women are capable of to how specific animals in these narratives may have been used to figure their gender without having to explicitly state it. Man was considered raised above beasts thanks to his likeness to God. Women, created from man, could easily be cast as subhuman and linked more easily to animals in these chivalric cycles, the most obvious being the duplicitous serpent.

2.3 Serpents as Sinners and the Bestiary Tradition

Whether defined philosophically using Aristotle’s idea that humans were a tier above animals because they are “rational,” or theologically by following God’s injunction in Genesis to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth,” there was in the Middle Ages the general idea of a superiority of humans over animals. That said, the animal kingdom was made up of far more than simply literal beings; it was “quasi liber, et

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Leglu, 80. In *Fallen Bodies* (pg 114), Elliott explains the medieval conception of the female body as the “good” upper half, which includes the breasts, and the “bad” lower half, which revolved around perceptions of the reviled menstrual and procreative abdomen.

pictura, nobis est, et speculum” (“like a book and a picture, it is also a mirror for us”).¹⁰⁶ As early as the second century CE, texts like the *Physiologus* were using animals and their “natural characteristics” to construct allegories teaching Christian dogma. By the end of the twelfth century, the *Physiologus* was included and expanded in “books of beasts,” or bestiaries, which continued to interpret many animals as symbols of moral truths, although some were simply sorted into zoological categories without further consideration of their religious significance.

Bestiaries could include animals both real and imaginary, often seamlessly jumping from creatures like lions and boars to dragons and manticores seemingly without need for explanation. The reason for this was that the details were based on *auctores*, not empirical observations.¹⁰⁷ The goal of these texts was not necessarily just to document the natural world in order to understand how it worked but to assume that everything in Creation had the purpose of fulfilling an ulterior aim, which was the improvement and instruction of sinful people. God created animals and creatures with particular habits and natures that would allow humans to see in them the world of mankind reflected in the natural world. Both in form and in text, these creatures

¹⁰⁶ Alan of Lille, “De Incarnatione Christi Rhythmus Perelegans,” *Documenta Catholica Omnia*, vol. MPL 210, Column 579, *Cooperatorum Veritatis Societas*, 2006.

<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/1125->

[1202,_Alanus_De_Insulis,_De_Incarnatione_Christi_Rhythmus_Perelegans,_MLT.pdf](#)

¹⁰⁷ The use of *auctores*, classical authors used as irrefutable authorities on various subjects, especially in terms of commenting on various classical works as a means of substantiating certain claims or repurposing them for use in a medieval context, was a common custom of the period.

were part of what the medieval author termed *ruminatio*—a meditative process by which through looking, hearing, or memorizing, one was able to ruminate on a work to fully draw out all of its various meanings. Through the examples of these strange creatures, people could see examples of various paths to redemption or damnation.¹⁰⁸

The animals that were *meant* to be called to mind in Mélusine’s case are the dragon, the snake, and the serpent: she is referred to under all these guises interchangeably. In the medieval mind, regardless of what good Melusine may have accomplished, her serpentine state would have registered as undeniably evil. The devil was sometimes called the “old serpent”; snakes were considered a subcategory of those serpents that were slippery and secretive; and dragons were the largest and fairest of all serpents, known particularly for laying sin in the path of the righteous.¹⁰⁹ The thirteenth-century bestiary at the Bodleian Library goes into further details about the links between serpents or snakes and sin. The text states that St. Ambrose claimed the viper was the most evil of all creatures and the more cunning of all other serpents. Its evil is specifically of a sexual nature, particularly of falling for the lures of women and the possible repercussions associated with doing so. Although the primary dividing line between humans and animals was the ability to think rationally, in the case of dragons and serpents there is reason to assume that in these instances, it was not simply animals as animals being mentioned, but

¹⁰⁸ Richard Barber, trans. *Bestiary: Being an English Version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bodley 764* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992), 7.

¹⁰⁹ “English Bestiary,” Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 764, f. 94v.

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/ecf96804-a514-4adc-8779-2dbc4e4b2f1e/surfaces/861ad634-1d6a-4673-9096-8f2120ecf9f4/>.

animals acting as representations of the devil or evil in general.¹¹⁰ This may be carried a step further when considering other literature such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or Radulfus Glaber's chronicle, among others, who wrote on dragons as portents of doom and destruction.¹¹¹

Despite these correlations with sin and evil, interestingly it is Raymondin in the latter work who both curses his wife as a serpent *and* refers to her as a unicorn, while describing himself as a snake, both of which would have had significant meaning for readers.¹¹² Quite different from modern characterizations, unicorns in the medieval period were regarded as almost goat-like; however, they still bore the recognizable horn on their brow. They were thought to be caught only by virgins, though the more important connection was that of the unicorn and Jesus, the "spiritual unicorn" of the Song of Songs, Psalms 92:10 ("My horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn"), and various other biblical references.¹¹³ The connection between unicorns and virgins inevitably led to a marrying of pre-Christian meaning with that of allegories referring to Jesus and

¹¹⁰ Riches, Samantha J.E. "Encountering the Monstrous." *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, 201.

¹¹¹ The first Viking attack on England was foreshadowed by fiery dragons flying around Lindisfarne, while Glaber reported a dragon terrifying the people of Gaul, a mirror of the dragon meant to signal the end times in Revelation.

¹¹² MS 3353, f. 131 r. "Je suis le faulx crueux aspis et vous estes la licorne précieuse."

¹¹³ Some of the biblical references are quite a stretch, although medieval authors did not hesitate to make them. For example, "He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:69) or "The single horn on the unicorn's head signifies what He Himself said: 'I and my Father are one'" (John 10:30).

his virgin mother, Mary. Borrowing heavily from references in the *Physiologus*, the connection was cemented as early as the seventh century by Isidore of Seville:

It has such strength that it can be captured by no hunter's ability, but, as those who have written about the natures of animals claim, if a virgin girl is set before a unicorn as the beast approaches, she may open her lap and it will lay its head there with all ferocity put aside, and thus lulled and disarmed it may be captured.¹¹⁴

The other obvious parallel to be found in bestiaries, as well as multiple examples of artistic descriptions and other types of literature, is the siren. Alternate definitions exist for the siren, some echoing the ancient Greek or Roman descriptions likening them to half-woman half-birds, while others describe them in terms more recognizable to us as mermaids. In fact, in some bestiaries, it seems the author and the artist were fulfilling two completely different conceptions of a siren at the same time. As can be seen in MS Bodley 764, the text states that “from the head down to the navel are like men, but their lower parts down to their feet are like birds,” yet the

¹¹⁴ Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum libri XX*, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Département des Manuscrits. Latin 7585, f. 146r. <https://manuscrits-france-angleterre.org/view3if/pl/ark:/12148/btv1b10542288m/f277>. “Tantae autem esse fortitudinis ut nulla venantium virtute capiatur; sed, sicut asserunt qui naturas animalium scripserunt, virgo puella praeponitur, quae venienti sinum aperit, in quo ille omni ferocitate deposita caput ponit, sicque soporatus velut inermis capitur.”

miniature is clearly women with fish-like tails without any discernible bird-like characteristics. While this is an obvious example of the authors of medieval text being separate from the illustrators, the idea that both would relate these two very different conceptions of a siren leads one to believe that both notions were present and popular.



Figure 2: English bestiary portraying sirens with fish tails, despite the text stating they were bird-like from the waist down, MS Bodley 764, f. 74v.

Despite the contrasting image with the text, the description of their action is familiar: they sing beautiful songs, luring imprudent, ignorant men to their deaths, the real-world imperative being that one should not delight in the vanity and pleasures of this world. Sirens, both in written and artistic form, were extremely popular images in the period, showing up in a variety of works, and in all instances, they foretold death and destruction. In some instances, as in the image above, they are depicted holding a fish—another overtly Christian symbol meant to show their danger to men’s souls. It should also not come as a surprise that these beings are almost always female, particularly as fears about female sexuality heightened. The linkage of sirens with evil and destruction is obviously a contribution from the Greeks; however, the Septuagint was responsible for bringing them into a Christian context—they live and dance with demons as Babylon burns (Isaiah 13:21-22, 34:11-14). It did not take long before sirens were transformed into sinful women in that same Christian context: in the seventh century, Leander Seville argued that women were either nuns or sirens, and his brother, Isidore, went even further to label sirens, already associated with women, as whores. The iconography only became clearer as the period progressed. The woman’s naked torso implied seduction, temptation, and lust; the abrupt contrast of her beauty with the fish tail meant to evoke the repulsiveness of the sin.¹¹⁵

The image of the serpent in marvels and tales was common, and its meaning was very well understood. While not necessarily a “female-gendered category” per se, it would not be unusual to link women with serpents in myths, marvels, or religious exempla. The representation

¹¹⁵ For a more detailed analysis of the evolution of sirens from Greek mythology to medieval writings of multiple genres, see William J. Travis, “Of Sirens and Onocentaurs: A Romanesque Apocalypse at Montceaux-l’Etoile,” *Artibus et Historiae*, 2002, Vol. 23, No. 45 (2002), 39-40.

of the serpent in any of these contexts was always negative, the most odious associations belonging to those who followed Peter Comestor's example of linking the serpent in Eden with Eve, thereby drawing negative associations with all women:

Because [Lucifer] was afraid of being found out by the man, he approached the woman, who had less foresight and was "wax to be twisted into vice" and this by means of the serpent . . . He also chose a certain kind of serpent . . . which had the countenance of a virgin, because like favors like.¹¹⁶

This became a popular trope roughly around the time that Gerald of Wales was writing, and it is not surprising that such a well-respected exegete's authority would be used to reproduce the representation of the serpent in such a way.¹¹⁷ In plays, art, and literature, the representation of the serpent in Eden having a female countenance was fairly cemented by the thirteenth century, particularly after the widespread popularity of books like Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Naturale*, which created for the archetype an entirely new species, the *draconcopede*:

¹¹⁶ Kathleen M. Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

¹¹⁷ Interestingly, Comestor cited Bede as his authoritative source for his claim; however, in Bede, the only similarity is that he states that he, meaning Satan, "elegit quoddam genus serpentis" or chose a certain kind of snake—there is no connection in Bede to the snake in any way resembling a woman.

Dragon-headed serpents are large and powerful, having virginal faces that resemble human beings, and end in the body of dragons. It is probable that he used this form, the devil who deceived Eve, because, as Bede says, it had the face of a virgin. Likewise, the devil applied this con to attract her with a similar form, showing her only his face, and hiding the rest of his body with the leaves of trees.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Vincent de Beauvais, *Speculum Naturale*, 20.33. “Draconcopedes serpentes magni sunt, et potentes, facies virgineas habentes humanis similes, in draconum corpus desinentes. Credibile est huius generis illum fuisse, per quem diabolus Euam decepit, quia (sicut dicit Beda) virgineum vultum habuit. Huic etiam diabolus se coniungens vel applicans ut con simili forma mulierem alliceret, faciem ei tantum ostendit, et reliquam partem corporis arborum frondibus occultavit.”



Figure 3: “Temptation.” Note that the image of the serpent (complete with legs) has a female face and is concentrated solely on Eve in the representation. Benjamin the Scribe, c. 1277-1286, The British Library, Add. MS. 11639, f. 520v.

2.4 The Curse of Eve

Despite the feminine ideal presented by the Virgin Mary, women were more commonly connected with Eve, thanks largely to the doctrine of original sin.¹¹⁹ Despite the overwhelming

¹¹⁹ The doctrine, put forth by St. Augustine of Hippo, drew on passages from the Bible such as the Genesis expulsion story, Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, and for its specifically female

use of maternal imagery in the High Middle Ages, it is important to note that this concentration on maternity was based on the religious idealization of Mary and the concept of her as a “second Eve” who could undo the sins of the first, a gratuitously unfair icon of self-sacrifice, obedience, and purity. In fact, the *differences* between Mary and Eve were what made Mary the pure and symbolic embodiment of what a woman and mother should be in the minds of medieval men. Even as a mother, perhaps *despite* being a mother, Mary was a virgin and therefore uncorrupted, maintaining a state of perfection and integrity created by God. Almost as importantly, if not more for medieval men, there was no question of paternal uncertainty, as she was the manifestation of chastity.¹²⁰ Eve and her carnality, juxtaposed with Mary to represent the polluting and sinful female body, bore the brunt of what Finn E. Sinclair refers to as the “radical disjunction of the spiritual maternal ideal from any notion of polluting corporeality.”¹²¹ For many medieval men, the negative portrayal of women was given divine authority, as the first creation story in Genesis was often overshadowed by the importance of the second: Adam was created in

association, David’s confession to God in Psalm 52:5: “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother did conceive me.”

¹²⁰ As Vladimir Tumanov so succinctly put it, she allowed for the male psyche to “have its reproductive cake and eat it too: she gives birth (so reproduction takes place) and yet requires no mate guarding effort or jealousy.” Vladimir Tumanov, “Mary Versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women,” *Neophilologus: An International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature*, vol. 95 (March 2011), 507.

¹²¹ Finn E. Sinclair, *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the “Chanson de Geste”* (Peter Lang AG: New York, 2003), 28.

the image of God. Eve was created from Adam's rib—in effect, a defective man.¹²² This argument ensured that women were seen as monstrous, hybrid creatures. If “all good is from God, hence there is no natural existence which is not from God,” as stated by Augustine, then women are not completely natural in the spiritual or material sense.¹²³ According to Bloch, “the great topoi of gender in the West at least since Augustine [was that] man is undivided, asexual, pure spirit, while woman remains a divided being whose body does not reflect the reality of the soul.”¹²⁴

Further, in the twelfth century, it became popular among philosophizing clerics to debate questions such as: Who was more at fault for sinning in the Garden, Adam or Eve? Though one would assume that fault would be found greater in Adam for willingly violating God's order, while Eve was deceived into believing the serpent, that was not the case. Many Christians, particularly notable Church Fathers such as Tertullian from the second and third centuries, read the story of Genesis 3 as a moral history to be learned from. Good Christian women were warned that they were the devil's gateway, the reason for the Fall, and that they would continue to bear the guilt of their sin.¹²⁵ Again, aided with a healthy dose of St. Augustine, women's “natural”

¹²² R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25.

¹²³ Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. J.H.S. Burleigh (London: SCM Press, 1953), 169.

¹²⁴ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 26.

¹²⁵ “. . . you are the devil's gateway. . . you are she who persuaded him, whom the devil did not dare attack . . . Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on your sex, lives on in this age; the guilt, necessarily, lives on too.” Tertullian, *Disciplinary, Moral, and Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church Series*, vol. 40, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Sister

proclivity for deception based on their weaker constitution was rationalized to show that women live by their “bodily sense,” whereas Adam was ruled by his spiritual mind:

He is ruled by wisdom, she by the man. For Christ is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman. Thus it said, "It is not good that man is alone." For there was still need to bring it about not only that the soul rule over the body, because the body has the position of a servant, but also that virile reason hold subject to itself its animal part, by the help of which it governs the body. The woman was made as an illustration of this, for the order of things makes her subject to man. Thus we can also come to see in one human what we can see more clearly in two humans, that is, in the male and the female. The interior mind, like virile reason, should hold subject the soul's appetite by means of which we control the members of the body, and by just law it should place a limit upon its helper, just as man ought to rule woman and ought not to allow her to rule him. When this happens, the home is perverted and unhappy . . . For he [the Apostle Paul] says: “The man must not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God; the woman is the glory of man [I Cor. 11:7].”¹²⁶

Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain (Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 2008), 117-118. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32b2dj>.

¹²⁶ Augustine, *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis—An Unfinished Book, The Fathers of the Church Series, vol. 84*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 112 and 137.

Using ancient philosophers to censure women based on their biology and Augustine's sexualized interpretation of sin, a connection to their lesser moral state was easily established. As Albertus Magnus, that great thirteenth-century Doctor of the Church whose commentaries reintroduced the philosophies of Aristotle to Western audiences, stated in his fifteenth book of commentary of Aristotle's *On Animals*, "One should beware of every woman as one would avoid a venomous serpent and a horned devil, for if it were right to say what I know about women, the whole world would be astounded."¹²⁷

2.5 The Demon Countess: Origins and Self

It is through the lens of these archetypes that one should look to Gerald of Wales's description of the countess of Anjou. The character herself is not the only important aspect here but also, where she is placed in the work, sandwiched in between tales of treachery and sins committed by Henry II and his family. It is almost as though Gerald wanted his reader to stumble upon her description and suddenly have all the pieces come together in their minds—*so this was*

¹²⁷ “. . . et ideo quod non potest acquirere per se, nititur acquirere per mendacia et diabolicas deceptiones. Unde, ut breviter dicam, ab omni muliere est cavendum tamquam a serpente venenoso et diabolo cornuto, et si fas esset dicere, quae scio de mulieribus totus mundus stuperet.” Albert the Great, *Questions Concerning Aristotle's On Animals, The Fathers of the Church Series, Mediaeval Continuation*, vol. 9, trans. Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr. and Irven M. Resnick (Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 454.

the reason, now it all makes sense. Building on a spate of literature about Henry II and his ill-fated family, which will be covered more in Chapter Three when discussing Plantagenet propaganda, Gerald surrounds his fantastic origin story with biblical allusions and injunctions, familiar tropes, and oft-repeated rumor, creating his own archetypes about the family itself.

It should not be surprising that the primary accusation leveled against the Plantagenets by Gerald was that on multiple occasions when they had the ability to reconcile themselves fully with the Church, they purposefully, and almost spitefully, chose otherwise. Nearly all examples of their “wickedness” is either contrasted by the faithful and pious French kings or with instances of their own wrongdoing against Christian ideas about the sacrosanct nature of the Church and its belongings. Henry is the “*grauem ecclesie malleum*” (“heavy hammer of the Church”), who will in the end, along with his sons, be brought low by the “*longanimis Dominus*” (“long-suffering Lord”) who brings punishment to those wicked who continuously refuse to repent.¹²⁸

Book Two of *De principis* begins with a broad description of how Henry came to power and how it was not long before his rule spiraled into tyranny. Combining two very different passages, Gerald cites both 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles to describe what he sees as the fitting

¹²⁸ MS Julius, f. 119r, 119v. “*Facit ergo longa exspectacio longaque uindictae dilacio, ut benignam Dei pacienciam delinquentium magis conuersionem appetere quam euersionem euidenter appareat. Facit eciam ut post tantam toleranciam in reprobos et peruersos, nec inmerito, durior fieri debeat animaduersio*” (“Therefore, the long waiting and the long delay in his revenge makes it evident that God’s benign patience is more desirous of the conversion of evildoers than their destruction. He also does so that after so much tolerance of the reprobate and perverted, their punishment may be, and not undeservedly, harsher”).

nature of Henry's later troubles: "the sword shall never depart from the house' of the impious, and this of his, God 'will raise up your seed' against you."¹²⁹ The "theft" of Queen Eleanor from Louis VII, Henry's own liege lord, as well as his participation in the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, placed Henry firmly in the category of a "son born of perdition" ("fililus in perniciem natus"), perfectly following in his father's, Geoffrey of Anjou, footsteps, or as Gerald puts it, "following his father in evil."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ MS Julius, f. 121r. "Non recedet gladius de domo' impii, et illud eiusdem, 'Suscitabit' Deus 'semen tuum' contra te."

¹³⁰ MS Julius, f. 121r. "In malo patrisans deseuire presumpsit." Gerald is referring here to an incident he describes later in Book Three (f. 164r) that is more thoroughly described in the *Vita Sancti Thomae, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris* by William Fitz Stephen in which Count Geoffrey of Anjou had the bishop-elect of Séez and his supporters castrated for not waiting for his consent before accepting election. Count Geoffrey then made the men carry their testicles to him in a dish: "Pater etiam domini nostri regis, Goffridus, comes Andegaviae, qui et Normanniam in manu forti sibi subdidit, Arnulfum Sagiensem electum et plures clericorum ejus fecit evirari, et eunuchatorum ante se in pelvi afferri membra; quia citra assensum ejus electioni Sagiensis ecclesiae de se factae assensum praebuit, et se electum gerebat." William Fitzstephen, "Vita Sancti Thomae, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris," *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. James Craigie Robertson, M.A., Canon of Canterbury, vol. III. (Lessing-Druckerei: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965), 65. Apparently the bishop himself had noted that he had been "consecrated wallowing in his own blood" ("sicut dicebat in volutabro sanguinis sui fuerat consecratus"). Ralph de Diceto, *Radulfi de Diceto Decani*

It is from that point on that Gerald frames the troubles with Henry's sons as a result of his own inability to conduct himself in a noble manner, likening him to a second Pharaoh who had hardened his heart to any kind of atonement. He became not only an adulterer, but a dishonorable oath-breaker who deferred on his responsibility to go on crusade or make his promised pilgrimage to Jerusalem.¹³¹ Further, as noted in his *Expugnatio hibernica*:

Because of their father's sin, sons sin against him who begot them, and an earlier crime becomes the cause of subsequent ones. Sons will rise up against their

Lundoniensis Opera Historica, vol. I, ed. William Stubbs (Lessing-Druckerei: Kraus Reprint, 1968), 256.

¹³¹ In 1173, Henry found himself at war with his wife and sons. Henry, the Young King, withdrew to his father-in-law, Louis VII of France's court, after his father reorganized his estates and granted his youngest son, John, some of the castles promised in the Young King's inheritance. Once in France, the Young King built strong alliances with his brothers, his mother, and with Louis's help, promised a range of powerful barons and counts lands in England. The timing of this revolt was seen as particularly heinous, as it was instigated at Easter, a time when Christians were expected to cease fighting. The concept of a king's own sons revolting against him was seen as unnatural, a "bella plus quam civilia" ("worse than civil war") according to Gerald and others. The rebellion lasted nearly two years, ending with a thorough victory by Henry II, who was able to bring his sons back under his control, at least for a little while. Attempting to smooth over relations between the King of England and the French king that had aided his son's rebellion, both rulers pledged peace and took the cross. This was the second time Henry had pledged to go on crusade. He would never go.

parent, and to avenge a crime the bowels will conspire against the belly. His own flesh and blood will rise up against a man of blood, and will suffer terrible affliction . . .¹³²

By 1173, war between Henry II and his co-heir had brought instability to England, as well as a strained relationship between the kings of England and France. Henry's inability to finalize how he would divide up his territorial possessions had grave consequences and sparked further hostilities between himself and his children, leading to the Brothers' War in 1183 which pitched Richard against his brothers, the Young King and Geoffrey. When Henry demanded Geoffrey and Richard pay homage to the Young King, Richard stoutly refused, stating the laws of firstborn sons ("lege primogenitorum") were applicable only to paternal goods, making him the legitimate inheritor of his mother's lands.¹³³ Henry eventually conceded, allowing Richard the promise of the duchy of Aquitaine in exchange for his performance of homage to Henry the Younger; however, the Young King now refused his service.

¹³² Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio hibernica*, ed. and trans. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 124-5. "Ex delicto geniti delinquent in genitorem, et precedens delictum fit causa sequencium delictorum. Filii insurgent in parentem, et ob sceleris vindictam in ventrem viscera coniurabunt. In virum sanguinis sanguis insurget, et desperabilis fiet afflictio."

¹³³ This is a clear instance of the different views of the time regarding inheritance laws and the changing nature of how successions should be addressed, whether through primogeniture of a whole estate, or the more typical method of the past, partible inheritance.

The episode would lead to the brutal war between brothers, the Young King gathering barons and lords across France to his side, even, notably, Geoffrey de Lusignan, who had remained quiet in the background during the initial disagreements. The war itself would shock contemporaries in the way that it defied chivalric convention. Richard began executing prisoners and ordered the beheading of any knights of the Young King or Geoffrey's households despite rank. Henry the Younger paid his Brabançons, condemned in 1179 by the Third Lateran Council as "godless heretics," with treasures pillaged from cloisters and churches. As the relationship between Henry the Younger and his father deteriorated over the course of the war, Richard found himself with a new ally—the King of England. The resistance of the Young King would only be crushed by his own death in 1183, though Geoffrey would align himself with the new King of France, Philip Augustus, and attempt a brief resurgence of animosities in 1186, only to die himself a few months later.

What follows these events in *De principis* is the retelling of a series of visions, both of Gerald and others, that are meant to show the multitude of times King Henry was warned of his need to repent and his continued refusal, as well as a description of the troubles happening in the Levant where Salah ad-Din was overpowering the crusader states of the east, particularly the kingdom of Jerusalem that had been ruled by Guy of Lusignan since 1186.¹³⁴ Two admonitory letters from the pope to Henry follow, as well as the description of a visit from the Patriarch of

¹³⁴ Salah ad-Din captured Guy of Lusignan at the Battle of Hattin in July of 1187. Though the city of Jerusalem was lost, the *kingdom* of Jerusalem itself was not—the capital was merely shifted over 160 kilometers north to Tyre. This would serve as justification for the Third Crusade, launched in 1189.

Jerusalem, Heraclius, who could not sway Henry, despite the promise of the entire kingdom. Though he promised to send money, Henry would not allow his sons to travel to Jerusalem in his stead either, sparking a litany of referential biblical curses from Gerald:

Oh, you who should be abandoned by the Lord, whom you abandon in this way, and deprived of grace, which you forfeit by your ingratitude! And, to address you, king, with words of authority, have you, wretch, entered into ‘a league with the death, and made a covenant with hell’? . . . ‘For his wrath is sudden and in the time of vengeance he will destroy you’ . . . ‘the mighty shall be mightily tormented.’¹³⁵

The scene reached its climax with a confrontation between Henry II and the patriarch, in which Heraclius threatened the king that he had failed the Lord’s test and as a result, would be abandoned and completely deprived of grace. Stretching out his neck, the patriarch urged Henry to “do with me what you did with St. Thomas,” and told the enraged king that he was worse than any Saracen.¹³⁶ When Henry charged that it was on account of his rebellious sons and the

¹³⁵ MS Julius, f. 136v, 137r. “O deserendum a Domino, quem sic deseris, et gracia destituendum, quam ingratitude demeris! Et ut uerbis auctenticis te, rex, conueniam, numquid persussisti, miser, ‘fedus cum morte, et cum inferno pactum’ fecisti? . . . ‘Subito enim ira illius et in tempore uindicte disperdet te’ . . . ‘potentes potenter tormenta patientur.’”

¹³⁶ MS Julius, f. 137r, 137v. “Cum autem toruis ad hoc ipsum oculis, ut consueuerat, in ira rex respiceret, obtulit ei capud collumque tetendit dicens: ‘Fac’, inquit, ‘de me quod de beato Thoma

possibility that they might seize his lands in his absence that he could not fulfill his multiple promises to go on crusade, Heraclius warned Henry once more of what happened to those who valued power more than their honor and uttered the words that would come to be so readily applied to the family by so many: “from the devil they came and to the devil they will go.”¹³⁷

Whereas Book Two of *De principis* was willing to show the family at the “highest points of the rim of the wheel” and may at least tease the possibility of redemption for the Plantagenets, the third book is very much concentrated on their downfall as a result of their malice, impiety, and perversity.¹³⁸ Repeating a vision by the French king Louis, Gerald foreshadowed the loss of the Angevin’s continental holdings via a dark, blood ritual that parallels the Eucharist:

He seemed to see assembled in his presence both the king of the English and all the major barons of the kingdom of France, with his son and heir Philip proceeding in their midst, giving the barons who wrongly held the rights of his crown human blood to drink in a golden goblet, starting with his mother’s family,

fecisti. Adeo namque cupio quod a te michi capud amputetur in Anglia, sicut a Saracenis in Palestina, quia tu omni Sarraceno proculdubio peior es” (“But when at this the king looked angrily at him with fierce eyes, as was his custom, he offered his head and stretched out his neck, saying: ‘Do with me,’ he said, ‘what you did with Saint Thomas. For I desire that my head be cut off by you in England just as much as by Saracens in Palestine, for you are worse than any Saracen”).

¹³⁷ MS Julius, f. 137v. “Quia de dyabolo uenerunt, et ad dyabolum ibunt.”

¹³⁸ MS Julius, f. 141v.

his uncles of Blois and the duke of Burgundy, and also his own mother, the sister of the (brothers) of Blois, and so continuing via Philip, count of Flanders, and finally bringing the cup to Henry, king of the English.¹³⁹

From the earliest moments of his reign, King Philip of France would be an instigator of torments between members of the family, making and breaking various alliances between the members of the family and their vassals.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ MS Julius, f. 142r. “Videbatur enim sibi uidere, collectis in presencia sua tam Anglorum rege quam baronibus regni Francie maioribus cunctis, filium et heredem suum Philippum procedentem in medium, baronibus per ordinem, qui iura corone sue detinebant, humanum sanguinem in citho aureo propinantem, incipientem quoque a stirpe materna, Blesensibus scilicet auunculis suis, et duce Burgundie, nec non et matre propria, Blesencium sorore, et sic per comitem Flandrie Philippum consequenter transeundo, poculum usque ad Anglorum denique regem Henricum producentem.” On many occasions Philip Augustus is described as the “avenger” of his father, responsible for the destruction of all the “usurpers” of various rights of the crown.

¹⁴⁰ Henry was accused of having been intimate with Philip’s sister, Alice, while she was betrothed to Richard and in his care. It was rumored that he planned to divorce Eleanor so that he could marry and have heirs by Alice, allowing him to disinherit his older sons, and had sent letters to cardinal legate Huguccio to come to England and perform the deed. Philip somehow intercepted the letters and immediately sent them to Richard.

The reader is also given accounts of Count Richard, who was said to have set an example for other rulers “this side of the Alps” by being the first to take the cross for the Third Crusade, spurring other rulers, namely Philip and Frederick Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor, to do the same. Gerald acknowledged the ferocity of whom he terms “leo noster” (“our lion”) that rejoiced “to travel only on bloodstained roads,” but initially excuses any accusations of cruelty as being leveled by the envious.¹⁴¹

Interesting in terms of animalistic associations, lions have a very varied symbolism in medieval bestiaries and other writings, particularly those associated with marvels. References to lions were ubiquitous throughout the Middle Ages, and for the twelfth century, they are seen often in describing knights and those who were consistently successful in battle. They can typically be divided into five symbolic categories: the threatening lion, the Christian lion, the noble lion, the sinful lion, and the clement lion.¹⁴²¹⁴³ Despite these different representations, the

¹⁴¹ MS Julius, f. 148r. “Nec ullas nisi sanguine fuso gaudens incedere uias.”

¹⁴² Nigel Harris, “The Lion in Medieval Western Europe: Toward an Interpretive History.” *Traditio* vol. 76 (2021), 185. <https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2021/5>. Harris’s article gives a fascinating breakdown of lion associations from the New Testament up through the Middle Ages, analyzing German, French, and Latin texts.

¹⁴³ The Christ-like lion is a common allegory in bestiaries, and for obvious reasons is the more prominent. In the Aberdeen bestiary, for example, the lioness gives birth to five dead cubs, only to have life breathed into them by the father on the third day—an explicit parallel to Christ. In the same passage, however, is mention of the lion’s force and capability to inspire terror. “Aberdeen Bestiary,” University of Aberdeen Library, Univ. Lib. MS 24, f. 8r.

fundamental presentation associated with lions remained the same: they were either likened fundamentally to Christ or the devil.¹⁴⁴ From this standpoint, we can see the ambiguity in Gerald's referencing of Richard as "leo noster," particularly when he writes:

Moreover, he who bestowed a nature bestowed also the passion of that nature. *In order to suppress the most ferocious motions of his mind*, this our lion, or more than lion, is *troubled with the pangs of a quartan fever*, like a lion, because of which he shakes almost continually, although he is not disturbed, so much that by his trembling he could make the whole world tremble and fear.¹⁴⁵

When lions are portrayed as sinful in medieval literature, it is usually in association with the sin of pride—they are the "kings" of all animals, and, like kings, they feel superior because of their position. Through their association with pride, they are akin to the devil who was cast out of heaven because of his pride. Even more telling, the next sin attributed to lions was wrath. Despite what good Richard might portray, he seemed always to be fighting against his internal nature, one that was best released on the battlefield. Richard's brutality would later overcome his reputation for chivalry in works like the play, "Richard Couer de Lion," in which he massacred

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ MS Julius, f. 148v. "Preterea, qui contulit naturam, contulit et nature passioinem. Ad reprimendos namque ferocissimos animi ipsius motus hic leo noster, plusquam leo, quartane stimulo leonino more uexatur, quo sic continue fere tremit nec, trepidat, ut et sui tremore mundum uniuersum tremere faciat et timere." Emphasis mine.

three thousand hostages and partakes in cannibalism.¹⁴⁶ For Gerald, Richard made the mistake of not accomplishing his heroic deeds with a healthy dose of humility and sincerity, instead dishonoring himself with pride, ill will, and avarice, taking for himself all recognition rather than giving it to God.¹⁴⁷

Though many of the initial pages of Book Three are dedicated to Henry's apostasy, describing the actions of Count Richard, and the enmity between father and sons, it is interesting to see one of the few left-right references, aside from the association with the demon ancestress, placed in a vision regarding Henry's impending death: "He who is corrected by scourges, is imitating the thief who entered paradise after he had acknowledged him on the cross. He who is not corrected by scourges, is *imitating the thief on the left-hand side*, who was raised on the cross for his sins and after the cross fell into hell."¹⁴⁸

The old king's death was presented as divine vengeance carried out by his children who persecuted their father to his end, both temporally and eternally, particularly John, Henry's youngest and favorite son. Again, using an ambiguous bestiary animal, Gerald described one of

¹⁴⁶ Although the cannibalism accusation is false, Richard did have nearly three thousand Muslim prisoners beheaded in view of Salah ad-Din's men in 1191. This is attested to in multiple sources, such as *Richard of the Holy Trinity: Itinerary of Richard I and others to the Holy Land*.

¹⁴⁷ Nigel Harris, 207-208.

¹⁴⁸ MS Julius, f. 153r. "Qui flagellis corrigitur, latronem imitatur, qui cum ipso in cruce cognito paradisum intrauit. Qui nec flagellis corrigitur, sinistrum latronem imitatur, qui propter peccata ascendit in crucem et post crucem ruit in Tartara." This is in reference to the traditional name given to the impenitent thief from the Gospel of Luke, Geldas. Emphasis mine.

Henry's final commissions, the painting of an eagle at Winchester. Perched on the eagle would be its four chicks, two on the two wings, one on the kidney, and the fourth on its neck, waiting to tear out its eyes.¹⁴⁹ For Henry, the meaning was clear. He was the eagle, the four eaglets his sons. According to the bestiary tradition, eagles could be used as noble creatures or sinful ones, much like the lion. In fact, eagles were considered the "king" of birds, a lion's avian counterpart. For their part in the persecution of Henry, their "inheritance" was secured, for "in their malice he [God] will destroy them" because "the divine will is sometimes fulfilled through the evil will of men" and their evil would later be punished.¹⁵⁰

In foretelling the wickedness that would define the family for Gerald, he then stepped back to address their origin story, their "corrupt root," "ut autem tam patris quam filiorum exitus

¹⁴⁹ MS Julius, f. 163v. "Contigerat aliquando cameram Wintoniensem uariis picturarum figuris et coloribus uenustatam, locam quemdam in ea uacuum regio mandato relictum, ubi postmodum aquilam depingi iussit et quatuor aquile pullos ei insidentes, duos alis duabus et tercium renibus, parentem unguibus et rostris perfodientes, quartum nec minorem allis in collo residentem et paternis acrius oculis effodiendis insidiantem. Requisitus autem a familiaribus suis quidnam hec pictura portenderet: 'Quatuor', inquit, 'aquile pulli quatuor filii mei sunt, qui me usque ad mortem persequi non cessabunt. Quorum minor natu, quem tanta dileccione nunc amplector, michi denique longe grauius aliis omnibus et periculosius nonnunquam insultabit.'"

¹⁵⁰ MS Julius, f. 164r. "'Et reddet illis hereditatem ipsorum, in malicia eorum disperdet eos, disperdet illos Dominus Deus noster.' Diuina namque uoluntas per malas interdum hominum uoluntates impletur, quia, sicut aliquando bona uoluntate aliud uult homo quam Deus, sic et mala nonnunquam idem quod Deus.'"

infaustos minus de cetero lector obstupeat” (“so that the reader may be less astonished at the unhappy ends of both father and sons”).¹⁵¹ Doubling down on archetypes his readers would recognize, Gerald traces the backgrounds of both Henry and Eleanor. Most references to Eleanor throughout his work are short, merely citing her name and nothing else.¹⁵² In Chapter 27 of Book Three, however, Gerald begins by describing Eleanor’s family, starting with the count of Poitou, whom he falsely refers to as her father, William X, when the story that follows is historically attributed to her grandfather, William IX of Poitou. It is stated that he abducted the wife of the viscount of Châtelleraut, named in various sources variations of Mauberium, Malbergio, or Amauberge and made her his de facto wife, despite still technically being married to the countess of Toulouse, Philippa. Other sources, however, question how much of an abduction it actually was, as she doesn’t seem to have minded too terribly much, earning her the nickname “Dangereuse” for her seductiveness and lascivious nature.

Eleanor specifically was subject to the Eve/Mary dichotomy that many powerful medieval women fell victim to when exhibiting power outside of their patriarchal restrictions as

¹⁵¹ MS Julius, f. 164r.

¹⁵² There are astonishingly few sources for a figure so famous and well-remembered as Eleanor of Aquitaine, making her popularity a really interesting point of study. This has been taken up by various scholars, the most eye-opening in terms of placing Eleanor’s reputation in the context of historical propaganda over the ages, is Michael R. Evans’s *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, in which he looks at the different legacies made for Eleanor over time, from her scandalous reputation to her 20th century on-screen representations.

regent or consort, not just for Gerald but many others, as will be discussed: in particular, a comparison between a sinful Eve and the maternal image of Mary. In this sense, her reputation as a scandalous or adulterous (or in some cases even demonic) woman overshadowed her profound fecundity and the loyalty and devotion she showed to her many children. The most important role that a queen filled was that of a mother, as it was through her that the line would continue. Tied up in this role was the integrity of the king and the honor of the dynasty. An immoral and unfaithful queen not only threw the guarantee of a true dynastic succession into question but could also be a sign of bad government on the whole. Writing as though he were too virtuous to lower himself to well-known gossip, Gerald glazed over Eleanor's purported illicit affairs with her uncles, Raymond, prince of Antioch, and Raoul de Faye, and her actions against Louis VII that are present in multiple chronicles of the time.¹⁵³ He is not, however, too proud or high to argue that Henry's father, Geoffrey of Anjou had insisted on many occasions that Henry was forbidden from touching Eleanor because, aside from being the wife of his lord, King Louis of France, he himself had already shared a bed with her. Not only would this make Henry and Eleanor's union borderline incestuous it was, according to Gerald, adulterous and could only result in a "de facto" marriage.¹⁵⁴

Making these types of claims was dangerous. Not only did it imply that any children from the union were not legitimate, but it also called into question the legitimacy of the entire family,

¹⁵³ Eleanor's "black legend" is recounted by multiple authors of the time: John of Salisbury, William of Tyre, Richard of Devizes, Walter Map, Helinand de Froimont, Caesarius of Heisterbach, etc.

¹⁵⁴ MS Julius, f. 164v.

a point Gerald strongly contended when referring to the whole of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy since the time of William I as “usurpers” who, as if by a reversal of order, ruled England “nec naturaliter nec legitime” (not naturally nor legitimately).¹⁵⁵ It is little wonder that Book Three was withheld from circulation until after John, the last of the Angevins, was dead.

The accusations against Eleanor showcased the growing fear of female sexuality and the role that it played in politics. Her maneuverings also showed disdain for female ambition and power when it was not within the proper constraints. Her reputation as adulterous and potentially incestuous placed her on the opposite end of the idealized image of motherhood as symbolized by Marian devotion, her negative traits firmly solidifying her image as an unruly seductress.¹⁵⁶ The chronicle of Richard Devizes summed up the contradiction best in its description of her, highlighting the slander on the manuscript to ensure attention was drawn to it:

Queen Eleanor, a matchless woman, beautiful and chaste, powerful and modest, meek and eloquent, which is rarely wont to be met with in a woman, who was advanced in years enough to have had two husbands and two sons crowned kings, still indefatigable for every undertaking, whose power was the admiration of her age, having taken with her the daughter of the king of the Navarrese, a maid more

¹⁵⁵ MS Julius, f. 165r.

¹⁵⁶ Walter Map suggested that Eleanor had lured Henry, who was ten years his senior, into the relationship after having slept with his father while still married to Louis of France, using the phrase “oculos incestos,” an interesting play on words as *incestus* may mean unchaste or incest, as Michael R. Evans points out in *Inventing Eleanor* (23).

accomplished than beautiful, followed the king her son, and having overtaken him still abiding in Sicily, she came to Pisa, a city full of every good, and convenient for her reception, there to await the king's pleasure, together with the king of Navarre's ambassadors and the damsel. *Many knew, what I wish that none of us had known. The same queen, in the time of her former husband, went to Jerusalem. Let none speak more thereof; I also know well. Be silent.*¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Richard of Devizes, *Cronicon Ricardi Divisensis de tempore regis Ricardi Primi*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 339, f. 31v.

<https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/g070yh9296>. Richard of Devizes, *Chronicon de rebus gestis Ricardi Primi, Regis Angliae*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Sumptibus Societatis, 1838), 25. See also: Richard of Devizes, *Chronicle*, trans. J.A. Giles (In parentheses Publications, 2000), 20.

“Regina Alienor, femina incomparabilis, pulchra et pudica, potens et modesta, humilis et diserta, quod in femina solet inveniri rarissime, quae non minus annosa quam quae duos reges maritos habuerat et duos reges filios, adhuc ad omnes indefessa labores, posse cujus, aetas sua mirari potuit, assumta secum filia regis Navarorum, puella prudentiore quam pulchra, secuta est regem filium suum, et consecuta morantem adhuc in Sicilia, venit Risam civitatem omni bono plenam et bonam receptui, praestolatura ibi velle regis, cum legatis regis Navarorum et virgine. Multi noverunt quod utinam nemo nostrum nosset. Haec ipsa regina tempore prioris mariti fuit Hierosolymis. Nemo plus inde loquatur; et ego bene novi. Silete.”

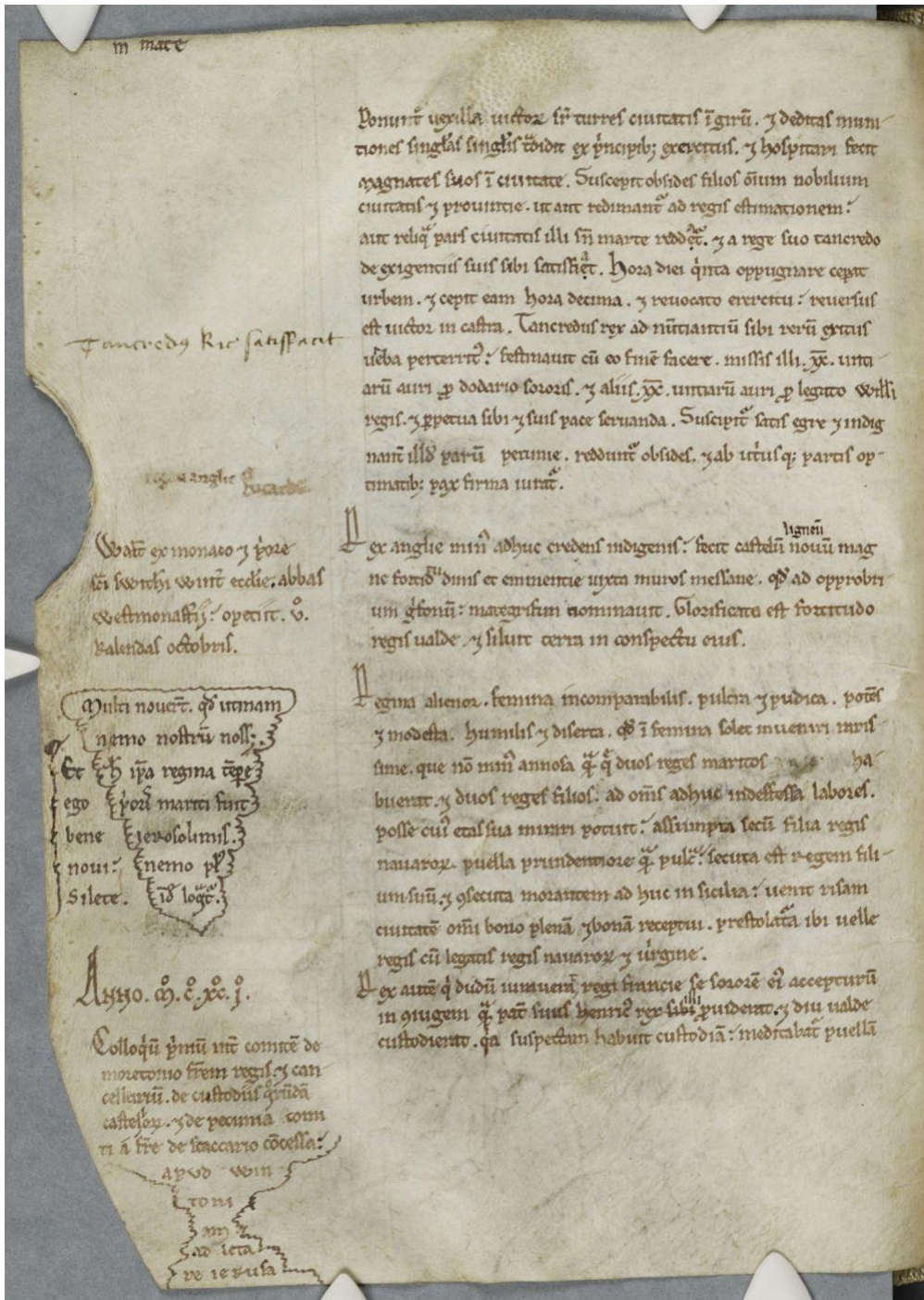


Figure 4: Manuscript page from Richard of Devizes's Cronicon Ricardi Divisensis de tempore regis Ricardi Primi. On the left, accentuated by a border in the margin so as not to be missed, is the retelling of the accusation of infidelity against Eleanor. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 339, f. 31v.

Claims of licentious behavior could be, and were, assigned to men as well, but these were more often attributed to the sins of gluttony and lust, as opposed to a natural state of being. Richard himself was berated in the *Gesta Henrici* by the Poitevin barons who claimed he was a terrible lord who stole the female wives and relatives of free men, treating them as concubines before making them whores for his men.¹⁵⁸

Also walking the thin line of the Eve/Mary dichotomy, according to Gerald, was Henry II's mother, the Empress Matilda. Her role in the Anarchy, which lasted from 1138-1153, was seen by contemporaries as ambiguous at best. She fulfilled her role as a good mother, the "good Matilda," when she was pushing her son's claim to the English throne; an arrogant, capricious,

¹⁵⁸ *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, vol. I (Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965), 291-3. The sentiment is also reiterated in Roger of Hoveden's *Annals*. "Quod cum homines Pictaviae comperissent, gavisi sunt gaudio magno valde, et nuncios suos miserunt ad regem, filium domini regis, significantes ei, quod ipse deberet esse dominus eorum jure haereditario; et quod si ipse vellet, redderent ei omnia castella, et munitiones et citates suas; et quod ipsi observarent ei fidem contra omnes homines, et sequerentur eum ubiconque velle, quamdiu viverent. Dicebant enim, quod nullo modo amplius terram de Ricardo tenere volebant, imponentes ei quod ipse malus erat omnibus, suis pejor, pessimus sibi. Mulieres namque et filias et cognatas liberorum hominum suorum vi rapiebat et concubinas illas faciebat; et postquam in eis libidinis suae ardorem extinxerat, tradebat eas militibus suis ad meretricandum. His et multis aliis injuriis populum suum afficiebat."

and prideful woman when she pushed for her own inheritance.¹⁵⁹ Further, Gerald insinuated that Henry's own legitimacy was in question, as he claimed that Matilda had married Geoffrey of Anjou while her first husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V, was still very much alive and living in a monastery, making her a bigamist and an adulteress. And, of course, it was through Geoffrey of Anjou whom we can trace the infamous countess reported by Gerald, that unholy ancestress that the family would so often reference.¹⁶⁰ The goal was to show that the corrupt nature of the family came from all sides.

2.6 Mélusine of Lusignan

Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* should be read as a response to Gerald's earlier referent in *De principis*. It is an amalgamation of pre-Christian narrative themes, the common demonic origin story of the high Middle Ages which was originally linked to the Plantagenets via Gerald of Wales, and the Capetian monarchy's vested interest in portraying itself as having a divine dynastic right to rule. Through the *Roman de Mélusine*, d'Arras accomplished multiple goals for his patron, the Duke of Berry. He was able to neutralize the most negative aspects of the

¹⁵⁹ Catherine Hanley, *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrior* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 24.

¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, the serpentine noblewoman would be described by many later chroniclers as Eleanor herself. Philip Mouskés, author of the *Chronique rimée* writing in the thirteenth century, very clearly associated Eleanor with Gerald's demon countess, claiming her origin from Aquitaine (as opposed to Anjou) and also cited other sources which recounted accusations of being a devil that were leveled against Eleanor at the time of her divorce from Louis.

character and her sons by portraying them as loyal Christians, more marvelously “other” than outright diabolical. Further, his Mélusine, despite her faults which are a result of her nature and her mother’s curse, rather than her own desires, shows us a mother whose dedication to her children and the townsfolk of Lusignan, as well as her dedication to Christian rites and rituals, place her on more ambiguous ground than the clearly demonic character in *De principis*. He was also able to show that “otherness” in a more cryptic way, less sinful than strange, allowing for a modicum of goodness to pass through in later generations as monstrosity waned, thus securing the territory associated with the story. This last element would be hugely important for his main goal of co-opting the baseline of a story that had long circulated the Plantagenets, supplanting their name with the name of a family known historically for their tense, off-and-on relationship with the Angevins, the Lusignans, and crafting for the Duke of Berry a tenuous tie to the family and their Poitevin lands which he had recently recovered in the Hundred Years War.

The points made by Gerald about the Angevins are negated in the origin story of the Lusignan. Raymondin commits murder; however, it is by accident. More than just accident, it is fulfilling a divine prophecy. In direct contrast to the prophetic visions Gerald recounts of the Angevin downfall, immediately prior to the hunting accident, the Count of Forez looks to the skies and determines that a lord will be killed by his subject, and, as a result, that subject would become the most powerful man of his line, spawning a noble lineage that would be remembered forever. To ensure Raymondin’s innocence, he counters the Count’s prediction: “I shall not believe it; it is not credible.”¹⁶¹ At that moment, a “monstrous” boar charged the men, ushering in not only agony and grief for Raymondin, but good fortune as well. In an attempt to impale the

¹⁶¹ MS 3353, f. 9r.

boar, Raymondin accidentally stabs his sword through his uncle's stomach, killing him. Here, an interesting points in regard to bestiaries must be made, since animal comparisons are important for descriptions of character in *De principis* too. Thomas of Cantimpré notes in his *Liber de natura rerum*, Quadrupeds 4.3, that:

Some cruel men of the age may be branded as wild boars, who receive literally no teaching of good works, but are always judged selfish and ferocious, black, that is, base and impious in their actions. They have crooked teeth in themselves, because he who injures another injures himself first in his conscience through the purpose of evil. He has half-foot teeth, because although they hurt the body, they have no control over the soul. And this is worthy of such: as long as they live, they can sow only; But when they are dead and cast into hell, their tyranny ceases.¹⁶²

Given that Raymondin mistakenly slays his uncle instead of the boar and will return to Poitiers and lie about the incident, the reader is left to wonder whether or not the animal in this prophetic episode is meant to represent Raymondin himself. Calling on God to swallow him up among those vile and hideous angels, an allusion to those cohorts of Satan cast out of heaven in Luke, Jude, and 2 Peter, Raymondin wanders the forest in a daze before stumbling upon three ladies beside a fountain at night, one of whom is Mélusine.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, British Library, Harley MS 3717, f. 45r.

¹⁶³ MS 3353, f. 10r.

Unlike the Angevins, the misdeeds of Raymondin are represented as having been set in the stars for the betterment of his lineage and his actions are seen as being outside of his personal intent. This was not the same type of consistent and purposeful offenses made by Henry and his sons, though they too were inclined to misdeeds because of their family's roots. Raymondin sees Mélusine as the answer to his prayers, and one might be forgiven for seeing why he would. After all, as she says, "I am on God's side."¹⁶⁴

One can juxtapose the treatment of Mélusine in the romance to the treatment of Eleanor or Matilda in *De principis* to see the negation as well. In all instances, when describing her actions or pursuing certain ends, Mélusine represents her powers as being used for the betterment of the men in her life, her husband and sons. In accepting rings that promise safety and victory against enemies, Raymondin pledges himself to Mélusine; however, the magic she performs to construct Lusignan and everything around it is specifically cited as being for his benefit alone. Remaining in her rightful place, all of Mélusine's fulfillments are professed to be for Raymondin's honor, estate, and lineage alone, unlike the women surrounding Henry II who performed outside the proper bounds of their sex.

2.6.1 Christianization

Whereas Gerald of Wales pulled together multiple tropes to demonize the Plantagenets, allowing his inclusion of a diabolical ancestress to make his views fully resonate, Jean d'Arras pointedly worked against them, promoting his character as a doomed heroine of sorts. By the time of circulation, the "romance" had become a popular, well-established genre. These narrative

¹⁶⁴ MS 3353, f. 11v.

fictions tended to be chivalric in nature, representing the values of the aristocracy. Starting as poems and lays, there were themes that were common to all romances: idealized romantic love, courtly behavior, quests, and magic. Another theme common to the romance genre was that of having its primary characters' lives culminate with a large confrontation, followed by inexplicable sorrow and love lost.

The final theme, love lost, is perhaps one of the most important for understanding the Christianization of the Mélusine character. In true romance fashion, the reader expects that the love between Mélusine and Raymondin will come to a sad end; however, this also serves another goal in this particular story, which is meant to resonate as a narrative *and* a history. In terms of a romance, their doomed relationship is understood because, despite wanting to portray herself as a human and a good Christian woman, Mélusine cannot escape her fairy nature. This is understood from the very first page of the narrative, as Jean d'Arras speaks not only of incomprehensible marvels, but also of the judgments and punishments of God. D'Arras then cites Gervase of Tilbury and his writing on nocturnal beings, which some called fairies and some referred to as “good ladies” (“les bonnes dames”), who take the form of beautiful women and marry mortal men. Some of these, he claimed, turned into serpents on certain days of the week.¹⁶⁵ The reason for their creation by God was unknowable, but their outcome was not: “. . . Ce soit par aucuns meffaiz secrez au monde et desplaisans a Dieu pourquoy il les punist si secretement en ces miseres que nulz n'en a congnoissance fors lui” (“It is by some unknown misdeeds to the world, displeasing to God, that he punishes them so secretly in these miseries that no one knows of them except him”).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ MS 3353, f. 2r.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

As a history, Mélusine's desire to be seen as a “good Christian” is necessary in terms of neutralizing any negative implications stemming from her own hybrid nature or the magic that she employs to build cities and protect her children. She is not the demonic creature, kidnapping her children and leaping out of a church window when confronted with the Mass. She is a marvelous creature, trying desperately to resolve her fairy state through a union and pact with a mortal man and her various good deeds. In a far more relatable, sympathetic state, Mélusine becomes a far more fitting forebear for a dynasty that emphasized its particular closeness with God. The Capetian monarchy had inherited from its predecessor, the Carolingian dynasty, the belief in sacral kingship and the legitimacy imparted through being anointed. The idea that coronation and the act of being anointed meant that a French king could not be deposed by a layman stretched back to the coronation of Charlemagne in 800, and the epithet “King of the French by the Grace of God” was solidified by the time of Louis VI in 1108. By the time of Philip II in 1165, legends circulated about the circumstances of his birth and the visions around it. Gerald of Wales recounted that: “Videbat enim puerum in cunis ab alto dilapsum et in Franciam demissum, Francisque regni heredem ualidum summo opere desiderantibus tanquam a Deo datum” (“For he [a monk of Vincennes priory] saw a boy in a cradle let down from on high and lowered into France, given, as if by God, to the French who desired a mighty heir”).¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere, Philip is referred to as “Philippi Augusti a Deo dati” or “Dieudonne,” meaning “God-given.” This legacy would continue through to the House of Valois, a cadet branch of the Capetians, which took over in 1328 with the death of Charles IV and accession of Philip VI. Most important to this theme is Mélusine’s complete renunciation of any negative actions and

¹⁶⁷ MS Julius, f. 162r.

the absolute resignation to the will of God, an emphasized point of the romance that ties it more closely to French propaganda:

Now you have cast me back into that obscure penance where I had been for such a long time because of my misdeed. Therefore, I must carry my penance and suffering until the day of Judgment because of your betrayal. I pray to God that He might forgive you for it . . . May He to Whom belongs true forgiveness, He who is the true Fountain of pity and mercy, grant you forgiveness of your sin, for I, myself, do forgive you with all my heart. But, as for me remaining here, it is for naught, because it is not the will of the Judge on High.¹⁶⁸

The appropriation of the Mélusine story, and the necessity of making her submission to God absolute, was an important aspect of claiming legitimacy in the Poitou region, and absorbing Lusignan into the growing French “state.”¹⁶⁹ The royal house of Valois, following the

¹⁶⁸ MS 3353, f. 138r, 138v. “Or me ras tu embatue en la penance obscure ou j’avoye long temps esté par ma mesaventure. Et ainsi la me fauldra porter et souffrir jusques au jour du jugement, et par ta faulseté; je pry a Dieu qu’il le te veulle pardonner . . . Le meffet vous veulle pardonner Cellui qui est vray et tout puissant pardonneur et le droit fons de pitié et de misericorde, car, quant a moy, je le vous pardonne de bon cuer. Mais quant de ma demouree, c’est pour neant, car il ne plaist pas au Hault Juge.”

¹⁶⁹ This is admittedly a questionable term for France at this time; however, there is little refutation that the kings of this period were expanding and formalizing the boundaries of what

senior house of Capet, portrayed itself as submissive and responsive to the will of God, thus giving them the proper right to rule and the romance needed to reflect that.

2.6.2 Faith and Good Works

In order to formalize the notion that Mélusine, despite her natural state, was genuinely attempting to become a mortal human there needed to be evidence of her acting as a good Christian woman and mother. During her sorrowful departure, Mélusine demonstrated precisely what she had hoped to gain from her marriage with Raymondin: to live and die like a “femme naturelle” (“normal/natural woman”), receive the sacraments, and be buried in the church of Notre-Dame de Lusignan with masses said to celebrate her life. This was not the first indication of her plan, however.

Mélusine was cursed by her mother for having killed her father, for which she is referred to as “mauvais” (evil or bad). Though she would have been able to eventually become fully mortal, as she was only half fairy, she lost that consolation because of her patricidal actions. It is from this point that the reader then associates Mélusine’s future actions with trying to regain her potential human nature, rather than being subject to supernatural laws. This goal has two contradictory aims: to find a husband who will adhere to the rules, thus fulfilling the supernatural pact, and proceeding to live as a Christian woman who executes all of the necessary rites and

eventually would be the country of France. One of the ways of doing so was by absorbing the territories of other powerful families, many of them held as fiefdoms, and holding them in perpetuity either through inheritance or the use of the *lèse-majesté* which allowed the King to usurp certain lands under the pretense of treason, whether fictional or otherwise.

actions expected of her. As is obvious by the end of the narrative, one cannot do both. For the story to follow the necessary archetype, the supernatural elements must be made to submit to the divine. That's not to say she doesn't try.

Mélusine's contradiction exhibits itself within the first few pages. Upon meeting Raymondin, she acknowledged his murder of his uncle, the necessity and power of God, and her own power as a supernatural being:

In all things one must call on God for their aide . . . By God, Raymondin, *I am second only to God* in helping you advance in this mortal world; in taking your adversity and evil deed and turning it into good . . . and I know very well that you believe my being and my words are illusion or the work of the devil, but I swear to you that I am of God and I believe in everything a true Catholic should believe . . . Do not doubt because *I am surely a creature of God*.¹⁷⁰

2.6.3 “I Give You These Two Rings . . .”

¹⁷⁰ MS 3353, f. 11v. “En toutes choses doit on appeller Dieu en son aide . . . Par Dieu, Remondin, *je suiz apréz Dieu*, celle qui te puet plus aidier et avancier en ce mortel monde, en tes adversitez, et ton malefice revertir en bien . . . Et saiches que je scay bien que tu cuides que ce soit fantosme ou euvre dyabolique de mon fait et de mes paroles, mais je te certiffie que je suiz de par Dieu et croy en tout quanque vraye catholique doit croire . . . ne vous doutez, car *seurement je quiz de par Dieu*.”

At various points of the story, Mélusine offers up magical rings to her husband and sons, an obvious deviation from a Christian norm, but one that represents the popular lapidary tradition of the time. But these in themselves are an archetype specific to the romance genre that gives an interesting look at contemporary culture. From the lais of Marie de France to the Vulgate and post-Vulgate cycles of Arthurian literature, one may find rings that do everything from curse the wearer to giving them the gift of invisibility.¹⁷¹ Medieval readers would have understood that the rings were magical, items made and controlled by humans. The stones *in* the rings, however, offer an interpretation that is a little more confusing. Theoretically, they fall under the category of “miraculous” because they are a part of God’s creation; however, they are also mysterious and unexplainable.¹⁷²

Historically, rings and stones have had a range of symbolism that stretches back to the ancient Greeks. The medieval lapidary is a mix of folk symbolism, occult practices, healing, and Christian belief. As such, it can be found in a variety of sources. Richard Kieckhefer attests to a variety of mentions, ranging from a common grocer who donated a sapphire to St. Paul’s of

¹⁷¹ The Vulgate cycle is a collection of Arthurian romances written in French prose. They are dated to around 1210-1230. The Post-Vulgate cycle is a revision of the earlier cycle, dated around 1230-1240, that removes much of the stories of Lancelot and other main characters, while expanding on the quest for the Holy Grail.

¹⁷² J.E. Stevens in his 1973 *Medieval Romance: Themes and Approaches* argued that rings in medieval romances could be considered purely mysterious (inexplicable), strictly magical (the marvelous controlled by man, whether it be an object or magician), or miraculous (the marvelous controlled by God).

London to a “toadstone” made from a fossilized fish head with two biblical inscriptions: “Iesus autem transiens per medium illorum ibat” (“But Jesus passed through their midst”) and “Et verbum caro factum est” (“And the Word became flesh”).¹⁷³ In many cases, religion and natural magic reinforced one another. Medieval lapidaries, such as Bishop Marbode of Rennes’s *Book of Stones*, were particularly popular at court, and as such, showed up often in the courtly romances, even after they became popular with broader audiences.

Rings have a long-standing association with magic, so it is of little surprise that they should show up in such a vast array of medieval literature and that they may be regarded so ambiguously, depending on the context. The infinite symbol of the band comes up in a variety of contexts, both in Christian iconography and in magical writings, both natural and necromantic. They may be associated with healing, the growth of crops, or in more sinister instances, the cursing of another individual. In romances, they are typically used as a tool for invincibility, a type of protection that is useful given the chivalric themes and elements of the genre. Similar to a talisman, these magical objects tend to have little explanation given as to their origins, a point of which is true also for the rings that Mélusine gives her sons and husband. This lack of explanation leaves more ground for speculation as to what the true nature of their magic is, which is similar to how Mélusine presents her own magical capabilities. Though these origins may seem insignificant, when combined with other elements of the storyline, such as Mélusine’s serpentine state, the monstrosity of her sons, or the dragon imagery in the manuscript itself, we

¹⁷³ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102-3. The passages are from Luke 4:30 and John 1:14, respectively.

can decipher ahead of time that her magic is not necessarily what one may consider “white magic” and therefore the story will not have a positive outcome.

2.6.4 Thick as a Herring Barrel

The signs of monstrosity in Mélusine and her children are glaringly obvious, noticed and remarked on by all who encounter them. As explained previously, hybrids and monsters in general are typically meant to be read as negative creatures because they are unnatural creations and therefore aberrations, although they do often serve a didactic purpose. Hybrids in particular were marked by the animals that they are seen in combination with: a minotaur was representative of excessive virility and aggressive violence, a werewolf portrayed those who were outside the bounds of the mutual responsibility of community because of their inclination toward greed or gluttony, and sirens or mermaids, as we would identify them, often defied piscine interpretations and were instead aligned with serpents or dragons.

In order to counterbalance the unfavorable interpretation of his characters, d'Arras often greets the monstrosity in his romance with an almost comical recitation, as opposed to one of terror. When noble ladies hear that Mélusine's sons are approaching, they remark on their well-known deformities:

“And how?” she said, “Is this young man who has such a strange face, is he as valiant as they say?”

“Truly, my lady, a hundred times more, and know that whatever they say, he is one of the most attractive men I have ever seen.”

“Well, now,” said Hermine, “If he had hired you to praise and value him, he used his money well.”

“Well, now, my lady, I have not spoken to him, but he is worth more than I have said.”

She then replied to the knight:

“My friend, goodness is worth more than beauty.”¹⁷⁴

In the case of Mélusine, her tail is described as almost laughably large and extraordinarily powerful. Multiple scholars have interpreted the scene as a jab at Raymondin’s lack of manliness in comparison to the phallic imagery of his wife’s tail, meant to represent her fecundity and economic productivity, or as means of de-eroticizing the fairy herself.¹⁷⁵ As Raymondin’s

¹⁷⁴ MS 3353, f. 53v - 54r. “Et comment?” dist elle, “Cellui damoiseil qui a se estrange phizonomie est il si batailleux comme l’en dit?” “Par ma foy, ma damoiselle, mais plus cent foie, et sachiez, quoy que on vous die, que c’est un des plus plaisans homs que je veisse oncques.” “Par foy,” dist Hermine, “S’il avoit loué pour lui louer et prisier, si a il bien employé sa mise.” “Par foy, ma damoiselle, je ne parlay oncques a lui, mais il vault mieulx que je ne dy.” Lors respondi elle au chevalier: “Amis, bontez vault mieulx que beautez.”

¹⁷⁵ For argumentation about the various meanings of Mélusine’s serpent tail see scholars such as Angela Jane Weisl, Ana Pairet, Frederika Bain, Kevin Brownlee, or Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, among others. In Brownlee’s “Mélusine’s Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis,” he references Adam de la Halle, a thirteenth-century French trouvère who discusses the use of herring as a non-courtly food item used during Lent. Kevin Brownlee, “Mélusine’s Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 86. Corps Mystique, Corps Sacre:

brother tells him of the local gossip that Mélusine is either an adulteress or “un esprit fae, qui le samedi fait sa penance” (“a supernatural spirit who performs her penance on Saturday”), Raymondin is overcome with anger and jealousy.¹⁷⁶

And he took his sword, which hung at the head of his bed, attached it, and went to the place where he knew very well that Mélusine went every Saturday. He found a heavy door of iron, very thick. Know positively that he had never before come so far. Now, when he saw the door, he drew his sword and put the point against it, which was very hard, and turned and pushed until there was a hole in it. And looking inside, he saw Mélusine who was in a large marble vat with steps leading to the bottom . . . When Raymondin twisted the sword, he made a hole in the door, through which he could see everything inside the room, and there he saw Mélusine in the basin, who was to her navel in the form of a woman, combing her hair. From the navel down, she had the form of a serpent, as thick as a herring barrel, and incredibly long. She beat the water so hard with her tail that it made it splash to the vaulted ceiling.¹⁷⁷

Textual Transfigurations of the Body from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century (1994), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930274>.

¹⁷⁶ MS 3353, f. 129v-130r.

¹⁷⁷ MS 3353, f. 130r, 130 v. “. . . et prent son espee qui pendoit a son chevez, et la cient, et s’en va ou lieu ou il savoit bien que Melusigne s’en aloit tous les samedis, et treuve un fort huis de fer, moult espez, et sachiez de vray que oncques mais n’avoit esté se avant. Lors, quant il

Monstrosity as comic relief is not a constant throughout the romance, however. Antoine, the son of Raymondin and Mélusine who would go on to become the Count of Luxembourg through marriage, was born with a lion's paw birthmark on his left cheek that sprouted fur and sharp nails before he turned eight. Despite assurances that he was much loved, the reader is also told that because of his deformity, he was much feared. This mother's mark draws a distinct parallel with the description of Richard I and his leonine qualities: though Richard's lion-like nature is often described in positive terms such as courageous, devout, or noble, it is just as often a negative when showing him as prideful, merciless, and aggressive, shaking with quartan fever. Antoine, despite his physical leonine qualities, is only feared because of his unfortunate markings and his impeccable luck in battle; he is not brutal or cruel. Luckily for d'Arras's

apperçoit l'uis, si tire l'espee et mist la point a l'encontre, qui moult estoit dure, et tourne et vire tant qu'il y fist un pertuis. Et regarde dedens, et voit Melusigne qui estoit en une grant cuve de marbre, ou il avoit degrez jusques au fons . . . que tant vira et revira Remond l'espee qu'il fist un pertuis en l'uis, par ou il pot adviser tout ce qui estoit dedens la chambre, et voit Melusigne en la cuve, qui estoit jusques au nombril en figure de femme et pignoit ses chevelx, et du nombril en aval estoit en forme de la serpent, aussi grosse comme une tonne ou on met harenc, et longue durement, et debatoit de sa coue l'eaue tellement qu'elle la faisoit saillir jusques a la voulte de la chambre."

patron, Jean, Duke of Berry, this honorable connection with the noble lion just also happens to link him to the house of Luxembourg.¹⁷⁸

2.6.5 Death by Eve, Life by Mary

Perhaps the most noticeable difference between the two representations of Mélusine is in her role as a mother. As mentioned previously, associations with Mary tended to focus on her purity and motherly nature. This is juxtaposed with Eve as a symbol of carnality, lasciviousness, and irrationality. Eve, therefore, brought original sin and sexuality into the world, whereas Mary was a sign of what may be considered “successful” virginity—even as a virgin, because of her disobedience, Eve ushered in death and perdition, while Mary’s virginity brought forth the Word of God.¹⁷⁹ As a medieval woman, motherhood did not automatically align one with an association with the Virgin; Eve was also eventually a mother. It was more so the obedience and complete submission to masculine control that defined a good mother, a woman who respected

¹⁷⁸ With Antoine portrayed as the Count of Luxembourg, it was easy for Jean of Berry to lay claim to Lusignan as a true member of the family, as his mother, Bonne, was born there.

¹⁷⁹ “For into Eve, as yet a virgin, had crept the word which was the framer of death. Equally into a virgin was to be introduced the Word of God which was the builder-up of life; that, what by that sex had gone into perdition, by the same sex might be brought back to salvation.” Tertullian, “The Similarity of Circumstances Between the First and the Second Adam, as to the Derivation of Their Flesh. An Analogy Also Pleasantly Traced Between Eve and the Virgin Mary,” *On the Flesh of Christ*, https://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-39.htm#17_1.

her position and supported her children in a way that would continue that pattern. This is not to say that the ideal woman was a meek mother who did not participate in the world around her; however, the ideal woman of status needed to do so along the proper channels, which unsurprisingly were aligned with men. Acting outside of those channels, showing independent ambition or power, was inviting calls of sexual intemperance or promiscuity, among other potentially dangerous accusations.

In this instance, it is helpful to consider further the ways in which Eleanor of Aquitaine was described in the passages surrounding Gerald's tale of the demon countess, as there is clearly some intended connection between the two and she best exemplifies the use of the Eve stereotype in describing inherited impropriety. Firstly, there is her descendancy from Dangereuse, her grandfather's mistress, whose claims of immodesty nearly got the couple excommunicated. Further, allegations regarding sexual misconduct were typically leveled at Eleanor by Gerald and others at specific points in her life where she exerted control over her own person. Her insistence on going on crusade with Louis was met with disdain by chroniclers who linked the act to several other noble women forcing themselves east with their husbands, and thereby "distracting" their men from their holy cause with temptation. While trying to get her marriage from Louis annulled, accusations swirled about her supposed incestuous relationship with her uncle Raymond while in Antioch, and in the lead-up to her marriage with Henry months later, rumors spread that she had slept with his father, Geoffrey of Anjou. She was admonished by the Archbishop of Rouen in 1173 when she and her sons rebelled against Henry in a letter insisting that by breaking the bond and consent of their union, Eleanor was violating the very

condition of nature, as women were created by man and therefore subject to his power.¹⁸⁰ Within fifty years of her death, her brazen reputation had grown immeasurably; she was by the late thirteenth century considered a lover of Salah ad-Din by the Minstrel of Rheims, as well as the murderer of Henry's mistress, Rosamond, by sources in the fourteenth century.

Notably, Eleanor is praised in the sources on those occasions when she is governing or negotiating on behalf of her husband or one of her sons in a politically "appropriate" and sanctioned manner. In these instances, when she is ruling Aquitaine on behalf of Henry while he is in England, raising money to ransom her son Richard from Henry VI, the Holy Roman Emperor, or jet-setting across Europe to ensure her grandchildren's good marriage prospects, Eleanor is regarded as tirelessly devoted and the ideal of courtly motherhood. However, these positive traits are not posited often by Gerald, especially not within proximity of his tale of the countess of Anjou. The intended archetype of his choosing, the one he focused on most specifically is, unsurprisingly, Eve.

For the Mélusine of Jean d'Arras, the situation is a little more complicated. The reader knows that she is the antithesis of the Marian archetype because even though God may create wonders and unknown marvels, there are indications of her darker nature hidden just below the surface of the narrative. As readers, we are told at the very beginning that there are judgments and punishments awaiting certain supernatural beings, and though Raymondin swears he will do anything for her "provided it be honorable and befitting of a good Christian," one of his first actions at Mélusine's instigation is to lie about the murder of his uncle, the Count of Forez, in

¹⁸⁰ Migne, Jacques-Paul, compiler. "Peter of Blois' Letter 154," *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol. 207, 448. <https://archive.org/details/patrologiae curs07unkngoog/page/n246/mode/2up>.

order to secure his inheritance.¹⁸¹ She is a temptress, luring men by her beauty and noble form, who promises them riches and lands beyond their wildest dreams. She protects her sons and husband through the use of magical rings, the source of whose magic is not overtly specified. And, in the end, as expected, she becomes a dragon, a curse worse than her original predicament of a hybrid form, obliged to circle the castle of Lusignan for the rest of her existence.

Though readers were confronted with this obviously damned character and expected an ending in which she and Raymondin would most assuredly be cursed because of the complicit nature of their moral crimes, the ambiguity of whether or not Mélusine truly *wanted* to be a good Christian but could not deny her nature creates a feeling of sorrow and internal conflict. Her use of magic is also a point of conflict. Yes, it is used to bring titles and abundance in a questionable manner, but the people love her for it. She creates monstrous children and protects them with magic rings, but they are widely renowned throughout Europe and the Levant and generally regarded as chivalrous, honorable young men (mostly). She is completely supportive of her sons as they embark on crusade, and at no point does she go beyond her female role by involving herself in it personally. She physically bears the mark of an animal associated with evil, but Raymondin, after his initial shock, seems completely alright with that fact. Morality aside, she was still, by all accounts, a good mother by medieval standards: she produced multiple children, she was fiercely protective of them, and she attempted to instill in them Christian values.

¹⁸¹ MS 3353, f. 11v. “Or vueillez savoir qu’il ne demourra pas pour peine ne pour travail que je n’assouvisse vostre plaisir a mon pouvoir, se c’est chose que bons crestiens puist par honneur entreprendre.”

Chapter 3 HYBRIDITY AND MONSTROSITY

This dragon is like the devil, the fairest of all serpents, who often leaves his cave to rush into the air; the air glows because of him, because the devil rises from his abyss and transforms himself into an angel of light, deceiving fools with hopes of vainglory and human pleasures. The dragon has a crest because the devil is the king of pride; its strength lies not in its teeth but in its tail, because having lost his power, the devil can only deceive with lies.¹⁸²

In examining multiple cultures across a vast span of time, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen concluded that monsters, whose etymology comes from the Latin for “that which reveals” or “that which warns,” are pure culture, embodying any given society’s fears, anxieties, or desires.¹⁸³ They are constructs and projections that signify displacement, their bodies are both

¹⁸² MS. Bodley 764, f. 93r.

¹⁸³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 4.

corporeal and incorporeal, and their largest threat is their predisposition to shifting forms.¹⁸⁴ They exist outside of the natural “order of things,” liminally sitting on the boundary between normality and the unknown. Generally speaking, their agenda in text is not frivolous or purely to arouse the imagination; they are both culturally and symbolically useful. They define boundaries between conformity and nonconformity, between morality and sin. They blur strictly defined cultural markers and disrupt the rigid order of Nature. That being said, despite the cultural importance of monsters in medieval literature, they are not monolithically so. They may be representative of physical deformity, irreligiosity, temporal markers, or constitutive of the social order.¹⁸⁵

The conflation of monstrosity and the female sex was a theme so common in medieval culture that it was even regarded by the fourteenth-century author Christine de Pizan as being the origin of her own self-loathing as an aberration in nature.¹⁸⁶ Echoing the writings of Aristotle, it

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, ed., *The Monstrous Middle*, 11.

¹⁸⁶ “. . . me venoyent auderant moult grant foyson de autteurs ad ce propos que je ramentevoye en moy meismes l’un après l’autre, comme se fust une fontaine resourdant. Et en conclusion de tout, je determinoye que ville chose fist Dieux quant il fourma femme, en m’esmerveillant comment si digne ourrir daigna oncques faire tant abominable ouvrage qui est vaissel, au dit d’iceulx, si comme le retrait et herberge de tous maulx et de tous vices. Adonc moy estant en ceste pensee, me sourdi une grant desplaisance et tristesse de couraige en desprisant moy meismes et tout le sexe feminin, si comme ce ce fust monstre en nature. . .” (“Like a gushing fountain, a series of authorities, whom I recalled one after another, came to mind, along with

was largely believed that women were naturally inferior to men, a passive vessel that required the active male force to create life. Female infants were only created because of some problem—“If a female results, this is because of certain factors hindering the disposition of the matter, and thus it has been said that woman is not human, but a monster in nature.”¹⁸⁷ Another popular idea from Aristotle was woman as a *mas occasionatus*, a “misbegotten” or “deformed” male. Whether seen as an aberration or an unfortunate accident, the connections between women and monsters were many.

Despite the negative association of being aberrations or *contra naturam*, in essence, the monster, was to be read as a means of God’s power. Only God could bend nature in such a way as to produce a monster, and only God would be able to reconstitute a monster into its natural form at the end of days. According to Augustine:

their opinions on this topic. And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when he made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have deigned to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature”). Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Queen*, British Library, Harley MS 4431, f. 291r. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4431_f291r.

¹⁸⁷ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women’s Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus’ De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries*, trans. by Helen Rodnite Lemay (State University of New York Press, 1992), 106.

If we assume that the subjects of those remarkable accounts are in fact men, it may be suggested that God decided to create some races in this way so that we should not suppose that the wisdom with which he fashions the physical being of men has gone astray in the case of monsters which are bound to be born among us of human parents; for that would be to regard the works of God's wisdom as the products of an imperfectly skilled craftsman.¹⁸⁸

In the case of Mélusine, a distinction needs to be made between what *type* of monster she is, as well as the monstrous characteristics of her children, both of which have different ramifications. Monsters may be categorized in a variety of ways. There are the monstrous races, which are essentially humanoid creatures with exaggerated features, like the sciapods or the blemmyae, who hide out on the margins of the world and represent unknown or little understood cultures and peoples. Then there are monstrous births, which are predominantly representations of deformity in some sense or another. These monstrous births hold an interesting place in medieval theological arguments about what type of being is rational and contains a soul. This type of monster will be returned to later in this chapter when discussing Mélusine's progeny. In order to discuss Mélusine specifically, however, we must look at those composite monsters known as hybrids.

¹⁸⁸ Augustine, *Civitate Dei Contra Paganos*, in *PL* 210, col. 487 (Book 16, ch. 8); Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 663-4.

Hybrids can fuse any number of creatures, human or animal. Often, the amalgamation of parts was not as important as the moral truths their nature was supposed to reveal. For example, a siren could have the upper body of a human with the lower half of a fish or bird, similar to Mélusine; however, by luring sailors with their songs and killing them, they were meant to represent the dangers of worldly diversions and how those could make one susceptible to the devil. In essence, monsters could be entertaining, while still showing the dangers of not conforming to society's norms. The norms in question in regards to Mélusine are two-fold: cultural standards related to religion and gender, as exemplified through her composite parts, both animal and female.

Privileged discourses from both medical and religious writers regard the female body as a deviation from the generic "type," meaning male. Grudgingly, Aristotle was forced to rationally concede that this deviation was straying from the "natural" way of things but was needed for the human race to continue. For Aristotle, the only difference between a monster and a female was its final purpose or cause—while a true monster's deformity was superfluous and useless, a woman's deformity was at the very least necessary. That being said, they are still both departures from Aristotle's consideration of normal, marking them both as figures of dissimilarity. Because he assumed that pure monsters were sterile, it was the role of women to continue the process of bringing forth monstrosity into the world.¹⁸⁹ At least since Augustine, according to R. Howard Bloch, women had no *natural* existence because she came from man, not God, and therefore was

¹⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, IV, iii, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 401-403.

from the beginning a hybrid—only half-human because of her divided being.¹⁹⁰ The very nature of the female body, being formed particularly for procreation, was necessary, yet unpredictable and enigmatic. Women’s bodies, whether through menstruation, pregnancy, or childbirth, were constantly changing form. These processes of change served as evidence that women, procreating women in particular, had no specific, unchangeable bodily form of their own. As Ruth Mazzo Karras emphasized, women weren’t simply “defective males,” they were flawed enough to be in an entirely different category than men.¹⁹¹ It comes as no surprise, then, that the medieval imagination would so easily link the “deformed” female body with monsters, particularly because monstrous creatures in the medieval period included beings that were not only deformed or hybrid, but also of a different racial, sexual, or religious type.¹⁹²

3.1 Religion, Morality, and the Monstrous Body

The very act of being a human was fraught with tension, primarily due to the very ideas about Christianity that were the fabric of medieval society, themselves creating a kind of dichotomic hybridity. On one hand, medieval people were taught that they were made in Christ’s image. On the other hand, their bodies were invariably marked with sin because of the Fall and the negativity associated with the material. Despite having a built-in duality, the result was often

¹⁹⁰ R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, 25.

¹⁹¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Do Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5.

¹⁹² Jan Shaw, *Space, Gender, and Memory in Middle English Romance: Architectures of Wonder in Mélusine*, 17.

that corporeality was seen as negative.¹⁹³ Furthermore, this only extended to Christians—“exotic” races of people had their entire humanity questioned, as strange customs or appearances gave rise to a variety of questions about whether or not they were rational or even possessed souls.

Feelings surrounding monstrosity were mixed. Because these could be considered in a variety of ways, such as describing a disability or deformity, explaining a cultural attribute, or as a physical manifestation of sin, there were different interpretations of what it meant to have such outward differences. The arguments essentially could be split into three camps: that the disability or deformity was a punishment for some egregious sin (of the mother in most cases), a malalignment of the stars, or that the inflicted were suffering purgatory on earth, and hence, were actually on a much quicker path to heaven than others.

In terms of women and monstrosity, it was assumed that monstrous progeny could be produced as a result of a mother’s imagination during gestation, or as a manifestation of her sin and natural otherness. In cases of a mother’s supernatural or unknown origin, the allegation of

¹⁹³ Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 21. Scholars of “posthumanism,” such as Karl Steel, believe this negativity toward the human body left people comparing themselves against animals, who were seen to be irrational, uncultured, and in need of control. While it may be true that the nonhuman traits that resulted from a hybrid or the transformation from a human to a nonhuman are largely seen as unfavorable at best and damning at worst, it seems to me that the better connection is not to see hybridity or metamorphosis as a subjugation of the nonhuman or subhuman, as post-humanists do; but as a way of reading the traits assumed of specific animals into the human experience.

monstrosity or hybridity is tacitly linked to her own physical or social difference and is consequently stamped onto her offspring. Mother-marks, as an example of a woman's internalized sin imprinting itself on her offspring, is an important aspect of the Mélusine story, one that will be returned to in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Anxiety about Transformation

More than just being a hybrid creature, Mélusine can be read as a symbol for a variety of concerns, particularly anxieties about change, nature, and the fragility of the human body. Shape-shifting and metamorphosis allowed characters to move seamlessly between natures that, in reality, are completely distinct. The idea of such a shift was instinctive—the very idea of the Eucharist required that one believe that, despite what their eyes were seeing, the Host becomes the body of Christ, thanks to transubstantiation.¹⁹⁴ The idea of *people* changing shape, however, has a varied past, one that started (as most do) with Augustine, who considered it “so extraordinary as to be with good reason disbelieved” that it would be impossible to physically change shape but that it could be possible to give the *illusion* of something having changed shape. Demons, according to Augustine, could very easily create these illusions by exploiting the “phantasticum hominis” (“phantasm of a man”).¹⁹⁵ Notions of the metamorphosis of a human body, whether or not it was physically possible for one to change wholly or partially into

¹⁹⁴ The concept of the Eucharist becoming the body and blood of Christ has been around since the earliest days of Christianity; however, the term “transubstantiation” did not come into use until the 11th century and was widespread by the 12th century.

¹⁹⁵ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/augustine/civ18.shtml>.

something else was, by the twelfth century, keeping pace with fears and anxieties about a world in flux. Monsters, in this context, were serving an ontological and epistemological purpose.

Caroline Walker Bynum's theory on the shift from emphasizing hybridity to emphasizing monstrosity is helpful here, particularly as it concerns Mélusine: monsters are archetypal examples of medieval people coming to terms with change. For this reason, pre-1200 hybrids appear to be the more classic representation of monstrosity, whereas after that date, we begin to see a move toward highlighting metamorphosis, changing from a human to another creature as opposed to a composite monster, as a means of representing change. The hybrids before the twelfth century were meant to delineate what was normal by showing the abnormal or divine by emphasizing the deviant in a very obvious, visual way. Metamorphosis, however, is meant to show process, representing the fears and insecurities of a culture currently undergoing change—a notion that fits well with the common understanding of the twelfth century as a period marked by drastic alterations in social organization, intellectual revitalization, and political philosophy.¹⁹⁶

The argument that there was a shift from hybridity to transformation, as well as the cultural implication of that shift, is particularly applicable to both the creature in *De principis* and the Mélusine of Jean d'Arras. By concentrating on what was left out in the former and what was expounded on in the latter, we can see clear evidence of the shift, not only in conceptions of monstrosity, but why that would have mattered at the time each was written.

3.3 By No Other Name than Demon

¹⁹⁶ Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 30-31.

The she-devil of *De principis* seems to be based on an amalgamation of a human and a creature that can take to the air—as many early sirens were imagined to do—because of her ability to fly. There is no room for ambiguity in this version: rather than being forced to hear Mass, she flies out the church window with two of her children, the obvious correlation being that she is inherently evil and therefore unable to remain for the most holy part of the service.

Gerald's monster has a variety of elements that are both interesting and essential for understanding the character. First, in relation to Bynum's theory of evolving conceptualizations of the monstrous, this version of the story seems to fit very well. The narrative, which was drafted over a period of time, bridges the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries—the precise moment mentioned by Bynum.¹⁹⁷ In the tale, the idea of metamorphosis is *hinted* at, as is the character's hybridity, though the reader is never explicitly told about a transformation taking place. That being said, we are told that she went into the church as a seemingly normal-looking woman who was beautiful and loved by the count because of the *corporis eleganciam* (elegance of her body).¹⁹⁸ The reason for her inability to express devotion in church is shown as a direct result of her nature; her transformation and hybridity hinted at when she *flew* (*euolauit*) through

¹⁹⁷ The book was written over a period of more than twenty-five years. Gerald of Wales had retired from court by 1199 at the latest, at which point, there was already a version of Book One being circulated on its own. It is thought that books two and three were written by 1191, but for obvious reasons were not put into circulation. It was not assembled and distributed in its entirety until 1216 or 1217.

¹⁹⁸ MS Julius, f. 165r.

the church window, shocking everyone present.¹⁹⁹ As if the point was not made clearly enough for the reader, Gerald finished the story by referencing King Richard:

King Richard used to often refer to this, saying that it was no wonder if, coming from such stock, the sons do not cease from attacking the parents nor the brothers from attacking each other; for, he said, from the devil they had all come and to the devil they were all going”).²⁰⁰

Another key aspect to her description is the explicit labeling of her as “nacionis ignote,” or, “of unknown descent.”²⁰¹ In books of marvels, bestiaries, and travel literature, monsters were commonly meant to represent foreign peoples, their excess or lack of features stemming from European misunderstandings of “exotic” cultures, particularly as they related to the Far East, the Indian subcontinent, or Africa. But monsters could also be found closer to home, in a local fen or forest—any place that contrasted what it meant to live in a “civilized” society or to be part of the local town or village. The woods were inhospitable, dangerous, and unknown. While the forest could provide resources, it was also a haven for all kinds of undesirables: travelers, witches, demons, wild people. It was a boundary, a marginal place, and the perfect home for anything related to the monstrous because, essentially, they represented the same ideas—they were liminal

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. “Istud autem rex Ricardus sepe referee solebat, dicens non esse mirandum, si de genere tali et filii parentes et sese ad inuicem fratres infestare non cessent; de dyabolo namque eos omnes uenisse et ad diabolium dicebat ituros esse.”

²⁰¹ MS Julius, f. 164v.

spaces that showed medieval people what *not* to do. To be described as having no known pedigree, Gerald of Wales was making the same association as those authors who wrote about women associated with fountains and lakes buried deep in the forest. They were questionable at best because no one knew their true origins; they were demonic or evil at worst because of that element of secretive concealment.

As already mentioned, it was quite common for authors to cast Queen Eleanor in a negative light. Though the evil origin, according to Gerald, comes primarily from Henry's side as a descendant of the counts of Anjou, there is an interesting story in Ralph de Diceto's *Ymaginus historiarum*, taken from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* published around 1136, where he associated Eleanor with one of Merlin's prophecies, and in that prophecy, her conniving and depravity are expressed through the anthropomorphizing of a bird, an eagle specifically. It is interesting that the prophecy assigned Eleanor the same type of creature that Henry chose to represent himself and his sons, and more so, the implication of the negative attributes of women when given that same form, even as allegory: potentially evil, prideful, ravishers of the soul.²⁰²

²⁰² "Aberdeen Bestiary," University of Aberdeen Library, Univ. Lib. MS 24, f. 62r.



Figure 5: Miniature of King Henry II of England and Queen Eleanor from the Lancelot-Grail (Vulgate) cycle, c. 1275. Note the hybrid creature with the body of a bird and the head of a dragon devouring a human head. “Mort Artu,” Bibliothèque nationale de France, BnF Gallica, MS Français 123, f. 229r.

Monmouth’s prophecies, attributed to Merlin, were essential in forming the literary phenomena around Arthurian texts; however, they had nothing to do with the Angevins.²⁰³ In the earlier text, Monmouth wrote that:

²⁰³ Geoffrey of Monmouth died a year after Henry II was crowned King of England, and though he and Eleanor were married at that point, it would have been too early to refer to their three sons. Perhaps in linking the two, Diceto was also harking back to the questionable situation

Albany shall be moved unto wrath, and calling unto them that are at her side shall busy herself in the shedding of blood. A bridle bit shall be set in her jaws that shall be forged in the Bay of Armorica. This shall the Eagle of the broken covenant gild over, and the Eagle shall rejoice in her third nesting.²⁰⁴

Ralph de Diceto took the prophecy further:

Eleanor the queen, who had been kept in strict custody for many years, received from her son the power to decree whatever she might wish in the kingdom. It was given out in mandates to the nobles of the kingdom, and decreed as it were in a general edict, that all things should be disposed according to the queen's pleasure. And so, in those days that prophecy came to light which had been hidden through the ambiguity of its words: "The eagle of the broken covenant shall rejoice in her third nesting." She is called an eagle because she spread her two wings over two kingdoms, both of the French and of the English. But from the French, on account of consanguinity, she was separated by divorce; and from the English she was separated by confinement in prison away from her husband's bed: an

surrounding Merlin's own birth, as he himself was supposedly born of a human woman and a demonic incubus.

²⁰⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Aaron Thompson (In parentheses Publications, Medieval Latin Series, 1999), 115.

imprisonment that lasted sixteen years. Thus 'the eagle of the broken covenant' on both sides. And what is added: 'shall rejoice in her third nesting,' you may understand thus: Queen Eleanor's first son, William, died in childhood; Henry, the queen's second son, raised to kingship only to show hostility to his father, paid the debt of nature. Richard, her third son, who is meant in the 'third nesting,' strove to exalt his mother's name.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Radulfi de Diceto, *Ymagines Historiarum*, ed. William Stubbs (Wiesbaden: Kraus Reprint, 1965), 67-68. "Alienor regina, quae per annos plurimos artae fuerat deputata custodiae, statuendi quae vellet in regno potestatem accepit a filio. Datum siquidem est in mandatis regni principibus, et quasi sub edicto generali statutum, ut ad reginae nutum omnia disponerentur. Itaque diebus istis propheticum illud venit in lucem quod ambiguitate verbi latuerat; "Aquila rupti foederis" "tertia nidificatione gaudebit." Aquila siquidem appellata quoniam duas alas expandit super duo regna, tam Francorum quam Anglorum. Sed a Francis propter consanguinitatem disjuncta fuit per divortium, ab Anglis vero per custodiam carceralem a thoro viri segregata fuit; custodiam dico sedecim annis continuatam. Sic "Aquila rupti foederis" utrobique. Quod autem additum est, "tertia nidivatione gaudebit," sic potes intelligere. Primogenitus filius Alienor reginae Willelmus aetate puerili decessit; Henricus filius reginae secundus sublimatus in regem, hostiliter congressurus cum patre, naturae debitum solvit. Ricardus filius tertius tertia nidificatione notatus maternum nomen in singulis intendebat extollere. Qui quoniam patri restitit, et Francorum Normannis semper adversarium partes fovere non minimum videbatur, nominis sui famam apud bonos et graves viros denigratam attendit. Sed ut tantos excessus redimeret, matri suae quem poterat honorem exhibere curavit, ut in obsequio materno quod in patrem commiserat deauratum

Outside of the text of *De Principis*, and others that put forth similar sentiments, we may take politics and authorship into consideration when looking at Gerald's account. Again, by stating that his Mélusine was of unknown origin, Gerald of Wales was implying an uncivilized and potentially evil background for the Angevins before he even mentioned her skipping the Secret and flying out the window. The stage was set for his reader to, at that point, pull all pieces of the story together, along with the apparent endorsement of the Angevins themselves, into a recognizable retelling of popular gossip.

Despite the fact that the Angevins and all aspects related to Mélusine in terms of the places and the people referred to are technically French, it is still helpful to, at least briefly, look at ethnic identities in twelfth and thirteenth-century England when considering this early account because it is, essentially, a hybrid of its own. It is also necessary to look at the socio-cultural context, as well as Gerald's personal background, all of which is closely related.

3.4 Geographic and Ethnic Hybridities

Although the Norman conquest of England had taken place over one hundred years prior, it would be overly generous to imply that the mixing of all the various peoples located in the British Isles was complete by the time *De principis* was being written. One need only look at contemporary sources for accounts of tensions between the conquerors and the conquered, whether between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons or the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans, both

omnibus apparet.” He has conveniently overlooked the fact that Eleanor was actually on her *sixth* child by the time Richard was born, probably because they were girls and therefore unlikely to rule.

of which were still common themes. For example, William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum anglicarum* contains fanciful accounts of a multitude of marvelous and prodigious events, including a description of revenants, although it is his famous telling of the green children of Woolpit that is relevant here. The oft-repeated story about two children, a girl and a boy with skin tinted green, speaking no English, and only able to eat beans, were found in a "Wolfpitte" in East Anglia. Over a period of time, they were "civilized" by the villagers through having them baptized and taught to speak English, a tale that has been quarried by many historians for its origins and meaning. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen asserts in his book *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages* that this story is representative of two clashing cultures: the native Britons and the "English."²⁰⁶ William of Newburgh was all too willing to deride any cultural achievements or specialness of the Britons, thanks largely to his Anglo-Saxon background and his desire to match his opinion to that of Bede. This authoritative bias against the natives of England stemmed from their perceived inability to preach Christianity to newcomers. To Bede, this made them deserving of their own conquest by the Anglo-Saxons, an interpretation that makes sense, considering his background, and serves as another contemporary's attempt at rationalizing the clash of multiple cultures over a wide range of time.

Interestingly, William of Newburgh was chronologically nowhere near "Anglo-Saxon England" really—and the background that he extolled as "English" was really what modern

²⁰⁶ To read more on Cohen's interpretation of the green children, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Green Children from Another World, or the Archipelago in England" in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England. The New Middle Ages* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

historians broadly refer to as “Anglo-Norman,” though there was no contemporary hyphenation of identities available to writers at the time. However, the term implies an equality that, in reality, was simply not present and completely ignores the presence of other peoples living in the surrounding areas at the time, namely the Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Cornish.

Using the hyphenation “Anglo-Norman” is problematic in the sense that medieval people had the capability of emphasizing one side of their heritage or another, depending on when it suited them best—so long as they were choosing from the correct, separate categories. For someone like chronicler William of Newburgh, referring to himself as “English” was perfectly fine because, by the end of the twelfth century when *Historia rerum anglicarum* was written, any distinct Norman identity had been subsumed and therefore represented something altogether different than it had around the tense time of the conquest when Norman nobles were supplanting the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy. “English” was understood to mean both and was considered suitable because the assimilation was considered complete: historians of the Anglo-Saxons tacked on an honorable and virtuous imagined past, while the rough and brutal edges of the Normans were toned down, leaving them valorous and intrepid. What presented a problem, however, were the distinctions *beyond* those particular collective identities. Gerald of Wales, as his surname suggests, was of Welsh background but only so far as he came from Welsh Marchers. These were a subgroup of Normans that were seen as entirely separate from the “true” Welsh, who were descended from the native Britons, and the “true” Normans from Normandy who had assimilated into the Anglo-Saxon population. The Marchers presented what Cohen

refers to as a “difficult middle,” particularly because of their inability to fit properly into any of the approved categories in English society.²⁰⁷

The Welsh March was a boundary, a border between the civilized lands of the English, and the crude, barbaric “other” that was Wales. It had been created by William the Conqueror shortly after coming to England, by creating three earldoms. In the years following, English lords pushed further west past the borderlands, establishing their own “Marcher Lordships” that were not subject to royal jurisdiction and pushing the native Welsh to the extreme west and northwest. Though they served as a buffer against the sometimes powerful Welsh resistance for the English, the Marcher lords were relatively autonomous and independent in the March, making the Crown constantly suspicious because of their willingness to marry into powerful Welsh families for money and land, much as Gerald’s grandfather had done.²⁰⁸ In essence, they were semi-regnal rulers, able to establish their own laws, collect their own taxes, and build their own fortifications.

²⁰⁷ Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 80.

²⁰⁸ Gerald of Windsor, Gerald’s maternal grandfather, married Nesta, the sister of the prince of Deheubarth, Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Tewdwr. The goal was made clear by Gerald of Wales in *Itinerarium kambriae*, written in 1191: “ut altiore in finibus illis sibi suisque radices figeret, Griphini principis Sudwalliae sororem, cui nomen Nesta, sibi lege maritali copulavit” (“in order to establish a foundation for himself and his men in that territory, [Gerald] married Nesta, sister of Gruffydd, the prince of South Wales”). Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium kambriae*, British Library, Royal MS 13 B VIII, f. 89r.

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_13_b_viii_f074v

Within a hundred years, the tradition of having the Marcher lords was well-established and those within that group saw themselves as having a distinctly unique identity, despite the reality of their background being a hybrid of Norman, English, and Welsh. In fact, it is very clear in much of Gerald's writing that he considered his Marcher background something quite different, rendering what he sees as *nostra gens* as "gens in Kambrie marchia nutrita" ("the people nurtured in the Welsh march").²⁰⁹ Whether or not anyone outside of the Marcher population would agree is doubtful; it seems the Welsh view was that the Marchers were no better than their English counterparts, and the English saw them as potential trouble makers.

Though he felt a connection to his Marcher background, Gerald was more likely to de-emphasize the Welsh aspect of it, though multiple ethnic groups on the islands—English, Welsh, and Irish—traced the founding of Britain back to Brutus, a descendant of Aeneas of Troy. The concept was first recorded in the *Historia brittonum*, written in the 800s and is thought to represent an early British legend that had survived in north Wales and the "old north" of Britain; however, each group had its own motives for emphasizing it.²¹⁰ Whereas the Welsh, who maintained a clear sense of linguistic and cultural distinction from the English, saw this representation of an ancient British kingdom as proof of their sovereignty, other authors like

²⁰⁹ Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*, 83.

Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio hibernica*, British Library, Royal MS 13 B VIII, f. 72v.

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_13_b_viii_f074v

²¹⁰ Helen Fulton, "Origins and Introductions: Troy and Rome in Medieval British and Irish Writing," *Celts, Romans, and Britons: Classical and Celtic Influence in the Construction of British Identities* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 53.

Henry of Huntingdon writing in the 12th century took the origin story and applied it to the much more specific “Angli” or “English,” as opposed to “Britoni” or “British,” as did other authors like William of Malmesbury.²¹¹ Marcher blood, too, was believed then to have historically come from the Trojans, not the Welsh. In his works, Gerald described the Welsh people in much the same way that he wrote of the Irish, as a *gens barbara* who were deserving of their own subjugation because of their backwardness and inability to keep Christian precepts faithfully.²¹² That same Marcher background, however, would stall his career goals, keeping him from achieving the coveted position of archbishop of Canterbury precisely because he was, in essence, a hybrid. Unable to fit in with the strict identities required of his time, his reputation was tarnished by those who wished to exploit the “difficult middle” he found himself in, characterized by Cohen as having “competing allegiances conjoined with tortured abjections.”²¹³

Considering his rejection from the role of archbishop because of his own hybrid background, we may also look at Gerald’s Mélusine as a form of punishment toward his Angevin employers and those he regarded as their co-conspirators.²¹⁴ Although the tradition surrounding

²¹¹ Fulton, 53-54.

²¹² Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio kambriae*, British Library, Cotton MS Domitian A I, f. 134r.
https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_domitian_a_i_f134r

²¹³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 87.

²¹⁴ In his autobiography, Gerald describes a meeting with Pope Innocent III in which a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury is read out loud. The meaning of the letter is clear: despite his present actions, because of his Welsh background, Gerald could never be seen as a trusted member of the court because he would “to the best of his power sow the seeds of perpetual

Mélusine had clearly started long before, and Gerald most likely brought it from France where he was educated, as opposed to having the story originate in his native lands. We can use other examples from his literary works and apply the same line of reasoning to the demon countess. In particular, Gerald's work on Irish werewolves, another type of hybrid monster, is a helpful comparison case.

The werewolves of Ossory in Gerald's *Topographia hibernica* have been described as enacting the "fantasy of colonial complicity."²¹⁵ As the story goes, a priest and his fellow traveler are stopped by a werewolf outside of Meath, where the wolf assures the priest of his internal humanity by telling him not to be afraid and adding some "orthodox words in reference to God." He begs the priest to follow him to his female partner and give her last rites. Though the priest gives the she-wolf last rites, he hesitates to give her Holy Communion until her mate pulls off her wolf skin to reveal her human, female form underneath:

dissension between the Welsh and the English for all time to come. For the Welsh stock of the Britons, boast that all Britain is theirs by right. Wherefore, if the barbarity of that wild and unbridled nation had not been restrained by the censure of the Church, wielded by the Archbishop of Canterbury, to whom it is known that this race has thus far been subject as being within this province, this people would by continual or at least by frequent rebellion have broken from their allegiance to the King, whereby the whole England must have suffered disquietude." Gerald of Wales, *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, trans. H.E. Butler (Boydell Press, 2005), 169.

²¹⁵ Rhonda Knight, "Werewolves, Monsters, and Miracles: Representing Colonial Fantasies in Gerald of Wales's 'Topographia Hibernica,'" *Studies in Iconography* vol. 22 (2001), 68.

And so to remove all doubt, using his paw like a hand and drawing back the whole skin from the head of the female wolf, he folded it back all the way to her navel: and immediately the form of an old woman clearly appeared.²¹⁶

After spending the evening conversing with the wolf, the priest asked whether or not the “hostile race” (“gens inimica”) which had landed on the island would remain, to which the wolf replied:

For the sins of our people, and their enormous vices, the anger of God, falling on an evil generation, hath given them into the hands of their enemies. Therefore, as long as this foreign race shall keep the commandments of the Lord, and walk in his ways, it will be secure and invincible; but if, as the downward path to illicit pleasures is easy, and nature is prone to follow vicious examples, this people shall chance, from living among us, to adopt our depraved habits, doubtless they will provoke the divine vengeance on themselves also.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica*, British Library, Royal MS 13 B VIII, f. 18r.

https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_13_b_viii_f018r. “Et ut omnem abstergeret dubietatem, pede quasi pro manu fungens, pellem totem a capite lupae retrahens, usque ad umbilicum replicavit: et statim expressa forma vetulae cujusdam apparuit.”

²¹⁷ Ibid. “Propter peccata . . . populi nostri, et vitiorum enormitates ira Dei descendens in generationem pravam, dedit eam in manus inimicorum. Quamdiu ergo gens ea mandata Domini

Gerald knew the “gens inimica” well—they were the Marcher lords sent by Henry II, and later by John, to subdue Ireland. The tale was Marcher/Plantagenet colonial ideology: the Irish needed saving through proper Christianizing efforts linked to English colonialism but the Marchers needed to be sure not to lose themselves in the process by absorbing any of the Irish identity—to not become *more* hybrid themselves.

If Irish inhumanity was portrayed through over sexualization (in the case of Gerald’s half-human half-ox hybrid, for example) or portraying them as entirely bestial, Gerald could then, by extension, assert their inability to rule themselves based on these natural deficiencies. He goes so far as to discuss afterward whether or not such a creature is a brute or a man, capable of rationality. Gerald’s ideas about humanity, in the case of the werewolves, have an ethnic charge to them, and this conception of what is “good” or “trustworthy” or “acceptable” can be applied elsewhere too.

By the time of his final revisions of *De principis*, Gerald had long washed his hands of his former Angevin employers, convinced of their lack of character, honor, and loyalty. By questioning where they came from with his story, Gerald could not only be hypothesizing about their right to rule based on their qualities as good Christians, but also based on their unknown origin through the line of this mysterious, inhuman woman in conjunction with his thoughts on

custodierit, et in viis ejus ambulaverit, tuta manebit et inconvulsa. Sin autem, quia proclivis est cursus ad voluptates, et imitatrix natura vitiorum, ad nostros ex convictu mores forte descenerint, divinam in se quoque proculdubio vindictam provocabunt.”

Norman tyrants. Perhaps this inclusion was a nod to the Angevin's depravity from the perspective of a Marcher who felt increasingly alienated from his "English" bosses. Whether or not that was the case, there does seem to be a clear indication that Gerald equates animality or monstrosity in these ways with suitability to rule or be ruled.

3.5 D'Arras Creates Ambiguity

There are, at their cores, some very basic similarities that may be assumed about Gerald of Wales's Mélusine and that of Jean d'Arras. First, these female figures are of mysterious origins—Gerald's character comes from an unknown land, while d'Arras has his Mélusine originate from the fairy "Isle of Avalon" and, through the link to her father, from "Albanie" (Scotland).²¹⁸ Second, there is the issue of their religiosity. Gerald does not mince words. The countess is not a good Christian, and her humanity in relation to that identity is called into question when she is unable to remain in the church beyond the recitation of the gospels. By contrast, Jean d'Arras goes to great lengths to keep the "twist" at the end of his romance by repeatedly providing his readers with proof that Mélusine is a good Christian woman, or at least wants to be, despite all evidence to the contrary. He wants his readers to be confused by the true intentions of his ambiguous hybrid character, but d'Arras's Mélusine was at no point capable of being read in any way other than negative given the standards of the day, something he and the illustrator hint at throughout the romance and a point discussed further in Chapter Four.

²¹⁸ There is scholarly argument over whether or not what is called "Albanie" is actually meant to refer to Scotland, but that point is irrelevant here.

Interestingly, Jean d'Arras concentrates on different aspects of Mélusine's monstrosity, a point which underlines those parts of her that are most useful for the story and its purpose. The overt concentration of detail to Mélusine's tail—it is huge and striped, almost like a caricature—mirrors the common definition of a dragon in which the main power is considered to be located in its tail rather than its teeth. Moreover, it is described as “d'azure et d'argent,” blue and silver, most often depicted as white, the heraldic color base of the House of Lusignan. Not mentioned are Mélusine's wings, although the inference is that she had them because of her ability to fly around the castle and from town to town. During her initial departure, it is written that she jumped (“sault”) to the sill of the castle window *as lightly as if she had wings to fly* (“legierement comme se elle volast et eust esles”).²¹⁹ In this tale, however, the transformation is witnessed and left the people “esbahiz” (“amazed”):

And heaving a pitiful sigh, she moaned and bounded into the air. Out the window she flew, soaring out over the orchard. It was then that she changed into an enormous serpent of great girth, some fifteen feet in length. It must be said, too, that the stone upon which she stood in departing from the window is still there, and the imprint made by her foot is still there . . . And the lady, in the form of a serpent, as I've just told you, circled the fortress three times.²²⁰

²¹⁹ MS 3353, f. 139v.

²²⁰ MS 3353, f. 140v. “Et lors fist un moult douloureux plaint et un moult grief souspir, puis sault en l'air, et laisse la fenestre, et trespasse le vergier. Et lors se mue en une serpente grant et grosse et longue de la longueur de xv. Piez. Et sachiez que la pierre sur quoy elle passa a la fenestre y

The implication is found in Gerald of Wales's version too when she, "in the sight of all, flew out through a lofty window of the church."²²¹ Perhaps there was no necessity to describe the wings, because in images, dragons had always been portrayed with wings, making it redundant to mention. Despite that, d'Arras repeatedly states the specifically hybrid nature of his creature, lest his readers write her off as having just transformed solely into a monster. Though they see her in serpent form, swooping around castles and nearly destroying some of the towers she built, d'Arras is careful to reiterate that what they are hearing as Mélusine circles the town is a *woman's* voice. One of the interesting turns of phrase that he uses when discussing her transformation is his use of the verb "mue." In this context, he is indicating a *change that takes place visually before their eyes*. The word "mue" on its own is more akin to molting or a sloughing off, implying that she is shedding her human skin to reveal her *true* form, one she tried very hard to keep hidden.

Most of the literature on d'Arras's Mélusine concentrates on the meaning of her hybrid body, and the interpretations are varied. Mélusine has been seen as a figure for the "overtly and problematically hybrid poetics of the late Middle Ages."²²² By examining contradictory female-gendered categories, Kevin Brownlee shows how the text purposefully stages their unresolvable contradictions. An example of this would be within the body of Mélusine herself. She has three

est encores, et y est la fourme du pie toute escripte . . . Lors a fait la dame, en guise de serpente, comme j'ay dit dessuz, trois tours environ la forteresse."

²²¹ MS Julius, f. 165r.

²²² Kevin Brownlee, "Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis," 19.

bodies: a woman's body, a mixed body (half-woman, half-snake), and the body of a flying snake. Brownlee believes this constitutes the very basis of the plot of d'Arras' tale because it exemplifies two types of metamorphosis coming from two sorts of transgression, both of which have consequences solely on female corporeality.²²³ Raymondin's transgressions against Mélusine can be summed up as accusations against her status as wife and mother, thereby questioning her status as a woman; however, her monstrous hybrid body actually proves her fidelity as a wife, while that same body reinforces Raymondin's first negative assumptions about his wife's role as mother.²²⁴ The speech Mélusine gives before relegating herself to her final form as a flying snake or dragon addresses the transgressions of Raymondin: first as a courtly erotic desiring subject, then as a mother in both geopolitical terms (the creation of Lusignan) and her human genealogy (via her human father, King Elinas). "The farewell scene sets up a striking contrast vis-a-vis the ensuing description of her metamorphosis into a monster. This contrast functions to present Mélusine even at the moment of her transformation as still fundamentally hybrid."²²⁵ Moreover, by using her hybridity as a female figure of power, her body becomes a secularized female version of metamorphosis that evokes the Incarnation.²²⁶

However, Mélusine's transformations are entirely dependent on actions of free will, in particular those that have harsh moral consequences, not just by and for Raymondin but also for Mélusine herself. Her body and its physical shape are triply damned. The first curse she brought

²²³ Ibid., 20.

²²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²²⁵ Ibid., 35.

²²⁶ Ibid., 38.

upon herself, as a result of committing patricide. The second is brought upon her by another, through the inability of Raymondin to keep his word; and the third is the result of his publicly calling attention to her questionable humanity. These examples of bad actions are what brings on metamorphosis, something that is difficult to link to the Incarnation in any serious sense. She is not embodied, she is transformed.

The role of the body is a major aspect of the construction and manifestation of identity, and according to Sylvia Huot, it is Mélusine's body that is the obstacle to that construction of self.²²⁷ Huot sees Mélusine as a foil to her husband Raymondin, a doubling of identity in crisis: as Mélusine is striving to establish herself as a mortal human being through her marriage to Raymondin, he is benefiting from the marriage by creating himself as a person capable of functioning within a specific social network.²²⁸ Because Mélusine has within herself aspects of both self and other, however, she is unable to succeed.

Mélusine's hybrid body is an impossible conjoining of opposites. In her upper half we see the human, the feminine, characterized by deliberate and controlled action; in her lower half, the bestial, the phallic potency of the serpent, with its random, tumultuous movements. Combing her hair, she seems the very epitome of culture and artifice, producing herself as an aristocratic lady and object of love

²²⁷ Sylvia Huot, "Dangerous Embodiments: Froissart's Harton and Jean d'Arras's Mélusine," *Speculum*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Apr. 2003), 401. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20060638>.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 411.

and desire. In her serpentine tail one sees all that must be excluded from that carefully crafted image of feminine humanity: a bodily excess both fascinating and abhorrent.²²⁹

This interpretation does not take into account that Raymondin, too, fails at inserting himself into a role that he cannot maintain. Though his faults are not manifested on the outside through a physically changing body, his identity as a man of status degenerates as the story unfolds. After his untruth about killing his uncle, he relies on his magical wife to build himself a noble territory; however, he cannot keep this image up any more than Mélusine can control her weekly transformations. He eventually breaks down, revealing the secret between him and his wife, and lives out his days in a monastery, secluded and miserable.

Huot describes the revelation of Mélusine's hybridity as the "tortuous process of endless becoming" that lies behind illusions of idealized ladyhood. In the case of Mélusine, the perfect feminine collapses into two incompatible bodies--those of what is expected and what actually exists. This separation is also desired by Mélusine, as she seeks to separate from the immortality of her fairy body in exchange for physical death and spiritual immortality, which Huot sees as a hope to separate her individual body as a mortal, feudal lady from the "body" of feudal lordship itself via the continuity of the House of Lusignan, essentially marking the Mélusine character as both an expression of identity, as well as one of patrimonial expression.²³⁰

²²⁹ Ibid., 412.

²³⁰ Ibid., 420.

It seems, however, a contradiction to state that that separation into what is expected and what actually *is* was *desired* by Mélusine. By her own words, it seems that the impossibility of combining the two is what leads to her distress. Despite her wishes, she cannot be the human who will have a mortal death, nor can she maintain her role as a mother in public while living as a serpent. In every sense, the formation of her identity is controlled and dictated by outside factors and characters. It seems, then, that any patrimonial expression is present in the act of calling attention to these inconsistencies expected of feudal women—that what is expected and appears to be desired is often subsumed by the incompatible reality of being.

Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner also reads Mélusine's hybrid nature as describing conflicting aspects of human nature, though in a different way. D'Arras's prologue sets the stage for the story by explaining two uncomfortably coexisting views of nature: Aristotle's notion of finality and the Christian explanation of nature's wonders.²³¹ These competing views of nature both include and exclude Mélusine. While Bruckner claims that Mélusine is only *natural* if limited to her identity as a woman, this negates the fact that medical philosophies, basing their interpretations on Aristotle's ideas of women as defective males, generally regarded women as unnatural because of their secondary status from the first and more complete human, Adam. In view of Aristotle's finality, it seems more likely that even the intrinsic qualities of what appears as her human self marks her as supernatural, or at the very least, "other."

²³¹ The principle of finality can be broken down in two steps. One, that every material body acts by virtue of intrinsic tendencies toward a definite goal; and two, that these intrinsic tendencies are directed toward the perfection of the specific person involved (or their species).

Mélusine's hybrid nature stands as a reminder of the ways in which human beings cross boundaries and overlap established categories such as animal and divine or monstrous and supernatural. From the male point of view, the female commonly represents the threatening ways in which humans can exceed classifications and representations, leading to interpretations of woman as one of frightening otherness.²³² This crosses over to Melusine's sons and her "natural" effect on them as well. In many ways, the fact that her sons are deformed means they are, by their very nature, monstrous and therefore emblematic of their mother. This is evident in the fear surrounding monstrosity and how it could potentially "erase" paternity by proclaiming female agency and its power over generation and legitimacy. After all, "anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type."²³³ When disordering or deforming the body, the conceptual purpose was to make people better appreciate the correct order of things, the forming of the first man and those who most closely resemble him. For Mélusine and her sons, their hybridity and monstrosity were morally and socially ambiguous, not only because they exceeded physical norms, but because they breached the boundaries of what was considered comfortable and acceptable.

Unlike Gerald of Wales's werewolves, monstrosity is far more layered in the latter Mélusine story, both for the character herself, as well as for her sons. In Gerald's tale, a character removes a layer to reveal the wayward yet redeemable Christian underneath, whereas his

²³² Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Natural and Unnatural Woman: Mélusine Inside and Out," *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns*, ed. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O'Sullivan (New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), 28.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt18gzf9k>.

²³³ Huot, 3.

Mélusine character removes her cloak to reveal her true demonic state. There is no metamorphosis: a contradictory nature is simply hidden and then revealed. The identity underneath is understood to be stable, even if it is unseen—it is always there and is ultimately unavoidable. For the *Roman*, there is an undeniable state of nature: Mélusine *is* partly fairy in the beginning, regardless of her mother’s curse, and Raymondin’s seed is never claimed as a means of overcoming the inherited monstrous natures of her sons, a promise she gave up as a result of Elinas’s patricide. Despite the multiple offers of redemption, ultimately free will is a negative for the identity of Mélusine and the more extreme of her sons. It is in the later examples of free will followed in the positive sense that we see emphasized a connection with the possibility of “goodness” for the successors of Lusignan, a noble and virtuous line, uncorrupted enough to be emphasized by Jean of Berry.

Chapter 4 GENEALOGY

She then saw her at early morning on a Sunday, when Henno had gone out to church, enter a bath and become, instead of a most beautiful woman, a dragon: after a short time she saw her leap out of the bath onto a new cloak which her maid had spread for her, tear it into tiny shreds with her teeth, then return to her proper form and thereafter minister in the same way in every point to her maid. The mother told the son what she had seen. He sent for a priest: they came on the two unawares and sprinkled them with holy water. With a sudden leap they dashed through the roof, and with loud shrieks left the shelter they had haunted so long. Marvel not that the Lord ascended to heaven with his body, since he has permitted such abominable creatures to do so, creatures which must in the end be dragged downwards against their will. This lady had numerous progenies yet living.

-Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*²³⁴

²³⁴ Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 851 (3041), f. 51v, f. 52.

“Videt eam igitur summo mane die dominica, egresso ad ecclesiam Hennone, balneum ingressam, et de pulcherrima muliere draconem fieri, et in modico exilientem a balneo in pallium nouum quod ei puella strauerat et in minutissima frusta dentibus illud concidentem, et inde in propriam reuerti formam, que postmodum per omnia simili argumento famule famulatur. Mater filio uisa reuelat. Ergo sibi presbitero ascito, inopinas occupant, aqua benedicta conspergunt, que subito saltu tectum penetrant et ululatu magno diu culta relinquunt hospicia. Ne miremini si

The choice of Mélusine as the originator of aristocratic houses initially seems peculiar, particularly because she was not only a woman, but a woman with a questionable past that ran contrary to acceptable Christian social norms. Where archetypes were useful in defining her character and imbuing it with common notions about women, generation, and power, genealogy was able to build on previous traditions that surrounded the specific families and their history. In order to address the anomaly that she represented, as well as her purpose, we must first show how and why genealogy became so important to medieval nobles in the twelfth century and beyond, as well as how Mélusine's roles as both a mother and a hybrid being fit into that artificial and radical new imperative.

In the creation of historical legacy, genealogy was vitally important. In order to impose an historical tradition or create an imprint on social memory, genealogy was necessary in order to create a semblance of social continuity. The addition of a broad genealogical scope was a long-standing trend among feudal families in medieval Europe, starting in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These additions were often thought to add a touch of radiance to a noble line, as well as authenticating its stable longevity. This preference in style is seemingly disordered when it comes to the Mélusine myth: *De principis* is very obviously not using the demon forebear as a means of establishing prestige—quite the opposite, actually, as it more clearly aligned with Gervase of Tilbury's story of the "Dame du Château de l'Épervier" or Walter Map's "Henno cum dentibus" which emphasize the diabolical nature of the fairy-wife and the fundamental incompatibility of her union with a human and with Christianity.

Domininus ascendit corporaliter, cum hoc pessimis permiserit creaturis, quas eiam necesse sit deorsum inuitas trahi. Huius adhuc extat multa progenies."

The difference between simply writing about a fabled demon ancestress by using (not particularly convincing) aliases and Gerald of Wales's account was that he had the audacity to specifically link the woman to the House of Plantagenet by name, not just by inference. This was the first time that a link between Mélusine and a contemporary house of the nobility had explicitly been made. While other writers had danced around the subject, Gerald linked the ancestors of Henry II to the demon woman by direct genealogical descent via her marriage to Fulk III Nerra, an earlier Count of Anjou; although given Fulk's personal reputation, it hardly seems fair to blame an entire line's bad deeds on a single woman, even a mythical one.²³⁵

In this instance, however, Gerald's reiteration of this founding myth had little negative effect. The Angevins rather relished the association, using it to excuse the worst of their deeds as simply part and parcel of their inherited natures. To contemporaries, such an association would not have seemed terribly incongruous: the Angevins had staked their reigns on their ability to be ruthless and oftentimes deceptive; and all were remembered for their explosive tempers and actions against the Church.²³⁶ The idea that Gerald was able to draw on so many similar stories, however, naturally implies that this myth in particular was very well known and relatively popular. His very mention that King Richard was fond of referring to the myth by exclaiming

²³⁵ *Historia Sancti Florentii*. In *Chroniques des églises d'Anjou*, ed. Paul Marchegay et Emile Mabille (Paris, 1869), 260, 273.

²³⁶ Although all of the Angevin kings, as well as Queen Eleanor, were constantly finding themselves at odds with Rome at various points during their reigns, each often fell back on their ability to repent and make amends when necessary or beneficial, particularly when threatened with papal injunctions or excommunication.

that “from the devil they had all come and to the devil they were all going” suggests that the association was known and popularized at least by the time he reigned.²³⁷

Jean d'Arras, on the other hand, sought to reestablish the prestige of the Lusignan family lineage, which was in its waning phase in the fourteenth century, by accenting Jean de Berry's claim through a far-reaching genealogical association in order to “remind” contemporary readers of his honorable and legitimate rule. The opaque nature of d'Arras's genealogy allows claims to be made that are strategically difficult to map out or refute and that scatters Mélusine's potential progeny across the known world. Le Goff emphasized this phenomenon centered on the drawing of family lines as a type of new collective memory, one that urged the solidarity of lineage by emphasizing the preservation of the past.²³⁸ Perhaps most importantly, the alignment of these families via lineage to a demon or fairy ancestress compromised the element of free will in future events, instead using the genealogies to convince readers of an inescapable destiny.²³⁹ These

²³⁷ MS Julius, f. 165r. Richard was King of England from 1189 to 1199.

²³⁸ Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, 77.

²³⁹ When Raymondin first breaks his agreement with Mélusine, he first curses “Fortuna” for having destined him to such an abysmal fate, rather than admitting that not only did he enter into the pact under his own free will, but that the repercussions of his disloyalty stemmed from his own actions.

genealogies establish what Jane H.M. Taylor referred to as a family's "partisan record," and without them, medieval histories could be dismissed by their readers as allegory.²⁴⁰

Concentrating on Mélusine as the founding member of a noble family is consistent in the historiography because that is precisely what Jean d'Arras claims he has set out to do. Modern interpretations of how and why he is doing this, however, vary. Jan Shaw offers the historically standard explanation that d'Arras was writing an elaborate attempt to legitimize Jean of Berry's holdings in the Poitevin area during the Hundred Years' War. Interestingly, Shaw sees the subtle differences in Couldrette's poetic version, released a decade later, as being a result of its allegiance to the English faction during the same war, an interpretation absent from Le Goff who sees the primary difference as being Couldrette's inclusion of Melusine's agrarian associations. Scholars such as Daisy Delogu argue that the most important aspects of the Roman de Mélusine are those which actually have very little to do with the demon mother. Delogu examines the sons of Mélusine who spend the majority of the romance crusading. According to Delogu, "in order to optimize the use Jean of Berry might make of the fairy's legacy in the fourteenth-century political context, her power and prestige had to be reinscribed in a masculine, Christian work," which led to a stronger emphasis on detailed accounts of military successes than what is found in

²⁴⁰ Jane H.M. Taylor, "Mélusine's Progeny: Patterns and Perplexities" in *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in late Medieval France* ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 167.

other accounts.²⁴¹ Mélusine's role in all of this is relatively small: she gives her sons rings that make them invincible in battle, and it is certain characteristics of their individual hybridity that they inherited from their mother which makes them effective in those battles, thereby proving Jean of Berry's worthiness by hereditary right.

We have no way of knowing how much of these stories were regarded as truth and their validity is not the important aspect here. Particularly in Jean d'Arras's version, there is the question of how much was meant to be understood as purely fictional and how much was meant to be considered historically factual.²⁴² Yes, it is the *Roman de Mélusine*; however, d'Arras goes to great lengths to insist on the historical accuracy of his story by interweaving contemporary people and events, as well as referencing authoritative figures from earlier generations.²⁴³ In doing so, d'Arras sought to gain a sense of *auctoritas*, that esteemed process of linking a contemporary story with widely respected authors of the past, something many medieval writers attempted in order to validate their claims.

²⁴¹ Daisy Delogu, "Jean d'Arras Makes History: Political Legitimacy and the Roman de Mélusine,"

Dalhousie French Studies, Vol. 80 (Fall 2007), 16.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40838405>.

²⁴² D'Arras spends the first section of his work claiming authority from the sayings and writings of the prophet David, Aristotle, Saint Paul, Gervais of Tilbury, and "various witnesses" (MS 3353, f. 2v).

²⁴³ The process of listing successive authors as a means of establishing authority and accuracy is extremely common in the Middle Ages; however, d'Arras incorporation of makes it defy categorization to some extent.

Gerald of Wales, who was also consistent in professing the validity of his writing, stated in his *Gemma ecclesiastica* that he was:

. . . one who with much labour extracts precious gems from the innumerable sands of the seashore, or one who, walking through spacious gardens, plucks the useful and virtuous from among the worthless and fruitless plants, separating the lilies and roses from the nettles and brambles.²⁴⁴

But seeking to prove the acceptance of these stories on any individual level, as opposed to finding their function within their historical context, is not only exhaustively trivial, but completely unnecessary. One does not invalidate the other.

Upholding an opposition between myth and history is problematic in itself, particularly in societies like the medieval West, where the two were so closely intertwined that the relationship between the two *should* be stressed in order to understand the historical conditions they were born into and how they became part of the history of that culture.²⁴⁵ Particularly for genealogical myths similar to the Mélusine-type, where antecedents may be seen repeated over time in vaguely related ways, we can assume that this collective memory has functioned “in accordance with a ‘generative reconstruction’ rather than with a mechanical memorization.”²⁴⁶ Because the foundational memory of these myths was not based on a word-for-word, rote memorization,

²⁴⁴ Giraldus II, p. 6. Cf. A.A. Goddu and R.H. Rouse, ‘Gerald of Wales and the *Florilegium Angelicum*,’ *Speculum* LII (1977), 489-490.

²⁴⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, 134.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

when they were eventually penned, they allowed the authors more creative freedom. The art of memorization was highly regarded; however, the need to commemorate memory and lineage through writing was intensified in the later Middle Ages, despite its being one of the fundamental elements of medieval literature. And it is in their individual creative flourishes that we might find the author's intent and meaning.

4.1 The Effects of Primogeniture

Central to this discussion is the concept of the family unit in the years immediately preceding the intense rise of the nobility. According to R. Howard Bloch, noble families of the ninth and tenth centuries had little concept of themselves as temporally defined entities.²⁴⁷ Without a concentration on a succession of generations, it is hardly surprising that so many early medieval dynasties destroyed themselves through the unsustainable practice of partible inheritance. Echoing Marc Bloch's description of the "first feudal age" in *Feudal Society*, the latter Bloch notes other "defining principles" between earlier noble families and those of the later medieval period: they grouped their clan or kin group "horizontally," essentially creating a familial unit with no limit and without much preference to whether or not relatives could be counted along agnatic or cognatic lines. They also had no fixed residence, no patronymic, and no image of themselves as peacekeepers with an heritable military tenure.²⁴⁸ Eventually, these combined trends led to the decline of a clan's wealth and the erosion of territory.

²⁴⁷ R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 66.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

Despite controversy over the term “feudalism,” which in the last few decades has become loaded with debate and contention, scholars still note a distinct change in relationship to the land that occurred around the turn of the millennium that resulted in shifts to the way that aristocratic families defined themselves.²⁴⁹ As particular pieces of land became increasingly considered familial possessions, it followed that kin groups settled and bound themselves “to a common residence, a castle, and a cradle of the paternal *alodium* (free holding)” which were essential in the evolution of personal to territorial control, inheritance from a patron to a *patrimoine*²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ It is not within the bounds of this work to discuss all of the internal debates between medievalists over the term “feudalism” and whether or not it is anachronistic or applicable to broad swathes of territory in Europe. It is an admittedly unspecific term that is not particularly useful except for in generically describing relationships between *some* members of the upper class; however, even that requires its caveats—if it is generally assumed that “feudalism” requires a vassal to pay homage to the lord of the land, how does one explain the majority of medieval English kings who rarely, if ever, performed this act to their French lords? Because of this, I have tried as much as possible to excise the term from the discussion in this dissertation. For further reading on the arguments around the term, see Thomas N. Bisson, Frederic Cheyette, Paul Hyams, Susan Reynolds, and John Gillingham.

²⁵⁰ An important note, *patrimoine* in this sense does not simply imply property inherited by one’s father but encapsulates a variety of meanings both tangible and intangible. While property was certainly a tangible patrimonial object to pass down, more intangible concepts like titles and founding myths to form what are referred to by anthropologists and sociologists as “vertical” intergenerational relationships came to increasingly be included.

through heredity.²⁵¹ Particularly in France, families began to organize themselves along agnatic lines of consanguinity that moved vertically to form *lignages*.²⁵² Georges Duby noted that the appearance of genealogies as a literary genre in the twelfth century both makes it evident that the lineage had a consciousness of itself and used that consciousness proactively, foisting it onto other members of the lineage group in order to exalt and legitimize their place in political life.²⁵³ As reiterated by Gabrielle M. Spiegel:

As genealogies were amplified in the course of the twelfth century, pushing out in every direction, filling in each sequence with more detail, adding names of younger sons, daughters, and ancestors not previously mentioned, the profile of

²⁵¹ R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*, 68.

²⁵² Gabrielle Spiegel, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative," *History and Theory* vol. 22, no. 1 (Feb. 1983), 47.

²⁵³ Georges Duby, *Hommes et structures du moyen âge* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1977), 268. There is an alternative influential view to the relationship between genealogical literature and social development at this time promoted by Leopold Genicot in his *Les Genealogies*, which asserts that although genealogies were promoted to ". . . exalter une lignee, fortifier sa position, legitimer son pouvoir," they cannot be used to assume that a territory has become a principality, only that a family has become aware of its own importance and is attempting to emphasize it. Leopold Genicot, *Les Genealogies* (Los Angeles: Turnhout, 1975), 36.

the family tree became a skeleton of aristocratic society, revealing the multiple threads which crossed and recrossed, binding regional nobilities into ever more integrated congeries of family relations. Raised to the royal level, genealogy took on the overtones of a dynastic myth, synonymous in many respects with the central myth of French kingship as the unbroken succession of the *trois races* of France. But whether aristocratic or royal, genealogies were expressions of social memory and, as such, could be expected to have a particular affinity with historical thought, and, at least to a certain extent, to impose their consciousness of social reality upon those whose task it was to preserve for future generations images of society in the record of history.²⁵⁴

One element to the creation of genealogical literature concerns the ideological assumptions inherent in the writing. They tend in the sources to form almost a new creation in and of themselves, a symbolic form and conceptual metaphor. That creation had its own effect on the patterning of historical narrative and the way it would be expressed. It was this thematic “myth” and a narrative “mythos” that Spiegel argued had served to symbolically govern the shape and significance of the past.²⁵⁵

Despite the organized and idealized method of recognizing and transmitting tangible and intangible property via highly involved and intricately crafted genealogies, the lived experience was often different than the ideal. For example, families in reality, particularly those that co-exist

²⁵⁴ Gabrielle Spiegel, “Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative,” 47.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

together in the same household, exist temporally together and that lived reality was constantly changing, whereas in a constructed genealogy, families were considered constant: “the replacement of the father by the son being elided by the acquisition by the son of his father’s genealogical identity, name, and title at the moment of death.”²⁵⁶ The genealogical romance genre goes a step further:

. . . [it] takes the ideological assumptions and desires of genealogical discourse and combines them with the diachronic temporality of the domestic family, as well as the threats to its continuity, the ‘crises and hiatuses of the nuclear family and the lineage.’ In doing so, genealogical romance legitimizes and confirms the value of the genealogy being described, while destabilizing the illusion of permanence that is both the desire and product of genealogical discourse.²⁵⁷

With the transition to primogeniture, which ideally would have ensured that the patrimony moved smoothly along the male line as romanticized in the literature, a host of problems produced themselves, doing serious detriment to the illusion of singularity. First, there was the issue of having too many children. Aside from needing to provide for the additional children, this form of transmission favored the eldest male child. “The son, the object of the first clause, is transformed into a new father, the subject of the next clause, and in order to meet these

²⁵⁶ Felicity Riddy, “Middle English Romance,” *Cambridge Companion to Middle English Romance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 200), 235.

²⁵⁷ Florschuetz, 161.

requirements, it must cut out or suppress other political and narrative possibilities such as multiple sons or female heirs.”²⁵⁸

On the other hand, a lack of multiple heirs could be problematic as well. Despite improved mortality rates, there was still always a chance that a line could be nearly wiped out before any of the children reached adulthood or that a child who had been unprepared for rule may inherit the patrimony after the death of his siblings, as happened with the Plantagenets. John “Lackland” was the fifth legitimate son of Henry II, and as such, should have never expected to become king. Henry’s eldest son, William, died in childhood, Henry the “Young King” died of dysentery at 28, Geoffrey at 27, and finally, Richard the Lionheart died in 1199, childless at the age of 41 thus leaving the throne to his youngest brother.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Laura D. Barefield, *Gender and History in Medieval English Romance and Chronicle* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 13.

²⁵⁹ It is important to note that it was Henry II’s insistence on foregoing the practice of primogeniture in favor of older partible inheritance practices that caused many of his problems with his sons and engendered rivalries between them. As he drew and redrew his patrimonial legacy, he sowed jealousy, dissension, and turmoil within his entire family that haunted him until his death in 1189. Also of notable mention is the fact that Richard had gone out of his way to make sure John would not inherit the throne by initially naming his nephew, Arthur of Brittany, son of his deceased brother Geoffrey, as his successor, although this act would be superseded on his deathbed when he recognized John instead, not due to any filial love for John but because Arthur had joined sides with Philip Augustus, Richard’s decades-long enemy.

Notably absent in these equations are the female members of the family, an obvious result of the acceptance of primogeniture. By moving away from the practice of allowing lineages along cognatic lines, the relevance of women in the creation of these families was relegated to their reproductive and moral functions, as well as their usefulness in creating marriage alliances, with a strong emphasis placed on legitimacy for the sake of ensuring the patrimonial passage of holdings.

With this growing emphasis on legitimacy, the obvious question becomes: why would any noble or royal house want to tie its bloodline to such a figure as Mélusine? It may be that the hybrid expresses “profound medieval anxieties about the production of heirs, and particularly violent and ungovernable heirs, without laying these phenomena exclusively at the door of fiends.”²⁶⁰ Perhaps an explanation for the scandalous behavior of nobles was needed at a time when the highest levels of society were supposed to have intelligence, virtue, and honor running through their veins.

4.2 The Polluted Root: Plantagenet Propaganda

Tracing lineage back to an otherworldly ancestor in history and literature is nearly as common as a culture’s propensity for origin or flood stories. Demon mothers have been particularly popular, often as a way to explain the outrageous exploits of later progeny. This is especially true of the demon mother first linked to the Angevins in the twelfth century. While

²⁶⁰ Alcuin Blamires, “The Twin Demons of Aristocratic Society in *Sir Gowther*,” *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 52.

multiple authors tied the family to a questionable source, none had the confidence of Gerald of Wales, who was the first to explicitly attach the demon mother archetype to the house of Plantagenet in his *De principis instructione*.

Gerald's description of the demon countess is preceded by numerous pages dedicated to the foul natures and inconceivable actions of the Angevins. He echoes rumors of infidelity, incest, and murder in a gossipy, yet authoritative, tone. His position as Henry II's clerk gave him the credibility to wield that authority, but also explains his highly partisan account, particularly after being passed over for his coveted church position because of his Marcher background. What Gerald of Wales was doing in tying a demon ancestress to the Plantagenet family tree was not new—not for Henry II and his children and not for many other royal families. By participating in the spread of this particular story, however, Gerald was helping to craft a semblance of social continuity, a social memory that was effectively building on earlier and current propaganda against the Angevins—and one that would continue long after his death. Had he been the only author to link the two, the reference may be considered his own creation. However, even though the Angevin family was not specifically named, authors had been referencing their “polluted” or “corrupt” root since the end of Henry's reign at least, if not earlier, and would continue to do so well after the death of John in 1216.

References to the “black legend” of Eleanor of Aquitaine, discussed previously, were already circulating by the time of Gerald's writing of *De principis*. The idea of questionable marriages and indiscretions were very popular, particularly among priggish clerics. The ancestors of Henry fared little better. The counts of Anjou were portrayed as violent and aggressive. Fulk III, one of the earliest counts of Anjou, was known as the “Black Count” or Foulque Nerra in Old French, thanks largely to his famously terrible temper and the many

accounts of his ferocity. Despite appearing to largely regret his savageness later in life and attempting to save himself the potential of eternal torment by going on pilgrimage and endowing abbeys, Fulk is remembered in the chronicles for his mercilessness, particularly toward members of his own family. The *Historia sancti florentii* records an event in which Fulk had his first wife, Elisabeth of Vendôme immediately burned for adultery upon hearing of her infidelity before having ever verified its veracity. A couple of days later, he burned the entire city where she had been residing to the ground: “Fulk, the hot-tempered one, killed his wife Elisabeth at Angers after she had survived an enormous fall. Then Fulk burned with fiery flames the same city which was defended only by a few men.” The account continues: “He burned Elisabeth because she had committed adultery.”²⁶¹ The cruelty of Fulk and his son, known as Geoffrey Martel, is noted in the early twelfth-century text *Gesta regum anglorum* by William of Malmesbury. Geoffrey, according to William, took the Count of Poitou, his lord, as his prisoner, starving him to death and then marrying his stepmother.²⁶² Further, recounted William, after treating the people of Anjou with severity, Geoffrey took up arms against his father, and when he failed, Fulk forced his son to walk for several miles with a saddle on his back before kicking his prostrate son and assuring him that “that’s beaten you at last.”²⁶³ Fulk’s apparent sadism extended to his own body, as well, for in his later years, he commanded his servants to drag him naked in front of the

²⁶¹ *Historia sancti florentii*. In *Chroniques des églises d'Anjou*, ed. Paul Marchegay et Emile Mabilie (Paris, 1869), 260, 273.

²⁶² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum anglorum*, trans. by R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 430-431.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 436-7.

Turks through the public streets to the Holy Sepulchre, one pulling a flaxen cord around his neck, while the other scourged his back.²⁶⁴

There is also, of course, the claim in the *Vita Sancti Thomae, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris* by William Fitz Stephen that Henry II's own father, Geoffrey of Anjou had castrated the bishop of Séez and his supporters, making them carry their testicles to him on a platter.²⁶⁵ Another account of the bloody act shows up in the works of Ralph de Diceto who claimed that the bishop himself reported that he had been consecrated in his own blood.²⁶⁶

The earliest appearing reference to Mélusine and the Angevins came in Walter Map's *De nugis curialium* in 1193. Referring to "nobilem illam pestilenciam," Map recounts the tale of one "Henno cum dentibus" who stole a mysterious woman destined to be the wife of the king of France for himself, a seemingly obvious slight to Henry II who had "stolen" his wife Eleanor from her previous marriage to Louis VII.²⁶⁷ Only later would he find out that she shunned holy

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 438-9.

²⁶⁵ William Fitzstephen, "Vita Sancti Thomae, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris," *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. James Craigie Robertson, M.A., Canon of Canterbury, vol. III. (Lessing-Druckerei: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1965), 65.

²⁶⁶ Ralph de Diceto, *Radulfi de Diceto Decani Landoniensis Opera Historica*, vol. I, ed. William Stubbs (Lessing-Druckerei: Kraus Reprint, 1968), 256.

²⁶⁷ MS Bodley 851 (3041), f. 68r. In the next distinctio, Map retells the history of the most recent English kings. Eleanor's reputation is questioned yet again, as Map repeats the standard gossip about her scandalous divorce and possible affair with Henry's father, Geoffrey: "Cui successit Henricus Matildis filius, in quem iniecit oculos incestos Alienor Francorum regina, Lodouici

water and never remained in the church for the consecration of the Lord's body and blood.²⁶⁸ After becoming suspicious, Henno's mother spied on her daughter-in-law, revealing that on Sundays, the beautiful woman transformed into a dragon. She immediately told her son of what she had seen, who then sent for a priest. Sneaking up on the woman, the priest sprinkled her with holy water, and she burst through the roof shrieking loudly. Map ends the tale with the oft-repeated warning that "huius adhuc extant multa progenies" ("This lady had a numerous progeny, yet living") and the foreboding admonition that such loathsome creatures would eventually be dragged down against their will.²⁶⁹ This premonition appeared to many to be true in 1189 as Henry II approached death, abandoned by his wife and children, blasphemed "Why, therefore, should I venerate Christ? Why should I deign to honor him, who is taking away my

piissimi coniux, et iniustum machinata diuorcium nupsit ei, cum tamen haberet in fama priuata quod Gaufrido patri suo lectum Lodouici participasset. Presumitur autem inde quod eorum soboles in excelsis suis intercepta deuenit ad nichilum." ("To him Henry, son of Matilda, succeeded, and upon him Eleanor, queen of the French, the wife of the most pious Louis, cast her unchaste eyes, and contrived an unrighteous annulment, and married him, though she was secretly reputed to have shared the couch of Louis with his father Geoffrey. That is why, it is presumed, their offspring tainted at the source, came to nought").

²⁶⁸ MS Bodley 851 (3041), f. 51v.

²⁶⁹ MS Bodley 851 (3041), f. 52r. Another possibility of descent, put forth by M.R. James is that Henno is actually a reference to the Norman baron Hamo aux Dents or Dentatus, who rebelled against Duke William in 1047. Through a winding genealogical turn of events, Hamo's great-great-great-granddaughter, Isabel, would become King John's first wife.

honor on earth and allows me to be confounded so shamefully by some boy?"²⁷⁰ Circulating also was the accusation of murder against Richard I in the case of Conrad of Montferrat and its subsequent coverup, an event that would grow in infamy as it became intertwined with tales of the Old Man of the Mountain.²⁷¹

Richard of Devizes told of how Richard, with dragon banners unfurled, turned his back on Jerusalem after the majority of his army deserted him. Despite what Devizes described as his initial good intentions, he clearly described Richard's response as having been to the detriment of God's honor, not his own, a particularly poignant and blasphemous blow to the ideal crusader reputation.²⁷² The use of dragons by the family seems to have started with the reign of Richard,

²⁷⁰ MS Julius, f. 151r. The "boy" to whom Henry is referring is Philip Augustus.

²⁷¹ MS Bodley 851 (3041), fol. 69r. This accusation is also reported in the *Itinerary of Richard I* as being wholly fabricated by "certain of the French, who sought to veil their own wickedness by such falsehood, and they infused it into the minds of all the people" (222-223). The legends and gossip surrounding the Old Man of the Mountain are numerous, but as with most things, based on historical truth. The Old Man was Rashid ad-Din Sinan, the leader of the Ismaili Assassin Order or Hashashin. The assassination of Conrad of Montferrat, King of Jerusalem, was considered to be his last act, and despite attempts by the French kings and others to link Richard to the murder, these claims appear to be unfounded.

²⁷² "On account of which defection, the king, greatly enraged, or rather raving, and champing with his teeth the pine rod which he held in his hand, at length unbridled his indignant lips as follows: — "O God!" said he, "O God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? For whom have we foolish Christians, for whom have we English come hither from the furthest parts of the earth to

when standards were first being developed. There is some question as to where the design came from and whether it was attributable to the dukedom of Normandy based on an old French register that mentions the carrying of “le Dragon du Duc;” however, sources from Roger of Hoveden to Gervase of Tilbury reference its use by Richard and its meaning.²⁷³ The signification of the dragon and its place on Plantagenet banners, meant to represent destruction and extermination, a menace of death, lasted through to Edward III.²⁷⁴

Devizes also describes the men of the family, particularly John and Geoffrey (Henry’s illegitimate son) as having a “natural genuine perverseness” and portrays John as a madman, whose rage and rancor often sent him into fits of gnashing his teeth and lashing out.²⁷⁵ Within the same decade, William of Newburgh related a story of Richard’s previous conspiring with the

bear our arms? Is it not for the God of the Christians? O fie! How good art thou to us thy people, who now are for thy name given up to the sword; we shall become a portion for foxes. O how unwilling should I be to forsake thee in so forlorn and dreadful a position, were I thy lord and advocate as thou art mine! In sooth, my standards will in future be despised, not through my fault but through thine; in sooth, not through any cowardice of my warfare, art thou thyself, my King and my God, conquered this day, and not Richard thy vassal.” Richard of Devizes, *Chronicon de rebus gestis Ricardi Primi*, trans. J.A. Giles (Cambridge: In parentheses Publications: Medieval Latin Series, 2000), 61-62. This profane speech is given no ink in the *Itinerary* (258).

²⁷³ “Raising Dragon,” *The Scottish Antiquary, or, Northern Notes and Queries*, April 1898, vol. 12, no. 48, 149.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁷⁵ Richard of Devizes, 27.

devil in the form of a demon who had been forced to leave when Richard went through a second repentance in 1197.²⁷⁶ One must also be drawn to the fearful warning by Philippe Augustus to John in Roger of Hoveden's *Chronicles* on Richard's release from prison in Germany that he should be careful for "the devil has been loosed."²⁷⁷

It was not only English sources that sought to further the propaganda that the rulers of England (and much of France) were a blasphemous, devilish bunch that deserved whatever bad fortune befell them. As mentioned previously, some English sources, as well as the highly laudatory *Gesta Philippi Augusti* by Rigord and those by other French writers, countered the diabolical reputation of the Angevins by pursuing their own form of propaganda that exalted the French king, nicknamed "Deodonatus" or "Dieudonne," and gave him the role of the "Last World Emperor," a definite undercut to Richard's crusading reputation that Philippe appears to have coveted.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ William of Newburgh, *History of the Affairs of the English*, Book V, ch.9, in Flori's *Richard I* (399).

²⁷⁷ Hoveden, 297. It is interesting that this follows multiple references to the devil, the Antichrist, and Revelation in previous pages.

<https://archive.org/details/annalsofrogerdeh02hoveuoft/page/296/mode/2up?q=devil>

²⁷⁸ Rigord, *The deeds of Philip Augustus: an English translation of Rigord's "Gesta Philippi Augusti,"* trans. by Larry F. Field (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022, 109).

The eschatology surrounding the Last World Emperor is too complicated and lengthy to discuss here. Briefly, beginning in around 950, the abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der made popular in the West a legend concerning the end of days in which the Antichrist would be born on earth and



Figure 6: Miniature from the Chronique de St. Denis showing Louis VII and his third wife, Adele of Champagne, receiving their son, Philippe Augustus, directly from God. Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 782, fol. 280r.

usher in the Day of Judgment. The Last World Emperor, identified by Adso as a “king of the Franks,” would defeat Gog and Magog, return to Jerusalem, and lay down his royal crown and scepter, ending the Roman empire for good, and thus calling on the Lord to come and defeat the Antichrist alongside the Archangel Michael. Various other prophecies comparing Philippe to the Last World Emperor and the “pre-eminence of the Franks” abound, as do those assuring that Frederick II would be the final earthly ruler—a competition that Philippe was apparently very concerned with as he grew older. Rigord links Philippe to this tradition as well. For a more thorough discussion on the application of this prophecy to the various rulers of the time, see Jessalynn Lea Bird’s “Prophecy, Eschatology, Global Networks, and the Crusades from Hattin to Frederick II” Tradition, vol. 77 (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2022.3>.

Otia imperialia, Gervase of Tilbury's early thirteenth-century encyclopedic work that he began drafting while under the employ of the Angevin royal family, recounts the tale of "The Lady of the Castle of L'Éparvier," an obvious parallel to both Walter Map's and Gerald of Wales's works.²⁷⁹ Similar to the mysterious woman of Anjou, this lady would never fail to leave the church early, just before the consecration of the Lord's body. When kept from retreating during the consecration, the lady was carried off by a "spiritu diabolico" and flew away, destroying part of the chapel as she went.²⁸⁰ Following a discussion of Fall, Gervase then misquotes Peter Comestor as Bede, stating that "the devil chose a particular kind of serpent with a woman's face, because like approves of like, and then gave its tongue the power of speech."²⁸¹ Immediately following, Gervase wrote about some women with the ability to change into serpents—an accusation he takes most seriously. He then tells the story of Raymond of Rousset, who married a beautiful, unknown woman who made him promise not to see her naked. After catching her bathing, the lady turned into a serpent and disappeared under the water, returning only to visit her children beyond the sight of other humans.²⁸² It was this same story from the

²⁷⁹ Despite beginning his work while under the favor of Henry II and Henry the Younger, *Otia imperialia* would not be finished until much later, eventually being dedicated to Holy Roman Emperor, Otto IV, who just happened to also be Henry II's grandson—and who also unceremoniously lost his throne in 1215 after repeated problems with Pope Innocent III.

²⁸⁰ Gervase of Tilbury, f. 69r.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, f. 10r.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, f. 10v.

early thirteenth century that Jean d'Arras would reference in the *Roman de Mélusine* as one of his primary authorities.

Hiding his association of the Angevins with a demon ancestor between tales of demonic possession and incubi, Caesarius of Heisterbach, writing nearly a decade after John's death in 1216 fails to repeat the exact tale of how the evil forebear corrupted the line. He does, however, mention in his discussion of the measurement of humanity in children born from human and demonic parents that the current kings of England are reported to have originated from a "matre phantastica."²⁸³ Caesarius was writing at some point between 1220 and 1235, demonstrating the myth had outlived at least John and was still being applied to Henry III.

The popularity of the Mélusine myth in association with the Plantagenets remained steady throughout the thirteenth century, well after the last "true" Angevin descended the throne.²⁸⁴ The strength of propaganda against them would outlive the family's main line, lasting well into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By the mid-thirteenth century, William of Tyre's *Historia* had been translated into old French and given new additions to bring it up to date by various anonymous authors. It appears that by that point, Richard was already being portrayed as a kind of phantom for Muslim mothers who would chastise misbehaving children with the

²⁸³ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus Miraculorum*, ed. J. Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1851), Bk III, c. 12, 124.

²⁸⁴ It is common to cease referring to this line of Plantagenets as "Angevins" after the death of John I, as he was responsible for the loss of most of the house's French lands, in particular, their namesake of Anjou. Technically, the Plantagenet line itself would survive through Richard II in 1399 when a minor branch of the house, the Lancasters, took over.

warning: “Quiet, King Richard is coming for you!”²⁸⁵ The ultimate culmination of these various crusading epic that gives its audience the full package: demon parentage, magic, massacres, and cannibalism.

4.3 Romancing the Demon: Jean d’Arras’s *Mélusine*

The *Mélusine* of Jean d’Arras needed to serve an altogether different kind of genealogical purpose. Stories of marvelous women who entered into pacts with human men, shunned Christian ritual, and finally revealed their diabolical form whether serpentine, fish-like, draconian or all of the above were not uncommon, particularly in the Poitevin region in France. Even English writers, when addressing a particular tale they had heard, made reference to the event having happened in France. Some, like Gervase of Tilbury, compared those draconic women with supernatural creatures in England called werewolves, which he authoritatively attested to having seen himself.²⁸⁶

In order to create his “vrayes chroniques” as a response to the myth of the Angevins, d’Arras essentially crafted his own genre, meticulously combining elements of chivalric romance with actual historical precedent to legitimize his patron, Jean, the Duke of Berry. It is for that reason that d’Arras goes to great lengths to mention various regions in both Europe and the

²⁸⁵ This particular reference is from Jean de Joinville’s *The Life of St. Louis*, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. Français 13568, f. 40. It also appears in the Old French Continuation of William of Tyre (both the Lyon and Ernoul), as well.

²⁸⁶ Gervase of Tilbury, f. 10r.

crusader states and how they relate to the Lusignan family, though often he is historically inaccurate in his names and quite vague with dates that correspond to real-life events.

4.3.1 Context, Bias, and Goals: Making Connections

Writing at the very end of the fourteenth century, Jean d'Arras placed his narrative without a clear chronological marker; however, judging from the events, people, and regions, the reader is meant to recall the third and fourth crusades. Though the Plantagenets dominate much of the space in the contemporary chronicles, the house of Lusignan is prevalent as well. Their close association with the Angevins, both as rebel lords and crusader warriors, make the association between the two nearly inseparable, particularly as they seemed to impulsively switch loyalties between their Angevin overlords and the kings of France. As one of the most powerful noble families in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Lusignans were a considerable force for any ruler to have on their side.

They began as the lords of Lusignan in the tenth century, their primary base being the massive castle near Poitiers where they served almost as local sovereigns, which remained as a symbol of power and prestige until the mid-fifteenth century.²⁸⁷ From there, they acquired the county of La Marche in central France in the early twelfth century, the county of Eu in Normandy, as well as Angoulême by the early thirteenth century. And these, of course, were just their European holdings. In the Latin East, the Lusignans were well established, having ruled in

²⁸⁷ See Figure 6 below for an image of the Lusignan Castle from the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, c. 1416, by the Limbourg brothers.

Jerusalem, Antioch, Tripoli, and Cyprus.²⁸⁸ Most of these acquisitions were made via marriage or money. How the Lusignan factored into relations between the Angevins and Capetians/Valois and why their family legend would be grafted on to that of the Duke of Berry, brother to King Charles V of France, is a bit more complicated.

As counts of La Marche, the Lusignan family technically fell under the rule of Eleanor, Henry II's wife, as she was from the Ramnulfid house and had inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine from her father in 1137. They were, by many accounts, happy to live up to the reputation given to unruly Poitevin nobles, quick to revolt and change alliances. In the *Chronicle of Saint-Maixent* from 1140, Hugh VI, a Lusignan lord from the eleventh century, was referred to as "Hugh the Devil" for his aggressive, land-stealing tendencies and mistreatment of the monks of Saint-Maixent and was also threatened with excommunication for his disagreements with the abbot there.²⁸⁹ By collecting tallage, accepting castles, and founding religious houses, the lords expanded their territory and power. The family's most important alliance would come in 1127 when Hugh VII befriended Geoffrey de Rancon, who brought the Lusignan into contact with the ruling Aquitanians and counts of Poitou through his deep connections with the region—and that

²⁸⁸ Technically, the house of Lusignan was also prevalent in Armenia in the late thirteenth and into the fourteenth centuries; however, that was a cadet branch, and it is a bit of a stretch to make any connection there. It is worth mentioning, however, because the name "Lusignan" must have still held significant influence for it to have been taken up once again.

²⁸⁹ "Chronicon Sancti-Maxentii Pictavensis," *Chroniques des églises d'Anjou*, ed. Paul Marchegay and Émile Mabille (Société de l'histoire de France, 1869), 402.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k202275v/f441.item>.

much closer to the French crown when Eleanor married Louis VII in 1137, invariably enlarging their demesne.

The close Lusignan connection with both the Poitevin region and the House of Capet would continue, even after the separation of Louis and Eleanor, and the barons would prove nearly ungovernable as Henry II tried to institute his control over his wife's regions after their marriage in 1152. When new revolts started up in 1168, Henry returned to Poitou with Eleanor and a trusted baron, Patrick of Salisbury. The Lusignans found themselves the beneficiaries of Henry's wrath as he destroyed multiple castles before leaving Eleanor and Salisbury to clean up the mess and govern after he left for Poitiers. Geoffrey of Lusignan, described in the *History of William Marshal* as a man of "lupine treachery," and a small group of men ambushed Eleanor and Salisbury as they rode to Poitiers. Eleanor fled to a nearby castle, while Earl Salisbury, his nephew William Marshal, and their small band of men tried to hold them off. In the melee, the Earl was treacherously killed from behind and the young William Marshal taken hostage.²⁹⁰ His treatment by the Lusignans before being ransomed by Eleanor was described as wicked and barbaric, though the author acknowledges this was partly out of expediency—they were terrified of Henry being given the time to hunt them down and what would befall them should they be caught.²⁹¹ Still, Geoffrey of Lusignan would continue his war against Henry, backed by the king of France, through the remainder of the year, until in 1169 when kings Louis and Henry met in Maine to discuss a peace.

²⁹⁰ Nigel Bryant, trans. *The History of William Marshal: The True Story of England's Greatest Knight* (New York: Boydell, 2008), 44.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Troubles would flare between the three houses again. The Lusignan faction would fluctuate between alliances between Young Henry and the King of England in the Revolt of 1173-74 that eventually came to include all of Henry's sons against him. According to the *History of William Marshal*, Henry originally backed Richard's aggressive treatment of the nobles in Poitou, including the Lusignan, stating that he hoped his son could teach them a well-deserved lesson in obedience and sent a huge army to defeat them and the other Poitevin nobles in their efforts against Richard.²⁹² Eventually, Henry encircled his sons and their allies, including Geoffrey of Lusignan, in a castle at Limoges. This, in turn, meant also that Lusignan allegiances varied for and against the Capetians, who conspicuously aided the Young Henry in all his exploits. By this time, the Lusignans had already also made a name for themselves in the Outremer, the Crusader States in the Latin East. At least three major members of the family had gone on crusade since the early twelfth century, with Aimery of Lusignan traveling to Jerusalem in the early 1170s. By the time his brother Guy arrived in 1180, Aimery had become the Constable of Jerusalem. Guy married Sibylla of Jerusalem and would eventually inherit the throne in 1186, despite the outrage of the nobles, though his army would lose miserably to Salah-Din at the Battle of Hattin in 1187, Jerusalem would fall, and both brothers would be held prisoner until 1188, thus ushering in the call for the Third Crusade.

Back in France, Richard had angered many of the Aquitanian nobles once again beginning soon after the culmination of Henry the Young King's revolt.²⁹³ He had made peace

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁹³ Richard spent about fifteen years putting down repeated revolts in Aquitaine. Understandably, from the point of view of the barons, Richard was vicious and cruel; however, Gerald of Wales

with his father and as a result, had to subdue and punish those Poitevin nobles who had taken his side, which he did with noted brutality. Various revolts sprang up against him throughout the region throughout the late 1170s and early 1180s, his enemies fleeing to the court of the new king of France, Philip Augustus. As Richard's power and renown grew, he found himself once again in conflict with his father. By 1183, his brothers, Henry and Geoffrey, had become involved and succeeded in turning his Aquitanian nobles against him. Tensions ceased temporarily when the Young Henry died in 1183, thus making Richard heir to England; however, when he refused to give up Aquitaine and Henry once again rearranged his succession, the insurrections began once again, with Geoffrey being supported by the French king against Richard and Henry until Geoffrey's death in 1186. Mediation was attempted by Henry to smooth relations between Richard, who had been joined on the battlefield by his brother John, and Philip.

Hostilities would slow once again when word traveled about Guy of Lusignan and the losses in the Outremer. Richard took the cross and began preparations but was deterred in 1188 when Geoffrey of Lusignan rebelled against him, killing one of his closest friends—an action reported by Gerald of Wales and Ralph Diceto as having been supported by Henry.²⁹⁴ After succeeding against Geoffrey of Lusignan and other Poitevin barons, financially aided by Henry, and attacking Toulouse, Philip Augustus was pushed to step in after receiving Henry's promise that he would not help his son anymore. The oath would not last, and Henry sent a huge army to

stated this was the perspective of envious men, while still also quoting Lucan in acknowledging that he rejoiced “to travel only on bloodstained roads.” MS Julius. 148r.

²⁹⁴ MS Julius, f. 147v; Ralph Diceto, *Ymagines Historiarum*, 54.

Richard's aid, crushing the French troops. The only thing that seemed to slow the conflict was the fact that the money being spent on these continental skirmishes was taking away from the crusading effort—and anyone who killed a noble who had taken the cross risked being excommunicated. Having been promised a better deal than what he could get out of his father, Richard came to the side of Philip Augustus in early 1189 and was fed healthy doses of propaganda relating to Henry's plans of marrying Richard's betrothed to John in order to give him Anjou and Poitou. Richard officially broke from his father, in public, by doing homage to the King of France for all of his continental holdings: Normandy, Poitou, Anjou, Maine, Berry, Toulouse, and all other fiefs.²⁹⁵ According to Gerald of Wales, Henry had instigated these events through his wickedness and delaying his trip to the Holy Land, thus incurring God's vengeance: "Because you have been an everlasting enemy, I will deliver you up to blood, and blood shall pursue you; and since you have hated blood, blood shall pursue you."²⁹⁶

By the middle of 1189, Henry lost the loyalty of his youngest and favorite son, John, retreated to Chinon, and died of a bleeding ulcer. His death would halt the hostilities. The abasement of his corpse appeared to many a sign of divine punishment, and Richard's second-hand fault at killing his father seemed readily apparent when his father's nose began gushing with blood in his presence.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Gervase of Canterbury, I, 435; Ralph of Diceto, II, 57–8; Roger of Howden, *Gesta Henrici*, II, 50.

²⁹⁶ MS Julius, f. 150v; from Ezekiel 35: 3-6.

²⁹⁷ Roger of Hoveden, 111; Roger of Wendover, 76. The implication of Richard's guilt stems from the belief in cruentation, that a body would bleed in the presence of its murderer.

Henry's death, however, would not stop the interactions between the three powerful families, however. In 1190, both Richard and Philip were on their way to the Outremer. By 1191, Richard was in talks with Guy of Lusignan, despite all their previous troubles. Guy had been besieging Acre since his release from prison in 1188 and agreed to aid Richard in his campaign against Isaac Comnenus for Cyprus in exchange for Richard's support of Guy against Conrad of Montferrat in Acre as king. However, Conrad had the support of Philip Augustus and Leopold of Austria. In 1192, after Conrad's questionable death, Guy purchased Cyprus from the Templars, who had purchased it from Richard a year prior. He did not hold it long, however, as the land passed to his brother, Amalric, in 1194 after his death.²⁹⁸

Despite the ability to support each other in the Latin East, peace between the Angevins and the Lusignan did not continue at home. The trouble would come with the death of Richard in 1199. John, the last surviving son of Henry II, expected to lay claim to the Angevin territories. He was supported by many of the English and Norman nobility, as well as his mother. At issue was the claim of Arthur of Brittany, Henry II's grandson by his son Geoffrey, who had the support of Philip Augustus and a majority of the nobles from Breton, Maine, and Anjou. Doing homage to Philip for his continental lands, John was able to gain the acceptance of his French overlord in claiming Richard's possessions, at least for a little while. John's new peace would not last, however, as he decided in 1200 to marry Isabella of Angoulême, despite the fact that he

²⁹⁸ It was the curious circumstances and timing of Conrad of Montferrat's death to lead many to blame Richard for having some part in it, having made an agreement with the Old Man of the Mountain. It would have been advantageous for him to have a vassal in the position; however, none of the claims have been proven even remotely true.

was already married and Isabella was already engaged to Hugh IX of Lusignan. This would be a politically advantageous marriage, giving John better control over huge swaths of Aquitaine, namely Poitou and Gascony. According to the author of *William Marshal*, the count of Angoulême whole-heartedly approved of the idea and had smuggled his daughter away from Hugh IX, probably in an attempt to keep the Lusignans from becoming alarmingly powerful.²⁹⁹ Once again, the Lusignans rose up in revolt, eventually appealing to the King of France as John's feudal lord to intervene on their behalf. When John refused to appear at the French court in 1202, Philip took Normandy and gave all his feudal lands to his rival, Arthur, who joined with the Lusignans to threaten Eleanor at Mirebeau Castle. It was at the Battle of Mirebeau that John defeated Arthur, while also capturing Geoffrey and Hugh of Lusignan. This Lusignan rebellion, though failed, would cost the Angevins half their French lands. News of the defeat reached Philip by way of another Lusignan, Ralph, the count of Eu, but despite the win, John made no friends in Anjou or Poitou with his arrogance. When Arthur was murdered in 1203, most suspected John, which in turn angered those few supporters he had left, causing many to defect to the King of France. Particularly notable was his abandonment by Geoffrey of Lusignan, who feigned a change of heart, had assured the king of his loyalty, only until John released his hostages, and then promptly turned against him and sided with Philip.³⁰⁰ John lost Normandy in 1204.

Despite their struggles, the house of Lusignan would maintain their hold in Aquitaine long after John's death in 1216. They would succeed in their ambitions in 1220, when Isabella of Angoulême, John's abducted widow, would finally be brought into the family through marriage

²⁹⁹ *History of William Marshal*, 152.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

to Hugh X, her previous fiancé's son, which successfully granted them that land through the marriage. She had five children by him, making them half-siblings to John's heir, Henry. This would actually set up more problems for the Lusignans and the English, as it created what scholars of a newly discovered truce between the two from 1222 have called "a legal and genealogical maze," while allowing the Lusignans to keep switching sides between the Plantagenets and the Capetians.³⁰¹ Perhaps realizing it was smarter to stay on the good side of that rebellious family, Henry III insisted on the presence of three of his half-brothers in England, where he gave them high-ranking positions and their sons aided in putting down multiple uprisings by disgruntled English barons. On the continent, they remained the largest obstacle to Capetian consolidation until the 1300s when male heirs ran out. In 1303, Angoulême was sold to Philip IV, and in 1314, the king annexed La Marche on the death of Yolande of Lusignan.

Though still surviving in various states in the Outremer, the power and prestige of the Lusignans had faded on the European continent.³⁰²

4.3.2 Legitimacy, Transfer of Power, Authority

³⁰¹ Amicie Péliissié du Rausas and Nicholas Vincent, "A Newly Discovered Anglo-Lusignan Truce," *Historical Research*, vol. 95, Issue 270 (November 2022), 556-574.

³⁰² By this, I am referring to the primary house, as opposed to the various branches. Although as a family they were still influential in their respective regions, they never again had the power they achieved in the 12th and 13th centuries. Many cadet branches, however, would emphasize prior claims to add to their prestige well into the 19th century.

It would not be incorrect to see the Lusignans as a force that needed to be dealt with, a constant thorn in the side of those Angevin kings who tried to assert their authority in the Aquitaine, as well as a problem for the Capetians who attempted to consolidate and unify French lands. The conflicts between the Plantagenets and the Capetians would result in the Hundred Years' War, which stretched from 1337 to 1453, as the English house attempted to build back its French empire that had dwindled down to the lands of Gascony after the death of Charles IV, the last Capetian, and the succession of Philip VI, Count of Valois.

Because Charles IV died with no sons or brothers, and Salic Law made female succession an impossibility, the choices for his succession were either Edward III of England or Philip, the Count of Valois. To check English power, French barons convened and decided to pass the crown to Philip.³⁰³ By 1337, Edward was threatening war over his claim to the French throne. Initially, the English saw many successes, winning back many of their lost territories with the Treaty of Brétigny in 1360, primarily those in Aquitaine, but by 1369 the fighting had resumed and all acquisitions were slowly chipped away.

Jean de Berry was made the Count of Poitou in 1356, by his father, King Jean II of France. When Poitou returned to English control, Jean's father gave him the new duchies of Berry and Auvergne as recompense; however, with the 1360 treaty, Jean was taken as a hostage to England. With his return to France in 1369, his brother, now King Charles V, gave him control over huge swaths of land as lieutenant general, charged him with keeping the English contained to the western section of the country, and when Poitou came back into his possession

³⁰³ Technically, Edward III had claims through not only his father's line, but also through his mother's, Isabella of France, daughter of Philip IV; however, this would not be considered in light of the adherence to Salian Law.

in 1372, Berry found himself dealing with the rebellious Poitevins, struggling to convince them to accept his new laws and taxation. He became regent to the crown in 1380 when his nephew, Charles VI, inherited the throne, and remained a powerful figure in the governance of the kingdom while Charles was a child and as he battled with bouts of mental instability. It is within this context that the *Roman de Mélusine* by Jean d'Arras, commissioned by Jean de Berry, must be considered.

Berry commissioned the romance in the late 1380s for two essential purposes. One was to sway Poitevin loyalty to the French side. The local superstition, which very clearly believed in the truth of the Mélusine fairy, appeared to have supported the English holding the castle, despite Berry controlling the town of Lusignan. Second, Berry needed to establish himself as a legitimate heir to the land.³⁰⁴ To make this connection, Berry needed to tie himself to the character, as well as negate the pre-Christian elements of the Mélusine tale that seem much closer to the demonic mother of the Angevins.

To address the first issue, that of connecting with the region, Jean de Berry needed to connect to the Lusignan legacy. He succeeded in retaking Poitou in 1372, and after winning back the castle in 1374, Jean moved his family there. However, living in the vicinity was not going to

³⁰⁴ Pierre Bersuire, a native Poitevin monk, mentioned the tale as early as the first half of the fourteenth century, reciting the same story in the same place but without mentioning names in the prologue of his *Reductorium morale*. The tale reads the same: a noble enters into a marriage pact with a woman who “serpente mutata esse fertur” who creates the lands in the Lusignan region. Pierre Bersuire, “Prologue to Book 14,” *Reductorium morale* (Paris: Claude Chevallon, 1521), 672. <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/184192>.

be a strong enough tie, and there needed to be some spectacle of transfer of ownership in order to make the townspeople—who already referred to themselves as “Merlusins”—believe that it was Jean who deservedly inhabited the castle, not the English.³⁰⁵ To do this, Jean d'Arras turned the Poitevin legend on its head: originally, it was claimed that Mélusine would visually appear to her chosen victor in the event of an armed conflict. Word had spread that Creswell, an English captain, had seen Mélusine, which implied that she had chosen him as the master of the castle.³⁰⁶ To counter this, d'Arras added an important caveat:

They say for certain that since she founded it, any time it changes hands, by acquisition or conquest, that the said fortress of Lusignan could not remain in anyone's hands for more than thirty years *if he was not from the said lineage on his father or mother's side*. And now, as I have told you in this history, when the said fortress changes lords, the serpent appears three days before.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Pierre Brantôme, *Oeuvres Complets: Les Vies des Grands Capitaines Français*, vol. 6, ed P. Merimée and L. Lacour (Paris: P. Jannet, 1858), 22.

³⁰⁶ Françoise Lehoux, *Jean de France, Duc de Berri*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions A. and J. Picard, 1966), 335-343.

³⁰⁷ MS 3353, f. 164 r, 164 v. “Et dit on pour certain que, depuis qu'elle fu fondee, pour change, pour acquest our pour conquest, que la dicte forteresse de Lusegnen ne demourra xxx. ans acomplis en main d'ome qui *ne feust extraiz de la dessus dicte lignie de par pere ou de mere*. Et sachiez que toutesfoiz, comme je vous ay ey dessus retrait en l'ystoire, quant la dicte forteresse doit changier seigneur, la serpente s'appert trois jours devant.” Emphasis mine.

Following, d'Arras created a fictional interaction between Creswell and his mistress in which Mélusine appeared to him as a sign that he should surrender the castle to its rightful owner:

He said he saw, clearly and distinctly, before his bed a serpent, long and marvelously thick, and its tail was seven to eight feet long, striped in blue and silver. He could not tell how she had entered, as all the doors were closed and locked, and a large fire burned in the fireplace. The serpent began to beat the bed with her tail, but without hurting them. He said he had never before in his life, or since, felt such fear. He said that he sat up straight and took the sword that was by his head. And then, he continued to my lord, Alixandre said to him: "Now, Creswell, you who have been to so many great strongholds, are you afraid of this serpent? Certainly, it's the lady of the fortress who founded it. Know that she will never hurt you. She has come to show you that you must give up this place."³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ MS 3353, f. 164 v. "Il vit, ce disoit il, apparoir, presentement et visiblement, devant son lit une serpente, grande et grosse merueilleusement, et estoit la queue longue de vii. a viiii. piez, burlee d'azur et d'argent. Et ne sçot oncques par ou elle entra, et estoient tous les huiz fermez et barrez. Et le feu adroit grant en la cheminee. Et aloit la serpente, debutante de sa queue sur lit, sans eulx mal faire. Et dist de certain a monseigneur qu'il n'avoit oncques en sa vie eu, ne ot depuis si grant paour. Et dist qu'il se dreça en son seant, et prist l'espee qui estoit a son chevez. El lors lui dist, si comme il recordoit a monseigneur, celle Alixandre: 'Comment, Cersuelle, vous

The serpent then changed into human form and remained there for the entire night, sitting silently by the fire and watching them before eventually reverting to her serpent shape, just as dawn approached. Through this small inclusion, d'Arras was able to negate the original legend that stated that because Mélusine appeared to Creswell, the castle should rightfully be considered his and turned ownership over to Jean de Berry, who d'Arras stated had legitimately conquered it.³⁰⁹ Through this small aside, d'Arras could show that the fairy actually *did* approve of Berry's acquisition of the lands. It could also negate any Plantagenet influence on the myth by creating a more palatable and complete version of the story that addressed what they saw as their noble town's history, as it was really the story of the town as much as it was the House of Lusignan.

The second point, legitimacy, was also assured along cognatic bloodlines: the romance details the successes of Mélusine's fourth son, Antoine, who became the duke of Luxembourg, a connection Jean de Berry could claim through his mother, Bonne, or his grandfather, Jean of Bohemia and Luxembourg. By the time of writing, many of the former Lusignan territories detailed in the romance had long since left their control. Mirroring historical fact, d'Arras goes to great lengths to show the reach of the house of Lusignan and tie the duke to it. Two of the sons, Urian and Guyon became the kings of Cyprus and Cilicia (Armenia), respectively. As mentioned, Antoine gained the duchy of Luxembourg, and Renaud became king of Bohemia. This, too, has an important function, as all of the sons gained their territories through crusades and feats of chivalric prowess. More importantly, d'Arras detailed how the fortunes of the

qui avez esté en tant de bonnes places, avez vous paour de celle serpente? Certes, c'est la dame de ceste forteresse, et qui la fist fonder. Et sachiez qu'elle ne vous fera ja mal. Elle vous vient monstrier comment il vous fault dessaisir de ceste place.'"

³⁰⁹ MS 3353, f. 164 r.

Lusignan rulers in Cyprus and Cilicia declined substantially. He insinuated that the legitimate French line was forever gone by relating the historical Geoffrey of Lusignan, nephew of King Guy of Jerusalem, to the character of Geoffrey au Grant Dent, who burns his brother Froimont and other monks alive in the abbey of Maillezais.³¹⁰ The real Geoffrey was known in the Poitou region for his brutal treatment of Benedictines and Cistercians and was eventually excommunicated in 1232 for his vicious treatment of two churches in the territory, Maillezais and Notre-Dame de l'Absie. This same historical Geoffrey was known for his battle cry “Il n’y a pas de Dieu,” and was forced to Rome to receive papal dispensation in 1233.³¹¹ The narrative shows this blasphemous Lusignan as having borne no children, thus cutting off the line of potential competition.

If having an entire prose romance dedicated to legitimizing a lineage claim through historicizing its fictions was not a strong enough method for providing an authorized transfer of power, Jean de Berry would continue the mission even after commissioning *Méluſine*. In the early fifteenth century, Berry, a well-known patron of the arts, employed the famous Dutch miniaturists, the Limbourg brothers, to create a small book of hours: the *Trés Riches Heures de Duc de Berry*. The book in itself is perhaps one of the most recognizable artifacts from the Middle Ages, and it is definitely the most well-preserved and important samples of an extant book of hours, breviaries that mark the divisions of the day with fixed times of prayer at regular intervals. Beginning with pages dedicated to the calendar, the illustration for March is

³¹⁰ Philippe Labbe, *Nova bibliotheca manuscriptorum librorum*, vol. tomus secundus, apud Sebastianum Cramoisy, 1657), 238.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=pqNMUe6wgosC&pg=GBS.PA238&hl=en>.

³¹¹ Louis Stouff, *Essai sur Méluſine*, 94.

particularly interesting in the context of the Mélusine story. Across the top of the page is an astrological projection, and the bottom third shows peasants doing the first of the year's field work, sowing and plowing. In the middle of the illumination is the castle of Lusignan as it looked in the early fifteenth century when Berry used it as a favorite residence. At the right of the castle is a tower and just above it, a dragon can be seen flying overhead, an obvious intended link to the story and Berry's right to ownership.



Figure 7: Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry. Chantilly, Musée Condé, Bibliothèque, MS 65, fol. 003v.

4.3.3 The Cypriot Episode: A Negation of Plantagenet Influence

If we consider the *Roman de Mélusine* as a carefully crafted pseudo-historical work that was intended to do more than simply entertain or reinforce the value system of a specific class, then each and every part of it becomes something to dissect and decipher. For example, a large portion of the narrative, most of it in fact, is dedicated not to Mélusine, as we would infer from the title, but to her semi-magical sons and their adventures. These deeds are carefully recounted in order to emphasize the chivalric military actions of her crusading sons, and most importantly, to tie them to real-life historical events that remove any Angevin sympathies that would be found in the true chronicles and replace them with a thoroughly French version of events.

Perhaps the best example of this is the so-called “Cypriot Episode” that occurs immediately after d’Arras described Mélusine’s excessive maternal output—seven boys in as many paragraphs. What follows is the tale of Urian and Guyon, the first and third son, who hear from two knights that the Sultan of Damascus had placed the King of Cyprus under siege. Fully understanding the reality of having so many heirs, the brothers decided that fighting the Saracens would give them honorable renown, as well as potentially allowing them to conquer foreign land. The narrative presents the brothers as liberators, making the connection between the good Christian mission, and the evil Saracen menace that must be stopped, despite the fact that their stated objective is to obtain land for themselves. Urian claims that they have “voulenté de conquerir terres et pays” (“desire to conquer lands and countries”);³¹² however, when they enter

³¹² MS 3353, f. 43r.

the lands, it is repeated by the brothers, the king of Cyprus, and a messenger that they are in fact “soudoyers Jhesucrist” (“soldiers for Jesus Christ”).³¹³

Having saved Cyprus from the Saracen enemy, the brothers attend a meeting with the king, greeted happily by townsfolk who claim, “Il est entré en ceste cité comme se il l’eust conquire” (“He has entered this city as if he had conquered it”) and “Bien viengnent les princes de victoire, par qui nous sommes resuscité du crueux servage des ennemis de Jhesucrist” (Welcome to the princes of victory, those who have rescued us from the cruel service of the enemies of Jesus Christ”).³¹⁴ The people welcomed them as victors, and from the moment they entered the kingdom, the brothers regarded it as an extension of their own, referring to it as “nostre droit heritage” (“our rightful heritage”).³¹⁵ When the king of Cyprus offered Urian the crown on his deathbed, the barons wept for joy.³¹⁶

The reality of the situation was far different. The Lusignans had not gained Cyprus by any valiant deeds. While Guy of Lusignan had briefly inherited Jerusalem because of his marriage, Cyprus had been conquered and taken from the pretender, Isaac Comnenus, by Richard the Lionheart. After soon realizing that he did not have the time, resources, nor the desire to remain with his army on the island after squeezing all of the taxes possible out of the population, Richard sold the island to the Templars in 1191. Within six months, the Templars wanted nothing to do with the island’s rebellious inhabitants and gave it back to Richard. By 1192, Guy of Lusignan was a landless widower after losing Jerusalem, and Richard needed someone to

³¹³ Ibid., f. 53v, f. 59v.

³¹⁴ Ibid., f. 60v; f. 60r.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid., f. 62r.

remain on the island and hold it for the Crusader states. Though the sources say it was *sold* to Guy, it is probable that Richard simply gave it to him so that he would not have to worry about it any longer.

This not-so-chivalric exchange of lands clearly would not meet the necessary standard of excellence for a noble house, nor would it make the Lusignan story brighter than that of their rivals, the Angevins. To ensure that the narrative fit with the goal of the Duke of Berry, d'Arras needed to embellish it in such a way that the House of Lusignan were brave conquerors, magnanimous rulers, and exemplary military men. By writing the Angevins out of the narrative completely, d'Arras could make it function how he needed to create the marvelous past that his patron wanted. To do so, he removed any unwanted characteristic traits or bad reputations from the Lusignan house, or at the very least assured his readers that there were no children born from those unwanted descendants. He then crafted a genealogy that placed the men in the Lusignan family in the right places, without explicitly giving any dates that could moor the story to any pesky historical facts, so that it would properly line up with that of its new Valois owner, Jean, the Duke of Berry.

Chapter 5 MOTHERHOOD

Since, therefore, the root was so completely vicious, how could a fruitful or virtuous shoot come forth from it?

-Gerald of Wales, *De principis instructione*³¹⁷

By my faith in God, I believe that that woman is nothing but a phantom, and that no fruit born of her womb can reach the perfection of goodness.

-Jean d'Arras, *Roman de Mélusine*³¹⁸

In the twenty-first century, when confronted with things we don't understand, we are often able to fall back on the science and technology of our day to find explanations to our questions. The Middle Ages, however, did not always have reliable, factual answers to people's questions and innermost fears. Attempts at easing social anxiety often led to the creation of rules around what was "good" by defining what was "bad," what was "natural" by defining what was "unnatural." That is precisely how we might demonstrate the reason for the existence of monsters throughout history, particularly in the medieval period, and is precisely what monster theory tries to explain—the ways in which a monster's characteristics define a society's anxieties of the unknown. The etymology of "monster" is telling. Considered to be derived from the Latin "monstrum" and "monere," a monster serves both as a portent and as a warning. As explained

³¹⁷ MS Julius, f.165r.

³¹⁸ MS 3353, f. 136v.

previously, in many ways, the word “monster” may be replaced with “woman,” and the definition still fits—both sit at what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen referred to as a “metaphorical crossroad,” demarcating the fears and anxieties of the time in which it appears.³¹⁹

As previously discussed, Western Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, particularly in France, had been experiencing a gradual change from partible inheritance to primogeniture—genealogies grew in popularity, lineages were exaggerated, and the necessity of legitimate male heirs was emphasized, which consequently placed increasing importance on the role of motherhood and all that it entailed. The result was a body of written works of all genres detailing the possible detriments that could be caused by mothers, primarily because it was an area of women’s lives over which men had relatively little control or knowledge. Women, curiously, had much in common with medieval monsters—they were inexplicable, imperfect, uncategorizable, and mysterious. Women were considered unstable. They held too much unchecked responsibility in the process of gestation and childrearing, making their duty both paramount and dangerous if not managed correctly and guided with the utmost moral rectitude. Mélusine, as both a woman and formal monster due to her hybrid state, was doubly suspicious from both a medical and religious standpoint. The roles of mother and monster made her the perfect choice for narrative propaganda for both the Angevins and Jean of Berry, as it could be used to serve two purposes: one to allow for misdeeds and the second to prove legitimacy, all of which hinged on ideas about maternity and inheritance.

5.1 Medical Discourses

³¹⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 4.

Notions of female imperfection, as well as their similarities to monsters, in religious discourses were thoroughly explained in Chapters One and Two; however, another aspect to this line of thinking is how it relates directly to female anatomy and the functions of the female body. It was a small leap from religious discourse based around notions of moral inferiority and implications of a debauched natural state thanks to a relation to Eve and the Fall to one based on natural philosophy, and like natural philosophy, medical thinking in the medieval period was based around methodological and epistemological principles. Medical discourses about women echoed essentially the same sentiment as religious ones by drawing parallels and making charged assertions about a woman's "true" nature or the hidden "meaning" behind any given female function. The rare exception being the text partially authored by Trota of Salerno, *The Trotula*, which while remaining relatively neutral in the bulk of the text that contains descriptions and remedies, still references the weaker nature of women in the introduction of the first book as a widely accepted fact, thanks largely to its reliance on Hippocratic theory.³²⁰ The natural concern,

³²⁰ "When God the creator of the universe in the first establishment of the world differentiated the individual natures of things each according to its kind, He endowed human nature above all other things with a singular dignity, giving to it above the condition of all other animals freedom of reason and intellect. And wishing to sustain its generation in perpetuity, He created the male and the female with provident, dispensing deliberation, laying out in the separate sexes the foundation for the propagation of future offspring. And so that from them there might emerge fertile offspring, he endowed their complexions with a certain pleasing commixtion, constituting the nature of the male hot and dry. But lest the male overflow with either one of these qualities, He wished by the opposing frigidity and humidity of the woman to rein him in from too much

then, would be just how much a character like Mélusine's innate sin or evil would be passed to her children and how. In the most basic sense, every natural defect or impurity found in women could potentially pass down to her children through the process of procreation and gestation, but that was, of course, not the only potential issue. Melusine was unnatural, not just as a woman, but also due to her otherworldly state.

5.1.1 Generation: What Makes a Man?

Most ideas about procreation came from ancient sources, particularly Aristotle and Galen, the latter of which was less deleterious to the natural character of women—but not by much. Aristotle's pursuance of a one-seed theory of generation argued that the father was the being that issued a "seed" or semen and was therefore both the formal and efficient cause of the creation of a fetus, whereas the mother was only the "material cause." He went so far as to compare the "fashioning" of an embryo to the curdling of milk:

The action of the semen of the male in 'setting' the female's secretion in the uterus is similar to that of rennet upon milk. Rennet is milk which contains vital

excess, so that the stronger qualities, that is the heat and the dryness, should rule the man, who is the stronger and more worthy person, while the weaker ones, that is to say the coldness and humidity, should rule the weaker [person], that is the woman. And [God did this] so that by his stronger quality the male might pour out his duty in the woman just as seed is sown in its designated field, and so that the woman by her weaker quality, as if made subject to the function of the man, might receive the seed poured forth in the lap of Nature." *Trotula*, ed. and trans. Monica Green (University of Philadelphia Press, 2001), 71.

heat, as semen does, and this integrates the homogeneous substance and makes it 'set'. As the nature of milk and the menstrual fluid is one and the same, the action of the semen upon the substance of the menstrual fluid is the same as that of rennet upon milk.³²¹

With arguments such as, "while the body is from the female, it is the soul that is from the male, for the soul is the reality of a particular body," it is easy to see why medieval theologians and medical professionals alike would see no problem in adopting and accommodating a "pagan" philosopher's words into something they themselves could use, as it seemed to perfectly suit their perception of woman as a "defective male," whose body was formed for procreation yet monstrous and incomplete.³²² Part of the fear and anxiety about the monstrous female body was that it was unpredictable and mystifying.³²³ There was a lack of permanent form, or more specifically what was considered the inability of a woman to maintain her physical form through various life stages, whether menstruation, pregnancy, or childbirth, that was particularly

³²¹ Aristotle. *On The Generation of Animals*. South Bend: Infomotions, Inc., 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, 37.

³²² *Ibid.*, 35.

³²³ As noted, medieval perceptions about women and monsters have proven to be eerily similar, primarily because much of the theories about both hinge on these beings having mysterious and unpredictable qualities that seem to personify social fears and anxieties about the unknown and impurity. Caroline Walker Bynum looks deeply at monsters as a categorical crisis in her previously mentioned book *Metamorphosis and Identity*, as does Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*.

abhorrent and monstrous.³²⁴ And it was contaminating.³²⁵ Though medieval theologians showed preferential treatment toward Aristotle's philosophies on the soul and rationality when it came to women, it was Galenic theories about anatomy and his focus on a two-seed theory in which both male and female bodies contained fluids and vapors that made up their seeds that drew the attention of most medical theorists. According to Galen and those who followed his writings, despite both men and women producing seeds, the female body was disconcerting because unlike the male body, it "leaked."³²⁶

³²⁴ Shaw, 4.

³²⁵ Menstrual taboos are nearly universal and almost always revolve around ideas about women being ritually unclean while menstruating, so it is not entirely surprising to find discourses regarding the "poisonous" character of the menstruating woman during the Middle Ages or prior. That being said, it is unusual to see condemnation of menstruation in learned scientific tracts until roughly the thirteenth century, according to Helen Rodnite Lemay, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35. At this point, Levitical traditions emphasizing ritual or spiritual uncleanness seem to be combined with or replaced by medical concepts stressing physical or material pollution. From the inclusion in medical texts, it was not a far leap to argue women were inherently evil because of their biological makeup to rationalizing that they were witches worthy of persecution, particularly in the fifteenth century when *Women's Secrets* influenced and was incorporated into Heinrich Kramer's infamous witchcraft text, the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

³²⁶ Shaw, 4. In the Galenic line of thinking, female "seed" was attributed to menstrual blood.

Menstrual fluid and vapors harbored “signs of monstrosity” and threatened contamination to both husbands and children. The lack of form also made women’s bodies monstrous. Menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth evidenced the capacity of the female body to change form, or rather, its incapacity to hold form.³²⁷

The most common metaphor used by medieval medical writers was that of comparing the fetus to a piece of hanging fruit: a mother’s body was full of dangerous substances, her blood in particular, that could harm the fetus, causing it to fall from her womb like fruit from a tree.³²⁸

³²⁷ Shaw, 4.

³²⁸ William F. MacLehose, “Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child,” *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 5. See also the *Trotula*: “Galen reports that the fetus is attached to the womb just like fruit to a tree, which when it proceeds from the flower is extremely delicate and is destroyed by any sort of accident. But when it has grown and become a little mature and adheres firmly to the tree, it will not be destroyed by any minor accident. And when it is thoroughly mature it will not be destroyed by any mishap at all. So it is when at first the infant is brought out from the conceived seed, for its ligaments, with which it is tied to the womb, are thin and not solid, and from a slight [accident] it is ejected through miscarriage. Whence a woman on account of coughing and diarrhea or dysentery or excessive motion or anger or bloodletting can

Writers were also wont to use plant metaphors in describing familial relations, particularly as lineages began to be emphasized. It is not surprising to see these metaphors so frequently used in *De principis*, as it is the author's goal to link motherhood with future descendants. Although Hippocratic ideas about embryology and procreation hinged on female inferiority—menses was not considered inherently harmful by either the ancient or the Arabic doctors influenced by them, but merely a sign of a woman's deficiency of heat—Western doctors increasingly saw menstruation as harmful and in situations barring pregnancy, in need of purgation. Reimagining what was “superfluous” as a negative, writers like Vincent of Beauvais cited Avicenna's theories on blood in terms of having a threefold function for the fetus: it fed it in utero, transformed into breast milk, and was also discharged after birth in the form of amniotic fluid.³²⁹

The retention of menstrual blood during pregnancy, although considered to be nourishment for the fetus, could also cause strange reactions or habits in a woman because of its superfluous build up that needed to be watched closely. Acknowledgement of cravings, ranging from a normal increase of appetite to what appears from a modern standpoint to be signs of pica, were attributed to the retention of the menses in the early months of pregnancy and described as having a negative effect on the fetus.³³⁰ Although necessary for the nourishment of the fetus, a

loose the fetus. But when the soul is infused into the child, it adheres a little more firmly and does not slip out so quickly,” 118.

³²⁹ Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, 31.34 (col. 2318) (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1964).

³³⁰ Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's 'De Secretis Mulierum' with Commentaries*, ed. by Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany: State University

woman's retained menstruation caused unusual and uncontrolled impulses and desires, which were considered to affect her imagination and enact a physiological change on the fetus, the inability of which to satisfy could cause physical deformity.³³¹ Furthermore, in regards to the legitimacy of the child, the "destruction of the paternal image, the natural form of the child, could occur at the moment of conception, or at any time during pregnancy," although the *Trotula* implies that there is a significant amount of time between when conception takes place and when a fetus may take on the "likeness of its mother or father," meaning those initial few months, one must be particularly careful not to imprint any unwanted traits onto the child.³³² Given the importance of maintaining a legitimate line in a time when there were very few ways of concretely determining it, the idea that a mother had the ability to deny a visible link with the

of New York Press, 1992), 141. "Pregnant women often desire unusual and foul-smelling foods. The reason for this is that their stomachs are infected with evil humors. Because the menses that have been retained flow to the stomach and cause them to desire foods that are similar to these humors. A woman sometimes craves something to such an extent that if it is not given to her the fetus dies because she is so weakened by the desire." These beliefs about women are clearly influenced by theological discourses emphasizing the insatiable and immoderate qualities of women who were considered incapable of self-regulating or controlling their own desires.

³³¹ Brian Lawn, ed., *The Prose Salernitan Questions: An Anonymous Collection Dealing with Science and Medicine Written by an Englishman c. 1200* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 19 and 236-7.

³³² Finn E. Sinclair, *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the "Chanson de Geste,"* 41. Green, 107.

father by altering its appearance was distressing, particularly because it lay outside the controlling framework of society.

Once the image of women as physically and morally impure had been created and disseminated in so many types of discourse, the notion of acknowledging the reality of any kind of maternal inheritance became exceedingly problematic . . . Any kind of resolution of the problem posed by the acknowledgement of the power of the female body and the woman as individual subject proved impossible to resolve in a coherent way. The differing ideologies and beliefs that framed the maternal body are here seen to conflict, producing an image of the female body and its potential influence that is contradictory and convoluted, open to different types of construction and reading in different social and textual contexts.³³³

This destruction of a physical connection with the father could be linked to the mother's imagination, but it could also be a symptom of her physical sin or innate female difference.

The recognition of the potential influence of maternal desire on the physical formation of the infant signals the fear of women's innate ability to escape the strategies of male control, a fear that also appears in didactic treatises aimed at women, aimed at the control of female behavior . . . In didactic treatises the strategies of control that dictate ideal female behavior have at their heart the

³³³ Ibid., 40.

desire to control sexual behavior, but their prescriptions are undercut by the recognition of the power of women to subvert male control . . . Didactic treatises may have presented an ideal of female comportment that proscribed social and moral behavior, but control of the extra-corporeal manifestations of female power—desire and imagination—lay beyond the strategies of representation that sought to confine, order, and sanitize the female body.³³⁴

5.1.2 “Mother Marks”

The notion that a woman could negatively corrupt her child in a variety of ways during the processes of procreation, gestation, and nursing was widespread. A related effect that a mother could imprint on a fetus was the “mother mark,” a physical representation on an infant’s body manifested from a mother’s sin, craving, emotional state, or wrongdoing. Described by David Williams, “the phenomenon of potential being without the binding limits of form. . . [was] therefore open to limitless deformations.”³³⁵ This could be used to describe something as simple as a birthmark, commonly known as a port wine stain:

This is evident in some people born with stains on their faces or on another part of the body. Truly this arises from menstrual blood, which, when there is too great an abundance, falls upon the child in the mother’s womb. And unless the little

³³⁴ Ibid., 41.

³³⁵ David Williams, *Deformed Discourse* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 175.

sack [*folliculus*] of the placenta is the intermediary between the falling blood and the child, [the blood] by penetrating would kill him who is exposed. Nevertheless from this there remains on the child a stain, which can never be destroyed, even when his skin has been stripped.³³⁶

More disconcerting than a birthmark, the moral laxity of a parent could result in deformity of the child, or as it would have more commonly been referred to, monstrosity.³³⁷ The link between sin and monstrosity or infirmity of some sort has biblical references: there are Levitical injunctions against those with deformities, in Matthew 9:2, Jesus heals a man with palsy by removing his sin, and in John 5:4, Jesus cures a man of lameness and sends him off with the advice to “go and sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.” There are some references, however, that attempt to negate this association--when Jesus cures a man of his blindness in John 9:1, he tells his disciples that the man had not become blind as a result of his or his parents’ sin, but so that God’s miracles could be seen working through him.³³⁸

³³⁶ Vincent de Beauvais, col.2330.

³³⁷ Kaye McLelland, “The Lame Man Makes the Best Lecher: Sex, Sin, and the Disabled Renaissance Body,” *Framing Premodern Desires: The Transformation of Sexual Ideas, Attitudes and Practices in Europe*, edited by Satu Lidman, Meri Heinonen, Tom Linkinen, and Marjo Kaartinen (Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 193.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1v2xsm3.13>.

³³⁸ Ibid.

Though many Church fathers agreed that deformities or monstrosities were evidence of God's will, there was still hesitation about claiming whether or not their sins were relevant to their impairment.³³⁹ As explained by Jeffrey Cohen in his theses on monsters, if the medieval mind saw the body as a symbol of order within a very general understanding of a Neoplatonically-ordered universe, an unaffected body was representative of a body that showed no indication of sin or God's displeasure.³⁴⁰ An affected or "disordered" body meant the opposite.

An almost obsessive preoccupation with blood and purity led to associations of monstrous birth and a mother's state in non-religious texts as well, creating an even more elaborate understanding of what these births could represent. In some stories, a monstrous birth demonstrated a mother's corrupt bloodline or a consequence of her unknown (read: common) heritage.³⁴¹

In *De principis*, we can clearly associate an uncommon and unnatural origin with its result—the woman came from an unknown land and, therefore, should not have been trusted.

³³⁹ Augustine, "The Case of Monstrous Births," *The Enchiridion, Addressed to Laurentius* (Unwin Brothers Printers, 1955), 117-118. In the *Enchiridion*, Augustine states that at the resurrection, "other births" or "monstrosities" will be restored to their *whole and complete* shape, meaning "normal." If the understanding is that sin is removed at the final resurrection, then the implication is that part of what is incomplete becomes whole when that sin is removed.

³⁴⁰ Jeffrey Cohen, *Monster Culture*, 6.

³⁴¹ Examples of this nature can easily be found, for example *Le roman du comte d'Anjou* or *Man of Law's Tale* by Chaucer.

That mistake would cause the family to follow down an unfortunate path full of sin, debauchery, and eventually, decline, particularly because the bloodline descended from this strange and diabolical woman. Henry's sons, for their part, used the connection to their benefit. While all of Europe gossiped about the devilish origins of the Angevins, Richard was frequently heard saying “de diabolo namque eos omnes uenisse et ad diabolum dicebat ituros esse”—that they had come from the devil and to the devil they would return.³⁴² Geoffrey insisted that he not be deprived of his natural, inherited right to behave as badly as he felt necessary.³⁴³ As Gerald stated, the root, stemming from that unknown countess and the two children she left behind, was too corrupt to create anything virtuous.

In the case of the later Mélusine story, the notion that a child literally shares its mother's blood and that traits are passed is more ambiguous. It is very clear that monstrosity is inheritable

³⁴² MS Julius, f. 165r. This phrase, in various forms, is cited by Gerald three separate times in *De principis*: by Richard I (f. 165r), by Heraclius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (f. 137v), and as a prophecy of Henry II given by St. Bernard of Clairvaux when he was a child (f. 167r).

³⁴³ Ibid. “Numquid ignores hoc nobis naturaliter proprium et quasi iure hereditario ab auis et attauis insitum et insertum, ut nullus ex nobis alterum diligat, sed ut semper frater fratrem, filius patrem, et e diuerso, totis nisibus infestare contendat? Noli ergo hoc iure nostro hereditario nos priuare, nec frustra ut naturam expellas elaborare” (“Do you not know that this property is naturally instilled and implanted in us, as if by hereditary right, from our grandparents and great-grandparents, so that none of us should love the other, but that brother should always strive to attack his brother, son against father, vice versa, and to all others? Therefore, do not deprive us of our hereditary right, nor labor in vain to drive out nature”).

from Mélusine herself, though her sons present a more conflicted understanding. Mélusine inherits her half-supernatural nature from her fairy mother, Pressine. When her human father breaks his pact with her mother by viewing her in her childbed, she and her daughters are forced to leave. Later, to avenge their mother, Mélusine and her sisters commit patricide, locking their father in a mountain. Filled with rage, Pressine curses her daughters, giving the most pointed admonition to the eldest, Mélusine, foreshadowing the conclusion of the narrative.

The power of your father's seed would eventually have drawn you and your sisters toward his human nature, and you would soon have left behind the ways of nymphs and fairies forever. But I proclaim that henceforth every Saturday you shall become a serpent from the navel down. If, however, you find a man who wishes to marry you and will promise never to look upon you or seek you out on Saturday and never speak of this to anyone, you shall live out your life like a mortal woman and die naturally . . . if you are ever separated from your husband, know that your former tribulations shall return, without end, *until the High Judge sits in judgment*.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ MS 3353, f. 5v. “. . . car non obstant *la verité du germe de ton père*, toy et tes seurs eut attrait avec soy, et eussiez bien briefment esté hors des mains de l'adventure de japhes et des faées, sans y retourner jamais ; et desoresmais je te donne le don que tu seras tous les samedis serpent des le nombril en abas, mais se tu trouvez homme qui te vueille prendre en espouse, et qu'il te promette que jamais le samedi ne te verra ne descclera ne revelera ou dira à personne quelconques, tu vivras ton cours naturel et morras comme femme naturelle, et de toy viendra

It is telling that her initial hybrid nature could be overcome by her father's purely human background and interesting that the ideal human state could be supplanted by a fairy's curse. Most importantly, however, is the innate "goodness" implied in being wholly human, more specifically a human male, and that regardless of any monstrosity passed via Pressine, and subsequently Mélusine, all would be put to rights at the Final Judgment. This statement squares clearly with the Augustinian idea that everything will be made whole and "right" at the end of days. All of this plants Mélusine firmly on the "unnatural" side before she meets and marries Raymondin, but what of their children?

Most of her sons, except for the two youngest, bear various mother marks, something that can only be seen as a direct inheritance from their mother. Without any reference to Mélusine having had strong emotions or upsets during her pregnancies, we are left to assume that their monstrosities were a result of her own unnatural state; and although these defects come with considerable wealth and status, there is no mention of how her sons may become fully human, if it matters, or if they can obtain salvation merely through their good deeds. As Peggy McCracken points out:

while a mother may participate in the conception of a child, even determine the child's nature, mother's blood cannot provide access to higher values and higher

moult noble lignée qui sera grande et de haulte proesse ; et par adventure si tu estoies decellée de ton mary, sachies que tu retourneroyes au tourment auquel tu estoies par avant, et seras tousjours sans fin jusques à *tant que le tres hault juge tiendra son jugement.*" Emphasis mine.

goods. Mélusine's legacy from her mother would seem to confirm this exclusion: when Pressine negates the value of her father's seed . . . her daughters lose the possibility of becoming human, and humanity is represented in this text as access to mortality and salvation.³⁴⁵

This juxtaposition between the advantages and disadvantages of being monstrous and unnatural seems to trickle down to Mélusine's sons because their physical deformities are for the most part forgiven and overlooked, yet their moral deformities are considered separate and reprehensible.

The idea of inheritable sin is clear in the Gerald of Wales version. It would influence the fortunes of the family from the time of Fulk Nerra to Henry II and his sons, allowing them to reach great heights, only to be brought down to crushing lows. We are not, in this instance, given any evidence of physical mother marks, however. What we are given are the details of her departure, and those themselves are telling. We know, for example, that she was not human—she could not remain for the Mass to be said and she *flew* out of the church window, though there is no physical description of *how*. We also know that because Gerald placed this Mélusine in between descriptions of the egregious deeds of the Angevin family, we are to read their mother marks as being internal, moral deformities, not physical. Blood, whether in the form of seed or when used to nourish a fetus in utero, transmitted these negative traits that then imprinted,

³⁴⁵ Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 89.

whether externally or internally, on future offspring; however, those types of blood transmission were not the only form to be considered.

5.1.3 Nature versus Nurture

Fears surrounding the transmission of traits did not stop at conception or gestation. Many felt that bad intentions, sin, and moral corruption could be passed through the breast milk of mothers and wet nurses, hence the multiple examples of proscriptions surrounding not only what a nursing woman may consume but also what type of upright person she should strive to be.

Although milk was considered to be more refined than the *materia* that helped to create the child, it was, in essence, still believed to have derived from menstrual blood and therefore potentially dangerous.³⁴⁶ As blood, it was still thought to be able to transmit “virtue and spiritual qualities.”³⁴⁷ As explained by Angela Florschuetz, this led to anxiety surrounding breastfeeding because of the “unsavory or debilitating maternal influence [that] might occur through the act of ingestion.”³⁴⁸ By the late Middle Ages, fears surrounding breastfeeding were so intense that maternal nursing came to be considered a type of “moral education,” thanks largely to a growing concentration on Marian maternity.³⁴⁹ Tania Colwell noted the popularity of representations of a

³⁴⁶ Angela Florschuetz, 41.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Tania Colwell, “Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?” in *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller, and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 185-186.

nursing Mary and infant Jesus in the later period that emphasized the intimacy of the act, as well as the spiritual quality. In recalling Christ and the Virgin, maternal nursing could strengthen the bonding process, as well as help deflect any negative transmission of character, although this could also be used in the careful choosing of wetnurses.³⁵⁰ Based on the span of medical literature dedicated to the quality of milk and improving lactation, it becomes clear that these writers considered a child's food a source of not only nourishment, but also of pathology.³⁵¹ Strict regimens regarding a woman's food intake, mental state, and levels of exertion were of the highest concern, revealing a distrust of the female body as a reliable source of nutrition and of women's habits that were linked either implicitly or explicitly to moral worries about actions and their consequences. Despite that, many male writers still insisted on the sole practice of maternal nursing. Tania Colwell's mention of Anne de France's recommendation to her daughter more closely parallels the reality for noble women: "Examine carefully those whom you choose to nurse them [the children], for they should be sensible and of respectable birth."³⁵²

Based on two mentions in d'Arras's *Mélusine*, it is assumed that wetnurses were used for all of her children, although she seems to have nursed her youngest sons herself during her nocturnal visits after her banishment. After the birth of her third child, Guyon, d'Arras states that

³⁵⁰ Ibid. Though much of the choice centered on a woman's physical appearance (her weight, age, shape of breasts, etc.), another important aspect in finding a wetnurse was whether or not she had given birth to a boy, as they were considered more conducive to a woman's good health.

³⁵¹ MacLehose, 11.

³⁵² Tania Colwell, 186. "Bien regarder par qui vous les [les enfants] faictes [. . .] nourrir, car ceux-là doivent estre saiges et de honnestes condicions."

she had “excellent nurses” and that “she herself took such good care of her children that they flourished and became so strong that all who saw them marveled.”³⁵³ Whether this is in reference to breastfeeding or upbringing is unclear, however, the reader is soon informed of the births of five more sons, the last of which “was so wicked and cruel that before the age of four he had killed two of his nurses.”³⁵⁴ Toward the end of the manuscript, after having been betrayed by Raymondin and forced to leave, Mélusine continues to nurture her two youngest children:

[She] came to visit her children every night and held them by the fire, comforting them with all her power. The nurses saw her and dared not say a word, and the children prospered and grew so much that everyone who saw them was amazed.³⁵⁵

There are no images of Mélusine nursing in the early extant d'Arras manuscripts, which makes drawing a clear connection difficult, save for the vague reference; however, the overt reference

³⁵³ MS 3353, f. 40v, 41r.

³⁵⁴ MS 3353, f. 41v. Colwell claims in her chapter “Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?” that the references to Mélusine’s caring for her children and the amazing rate of their growth are clear indications that she shared the nursing duties with the nurses. She likens this to other heroic characters like Lancelot, who are also nursed by supernatural creatures.

³⁵⁵ MS 3353, f. 141r, 141v. “[Elle] venoit tous les soirs visiter ses enfans, et les tenoit au feu, et les aisoit de tout son pouvoir; et la veoient bien les nourrices, qui mot n’osoient dire. Et admendoient et croissoient les deux enfans si fort que chascun s’en donnoit merveille.”

to maternal nursing and its impact is very clear in later versions, translations, and even images surrounding Mélusine, most notably in Couldrette's verse version which was released less than a decade later (see below).



Figure 8: Mélusine visits the castle in dragon form and nurses her youngest children. Paris, BNF, MS français 24383, fol. 30r.

5.2 The “Totally Corrupt Root”

Though we are given no description of that fair woman from Anjou in *De principis instructione* by Gerald of Wales, aside from her beauty and refusal to remain in church during the Mass, we may make inferences regarding various details. These inferences may be accepted regardless of whether or not the story was intended to be considered factual or as a didactic warning. First, we know the demon countess was a mother, and whether one adheres to the

Aristotelian one-seed theory or the Hippocratic two-seed theory is largely irrelevant because, as a mother, some aspect of her nature would have been considered to have passed to her children, either during the very act of conception or during gestation. It could also have been done through nursing, although given her social status, that would have been unusual.

In Book Three, Chapter 27, of *De principis instructione*, Gerald of Wales goes to great lengths to stress the unsavory origins of his employer, Henry II and his family. As previously discussed, he begins the chapter by recounting the exploits of Eleanor's father, who stole the wife of one of his vassals and was cursed by a holy hermit who told him that no children would be born of the union, and if there were, they would not be "happy fruit."³⁵⁶ He then follows with oft-repeated gossip regarding Eleanor:

How Eleanor, queen of France, first behaved when she went overseas to Palestine, how she conducted herself after she had come back, both towards her first husband and towards her second, and how her sons, of whom there was such hope in the flower, withered without fruit, all this is well enough known.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ "Felices fructus," f. 164r. Gerald is actually incorrect here. The story was technically about Eleanor's grandfather, William IX of Aquitaine, however, the point is made all the same.

³⁵⁷ MS Julius, f. 164v. "Qualiter autem Alienor, regina Francie, primo tam in transmarinis Palestine partibus se habuerit, qualiter eciam postea reuersa tam erga primum maritum quam eciam secundum se postea gesserit, et de filiis eius, de quibus in flora tanta spes fueret, quomodo citra fructum eius emarcuerunt, satis est notum." Eleanor could quite possibly be regarded as one of the most "scandalous" women of the period. Her exploits were repeated by multiple

Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most recurrent rumors about Eleanor, mentioned both by Gerald and Walter Map, was that she had slept with Henry's father, Geoffrey of Anjou, and was therefore in large part responsible for why their children did not have offspring of their own. After repeating salacious accounts of the family, Gerald then goes on to address the demon ancestress that was ultimately culpable for their perpetual disgrace. When the countess, who was "facie pulcrior quam fide," was forced to remain in the church after the Gospel, she

. . . immediately cast off the cloak by which they held her and leaving behind her two little sons whom she had with her under the right side of the cloak, she snatched up under her arm the other two sons, who were standing on her left, and in front of everyone, flew out through the window of the church . . . taking her two children with her, never appeared again.³⁵⁸

With that last example of egregious behavior and sin, it appears that Gerald was trying to emphasize the role of this countess in passing on her transgressions and nature, and it is possible

chroniclers, such as John of Salisbury, William of Tyre, Richard of Devizes, Helinand de Froidmont, and Walter Map.

³⁵⁸ Gerald of Wales, f. 165r. ". . . reiecto statim pallio per quod tenebatur, et duobus filiis suis paruis, quos sub dextro pallii panno secum habebat, ibi relictis cum ceteris filiis duobus, qui stabant a sinistra, sub brachio arreptis, per fenestram ecclesie sublime, cunctis intuentibus, euolauit . . . cum prole gemina secum assumpta, nunquam ibi postea comparuit."

to infer that the two children she took with her were chosen because they had not yet been weaned. These “Normannici tyranni” were experiencing God’s divine vengeance based on what he refers to as their “personal intention”—a means of discrediting any good deeds they may have accomplished in life by emphasizing their lineage from a demonic mother.³⁵⁹

5.2.1 Significance of the Left Hand

Despite the brief account, the fact that the countess was a mother would have been enough for the medieval mind to presume that some traits or characteristics could be present in her offspring, simply because it was an inherent part of her nature. Gerald, however, added that interesting detail in his description of her departure: after having deserted the children on her right side, “she snatched up under her arm the other two sons, who were standing on her left (*sinistra*), and, in sight of all, flew out aloft through the window of the church.”³⁶⁰

The association of the left with evil or sin is ancient. The Latin word for left, *sinistra*, has come to have its own negative connotations, and Greek culture was replete with left-right distinctions that linked the left in a table of opposites with other characteristics like darkness, bad, and, notably, female.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Gerald of Wales, f. 165v.

³⁶⁰ MS Julius, f. 165r.

³⁶¹ James Hall, *The Sinister Side: How Left-Right Symbolism Shaped Western Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15.

Table 1: Table of left-right distinctions (Hall).

limit	unlimited
odd	even
unity	plurality
right	left
male	female
rest	motion
straight	crooked
light	darkness
good	bad
square	oblong

Art historian James Hall also noted that in artistic interpretations, the left side was almost always considered accessible or complicit in scenes of physical or sexual assault. If the left side of the victim is violated, the moral issues surrounding the scene appear more ambiguous—the victim was considered either somewhat culpable or complicit.³⁶² Hall also notes some instances,

³⁶² Ibid., 40.

particularly in courtly literature and art, when the left side could be seen as sumptuous (when exhibiting clothing) or as an example of elegant beauty; however, those characteristics caused many Christian moralists to argue that that was exactly what made it so potentially dangerous and evil.³⁶³ Beyond that, representations of the left as bad while the right is good can be traced back to the Hebrew Bible, which shows a clear dextral preference. In the New Testament gospels, there are clear associations made between the right and the left in the parabolic biblical references about the sorting of the sheep and the goats:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.... Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ . . . Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Ibid., 233.

³⁶⁴ Matthew 25:32-41. Interestingly, linguist Anatoly Liberman has noted that while the Romans seemed to favor the left, facing south when taking auspices so that their left side was toward the “fortunate quarter,” the east, the left is mostly considered negative amongst various cultures when traced etymologically, although they still had superstitions surrounding the right as the “better” side. Ranging from the Goths to the Italians, words depicting the left alternately

In his examination of “handedness” in art from the early Christian and medieval periods, Robert Couzin notes that in certain representations of the left and right there were stipulated customs that were unavoidable: Christ only blesses and heals with his right hand. The damned sit to Christ’s left in images of the Last Supper.³⁶⁵ The “right was eternal, spiritual, charitable, and salvific; the left was worldly, carnal, greedy, and hellish.”³⁶⁶

But that is, of course, in reference to Christ. How many positive characteristics could be assumed to be on the right-hand side of a woman, let alone a diabolical one? In taking the children on her left side, did this woman flee with the *most* diabolical of the children? To this point, Gerald is silent, but given the assumptions surrounding the role of the mother in instilling in her children some of her nature via conception and/or gestation, it is safe to presume that even those on her right would still bear some resemblance to their mother, although to what extent may be debatable. There are some theological examples showing that being ambidextrous could be read as beneficial, not because the left was good, but because it implied that it could be as effective at warding off temptation or evil, assuming it received adequate spiritual training. If one could be spiritually strong enough, they could become spiritually ambidextrous and thus able to deter susceptibility to the corporal, carnal problems typical of the left.³⁶⁷ Perhaps the

developed from words like “weak,” “deficient,” “crooked,” or “inauspicious.” Anatoly Liberman, “The Sinister Influence of the Left Hand,” *Oxford University Press Blog*, September 2010, <https://blog.oup.com/2010/09/left-hand/>.

³⁶⁵ Robert Couzin, *Right and Left in Early Christian and Medieval Art* (Boston: Brill, 2021), 3.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁶⁷ Hall, 47.

implication is that through their own free will and spiritual dedication, those children on the right that were abandoned had the ability to redeem themselves. Though because it was these remaining two children upon whom the Angevins would recall when insisting that no one should deprive them of their inherent nature, it becomes obvious that they did not choose the path of atonement.³⁶⁸

5.3 Maternal Mélusine

The Jean d'Arras version of the Mélusine story is greatly expanded in all aspects but is most poignantly revised regarding her actions as a mother. Where the short entry by Gerald of Wales simply states that the woman entered the church with four children only to leave with two of them, d'Arras attributed the birth of eight sons to his Mélusine and commented as to how she nurtured them all from birth, even after her forced removal from Poitou. The depiction of her maternal nature is a theme repeated throughout her children's lives. The emphasis is a striking positive counterpoint, not only to the demon countess of Anjou, but to writings about Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was consistently referenced by authors as the stereotypical meddling, overreaching mother.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ MS Julius, f. 165r. "Noli ergo hoc iure nostre hereditario nos priuare, nec frustra ut naturam expellas elaborare."

³⁶⁹ Eleanor was repeatedly scandalized as being not only incestuous, but also for having had an alleged affair with Henry's father. In her later years, with her marriage to Henry crumbling and after having fomented a revolt among her sons, the claims against Eleanor changed from the salacious to the conniving, even prompting the Archbishop of Rouen to have a letter written by

The births of Mélusine’s sons are very closely tied to her creation of the town of Lusignan, and there is clear indication that it was entirely intentional as a means of implying that she was also the mother of the region and its inhabitants—a point that squares with Jacques LeGoff’s insistence that Mélusine represented a hold-over fertility figure from pagan times.³⁷⁰ The nurturing of her children early on mirrors closely her cultivation of the town and its surrounding lands, and her later support of them reflects the work she invested on an economic and political scale.

Usually, when the birth of a child is registered in the romance, there is also mention of the town and an addition made to it in order to reinforce their connectedness. Immediately following the creation of the town of Lusignan and the two-week-long wedding festivities, Mélusine gave birth to her first son, Urian.³⁷¹ With the birth of Eudes, Mélusine built the castle and village of Melle, as well as Vouvant and Mervent. After Guyon, she had a variety of

Peter of Blois in 1173 urging her to remember her role as a woman and wife: “A woman who is not under the headship of the husband violates the condition of nature, the mandate of the Apostle, and the law of Scripture: ‘The head of the woman is the man [1 Corinthians 11:13].’ She is created from him, she is united to him, and she is subject to his power.” Chartres MS #208; Cf. Migne, P.L. 207:448-9.

³⁷⁰ Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture*, 218.

³⁷¹ Directly before the description of Urian is a conversation between Mélusine and the Count of Poitiers who insists that Mélusine name the town after herself. She names it Lusignan, a name the count wholly agrees with, stating “that name is doubly appropriate, because you are Mélusine of Scotland, and because Scotland in Greek means ‘an infallible thing,’ while Mélusine means ‘marvels’ or ‘marvelous.’” MS 3353, f. 23v.

settlements established in Poitou and Guyenne. Following her fearful looking son Antoine, Mélusine founded churches throughout the land, perhaps as an early act of atonement.

Aside from the close association between Mélusine's sons and her architectural fecundity, there is also a strong indication of her role as a doting mother, which is in stark contrast to the woman presented so curtly in Gerald of Wales's description. Her adoration of her children is frequently mentioned, as is her insistence on supplying her oldest sons with any supplies they may need as they seek out their own lands in the east: "she raised them up and kissed each one, tearful and saddened by their imminent departure. For what she felt for them was not the transient sentiment of a wet nurse, but deep maternal love."³⁷² Before their departure, she called them to her side:

My children, here are two rings whose stones have the same virtue: as long as you wear them and practice loyalty, shunning wickedness and treachery, you shall never be defeated; you shall always have the upper hand in any conflict, and no spells, enchantments, or poison of any sort will harm you, for as soon as you gaze at one of these rings the evil power will be neutralized.³⁷³

Following the gifting of the supernatural rings, Mélusine imparts words of wisdom to her sons that mirror contemporary thoughts on chivalry—attend Mass, be humble, fulfill promises, avoid pride, and take care of any subjects governed as a result of conquest.³⁷⁴ She invoked

³⁷² MS 3353, f. 43v.

³⁷³ MS 3353, f. 44r.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

similar chivalric prescriptions on her sons Renaud and Antoine when they set out to rescue the Duchess of Luxembourg from the King of Alsace and also granted them each a gold ring set with a stone that would guarantee their victory in any battle so long as their cause was just. She then “kissed them both lovingly as a mother,” and sent them on their way.³⁷⁵

Her most poignant moments as a symbol of maternal love, perhaps surprisingly, come after her monstrous nature is revealed and she is forced to leave Lusignan. In her long goodbye, Mélusine set out instructions for her three youngest sons. Thierry is to become the Lord of Parthenay, Vouvent, and Mervent, while Remonnet will be the Count of Forez. She assured her husband that, although he would no longer see her in her human form, she would return to care for the toddlers. She also instructs Raymondin that Horrible, her wicked, three-eyed eighth son who had killed two of his nurses as an infant, must be put to death for the greater good of their lands. Although seemingly contradictory to a loving maternal nature, this injunction is perhaps not so conflicting if one considers the lands surrounding Lusignan as an extension of her maternal nurturance. Keeping her promise, Mélusine returned to Remonnet and Thierry every evening, “holding them as she sat before the fire and comforting them as best she could.”³⁷⁶

5.3.1 Physical Descriptions of Sons and Characteristics

Given the presumption that a parent’s moral state could influence or imprint onto the physical characteristics of their children, it should be no surprise that nearly all Mélusine’s sons

³⁷⁵ Ibid., f. 80r.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., f. 141v.

bore some mark of deformity. Her first son Urian’s “visage court et large au travers, et avoit un oeil rouge et l’autre pers” [his face was short and wide across, and he had one red eye and one blue], with ears as large as the handles of a winnowing basket.³⁷⁷ Eudes had one huge ear, similar to a sail.³⁷⁸ Guyon had extremely uneven eyes [il ot un oeil plus hault que l’autre], while on Antoine’s cheek was a lion’s paw [il apporta en la senestre joue une pate de lyon], complete with fur and sharp nails.³⁷⁹ Renaud was born with one eye—although he apparently could see extraordinarily well with it, some twenty-one league distance.³⁸⁰

Her next two children, Geoffrey and Froimont, were born nearly back-to-back and serve as foils to each other as they mature and reach adulthood, the latter extraordinarily pious and the other with the potential to be frightening and cruel. Geoffrey was born with one tooth that jutted out of his mouth more than an inch and was referred to as Big-Tooth, an obvious borrowing on Jean d’Arras’s part of earlier anecdotes by Walter Map, Orderic Vitalis, and others, including his authoritative reference, Gervase of Tilbury. Froimont had a tuft of hair on his nose that resembled the hide of a mole.³⁸¹ Mélusine’s eighth son, Horrible, who was smothered before

³⁷⁷ Ibid., f. 41v.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., f. 41r.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Map, *De nugis curialium*, 348; Orderic, iii, 228; iv, 84; Malmesbury, *Gesta regum*, i, 428-9; cf. ii, 221; Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, 85-91, 665-9.

being given the opportunity to fully live up to his name, was born “monstrously large” with three eyes, one in the middle of his forehead.³⁸²

The last of Mélusine and Raymondin’s sons, Thierry and Remonnet, are born with no signs of monstrosity, physical or moral. Scholars have wondered about d’Arras’s meaning behind the addition of two “normal” children and whether or not it served a purpose for the overall intention of the work, particularly as a piece of legitimizing propaganda. Jane H.M. Taylor interprets this as deliberate:

Mélusine’s progeny is unavoidably ambiguous. They are perhaps necessarily so, merely because of the kernel story: their mother’s possibly devilish, and at the very least uncanny, origin . . . physically imprinted on the immediate progeny by the *tares*—the deformities consequent on Mélusine’s dual, human and fairy, nature.³⁸³

To make sense of this ambiguous nature, and, in particular, to legitimize the ambiguous nature of Jean de Berry’s inheritance, d’Arras participates in what Taylor theorizes was the intentional blocking of a particular narrative schemata, a means of conveniently “forgetting” potentially disgraceful physical manifestations. Whereas these men’s physical states should have represented their and their mother’s moral state, Jean attempted to downplay almost every single negative association with the supernatural until it eventually disappeared.³⁸⁴ For others like

³⁸² MS 3353, f. 41v.

³⁸³ Taylor, 173.

³⁸⁴ Taylor, 173.

Douglas Kelly, Mélusine's sons not only have to have their presentations of physical monstrosity superseded by their moral turpitude, but there must also be some sense of decreasing monstrosity, hence the entirely human representation of Thierry and Remonnet.³⁸⁵ This is done to show the humanization of Mélusine herself, thus showing her own decreasing monstrous state as she gets further removed from her mother Pressine's curse and closer to achieving her desired mortal life and good Christian death.³⁸⁶ Kelly explains a sort of domestication of marvels in the romance genre, something attempted in *Mélusine* but that falls short: "Since Remonnet and Thierry have no physical abnormality, does not the absence of a mark betoken Mélusine's progress in metamorphosis into a mortal?"³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Douglas Kelly, "Domestication of the Marvelous," *Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Medieval France*, 34-5.

³⁸⁶ At the beginning of the romance, it is explained that Mélusine herself is actually the product of a fairy-human union. Using her "fairy powers" she plots the King of Scotland's, her father Elinas's, death, and her mother imposes a curse on her three daughters: "The power of your father's seed would eventually have drawn you and your sisters toward his human nature, and you would soon have left behind the world of nymphs and fairies forever. But I proclaim that henceforth every Saturday you shall become a serpent from the navel down." There is, however, no explanation of what her physical state was prior to the curse or how she would be "drawn" into being completely human, had she not imprisoned her father in a mountain in Northumberland. MS 3353, f. 5v, 6r.

³⁸⁷ Kelly, 35.

While it may be true that d'Arras paralleled Mélusine's sons' lessening monstrous appearances and natures with her getting ever closer to the Christian ideal, as with almost all stories revolving around unions between humans and supernatural beings, order must be restored by the dissolution of the pact. Additionally, it is impossible to consider that a family descended from Mélusine could in fact have a happy end—a monstrous slate cannot entirely be wiped clean. Early in the romance, Mélusine's mother, Pressine, admonishes her daughters for patricide, chastising them with the claim that their father's human seed could have eventually removed the supernatural stain on the girls. Despite claims of ambiguity, with this statement, Mélusine's cursed state is secured from the very beginning and any chance of her experiencing a later metamorphosis into a "good Christian woman" seems determined concretely early on, both in writing and representation. As shown below, even in images from the manuscript, the dragon lurking in the picture serves as a reminder that there is no remedy for one's nature.



Figure 9: Pressine cursing her daughters Mélusine, Melior, and Palestine for the killing of their father, King Elinas. Note a small dragon that can be seen in the near center, a representation meant to tell the reader that there will be no salvation coming later in the story, MS 3353, f. v.



Figure 10: Again, despite the good works and fertility implied in the building of Lusignan, we can see in the left bottom of the image that there is a small dragon hiding behind Mélusine, a clear indication that the story will have a tragic end because of the predetermined supernatural state of its foundress, MS 3353, f. 22v.

5.3.2 Paragons of Chivalry, Debasement Embodied

While Taylor and Kelly make valid observations about the physical tares of Mélusine's sons, it appears that it is more likely a mixture of both of their conclusions. The signs of monstrosity, which would have signaled to medieval readers that there was something sinful about the men or their origins, are juxtaposed with examples of their chivalric attributes and ways in which others around them ignore or justify their mother-marks. Though Taylor argues

that this was d'Arras's way of stopping the schema of possible sinfulness and monstrosity in its tracks by failing to engage with it, it seems more likely that he was using these juxtapositions as a means of exhibiting their half-fairy half-human hybridity, a way to signal and show the existence of both natures. Despite the descriptions of deformity, most of the men experience good fortunes as adults with titles including the Count of Luxembourg and King of Cypress, Armenia, Bohemia, and Jerusalem. And the descriptions of defects are often countered by assurances that they were otherwise well-formed or of correct proportion. This does not stop their otherly state from being recognized, however, and one would do well to remember that this was actually a "rider" of sorts to Pressine's original curse.³⁸⁸ Everyone is noted to have regretted Urian's "odd visage," and Antoine's paw still causes him to be "much feared," though later the appearances of Urian and Guyon are downplayed to the Princess of Cypress in an almost humorous way:

"Are they handsome?" asked Hermine. "In faith, they are. The elder is tall, upright, long of limb, and exceedingly strong, though in fact he does have a short, rather wide face, with one red eye and one dark eye, and amazingly big ears. Rest assured, though, that in body and build he's one of the fairest young champions I've ever laid eyes on! The younger brother is not as tall, but he has a fine

³⁸⁸ MS 3353 5v. "Et, non contretant, de toy yatra noble lignie moult grant, et qui feront de grans et haultes prouescs" (But regardless, from you will be born a noble and powerful lineage who will accomplish great feats).

physique and is particularly fair of face--except that one of his eyes is a wee bit higher up than the other one, but it doesn't spoil his looks too badly."³⁸⁹

The emphasis for the first few brothers is on their exploits—fighting Saracens, rescuing damsels in distress, and generally living up to the expectations set for noble, chivalric offspring—despite their rather shocking looks, something which does not stop them from later marrying and having children of their own.

This valiant progression begins to break down with Mélusine's next three sons: Geoffrey, Froimont, and Horrible. Geoffrey's stature was almost as terrifying as his monstrous tooth, and he managed to frighten people simply through hearsay. With Geoffrey, readers are shown the real possibilities that result from his hybridity: a complete manifestation of his evil, as well as the prospect of atonement. He is the epitome of monstrous ambiguity; he is the only brother referred to as a "devil" or "demon," and the Sultan of Damascus himself questions his true nature.³⁹⁰ It is also because of his cruelty in burning the abbey of Maillezais that his mother's secrets are

³⁸⁹ MS 3353, f. 50v.

³⁹⁰ MS 3353, f. 121v, 122r. After fighting ferociously in Ireland and Armenia, Geoffrey helps his brothers battle Muslims in Syria, at which point the Sultan, terrified by Geoffrey's military prowess, exclaims, "By Mohammed, this is no mortal man but some kind of demon, or else the Christian God who's come down to destroy our religion!" If the point was to completely ignore the monstrous schema of the romance, it seems unlikely that Geoffrey's cruel tendencies would not only be emphasized but consistently compared to demons, although it is interesting that the question was posed by a different potential "Other" as to whether or not Geoffrey was powerful because he was evil or divine.

revealed by Raymondin. However, conversely, he obtained absolution from the Pope and became the legitimate Lord of Lusignan after his father's passing.

Serving as a foil to the cruel brother with the potential to be good was Froimont, who from his earliest was described as thoroughly devout, entering holy orders at the abbey of Maillezais. It is unclear exactly why Froimont's entrance into the monkhood enraged Geoffrey so much. Though he refers to the monks as "lascivious miscreants" who lured his brother into the order, his rage persists even after Froimont assures him that he made the choice of his own free will, at which point Geoffrey locks all the monks, including his brother, inside the abbey and burns it to the ground.

With the full extent of Geoffrey's potential evil fully demonstrated, Raymondin cursed the hybrid, monstrous children he fathered with Mélusine:

Ah! You deceitful serpent, by God, you and your deeds are nothing but phantoms, nor will any heir you have borne ever come to a good end! How can those who perished in agony have their lives restored to them, including your own son who had found solace in religion? Froimont was the only good being to issue from you. Now he has been destroyed through the malice of the devil.³⁹¹

It was because of Geoffrey's evil crime that Raymondin condemned Mélusine in public, an act that not only caused her banishment, but that led to repercussions for the entire family. From that point on, the men had to reconcile with their natures—Geoffrey and Raymondin sought

³⁹¹ MS 3353, f. 137v, 138r.

absolution, which eventually allowed Geoffrey to become the legitimate Lord of Lusignan after his father's passing, and Horrible was sentenced to death.

After Geoffrey, who represents the extreme spectrum of possibilities for a hybrid child, and Froimont, who appears a pure manifestation of Mélusine's desire to be a good Christian, the next son in line is Horrible, in whom every evil that could be conceived is demonstrated. By the age of six, he had killed four people and is secretly put to death to avoid, as Mélusine states, "such damage that the loss of twenty thousand men would be as nothing compared to it, for he would surely destroy everything I have built, and warfare would never cease in the lands of Poitou and Guyenne."³⁹² It is almost as though the last traces of corruption were shaken out through the sacrifice of Horrible.

5.3.3 Decreasing Maternal Manifestations

How do we analyze the last of Mélusine's two sons? Whether Jean d'Arras was becoming tired of the mother-mark trope after describing the exploits of eight sons or if he was trying to ensure that his readers understood that the last of Mélusine's sons were meant to represent her transformation to *almost* human, the intended result was a means of proving legitimacy. The physically abnormal but spiritually pure sons would inherit foreign lands gained through conquest and marriage, intertwining themselves into the family lines of royal houses from England to Aragon; the most morally corrupt of her sons would remain childless. Lusignan would pass to Geoffrey but an unnamed member of the family would inherit it upon his death, as he would have no heirs. The surrounding lands would move conveniently to the younger,

³⁹² MS 3353 139r, 139v.

physically *and* morally flawless sons, Thierry and Remonnet, thus confirming that any ambiguity in the natural origin and succession--and thereby Jean de Berry's real-life, contemporary claim--was removed.³⁹³ According to d'Arras, only a descendant of Lusignan, on his mother or father's side, could hold the fortress and lands for more than thirty years, while also claiming that, "this noble fortress of Lusignan in Poitou has passed from hand to hand until it has come, by right and by the sword, into that of the exalted, noble, and very powerful Prince Jean, son of the King of France, Duke of Berry and Auvergne, Count of Poitou and Auvergne."³⁹⁴ Though the duke had no direct claim to Lusignan--the main French branch of the family had died out nearly one hundred years earlier in 1308--he could very broadly sketch out a link through his mother Bonne of Luxembourg and her father, Jean of Bohemia, hence the decent amount of time d'Arras spent discussing Antoine and Renault's rule over those two territories.

Through that murky link, the Duke of Berry crafted his own legitimacy; however, based on the convention of the day, the implications of the founding mother of Lusignan being not only a woman, not only a mother, but a hybrid being, left the claim relatively tenuous, despite the claim made by d'Arras that the family would rule until the end of the world. In each state, whether as a woman, a mother, or a hybrid, Mélusine occupied liminal spaces, something shown to produce anxiety and suspicion in a society progressively moving toward singling out the "other." While Berry relished the idea of a protective draconian presence that circled the castle

³⁹³ Technically, Froimont was not morally unscrupulous, quite the opposite. As a monk, he would have remained childless anyway, but his future was unceremoniously cut short when his brother Geoffrey burned him and his fellow brothers alive in the monastery at Maillezais.

³⁹⁴ MS 3353, f. 164r.

safeguarding his fictive inheritance so much that he had it included in his famed *Tres Riches Heures*, a collection of prayers commissioned by the Limbourg brothers, d'Arras seems to have left no question that her state was meant to be seen negatively, as was the earlier depiction by Gerald of Wales, and as something that had passed to her children based on the interpretations surrounding gender and motherhood at the time.

Due to the beliefs surrounding both the physical participation of women in creating children—the act of conception and gestation—as well as the emotional aspects of motherhood, such as nurturance, protection, and affection, we can make a correlation between the character of Mélusine and her descendants in terms of their varied natures. The difference between the Gerald of Wales and d'Arras versions, then, is in examining what part of Mélusine's supernatural character traits would flow through the veins of her children and their children after them. For the Angevins, the necessity is to explicitly define the countess as diabolical so that there would be no question as to why the family behaved as it did. The character was already recognized in the Poitou region in France, where troublesome antagonists to Angevin holdings already resided, so by crafting this background, Gerald of Wales was simply building on a story that was already there, one that seemed logical and believable when compared to the historical record. D'Arras had a much more complicated message to convey. His Mélusine had to be seen as inherently bad as well, despite her later efforts. Therefore, some of that negativity had to have passed along to her sons; however, the extent of her sons' monstrosity and elements of free would allow d'Arras to craft characters that were more adaptable to the almost saintly reputation promoted by the Valois monarchy as they faced the Angevins for control of France in the late fourteenth century.

Chapter 6 CONCLUSION

*De sa verge Dieu les pugnist et bat
Et t'a rendu Guyenne et Normandie*

--Alain Chartier, "La Balade de Fougières"³⁹⁵

6.1 Anthropological Understanding and Meaning

The character of Mélusine, from an anthropological standpoint, can be seen as a uniquely Poitevin concept, taken up by townspeople and absorbed by very specific members of the elite. According to famed anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, "Culture is an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols; a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form, by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."³⁹⁶ Mélusine's body was a cultural marker, one that could be molded to symbolize features that the Angevins, Lusignan, and, eventually, Valois wanted to emphasize. There are various modes of acquiring culture, all of which we see with the Mélusine stories: imitation, indoctrination, socializing, and conditioning. The foundational story was repeated, adapted, and disseminated to enhance political reputations and claims. Mélusine's body

³⁹⁵ This poem, from the works of Alain Chartier, speaks on God's punishment of the English for attempting to control any part of France, cursing their kings with defeat, loss, and madness.

Leroux de Lincy, *Recueil de Chants Historiques Français depuis le XIIe jusqu'au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: 1909), 340.

³⁹⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 89.

as symbol operated within and was defined by broader social and cultural understandings of the female body, its physical and spiritual inferiority, and its similarity to monstrosity.

To reiterate an earlier point, it is important here to bring up three terms to concentrate on: culture, monstrosity, and memory. Culture, as discussed, consists of shared patterns of behavior and the meanings behind those behaviors that teach people how to participate within their own social groups. They learn what is acceptable and what is not by way of these symbol systems—those methods through which meaning is conveyed. Monsters, as Cohen stated in his book *Monster Theory*, are culture. They should be read as symbols for what a given culture is experiencing at a given time.

At the risk of sounding tediously repetitive, it is important also to reiterate the etymological meaning of the word “monster.” In Latin, the root words are *monstrare* and *monere*, “to show” and “to warn,” respectively. We can view the character of Mélusine as a marker for both—something that should be seen as a marvel, as well as something that is being shown as a type of warning. The question then becomes: how do we interpret this marvel that we are being shown and what is the warning we are met to decipher from her?

Lastly, we must consider memory. Collective memory is a study that has grown exponentially in the eighty years since it began, yet its definition is incredibly hard to pin down, as it seems to be a hotly debated subject. Within the field of memory studies, there has been an attempt to not oversimplify the meaning behind the term and to avoid making analogies between individual memory and collective memory. The argument here is that we can say that although memory is not the same between individuals and social groups, that individual memory is influenced fundamentally by its social context. This difference, that all detailed recall must fit social organizations that influence the manner and matter of that recall, is argued by the founder

of modern memory studies, Frederic Bartlett, who states that there is “memory *in* the group, not memory *of* the group.”³⁹⁷ For memory *in* the group, we can assume a “distributed version” of collective memory that fits two necessities: 1) it is distributed socially in small group interaction, and 2) is distributed “instrumentally,” meaning it involves active agents and instruments for remembering.³⁹⁸ These instruments can include written records, narratives, and oral communications.

It is in this interdisciplinary hodgepodge that we can properly assess Mélusine, this veritable hybrid of integrative studies—literary, historical, anthropological—that allows us to view her as an ideogrammatic and iconographic symbol and referent for historical processes. If we assume that d’Arras was correct that the residents of Lusignan had an underlying belief in the fairy Mélusine in his later version of the narrative, when compared to the rough geographical origins of the Angevins and their preferred residence, as well as the instruments of collective memory that tie the two similar stories together, we can then argue that there developed a tradition between the families, the region, and the character. It fits the requirements of only involving a small group, as well as having instruments by which to distribute the storyline. In addition, we may then take that collective memory and see how it is being used—by two specific houses based largely in one region, as well as the Valois royals who need to coerce their way into that memory and graft it onto their own genealogical record—to view it as what I have termed “competitive memory.”

³⁹⁷ Frederic Bartlett in *Memory in Mind and Culture*, Pascal Boyer and James V. Wertsch, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 118-119.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

6.2 Mélusine and the Hundred Years' War

Mélusine, as a character, must be read against the backdrop of a quickly changing political situation in Europe, particularly in France. She is part of a broader story of kingship, acquisition, changing loyalties, and intricate crossovers of fealty oaths. The twelfth through fourteenth centuries were pivotal in defining, not only the borders of the country, but how rulers would divide up the territory. Though the main branch of the Capetians claimed continual rule from the time of Hugh Capet in 987 until the death of Charles IV in 1328, when considering the actual territory of the royal domain during that time frame, the claim is shaky at best.

When Henry II married Eleanor of Aquitaine, they amassed a territory that stretched from the Scottish border to the Pyrenees, far exceeding the regions under direct control of the French kings, Louis or Philip, initially. Under King John, the Angevin holdings in France would all but disappear, thanks to an alliance between Philip and the House of Lusignan, the latter of which was spurred into action when John married Isabella of Angoulême, the fiancée of Hugh IX of Lusignan. Genealogical lines would cross when Isabella later married Hugh X and their children became half-siblings to the king in England, Henry III. The presence of these Lusignan men in England, named in the sources by the surname Valence, was unwelcome by many, especially the barons, as they were all given positions of power and would retreat to France whenever trouble seemed to find them.

Though John lost most of the Angevin holdings on the continent, they still maintained Gascony as Dukes of Aquitaine in their capacity as vassals to the French kings until 1337, an

issue that would remain a point of conflict.³⁹⁹ In an attempt to ease tensions between the two crowns, the widowed Edward I agreed to marry Philip IV's sister Margaret in 1299, while later promising his son Edward II to Philip's daughter, Isabella, in 1308, the idea being that any heir would bring the territory of Gascony under English *and* French control. This plan would fail magnificently with the ascension of Charles IV in 1322. Not only did he demand homage for Gascony, but Charles also insisted on having French officials in the region to carry out his orders. Within two years, the French army was marching into Aquitaine. Edward II, in response, ordered the arrest of any French person found in England and seized his wife's lands because she was of French descent. To alleviate the problem, Isabella was sent to plead the English case to her brother as an envoy to France. Though Isabella was able to mediate an agreement that would allow Edward II to keep Gascony, she did not return to England and instead worked with an exiled Marcher lord to invade England and force her husband's abdication in favor of their son, the future Edward III.⁴⁰⁰

In 1328, Charles died with no heirs. Citing Salic law, the French barons refused Edward III the crown, despite being Charles's nephew and closest male relative. Isabella attempted to claim the throne for her son, but the barons were determined to give the crown to a native Frenchman and thus looked to Charles's patrilineal cousin, the Count of Valois, Philip. Adding insult to injury, in 1337, Philip would take Gascony and bring it back under the control of the

³⁹⁹ There was an interval between 1294 and 1303 when Philip IV declared Gascony forfeit and reclaimed it for the Crown because of Edward I's refusal to appear before him in France.

⁴⁰⁰ Isabella would be remembered for her part in the insurrection and subsequent murder of her husband for centuries as the "She-Wolf of France."

French throne. These were the opening events of the Hundred Years' War, and it is in this context—both the build up to it and the ensuing confrontations—that we need to address Mélusine, as this is where the agency of the character lies. It is in this context of war and territorial conquest where Mélusine, as well as the transformation or erasure of characters, becomes all important. In this sense, though seemingly more tame, neutral, or ambiguous, the 1393 Mélusine more effectively captured fears about the power of women as other and harnessed it into the origin story of a powerful family that was not just used to bolster a reputation, but to craft and perpetuate a propaganda campaign taken on by the House of Valois that deemed them legitimate in the eyes of the people and God.

6.3 *Trés Riches Heures* and Its Legacy

By 1377, Jean Froissart had completed Book I of his chronicle of the Hundred Years War. Froissart, previously in the employ of Philippa of Hainault, Edward III's queen consort, had by the time of writing been in the service of Guy de Châtillon, Count of Blois, a loyal man of the Crown. The Duke of Berry, brother to Charles V, who would later commission the *Trés Riches Heures*, captured Limoges from King Edward's heir, Edward the Black Prince, in 1370. Determined to get it back, the Black Prince laid siege to the town. According to Froissart, Edward, enflamed by passion and revenge, massacred its inhabitants:

Then the prince, the duke of Lancaster, the earl of Cambridge, the earl of Pembroke, Sir Guichard d'Angle and all the other with their companies entered into the city, and all other foot-men, ready appalled to do evil, and to pillage and rob the city, and to slay men, women and children, for so it was commanded them

to do. It was great pity to see the men, women and children that kneeled down on their knees before the prince for mercy; but he was so inflamed with ire, that he took no heed to them, so that none was heard, but all put to death, as they were met withal, and such as were nothing culpable. There was no pity take of the poor people, who wrought never no manner of treason, yet they bought it dearer than the great personages, such as had done the evil and trespass. There was not so hard a heart within the city of Limoges, and if he had any remembrance of God, but that wept piteously for the great mischief that they saw before their even: for more than three thousand men, women and children were slain and beheaded that day, God have mercy on their souls, for I trow they were martyrs.⁴⁰¹

In keeping with his Plantagenet reputation, the Black Prince was maligned by the French as excessively cruel and evil. However, given the source, and a letter in Edward's hand giving a first-person account of the siege, it is undeniably another piece of Valois propaganda.⁴⁰² Both the Black Prince and his father, Edward III, would be dead by 1377 and by 1380, the only English holding in France would be Calais. Despite slowly building up their holdings, the constant gains and losses between the French and the English are dizzying. And it is in this unsteady state of

⁴⁰¹ G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Chronicles of Froissart*, Lord Berners, trans. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1904), 201.

⁴⁰² A letter from the Black Prince to lord Gaston Febus was found in a Spanish archive by historian Guilhelm Pepin in 2014, in which Edward states that he took several high-ranking men prisoner, somewhere around 200, with no mention of a massacre. Other sources, Chandos Herald and a local source from the abbey of Saint-Martial of Limoges, cite 300 as their mortality figure.

affairs that we get *Mélusine* and the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. The context that created the *Roman de Mélusine* also led to very particular elements in the extravagant book of hours commissioned twenty years later. Understanding the importance of the town of Lusignan—its traditions, its beliefs, its culture—the duke knew very well how to culturally reinforce the position he was fighting for in the region. One of the most lavish extant manuscripts produced in the late Middle Ages, the March page of the *Très Riches Heures* picks up where the romance left off: with a newly renovated Castle of Lusignan and Mélusine flying overhead in her dragon form approvingly.



Figure 11: *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Chantilly, Musée Condé, Bibliothèque, MS 65, f. 3v.6.4 Église de Notre Dame et St. Junien.

Despite the multiple written sources discussing the ongoing conflict between the Angevins and the House of Lusignan, admittedly, aside from tales of bad reputations and d'Arras's later claims, the hardest explicit link to make is between Mélusine and the historical Lusignan family. Mélusine as a character has become a kind of novelty in modern-day Lusignan, her form adorning city placards and made into kitschy souvenirs, but as for the family she supposedly created? On that, the historical record is eerily quiet.

One instance of her ancient association with the family, however, is located on the Église de Notre Dame et St. Junien. The church itself was built in the eleventh century, founded by Hugh IV for assurance as to the safety of his soul. It was renovated and added to until the fifteenth century. Located on an apsidiole rebuilt in the twelfth century is a sculpture of the fairy, her wings spread and her tail trailing behind her. Assuming this sculpture is not a modern addition, it serves as a concrete early connection between the lords of Lusignan and Mélusine.⁴⁰³

Another connection is to the castle of Lusignan itself. One of the towers of the chateau, destroyed by Henry II in 1166, was named the Tour de Mélusine and was rebuilt by Jeanne de Fougères who married into the Lusignan family in 1256. A further, although admittedly dubious, connection was made by Marie de Lusignan in 1888, a distant family member who claimed to be reviving the Order of Mélusine, an order supposedly started by Sibylla of Jerusalem in 1186. Even if the claim is fantastical, which it almost certainly is, at the very least it is a testament to Mélusine's enduring popularity.

⁴⁰³ Marie de Lusignan, *Statutes Ordre de Mélusine* (Paris, 1888), 6-7.



Figure 12: Sculpture of Mélusine on the Église de Notre Dame et St. Junien, Lusignan.

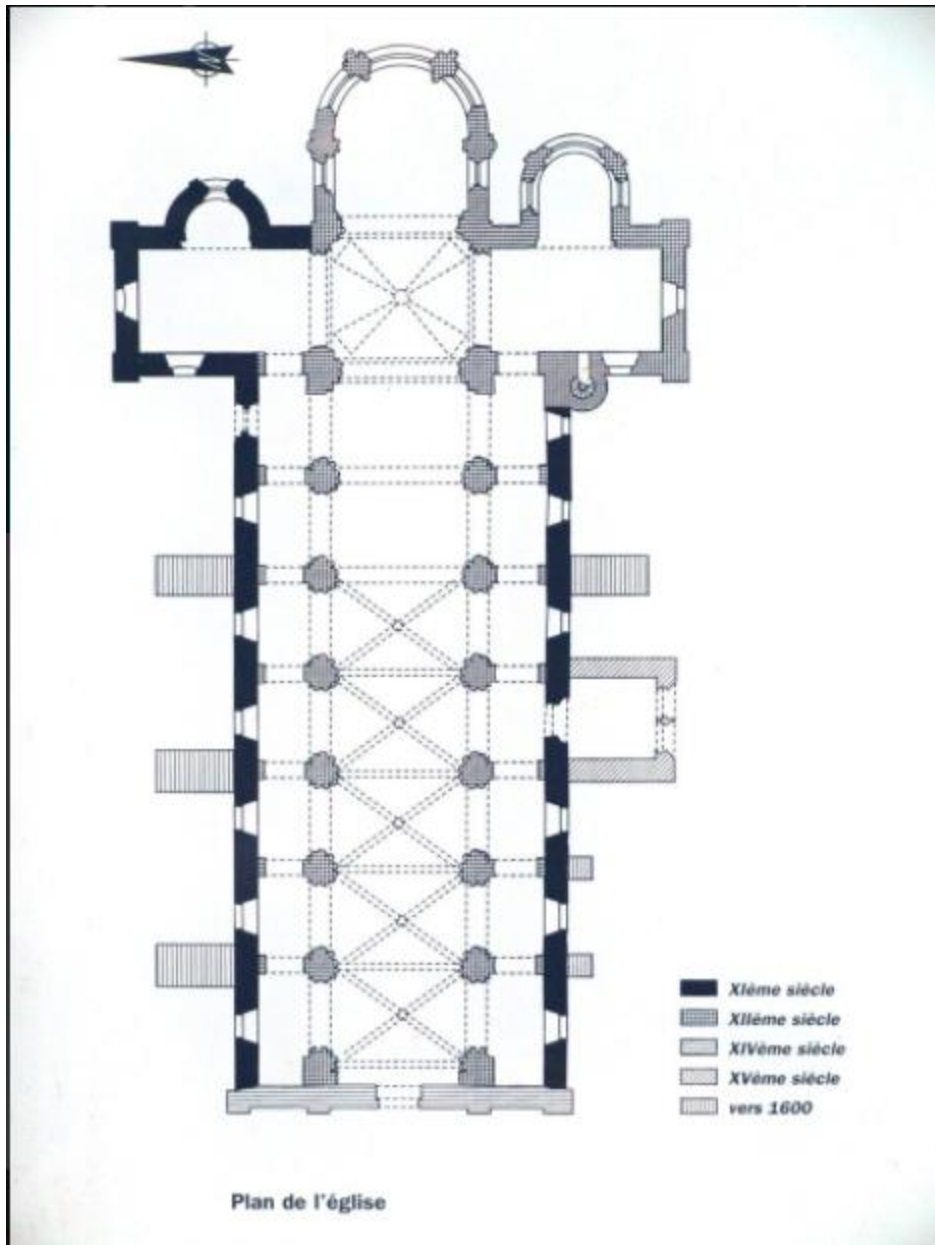


Figure 13: Floorplan of the Église de Notre Dame et St. Junien, Lusignan.

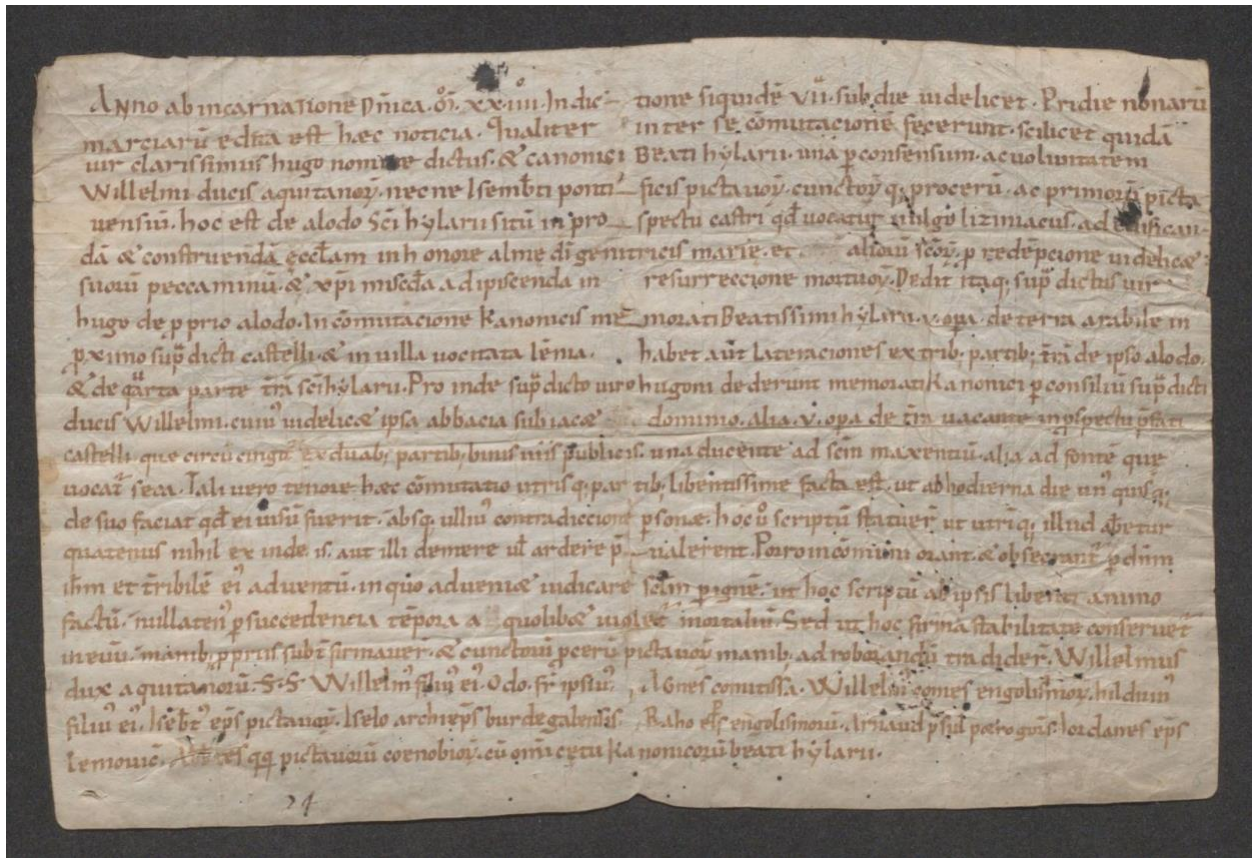


Figure 14: Foundational charter for the monastery of Notre Dame de Lusignan as a dependency of the abbey of Nouaillé, 1025.

6.4 D'Arras's Changes

The genius of Jean d'Arras was in his ability to engage with a widely popular folklore motif and incorporate contemporary sources from preceding generations to back his claims. The best example of this was his citation of Gervase of Tilbury as a source of authority, knowing that Gervase was employed by Henry II and had written his cited source, *Otia imperialia*, for the king's grandson, Otto. Written around the same time as the final editions of *De principis*, Gervase reiterated essentially the same tale, but with more detail—detail that would prove indispensable for d'Arras. Though Gervase did not link his character to anyone specific like his contemporary Gerald of Wales, he did allude to some knowledge of that work: "This allegation

that women change into serpents is certainly remarkable, but not to be repudiated. For in England we have often seen men change into wolves according to the phases of the moon,” echoing Gerald’s tales of the existence of such creatures.⁴⁰⁴

The names used by Jean d’Arras, primarily Guyon (Guy) and Geoffrey, were important to situating the story at a specific time in the historical past. Everyone knew of Guy and Geoffrey of Lusignan, for better or worse, and they were aware of their role in the Outremer. With two hundred years of time having passed, Jean d’Arras could recreate the story in a more favorable light, making the Lusignan men in the east noble, honorable, and victorious. He could also draw a strong crusading legacy from the earlier Lusignan men to the Duke of Berry’s father, Jean of Luxembourg, who himself had joined crusading missions in the Baltic and eventually died fighting in the field at the Battle of Crécy in 1346.

One last important note on the modification and elaboration by Jean d’Arras would be the appropriation of the Lusignan coat of arms previously mentioned. In written sources, the arms are described as “azure and argent,” or blue and silver; however, in images of the time, argent was typically depicted as white. The use of this color scheme and design by the Lusignans was well-known and was even noted in a marginal illustration in Matthew of Paris’s *Chronica majora*.⁴⁰⁵ In an entry for the year 1247, we can see the knighting of William of Valence, represented by a shield situated upright, colored with stripes of blue and white. Valence, who

⁴⁰⁴ MS Vat. Lat. 933. “Sane quod in serpentes mutari dicunt feminas mirandum quidem est, sed non detestandum. Vidimus enim frequenter in Anglia per lunationes homines in lupos mutari.”

⁴⁰⁵ Matthew Paris OSB, *Chronica maiora II*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 016II, 216v. <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/qt808nj0703>.

changed his name after coming to England at the bequest of his half-brother, Henry III, represented the union of the two houses by adding a label gules, each with three lions passant gardant, a symbol taken up by the Lionheart in the twelfth century. His effigy at St. Edmund's Chapel shows the knight lying with the original Lusignan arms on his shield. Aymer de Valence, William's brother who died on embassy to Charles IV in France, was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1324, his effigy's surcoat striped in white and blue, a lion lying at his feet.



Figure 15: William of Valence (Lusignan) Knighted, 1247. Matthew Paris OSB, *Chronica maiora II*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 016II, 216v.



Figure 16: Aymer de Valence (Lusignan) effigy, Westminster Abbey.

Though it may not seem like a major detail, we could compare this to the effect that resulted from Edward III quartering the arms of France with that of England in 1340. This symbolic act was seen as an affront to the French crown, one that represented Edward's claim to the throne and his intent to pursue his claim, thus accelerating the beginning of the Hundred Years' War. By using the heraldry of the House of Lusignan in his narrative, Jean d'Arras refuted that assertion and reclaimed the region for the House of Valois.



Figure 17: Edward III quarters the arms of France with his own, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Français 2675, f. 56.

6.5 Summary of Findings

A concentration on the character of Mélusine that regards her only as a literary figure negates the ideological weight that she was meant to carry. She encapsulated widespread beliefs about the female body and motherhood, particularly as they pertained to lineage and legitimacy, while also representing the limitations of what was “good” or acceptable to medieval society and how those ideas changed over time. Through this woman, we can gauge contemporary feelings

involving multiple categories, ranging from natural philosophy to theology to genealogy. Freighted with meaning, Mélusine, examined through the historical context of the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, tells us through her body, her actions, and her words, how we as modern readers can interpret fragile social boundaries and how they were accentuated by powerful men. But this is not the story of a female character bent and molded to suit the aims of these men and their families. In choosing Mélusine, these authors and families were making a conscious choice, realizing the significant agency present in a monstrous, hybrid woman and the benefits that such a choice could have.

Viewing Mélusine as simply a motif or a fairy or phantom effectively removes the very agency she was meant to embody. She was the foundress of these houses, and everything they did, for better or for worse, was rationalized through their proximity to her, giving her an exceptionally powerful role in the social memory of the Poitevin region and beyond. The goal of this work was to give a piece of that agency back by showing how she was not only meant to be read but, also, how imperative she was for developing and perpetuating the reputations of the houses of the Angevins, Lusignan, and Valois.

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