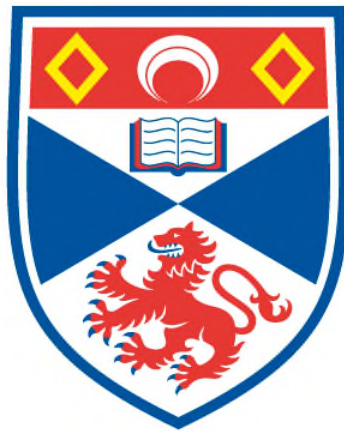


'FAIRY' IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

Chera A. Cole

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



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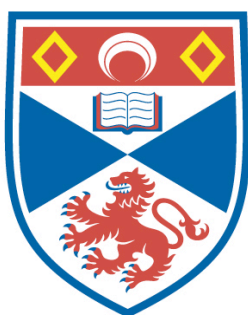
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‘FAIRY’ IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

Chera A. Cole



University of
St Andrews

*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the School of English in the University of St Andrews*

17 December 2013

ABSTRACT

My thesis, 'Fairy in Middle English romance', aims to contribute to the recent resurgence of interest in the literary medieval supernatural by studying the concept of 'fairy' as it is presented in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English romances. This thesis is particularly interested in how the use of 'fairy' in Middle English romances serves as an arena in which to play out 'thought-experiments' that test anxieties about faith, gender, power, and death.

My first chapter considers the concept of fairy in its medieval Christian context by using the romance *Melusine* as a case study to examine fairies alongside medieval theological explorations of the nature of demons. I then examine the power dynamic of fairy/human relationships and the extent to which having one partner be a fairy affects these explorations of medieval attitudes toward gender relations and hierarchy. The third chapter investigates 'fairy-like' women enchantresses in romance and the extent to which fairy is 'performed' in romance. In my fourth chapter, I explore the location of Faerie and how it relates as an alternative 'Otherworld' to the Christian Otherworlds of Paradise, Purgatory, Heaven, and Hell. My final chapter continues to examine geography by considering the application of Avalon and whether Avalon can be read as a 'land of fairies'.

By considering the etymological, spiritual, and gendered definitions of 'fairy', my research reveals medieval attitudes toward not only the Otherworld, but also the contemporary medieval world. In doing so, I provide new readings of little-studied medieval texts, such as the Middle English *Melusine* and *Eger and Grime*, as well as reconsider the presence of religious material and gender dynamics in medieval romance. My thesis demonstrates that by examining how fairy was used in Middle English romance, we can see how medieval authors were describing their present reality.

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I, Chera A. Cole, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 73,300 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in October 2009 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D in September 2010; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2013.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this thesis:

I. Periodicals and publishers

ES	Extra Series
EETS	Early English Text Society
H.M.S.O.	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
NS	New Series
OS	Original Series
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
RS	Rolls Series
STC	Short Title Catalogue
STS	Scottish Text Society

II. Titles of romances

<i>GW</i>	<i>Guy of Warwick</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>Sir Launfal</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Sir Orfeo</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Melusine</i>
<i>SGGK</i>	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
<i>TE</i>	<i>The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune</i>

III. Miscellaneous

BL	British Library
CUL	Cambridge University Library
HL	Huntington-Laing manuscript
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MS	Manuscript
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
P	Percy manuscript
TLF	<i>Trésor de la langue française</i>

INTRODUCTION

When King Elynas comes across the fairy Pressyne by a fountain in the forest, the audience is prepared for events to proceed in the standard pattern of a fairy romance: the knight and fairy pledge their love, and the fairy imposes a prohibition of some kind, which the knight inevitably breaks to his detriment, though the fairy may eventually forgive him. But in the romance of *Melusine*, the story takes a different turn after King Elynas breaks his oath to never see his fairy wife in childbed. Pressyne takes her three daughters to Avalon, and when they are older, the daughters seek revenge against their father by imprisoning him in a mountain. Upon learning of their transgression, their mother makes an unusual statement to the eldest of the sisters, Melusine:

For notwithstanding the vnlawfulness of thy fader / bothe thou & thy sustirs he shuld haue drawn to hym, and ye shuld shortly haue ben out of the hands of the Nymphes & of the fairees, without to retourne eny more. (p. 15)¹

According to Pressyne, these half-fairy, half-human women would have eventually become fully human on account of their father's nature. By adding the condition that human nature is stronger than fairy nature in a 'mixed-race' person, Jean d'Arras, the author of the French source text, manipulates the 'fairy convention'² of knight-meets-fairy, knight-breaks-taboo motif. As we can see here, the ways in which medieval authors use 'fairy' provides an insight into the medieval imagination: Why does the author make this change? What purpose does it serve in his text? This thesis aims to provide some answers to these questions, both with regard to the case of *Melusine* and more broadly,

¹ Page numbers refer to A. K. Donald (ed.), *Melusine compiled by Jean d'Arras. Edited from a unique manuscript in the Library of the British Museum* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., EETS.ES.68, 1895).

² James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 1.

investigating the motivations behind how English authors use and alter familiar fairy motifs in their texts.

'Fairy' as a literary subject has recently come under scrutiny with James Wade's investigation of the generic conventions of fairy in medieval romance and with Corinne Saunders's studies of magic and the supernatural.³ James Wade's recent study, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (2011), is revolutionary in offering the first book-length study on fairy that does not focus on the folklore about fairy or on fairy belief. However, the sheer size and scope of his study makes it difficult to draw conclusions regarding *why* medieval authors manipulated 'fairy conventions' the way that they did. The purpose of Wade's study is to 'trace the use of supernatural figures and motifs across over 400 years of literary history', which necessarily 'is concerned with tracking how fairy conventions are established and maintained across time and literary modes'.⁴ His texts range from Old French *lais* to early printed romances in the late sixteenth century, including texts written in Latin, Old French, Anglo-Norman, German, and Middle English. Wade employs 'possible worlds theory'⁵ as a way to understand how fairy is used in the 'internal folklore'⁶ of the text. He is primarily interested in the ways medieval authors manipulated 'fairy conventions' to fit their specific narrative needs. Furthermore, he is more concerned with the construction and use of 'fairy' as a literary device than what the use of this literary device reveals about its medieval authors and audiences. Wade's examination demonstrates how 'fairy' as a literary device was used in different ways across the genres of romance and chronicles, over four centuries, in texts in various languages and from different countries; in effect, Wade focuses on the bigger picture of 'fairy' in medieval literature.

³ Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010)

⁴ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, p. 1.

⁵ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, p. 2.

⁶ Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance*, p. 3.

As a result, Wade has left room for more localized studies on fairy to be done, focusing on how fairy is used in a particular country, language, or century. My thesis aims to add to this interest in the literary medieval supernatural by studying the concept of ‘fairy’ as it is presented in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English romances. The reason for this is to investigate *why* medieval English authors manipulated fairy conventions the way they did, and what this reveals about the medieval English imagination. In this thesis, I will examine how and why medieval English authors use fairies as opposed to using human characters and, in the process, I will demonstrate how using fairies helped medieval authors and audiences to think through anxieties about the soul and salvation, medieval demonology, gender roles, power, and violence. Similarly, I explore the uses of Faerie – the Fairy Otherworld – and what this reveals about medieval ideas about the Christian Otherworlds of Heaven, Hell, Paradise, and Purgatory, and the fictional Otherworld of Avalon. By considering the imaginative, spiritual, and gendered definitions of ‘fairy’, this study reveals medieval English attitudes toward both the Otherworld and the contemporary medieval world.

The otherworldly is necessarily difficult to describe in concrete terms, and we must be careful with our terminology when considering the medieval supernatural. Robert Bartlett discusses the development of the term ‘supernatural’ in the medieval period, stating that it was, in part, to ‘mark off’ the natural from something *else*.⁷ The ‘something else’ in this thesis is, of course, ‘fairy’. The term ‘supernatural’ is a slippery one, and as Carl Watkins observes, medieval chroniclers were more likely to refer specifically to miracles or signs, or to use more elastic words such as ‘wonder’, ‘marvel’, and ‘prodigy’.⁸ But even if chroniclers did not use the term *supernaturalis* when referring to strange or

⁷ Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 17.

⁸ Carl Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 18.

unusual events, Watkins argues that the idea of the 'supernatural' as being something different, 'above' or 'beyond' the 'natural', did exist,⁹ and for our purposes we can use the term 'supernatural' to distinguish the extraordinary from the ordinary.

I will use the standard Modern English spelling *fairy* throughout. While my first inclination is to shy away from a spelling that may, for some modern readers, evoke gossamer-winged creatures sitting on flowers and drinking out of thimbles, armed with magic wands and satchels of fairy dust, in the end, *fairy* – a spelling also found in some of the Middle English texts under discussion here – offers itself as the best option.¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, I shall use 'Faerie' to refer to the place or realm of fairies, synonymous with Fairyland. While the alternative spellings of *faerie* and *faery* have gained popularity with the New Age movement, propounded by people who believe in fairies and who conflate fairies with other paranormal activities,¹¹ I choose to use this term because this particular spelling of 'faerie' comes from Old French, referring to the country or land belonging to such beings as fairies. How the word 'fairy' developed in Middle English will be discussed further below.

Although the fairies depicted in medieval literature both perform magic and are portrayed as magical beings, 'fairy magic' is different from other magic in the Middle Ages. Valerie Flint offers the useful definition that magic is 'the exercise of a preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they'.¹² Studies on medieval magic have tended to focus on natural magic or ritual magic; that is, magic that is performed by uttering spells or enacting certain rites

⁹ Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *Fairy* is one of the spellings used in *Sir Orfeo*, found also in *Reinbrun* and Lydgate's *Troy Book*.

¹¹ A simple search on Google with the search term 'faerie' will bring up a host of websites and images proving this point. *Faerie* and *faery* are also commonly used in modern fantasy texts, such as the acclaimed *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman (1998) and the recently published *Knife* by R. J. Anderson (2009) and *Midnight Never Come* by Marie Brennan (2008). While these authors do make use of some fairy lore and tradition, fairies are refashioned to fit their stories.

¹² Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 3.

or sacrifices. This is the case in the seminal works such as Valerie Flint's *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* and Richard Kieckhefer's *Magic in the Middle Ages*,¹³ both of which discuss the Classical origins of medieval magic and the different branches of magic as it is practiced in the Middle Ages, such as astrology, divination, and necromancy. Claire Fanger classes necromancy (sometimes called 'nigromancy' or 'black magic') as 'ritual magic' because it is distinguished from other types of spells and charms by the longer, more complex rituals used for conjuring demons.¹⁴ These general studies on medieval magic provide useful points of comparison with how 'fairy magic' is often depicted in Middle English romances. The first chapter of this thesis, 'Fairies and Demons: The Case of *Melusine*', makes use of medieval demonology in determining fairy's place in the Christian hierarchy of the supernatural. The third chapter, "'Performing" Fairy', also highlights the difference between fairy magic and ritual magic, particularly the fact that medieval magic was, for the most part, considered a learned craft and was performed through spells and incantations.

To set the context for this examination of fairy in Middle English romance, I will provide a literature review of previous studies on fairy, most of which focus on folklore or 'fairy belief'. This literature review, albeit surveying studies which are significantly different in purpose from my own, demonstrates the predominant trend in fairy scholarship. I will then develop a literary definition of 'the medieval English fairy' by undertaking an etymological and historical survey of the words 'fairy' and 'elf'. These two terms became interchangeable in fourteenth-century Middle English, and while each term has been studied individually,¹⁵ and Wade considers both briefly in his

¹³ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Claire Fanger, 'Medieval Ritual Magic: What is it and why we need to know more about it', in Claire Fanger (ed.), *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. vii-viii.

¹⁵ For studies on the word 'fairy', see Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology* (London: Wildhood House Ltd., 1981), pp. 4-12; Noel Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin

introduction,¹⁶ no previous study on the Middle English fairy has examined both in detail. By considering the origins and development of both terms, I demonstrate a uniquely English understanding of 'fairy'. Continuing from this etymological study, I will explore what other words are associated with 'fairy' and 'elf' in Middle English texts in order to survey what themes fairy was associated with in Middle English and medieval English thought.

Fairy 'belief': a brief review of studies on fairy

With the exception of Wade's *Fairies in medieval romance*, book-length studies on fairies have thus far been associated either with the collection of folklore from the eighteenth to the earlier twentieth centuries or with the study of belief in fairies. In this section I will review the notable works in fairy scholarship, looking at the different traditions in which fairy has been studied. By way of contrast, this literature review reveals methodologies and approaches to the subject of fairy which this present thesis avoids: rather than continue the trend of studying fairy in terms of fairy belief, this thesis studies fairy as an imaginative concept without attempting to determine how far medieval authors and audiences actually believed in them.

One tendency in these early studies on fairy belief is to use medieval romances as evidence for medieval belief in fairies. Like Euan Cameron, whose field is pre-modern 'superstition', I am sceptical of the extent to which literature from learned or literary

Air', in Peter Narváez (ed.), *The Good People: New Fairyllore Essays*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1376 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991), pp. 457-78; Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a history* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), pp. 16-17. For an in-depth study on 'elf', see Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: matters of belief, health, gender and identity* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 4-5.

sources can be used as real evidence for everyday beliefs and attitudes.¹⁷ Cameron discusses the staunch postmodern approach which reads these texts in a vacuum: that the authors of these medieval theological texts – or in the case of this thesis, romances – interact only with other literary texts and that the superstitions recorded in their texts bear no resemblance to actual belief. In contrast to this approach observed by Cameron regarding literature on superstition, some literary critics and historians, such as Thomas Keightley and W. Y. Evans Wentz, and, in the present day, Diane Purkiss, have interpreted the presence of fairies in medieval romances, such as the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*, to reflect a real belief in fairies in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ While this may be true, such a statement should not be made without qualification or examination. Similarly, ballads that include fairies such as ‘Thomas the Rhymer’¹⁹ and ‘Tam Lin’²⁰ are used to demonstrate folk belief during the medieval and Early Modern periods. The critics who use ballads as evidence for early folk belief are likely to say that if a ballad contains fairy characters, there must have been a belief in fairies in order for these stories to exist, and a sustained belief in fairies as these ballads continued to be told and sung.

One of the theses in *Folklore in English and Scottish Ballads* by Lowry C. Wimberly (1928) is that ballads ‘mirror the life and thought of the people from whom the substance of traditional poetry originally sprang’.²¹ In 1932, Gordon Gerould writes that those who participate in the circulation of ballads ‘doubtless believed that the stories mirrored real happenings, just as they have accepted supernatural beings and events as a

¹⁷ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 8.

¹⁸ Thomas Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*; W. Y. Evans Wentz, *The fairy-faith in Celtic countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1911); Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: a history of fairies and fairy stories* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000).

¹⁹ ‘Thomas the Rhymer’, Child Ballad #35, in Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. I (New York: *Folklore*, 1956), pp. 317-29.

²⁰ ‘Tam Lin’, Child Ballad #39, in Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. I, pp. 335-58.

²¹ Lowry C. Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, Co., 1928), p. 6.

matter of course'.²² A certain sense of 'timelessness' is attributed to ballads, thus placing them outside the standard methodology of approaching other genres of literature: questions of location and date are removed from consideration. M. J. C. Hodgart, writing in 1950, perpetuates this trend when he claims that 'the ballad cannot be defined in terms of its origin or of the circumstances of its collection, but only in terms of its structure and other internal characteristics. It is an artistic form, not a scientific category'.²³ Despite this New Critical stance, the details of the ballad's collection, the date, location, and provenance, cannot be entirely ignored. No literature exists without context. David Fowler discusses the fallacy of relying on the internal autonomy of oral tradition in *A literary history of the popular ballad* (1968).²⁴ While expressing his indebtedness to Francis J. Child for his collection of ballads, Fowler comments that an effect of Child's arrangement of the ballads has been to encourage the study of English and Scottish ballads in isolation, without respect to time, place, or the circumstances of their collection.²⁵ This structuralist attitude toward the ballad presumes that the people from whom the ballads were collected made little or no alterations to the texts and neglects to consider oral literature as an evolving genre, allowing for stories to change with the telling.

Although a popular work, Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology* (1870),²⁶ has often served as the first port of call for later studies on fairy, despite its methodological weaknesses. Keightley includes two chapters on medieval romances in *The Fairy Mythology*, and although he does separate romance from folktales or 'popular fairies', the distinction ends there. By including medieval romance in a work which claims to

²² Gordon Hall Gerould, *The Ballad of Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp.131-32.

²³ M. J. C. Hodgart, *The Ballads* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1950), p. 12.

²⁴ David Fowler, *A literary history of the popular ballad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1968).

²⁵ Fowler, *A literary history of the popular ballad*, pp. 3-5.

²⁶ Later reprinted as Thomas Keightley, *The World Guide to Gnomes, Fairies, Elves and Other Little People* (New York: Avenel Books, 1978).

‘describe’ and ‘record’ the ‘manners’ and ‘deeds’ of ‘Fairies, Fays, Elves, *aut alio quo nomine gaudent*’,²⁷ Keightley in effect claims that medieval romance is a valid source for the existence of medieval belief in fairies.

In *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911), W. Y. Evans Wentz sets out to explore the phenomenon of *belief* in fairies, which he did by travelling around Britain, Ireland, and Brittany collecting folk tales about fairies. Evans Wentz writes in his introduction:

In studying this belief, we are concerned directly with living Celtic folk-traditions, and with past Celtic folk-traditions as recorded in literature. And if fairies actually exist as invisible beings or intelligences, and our investigations lead us to the tentative hypothesis that they do, they are natural and not supernatural, for nothing exists that can be supernatural; and, therefore, it is our duty to examine the Celtic Fairy Races just as we examine any fact in the visible realm wherein we now live, whether it be a fact of chemistry, of physics, or of biology.²⁸

Evans Wentz also includes medieval romances in his survey of ‘the fairy faith’, particularly in the chapter on Arthur and his court as Brythonic deities. While arguing that the characters in Arthurian romances are remnants of ancient Celtic deities, Evans Wentz claims that even Chrétien de Troyes is aware of this, and that the sword and water bridges in *The Knight of the Cart*²⁹ are meant to reflect the entrances into ‘the subjective world, where the god-like Tuatha de Danann, the *Tylwyth Teg*, and the shades of the dead equally exist’.³⁰ Like Keightley, Evans Wentz freely uses the narratives of medieval romance as evidence for early, pre-Christian belief, albeit Evans Wentz does so to an extreme. Of course, we must remember that Evans Wentz wrote in the early twentieth century, when Spiritualism was still in vogue, and only six years before Sir Arthur Conan Doyle verified the Cottingley Fairy photographs as being authentic.

²⁷ Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, p. 4.

²⁸ Evans Wentz, *The fairy-faith in Celtic countries*, pp. xvi-xvii.

²⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, ‘The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)’, in William W. Kibler (trans. and ed.), *Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 244-45, 270.

³⁰ Evans Wentz, *The fairy-faith in Celtic countries*, pp. 311-12.

Katharine Briggs, perhaps one of the most dedicated British folklorists of the twentieth century, includes folklore, Anglo-Saxon medical texts, chronicles, and romances in the historic survey in the first chapter in *The fairies in tradition and literature* (1967).³¹ Despite differences in genre, date or language of composition, she treats all of these texts as sources for evidence of fairy belief. Even though she draws on folklore for her survey of fairies, Briggs departs from Evans Wentz's approach. As she states in her preface:

This is not an attempt to prove that fairies are real. My intention has been to report objectively what people believed themselves to have seen. My standard has been truth to tradition rather than truth to fact, and I have discussed the fairy standards and practices seriously, as one discusses characters in a good book.³²

Briggs otherwise draws from all of her source material equally. In Briggs' defence, she writes as a folklorist about folklore, and the medieval period is not her primary concern. Her purpose is to explore the different types of fairy in English tradition, and in the process, to create a survey and dictionary of English folk tales.

In *Troublesome Things* (2000),³³ Diane Purkiss juxtaposes medieval literature about fairy with folk tales, ballads or the rare chronicle account that does indicate belief in fairy. She claims in her chapter 'Medieval Dreams' that,

Writing about fairies in the Middle Ages is, as we shall see, writing about nearly nothing. Talking about fairies is so fatal that very few people are willing to do it. That is why we are left with glimpses. No one wants to conjure a whole.³⁴

This statement is made early on in her chapter on medieval fairies, and appears to be an excuse to rely not on medieval texts that include or are about fairy, but to use instead ballads and folklore collected well beyond the medieval period.³⁵ For example, she tells

³¹ Katharine M. Briggs, *The fairies in tradition and literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).

³² Briggs, *The fairies in tradition and literature*, p. x.

³³ Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: a history of fairies and fairy stories* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000).

³⁴ Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, p. 56.

³⁵ To give examples of Purkiss's practice: when discussing changelings (p. 58), she cites 'a Gaelic song, which may be older than Guinefort', and this song is included in John Gregorson Campbell's *Clan*

of Heurodis's abduction by the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* in the same breath as she gives the account of Katherine Fordyce of Unst, whose death was interpreted as being fairy-taken, though the latter is given without the benefit of a date or citation.³⁶ In her chapter on medieval fairies, Purkiss more often refers to Child's ballads than she does to tales extant before the sixteenth century.³⁷

Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan state their purpose in *Scottish Fairy Belief* (2001) as being concerned with the *dramatis personae* of fairy stories, yet not with the intent to prove the existence of fairy.³⁸ Their study investigates the way fairy belief shaped Scottish culture from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. For the medieval period, Henderson and Cowan rely heavily upon medieval romances, such as *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* and *Sir Orfeo*, as well as ballads, and records from sixteenth-century witch trials. In the second chapter, 'The Wonderful World of Fairy', they juxtapose Thomas Rhymer's journey into Fairyland in the ballad 'Thomas the Rhymer' with witch trial accounts of encounters with fairy.³⁹ Although they acknowledge that their use of ballads is controversial, Henderson and Cowan claim that ballads 'preserve valuable material' and that they 'provide an important articulation of

Traditions and Popular Tales of the Western Highlands, Waifs and Strays of Celtic Traditions, Argyllshire Series 5 (London: Nutt, 1895); again, on p. 68, she conflates chivalric romance with ballads: 'But the commonest of all fairies met by men in the greenwood is a story which becomes part of a genre – chivalric romance. It begins as one of the generic markers of the romance of adventure, one of the defining stories of knighthood and chivalry. The story is clear and simple in the ballads "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin"'. It is unknown why Purkiss does not refer to *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, of which 'Thomas the Rhymer' is a later analogue, or to *Sir Launfal*, in which Launfal encounters the fairy Tryamour and becomes her lover, but rather relies on two ballads out of Child's collection.

³⁶ Katherine Fordyce is discussed on p. 61 in *Troublesome Things*, and *Sir Orfeo* on p. 77.

³⁷ Of the 45 sources cited for Purkiss's chapter *Medieval Dreams*, only seven are medieval primary sources; the remaining citations belong to secondary sources and to folktale and ballad collections. Purkiss, *Troublesome Things* 328-31. An example of her practice is seen on pp. 72-74 when she briefly mentions *Thomas of Erceldoune* but uses Child's 'Thomas the Rhymer' for the details of her discussion.

³⁸ Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief: a history* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), p. 2.

³⁹ 'Elfland was a place that many contemplated but few had the opportunity to visit. Indeed most who found it did so unwillingly or by accident. The most remarkable depiction of the journey to Fairyland, in the ballads or any other source, is of that made by Thomas Rhymer,' p. 36; Thomas Rhymer's journey into Fairyland is juxtaposed with witch trial accounts of encounters with fairy on p. 37.

folk belief".⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Henderson claims that while it is possible to reconstruct a picture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century folk belief about fairies without referring to ballads at all, ballads can illuminate early modern belief about fairies.⁴¹ Unlike Henderson, Cowan, and Purkiss, I will not use ballads as sources in this thesis. While nuggets of medieval fairy belief can exist through the ages, to use such later material as evidence for such belief without the consideration that elements change through transmission, in both text and most especially in oral tradition, is problematic to say the least.⁴² Fairy certainly does appear in medieval texts, but perhaps not in exactly the same manner as fairy is presented in ballads collected at a later date.

Although this literature review has shown that previous studies have mostly focused on belief in fairies, this thesis is not concerned with fairy belief and will not use Middle English romances as evidence for this belief in medieval England. Rather, I will use Middle English romances – primarily *Sir Orfeo*, *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, *Sir Degaré*, *Sir Launfal*, *Melusine*, *Partonope of Blois*, *Eger and Grime*, *Guy of Warwick*, and *Sir Gowther* – to explore how fairy and 'fairy conventions' are used in Middle English texts. 'How?' and 'why?' are the two main questions of this study, with the intent of discovering what anxieties, concerns, and attitudes were held by medieval English authors and audiences by asking these questions.

⁴⁰ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Lizanne Henderson, 'The Road to Elfland: Fairy Belief and the Child Ballads', in Edward J. Cowan (ed.), *The Ballad in Scottish History* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), p. 69.

⁴² Hodgart says on p. 14 of *The Ballads* that 'a ballad taken down from folk singers in the twentieth century may have more ancient history than one found in a fifteenth century manuscript'. But in contrast to Hodgart, Gerould observes that the ballads 'present no coherent record of either historical event or of popular believe and custom at any one period' and are as likely as to include elements of belief and tradition for a variety of centuries and decades, depending on the age of the ballad (Gerould, *The Ballad of Tradition*, 161).

The development of 'fairy' and 'elf'

In a period so richly populated with ideas about the supernatural as the medieval period, spiritual and otherworldly creatures can be understood not only by the way they were described, but also by the very words used to name them. By the mid-fourteenth century, the Middle English terms 'fairy/fairie/faierie/feiri(e)/farie' and 'elf' were used interchangeably for the same creature, resulting in a conflation of the differing traditions from which each word comes: *fairy* from Latin and French, and *elf* from Old English and Old Norse. In this section, I will trace the origins of the words *fairy* and *elf* up until the fourteenth century, when the two words became synonymous. In doing so, I will identify particular traits that are attributed to fairies, bringing us closer to some definition of 'the medieval English fairy'.

❖ *Tracing 'fairy'*

Various critics have attempted to determine the derivation of the word *fairy*. Among the less plausible theories proposed by Keightley are the ideas that *fairy* comes from the final syllable of *nympha* or that *fairies* are actually the descendents of Persian *Peries*. This latter theory claims that crusaders brought back stories about fairies from Palestine, supposing that the Persian *Peri* became *Feri* in Arabic because the latter alphabet contains no sound for /p/.⁴³ Another theory derives *fairy* from Anglo-Saxon *faran*, meaning 'to go', perhaps in reference to the nomadic aspect of 'trooping fairies'; or from

⁴³ Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, p. 4. Peries and Deevs correspond to the good and evil Jinn from Arab mythology; Peries are beautiful beings of light and paradise, long-lived but not immortal, magical and able to change shape. Keightley includes a version of 'The Peri Wife' that contains the folktale motif of the Swan Maiden (Motif D361.1), but like the Seal Wife stories from Scotland, the fairy wife, once restored to her natural form, does not return.

fagan, the word for fair, changing in colour, or shining.⁴⁴ The prevailing view, however, is that *fairy* derives from the Latin word *fata*, the neuter plural form of *fatum*, 'fate'. The *OED* entry for *fairy* refers to the etymology of *fay*, which is derived from Old French *fae*, *faie* (French *fée*). The claim for derivation from a Latin source is reinforced when we consider the words for *fairy* from other Romance languages: Provençal and Portuguese *fada*, Spanish *hada*, and Italian *fata*. Furthermore, the German word for fairy, *fee*, also comes from the French *fée*, which Kluge's *Etymologisches Wörterbuch* derives from Latin *fata*.⁴⁵ Similarly, the *MED* derives *fairie* from Old French *faerie*, which, according to *Trésor de la langue française (TLF)*, derives from *fée* and the suffix *-erie*, meaning an activity or where an activity is taking place. The *MED* notes that 'some OF words in *-erie* formed on nouns were taken into ME along with their primaries: e.g. *fai-erie* fairyland, enchantment (and *fai* fairy)'. It defines *fairie* not only as the otherworldly being but also the country or place such supernatural creatures inhabit; a collective or singular noun referring to such creatures; to some form of enchantment, magic or illusion; or, something incredible or fictitious, a figment of the imagination.

The *TLF* derives the French *fée* from the Latin *fata*. The Latin *fatum* literally means 'thing said', and in the plural form *fata*, it is used to describe the mythological Fates, Lachesis, Atropos and Clotho. Some have supposed that during the early Middle Ages *fata* was misread as a feminine singular, resulting in 'female fate, goddess' as an alternative definition.⁴⁶ However, this 'misreading' relies on 'confusion' in the minds of medieval writers who first used the word *fairy*,⁴⁷ a presumption which is difficult to prove

⁴⁴ Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, p. 4; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 16. For 'trooping fairies', see W. B. Yeats, ed. *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (New York: Metro Books, 2002), pp. 10-12, and Briggs, *The Fairies in tradition and literature*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ 'Fee', in Friedrich Kluge, Max Bürgisser, Bernd Gregor, and Elmar Seebold, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch Der Deutschen Sprache* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989).

⁴⁶ Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air', in Narváez (ed.), *The Good People*, p. 462; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air', in Narváez (ed.), *The Good People*, p. 457.

several centuries later. Instead, as Noel Williams argues, the derivation from *fata* may lie more in the concept of ‘fatedness’ than in a confusion of Latin declension. This idea of ‘fatedness’ can be seen as we trace the development of the Middle English *fairie* from its Latin root.

As Old French evolved from vulgar Latin, the second syllabic consonant was dropped, resulting in *fa’a*, or *fae*.⁴⁸ Keightley notes a similar change in the Latin verb *fatāre*, to enchant, which became in Old French *faer* or *fēer*, the past participle of which is *faé* or *fē*.⁴⁹ That the Latin root *fata* is linked with fairies is reinforced by the Latin writings of twelfth-century writers such as Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury: Map uses *fatalitas* to ascribe fairy nature to a woman, and Tilbury uses *fatata* to refer to Morgan le Fay.⁵⁰ As we can see, the concept of fairy has a strong connection with the idea of ‘fatedness’, of something ordained by Fate.

The difficulty of defining fairy increases when the word is incorporated into Middle English. *Faie* (or *fei*) comes directly from Old French *faé* or *fée* and, like its French source, the Middle English *faie* (also *fei*) is both an adjective and a noun: as an adjective, it means enchanted or bewitched; as a noun it is the person possessing the power to enchant. More common is the Middle English word *fairie* derived from the French *faerie*, meaning enchantment by witchcraft. Other common alternative spellings of *fairie* in Middle English are *faierie*, *feiri(e)*, *farie* and *fairy(e)*.

⁴⁸ Williams, ‘The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air’, in Narváez (ed.), *The Good People*, p. 462. Henderson and Cowan say that there is no written evidence for this change (*Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 16), but there may be linguistic support. In the early development of French, single consonants in intervocalic positions, particularly middle consonants, were also in relatively weak positions in the word; dominated by the surrounding sounds of the vowels (especially homophonous vowels), these consonants were more liable to change or effacement. For more, refer to M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French with especial consideration of Anglo-Norman: Phonology and Morphology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), §§ 209, 335, 347, 348, 368.

⁴⁹ Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁰ See citations for *fatalitas* and *fatatus* in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, Vol. I A-L, Fascicule IV F-G-H (1989). For use of the word *fatalitas* see Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* = *Courtiers’ Trifles*, M. R. James (trans.) and C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp. 155-9, and for *fatata* see S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (eds. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 428.

Another theory claims that Old English is a source for the Middle English word *fairie* as well as the word *elf*. The most obvious of these comes from the *fæger*, from which we get the Modern English word *fair*. In Old English it means much the same as it does now: beautiful, pleasant. At the very least, *fæger* might be the source for the common epithet used for fairies, 'the fair folk'. As mentioned above, *faran*, 'to go', is also presented as a possible source, but the only relation could be that of the trooping fairies – nomadic fairies in folklore – and this seems a fragile connection indeed. However, while an Old English source for the word *fairie* is unlikely, the Old English *fæge* is very similar to the French *faie*. In Middle English this word appears as *fei(e)*, *feȝe*, very similar to the Middle English *faie* or *fei* from the Old French *faé* and *fée*. The Old English *fæge* and its Middle English cognate both mean 'doomed to death; fated to die'. When both *fei* and *fai* are used to describe fairies and elves, when one means doom and the other enchantment, it is possible that a conflation of meanings can occur, reinforcing the dual magical and 'fatedness' nature of fairies.

❖ Tracing 'elf'

By Chaucer's time, the words *elf* and *fairie* had become synonymous and interchangeable, yet *elf* comes not from the French tradition but from the Anglo-Saxon. Jacob Grimm argues that *ælf* and other Indo-European cognates are derived from the base **/a lb^h-/*. He claims that these words are connected semantically by this quality of 'whiteness'.⁵¹ The most recent and detailed study of the development of the word *ælf* has been carried out by Alaric Hall, who hesitates to place too much emphasis on the

⁵¹ Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, Vol. 2, James Steven Stallybrass (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 444.

‘whiteness’ attribute of *ælf*.⁵² While Grimm then goes on to posit that this association with ‘whiteness’ indicates a positive moral connotation, Hall points out that there may be many reasons why supernatural beings are associated with ‘whiteness’, and he instead makes the connection between the *álfar* and light.⁵³

Whatever the origins of the word, it is clear that Middle English *elf*, Old English *ælf* and Old Norse *álf* are cognates. The *álfar* in Norse mythology were supernatural, neither gods nor monstrous but human-like; Hall uses the term ‘otherworldly beings’ to maintain a sense of awe and wonder.⁵⁴ This sense of ‘otherworldliness’ is carried over into the Old English cognate *ælf*. The Old English *ælf* is grammatically masculine, but Hall demonstrates that early Anglo-Saxon elves were ‘prototypically male’,⁵⁵ as was usually the case with the Old Norse *álf*. However, Hall observes a shift in the gendering of elves during the Anglo-Saxon period: as Anglo-Saxon writers began to gloss Latin texts about classical beings such as nymphs, dryads and naiads, the feminine variant *ælfen* was created to gloss these clearly female creatures as elves, wood-elves and water-elves.⁵⁶ Hall notes that despite being usually gendered male, *ælfen* were also attributed various traits that were considered effeminate,⁵⁷ such as being seductively beautiful.⁵⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum claims that men use images of reversal to demonstrate liminality.⁵⁹ for

⁵² Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 54-55.

⁵³ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 157.

⁵⁶ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 77-89; The entry for ‘*ælfen*’ in the *Dictionary of Old English: A to G* on CD-ROM, Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey *et al.* (eds.) (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies for the Dictionary of Old English Project 2008), gives two citations: glossing *ælfen* for *nympha* and *wilde ælfen* ‘wild elf’ for *hamadryas* ‘wood-nymph’; the *Middle English Dictionary* gives the following the etymology for *elf*: ‘OE had a masc. *ælf*, pl. *ylfe* (from Gmc. **alba-*, **albi-*) and a fem. **elfen*, pl. **elfenna*, -*elfen* (from Gmc. **albinj-*). Both words survive in ME, the former as *elf* (with the vowel of the pl.), pl. *elves*, the latter as *elve(n)*, WM *alve(n)*, pl. *elven(e)*, WM *alven(e)*. Both words occur also in ME cpds.].’

⁵⁷ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 157.

⁵⁸ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 92-93, 148.

⁵⁹ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 161; Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘Women’s Stories, Women’s Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner’s Theory of Liminality’, in Robert L. Moore and Frank E. Reynolds (eds.), *Anthropology and the Study of Religion* (Chicago: Center for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1984), pp. 110.

instance, by reversing gender roles in a text, the male author casts the man or woman as 'Other'. Hall borrows this theory and uses these examples of effeminate male elves and the elves in *Wið færstice* (Hall claims that the shooting elves at the beginning of the charm are female)⁶⁰ to argue that the blurred depiction of elves' gender roles expressed elves' otherworldliness. Female elves can bear weapons precisely because they are elves. I will explore the ways authors use fairy to subvert traditional gender roles in texts in the second chapter of this thesis, 'Fairies, Gender, and Power', in which I look at the ways male and female fairies in Middle English romance exercise control over their human lovers.

The *Dictionary of Old English* gives seven citations for *ælf*, five of which are words dealing with illness, medical conditions or charms, or as an element of proper names.⁶¹ Three Old English adjectives draw on *ælf* as a root: *ælfisc*, *ælfīg* and *ælfscyne*. The first, *ælfisc*, means 'elvish; having the qualities of elves'. The other two, in so far it is possible to use words to understand other words, might illuminate some of the characteristics attributed to elves. *Ælfīg* is found in glosses for Latin, meaning 'afflicted in mind, mad, frantic'.⁶² One of the known uses as a gloss is for the Latin *comitialis*, a talker or babbler, or a lunatic. Attributing madness to elves may explain why in Middle English *elf* is sometimes used in the phrase 'takyn with an elfe', a phrase used to indicate someone who is possessed or insane.⁶³ The second use of *ælfīg* as a gloss is to indicate a divinely inspired temple servant. The third adjective *ælfscyne* has the meaning 'radiant or fair as an elf, beautiful', 'delusive as an elf' or 'divinely inspired'.⁶⁴ The quality of divine inspiration that *ælfscyne* shares with *ælfīg* possibly reinforces the supernatural characteristics of elves. It should be noted that the three instances of *ælfscyne* are used to

⁶⁰ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 114.

⁶¹ 'Ælf', in *Dictionary of Old English*.

⁶² 'Ælfīg', in *Dictionary of Old English*.

⁶³ 'Taken', in *The Middle English Dictionary*, citation from the Towneley cycle under definition 2.b.c.

⁶⁴ 'ælfscyne', in *Dictionary of Old English*.

describe women whose beauty proved dangerous to the men around them: Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and Judith. Hall discusses this in his chapter ‘Female elves and beautiful elves’, devoting several pages to the discussion of *ælfscyne*.⁶⁵ The generic element of *ælfscyne*, *scyne*, means ‘bright’ and ‘beautiful’ and is used throughout Old and Middle English to denote both of these meanings. Like the word *beautiful*, it is used more often in reference to women than it is to men (the exception being in the description of angels, yet this only reinforces the connection between *ælf* and angel). In the three instances of *ælfscyne* in Old English texts, it appears that the quality of beauty is more apparent than brightness: Sarah is a liability to Abraham in both episodes in *Genesis A* because of her beauty, and in *Judith* the heroine uses her beauty to seduce Holofernes in order to kill him.⁶⁶ But as Hall points out, ‘The women who are *ælfscyne* are not simply beautiful, but perilously so’.⁶⁷ Sarah’s beauty invites the lust of Pharaoh and of Abimelech, to the endangerment of both their houses and Abraham’s life. Judith’s beauty is used to provoke Holofernes’s sexual desire for the purpose of assassination. The element of surpassing beauty, like that of an *ælf*, is a dangerous one. The use of *ælfscyne* indicates a feminine quality for elves, and a femininity that is both otherworldly and dangerous in its otherworldliness.

By the Middle English period, both *elf* and *elven* were capable of referring to elves of either sex. The *MED* defines *elf* as ‘a supernatural being having magical powers for good or evil; a spirit, fairy, goblin, incubus, succubus, or the like’ and *elven* as ‘an elf or fairy’.⁶⁸ The Middle English then maintains the ambiguity of elves, allowing for a fluid understanding of what elves may be, so long as the creature is supernatural. The attributes of ‘fatedness’, ‘otherworldly’ and ‘shining’ beauty shared by *ælf* and *faie* easily could be

⁶⁵ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 88-94.

⁶⁶ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ ‘Elf’ and ‘elven’, in *The Middle English Dictionary*, The Middle English Compendium, 2001. Consulted on 18 March 2010.

seen as creating a connection between these two supernatural beings, allowing for the Middle English *elf* and *fairie* to be interchangeable. The concept of the medieval fairy was a combination of both the Anglo-Saxon and French traditions, and the joining of the two allowed for the representation of both male and female fairy/elf beings. The ambiguously gendered *aelfe* in Old English, when introduced to fairies from the French tradition, allowed for the further development of a feminine elf, as Anglo-Saxon elves provided for masculine fairies.

❖ *Other names for fairies*

Fairies are also associated with Celtic traditions, and thus far no Celtic or Gaelic etymology has been offered as a source for *fairy*. The most common Celtic word is *sidhe*, used by the Irish and in parts of Scotland to refer collectively to all fairies. Folklore collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is filled to the brim with various names for fairies, and Victorian folklorists set themselves to creating a taxonomy of the different types of fairies. It was unlucky to speak the word *fairy*, for the fairies disliked this name, and so it was to ward off the fairies' displeasure that epithets such as 'the fair folk' or 'the good neighbours' were created.⁶⁹ When we consider the folkloric taboo against referring to fairies directly, we can see that many of these names are similar to 'the fair folk' that is used in English: the Seelie and Unseelie Court in Scotland, from Old English *selig* for 'blessed, happy' and its opposite, or the Welsh *Tylwyth Teg* meaning 'the fairy family'.⁷⁰ The myriad of names found for fairies – kelpies, brownies, pixies, and so on – could be

⁶⁹ Or also in Ireland, 'the gentry', which Briggs says is 'the polite Irish name for the fairies, equivalent to the Highland "People of Peace", for it is not lucky to call them Fairies' *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, p. 218. The unluckiness of the word *fairy* is said somewhat fancifully by Purkiss at the end of her introduction to *Troublesome Things*: 'Even to say the word "fairy" costs the sayer a year of life. So, dear reader, be careful. Do not read this book aloud', p. 10.

⁷⁰ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 14.

local *noa*, or safe words used to avoid speaking the taboo *fairy*.⁷¹ Some of these typological names for fairies appear to have no literary history before the seventeenth century.⁷² There are exceptions, however: *hob*, often found in the combination *hobgoblin*, can date back to 1460; *brownie* dates back to 1513; and *Tylwyth Teg*, a combination phrase used to refer to fairies as early as 1551; and yet these words appear to be largely absent from written literature until also the seventeenth century.⁷³ The persistence of these words in oral literature and the absence of them in medieval written literature suggest that the word *fairy* in the Middle Ages was primarily a literary one; the oral tradition would no doubt have continued to use common Anglo-Saxon or Gaelic words to refer to supernatural creatures.⁷⁴ It is unfortunate that we only have access to half of the double life of medieval fairies; what folk tales available were collected after the Middle Ages, and no doubt changed with centuries of retelling.

Lexical Themes: Linguistic associations with 'fairy' and 'elf'

Taking note of other words that are often associated with *fairy* and *elf* can further illuminate our understanding of the idea of fairies in medieval English literature. The attributes associated with *fairy* and *elf* in the *Middle English Dictionary* can be collected

⁷¹ Yeats (ed.), *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, p. 10; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 19; Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air', in Narváez (ed.), *The Good People*, p. 468; J. M. MacPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1929) 98; see also Appendix I 'Fairy Types and Individuals' in Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, which is by no means an exhaustive list but quite an extensive one.

⁷² To give a sampling of the dates for other fairy names according to their citations in the *OED*: 'Will o' the wisp' is first dated in 1608 (its Latin counterpart, *ignis fatuus* is used first in an English text in 1563, according to the *OED* entry on 'ignis fatuus'); 'Pixie' in 1636; 'Kelpie, kelpy' is cited in the *Dictionary of the Scots Language* and in the *OED* as first being used in 1747; 'Redcap', used in the sense to refer to a goblin or sprite, dates to 1764.

⁷³ 'Hob' in the *OED*; 'Brownie' in the *OED*; 'Tylwyth Teg'. *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru (The Dictionary of the Welsh Language)*. 1st edn. 1950-2002, at <http://www.cymru.ac.uk/geiriadur/>. Consulted on 19 April 2010. A searchable, concise edition of the dictionary has only been recently completed. To see the citations for the dictionary entries, the editors of the dictionary invite researchers to visit the slips collections room in Aberystwyth, Wales.

⁷⁴ Williams, 'The Semantics of the Word *Fairy*: Making Meaning out of Thin Air', in Narváez (ed.), *The Good People*, p. 468; Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 17.

into five loose categories: fairies as aristocratic, liminal, supernatural, dangerous, and linked with death.

Fairies are associated with dancing, and folklore about fairy rings is common enough even in the present day.⁷⁵ Though dancing is certainly not solely an aristocratic activity, the fairies that dance are Fairy Kings and Queens and their court. For example, the Wife of Bath says in her tale, 'The elf queen with her ioly compaignye/ Daunced ful ofte in many a grene mede' (line 861)⁷⁶ and in the *Tale of Sir Thopas* the queen of Fairy is entertained 'with harpe and pipe and symphonie' (line 815). In the *Merchant's Tale*, Proserpine and 'al hir fairye Disporten hem and maken melodye' (line 2040). Likewise, in 'St Michael the Archangel' in the *South England Legendary*, it is said, 'Grete compaygnie men i-seoth of heom bope hoppie and pleiȝe þat Eluene beoth i-cleopede' (lines 254-5).⁷⁷

In keeping with the usual description of fairies wearing fine clothes or encounters with the Fairy Queen, fairies are often seen engaged in aristocratic pursuits: they have enough leisure to spend time dancing, listening to music, watching and playing games. In *Sir Orfeo*, during his self-imposed exile in the wilderness, Orfeo sees the Fairy King hunting and later finds his way into Fairyland by following a group of fairy women hunting with falcons, an activity enjoyed by nobility (lines 281-313).⁷⁸ In written literature at least, fairies are associated with the upper classes. This could be attributed to the intended aristocratic audience of medieval romances who would have preferred to

⁷⁵ Briggs, *The Fairies in tradition and literature*, pp. 86, 104-107; John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 197-283, several of the stories in this chapter 'Fairy Ways and Words' refer to fairy rings.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, 'The Canterbury Tales', in Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). All future references to Chaucer come from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

⁷⁷ 'St Michael, Part II', in Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill (eds.), *The South English Legendary, edited from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS.145 and British Museum MS. Harley 2277 with variants from Bodley MS. Ashmole 43 and British Museum MS. Cotton Julius D.IX*, Vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, EETS.OS.236, 1956), pp. 410.

⁷⁸ A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). Line numbers given from the Auchinleck MS.

hear tales that included activities similar to their own, though the opportunity to use the fairy court to comment on current events was certainly not lost on later writers such as Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*.⁷⁹

Fairy tends to occupy the liminal spaces of the world: fairies are not quite human and not quite spirit, Faerie exists on the boundaries of this world and on the threshold of the next. Encounters with fairies frequently took place ‘between known space (purity) and unknown space (danger)’.⁸⁰ This idea of liminality is underscored by the times of the day and of the year that fairies are described as being most active. Heurodis and Orfeo both saw fairies at ‘undrentide’, or midday at noon (*Sir Orfeo*, lines 133-8, 281-6).⁸¹ The knight Launfal also comes across the fairy mistress Dame Tryamour at around noon (lines 220-88),⁸² and similarly the princess in *Sir Degaré* encounters the fairy knight at midday (lines 71-97).⁸³ In the brief episode in *Guy of Warwick* in which Guy’s son Reinbrun journeys into the Fairy Otherworld, Reinbrun also enters Faerie at noon (stanzas 77-78).⁸⁴ Lydgate says in his *Troy Book* that elves ‘are wont to go In undermeles’, which can be either midday or the early afternoon.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Heurodis was abducted by the Fairy King at the beginning of May.⁸⁶ May Day (Beltane) is one of the dates which marks the change in season and year, and these are days with which fairies are traditionally linked.

From these examples we can see that fairy is associated with times and dates of transition:

⁷⁹ This may also explain why folk tales collected from rural areas feature fairies participating in activities more within the realm of experience of farmers: Tom Tit Tot helps a woman with spinning flax, brownies that clean kitchens or thresh wheat, seal-women who become fishermen’s wives upon the theft of their skins. For ‘Tom Tit Tot’, see Katharine M. Briggs, *British Folktales* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), pp. 43-47; for brownies see Keightley, *The Fairy Mythology*, pp. 357-9 and Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, pp. 31-9; and for seal people see Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, p. 124.

⁸⁰ Henderson and Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief*, p. 39; Diane Purkiss also discusses the liminality of fairies in *Troublesome Things*, p. 86.

⁸¹ Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*.

⁸² A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960).

⁸³ Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (eds.), ‘Sir Degaré’, in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

⁸⁴ ‘Reinbrun, Gij sone of Warwike’, in Julius Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., EETS.ES.42, 49, 59, 1891).

⁸⁵ John Lydgate, *Lydgate’s Troy Book: A.D. 1412 – 20*, Vol. 3. Henry Bergen (ed.) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, EETS.ES.106, 1910), IV.6985.

⁸⁶ Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn., lines 57-76.

for instance, noon is neither morning nor afternoon, but is one on the verge of becoming another. Times of change are always times of uncertainty, which makes these times ideal for being associated with an unpredictable supernatural.

The *MED* gives the second definition of *celestial* as 'belonging to the Christian or pagan heaven; heavenly or divine in nature; unearthly'. In Lydgate's *Troy Book*, the construction of a temple to Pallas is blessed by the divine bestowal of a holy relic, whose appearance is described thus: 'þis merveil was so celestial: for þer cam down from þe hiȝe heuene...Like a fairy a meruellous ymage' (Book IV, line 5582-86).⁸⁷ *Fairy* here is equated with a celestial sight, associated with heaven, or at the very least, something so above human nature as to brush wings with the divine. Characteristic of the supernatural is a sense of awe and wonder, as well as a sense of disbelief.

However, the liminal, ambiguous nature attributed to fairies also means that it is unclear to whom fairies are held accountable, and this ambivalence makes fairies dangerous beings within the stories in which they play a part. *Fairy* is also sometimes used to refer to a trick, an enchantment, or falsehood. In *Kyng Alisaunder*, *fairy* means a contrivance, 'That thou herdest is a fairye' (line 6924),⁸⁸ and in Lydgate's *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, the word *fairy* means falsehood, 'Wher yt be trouth or fayrye' (line 9260).⁸⁹ That to say someone 'tells a fairy' could be used to say someone is lying suggests that 'fairy' cannot always be trusted.

The fairies in these texts hold no loyalty to humankind. Their allegiance is not always attributed to hell, but neither is it given to heaven; more often than not, fairies in literature serve themselves and their encounters with humans are for their amusement. Fairies may sometimes appear to be benign creatures of song and dance, but this view of

⁸⁷ John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Troy Book: A.D. 1412-20*, Vol. 3, Bergen (ed.), IV.5582-86.

⁸⁸ G. V. Smithers (ed.), *Kyng Alisaunder* (London: Oxford University Press, EETS.OS.227, 1952).

⁸⁹ John Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, F. J. Furnivall and K. B. Lockcock (eds.) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., EETS.ES.77, 83, 92, 1899, 1901, 1904).

them neglects the ‘fatedness’ aspect of their character. The adjective *fendlich* is used sometimes to describe elves, meaning hostile, fierce, devilish and monstrous.⁹⁰ A consequence of encountering a fairy could be bodily abduction, as was the case for Heurodis or Thomas of Erceldoune, or possession, such as the example from the Towneley Cycle mentioned above, ‘takyn with an elfe’ is the same as demonic possession, and in later folk tales it is not uncommon to find that people who have encountered fairies often waste away and die.⁹¹

Despite rarely being connected to hell outright in romances, the sense of danger that surrounds fairy often relegates fairies to the realm of the demonic. As ‘taken with an elfe’ shows, an elf or fairy can also mean evil spirit. The *MED* provides *gobelin* – meaning a devil, incubus, fairy or an evil spirit – as another word for *fairy* and the *South England Legendary* identifies elves among the fallen angels.⁹² Likewise, the romance *Melusine* includes creatures ‘whiche somme called Gobelyns, the other ffayrees’ (p. 4).⁹³ In *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, the Fairy Queen is anxious to return Thomas to the mortal world lest he be used to pay the teind, or tithe, to hell: ‘To Morne, of helle þe foulle fende. / Amange this folke will fech his fee’ (lines 289-90); and the theme of the teind is picked up by later Tam Lin stories.⁹⁴ However, it appears that the fairy court might maintain its autonomy despite this tribute, and thus the ambivalence of fairy remains.

The sense of ‘fatedness’ discussed earlier regarding the etymology of the words *fairy* and *elf* lends to the idea of fairy an association with destiny, particularly with death.

⁹⁰ ‘The letter spak the queene deliuered was Of so horrible a fendlich creature... The moder was an elf by aventure’, Chaucer, *Man of Law’s Tale*, ‘The Canterbury Tales’, in Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer*, line 751.

⁹¹ Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, pp. 52-53.

⁹² ‘St Michael’, *The Early South-English Legendary* (line 255).

⁹³ Donald (ed.), *Melusine*.

⁹⁴ James A. H. Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London: N. Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.61, 1875), Thorton MS lines 289-292; Child Ballad #39, ‘Tam Lin’, in Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, p. 342.

In *Sir Orfeo*, Hades of the classical myth is replaced with Fairyland, not only in the Fairy King's abduction of Heurodis but also in the *danse macabre* of mortals caught in the throes of death that Orfeo sees on his way to the Fairy King. In Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale*, Pluto, the Roman god of the underworld, is called the 'kyng of fairye' and Persephone the queen (lines 2039, 2227). This is likely to derive from a conflation of the homonyms *fey* (derived from Old English *fæge*, meaning 'doomed to die') and *fei* (from the Old French *fée* for someone or something that possesses magical powers). Morgan le Fay's presence at the death of Arthur in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* also associates fairies with death. The line is further blurred between ghosts and fairies in Scottish sixteenth-century accounts of witch trials, as several of the witches' familiars were fairies who had once been mortals, or at least, ghosts of mortals now dwelling with the fairies.⁹⁵

From the themes mentioned above, it is clear that fairy in the medieval English imagination was an ambiguous supernatural. The liminal, ambivalent qualities of fairy made it an ideal literary device with which medieval authors could explore the anxieties which concerned both themselves and their audiences. This thesis is divided into five chapters, and each chapter will consider a different way in which fairy is manipulated in Middle English romance and how the use of fairy in these texts provides insight into the medieval English imagination.

One of the themes highlighted above is fairy's association with demons, which also fits into debates about fairies' place in the Christian worldview. The first chapter addresses how fairies fit into medieval Christian spirituality by examining the romance

⁹⁵ Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, pp. 102-104.

Melusine, a late fourteenth-century Middle-English translation of a thirteenth-century French romance. Featuring a character that is half-human, half-fairy, this text serves as an ideal case study for examining the concerns that fairies might share qualities with demons and the extent fairies can hope for salvation. This chapter explores the differences between fairies and demons according to medieval demonology and examples of fairies and demons in Middle English texts. Additionally, this chapter also touches on medieval attitudes towards monstrosity and purity of blood, especially when examining the ways Melusine attempts to 'pass' as a human in order to gain salvation for her soul.

The second chapter, 'Fairies, Gender, and Power', challenges the notion that most fairies in Middle English romance are female and offers an examination of both male and female fairies. Building upon Corinne Saunders's and Kathryn Gravdal's scholarship on rape and the supernatural, this chapter discusses how male fairies operate within a 'paradigm of violence'. I then argue that this propensity to wield greater control than human characters is intrinsic to all fairies, demonstrating this 'paradigm of control' by examining how female fairies also exercise control over their human lovers. While both male and female fairies are able to wield greater power over humans than their human counterparts, the ways they exercise this control continues to follow gendered forms of control. The exception is that by virtue of being a fairy, female fairies are able to usurp the male 'role' in a heterosexual relationship, and this allows them to perform both male and female forms of power.

The third chapter tests some of the conclusions made in the previous chapter, particularly the ways female fairies can exercise both male and female types of power. This chapter, 'Performing Fairy', examines human enchantresses who are mistaken as fairies both within the narratives and by critics of these texts. Adapting Judith Butler's theory of gender as 'performance', I examine the ways Melior in *Partonope of Blois* and

Loosepaine/Lillias in *Eger and Grime* 'perform' fairy. The ways the authors of these texts use these characters evoke motifs usually associated with fairy mistresses, and yet these characters serve a different function because they are not actually fairies. Unlike their fully-fairy counterparts, human women who 'perform fairy' revert back to orthodox gender roles by the end of the texts.

A common theme in romances featuring fairies is the journey into the Fairy Otherworld. The fourth chapter of this thesis, 'The Fifth Road to Faerie', returns to the medieval Christian worldview and examines the Otherworld realm of Faerie alongside the Christian Otherworlds of Heaven, Hell, Paradise, and Purgatory. In this chapter, I examine the definitions of mortality and the soul, and the fate of the soul in the afterlife, as they relate to fairies in Middle English romance. This chapter considers to what extent the Otherworld, in this case the land of fairy, represents the Underworld or, in Christian terms, Purgatory or Hell. Fairyland often shares qualities of both Paradise and Hell, a situation that provides an engaging exploration of medieval ideas about Purgatory. By comparing the motifs of each of the different Otherworlds I determine that Faerie serves as an ambivalent secular Otherworld in the medieval imagination.

Continuing the previous chapter's discussion of Otherworlds, the fifth and final chapter examines Avalon in Arthurian literature and the extent it can be considered a type of Fairy Otherworld. This chapter traces the development of Avalon in British literature, employing both chronicles and romances written in England, and then examines the resulting image of Avalon with the motifs of Faerie discussed in the previous chapter. In doing so, I challenge the tendency in scholarship to treat Avalon as a type of Fairy Otherworld. This chapter also considers Morgan le Fay in terms of her relationship with Avalon and, applying the conclusions drawn in Chapter Three, her position as a quasi-

fairy character. I conclude that despite first appearances, neither Avalon nor Morgan le Fay is truly associated with fairy in the English tradition.

The ways fairy is used in Middle English romances raises several lines of enquiry regarding medieval English attitudes towards faith, gender, and society. Again and again fairy is presented as morally ambiguous, as humans are, and in this way authors can have fairy characters interact with humans in human social settings. However, because fairies are not human, authors can push the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable by making their fairy characters behave in ways that would be objectionable or impossible for human characters. By investigating the motivations behind the ways authors manipulate fairy in Middle English romances, my thesis will explore how fairy was used to address different anxieties, concerns, and fears about faith and dying, power and gendered relationships, and how the concept of fairy fits into the medieval Christian thought.

CHAPTER I

FAIRIES AND DEMONS: THE CASE OF *MELUSINE*

What place does fairy hold in the spiritual hierarchy of the medieval Christian worldview? Fairies appear to share traits with both demons and angels, and the sense of danger attributed to fairies would seem to link them more with the former than the latter. Considering religious texts that mention devils and elves in the same breath, and with texts such as *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* in which the fairy world must pay a tithe to hell, one must ask: what *is* the difference between a demon and a fairy? Though other romances hint at this relationship between the fairy and the demonic, the relationship between fairies and demons is explored in medieval literature nowhere more thoroughly than in the romance of *Melusine*.

In addition to being a politically motivated, dynastic history geared to increase the prestige of Jean, duc de Berry's family, *Melusine* is also a text about a fairy and her salvation. Woven into the narrative of the rise and decline of a great family is a concern for fairy's place within the spiritual hierarchy of medieval Christianity, with particular emphasis on the half-fairy, half-human soul. The romance *Melusine* is an exploration of how closely one can be associated with evil and still be eligible for salvation. In no other romance is fairy linked so closely with the demonic, and yet in no other romance is the fairy also so concerned for the salvation of her soul. This chapter will analyse the fairies in *Melusine* – which, for the sake of this chapter, include Pressyne, Melusine, and Melusine's sons,¹ all of whom have some degree of 'fairy blood' – in the context of

¹ Each critic who has written on *Melusine* has adopted slightly different spellings of the main characters' names. For the sake of clarity, I will use the spellings as they are given in the Middle English text. If any

medieval writings on the nature of demons. First to be discussed will be the corporeality of fairy and demon, especially with regard to procreation with humans resulting in 'half-fairy' or 'half-demon' offspring. Linked to the discussion of the physical aspects of bodies is that of appearances, what the fairies look like in *Melusine* and how this fits with medieval views of beauty, morality, and the monstrous. This chapter will also examine the actions and motivations of the fairies in *Melusine* to see where their intentions lie along the scale of good and evil. Finally, this chapter will consider the hybridity of Melusine's character and what it means to be fairy. In her quest to attain salvation as a mortal being, it may be that despite her fairy background, it is her humanity that has the ability to save her.

The texts

The French *Roman de Mélusine* was written between the years 1387 and 1393, according to the text,² by Jean d'Arras under the commission of the duc de Berry. Much has been written regarding the various reasons why de Berry would have commissioned the legend of Melusine, but the general consensus is that de Berry was politically motivated: claiming descent from the Luxembourg Lusignans, de Berry wished to legitimise his claim to Lusignan in France and, by extension, Poitou.³ Jean de Berry was appointed

quotations are used from these secondary sources that use alternate spellings, then the quote will be faithful to its author's choice.

² Matthew W. Morris (ed.), *A Bilingual Edition of Jean d'Arras's Mélusine or L'Histoire de Lusignan*, 2 vols. (Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd.: New York, 2007), pp. 50-51 and 710-11; and in the Middle English edition, Donald (ed.), *Melusine*, pp. 2 and 368.

³ For in depth discussion on the circumstances of RM's commission, see: Robert J. Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine: A Medieval Prose Romance* (unpublished PhD Thesis, New York University, 1970); Matthew W. Morris, 'Jean d'Arras and Couldrette: Political Expendiency and Censorship in Fifteenth-Centry France', *Postscript* 18-19 (2002), 35-44; Matthew W. Morris, 'The Romance of *Mélusine* and the Sacralization of Secular Power', *Postscript* 14 (1997), 57-68; the introduction to Matthew W. Morris (ed.), *A Bilingual Edition of Jean d'Arras's Mélusine or L'Histoire de Lusignan*; and Tania Colwell, 'Chapter Two. Patronage, politics, and patrimony: early reception of the *Roman de Mélusine* and the *Roman de Parthenay*' in *Reading Mélusine: romance manuscripts and their audiences, c. 1380-*

comte de Poitou in 1356 and ruled over it until he was forced to surrender it to the English in 1360; however, he reclaimed it from the English in 1372. The earliest extant print of *Roman de Mélusine* is the Adam Steinschaber edition of 1478, printed in Geneva.⁴ Another version of the Melusine story is found in *Le Roman de Parthenay* by Coudrette, commissioned by Guillaume de Parthenay shortly after d'Arras's *Roman de Mélusine*, in 1401. This poetic version makes some alterations to the story line in order to defend Guillaume's claim to Poitiers as well as praise Guillaume's English allies.⁵

The story of the Poitevin fairy was immensely popular in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At least fifteen manuscripts exist of the French *Roman de Mélusine* and twenty manuscripts for *Le Roman de Parthenay*, all of which date from the fifteenth century.⁶ This proliferation of manuscripts reflects the popularity the *Mélusine* romances had in France.⁷ After its initial printing in 1478, the romances were translated and printed in several languages across Europe, including German, Castilian, English, Flemish, Danish, Icelandic, Polish and Russian.

The English *Melusine* is extant in a unique manuscript in the British Library (Royal MS 18.b.II) dating from ca. 1500.⁸ The earliest known owner of the manuscript is John Lumley (1533-1609), the first baron of Lumley.⁹ Although better known for his

c.1530 (unpublished PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2008). In her thesis, Colwell offers an analysis of the ownership and circles of readership for *Mélusine*. I extend my thanks to Tania Colwell for allowing me to read her thesis.

⁴ Jean-Jacques Vincensini, 'Foreword', *A Bilingual Edition of Jean d'Arras's Mélusine or L'Histoire de Lusignan*, p. xi.

⁵ Morris, 'Jean d'Arras and Coudrette: Political Expediency and Censorship in Fifteenth-Century France', p. 37.

⁶ Colwell, *Reading Mélusine*, p. 31.

⁷ When examining the libraries in which the French *Mélusine* romances were found, Colwell observes that the 'Mélusine romances thus circulated among an extensive network radiating out from the Valois court to include provincial and urban nobles, their recent composition and heterogeneous content consistent with the broad literary preferences of this educated milieu,' *Reading Mélusine*, p. 63.

⁸ Nolan observes that the manuscript's watermark 'resembles numbers 3637 and 3638 of C. M. Briquet's *Les Filigranes* (Paris 1907), I, 323, the former from Cologne, 1515, and the latter from Naardun, 1546', *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 19.

⁹ *Melusine*, entry from the British Library Manuscripts Catalogue, Royal ms18.b.II at http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=IAMS_VU2&afterPDS=true&ins

involvement in conspiracies in support of Mary Tudor, Lumley was also one of the great collector-patrons during the Elizabethan period. A collector of books, paintings, and marbles, Lumley had a library that contained nearly 3,000 books, making it one of the largest in Elizabethan England. The majority of the books listed in his catalogue now resides in the British Library, having passed from Lumley to Henry, Prince of Wales, to the Royal Library.¹⁰ Lumley's copy of *Melusine* was included in this transaction.

Melusine is a largely faithful translation of the French original,¹¹ yet the identity of the translator and why the text was translated is unknown. It is thought that the translator of *Melusine* may have used the 1478 Steinschaber edition of the *Roman de Mélusine*.¹²

Another English version of *Melusine* is found in Wynkyn de Worde's printed edition also from ca. 1500.¹³ These two versions are of similar age, which indicates that this text must have been widely circulated. However, no collation has been done with these two versions.¹⁴

Only one modern printed edition exists for *Melusine*. A. K. Donald edited *Melusine* for the EETS in 1895. Originally intended to be two volumes, only the first volume – that of the text found in Royal MS 18.b.II with glossary and minimal explanatory notes – was published. In response to this lack of introductory critical material, Robert J. Nolan wrote *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine: A*

titution=BL&docId=IAMS040-002107496. Consulted on 29 June 2013; Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 18.

¹⁰ Kathryn Barron, 'Lumley, John, first Baron Lumley (c.1533–1609)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2007.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17179>. Consulted on 20 April 2011.

¹¹ Brenda M. Hosington, 'Mélusines de France et d'Outremanches: Portraits of Women in Jean d'Arras, Coudrette, and their Middle English translators', in Juliette Dor (ed.), *A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck* (Liège: Dép. d'anglais, Université de Liège, 1992), p. 200.

¹² Vincensini writes that A. K. Donald 'affirms that this version follows, in general, the Steinschaber edition of 1478', p. xxvi. The version he referring to is Donald's edition. Nolan supports this claim by noting that the number of capitula and their placement in *Melusine* matches that of the Steinschaber edition (*An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 19).

¹³ The fragments of *Melusine: a tale of the serpent fairy* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1510) are held in the Bodleian Library, Vet. A1 d.18. (STC (2nd ed.) /14648).

¹⁴ I intend to collate the English versions of *Melusine* in the near future.

Medieval Prose Romance for his doctoral thesis in 1970.¹⁵ However, Nolan's thesis has not been published, with the exception of two articles derived from it and published in *Fabula* in 1974.

Early studies of the romance have focused on the origins of the Melusine myth that forms the subject of the romance.¹⁶ Related to the investigation of the origin of the story itself are studies of why the French romance was written and its function as political propaganda.¹⁷ Other critics have focused on the manuscripts, prints, and readers of this romance,¹⁸ and still others have analysed the romance in terms of narrative and genre.¹⁹

¹⁵ Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Sidney Hartland, 'The Romance of *Mélusine*', *Folklore* 24.2 (1913), 187-200; Robert J. Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Mélusine*; Robert J. Nolan, 'The Origin of the Romance of Melusine: a New Interpretation', *Fabula* 15.3 (1974), 192-201; Laurence de Looze, "'La fourme du pié toute escripte": Melusine and the Entrance into History,' in Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 125-36; Bo Almqvist, 'The *Mélusine* Legend in the Context of Irish Folk Tradition', *Béaloideas* 67 (1999), 13-69.

¹⁷ Emmanuele Baumgartner, 'Fiction and History: The Cypriot Episode in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 185-200; Morris, 'The Romance of *Mélusine* and the Sacralization of Secular Power', 57-68; Morris, 'Jean d'Arras and Couldrette: Political Expediency and Censorship in Fifteenth-Century France', 35-44; Daisy Delogu, 'Jean d'Arras Makes History: Political Legitimacy and the *Roman de Mélusine*', *Dalhousie French Studies* 80 (2007), 15-28.

¹⁸ Robert J. Nolan, 'The Roman de *Mélusine*: Evidence for an Early Missing Version', *Fabula* 15.1/2 (1974), 53-58; Anthony R. A. Hobson, 'Histoire de la belle *Mélusine* and Nicolas Moreau d'Auteil', *Bulletin du bibliophile* 1 (1993), 95-98; Brenda Hosington, 'From "Theory" to Practice: The Middle English Translation of the *Romans of Partenay, or of Lusignan*', *Forum For Modern Language Studies* 35.4 (1999), 408-20; Albrecht Classen, 'Inventing the Middle Ages as Recreation: The Testimony of the Chapbook', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 25 (2000), 345-364; Ana Pairet, 'Medieval Bestsellers in the Age of Print: *Melusine* and *Oliver De Castille*', in Virginie Greene (ed.), *The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), pp. 189-204; Tania Colwell, *Reading Mélusine*; Albrecht Classen, 'Objects of Memory as Hermeneutic Media in Medieval German Literature: Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine*, and *Fortunatus*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 65 (2009), 159-182; Celia M. Lewis, 'Acceptable Lessons, Radical Truths: *Mélusine* as Literature for Medieval Youth', *Children's Literature: Annual of The Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and The Children's Literature Association* (2011), 1-33.

¹⁹ Michael Robertson, 'Narrative Logic, Folktales and Machines', *Orbis Litterarum* 43 (1988), 1-19; Sara Sturm-Maddox, 'Crossed Destinies: Narrative Programs in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 12-31; Rupert T. Pickens, 'The Poetics of Paradox in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 48-75; Michèle Perret, 'Writing History/Writing Fiction', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 201-25; Marina S. Brownlee, 'Interference in *Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 226-40; Nadia Margolis, 'Myths in Progress: A Literary-Typological Comparison of Melusine and Joan of Arc', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 241-66; Donald Maddox, 'Configuring the Epilogue: Ending and the Ends of Fiction in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 267-88; Sara Sturm-Maddox, 'Alterity and Subjectivity in the *Roman de Melusine*', in Evelyn Mullally and John Thompson (eds.), *The Court and*

Thematically, *Melusine* has most often been considered on the subject of monstrosity (with particular emphasis on Melusine as monster-mother and her deformed sons), Christianity, and the fairy mistress theme.

The fairy mistress theme has been studied most recently by Carolyn Larrington,²⁰ Corinne Saunders, and James Wade. Saunders discusses the Middle English *Melusine* alongside the *Sir Launfal* and *Partonope of Blois* in her article 'Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance', in which she considers the ambiguity of the enchantress and fairy mistress: empowered by magic, the woman can subvert and yet still be constrained by traditional gender roles.²¹ Saunders again picks up *Melusine* in her chapter on fairies in her 2010 monograph, *Magic and the supernatural in medieval English romance*.²² In this chapter, Saunders considers *Melusine* once again under the heading 'Faery Mistresses and Enchantresses', this time in terms of how marriage limits the supernatural. Although *Melusine* provides excellent material for both of these subjects, my examination of fairies, gender, and power is found in Chapter Two of this thesis, and I explore how the rules of society limit magic in my chapter on magic and performance in Chapter Three. James Wade includes *Melusine* in his chapter on gifts and taboos in *Fairies in medieval romance* (2011), discussing how the nature of her gifts to Raymondin proves her function as a fairy mistress.²³ Both Saunders and Wade use the Middle English *Melusine* for their studies, adding to Brenda M. Hosington's²⁴ and Jan

Cultural Diversity: Selected Papers from the Eighth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, The Queen's University of Belfast 26 July – 1 August 1995 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 121-29.

²⁰ Carolyn Larrington, 'The fairy mistress in medieval literary fantasy', in Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White (eds.), *Writing and Fantasy* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 32-47.

²¹ Corinne Saunders, 'Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance', in Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 38-52.

²² Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 179-206.

²³ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 122-30.

²⁴ Brenda M. Hosington, 'Mélusines de France et d'Outremanches: Portraits of Women in Jean d'Arras, Coudrette, and their Middle English translators', 199-208.

Shaw's²⁵ examinations of the representation of women in the English *Melusine*. Thus far, the trend in scholarship on the English translation of Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* has been to focus on the fairy mistress theme.²⁶

Studies of monstrosity in *Melusine* are difficult to separate from studies done of Melusine as a mother:²⁷ it would seem that a common thread in studies of monstrosity in *Melusine* is that Melusine's monstrous hybrid body is hereditary.²⁸ Birthmarks, or as Douglas Kelly calls them, 'mother-marks', were believed to be related to conception and pregnancy – usually something the mother strongly desired or feared during pregnancy.²⁹ This concept explained why someone might have a birthmark vaguely in the shape of an apple, for example, but what Kelly and Catharine Léglu both go on to claim is that it is Melusine's particular otherworldliness that resulted in her sons' unusual birthmarks. This idea is not held by Kelly and Léglu alone; Ivy Corfis, while discussing the Spanish version of *Melusine*, the *Historia de la linda Melosina*, says, 'the other-worldliness of the mother has left a stigma on the sons [...] the fairy heritage of the sons can explain their

²⁵ Jan Shaw, 'Courtly Love and the Tale of Florie in the Middle English *Melusine*', *Leeds Studies in English* NS 3 (2004), 101-20.

²⁶ With the exception of Robert J. Nolan's *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine: A Medieval Prose Romance* and the two articles derived from this, and Helen Cooper, 'Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances', in P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (eds.), *Youth in the Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 101-22.

²⁷ Other studies on family in the romance of *Melusine* include Albrecht Classen, 'Family Life in the High and Late Middle Ages: The Testimony of German Literary Sources', in Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre (ed.), *Medieval Family Roles: A Book of Essays* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 39-66; Ana Pairet, 'Melusine's Double Binds: Foundation, Transgression, and the Genealogical Romance', in Kathy M. Krause (ed.), *Reassessing the Heroine in Medieval French Literature* (Tampa: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 71-86; and Helen Cooper, 'Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances'.

²⁸ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 100-24; Jane H. M. Taylor, 'Melusine's Progeny: Patterns and Perplexities', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 165-84.; Tania Colwell, 'Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?', in Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller and Sarah Rees Jones (eds.), *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2003), pp. 181-203; Sylvia Huot, 'Dangerous Embodiments: Froissart's Harton and Jean d'Arras's Melusine', *Speculum* 78.2 (2003), 400-21; Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 212-24.

²⁹ Douglas Kelly, 'The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, p. 39; Catharine Léglu, 'Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French versions of the Roman de Mélusine', *Medium Ævum* 74.1 (2005), 78.

physical appearance and defects'.³⁰ But while Léglu supports the idea that the sons' deformities categorise them as belonging to those groups marked by Cain: traitors, peasants, and monsters;³¹ and Albrecht Classen claims that the birthmarks are all 'faint traces of their monstrous origin',³² such readings do not quite encompass the whole of the sons' circumstances. Their mother is half-fairy, half-human, and though she regularly takes the form of a half-serpent, this was not always her form, nor can it be said that Melusine's hybrid half-human, half-snake body is her 'true' form. Like Kevin Brownlee,³³ I believe that it is Melusine's curse rather than her nature as half-fairy that causes her sons' deformities. In this chapter I will develop this theory in more depth and examine how it relates to Melusine's salvation.

With Melusine's serpent tail and transformation into a dragon, it is no surprise that another theme in studies on *Melusine* is her relationship with the demonic: the serpent and dragons were habitually associated with the demonic in the medieval imagination. Nolan spends much of *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine* arguing that Melusine is a 'demon woman', citing similarities between Melusine's hybrid body and medieval iconography of the serpent in Eden as having the head of a woman,³⁴ and that the romance is essentially a cautionary tale about the spiritual dangers of mortal unions with supernatural beings. Stephen G. Nichols also argues in favour of Melusine's demonic nature.³⁵ However, like Gerhild Scholz Williams³⁶ and Stacey L. Hahn,³⁷ I am not

³⁰ Ivy Corfis, 'Beauty, Deformity, and the Fantastic in the Historia de la linda Melosina', *Hispanic Review* 55.2 (1987), 190.

³¹ Catharine Léglu, 'Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French versions of the Roman de Mélusine', 78.

³² Albrecht Classen, 'Love and Fear of the Foreign: Thüring's *Melusine* (1456), A Xenological Analysis', *Daphnis* 33 (2004), 107.

³³ Kevin Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994), 18-38.

³⁴ Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 129.

³⁵ Stephen G. Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History: Profile of a Female Demon', in Jan-Dirk Müller and Horst Wenzel (eds.), *Mittelalter - Neue Wege durch einen alten Kontinent* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1999), pp. 217-40.

³⁶ Gerhild Scholz Williams, *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 23-44.

convinced that Melusine is in fact fully demonic. While Williams only hints that Melusine might have acquired a soul through her father's human nature,³⁸ Hahn suggests that further study on the subject of *Melusine*, demonic bodies, and salvation is needed. I diverge from Nolan's and Nichols's view that Melusine is a demon by exploring the implications of Melusine's eligibility for salvation, and in doing so I demonstrate the differences between demons, fairies, and humans in the medieval imagination, and what these differences tell us about medieval views of the soul.

This chapter addresses the relationship fairies have with the demonic by comparing the character Melusine not only with medieval iconography, but also with what medieval theologians had to say about the nature of demons. There is no doubt that Melusine is a fairy: the text refers to her as such.³⁹ What is at stake here is how similar fairies are to demons. Can we refer to fairies and demons in the same breath? Although Nolan and Nichols both argue that Melusine is both fairy *and* demon, important differences distinguish the fairy and the demonic in the medieval imagination. We cannot rely on appearances alone; instead, we must also consider matters of the body, blood, and soul when determining the correlation between fairy and demon.

Thus, I include not only Melusine in my study, but also her fully-fairy mother and her part-fairy sons. By doing so, I address both the question of corporeality and how 'human' someone must be in order to attain salvation as well as the question of heredity, identity, and blood. Related to the question of corporeality is that of the soul: does a fairy have one? In this way I bring together the themes of the monstrous, inheritability, and the demonic in my examination of the Middle English *Melusine*, thus contributing to both *Mélusine* scholarship at large and to the small pool of scholarship done on the Middle

³⁷ Stacey L. Hahn, 'Constructive and Destructive Violence in Jean d'Arras' *Roman de Mélusine*', in Albrecht Classen (ed.), *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 193-208.

³⁸ Williams, *Defining Dominion*, p. 30.

³⁹ All quotations of this text are from Donald (ed.), *Melusine*.

English *Melusine*, and also to studies of the monstrous and medieval attitudes towards the demonic. I conclude that not only are fairies corporeal beings, but they also have an immortal soul – and yet this does not necessarily make them eligible for salvation.

The body and soul

Nichols opens his argument about Melusine's demonic qualities by citing the five characteristics of the morally neutral daimons (or 'Genius spirits') outlined by the second-century philosopher Lucius Apuleius in *De Deo Socratis*.⁴⁰ Apuleius builds on Plato's doctrine that daimons serve as messengers between humans and the gods. The characteristics daimons are said to have are: 1) the power of movement, 2) the faculty of reason, 3) a passionate soul, 4) a body composed of air, and 5) eternal life. Christian theologians appropriated these basic characteristics to define angels and demons; as a result, theological discussions about spirits were no longer about the morally neutral 'daimon' but about good and evil. It is unclear whether Nichols means to align Melusine with daimons or demons: the fact that he refers to Augustine of Hippo's response to the idea that demons have souls and consistently uses the spelling 'demon' rather than 'daimon' makes it seem that he is operating within a medieval Christian understanding of the cosmos; however, he also refers to Melusine's mother as a 'Genius spirit', calling into question the framework in which he is working.⁴¹ The character of Melusine might share *some* characteristics with Classical and medieval definitions of daimon/demons, but she is neither. Nichols focuses on Melusine's penchant for illusion as the main quality that links her with demons,⁴² and in doing so he overlooks another defining characteristic of both angels and demons in the medieval imagination: that they have bodies made of air. In this

⁴⁰ Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', p. 220.

⁴¹ Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', p. 227.

⁴² Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', pp. 221-22.

section I demonstrate that fairies have corporeal bodies, a fact which makes them *unlike* demons.

Classical philosophers had described daimons as having bodies of air, and this characteristic was appropriated and adapted by Christian theologians to explain the characteristics of spiritual beings in the Christian hierarchy, namely angels and demons. For instance, Isidore of Seville writes in his *Etymologies* that both angels and demons used to have ‘celestial bodies’, but since the demons’ fall from heaven the demons now have ‘aerial bodies’ and are no longer allowed to occupy the more celestial, purer expanses of air, but rather those murkier regions closer to earth.⁴³ In both *City of God* and *The Divination of Demons*, Augustine of Hippo claims that demons are able to divine the future because of the qualities they have from having aerial bodies: ‘they readily surpass the perception possessed by earthly bodies, and in speed, too, because of the superior mobility of the aerial body, they incomparably excel not only the movements of men and beasts but even the flight of birds’.⁴⁴ It is because demons are endowed with these faculties – keenness of senses and speed – that demons are able to amaze human beings, who are more ‘sluggish’ because of having physical bodies.

Some of these superhuman abilities are shared by fairies as well, including those in *Melusine*. Pressyne, upon hearing of her daughters’ unfilial conduct toward their father, curses them each with a special enchantment (pp. 15-16). While some have said that Pressyne’s ability to curse allies her with demons,⁴⁵ it must be noted that Pressyne’s curse upon her daughters was not done capriciously. Rather, Melusine, Melior, and Palatyne are cursed in punishment for their crime against their father; in essence, their curses are forms

⁴³ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Book VIII.xi.16-17.

⁴⁴ Augustine of Hippo, ‘The Divination of Demons’, in Roy J. Deferrari (ed.), Charles T. Wilcox, M.M., et al. (trans.), *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation 27 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1955), p. 426.

⁴⁵ Nichols, ‘Melusine Between Myth and History’, p. 235.

of judgement for their sin. As for Melusine herself, at her first meeting with Raymondin, Melusine recounts to him his misfortunes and knows his name though he never told it to her (p. 30). Later, when they are married, Melusine oversees the construction of the Castle of Lusignan, which is built in mere days (pp. 62-3). Melusine's magic, as well as her mysterious workmen 'that no body knew from whens these werkmen were' (p. 62), is the only way Castle Lusignan could have been built with such expediency.

Continuing both Isidore's and Augustine's claims that demons and angels can assume physical, or at least visible, bodies, Peter Lombard addresses the problem of the tangibility of angels' and demons' bodies in the *Second Book of Sentences*. Lombard's works became standard texts for theological study throughout the medieval period; consequently, his systematic investigation of angels and demons was widely read and commented upon.⁴⁶ As a result, the history of medieval angelology and demonology is 'the history of commentaries on the *Sentences*'.⁴⁷ Lombard diverges from Isidore's theory that angels have celestial bodies and demons aerial ones, and explains that both angels and demons have aerial bodies. Angels have bodies of air formed 'from a purer and superior part of the air' and demons, having fallen from grace, have bodies formed from the lower, or baser, quality of air, which therefore enables demons to suffer pain.⁴⁸ As a result of being made of lower, thicker air, demons had bodies that were thick enough to not only feel pain, but also to be tangible to humans.

Though Peter Lombard writes that angels assume bodies that God had prepared beforehand for his purposes, 'for the fulfilment of the ministry enjoyed upon them', Thomas Aquinas offers a slightly different process by which angels assume physical

⁴⁶ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: witchcraft, sex, and the crisis of belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 59.

⁴⁷ David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 89.

⁴⁸ Peter Lombard, 'LIBER SECUNDUS SENTENTIARUM -- D. 8, Pars. 1, Cap. 1: Petri Lombardi', Trans. and Ed. Br. Alexis Bugnolo, 2008. The Franciscan Archive. <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/lombardus/opera/l2-08.html>. Consulted on 10 March 2011.

bodies. In reply to hypothetical objections that angels assume bodies, Aquinas concedes that air does indeed have neither shape nor colour when it is in a state of rarefaction; yet ‘when condensed it can both be shaped and coloured as appears in the clouds. Even so the angels assume bodies of air, condensing it by Divine power in so far as is needful for forming the assumed body’.⁴⁹ Angels and demons can assume physical bodies made of very condensed air.

This idea is echoed later in *Sidrak and Bokkus*, saying that ‘Of the ayre [the angel] takeþ a body / And is seyn openly’ (Laud, p. 582, lines 8797-8).⁵⁰ That the explanation of aerial bodies appears in *Sidrak and Bokkus* indicates how a theological idea filtered down from a very specific readership to a much more popular audience. *Sidrak and Bokkus*, and its various incarnations, were enormously popular in the late Middle Ages, and the British Library contains manuscripts in not only English, but also French, Dutch, Danish, and Italian.⁵¹ *Sidrak and Bokkus* represents some of what theological knowledge would be available to the lay, non-specialist reader.

Ultimately, Aquinas rejects the idea that angels and demons can assume *material* bodies; they are instead purely intellectual beings. Because of this lack of a material body, Aquinas departs from the Augustinian belief that demons can experience and in fact enjoy lewd or carnal sins. Instead, because demons are intellectual spirits, they can experience only spiritual sins, those of pride and envy. A demon can inspire, but not experience, avarice, lust, anger, concupiscence, and sloth.⁵² These sins of the flesh can only be experienced by those who have a physical body – humans, and possibly fairies. The rage

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Latin-English*, Vol. 1, Prima Pars, Q. 1-64, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (trans.) (Scotts Valley, CA: NovAntiqua, 2008), Q.LI. Second Article, Reply Obj. 3, p. 608.

⁵⁰ T. L. Burton, (ed.), *Sidrak and Bokkus: a parallel-text edition from Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Lansdowne 79*, 2 vols. (Oxford: EETS.OS.311-312, 1998).

⁵¹ Burton, (ed.), *Sidrak and Bokkus*, Vol. 1, p. xxxii.

⁵² Dyan Elliott, *Fallen bodies: pollution, sexuality, and demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 134-5.

experienced by Geoffray with the Great Tooth, which will be discussed below, certainly suggests that Geoffray, a part-fairy, had a physical body.

Why is tangibility an issue? Theologians were also hard pressed to explain accounts of humans copulating with devils. Most often this issue was addressed in commentaries on Genesis. The situation as it is presented in Genesis is, 'That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose' (Genesis 6.2). In Augustine's exegesis, he concludes that the 'sons of God' mentioned in Genesis refer not to God's holy angels.⁵³ Neither do they refer to fallen angels, for Augustine writes that the angels that rebelled with Satan had been cast down and are bound with chains.⁵⁴ Instead, Augustine glosses 'sons of God' with 'sons of Seth', and then assigns the 'daughters of men' to mean 'daughters of Cain'. However, in this same chapter he acknowledges accounts of sexual intercourse between nature spirits and demons with human beings:

Et quoniam creberrima fama est, multique se expertos vel ab eis qui experti essent, de quorum fide dubitandum non esset, audisse confirmant, Silvanos et Panes, quos vulgo incubos vocant, improbos saepe extitisse mulieribus et earum appetisse ac peregissee concubitus [...] non hinc aliquid audeo definire, utrum aliqui spiritus elemento aëro corporati (nam hoc elementum, etiam cum agitur flabello, sensu corporis tactuque sentitur) possint hanc etiam pati libidinem ut, quo modo possuunt, sentientibus feminis misceantur.⁵⁵

[Again, it is widely reported that the gods of the woodland and fields who are commonly called *incubi* have often behaved disgracefully towards women, lusting after them and contriving to lie with them; and this has been confirmed by many people, either from their own experience or from accounts of the experience of others whose good faith there is no reason to doubt. [...] Hence, I would not venture to say anything definite as to the question of whether some spirits with bodies of air – an element which even agitated by a fan is felt by the bodily sense

⁵³ Augustine, *City of God*, R. W. Dyson (ed. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book XV, Chapter 23, p. 681.

⁵⁴ It seems contradictory that Augustine claims here that demons are imprisoned in hell when earlier he allowed them freedom of movement.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *The city of God against the pagans in seven volumes*, Vol. 4: Books XII-XV, T. E. Page (ed) and Philip Levine (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), Book XV, Chapter 23, pp. 548-50.

of touch – can also experience this lust, and so have intercourse, in whatever way they can, with women, who feel them do so.]⁵⁶

It must be first pointed out that Augustine speaks only of ‘male’ spirits who have intercourse with human women. He does not mention ‘female’ spirits visiting human men. In the romances discussed in this thesis on fairy, there are as many female fairies as male in Middle English romances. Augustine’s explanation of how demons can have sex with women omits how human men manage to have sex with demon (or in this case, fairy) women, or how fairy women like Pressyne and Melusine are capable of being impregnated by human men.

Later theologians were not entirely satisfied with Augustine’s solution to the mystery of how a spirit might have intercourse with a mortal. Thomas Aquinas⁵⁷ and Caesarius of Heisterbach⁵⁸ both display concern for the spiritual condition of those who might be born as the result of such unions. If a person were truly half-demon would that person be damned irreparably; not simply being victim to original sin as humans were believed to be, but incapable of even being eligible for salvation? This concern is apparent in *Sir Gowther*, an early fifteenth-century romance in which the title character is the son of a woman and a devil. He leads a wicked life until he is struck with the need to repent when he is told his true paternity, after which Gowther then seeks absolution from the Pope for his demonic nature. The Pope assigns Gowther a humiliating penance – he shall speak to no one and only eat what is brought to him by dogs – and to do so for an indefinite time; Gowther is to continue his penance until he has received a sign from God that his sin has been forgiven (*Sir Gowther*, lines 295-300).⁵⁹ By giving Gowther an ongoing penance, the Pope admits that he himself does not have enough authority to

⁵⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, Dyson (ed. and trans.), Book XV, Chapter 23, p. 681.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, Q.LI. Third Article, Reply Obj. 6, p. 611.

⁵⁸ Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, H. Von E. Scott and Charles Cooke Swinton Bland (trans.) (London: Routledge, 1929), Chapter XII, pp. 139-40.

⁵⁹ Line numbers for *Sir Gowther* come from Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (eds.), ‘Sir Gowther’, in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

forgive Gowther's sin; a half-demon can only be forgiven by God.⁶⁰ The question of whether someone who is not fully human, especially if they have possible demonic heritage, can attain salvation will be discussed further in regard to Melusine below.

Aquinas cites the passage above from Chapter XV of Augustine's *City of God* in his reply to Q. LI. The third article of his reply addresses the question: if angels can assume physical bodies, are they then capable of physical sensations such as eating, drinking, and having intercourse? Aquinas explains that angels only give the *appearance* of eating and drinking, and Nichols claims that Melusine has proclivity for illusion which categorises her with the demonic.⁶¹ Regarding demonic intercourse, however, Aquinas adds his own thoughts:

Si tamen ex coitu daemonum aliqui interdum nascuntur, hoc non est per semen ab eis decum, aut a corporibus assumptis, sed per semen alicuius hominis ad hoc acceptum, utpote quod idem daemon qui est succubus ad virum, fiat incubus ad mulierem; sicut et aliarum rerum semina assumunt ad aliquarum rerum generationem, ut Augustinus dicit, III de Trin.; ut sic ille qui nascitur non sit filius daemonis, sed illius hominis cuius est semen acceptum.⁶²

[Still if some are occasionally begotten from demons, it is not from the seed of such demons, nor from their assumed bodies, but from the seed of men taken for the purpose; as when the demon assumes first the form of a woman, and afterwards of a man; just as they take the seed of other things for other generating purposes, as Augustine says (*De Trin. iii.*), so that the person born is not the child of a demon, but of a man.]⁶³

Perhaps Aquinas has in mind that just as a body made of condensed air would not have the internal organs to digest food and drink, so an aerial body would be incapable of producing semen to beget a child with a human woman. Because the demon takes semen from a human man, a child born from such unions is considered fully human. If this theory is to be applied to some of the romances considered thus far, then Sir Gowther's

⁶⁰ Dana M. Oswald explores Gowther's penance in depth in *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010). She writes, 'Despite the Pope's absolution, Gowther's forgiveness can only come from God because of the nature of his monstrous body. His case requires the very highest authority; a priest cannot confer this kind of transformation', p. 181.

⁶¹ Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', pp. 221-22.

⁶² Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, Q.LI. Third Article, Reply Obj. 6, p. 611.

⁶³ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, Q.LI. Third Article, Reply Obj. 6, p. 611.

unusual parentage is not to blame for his wicked behaviour, and neither are Melusine's sons tainted for having fairy blood, because they are all human – in fact, there is no question about fairy blood, because there is none. Sir Gowther, Horrible, and Geoffray are simply wicked men.

While we might be able to apply Aquinas's theory of illusion to Melusine's eating habits (she eats and drinks at the wedding feast on pp. 54-5), his conclusion does not fully apply to fairies. Aquinas's theory of demonic insemination – in which the demon first acquires human semen in the form of a succubus and then inseminates a human woman in the form of an incubus – works only when the final recipient of the human semen is a human female. Aquinas's theory falls apart when the situation is one in which the female *supernatural* conceives, having been inseminated with human semen. Unless, that is, the female supernatural only *appears* to be pregnant, and give birth. Again, this is an unsatisfactory conclusion, as it results in a reading of *Melusine* that interprets Pressyne's pregnancy and childbirth as an illusion, meaning that Melusine and her sisters do not actually exist. This is a problematic reading indeed, considering that Melusine herself goes on to marry and have children – if it is all appearance and illusion, when does it end?

Nichols attempts to apply Aquinas's theory of illusion to Melusine's hybrid body: her 'true' form is half-serpent, half-human, and her seemingly normal human body the other six days of the week is mere illusion.⁶⁴ And yet Melusine's serpentine nature is an isolated case: not all fairies are serpentine on Saturdays. Indeed, Melusine herself is not half-serpent until after her mother's curse. The visual depictions of the Edenic serpent as having the head of a woman would make Melusine's relation with the demonic convincing.⁶⁵ However, this section on the body has demonstrated that despite visual

⁶⁴ Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', pp. 221-2.

⁶⁵ John K. Bonnell, 'The Serpent with a Human Head in Art and in Mystery Play', *American Journal of Archaeology* 21 (1917), 255-91; Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'The Metamorphosis of the Eden Serpent during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance', *Viator* 2 (1971), 301-27.

iconography that might link Melusine herself with the demonic, fairies did not fit the same definition of demons in the medieval imagination. Nichols's insistence that Melusine is demonic and that she 'hides' her hybrid body with illusion fails either to categorise all fairies as demonic or even to categorise Melusine as such. A romance based on the premise of a fairy founding mother could not rely on the conclusion that spirits only *appeared* to copulate with humans; Pressyne and her daughter Melusine would have to be capable of giving birth to physical, living children for Melusine to found the Lusignan dynasty.

To Jean d'Arras and his English translator, at least, fairies occupied a different category, and it is no surprise that the prologue to *Melusine* invokes Gervase of Tilbury (pp. 4-5). Gervase of Tilbury, an English thirteenth-century theologian, was troubled by the difficulties encountered when neatly attempting to explain fairies and other similar spirits with the same arguments used to explain demons. In Book III of *Otia Imperialia*, he also cites the passage given above from Augustine's *City of God*, Chapter XV, and like Augustine Gervase concludes that these spirits cannot be the demons whom God has imprisoned in hell. What Gervase says next, however, allows for an entirely different possibility:

Vnum tamen scio, quod angeli Dei nullo tempore sic labi potuerunt, dicente apostolo Petro: 'Si enim Deus angelis pecantibus non pepercit, sed carceribus caliginis inferre retrudens tradidit in iudicio puniendos reservari;' uerum hi qui cum diabolo minus superbierunt ad huiusmodi illusiones reservati sunt ad hominum penam.⁶⁶

[But one thing I know, that the angels of God could never have fallen like the ones of whom the apostle Peter says: 'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but thrust them down to the dungeons of nether darkness and delivered them to be reserved for punishment at the judgement;' it must be, then, that those who sided with the devil but whose pride was less grievous were reserved to provide phantoms of this nature to punish humankind.]⁶⁷

⁶⁶ S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (eds. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Book III.87, p. 730.

⁶⁷ Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia*, Book III.87, p. 731.

In his attempt to reconcile the stories of men and women having intercourse and even long-lasting relationships with spirits, incubi, and fairies, Gervase of Tilbury appeals to the idea that there is another category in the spiritual hierarchy of good and evil. The spiritual realm is populated by spirits outside the angel/demon dichotomy; that is, those spirits who fell from grace but were not so evil as to fall so far as hell. Gervase of Tilbury was not alone in this idea, nor was he the first to discuss it, though he did provide a lucid, concise description of this third category. Geoffrey of Monmouth, when giving an account of Merlin's parentage in *The History of Kings of Britain*, asserts that 'between the moon and the earth live spirits which we call incubus demons. These have partly the nature of men and partly that of angels, and when they wish they assume mortal shapes and have intercourse with women' (Book vi.18).⁶⁸ Here Geoffrey directly cites Apuleius's *De deo Socratis*. Gervase of Tilbury, by suggesting that a third category of spirit exists, one that is neither wholly evil nor good, must hearken back to earlier thought to find similar ideas that had been since refuted by Aquinas and Lombard. This third category of spirits is described by C. S. Lewis in his chapter on the *Longaevi* as

angels who were only "somdel in misthought";⁶⁹ almost, but not quite, guilty of sedition [during Lucifer's rebellion]. These were banished, some to higher and calmer levels of air, some to various places on earth, including the Earthly Paradise.⁷⁰

However, Gervase of Tilbury states that the purpose of these spirits is still to punish humankind, and he also does not address whether these partially-fallen spirits can someday return to a state of grace.

What then, about the soul? The body and soul were inextricably linked in the medieval mind: a person was a composite of both body *and* soul in psycho-somatic

⁶⁸ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Lewis Thorpe (trans.) (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 168.

⁶⁹ Lewis quotes here 'St Michael, Part II', in D'Evelyn and Mill (eds.), *The South English Legendary*, p. 408, line 201.

⁷⁰ C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 136.

unity.⁷¹ I have demonstrated that fairies in Middle English romances were imagined to have bodies more similar to humans than to demons or angels. It appears that Melusine, at least, if not fairies in general, has a soul as humans were believed to have. Throughout the romance of *Melusine*, Melusine's ultimate goal is to attain salvation by living and dying as a normal, mortal human woman (p. 316). A fairy's desire for entrance into heaven is unique to the romance *Melusine*, and bears further investigation.

Medieval concepts of the soul and its relation to the body were also inherited from Greek philosophy.⁷² The three kinds of soul, as first outlined by Aristotle in *De anima*, are vegetative, sensory, and rational souls. Each of these souls builds upon the former: vegetative souls take in nutrients, grow, and reproduce; sensory souls do all of these as well as have an appetite, sensory perception, and the ability of movement; and, last of all, the rational soul adds to all of these characteristics the capabilities of memory, will, and intellect.⁷³ While Augustine, Aquinas, and other medieval theologians might disagree over the precise relation between the soul and the body (and whether each of these 'kinds' of soul constitute separate souls), the general three-fold concept of the soul was accepted during the medieval period. For example, the 'Legend of St Michael' in the thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* describes a tripartite soul:⁷⁴ humans share the first soul with trees and other plants, this being the soul of substance (p. 321, lines 744-5); the second soul is that of the spark of life and breath, which humans share with other animals (p. 321, lines 752-7). According to the Legend of St Michael, these first two souls die with the body. But the third soul is spiritual in substance and shared with angels – this

⁷¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 222.

⁷² Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, Michael Mooney (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 186; John Haldane, 'Soul and Body', in Robert Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 293-96.

⁷³ Haldane, 'Soul and Body', p. 295.

⁷⁴ 'St Michael', in Carl Horstmann (ed.), *The Early South-English Legendary, or Lives of Saints, I, MS. Laud, 108, in the Bodleian Library* (London: N. Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.87, 1887), pp. 320-322, lines 736-803.

soul is immortal (p. 321, lines 767-77). Not only do memory, will, and intellect set humanity apart from other beasts and animals, but also immortality. Humanity's immortal soul creates the necessity for humankind's salvation: if humans perished completely as animals do when they die, then there would be no concern for one's welfare in the life after death. Although humans share the characteristic of having an immortal soul with angels and demons, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 confirms that only humans have incarnate bodies: corporeal bodies infused with spirit. The Fourth Lateran Council confirmed 'the body's salvific potential [...] as well as jealously protecting this potential as a uniquely human prerogative'.⁷⁵ Resulting from this distinction was the idea that reconciliation with God depended upon an incarnate body, which demons lack.⁷⁶ Since the above discussion determined that fairy bodies are corporeal, and because they are also considered to be rational beings, we can infer that fairies were also considered to be incarnate beings, having both body and spirit.

Despite having an immortal soul, mortality was also considered prerequisite for salvation. Death was understood to be a consequence of the Fall of Man; the belief that prelapsarian humanity was free from death, disease, and suffering is inferred from the punishment given to Adam and Eve after their disobedience in the Garden (Gen. 3.17-19). This creates a correlation between mortality and salvation: humanity, when it was bestowed with the possibility for immortality, had no need for salvation; but when humanity fell and became mortal, salvation became necessary to be restored to God. Or, as Augustine puts it in Book XIII of *City of God*:

Non enim eo modo quo angelos condiderat Deus homines ut, etiam si peccassent, mori omnino non possent, sed ita ut perfunctos oboedientiae munere sine intervntu mortis angelica immortalitas et beata aeternitas sequeretur, inoboedientes auttem mors plecteret damnatione iustissima;⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Elliott, *Fallen bodies*, p. 137.

⁷⁶ Elliott, *Fallen bodies*, p. 137.

⁷⁷ Augustine, *The city of God against the pagans in seven volumes*, Vol, 4, Book XIII, Chapter I, pp. 134.

[For God did not make men like the angels: that is, in such a way that, even if they sinned, they could not by any means die. Rather, if they discharged the duty of obedience, the reward of an angelic immortality and a blessed eternity was to follow without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, they were to be most justly punished with the sentence of death.]⁷⁸

This teaching is echoed later in *Sidrak and Bokkus*, with the following response:

*'If no synne hadde ydo Adam,
Shulde alle folk þat of him cam
Wip flesshe and fel as þei be seen
Euere in paradys haue been?'*

*'Hadde Adam so him bypoght
þat he hadde no synne wrought,
Of his hospring shulde neuere noone
Out of paradys haue goone
But lyued þere out of torment
And from þennes to heuere haue went
Right as oone of heuene hyne
Wipouten deth or any pyne.'*

(Sidrak and Bokkus (L), p. 547-549, lines 9377-80)

Had Adam not sinned, he and his descendants would have gone straight to heaven without dying. Equally important, the passage from Augustine points out that humans are *unlike* the angels in that they would be punished with death for disobedience. The spirits that joined with Satan's rebellion are eternally damned, because they are eternally alive.

In this regard it would appear that Melusine is caught between her two natures of human and fairy. If her taboo is kept, her human nature prevails and she can die like a human woman; but if the taboo is broken, then she is condemned to immortality in the form of a serpent until the final judgement. According to the terms of Pressyne's curse (p. 15), if Melusine's future husband keeps his promise, then Melusine can live a natural course of life, and 'shall dey as a naturel & humayn woman'. There are two fates in Melusine's curse: human and nonhuman, mortal and immortal. Melusine's possible fate of eternal punishment is similar to that of the fallen angels'. It would seem that her options as a half-fairy are to live either as a human or as a demon.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, Dyson (ed. and trans.), Book XIII, Chapter 1, p. 541.

When Nichols claims that Melusine's soul is demonic, he overlooks the ultimate reason why medieval audiences would not have considered Melusine to be demonic, and it is the driving force of the narrative: Melusine's *desire* for salvation. Demons, though they might desire happiness, were considered to be too twisted, perverted in thought, and too prideful to ask God for mercy.⁷⁹ Melusine and her sisters depart from their mother with heavy and sorrowful hearts after they have been cursed (p. 16), and if that is not explicit enough then Melusine's lamentations upon her departure from Raymondin demonstrate her sorrow at being denied the hope of heaven:

‘Halas, my frend! yf thou haddest not falsed they feythe & thyn othe, I was putte & exempted from all peyne & toument, & shuld haue had al my ryghtes, & hadd lyued the cours natural as another woman; & shuld haue be bryed, aftir my lyf naturel expired, within the chirche of our lady of Lusynen, where myn obsequye & afterward my annyuersar shuld haue be honourably & deuoutely don / but now I am, thurgh thyn owne dede, oerthrowen & ayen reuersed in the greuouse and obscure penitence, where long tyme I haue be in, by myn auenture: & thus I muste suffer & bere it, vnto the day of domme’ (p. 316)

Contrast, then, Melusine's hope and sorrow with theological discussions about demons:

Thomas Aquinas writes that ‘since the demon has a perverse and obstinate will, he is not sorry for the evil of sin’,⁸⁰ and also in *Sidrak and Bokkus*, devils ‘mowen no mercy haue / Ne for pride þei mowen noon craue’ (*Sidrak and Bokkus* (L), p. 121, lines 2053-4).

Melusine *is* sorry for the evil of her sin; neither is she too prideful to desire mercy and grace. The fact that the romance of *Melusine* is so concerned with Melusine's salvation, and that Melusine herself desires salvation, counters the theory that fairies were demonic in the medieval imagination.

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ*, Q.LXIV, Articles 2 and 3, pp. 739-43.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiæ*, Q.LXIV. Third Article, Reply Obj. 3, p. 743.

To be a 'humayn woman'

Melusine's salvation, then, is contingent upon how well she, as a fairy, can 'pass'⁸¹ as human; how well she can integrate into human society. This is dependent on both Melusine's behaviour and her heritage: that is, her blood. The concern for purity of blood, or lack of it, portrayed in the romance, particularly between 'races', is surprisingly reminiscent of other, more modern literary discussions on race, such as African-American literary criticism. I aim to use race theory to inform our reading of *Melusine*. Cohen argues that the questions asked in postcolonial theory can inform medieval studies, especially the idea of hybridity in race studies.⁸² How is the presence of fairy used to construct a definition of 'humanness'?⁸³ If the narrative emphasises Melusine's human side over that of her serpentine, fairy body, as Kevin Brownlee claims,⁸⁴ it may be to reassure audiences about humanity's central place in the cosmic hierarchy. As the romance chronicles Melusine's acceptance into human society, (even if ultimately in the end, Melusine is to be exiled from it) human society, especially in courtly society, is

⁸¹ The concept of 'passing' as one gender or race other than one's own is outlined in Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 167-85; Suki Ali builds on Butler's idea by discussing the ways mixed-race people can 'pass' as one race or another, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 12-14.

⁸² 'Medieval monstrosity intimates an unthought epistemological limit to the widely influential postcolonial criticism derived from the study of English India, and suggests that an alliance might be usefully forged between medieval studies and what has been called borderlands theory. Derived mainly from Chicana/o studies, this growing body of work takes as its central figure not the all too literary hybrid, with his [*sic*] ambivalence, mimesis, and sly civility, but the provocative and proudly resistant *mestiza*, with her insistently embodied experience of that middle formed by the overlap among a multitude of genders, sexualities, spiritualities, ethnicities, races, cultures, languages', from 'Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales', in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 85-6. The term *mestiza/o* refers to 'mixed blood' individuals of Indian-Latino-White descent in Latin America. Chicana/o refers to *mestizos* living in the borderlands of Northern Mexico and the Southwest United States.

⁸³ This question of how the presence of fairy can create a definition of humanness in the text is adapted from one of the observations made in Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). She writes, 'Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor so necessary to the construction of Americanness that it rivals the old pseudo-scientific and class-informed racisms whose dynamics we are more used to deciphering' (p. 47).

⁸⁴ Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', 26-27.

depicted as both a privileged and desired place to be in the world, and also a place of acceptance, order, and the 'right' place to be.⁸⁵

❖ *Rites of passage*

While some critics insist that Melusine's fairy nature estranges her from Christian society, there is plenty of evidence in the text to dispute this claim. One way Melusine integrates into human society is through performing certain rites of passage: namely, her marriage to Raymondin and her construction of the castle of Lusignan. The former marks her entrance into human society and the latter establishes her place and her authority in that society.

Comprising six chapters in the romance, the wedding is described with immense detail: the feasting, the jousting, and gift giving. Most important is the ceremony itself, which takes place in a richly ornamented chapel filled with images of the crucifixion and of the Virgin Mary. Unlike the supernatural women in analogues to *Melusine* from Walter Map, Gerald of Wales, and Gervase of Tilbury, and even the fairy ancestress of Richard I, Melusine has no aversion to the crucifix or to the Eucharist. All three of these writers include stories of supernatural women who hid their true nature by studiously arriving late to Mass and leaving before the Host was consecrated; but when forced to stay for the consecration of the Host, they vanish, usually by flying out of the window.⁸⁶ Melusine, however, passes 'the Eucharist test',⁸⁷ for not only does she attend mass sung by the

⁸⁵ This is similar to Thomas Hahn's argument that Gawain often serves the role of reconciling the 'Other' to the Arthurian court, which also indicates the primacy of the human court. Hahn, 'Gawain and popular chivalric romance in Britain,' in Roberta L. Krueger (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 223-4.

⁸⁶ Colwell, *Reading Mélusine*, p. 101; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, pp. 101-2.

⁸⁷ This phrase is borrowed from Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 31.

bishop, but the bishop also blesses the wedding bed (pp. 54, 56-7). As Wade observes, most fairies in literature are comfortable enough with Christian ritual, unlike demons, who cannot withstand swearing in the name of God or the presence of the Eucharist.⁸⁸ That Melusine participates in Christian ritual and even encourages her sons to keep the Christian faith further counters the claim that fairies are demonic; rather, Melusine's behaviour is more like a human in these instances than a demon. The Old French original would no doubt have included these scenes and the inclusion of the blessing of the bed to legitimize Melusine's marriage to Raymondin, and thus remove any doubt of their marriage's validity in what is essentially a dynastic founding tale. Even so, these Christian details also highlight Melusine's positive relationship with Christianity.

If Melusine's wedding marks her entrance into human society, then her construction of Castle Lusignan cements it. Immediately after their wedding, Melusine oversees the construction of a castle on the land Raymondin received from his cousin, the Earl of Poitiers. Up until this point in the narrative, the Earl of Poitiers and the rest of his court have expressed curiosity, and perhaps a little suspicion, at Melusine's unknown origins (this will be discussed in detail below). As mentioned above, Melusine raises what is a magnificent castle in just a matter of days (pp. 62-3). When it is finished, the Earl of Poitiers and his family, the Earl of Forests, and other barons are invited to a great feast at which there are the usual pastimes of jousting and dancing. Melusine then calls them all together and announces that the reason for the feast is to decide upon a name for the castle (p. 63). Colwell describes the construction and 'baptism' scene as being a 'watershed moment' in which Melusine is accepted into the Poitevin court.⁸⁹ In an exchange in which both Melusine and the Earl of Poitiers submit to the authority of the other, the Earl of Poitiers publicly acknowledges Melusine's wisdom and superiority, and

⁸⁸ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁹ Colwell, *Reading Mélusine*, pp. 113-4.

thus her right to name the castle herself. In doing so, the Earl of Poitiers allows her a place in his court based not on her status as wife to his cousin Raymondin, but in her own right. Melusine christens the castle Lusignan after her own name (p. 64). The Earl of Poitiers approves, declaring that 'Lusignan' is a fitting name because it is derived from Melusine's own name, which he says means 'marvellous' in Greek, and also because the castle was marvellously made (p. 64). It is Melusine's name that is commemorated in the naming of the castle; Melusine's position in the human court is made secure in that a castle and a dynasty can be named after her.

❖ *Purity of blood*

This section will consider how much the romance is concerned for so-called 'purity of blood' and to what extent Melusine can 'pass' as a human despite her fairy parentage. As mentioned above, the concept of 'passing' as one race or gender rather than another is an idea that mixed-race authors and theorists have picked up to explore in more detail, not only in literature, but also in modern British society.⁹⁰ Butler, Ali, and Ahmed all discuss how performance is part of how someone of mixed-blood can 'pass' as one race or another, and we have already seen how Melusine 'performs' humanity by taking part in rituals that mark her as part of human society, especially as one of the nobility. But Melusine would not need to attempt to 'pass' as human if it were not for her mixed blood, and the narrative focus is always on Melusine's hybrid nature.

The mixed nature of Melusine's blood calls into question her eligibility for salvation. As mentioned above, Melusine's options as a half-fairy seem to be to achieve salvation by living as a human, or to live as a dragon until Judgement Day. But those are

⁹⁰ Suki Ali, *Mixed-Race, Post-Race*, pp. 12-14; Sara Ahmed, *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 127.

Melusine's options *after* her transgression against her father and the punishment of her mother's curse. Pressyne's stipulation that Melusine could only die as a 'naturel & humayn woman' as the result of her husband's fidelity might imply that Melusine would not have been able to live a mortal life otherwise; however, this aspect of Melusine's curse offers the fate of living a human life that Melusine and her sisters forfeited when they imprisoned their father in the mountain. Pressyne tells them:

For notwithstanding the vnlawfulness of thy fader / bothe thou & thy sustirs he shuld haue drawn to hym, and ye shuld shortly haue ben out of the handes of the Nymphes & of the fairees, without to retourne eny more. (p. 15)

Nichols claims that Melusine is monstrous as the result of her mixed parentage,⁹¹ and this claim would appear to be supported by medieval theorists of the day. One explanation for the existence of monsters given by Hildegard of Bingen was that hybrid offspring were the product of a mixing of seeds,⁹² thus the human and fairy 'seed' that mixed to result in Melusine, Melior, and Palatyne also resulted in their hybridity. Thomas Aquinas and Caesarius of Heisterbach both display concern for the spiritual condition of those who might be born as the result of mixed unions, particularly between human and demon. Both seem to believe that if a person were truly half-demon that person would be damned irreparably; not simply being victim to original sin as humans are, but incapable of even being eligible for salvation. As mentioned above, this concern is apparent in *Sir Gowther*, where the case in question involves a half-demon. Unlike the case for Gowther, the human heritage inherited from their father would have allowed Melusine and her sisters both mortality and the eligibility for salvation. Although Melusine and her sisters are half-fairy, they are also half-human, and their human blood is implied to be superior to their fairy blood, to the point of being transformative. In this way the romance privileges the human condition over the fairy condition.

⁹¹ Nichols, 'Melusine Between Myth and History', pp. 223, 228.

⁹² Colwell, 'Mélusine: Ideal Mother or Inimitable Monster?', in Davis, Müller, and Rees Jones (eds.), *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 199.

The next indication that there is some concern over the nature of Melusine's blood comes when Raymondin announces his and Melusine's engagement to his cousin the Earl of Poitiers. In this case the concern is not yet about whether Melusine's blood is human, but whether Melusine is noble enough to enter the Poitevin court. It comes as no surprise that the Earl of Poitiers is shocked to hear that Raymondin had suddenly decided to get married without any previous mention of it (p. 48). In true romance fashion, Raymondin claims he has been commanded by love and begs his cousin not to take offence. The Earl responds by asking after Melusine's lineage (p. 48). The following exchange takes place:

‘By my feyth,’ said Raymondyn, ‘ye demande of me a thing / to the whiche I can not gyue none ansuere, for neuer in my lyf I ne dide enquiryre me therof.’
 ‘Forsouthe,’ sayd the Erle, ‘it is grett meruaylle. Raymondyn taketh a wyf that he knoweth not, ne also the lynage that she commeth of.’ (pp. 48-9)

That Raymondin, the second son of the Earl of March, cousin to the Earl of Poitiers, would choose to marry without first enquiring after his potential wife's family and lineage is unthinkable, and reckless for the family's blood. Raymondin's response is that it is not his cousin who is marrying Melusine, but himself, and that he ‘alone shall bere eyther joye or sorowe for it’ (p. 49). He then assures the earl that he will be well pleased with Melusine once he meets her. Her beauty, manners, and speech are enough to make her noble. Here are two differing definitions of nobility held in tension: Raymondin seems to be on the side that ‘manners make the man’, or that virtue indicates nobility instead of rank;⁹³ but for the earl, nobility is found in one's blood.⁹⁴

Raymondin's assurances about Melusine do not quench the earl's curiosity, however, and he continues to ask about Melusine's heritage while en route to the Fountain of Soyf for Raymondin and Melusine's wedding (p. 50). It is not until the Earl

⁹³ John Scattergood, “‘The unequal scales of love’: Love and Social Class in Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore* and Some Later Texts”, in Helen Cooney (ed.), *Writings on Love in the English Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 68, 72.

⁹⁴ S. H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 199.

of Poitiers sees the richness of the pavilions set up around the Fountain of Soyf, observes the graciousness and courtesy of her servants, and meets her himself that his qualms about Melusine's mysterious lineage are eased – but not entirely put to rest. She certainly demonstrates largesse enough to be noble: Melusine gives rich, extravagant gifts to all who come to the wedding, especially to Raymondin's extended family. Despite the agreement that 'alle sayd that Raymondyn was gretly mightily and valiauntly married' (p. 59), the Earl of Poitiers still presses Raymondin for information about Melusine's estate and parentage. At last, Raymondin tells the earl that Melusine is a 'kyngis doughter' (p. 60), which was evident enough by her comportment and manners. The earl admits that he was afraid he had not given Melusine the proper honour due her, should she be of higher nobility than he is. His remarks betray a much more mundane concern than whether Melusine might not be fully human. Ultimately, the earl's concern is centred on nobility and class, not 'race'.

In addition to the Earl of Poitiers's curiosity about his cousin's mysterious wife, the romance also demonstrates a concern for the purity of blood with the birth of each of Melusine's sons. Each of her sons displays some curious feature or defect, to which 'wherof they that sawe hym wondred, & moche were abashed' (p. 104; this line is found in the description of Anthony's birth, but it takes no stretch of the imagination to believe that each of Melusine's sons would be greeted with similar amazement). Even if the people of Lusignan do not know at first why Melusine's sons are born with these deformities, the author and the reader do. By employing dramatic irony, the author is communicating with the reader that there is something unusual about Melusine and Raymondin's bloodline. Not just one of their sons is born with a strange defect, but eight of the ten are. Various critics claim that the sons' deformities are the result of traces of fairy blood in effect 'polluting' the bloodline, pointing to Melusine's own serpentine

figure as proof for a polluting hybrid figure.⁹⁵ As mentioned above, birthmarks, or ‘mother-marks’, were believed to have been the result of some strong desire or fear during conception and pregnancy. Enormous ears, red eyes, too many eyes or too few, tusks and claws coming out of one’s face, these abnormalities are marvellous to all except, perhaps, the reader, who alone knows that Melusine is somewhat monstrous herself. These critics then categorise Melusine’s sons as belonging to those groups marked by Cain or of displaying ‘faint traces of their monstrous origin’.⁹⁶ The fact that fairy becomes monstrous when mixed with human blood appears to indicate that fairy blood ‘pollutes’ human blood. The deformities of Melusine’s sons are external indicators of their internal mixed nature. Though they, their father, and their father’s people are not aware that they contain a bit of fairy blood, some critics would interpret the sons’ deformities as showing that the fairy-ness in them cannot be hidden. However, Melusine was hybrid even before she was cursed to turn into a half-serpent every Saturday. Monstrous births were also attributed to the sin of the parents, particularly the mother.⁹⁷ Melusine’s fairy blood may be the source for her sons’ deformities, but an equally possible cause is the sin she committed against her father by imprisoning him in a mountain, and for which she is continually punished every Saturday. Indeed, something may be ‘wrong’ with the mother, either her fairy blood or her curse. And yet, the fact that

⁹⁵ Kelly, ‘The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances’, in Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (eds.), *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction*, p. 39; Léglu, ‘Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French versions of the Roman de Mélusine’, 77-78; Corfis, ‘Beauty, Deformity, and the Fantastic in the Historia de la linda Melosina’, 190.

⁹⁶ Léglu, ‘Nourishing Lineage in the Earliest French versions of the Roman de Mélusine’, 78; Classen, ‘Love and Fear of the Foreign: Thüring’s *Melusine* (1456)’, 107.

⁹⁷ Jane Gilbert, ‘Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*’, in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale, Lesley Johnson (eds.), *Mediaeval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain, Essays for Felicity Riddy* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2000), p. 330; Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 91-92; John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), pp. 338-39. However, Gilbert’s essay on the paternity of the children in *King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther* raises the Aristotelian theory that although the mother provides the mater for making a child, the father’s seed determines what form the child will take. Following this reasoning, it would seem that the sons of Lusignan are deformed as result of their father’s sin, rather than their mother’s.

the author chose a fairy heroine as a founding mother and that neither the half-fairy Degaré nor the half-demon Gowther in other medieval romances are monstrous in appearance casts into doubt the theory that fairy blood was considered to be polluting.

The scene in which Raymondin spies on Melusine in her bath on a Saturday is one the reader would expect would emphasize Melusine's hybrid, if not serpentine, nature. Raymondin sees Melusine combing her hair in the bath, a beautiful woman except for the body of a serpent from the navel down (p. 297). Her tail was 'as grete & thykk as a barell' and so long that she often made it touch the ceiling. When discussing the same scene in the French version, Brownlee writes that the description of Melusine's tail abruptly deeroticizes Melusine as a woman: 'She is portrayed not only as a monster, but as a somewhat comical monster'.⁹⁸ This description serves to immediately emphasize the *non*-humanness of Melusine, but this emphasis is short-lived in the text. Raymondin's lament that he has betrayed her casts Melusine once again in courtly terms:

'Now haue I fonde the ende of my Joye / and the begynnyng is to me now present
of myn euerlastyng heuynes / Farwel beaute, bounte, swetenes, amyablete /
Farwel wyt, curtoysye, & humilite / Farwel al my joye, al my comfort & myn
hoop / Farwel myn herte, my prowes, my valyaunce, For that lytel of honour
whiche god had lent me, it came thurgh your nobless, my swete and entirely
belouyd lady.' (p. 298)

Raymondin continues for another dozen or so lines, describing Melusine's nobility, wit, excellence, and other virtues. As Brownlee rightly observes, Raymondin's lament serves to 'intensify Mélusine's human side at the very moment that her corporeal identity has been most graphically presented in the text up until now'.⁹⁹ Instead of shock, disgust, or revulsion at the sight of his wife's hybrid body – all of which would be expected reactions on Raymondin's part – Raymondin instead expresses remorse that he has betrayed her trust. Albrecht Classen argues that Raymondin's failure to investigate or examine

⁹⁸ Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', 25.

⁹⁹ Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', 26-7.

Melusine's hybrid nature or her origins is his inability to face the existential question of Melusine's Otherness.¹⁰⁰ While this is ultimately true, for Raymondin's fear of the Other results in his denunciation of Melusine later in the romance, Raymondin's lack of revulsion in this particular scene instead suggests the possibility that Raymondin *could* accept the Other, the hybrid fairy, into his life and his worldview. And indeed he does, for he is relieved when Melusine returns to him, albeit in her usual human shape (p. 299). Alternatively, it could be that Raymondin is so confident and familiar with Melusine in her human form that he is not as shaken by the experience of seeing her in a hybrid form as possibly imagined by later critics. This can certainly be the case considering his emphasis on her humanity in his lament.

However, Raymondin's acceptance of Melusine's hybridity comes to an end when he denounces Melusine upon seeing the wreckage left by Geoffray at the monastery of Maillezes:

By the feyth that I owe to god, I byleue it is but fantosme or spurut weke of this woman / and as I trowe she neuer bare no child that shal at thende haue perfection, For yet hath she broght none but that it hath some strange token // see I not the horryblenes of her son called Horryble, that passed not vii yere of age whan he slew two squyres of myn / and or euer he was thre yere old he made dye two gentyl women his nourryces, thugh hys bytting of theire pappes? / sawe I not also theyre moder of that satirday, whan my brother of Forestz to me brought euyl tydynges of her / in fourme of a serpent fro the nauel douward? / by god, ye / and wel I wote certayn / it is some spyryt, som fantosme or Illusyon that thus hath abused me / For the first tyme that I sawe her / she knew & coude reherce all my fortune & auenture.' (p. 311)

Raymondin repeats his accusations to Melusine herself, declaring her a 'fals serpente', that neither she nor her sons are anything but phantoms, and that 'goode fruyte yssued neuer' of her (p. 314). Although he almost immediately recants his words, the damage has been done. As Raymondin and Melusine weep that they must now be separated by the fulfilment of her curse, their barons lament that they 'shal lese this day þe best lady that

¹⁰⁰ Classen, 'Love and Fear of the Foreign: Thüring's *Melusine* (1456), 111-5.

euer gouerned ony land / the moost sage / most humble / moost charytable & curteys of all other lyuyng in erthe' (p. 317). Once again the narrator humanizes Melusine, even on the verge of her transformation, by highlighting Melusine's social role and how loved she is by the people of Lusignan.¹⁰¹

Finally, it is Melusine herself who elevates her human heritage above her fairy nature. After Raymondin publicly rejects Melusine in front of their court because of her fairy nature, the curse is fulfilled and Melusine must depart from her family and Lusignan. She laments and delivers her final testament, and finally tells them of her lineage:

'I wyl lete you knowe what I am & who was my fader, to thentent that ye reproche not my children, that they be not borne but of a mortal woman, and not of a serpent, nor as a creature of the fayry / and that they are the children of the doughter of kynge Elynas of Albanye and of þe queene Pressyne' (p. 320).

Here Melusine claims her human paternity as her identity, not her fairy maternity. She does this partly for her sons' sakes, to insure her children are also classified as human. Her sons are the grandchildren of the former king and queen of Albany; it is her human heritage that Melusine leaves her children, not her heritage as a fairy. However, she also claims her human nature for her own sake. It was as a human woman she had lived among them for so many years, and as a human woman she almost attained her desired salvation. The timing of her speech, spoken on the verge of her transformation, from the liminal location of the window, highlights her hybridity, yet Melusine's choice to claim her human heritage even as she is changing into a serpent is important.¹⁰² For Melusine, the life of a human woman is preferred to that of a fairy, and she is sorry to be leaving human society.

¹⁰¹ Hosington, 'Mélusines de France et d'Outremanches: Portraits of Women in Jean d'Arras, Coudrette, and their Middle English Translators', in Dor (ed.), *A Wyf Ther Was*, p. 203.

¹⁰² Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', 33-4.

The romance of *Melusine* does display an interest in the purity of blood. Melusine herself expresses anxiety about which heritage her sons will be known for, demonstrating her own conflict regarding being a person of mixed fairy and human blood. The author, too, shows concern for the mixing of human and fairy blood through the descriptions of Melusine's sons' deformities. Racism, and concern for purity of blood, implies a hierarchy: in Western society, the top of the hierarchy was white, with black and brown beneath. Recent studies on mixed-race highlight not only the injustice rooted in racism, but also the ambiguities that come from being perceived as being of two races. Although 'race' for fairies does not have to do with skin colour, fairies were imagined to be inexplicably different and *Other* than humans. Melusine, half human and half fairy, can 'pass' as a human until her fairy lineage is revealed.

Why is Melusine's humanity an important theme in *Melusine*? And what does it have to do with Melusine's eligibility for salvation? Melusine's human blood would have won out over her fairy blood, making her human: thus, mortal, with an immortal soul. Her sin of imprisoning her father somehow gives primacy to her fairy blood, which can only be countered by Melusine acquiring a human husband and who upholds the conditions laid out in her mother's curse. Melusine must successfully integrate into human society if she wants the human gift of salvation.

Looking back at mixed-race studies, we can see how it sheds light on how we can read Melusine's mixed nature in *Melusine*. Janice Gould writes regarding her own experience as part-Native American:

I have not found the folk mythology that connects human blood to racial type, but certainly that sort of thinking exists to this day, and informs one's claim, especially to being Indian, on the basis of blood quantum. It seems that people thought that the blood in our veins determined the differences in the races and that

somehow race was manifested in some variation of these colors. The details of hair type, shape of eyes, and even skull size were added to support the variation in and separation of the races as if on some empirically scientific basis. We know, of course, that the point of these categorizations was to allow the Euro-American male to congratulate himself on his superiority over non-Euro-Americans.¹⁰³

Considering that Melusine and her mother both desire human society so much in the romance of *Melusine*, and that Melusine's salvation is dependent first on the superiority of her human blood inherited from her father, and then by the success with which she can integrate into human society, the way fairy is portrayed in *Melusine* indicates that for all of fairy's beauty and allure, humanity is the privileged race in this paradigm. *Melusine's* concern for both her salvation and how 'human' she is suggests that Melusine's plight reassures the audience of the place humanity holds in the medieval Christian cosmos. Angels, demons, and fairies might be immortal; angels might dwell in heaven already, but they do not have bodies; demons are too evil to know God; and fairies might be both immortal and corporeal; but only humans can have reconciliation with God as his prized creation.

¹⁰³ Janice Gould, 'The Problem of being "Indian": One Mixed-Blood's Dilemma', in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *De/colonizing the subject: the politics of gender in women's autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 83.

CHAPTER II

FAIRIES, GENDER, AND POWER

Human and fairy relationships are defined by taboo or violence, and each instance is an example of dominance and control. Whether it is the subversive dominance of the fairy mistress, or the violence of the fairy knight, these fairy and human encounters in the world of romance suggest disquiet about relations between the sexes. At the root of medieval attitudes toward gender is the concern over *control*: not only who is in control of whom, but also regarding the control of gender roles themselves and maintaining gender orthodoxy. This chapter will explore another aspect of the role of the fairy in the medieval imagination: that of control, power, and gender. In analysing the relationships fairy characters have with human characters, particularly the aspect of power and hierarchy in the relationship, this chapter will provide another reading by which to understand the fairy in Middle English literature.

Studies on fairies and gender have tended to focus exclusively on either male fairies or on female fairies. Male fairies, such as the characters of the fairy knight in *Sir Degaré* and the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*, are studied in terms of physical violence. Kathlyn Gravdal, Louise M. Sylvester, and Corinne Saunders all have examined these romances in terms of medieval law regarding rape and ravishment.¹ As for female fairies, Amy N. Vines explores female fairies and their patronage of human knights,² though a familiar theme in medieval romance criticism is to examine female fairies as forms of

¹ Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Kathlyn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); and Louise M. Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

² Amy N. Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011).

wish-fulfilment.³ There has been the tendency also to focus on female fairies, almost with the assumption that there are no male fairies in Middle English romance outside of *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degaré*. But if we take a census of full-blooded fairies in Middle English romance, we find that there are an equal number of female and male fairies in Middle English romances, which, admittedly, is a small number out of the hundred or so extant Middle English romances. Texts which feature full-blooded male fairies (i.e., not including those with a human parent) are *Sir Orfeo* (the Fairy King), *Sir Degaré* (the Fairy Knight), and *Reinbrun* (the Fairy Knight), and texts which feature full-blooded female fairies are *Sir Launfal* (Tryamour), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (the Fairy Queen), and *Melusine* (Pressyne). If we include partly-human fairies then the number of fairies in Middle English romances increases dramatically: for male fairies, we have all eight of Melusine's sons and Sir Degaré; for female fairies, we have Melusine and her two sisters. This chapter, however, will focus only on 'full-blooded' fairies, that is, characters who are fully fairy without any human parents. By analysing the roles of both sexes of fairies, I hope to marry these two studies of male fairies and female fairies and develop an overarching definition of fairy, gender, and power.

³ Lee C. Ramsay, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 132; Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 109; Corinne Saunders discusses *Sir Launfal* and fairy as a place or means of material wish-fulfilment in 'Otherworld Enchantments and Faery Realms', in *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), as well in 'Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance', in Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 38-52; Neil Cartlidge, 'The Fairies in the Fountain: Promiscuous Liasons', in Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević, and Judith Weiss (eds.), *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 15-27; Carolyne Larrington, 'The fairy mistress in medieval literary fantasy', in Ceri Sullivan and Barbara White (eds.), *Writing and Fantasy* (London: Longman, 1999), 32-47; A. J. Bliss, 'Introduction', in *Sir Launfal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960). In his introduction to *Sir Launfal*, A. J. Bliss states outright that the romance is a wish-fulfilment story. Bliss observes that despite the hero's aristocratic origin, his poverty makes it possible for 'the peasant listener to identify himself with the hero, and to share in imagination in his success'. Though it must be noted that Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury temper Bliss's remarks about the audience of *Sir Launfal*: while not aristocratic, it was not necessarily peasant either, but more likely to be a mercantile and bourgeois audience (Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*, p. 119).

At this point my readers may expect me to include the character of Morgan le Fay and her various incarnations in my study here on fairy and gender. According to my definition of fairy, Morgan is not a ‘full-blooded fairy’ as she is given human parentage in Middle English romance.⁴ Even so, she will not feature in the following chapter on ‘fairy-like women’ either. Rather, Morgan le Fay will be considered in Chapter Five’s study on Avalon.

Gender roles and gender rules influenced the lives of medieval people just as much as they do today, if not more so. This chapter will adapt the vocabulary and methodology of the gender theoretical framework to fit these medieval texts. Fundamentally, I will adopt the questions of feminist theory: how are gender relations shaped and experienced? And how do we – or in this case, the audiences of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English romances – think or, just as importantly, not think about gender relations?⁵ As Simon Gaunt observes, medieval texts ‘do not theorize gender in the same way as us, but this does not mean they do not theorize gender at all’.⁶ Once adjusted and nuanced to fit medieval literature, we can use feminist literary theory to discuss medieval literature in a more critical way⁷ and thus analyse the dynamics of gender and sexuality in literary texts: what it means to be a woman or a man, consequently reaffirming or challenging existing cultural norms.⁸ Literature of any time period, including medieval romances, does not simply mirror its historical context, nor is it cut off from that context; when approaching these texts with the question of gender in

⁴ Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur, Or, The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*, Stephen H. A. Shepherd (ed.) (New York: Norton, 2004), pp. 5-6, 32.

⁵ Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, ‘Introduction’, in Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires (eds.), *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 6.

⁶ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 20.

⁷ Matilda T. Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: interpretation, truth, and closure in twelfth-century French fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁸ Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, ‘The Story So Far’, in Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (eds.), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism* (Houndsmills: Macmillan Education, 1990), p. 1.

mind, we must acknowledge that literature is in dialogue with its historical moment of production.⁹ Just as the medieval historical context influenced the literature created within that context, so also consumers of that literature could be influenced by the ways in which the literary text responded to that context. I will be using Bruckner's idea that medieval romance provides a 'free space'¹⁰ in which the author and audience can experiment with different and challenging ideas regarding gender roles.

Paradigm of Violence

As mentioned above, studies of male fairies in medieval romance have tended to focus on their propensity for violence. Saunders has observed that the only times rape occurs within the romance narrative, 'on stage' so to speak, the perpetrators are supernatural.¹¹ Although rape is frequently threatened, to the point that Gravdal claims that sexual violence is a necessary component of Arthurian romance,¹² Saunders claims that '[a]ctual rape is found only on the margins of romance'.¹³ Gravdal theorizes that the prevalence of the threat of sexual violence in medieval literature intended for mixed audiences suggests that audiences used these literary texts as an imaginary stage on which to act out their anxieties and gain mastery (however fleeting) over their fears of sexual violence that was a daily reality.¹⁴ Even as Gravdal argues that Chrétien's construction of the Arthurian romances anaesthetizes rape, making 'ravishment' an aspect of courtly love, no longer

⁹ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 4; Laurie A. Finke, 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature: "Séparés, on est ensemble"', in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), p. 352.

¹⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 4.

¹¹ Saunders excludes 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' from her examination of rape in romances, instead placing it within her study on Chaucer and rape in *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*. I also exclude 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' on the grounds that one does not read 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' on its own as one would *Sir Orfeo* or *Sir Degaré*, but rather with 'The Wife of Bath's Prologue' and within the larger context of *The Canterbury Tales*.

¹² Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 43.

¹³ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 187; Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 43.

¹⁴ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 18.

distinguishable by violence,¹⁵ actual sexual violence featuring forced coitus does not happen ‘on stage’ for the audience to see – unless, that is, the perpetrator is not human.

And yet these instances are also rare: it is more often the threat of rape that features in romance, not the act itself. In most romances that feature the threat of rape, the aggressors are giants, such as in *Lybeaus Desconus* and *Ywain and Gawain*.¹⁶ This is because giants are considered creatures of excess and corruption; however, these are not the romances that actually feature rape ‘on stage’.¹⁷ For the romances that include sexual violence within the narration, we must turn to *Sir Degaré*, *Sir Gowther*, and *Sir Orfeo*. The latter romance provides an example of ‘ravishment’, or abduction, a term that was synonymous with ‘rape’ in the Middle Ages. Though a modern audience would not consider Heurodis’s abduction as having the same gravity as the rape of the women in *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther*, medieval law refers to both abduction and forced coitus by the term *raptus*,¹⁸ resulting in a definition that lends the act of abduction the threat of sexual violence.¹⁹

¹⁵ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 43.

¹⁶ ‘Lybeaus Desconus’, in George Shuffleton (ed.), *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008); ‘Ywain and Gawain’, in Mary Flowers Braswell (ed.), *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

¹⁷ With the exception of the giant of Mont Saint Michel: he rapes two women, Helen, the daughter of the Duke of Brittany, and her aged attendant. Helen is raped, and killed, before Arthur arrives, and he witnesses the rape of the older woman. See the ‘Alliterative Morte Arthur’, in Larry D. Benson (ed.), *King Arthur’s Death* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986), lines 950-1052 and *Layamon’s Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon’s Brut*, W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (eds.) (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), lines 12964-68. Both the *Alliterative Morte* and *Layamon* inherited the Mont Saint Michel episode from Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Lewis Thorpe (trans.) (London: Penguin, 1966), Part 7, x.3 (pp. 237-40). However, both the *Alliterative Morte* and the *Brut* classify as history and not as romance. Rosamund Allen claims, ‘Such events occur in romances, but we are not required to experience them first hand like this’, from ‘Female perspectives in romance and history’, in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carole Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 143.

¹⁸ See discussion of secular law in the first chapter of Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* and the second chapter of Louise M. Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁹ Or reduces the violence of ‘rape’ to a form of property theft.

Sir Degaré is an early fourteenth-century romance that is in the group of romances considered Breton lays²⁰ (cf. lines 9-10, 'In Litel Bretaygne was a kyng / Of gret poer in all thing'²¹). The eponymous hero is the son of a princess who is raped by a fairy knight. In the opening of the poem, the princess and her handmaidens are separated from her father's retinue while traveling in the forest. In the heat of the day, the women stop to rest under the shade of chestnut trees. The princess wanders away from her sleeping attendants, listening to birdsong and gathering flowers (lines 77-78). A handsome knight approaches her, announces that he is a fairy knight, and then declares:

'Ich have iloved the mani a yer,
And now we beth us selve her,
Thou best mi lemman ar thou go,
Wether the liketh wel or wo.'
(lines 105-8)

His declaration of love is contradicted by the violence that follows:

Tho nothing ne coude do she
But wep and criede and wolde fle;
And he anon gan hire at holde,
And dide his wille, what he wolde.
He binam hire here maidenhod,
And sethen up toforen hire stod.
(lines 109-14)

The following narrative reveals this scene for the plot device it is: like other great heroes, such as Richard Coeur de Lion, Degaré's supernatural origin sets him apart and accounts for his greatness.²² Even so, this event demonstrates a moral license given to male fairies that is not given to male humans, or even to giants in medieval romance. Human men and giants might threaten sexual violence or rape, but they do not actually carry out these threats where the audience can see them. The exceptions to this rule are texts that follow

²⁰ Laura A. Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1960), pp. 301-5; J. Burke Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500* (New Haven, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), pp. 140-1.

²¹ Line numbers for *Sir Degaré* come from Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, eds., 'Sir Degaré', *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

²² Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, p. 191.

the chronicle tradition, such as the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*, which, because they follow the historical rather than the romance tradition, are not relevant here. Like humans, giants are categorized as mortal, carnal creatures, and yet giants are also excessive in their carnal desires.²³ The crude language used by the giant in *Ywain and Gawain*, combined with the threat itself, demonstrates the reprehensible nature of the giant when he boasts that he will give the lord's daughter to:

‘Ane of the foulest quisteroun,
That ever yit ete any brede.
He sal have hir maydenhede.
Thar sal none other lig hir by
Bot naked herlotes and lowsy’
(lines 2400-04)²⁴

And yet, the giant's threats come to nothing as he is defeated by Ywain. In contrast, the fairy knight in *Sir Degaré* disguises his threat in the language of love and rapes the princess even as she protests. Where the giant is condemned for his threats,²⁵ the fairy's sexual aggression does not meet with the same criticism in romance.

The rape scene in *Sir Degaré* can be read alongside a similar scene in *Sir Gowther*. The latter romance, found in two later fifteenth-century manuscripts, does not feature a fairy knight but rather an incubus, or a devil.²⁶ The parallels of these two romances recall the uneasy links between the fairy and the demonic as discussed in the previous chapter. Although the titular heroes of these two romances were discussed alongside *Melusine* and helped to demonstrate that fairies are not merely some variant of demon, the unnamed fairy knight who fathers Degaré and the devil who begets Gowther remind us that fairies are not entirely human either.

²³ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 209; Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 159-61, 169-70. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures Vol. 17 (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. xii.

²⁴ Line numbers for *Ywain and Gawain* refer to ‘Ywain and Gawain’, in Braswell (ed.), *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

²⁵ Cohen, *Of Giants*, p. 38; Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, p. 161.

²⁶ Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 141-2; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, pp. 49-57.

The premise of *Sir Gowther* is like that of many fairy tales: a duke and his wife cannot have a child.²⁷ When the duke decides to set his wife aside, she prays that she may get pregnant by any means possible (lines 63-6).²⁸ She then has sex with a man who she thinks is her husband, but who turns out to be none other than a devil:

In hur orchard apon a day
Ho meyt a mon, tho sothe to say,
That hur of luffe besoghth,
As lyke hur lorde as he myght be;
He leyd hur down undur a tre,
With hur is wyll he wroghthth.
When he had is wyllle all don
A felturd fende he start up son,
And stode and hur beheld;

(lines 67-75)

Like the fairy knight in *Sir Degaré*, the hairy fiend announces that he has impregnated her and that she will have a son. The tale then follows the child Gowther, who does not grow up with the same good manners as Degaré does, instead terrorizing his (foster) father's realm, pillaging and raping, and becoming a tyrant when he inherits the duke's title. It is only after he undergoes a humiliating penance that Gowther's character is redeemed to the point of appearing anything like a hero. The impetus for the plot lies in Gowther's demonic father, against whose heritage Gowther must struggle to achieve redemption. These parallel rape scenes in *Sir Degaré* and *Sir Gowther* suggest that when it comes to acts of sexual violence in medieval romances, male fairies and demons both have similar roles to play.

Although no explicit rape scene features in *Sir Orfeo*, the heroine Heurodis is 'ravished' and abducted by the Fairy King. The act of being 'carried away', or

²⁷ See S223 (Childless couple promise child to the devil if they may only have one) and T510 (Miraculous conception) in Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Studies, 1935); Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, p. 52.

²⁸ Line numbers for *Sir Gowther* come from 'Sir Gowther', in Laskaya and Salisbury (eds.), *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

‘ravishment’, could mean being carried away emotionally as well as physically.²⁹ In *Sir Orfeo*, the queen Heurodis wakes from a nightmare, frightening everyone with her self-mutilation caused by her distress. She tells how she had fallen asleep in the orchard and that the King of Fairy had visited her. He took her away to see the delights of Faerie, then insisted that he would come again to take her body into Faerie, too: ‘& þan þou schalt wiþ ous go, / & liue wiþ ous euer-mo’ (lines 167-8).³⁰ It is clear by her actions that she has been ravished mentally: scratching at her face until she bleeds, tearing at her hair, wailing. Indeed, this intrusion into Heurodis’s psyche is ‘deeply sinister’ and a foretaste of the bodily ravishment that is to come.³¹ Despite the protection of King Orfeo and his host of ten hundred knights, Heurodis is snatched from their midst:

þe quen was oway y-tviȝt,
Wiþ fairi forþ y-nome
-- Men wist neuer wher sche was bicomē.
(lines 192-5)

Although Heurodis may not have suffered sexual violence at the hands of the Fairy King, she was forcibly taken from her home and her court in the mortal world. In that sense, Heurodis was the victim of ‘sexualized violence’, a form of violence in which the perpetrator humiliates the victim or otherwise forces upon the victim a subordinate position in a way that has sexual overtones, even if a sexual act does not take place.³² In

²⁹ Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality*, p. 44.

³⁰ Line numbers for *Sir Orfeo* come from Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn.

³¹ Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Literature*, p. 201.

³² For the development of the term ‘sexualized violence’, see Brigitte Halbmayr, ‘Sexualized Violence against Women during Nazi “Racial” Persecution’, in Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (eds.), *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), p. 30: ‘The term sexualized violence makes it clear that male violence against females is not about sexuality but is a show of power on the part of the perpetrator and includes many forms of violence with sexual connotations, including humiliation, intimidation, and destruction. [...] From this we can derive that violent acts can be understood as sexualized if they are directed at the most intimate part of a person and, as such, against that person’s physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity. It must be stressed that the goal of all forms of sexualized violence is the demonstration of power and dominance through the humiliation and degradation of the other. This definition of the term covers direct physical expressions of violence that are bodily attacks, an unauthorized crossing of body boundaries. They range from flagrant sexual advances to rape.’

the mind of medieval audiences, this scene would resonate with what knowledge they had of ravishment cases; Orfeo's queen was no doubt the victim of a violent sexualized crime.

Both Heurodis's mental and physical ravishment by the Fairy King are analogous to the rape of the princess by the fairy knight in *Sir Degaré*.³³ Once again the aggressor is of supernatural origin – his act of violence is made all the more sinister by his ability to intrude upon the privacy of her mind and to snatch her away even when amongst a crowd of armed knights. Saunders writes that, 'As in rape, the crucial dynamic is a gendered one, of power of the male over the female, reinforced here in the power of faery over human'.³⁴ The Fairy Knight in *Sir Degaré* and the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* both demonstrate how male fairies dominate over their human female victims.

Although Saunders has argued that sexual violence is only enacted in romance when the perpetrator is supernatural, violence itself is prevalent in romance literature. According to James Schultz and Richard W. Kaeuper, one of the spheres in which noblemen in the Middle Ages defined themselves was violence.³⁵ Schultz describes how courtly protocols developed to limit male violence, forbidding it in many cases, or redirecting its energies to less disruptive avenues. The two domains in which men defined themselves, fighting and women, became increasingly restricted in the world at large, politically and ecclesiastically.³⁶ The fact that male violence was regulated and channelled into appropriate settings, instead of being done away with altogether, indicates that violence remained an important factor in defining and proving manhood.

In romance we also have the custom of Logres: as presented in Chrétien's romances, chivalric code stipulates the protection of women; however, a woman

³³ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 229.

³⁴ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 231.

³⁵ James A. Schultz, 'Masculine Identity and the Consolations of Fiction', in *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 177; Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 161-88.

³⁶ Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, p. 174

travelling with a knight is fair game for abduction.³⁷ Another knight may challenge the lady's protector and fight for her.³⁸ The woman's consent does not factor into this arrangement. Echoes of this custom occur in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, in which the Queen's court commands Gawain that he must not harm or injure women and must come to a woman's aid whatever the situation may be.³⁹ Here, the injunction *not to harm* women is as telling as the command to help women in distress: male violent tendencies need to be checked and redirected into socially appropriate channels. That the knight's duty to protect others should explicitly include women (an inclusion which otherwise would seem obvious⁴⁰) indicates that violence, particularly sexual violence or violence against women, was a reality.

Saunders concludes that medieval authors were able to use fairies to contemplate acts of violence because the supernatural is not bound by human morality.⁴¹ Human males may threaten sexual or sexualized violence, but both the secular and ecclesiastical courts condemned such forms of violence. If an author wanted to include rape in his narrative, he had to use a supernatural character: the rape of a noblewoman, though still shocking, was made more palatable by the obvious fictionality of having it carried out by a fairy or a demon. As a result, the male fairy is associated with a 'paradigm of violence',⁴² especially when we consider that we have no examples of a non-violent male fairy.⁴³

³⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, 'The Knight of the Cart (Lancelot)', in William W. Kibler (trans. and ed.), *Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 223-4

³⁸ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, pp. 226-27.

³⁹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 70; Corinne Saunders, 'A Matter of Consent: Middle English Romance and the Law of Raptus', in Noël James Menuge (ed.), *Medieval Women and the Law* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), p. 118.

⁴⁰ Cartlidge, 'The Fairies in the Fountain', in Ashe, Djordjević, and Weiss (eds.), *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, p. 25.

⁴¹ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, pp. 232-33.

⁴² The term 'paradigm of violence' is my own.

⁴³ Unless, of course, we consider half- or part-fairies, in which case we do have examples of non-violent, or at least violent in sanctioned situations, male fairies, such as Degaré in *Sir Degaré* and Melusine's sons, particularly Froimond, in *Melusine*.

Violence, then, is a male gendered form of control. We are not all that surprised then when male fairies enact control through violence; what is surprising, rather, is the level of violence exhibited by these characters. If violence against women was forbidden in chivalric code, then these fairy knights are not chivalrous. Male fairies wield control in a fashion that was considered correctly masculine, but the severity of their violent crimes is increased as the result of being characters outside of human society, not bound by human moral constraints. Men who are human may threaten violence and even kill women; men who are fairies may threaten violence and rape 'on stage'.

Because male fairies still fit within gender orthodoxy, even when displaying an excessive amount of violence, the 'paradigm of control' performed by these particular characters has not been considered as a characteristic of all fairies, but rather as a characteristic of all males. If we recast Saunders's 'paradigm of violence'⁴⁴ as one of a 'paradigm of control', then we can apply it to female fairies as well.

Paradigm of Control

Women tend to play a passive role in romance. Although courtly literature saw the rise of female characters as having some of their own will rather than simply being personifications of abstract ideas,⁴⁵ women in romance often function as the source of inspiration for the male poet or hero; the result is a passive character with little or no personal agency.⁴⁶ One exception is the 'wooing woman' of Anglo-Norman romance,

⁴⁴ This term is mine, however.

⁴⁵ Joan M. Ferrante, 'Male fantasy and female reality in courtly literature', *Women's Studies* 11.1-2 (1984), 67.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Archibald, 'Women and Romance', in Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald (eds.), *Companion to Middle English Romance* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), pp. 156-58.

such as Rigmel and Lenburc in *King Horn*⁴⁷ and Josiane in *Boeve de Haumtone*.⁴⁸ These heroines, argues Judith Weiss, take matters of love into their own hands.⁴⁹ They pursue their lovers, not the other way around. However, Elizabeth Archibald points out that ‘when a woman does manipulate the plot, either she returns immediately to passivity or else she is not the heroine’.⁵⁰ Even when these female human characters woo their lovers, they are often reconciled to gender orthodoxy by submitting to the husband they have chosen, or are otherwise married off without consultation.⁵¹ This is not the case when the heroine is a fairy; instead, the female fairy retains her agency and wields power over her human lover even to the end of the romance.

At first glance, the fairy mistress’s gifts of armour, wealth, and prestige all serve to benefit the human knight. With closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear that, instead of being mere tools of wish-fulfilment for the men in the audience, Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* and the Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* are subversive in their relationships with human men. These female fairies both exert and maintain their dominance over their human male partners, exercising power that their human female counterparts cannot. Female power is sometimes manifested in a patron/client relationship, as seen in *Sir Launfal* and even *Melusine*. This is not always the case, as will be seen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, in which we see that female fairies also exert power over their human partners by restricting speech. Through both the power of gift-giving and the ability to silence men, female fairies are just as much in control of their human partners as male fairies are.

⁴⁷ Rosamund Allen (ed.), *King Horn, with an analysis of the textual transmission* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984).

⁴⁸ Judith Weiss (ed.), *Boeve de Haumtone and Gui De Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008).

⁴⁹ Judith Weiss, ‘The wooing woman in Anglo-Norman romance’, in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carole Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), p. 150.

⁵⁰ Archibald, ‘Women and Romance’, in Aertsens and MacDonald (eds.), *Companion to Middle English Romance*, p. 158.

⁵¹ Weiss, ‘The wooing woman’, in Mills, Fellows, and Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England*, p. 155; seen in romances such as *Beves of Hamptoun*, *King Horn*, *Partonope of Blois*, and *Eger and Grime*.

Ways of control: Patronage

When human women exert their influence in the form of material gifts of wealth and the trappings of chivalry, they assume power over the men to whom they give their gifts.

Amy N. Vines discusses how fairy women can exercise power through their patronage of human knights.⁵² Women may not be able to fight or go to war themselves, but they can finance men to fight for them. *Sir Launfal* is a romance in which this is the case: the fairy mistress gains control over her human lover through the power of gifts.

Written by Thomas Chestre in the late fourteenth century, *Sir Launfal* is one of two Middle English adaptations of Marie de France's twelfth-century Breton lay, *Lanval*; the other is *Sir Landevale*, also represented by *Sir Lambwell* and *Sir Lamwell*.⁵³ *Sir Landevale*, was one of Chestre's main sources, though he may have also taken material from the anonymous lay *Graelent*, which has a similar plot to *Lanval*.⁵⁴ In all versions, an unfortunate knight leaves the court of Arthur disgraced and impoverished as a result of his lord's neglect. Sir Launfal then comes upon a fairy in the forest. The fairy immediately declares her love for Sir Launfal and promises to make him rich if he 'wylt truly to [her] take, And alle wemen for [her] forsake' (lines 316-7).⁵⁵ It comes as no surprise that Sir Launfal would accept her terms; as has already been noted by other critics, the fairy mistress exhibits the epitome of wish-fulfilment.

In Chestre's version of the romance, it is Gwenere who denies Launfal patronage, not King Arthur. Vines agrees with Peter J. Lucas's interpretation of 'take' in line 316 of the poem: rendering 'Yf þou wylt truly to me take' not as 'become a lover' but 'to attach

⁵² Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*. See chapters three and four in particular.

⁵³ Bliss, 'Introduction', in *Sir Launfal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960), pp. 2-5, 12-16; Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 138-40.

⁵⁴ Priscilla Bawcutt, 'Sir Lamwell in Scotland', in Rhiannon Purdie and Nicola Royan (eds.), *The Scots and Medieval Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 83-84.

⁵⁵ Line numbers for *Sir Launfal* come from Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960).

oneself to' in a lord/vassal relationship, which hitherto Launfal has lacked.⁵⁶ With these terms Tryamour offers to become Launfal's patron as well as his lover. This patron/client relationship between Tryamour and Launfal is demonstrated further by her gift of a pennant with her heraldic device, as well as his new armour and clothes sporting the colours and ermine specifically associated with her (lines 328-30, 416-7). As a result, Launfal identifies himself to the world of the romance as *someone's* knight because he wears signs that mark his allegiance to a patron other than Arthur and Gwenere.⁵⁷ As a result, Dame Tryamour exerts power over Sir Launfal in his financial and material dependence on her.

By entering into a patron/client relationship with Dame Tryamour, Launfal also enters into an asymmetric relationship in which he is subordinate to his patron, who is in this case a woman. Thus, this patron/client relationship inverts the asymmetry of the traditional gendered relationship, in which the female is subordinate to the male. In the historical context of medieval romance, patronage was one of the few sanctioned avenues of female power, although often the woman required her husband's permission to engage in such an activity.⁵⁸ This is not the case in literature, as Dame Tryamour, Melior, and even Melusine all become patrons on their own authority. In the case of Dame Tryamour (and of Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, to be discussed in the next chapter), this patronage creates an unequal power relationship. Sarah Kay explains that patronage works best in a gift economy, where the desire to receive and to give gifts is rooted in expanding social relations, not in the accumulation of wealth, as it is in a commodity economy.⁵⁹ As

⁵⁶ Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*, p. 130; Peter J. Lucas, 'Towards an Interpretation of *Sir Launfal* with Particular Reference to Line 683', *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970), 295.

⁵⁷ Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*, p. 131.

⁵⁸ June Hall McCash, 'The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women: An Overview', in June Hall McCash (ed.) *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 1, 8-9.

⁵⁹ Sarah Kay, *The 'chansons de geste' in the age of romance: political fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 39-40; Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia* (London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 143.

Christine Chism observes, 'a gift is given not simply to endow but to arrest the recipient's attention, perform oneself as an important cultural agent, and to secure one's claim to a portion of the recipient'.⁶⁰ In a gift economy, the generosity of the giver both empowers and constrains the recipient; the recipient receives wealth but also finds himself/herself in obligation to the giver. Although Kay observes that *chansons de geste* tend to operate in a gift economy and romances in a commodity economy,⁶¹ a gift economy also functions in medieval romance.⁶² Fairy women in medieval romance gain control over their human male lovers through patronage and gifts; these supernatural gifts can never be adequately repaid in the human world, thus creating an 'imbalance in the exchange system'.⁶³ The bonds made between Dame Tryamour and Sir Launfal are unequal: the human male in this relationship has the most to gain, and the most to lose, in the mortal world at least. And yet in the currency of gifts, he is seriously and irrevocably in debt to his fairy mistress. The female fairy thus retains dominance in this relationship as a result of this debt and because her gifts are contingent upon the conditions laid out in her taboo. With the constant threat that the fairy mistress might withdraw her love and financial support, the female fairy is able to coerce her male partner to do her will.

According to Gaunt, the male character in medieval romance is often dependent on the female character to develop his masculine identity,⁶⁴ and this is especially the case in these types of asymmetric relationships. Stephen Guy-Bray notes that the two early gift-giving scenes in *Sir Launfal* – first at Gwenere's wedding feast where she snubs Launfal, and the second in which the mayor's daughter gives Launfal a saddle and bridle

⁶⁰ Christine Chism, 'Winning Women in Two Middle English Alexander Poems', in Sara S. Poor and Jana K Schulman (eds.), *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 30.

⁶¹ Kay, *The 'chansons de geste' in the age of romance*, p. 230.

⁶² Ad Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities in Sir Amadace', *The Review of English Studies*, NS 51.203 (2000), 371-394; Rebecca Kerry, "'He Tolde Oute Four Hundred Pounde": Resolution of an Arithmetical Problem in Editions of A Gest of Robyn Hode', *Notes and Queries* 60.3 (2013), 367-370.

⁶³ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 115.

⁶⁴ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, p. 92.

for his horse – suggests that ‘the world in which Launfal lives is controlled by women’.⁶⁵ The idea of this being a female-dominated world is reinforced by Dame Tryamour’s role within the romance, both as lover and patron of Sir Launfal. She controls him by binding him to her with oaths and the obligation that comes with gift-giving. Dame Tryamour provides Launfal with the materials and trappings necessary to establish himself as an honoured knight according to his society’s standards. He could not have built a reputation for generosity and ‘largess’ in addition to strength in battle if it were not for Tryamour’s gifts of a never-empty purse and other forms of wealth. Vines’s recent discussion of *Sir Launfal* continues this definition of a female-dominated world in the romance: she claims that Chestre revises Gwenere’s character from how she appears in his sources so as to set up two competing models of female patronage between which Launfal has to choose.⁶⁶ Even with the two other women in the romance as controlling figures, neither of the human women succeeds in controlling Launfal long-term. This is achieved only by Dame Tryamour, the fairy mistress.

Ways of control: Speech

Enacting power through patronage is not the only method female fairies in medieval romances exert dominance over their human partners. Female fairies also use speech, through the imposition of taboos and the restriction of men’s speech, to wield power over men. The imposition of a taboo, or *geis*, is one of the ‘fairy conventions’ often found in stories that feature fairies.⁶⁷ Although the prohibition may at first seem arbitrary, this

⁶⁵ Stephen Guy-Bray, ‘Male Trouble: Sir Launfal and the Trials of Masculinity’, *English Studies in Canada* 34:2-4 (June-Sep 2008), 36.

⁶⁶ Vines, *Women’s Power in Late Medieval Romance*, p. 117.

⁶⁷ John Revell Reinhard, *The Survival of the Geis in Mediaeval Romance* (Halle A.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1933), pp. 218-99.

section will demonstrate how authors manipulated the convention of the taboo to great effect when exploring the power exercised by fairy mistresses.

❖ *The case of Sir Launfal*

Dame Tryamour's power over Sir Launfal extends beyond the material and into the verbal and sexual as well. Launfal agrees to the fairy's bargain, but Dame Tryamour has not listed all of her terms. The next morning, after she has already bound Launfal to her, the fairy mistress lays out the rest of her demands:

'Bot of o þyng, Syr Knyȝt, I warne þe,
þat þou make no bost of me
For no kennes mede!
And yf þou doost (y warny þe before)
All my loue þou hast forlore!
(lines 361-5)

Dame Tryamour's imposition exhibits the arbitrary nature of fairy taboos. This taboo in particular goes beyond the usual injunction to secrecy for romance affairs, but places Launfal in her power by increasing the stakes for his secrecy. Dame Tryamour's love and generosity are not unconditional, and they require not only the knight's faithfulness – that he forsake all other women to love her only – but also his silence. Sir Launfal loses his freedom of speech by accepting the love and wealth of his fairy mistress. This does not seem to pose any problem for the knight until he cannot defend himself against Queen Gwenere's advances without revealing that he already has a mistress, which he is incapable of doing without also boasting of his mistress's beauty. Even though she does eventually return to him and rescue him from death for treason, Dame Tryamour again exerts her power by taking Sir Launfal away with her.

In addition to free wealth or gifts of prophecy, fairy mistresses provide a means for their male human lovers to demonstrate and maintain their masculinity. Medieval

masculinity was both proven and maintained by performing a triad of tasks: impregnating women, protecting dependents, and providing for one's family.⁶⁸ Medieval ideas of anatomy and physiology of both men and women, adopted from the classical period,⁶⁹ created several pressures for men, especially regarding their sexual performance. Vern L. Bullough claims that ultimately 'the male was defined in terms of sexual performance, measured rather simply as his ability to get an erection'.⁷⁰ When even the appearance of a man's children was an indication of his masculinity – how much the child resembled the father was a measure of the 'success' of the father's seed when mixed with the mother's seed – and because of the belief that women could not get pregnant without experiencing an orgasm, there is no wonder that medieval men experienced some amount of anxiety about their sexual identity. Fairy women, therefore, may not only serve as wish-fulfilment by offering free sex because sex is pleasurable, but also because by offering sex the fairy mistress provides the opportunity for the mortal man to reassure himself of his masculinity.

But how 'free' is this 'free sex'? The fairy mistress is the 'offeror', and by taking initiative she takes control of the relationship.⁷¹ The knight also becomes dependent upon her for his personal identity and yet must keep his relationship with her a secret. This is the case with both Thomas of Erceldoune, to be discussed below, and Sir Launfal, who is

⁶⁸ Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages', in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities: regarding men in the Middle Ages* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 33.

⁶⁹ Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages', in Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities*, p. 34; Judith Weiss, 'The power and the weakness of women in Anglo-Norman romance', in Carol M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 7-8; Elaine Tuttle Hansen, 'The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (eds.), *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 59; Joyce E. Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', in Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), pp. 85-87; Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in Bullough and Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, pp. 125-7.

⁷⁰ Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages', in Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities*, p. 43.

⁷¹ Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality*, p. 37. Sylvester introduces the terms 'offeror' and 'offeree' regarding who initiates the sexual encounter. Traditionally, women are most frequently the offerees – 'in the traditional sexual script it is acceptable for men, but not for women, to take the sexual initiative'.

forbidden to speak of his fairy mistress. Because Sir Launfal cannot make public his relationship with Tryamour, he is put in an awkward and dangerous situation when Queen Gwenere makes her own advances toward him. When he refuses, she accuses him of not liking the company of women. As it turns out, Launfal is dependent upon Tryamour for both the personal and public aspects of his gendered identity. Overlooked, patron-less, lady-less at the beginning of the poem, Launfal discovers himself as the result of his relationship with his fairy mistress.⁷² He is indebted to her not only financially and socially, but sexually as well.

❖ *The case of The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*

The earliest extant copy of *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* is found in the mid-fifteenth-century Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, or the 'Thornton MS'.⁷³ This Northern text is unusual in that it begins as a romance but then is composed mostly of prophecies attributed to 'True' Thomas about the fate of Scotland, who received this knowledge from the Queen of Fairy.⁷⁴ For most of its history, either the prophecies or the Fairy Queen's transformation from a beautiful maiden to an ugly hag have received the focus of scholarly interest.⁷⁵ This chapter, however, will only consider the romance portion of the text, found in the first fitt and the beginning of the second fitt.

⁷² Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, p. 109.

⁷³ James A. H. Murray (ed.), 'Introduction: Description of the MSS', in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London: N. Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.61, 1875), p. xxiii.

⁷⁴ Murray (ed.), 'Introduction: Description of the MSS', in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, p. lvi.

⁷⁵ For research on the prophecies, see E. B. Lyle, 'Thomas of Erceldoune: The Prophet and the Prophesied', *Folklore* 79 (1968), 111-121; Helen Cooper, 'Thomas of Erceldoune: Romance as Prophecy', in Corinne Saunders (ed.), *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Studies in Medieval Romance, 2005), pp. 171-87; and as recently as a paper delivered at the thirteenth Romance in Medieval Britain conference at St Hugh's College, University of Oxford, Victoria Flood (University of York), 'Crossing the Border in *The Romance of Thomas of Erceldoune* and *The Turke and Sir Gawain*', 25 March 2012. For work on the Fairy Queen as a Loathly Lady, see William P. Albrecht, *The Loathly Lady in 'Thomas of Erceldoune', with a Text of the Poem Printed in 1652* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New

In this romance, a mortal man also meets a fairy woman, but it is the human Thomas who first propositions the fairy woman. The fairy woman offers what could be described as ‘token resistance’, eliciting a rash oath of fidelity from Thomas, and it is this oath that gives the Fairy Queen mastery over Thomas. In her discussion of the performance of heteronormative gender roles, Sylvester observes that women in medieval romance frequently offer only a ‘token resistance’ to male propositions for sex, resulting in problematic scenarios where ‘no’ cannot really be believed to mean ‘no’.⁷⁶ If gender is a characteristic that is performed,⁷⁷ then the Fairy Queen acts in a way that demonstrates her femininity according to the medieval mindset by only appearing to rebuff Thomas’s advances. Because she is female, she of course wants to accept Thomas’s request: she only *seems* to say ‘no’ in order to adhere to the heterosexual script which dictates that she at least makes the appearance of resisting, and also to find out what she might get from Thomas in return for giving her body to him. Although the Fairy Queen does not proposition Thomas, she is open to suggestion – and the poet emphasises her sexual appetite by stating explicitly that they have sex seven times under the tree: ‘And, als the storye tellis full ryghte, / Seuene sythis by hir he laye’ (line 124).⁷⁸ In this way the Fairy Queen appears to be performing within the expectations of gender orthodoxy. But even as she acts in an expected, feminine way, she will soon hold power over Thomas that a normal human woman could not have.

Thomas pledges to the lady, saying that ‘euer more with the duelle; / Here my trouthe j will the plyghte. / Whethir pou will in heuene or helle’ (lines 106-8). The fairy

Mexico Publications in Language and Literature 11, 1954); Ellen M. Caldwell, ‘Brains or Beauty: Limited Sovereignty in the Loathly Lady Tales “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” “Thomas of Erceldoune,” and “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle”’, in Elizabeth S. Passmore and Susan Carter (eds.), *The English ‘Loathly Lady’ Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 325-57.

⁷⁶ Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality*, pp. 47-8.

⁷⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge), p. 179.

⁷⁸ Line numbers come from James A. H. Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London: N. Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.61, 1875), following the Thornton manuscript.

woman does not submit to the man's request until after he has made this oath to her. Even though lying with Thomas, a mortal, will destroy her ethereal beauty (a trait not found in the other fairy mistress tales), she has gained control over him.

After their 'pley', in which she also provides an opportunity for him to prove his masculinity by relating to him sexually, the fairy woman transforms into the epitome of ugliness. To Thomas's horror, the Fairy Queen-now-hag takes him up on his promise:

Scho sayd, 'Thomas, take leue at sonne
And als at lefe þat grewes on tree;
This twelmoneth sall þou with me gone,
And Medill-erthe sall þou none see.'
(lines 157-160)

Although Thomas prays to the Virgin Mary for his deliverance (lines 163-68), he is still taken by the Fairy Queen. In this way the Fairy Queen's actions mirror those of her male counterpart in *Sir Orfeo* when the Fairy King abducts Heurodis. By holding Thomas to the oath he made, the Fairy Queen performs her own *raptus* of Thomas, taking him bodily away with her into Faerie.

The journey they take from the mortal world to the kingdom of Faerie is an unusual one, passing through a cavern with the sound of a rushing flood and wading through waters that go up to their knees. In a 'faire herbere' the fairy mistress prevents Thomas from eating forbidden fruit and shows him the five paths to the Otherworld (lines 201-21). Announcing that she will not be taking him to 'heuene', 'paradyse', 'helle', or that place 'whare synfull saulis suffirris þaire payne' (presumably purgatory), but to Faerie, the fairy mistress gives another injunction to her mortal lover (lines 201-22). Like Dame Tryamour, the Fairy Queen silences her mortal partner: 'Luke þou answere non bott mee', says the Fairy Queen, adding that she will tell the fairy court that she 'tuke [his] speche by-ȝonde the see' (lines 228, 232). Thomas may see and experience all the delights of the fairy realm, but he will not be allowed to speak to anyone other than his

fairy mistress. She has, in fact, taken away his voice. She protects herself from her husband, the King of Fairy, discovering her infidelity while also maintaining control over a mortal man who has become her lover.

Again, Thomas makes no complaint about this injunction. Like Sir Launfal, he has no choice in the matter. Thomas spends what he thinks is three days in Fairy, enjoying the hunts, dancing, and pleasures of the court. Indeed, his only protest is when his fairy mistress tells him it is time for him to leave Fairy. What he thinks has been only three days has been, in fact, three years: the Fairy Queen has kept him far longer than the twelve months for which she had claimed him.

Even when the Fairy Queen returns Thomas to the mortal world, she does not quite relinquish her control. Thomas insists that she leave him a token before they depart forever. She gives him the choice of ‘to harpe or carpe’. He refuses the gift of ‘harpyng’, and so she leaves him with this double-edged gift: ‘If þou will spelle, or tales tell, Thomas, þou sall neuer lesyng lye’ (lines 317-18). It is this ‘gift’ that the fairy mistress leaves Thomas that earns him the epithet of ‘True Thomas’. Unlike Tryamour’s gifts of wealth and arms, the Fairy Queen gives Thomas a much more abstract, intangible gift. Blessed, or cursed, never to speak lies, Thomas’s encounter with the fairy affects him permanently. Long after his liaison with the fairy mistress beneath the Eildon tree, Thomas will still be controlled by the Fairy Queen. As Launfal is defined by his relationship with Dame Tryamour, so also is Thomas defined by the relationship he has with the Fairy Queen. Her gift shapes him so completely that it characterizes his public and social role, to the point that he is renamed ‘True’ Thomas. The gift of true speech continues to define him even after his relationship with the Fairy Queen has ended.

From these two examples of female fairies, it becomes clear that it is not only male fairies that exert control in their fairy/human relationships. Female fairies also

dominate over their human partners, with control much more far-reaching than their human counterparts. After noting that female characters almost never influence the plot, Archibald makes an observation about female fairies similar to the conclusion Saunders reaches regarding male fairies and rape: 'The fairy [...] is in a special category. *She is not human*' (emphasis mine).⁷⁹ Thus, when a romance features a fairy/human relationship, the fairy will control his or her partner, regardless whether the fairy is male or female. Fairy characters are allowed control in these narratives due to being *fairies*, not because they happen to be of a particular sex, e.g. male fairies. This 'paradigm of control' can be said to be characteristic of all fairies and in the medieval mind, a fairy character, whether male or female, will be the character in control.

As for female fairies, they may not exercise violent physical control over their partners, as male fairies do, but they do wield psychological and verbal control. Why is it that female fairies use manipulation rather than violence? If 'fairyness' is a prerequisite for having power over one's sexual partner, then female fairies might also be allowed physical power, and yet this does not seem to be the case. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski have observed that real medieval women were allowed certain avenues of power in the private sphere in the real world. Sanctioned forms of women's power included using their influence to support their husbands' or sons' authority, or their husbands' financial contributions to ecclesiastical institutions, or to persuade their husbands' to convert to Christianity.⁸⁰ Mostly, women were allowed to use their influence to encourage men in individual or private matters. Female power had to be exercised in private, and so it often is with female fairies. Again, as with male fairies and the exercise of power as violence, the reach of female fairies' control is due to their fairy nature. The

⁷⁹ Archibald, 'Women and Romance', in Aertsen and MacDonald (eds.), *Companion to Middle English Romance*, p. 158.

⁸⁰ Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), p. 11.

ability to silence, financially ruin, and abduct their male partners is the result of the fairies' magical power and authority. Female fairies may not exercise violence as their male counterparts do with their human lovers, but it is still the fairy that is very much in control.

Gendered control

Let us revisit the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: How are gender relations shaped and experienced? How do the audiences of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English romances think or do not think about gender relations? What we have found in this chapter is that control is gendered: male forms of control feature violence and female forms of control tend to be psychological. Men may physically force others to their will, while women manipulate men to theirs. Women also exercise their power in private. This is the case also for fairies. Both male and female fairies wield power according to their prescribed gender roles, but the reach with which they exercise that power is exaggerated because they are fairies. As Maureen Duffy succinctly states, 'In fayrie all the natural laws are reversed or don't apply'.⁸¹

And yet by taking control of the sexual relationship, female fairies exercise power beyond what is considered gender orthodox for medieval women. While patronage may appear to be in the interests of their mortal lovers, female fairies also use strategies that are seen to undermine male authority – for instance, using their sexuality in ways that was 'feared, labelled subversive, and condemned as socially unacceptable avenues to power'.⁸² When Dame Tryamour propositions Sir Launfal, she usurps the male role of 'offeror' usually found in medieval romance. Similarly, when the Fairy Queen takes

⁸¹ Maureen Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), p. 53.

⁸² Erler and Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.

Thomas to the Otherworld, she performs her own version of *raptus*. Though fairy women may exert control in the acceptable feminine avenue of patronage, they also take on the masculine role of taking control of the sexual relationship. Being a man already allows the male fairy control, particularly through physical violence, but being a fairy exaggerates the amount of power he can wield. For female fairies, however, being a fairy accords them with the ability to perform both feminine and masculine forms of control.

Even as I argue that fairy women claim control over their human lovers, why are these women given masculine power? That these female characters are given more power for their own sake, simply for the empowerment of women, is unlikely. Sheila Fisher writes that the ways women are depicted in romances registers an anxiety about masculinity and masculine identity and that the function of female characters is to be 'involved in the construction (and at times, the destruction) of men's chivalric identities'.⁸³ In the same vein, Schultz claims that male characters are still more interesting than women *even when* they are powerless.⁸⁴ We must consider who the most interesting human character is supposed to be in these romances. In the texts which feature a female fairy in control, *Sir Launfal* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, the heroes are the titular characters, Launfal and Thomas: in *Sir Launfal*, the plot centres on the knight's chivalric career and Tryamour's part in it, and in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, the liaison with the Fairy Queen is a means to provide authority to Thomas's prophecies. Tellingly, the same goes for the texts which feature male fairies: the princess is not the main character in *Sir Degaré*, but rather her son is, the result of her rape by the fairy knight; and it is Orfeo, not Heurodis, who claims most of the poet's and audience's attention in *Sir Orfeo*. In *Sir Launfal* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, the function of the fairy character is

⁸³ Sheila Fisher, 'Women and men in late medieval English romance', in Roberta L. Krueger (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 151.

⁸⁴ Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, p. 183.

to build up the hero's reputation and career. In *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degaré*, the fairy is used as a plot device to create the story, whether it is begetting the hero or testing a political rival. The male characters are the more interesting characters, and so they were allowed more agency within the text.

When we consider consent we can see another way power exercised in fairy/human relationships is gendered. Human men can *choose* to participate in an asymmetric relationship with a female fairy and yet human women appear to have no choice when encountering the male supernatural. In the forms of gendered control discussed above, we see that male violence is so dependent upon the will of the man, and is so quick in narration, that the woman has absolutely no choice in the matter. The princess is raped by the fairy knight, not seduced; Heurodis is abducted, not asked if she wanted to run away. On the other hand, Sir Launfal has the opportunity to turn down the offer made by Dame Tryamour, and Thomas could have accepted the Fairy Queen's resistance as true resistance. When the fairy is male, the fairy has complete power and yet when the fairy is female, the relationship allows for the agency of both sexes.

This chapter has shown that the 'paradigm of violence' attributed to male fairies can be extended to include female fairies, allowing for 'fairy' to be defined by a 'paradigm of control'. I have demonstrated that this quality of dominance is one of the defining characteristics of the medieval literary fairy. Fairies, both male and female, exercise power and control over their human partners, though the way they demonstrate this power differs according to their sex. Still generally following the different roles defined by gender orthodoxy, male fairies exercise physical violence to control their human partners while female fairies wield control through manipulation and patronage, exaggerated in

both cases in ways beyond which human characters usually acted in Middle English romance. In this way medieval poets recognised and used this literary motif of the powerful supernatural to good effect, using fairy characters to push beyond the bounds that would otherwise constrain human characters. The genre of romance was already the ideal medium with which to explore questions of gender and power; using fairy in literature creates a 'free space' in which these questions could be tested even further.

Chapter III

‘Performing’ Fairy

AN enchantress in a far off land sets her desires on the young nephew of the king of France. With her magical arts, she orchestrates a series of events to bring him to her. He gets lost while hunting and comes upon a boat by the sea. The ship carries him across the sea, bringing him to a beautiful, grand city, which, like the ship, is completely empty. He eats a feast in the palace and an invisible servant leads him to a bedchamber where a woman joins him in bed. He later learns that she has masterminded the entire affair, from his hunt in the forest to the enchanted boat and city, all to provide for their lovemaking. She imposes a taboo on him and promises to be a faithful lover, giving him wealth and status besides. This is Melior of *Partonope of Blois*, and despite appearances she is not a fairy.

In the previous chapter I established that power, or control, is a defining characteristic of the literary fairy in Middle English romance: the fairy will wield control over his or her human partner, and, importantly, the fairy will have this control whether male or female. I demonstrated that female fairies also operate within the ‘paradigm of control’ and that being fairy allows for female fairies to have authority over their (human) male partners that their (human) female counterparts do not have, since passivity is demanded from human women in order to adhere to gender orthodoxy.

But what about human women who look and act like fairies in romances? Such women include Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, described in the brief summary above, or Loosepaine/Lillias in *Eger and Grime*. At first glance these women look and act like fairies and have been mistaken for fairies by characters within the romance and by critics

alike. Critics have used the term 'rationalised fairy' – that is, a character whose fairy-like qualities can be explained, or has been made recognisable as a human character – when discussing Melior or Loosepaine/Lillias.¹ This is an attractive term to describe women whose use of magic results in a 'fairy-like' appearance, but it can also be misleading because these women are not, in fact, truly fairies in these texts. The very fact that these 'fairy-like' characters are actually human underpins the argument in this chapter: because female fairies exist outside the traditional hierarchies of gender orthodoxy, when human female characters 'act like fairies', these characters can also act outside the traditional role of the romance heroine. This chapter will test the conclusion from the previous chapter – that being fairy accords characters power over others which they might not have had as a human – by examining how human women 'perform fairy' and the results of this performance.

This chapter will adapt the vocabulary and methodology of literary gender theory to fit these medieval texts, asking particularly: how are gender relations shaped and experienced? And how do the audiences of fourteenth and fifteenth-century Middle English romances think or *not* think about gender relations?² Applying any modern theory, even feminist theory, to the medieval period runs the risk of being anachronistic if applied dogmatically. As Simon Gaunt observes, medieval texts 'do not theorize gender in the same way as us, but this does not mean they do not theorize gender at all'.³ Literature of any time period, including medieval romances, does not simply mirror its historical context, nor is it cut off from that context: when approaching these texts with the question of gender in mind, we must acknowledge that literature is in dialogue with its

¹ James Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 21-23; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, p. 211.

² Kemp and Squires, 'Introduction', in Kemp and Squires (eds.), *Feminisms*, p. 6.

³ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, p. 20.

historical moment of production.⁴ By employing feminist readings of these texts, we allow for an exploration of how these writings address the implications of women's power, be it perceived or actual.⁵ Like Bruckner, I believe that medieval romance provides a 'free space'⁶ in which the author and audience can experiment with different, and challenging, ideas of gender roles.

Performing Fairy

One concept that I will adapt for this study is Judith Butler's idea of 'performative gender'.⁷ In response to the 'essentialist' school of thought, which held that because women and men are anatomically, 'essentially' different, they are also psychologically and emotionally different, Butler argued that gender difference is also a result of cultural conditioning.⁸ Though Butler specifically looks at the phenomenon of drag, her observation can be more widely applied: gender roles are largely made up of actions, gestures, appearances, and behaviours that are culturally defined and, more importantly, *performed*. Although we must be careful not to imagine the Middle Ages as having a single, overarching interpretive narrative regarding gender,⁹ we can make some generalizations: attitudes towards gender in the medieval period were largely inherited

⁴ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 4; Finke, 'Sexuality in Medieval French Literature: "Séparés, on est ensemble"', in Bullough and Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, p. 352.

⁵ Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley, 'Introduction: The Lady Vanishes: The Problem of Women's Absence in Late Medieval and Renaissance Texts', in Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (eds.), *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 5.

⁶ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 4.

⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, pp. 163-179.

⁸ Belsey and Moore, 'The Story So Far', in Belsey and Moore (eds.), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, pp. 1-20; Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, 'Sexual Difference', *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2004), pp. 152-60; Kemp and Squires, 'Introduction', in Kemp and Squires (eds.), *Feminisms*, pp. 3-12; Fiona Tolan, 'Feminisms', in Patricia Waugh (ed.), *Literary Theory and Criticism: an Oxford Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 319-39.

⁹ Jacqueline Murray, 'Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives', in Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (eds.), *Power of the Weak: studies on medieval women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 2; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the Middle Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

from Patristic thought and the Classical period, and we could say that medieval people were 'essentialists'. In the Middle Ages, at least, 'biology was destiny'.¹⁰ And yet, even if sex dictated gender in the medieval mind, gender still had to be 'performed', as demonstrated by Cordelia Beattie's study of gender, femininity, and cross-dressing in medieval England.¹¹ Using the cross-dressing case of John Rykener as a case study, Beattie explores the hierarchy of masculinity and femininity and the slippage between the two, concluding that masculinity is more unstable than femininity in terms of performance.¹² That characteristics of gender were performative in the Middle Ages, and that certain behaviours were expected for men or for women, is important to this study in which I look at 'fairy' as something that can be 'performed'.

So how does one 'perform fairy'? To answer this we need to identify the actions and characteristics exhibited by fairies in Middle English romances. In part we can refer back to our list of traits associated with fairies discussed in the Introduction. These traits include incredible beauty, royalty or nobility, and a sense of fatedness or danger. Additionally, as seen in the romances *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Degaré*, *Melusine*, *Sir Launfal*, *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, and the Reinbrun section of *Guy of Warwick*, we have other characteristics by which we can 'identify' a fairy.

Firstly, fairies can do strange or inexplicable things. For instance, the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* exerts some kind of mind control over Heurodis when he first abducts her mentally (lines 131-74),¹³ and Melusine appears to have telepathy when she knows what

¹⁰ Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', in Bullough and Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, p. 81.

¹¹ Cordelia Beattie, 'Gender and femininity in medieval England', in Nancy Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 153-70.

¹² Beattie, 'Gender and femininity in medieval England', in Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History*, pp. 158-59.

¹³ Line numbers for *Sir Orfeo* come from Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn.

Raymondin is thinking (pp. 29, 299).¹⁴ Fairies can also predict the future, as demonstrated by the Fairy Queen (*TE*, lines 309-700)¹⁵ and Melusine (*M*, pp. 317-18).

Female fairies tend to impose a taboo. These taboos are seemingly arbitrary and the fairy's favour or gifts are contingent upon her lover's ability to keep his promise. In *Sir Launfal*, Tryamour demands that Launfal keep their relationship secret (lines 361-65); in *Melusine*, Pressyne forbids her husband to see her in childbed (p. 11) and Melusine charges Raymondin to not look at her or for her on Saturdays (p. 32); and in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, the Fairy Queen orders Thomas to speak to no one but her (lines 225-28).

For the most part, fairies are encountered out of doors, usually away from human-made habitations: the Fairy King appears in an orchard (*SO*, lines 133-34), the Fairy Knight in *Sir Degaré* is first encountered in the forest (lines 63-90), Melusine and Pressyne are also both found in a forest (*M*, pp. 7-8, 27-28), as is Tryamour (*SL*, lines 222-28, 262-64). Thomas meets the Fairy Queen on the side of a hill (*TE*, lines 27-36) and Reinbrun fights the Fairy Knight in *Guy of Warwick* outside of the palace (stanzas 90-92).¹⁶

The fairies in romances also have incredible wealth, as seen by the Fairy King's crown and palace (*SO*, lines 149-52, 355-76), the Fairy Queen's clothing and hunting attire (*TE*, lines 41-72), Tryamour's pavilion and gifts (*SL*, lines 265-88, 319-33), Melusine's castle-making and feasts (*M*, pp. 50-59, 62-64, 102-04), the Fairy Knight's clothes in *Sir Degaré* (lines 90-97), and the Fairy Knight's castle in *Guy of Warwick* (stanzas 79-81).

¹⁴ Page numbers for *Melusine* come from Donald (ed.), *Melusine*.

¹⁵ Line numbers for *Thomas of Erceldoune* come from Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, following the Thornton manuscript.

¹⁶ Stanza numbers come from 'Reinbrun, Gij sone of Warwike', in Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*.

Another characteristic of fairies is their pursuit and abduction of the human victim (or lover), demonstrated by the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* (lines 187-94), Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* (lines 1009-20), the Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (lines 157-60), and the Fairy Knight in *Guy of Warwick* (stanza 75).

Displays of wealth are common enough in romance that a wealthy woman cannot immediately be identified as a fairy; but she might be mistaken for a fairy, perhaps, if she also pursues her lover and places a seemingly arbitrary taboo on him. To determine whether a character is 'performing fairy' one or more of these characteristics should be displayed, but there must also always be some sense of inexplicable mystery.

The previous chapter demonstrated that power or control over mortals is characteristic of all fairies; this chapter will prove that the ability to maintain this control differentiates fairy women from human women. Thinking in terms of performative gender, exercising control over others allows female fairies to take on more 'masculine' roles in their male/female relationships with humans. For example, the act of initiating sex with a partner is typically gendered male,¹⁷ but is one which Tryamour performs in her relationship with Launfal. By adapting Judith Butler's theory of performative gender, I explore how human women 'act like fairies' when they attain agency they would not otherwise have as human women. Of course, one must ask: do female characters gain agency by knowingly 'acting like fairies', or do these characters *appear* to be fairies because they use magic? The texts *Partonope of Blois* and *Eger and Grime* give no explicit indication that these 'fairy-like' women intentionally pretend to be fairies. However, because these women perform behaviours usually attributed to fairies, these women are 'performing fairy'. The authors of these texts are able to use the fairy trope in

¹⁷ Sylvester, *Medieval romance and the construction of heterosexuality*, p. 37.

order to make these human characters act with more agency than they would have had otherwise.

In her examination of sex difference in the Middle Ages, Joan Cadden argues that, according to representations of secular women in literature, women are only given special status when they are removed from human societal constraints and given supernatural characteristics.¹⁸ It was possible for women not to act like women in literature, especially since imaginative literature was not expected to be taken literally or to depict life realistically.¹⁹ In a similar study, Barbara Newman claims that medieval women writers, especially mystics, found speaking through the 'voice' of allegorical 'goddesses', such as Philosophia, Ecclesia, Lady Reason, Dame Nature, etc., a source of empowerment.²⁰ If the literary tradition allowed female writers empowerment by associating them with goddesses, then it is no stretch of the imagination to believe that authors might find fairies a source of empowerment for their female characters, too. Bruckner implies that the fairy's role as a dominant partner is the male role in her examination of *Partonopeu de Blois* by first claiming that 'the supernatural character of these fairy mistresses authorizes their dominant role in the couple'²¹ and then arguing that Melior's actions in the first half of the romance, in which she is depicted as being like a fairy, are gendered male.²² Understanding that active agency is both male-gendered and fairy-like, we can infer that

¹⁸ Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 209-12. However, the exceptions to this rule are the stock characters of the lascivious widow (e.g. the Wife of Bath), perhaps because widows held more personal autonomy in real life than women otherwise might have, and the amorous heroine featured in Anglo-Norman romance. For the latter, see Judith Weiss, 'The wooing woman in Anglo-Norman romance', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 149-161.

¹⁹ Cadden, *Meanings of sex difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 209.

²⁰ Barbara Newman, 'Did Goddesses Empower Women? The Case of Dame Nature', in Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 135, and Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

²¹ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 123.

²² Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, pp. 129-30.

female fairies are allowed to be simultaneously feminine and masculine; thus for a human woman to attempt to exercise this aspect of masculine privilege is to act like a fairy.

Why would medieval authors use a human woman when they could use a fairy mistress? Perhaps because a human woman is still bound by the morality of human society. As I demonstrate in the following sections, the 'fairy-like' characters Melior and Loosepaine/Lillias may exercise control in these romances, but only when they are mistaken for being fairies. Medieval authors allow their human female characters in these romances an alternative to gender orthodoxy through 'performing' fairy; however, this alternative performance is not sustainable, and this allows authors to address different anxieties about gender and power than are possible with a genuine fairy mistress.

The case of Partonope of Blois

One of the most powerful and famous enchantresses in medieval literature is Melior in *Partonopeus de Blois*.²³ Immensely popular in the Middle Ages, this twelfth-century French romance was translated into High German, Dutch, Old Norse, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, and Middle English.²⁴ The fifteenth-century Middle English *Partonope of Blois* exists in a short and a long version, the short version found in a fragment of only 308

²³ The French romance exists in three different versions found in seven complete or near-complete manuscripts: one variant ends with a long sequence leading up to a description of a triple wedding between the protagonists and their companions (found in MS Paris, Arsenal 2986); another ends with a shorter sequence and the wedding of only the hero and heroine (MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1971), and the third version features a Continuation of the story (found in the remaining manuscripts).²³ The English version, the longest of which is found in British Library, Additional MS 35288, dating from 1475-1520, is faithful to the order and content of the second French version, which ends with the marriage of Partonope and Melior.

²⁴ Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), p. 113; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, pp. 200-13; Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 149-151; Prefatory Note in A. Trampe Bødtker (ed.), *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., EETS.ES.109, 1912), pp. v-vi; *The Romance of Partonopeus de Blois*, entry from the British Library Manuscripts Catalogue, Add MS 35288 [<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts/HITS0001.ASP?VPath=html/28055.htm>]; Helaine Newstead, 'The Traditional Background of Partonopeus de Blois', *PMLA* 61.4 (Dec. 1946), 916.

lines (MS. Vale Royal). The longer version is extant in four manuscripts, the oldest of which is the mid-fifteenth-century manuscript University College Oxford, C. 188 and the most complete is the late fifteenth-century British Library, Additional MS 35288.²⁵ A. Trampe Bødtker edited the latter for the EETS, and it is this edition that is consulted in this chapter. While the long English adaptation is mostly faithful to the narrative of the French source, it is not a direct translation: the English poet condenses or expands various sections, particularly descriptions, and adds reflective, rhetorical elements.²⁶ The English poet even discusses his translation of the French text, inserting comments where he openly disagrees with the French narrator, such as when he defends the purity of women²⁷ (an editorial practice some critics claim to be 'Chaucerian').²⁸ Studies of the English *Partonope of Blois* have tended to focus on the poem's relation to its French source²⁹ and gender roles in the romance.³⁰ This chapter will expand upon Hosington's, Vines's,

²⁵ Bødtker (ed.), *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*, pp. vi-viii.

²⁶ Ronald M. Spensley, 'The Courtly Lady in *Partonope of Blois*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973), 288.

²⁷ Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 150-1; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, pp. 202-3.

²⁸ A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 141; other critics have commented on the similarities between Chaucer's 'The Knight's Tale' and *Partonope of Blois*, namely Roland M. Smith, 'Three Notes on the Knight's Tale', *MLN* 51.5 (1936), 318-22; Johnstone Parr, 'Chaucer and Partonope of Blois', *MLN* 60.7 (1945), 486-87; and Barry Windeatt, 'Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Romance: Partonope of Blois', in Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (eds.), *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 62-80.

²⁹ B. J. Whiting, 'A Fifteenth-Century English Chaucerian: The Translator of *Partonope of Blois*', *Medieval Studies* 7 (1945), 40-54; Ronald M. Spensley, 'The Courtly Lady in *Partonope of Blois*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973), 288-91; Lilian M. McCobb, 'The English *Partonope of Blois*, Its French Source, and Chaucer's Knight's Tale', *The Chaucer Review* 11.4 (1977), 369-72; Brenda M. Hosington, '*Partenopeu de Blois* and its fifteenth-century English translation: a medieval translator at work', in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator*, Vol. 2 (London: Centre for Medieval Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1991), pp. 231-252; Brenda M. Hosington, 'Proverb translation as linguistic and cultural transfer in some Middle English versions of Old French romances' in Roger Ellis and René Tixier (eds.), *The Medieval Translator*, Vol. 5 (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1996), pp. 170-186; Craig Thorrold, 'Mistranslation or Modification? Toponymical Transformation in *Partonope of Blois*', *Mediaevalia: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Medieval Studies Worldwide* 25.2 (2004), 1-24.

³⁰ Brenda M. Hosington, 'Voices of protest and submission: portraits of women in *Partonopeu de Blois* and its Middle English translation', *Reading Medieval Studies* 17 (1991), 51-75; Karen A. Grossweiner, *Subjectivity and Voicing in Medieval Romance* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2001); Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'Urake and the Gender Roles of *Partonope of Blois*', *Mediaevalia* 25.2 (2004), 181-95; Amy N. Vines, 'A Woman's "Crafte": Melior as Lover, Teacher, and Patron in the Middle English *Partonope of Blois*', *Modern Philology* 105.2 (2007), 245-70, and also in 'Chapter 3: A Woman's "Crafte": Sexual and Chivalric Patronage in *Partonope of Blois*' in Amy N. Vines, *Women's Power in Late*

Rikhardsdottir's, and Mieszkowski's readings of the gender roles performed by Partonope and Melior by examining how Melior's use of magic allows her to 'perform fairy'. In these critics' discussion of the 'criss-crossing' of gender roles in this romance, Melior is generally presented as adopting the 'male' role in her relationship with Partonope. I argue that her role in this romance is more complicated than that by investigating the particular ways Melior's performance is the result of 'acting like a fairy'.

Melior's actions in the first half of the romance mimic those of the fairy mistresses discussed in the previous chapter, especially those of Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal*: she loves from afar and the enchantments she makes bring the beloved to her city and ultimately to her bed. In this way Melior 'acts like a fairy' and the audience is primed to treat her as such, for Partonope himself claims the enchanted ship is 'of ffayre' (line 743). The enchanted ship, the empty city, and the prepared feast create a sense of mystery which Melior controls and explains once she reveals herself to Partonope. Just as Tryamour's servants brought Launfal to her pavilion in the forest, so also does Melior's magic bring Partonope to her, and both Launfal and Partonope have little say in the matter.

Like the fairy mistresses in the previous chapter, Melior waits until Partonope is fully in her power to place a taboo on him. In this case, Partonope is alone in a foreign city and has just been seduced by an invisible woman. Melior tells him:

"Ye shalle not fayle no nyghte to haue me
Redy to parforme yowre hertes desyre.
In kyssynge, in felynge, and in all þat may be pleysre,
To yowe, my herte, I wolle euer redy be;
Safe onely syghte desyre þat noghte of me,
Tylle tyme come, wyche ys neyder fer ne nere
Butte too yere hen and euen halfe a yere."

Medieval Romance (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 85-114; and 'Chapter 4: Female Sovereignty and Male Authority in Old Norse and Middle English Versions of *Partonopeu de Blois*' in Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 113-51.

(lines 1798-1804)³¹

Partonope may not see her for the span of two and a half years, though she will be with him every night under the cover of darkness. At the end of the allotted time, she will present him to her barons as her chosen husband. He need only keep the taboo and they will live happily ever after. If he breaks the taboo and tries to see her, however, she threatens that 'trewly ye shalle be dedde. / Ye mowe not scape, to ley a lasse wedde, / And I shulde lese my name for euer-moo' (lines 1875-77). By placing a taboo on Partonope, Melior performs an action characteristic of female fairies. Like 'real' fairy mistresses, Melior makes her gifts and favours contingent upon Partonope's adherence to the taboo she places on him. Not only are her gifts extravagant enough that Partonope cannot repay them, giving Melior power over him as his patron, but these gifts are dependent upon his continued obedience to her,³² as is the case with Dame Tryamour and her gifts to Sir Launfal. In both the gift-giving and the taboo Melior 'performs' fairy and in this way she gains dominance over her human male partner despite being human herself.

Melior also usurps the role of the more sexually active partner from Partonope. Despite her initial shyness, once her appetite is whetted, Melior wants more from her lover:

Offte sho was In porpose hym to wake
 To haue more plesauns of hym þat ys her make.
 Wyth hym to play was all her moste delyte.
 Yette alle her luste sho woll putte In respyte.
 Sho þoʒte grette trauayle all þat nyʒte had he;
 Hym to wake, hyt had ben grette pyte.
 (lines 1923-28)

³¹ All quotations from *Partonope of Blois* come from Add MS 35288 in A. Trampe Bødtker (ed.), *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., EETS.ES.109, 1912).

³² Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 115.

As Sif Rikhardsdottir has discussed, here it is Melior who is in possession of the traditional 'male gaze'.³³ The faculty of sight was considered necessary to fall in love, and was usually gendered masculine.³⁴ This is another instance in which a woman, when she takes on a traditionally 'masculine' role, 'performs' fairy. Melior's taboo and the darkness of the room prevent Partonope from seeing her, and yet she can see him. Once we take into consideration the role of sight in a romantic relationship, we can better understand Partonope's mother when she expresses distress that Partonope has a mistress he has never seen (lines 5080-84). His mother's insistence that he should break the taboo and her provision of an enchanted lamp are intended to provide him with the means to 're-establish his masculine identity'.³⁵

The fact that Melior is a human woman ultimately comes to light. Despite her warnings that his betrayal would kill them both (lines 1875, 5533-55), neither are struck dead when Partonope pulls back the cover of his lamp to shed light on his lady. The breaking of the taboo restores to Partonope the faculty of sight, and it is in this moment that Melior's 'performance' of fairy ceases. She is transformed from a seemingly supernatural mistress to a beautiful, undeniably human, woman. Her identity as well her body is revealed: she is the eldest daughter of the emperor of Constantinople. For lack of any other heir, she received the education of a prince, a practice not unknown at the time the French *Partonopeus de Blois* was composed,³⁶ learning divinity and the seven arts, and even went on to master necromancy and magic. Her mastery of magic allows Melior to 'perform fairy' so successfully that Partonope thinks that he has come to Faerie by her enchantments (lines 743, 887) and Partonope's mother fears that his mistress is a fairy or

³³ Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 142.

³⁴ Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, pp. 7, 145. See also Spearing's chapter on *Partonope of Blois* on pp. 140-55.

³⁵ Rikhardsdottir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse*, p. 146.

³⁶ Joan M. Ferrante, 'The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy', in Patricia H. Labalme (ed.), *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), p. 32.

a demon (lines 5011, 5655-56). And yet, we find that learning does not necessarily result in power. Judith Weiss observes that though book-learning is associated more often with women than with men in medieval romance,³⁷ learned women do not get what they want: even Melior, who for the first half of the romance wields power both in her personal relationship with Partonope and in the public sphere of her realm, ultimately loses that power. She does end up marrying the man she loves, but she does not marry Partonope on her terms. This 'happy ending' includes Melior's loss of personal agency.

Saunders observes two other points in the text at which she says Melior loses her agency. The first is when Melior consummates her love for Partonope by 'acting' the victim in her own 'rape', on which Saunders comments: 'once she has succumbed to desire, she succumbs too to the traditional gender balance in which she approaches the status of the victim she pretended to be'.³⁸ The second is later in the text, when Melior marries Partonope, commenting that 'with marriage [Melior] is drawn back into the more traditional stereotype of the woman as object, to be desired and possessed'.³⁹ However, the real moment in which Melior loses her power and her agency is the same moment when Melior loses her magical abilities, the moment when Partonope breaks the taboo by looking at her by the light of a magic lamp. As Mieszkowski so aptly describes, 'The magical empress who controls her world has become a medieval woman hemmed in on every side by societal requirements and women's limitations'.⁴⁰

And yet the English version does give clues that Melior is not exactly a fairy mistress, despite the enchantments. The first indication that Melior might not be a fairy is

³⁷ Judith Weiss, 'The power and the weakness of women in Anglo-Norman Romance', in Carol M. Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 13.

³⁸ Saunders, 'Erotic Magic: The Enchantress in Middle English Romance', in Hopkins and Rushton (eds.), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, p. 44.

³⁹ Corinne Saunders, 'Subtle Crafts: Magic and Exploitation in Middle English Romance', in Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (eds.), *Exploitations of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 114.

⁴⁰ Mieszkowski, 'Urake and the Gender Roles of *Partonope of Blois*', 192.

when she stages her own rape – even though the narrator tells us that she is perfectly willing, she manipulates the situation so that Partonope makes the first move because she does not want to appear too forward in her advances.⁴¹ Ronald M. Spensley observes that Melior in the English version is far more concerned with her reputation than in the French version and he claims that the English *Partonope of Blois* emphasises the 'courtly lady' more than its French source.⁴² The passages Spensley highlights are the bedroom scene (lines 1137-46 in the French text,⁴³ lines 1305-11 in the English version), the dubbing scene (F lines 7536-38, E lines 9072-74), and during the tournament (F lines 8767-68, E lines 10467-69). In the bedroom scene, Melior's preoccupation with how she will appear – both here to Partonope, and later to her barons and court – indicates that for all her magic, Melior is still set in a human context where human opinion, especially regarding her chastity and character, matters to her role as empress and lover. Although Spensley does not say so himself, I would argue that Melior's concern for her reputation is because she is human and not fairy. This is not to say that fairy women are oblivious to their reputation – the Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* fears that her fairy husband will learn of her unfaithfulness – but rather to say that fairies such as Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* or the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* do not care for human opinion.⁴⁴ That Melior *does* worry about her reputation among humans places her solidly in the human world. From the start, there is evidence that though Melior might appear to be a fairy, she is only a human woman 'performing fairy'.

⁴¹ The presence of this 'rape' scene in *Partonope of Blois* would at first appear to contradict Saunders's theory that rape only occurs in romance when the aggressor is supernatural. This is still the case, for as explicit as this scene may be, the situation has been entirely orchestrated by Melior, an enchantress.

⁴² Spensley, 'The Courtly Lady in *Partonope of Blois*', 289.

⁴³ Lines for the French *Partonope de Blois* come from Joseph Gildea (ed.), *Partonopeu de Blois*, Vol. 1 (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1967).

⁴⁴ A. M. Kinghorn, 'Human Interest in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*', *Neophilologus* (1966), 359-369, claims that humans are concerned with human things and that fairies are depicted as being different.

Though Melior's magic allows her to 'pass' as a fairy temporarily, the origin of Melior's enchantments is another characteristic which separates her from fairies: Melior's magic is learned rather than inherent.⁴⁵ During her explanation of her education, Melior says, 'Then to Nygromancy sette I was, / Then I lerned Enchawntemente[s], / To knowe þe crafte of experimemente[s]' (lines 5933-35). Nigromancy, 'black magic', and the illusions and enchantments one can make with that skill, is knowledge that must be learned.⁴⁶ No explanation is given for the magic wielded by Dame Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* or the Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*⁴⁷—being otherworldly, the magic of fairies is innate. Bruckner notes that neither Cupid (as the Cupid and Psyche myth is often seen as a source for the poet of the French *Partonopeus de Blois*) nor the Celtic fairy mistresses 'find their powers contingent on their lovers' behavior'.⁴⁸ When the fairy mistress is truly a fairy, she does not lose her magic as a result of her lover's infidelity.

Because Melior's magic is the result of acquiring skills external to herself, rather than having inherent magical abilities, she is not able to sustain her 'performance' of fairy. Partonope's act of betrayal breaks the enchantment along with her taboo:

All þys connyng and all þys crafte
 Ye haue clene fro me be-rafte.
 Thys ys þe cause and þe skylle,
 For ye haue sene me a-yen my wyll.
 For all þe dayes whyle I lyffe,
 Thys crafte woll I neuer putte in preue.
 (lines 5976-81)

⁴⁵ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ For uses of nigromancy or necromancy (though the latter is more specifically associated with conducting magic using the dead), see Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, pp. 154-58; Charles Burnett, *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 1-15; Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, pp. 214-16; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 8-17, 105-15.

⁴⁷ For my discussion on Dame Tryamour and the Fairy Queen, please refer to pp. 78-91 of this thesis.

⁴⁸ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 133.

Though Partonope is banished from Melior's presence and even her kingdom, it is Melior who loses the most by Partonope's betrayal. Melior cannot 'perform fairy' without her magic; as a result, her loss of magic is synonymous with her loss of personal autonomy and agency. Her illicit affair is discovered, made public to her court, and her barons insist she get married at once – to a man of their choosing. The barons schedule a tournament open to all knights of noble birth and the queen must choose her husband from the six best knights. Bereft of her magic, Melior is reduced to a simple human queen ruled by her male barons. What she privately wants is of no concern to her barons; rather, they are concerned with the traditional and political: they want their queen to marry so that a chivalrous king can rule over them and so that she will produce an heir. It would appear that part of Melior's threat to Partonope about breaking the taboo has come true: she has lost her 'name', her own personal, active agency (line 1877).

According to Bruckner, however, Melior maintains her agency after her loss of enchantment; only now Melior acts within accepted, expected channels of (human) female behaviour.⁴⁹ Melior's actions and behaviour after the betrayal are not simply a case of fading into the passive, submissive romance heroine; rather, Bruckner interprets Melior as wielding her 'role' as the wronged lover as a means to manipulate the men in her life to 'choose' 'for her' what she already wants. For instance, Bruckner claims that Melior's apparent 'choice' of the Sultan is her way of playing 'hard to get' – or of saying what she wants while not actually saying it.⁵⁰ This would be an example of 'performative passivity', a term Holly A. Crocker uses in her examination of May's agency in the 'Merchant's Tale'.⁵¹ Crocker claims that women can have agency while 'performing' passivity, and that to maintain the appearance of passivity actually requires agency on the

⁴⁹ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 137.

⁵⁰ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 127.

⁵¹ Holly A. Crocker, 'Performative Passivity and the Fantasies of Masculinity in the "Merchant's Tale"', *The Chaucer Review*, 38.2 (2003), 178-198.

part of the woman.⁵² In the 'Merchant's Tale', January's authority over May is a farce:⁵³ though she submits her body to January, he fails to animate her body, or even his own, during sex (lines 1821-54).⁵⁴ Crocker and Bruckner both claim that human women can exert their agency by 'performing passivity', and Bruckner claims this to be the case for Melior once she loses her magical abilities. Melior may indeed retain agency, but as a human woman she must exercise it in ways acceptable to human society. Allowing women agency through 'performative passivity' implies that active agency is gendered male. We find that just as Butler argues that 'drag' is subversive in that it undermines the power of gender orthodoxy through impersonation of the opposite sex,⁵⁵ Melior's earlier performance of fairy is also subversive because by appropriating an active agency she is also claiming a form of agency that is usually gendered male.

On the other hand, Penny Eley, when discussing how the French *Partonopeus de Blois* is a fusion of 'fairy mistress' and 'dynastic' models, observes that a fairy mistress cannot be under the authority of a male relative – father, husband, or brother – from whom her lover would be required to request consent, and in the first half of the romance in both English and French versions this seems to be the case for Melior.⁵⁶ But in order for the narrative to follow the dynastic model, Partonope cannot forever remain under the power of his 'fairy' mistress, nor remain indefinitely in the junior role in their relationship. There needs to be a 'fracture that allows for the two principal narrative strata – fairy-mistress story and dynastic romance – to be re-aligned so that the latter can gradually come to overlay the former'.⁵⁷ This 'fracture', the breaking of the taboo, leads to a crossing of the narrative strata that also results in the reversal of gender roles and a

⁵² Crocker, 'Performative Passivity and the Fantasies of Masculinity in the "Merchant's Tale"', 179.

⁵³ Crocker, 'Performative Passivity and the Fantasies of Masculinity in the "Merchant's Tale"', 187-8.

⁵⁴ Lines for the 'Merchant's Tale' come from Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Canterbury Tales', in Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of 'sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 231.

⁵⁶ Penny Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois: romance in the making* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), p. 25.

⁵⁷ Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois: romance in the making*, p. 35.

return to gender orthodoxy. Once the narrative becomes a dynastic romance, Melior's human context becomes more important than before, and she is forced to become a normal human woman without magic. Her seeming autonomy and freedom from male authority vanishes along with her invisibility and magic.⁵⁸

After Partonope's betrayal, Melior is given a social context: she has a father and a lineage, she has a sister, a court, and a host of barons with whom she has a contest of wills regarding when and whom she should marry. Her father, concerned about the future governance of his empire, has educated his only heir even though she is female. She has a sister, Urake, who, though courtly, has no magical powers and appears never to have had any. Melior is shown to be grounded in the human world rather than the Otherworld. She is also returned to 'human time',⁵⁹ that is, when Melior was 'performing fairy', she appeared to be ageless,⁶⁰ existing outside of human time like Dame Tryamour and the Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*; yet when Melior loses her magic, Melior enters human time by re-acquiring her human context.

Although Gretchen Mieszkowski identifies Urake as the key agent in restoring both Melior and Partonope to traditional gender roles in the second half of the romance (Urake helps Partonope become 'manly' again and through accusatory conversations with Melior, forces Melior to take a more submissive role),⁶¹ that the lovers need to be reconciled to gender orthodoxy is a result of Melior 'performing fairy'. Mieszkowski observes that for the first half of the romance, Partonope is passive, loved for his beauty alone and did not have to do anything to 'earn' love, while Melior is active. By 'performing fairy' at the beginning of the romance, Melior is then performing the male role. In keeping with the view that women who practice magic are predatory, pursuing

⁵⁸ Bruckner, *Shaping Romance*, p. 123.

⁵⁹ Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois: romance in the making*, p. 36.

⁶⁰ Eley, *Partonopeus de Blois: romance in the making*, p. 33.

⁶¹ See Mieszkowski, 'Urake and the Gender Roles of *Partonope of Blois*, *Mediaevalia* 25.2 (2004), 181-95, for a study of how Urake's influence on both Melior and Partonope returns them to gender orthodoxy.

men to satisfy their personal erotic desires,⁶² Melior uses her enchantments to lure Partonope away from the hunting party and bring him to her castle. Yet despite exercising powerful agency for her own desires, the result of Melior's enchantments is ultimately to return the enchantress to gender orthodoxy. The fact that Melior is human means that she cannot sustain her performance of fairy, which means that for the romance to end happily, Melior and Partonope must be restored to orthodox gender roles. With Urake's help, Partonope recovers from his madness and depression in order to win the tournament and marry Melior – with the result that the Melior that is presented in the romance after Partonope's betrayal is a shadow of the Melior first encountered.

Though she has 'performed fairy' and though some refer to her as a 'rationalised fairy', Melior is a human woman. Unlike the fairy mistresses of *Sir Launfal* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, she cannot maintain an active personal agency or her power over her human lover. 'Real' fairies not only retain their magic but continue to exercise their power over their human lovers after the taboo is broken, further demonstrating that there is a marked difference in the amount of power authors give to female fairies as opposed to human women.

The case of Eger and Grime

Loosepaine/Lillias in *Eger and Grime* also blurs the line between human and fairy. *Eger and Grime* is a romance probably composed sometime in the fifteenth century originally,

⁶² Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages', in Lees (ed.), *Medieval Masculinities*, p. 34; Weiss, 'The power and the weakness of women in Anglo-Norman romance', in Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, pp. 7-8; Hansen, 'The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in Fisher and Halley (eds.), *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings*, p. 59; Salisbury, 'Gendered Sexuality', in Bullough and Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, pp. 85-87; Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages', in Bullough and Brundage (eds.), *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, pp. 125-7.

although the earliest extant versions date from the seventeenth century.⁶³ *Eger and Grime*, also known as 'Graysteel', exists in two versions: the first survives uniquely in the Percy Folio MS of c. 1650 and is 1474 lines; the second, much longer version of 2860 lines, is known as the Huntington-Laing version (hereafter HL), which is preserved in three Scottish prints dating from 1669-1711.⁶⁴ The two versions feature dramatically different endings and also different names for the heroine and one of the heroes: Loosepaine in the Percy folio is Lillias in the HL version, and Sir Grime (P) is Sir Graham (HL). Critics disagree over which text might be the elder text and which might be closest to the original composition.⁶⁵ Although references to the story of *Eger and Grime* exist from the late fifteenth century – the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland includes a record of payment to 'tua fithelaris that sang Graysteil to the King' on 19 April 1497⁶⁶ – these cannot be matched with certainty to either of the two extant texts.

Uncertainty about the tale's provenance and date has led to its neglect in scholarship, though this is slowly beginning to change. This neglect is partly due to lack of current critical editions: the P text is found in *Middle English Metrical Romances*

⁶³ Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 151-2; Hibbard, *Mediæval Romance in England*, pp. 312-19; Rhiannon Purdie, 'Medieval Romance in Scotland', in Priscilla Bawcutt and Janet Hadley Williams (eds.), *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), p. 166.

⁶⁴ Purdie, 'Medieval Romance in Scotland', in Bawcutt and Williams (eds.), *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, p. 168; James Ralston Caldwell, 'Introduction', in James Ralston Caldwell (ed.), *Eger and Grime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), pp. 13-20.

⁶⁵ Purdie, 'Medieval Romance in Scotland', in Bawcutt and Williams (eds.), *A Companion to Medieval Scottish Poetry*, pp. 168-9; Caldwell claims that HL is the elder text ('Introduction', *Eger and Grime*, p. 20), citing Georg Reichel's study, 'Studien zu der Schottischen Romanze: The History of Sir Eger, Sir Grime, and Sir Gray-Steel', *Englische Studien* 19 (1894), 1-66. In contrast, Helen Cooper favours Percy as the older version of the text, *The English Romance in Time: transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 82. Deanna Delmar Evans neatly side-steps the question by claiming that both Percy and HL versions descend from an earlier original, 'Re-evaluating the case for a Scottish *Eger and Grime*', in Graham Caie, Roderick J. Lyall, Sally Mapstone, and Kenneth Simpson (eds.), *The European sun: proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Language and Literature, University of Strathclyde, 1993* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001), 278.

⁶⁶ Thomas Dickson (ed.), *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, Vol. 1 (1473-1498) (Edinburgh: General Register House, 1877), p. 330; Caldwell, 'Introduction', in Caldwell (ed.), *Eger and Grime*, p. 6; C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 68.

edited by Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale in 1930⁶⁷ and James Ralston Caldwell produced the most recent edition of both P and HL texts in 1933.⁶⁸ However, Rhiannon Purdie is currently preparing a new critical edition for the Scottish Texts Society. Whereas previously *Eger and Grime* would only briefly be mentioned in anthologies or introductions,⁶⁹ the past two decades have seen *Eger and Grime* examined from a variety of angles: an argument for the poem's Scottishness based on word choice;⁷⁰ the Percy Folio's historical context;⁷¹ Lacanian and Freudian studies;⁷² the homosocial bond between the two heroes;⁷³ in comparison to *Ywain and Gawain*;⁷⁴ as a source for Scott's *Redgauntlet*;⁷⁵ as a linguistic study of the romance's use of proverbs;⁷⁶ a commentary on the genre of romance itself.⁷⁷ Corinne Saunders⁷⁸ and James Wade⁷⁹ have both considered *Eger and Grime*'s inclusion of otherworldly motifs. This chapter will contribute to the rising interest in *Eger and Grime* by examining the role of fairy in this text, particularly how fairy is performed within the text in order for human characters to gain access to the power attributed to fairies.

⁶⁷ Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (eds.), *Middle English Metrical Romances*, Vol 2 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1930).

⁶⁸ James Ralston Caldwell (ed.), *Eger and Grime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933).

⁶⁹ Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, pp. 68-69; Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 261.

⁷⁰ Evans, 'Re-evaluating the case for a Scottish *Eger and Grime*', in Caie, Lyall, Mapstone, and Simpson (eds.), *The European sun*, pp. 276-87.

⁷¹ Joseph Donatelli, 'The Percy Folio Manuscript: A Seventeenth-Century Context for Medieval Poetry', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* 4 (1993), 114-33.

⁷² Anthony J. Hasler, 'Romance and Its Discontents in *Eger and Grime*', in Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert (eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 200-18; and Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances: Popular Literature in the Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1933), pp. 135-50.

⁷³ Tison Pugh, *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 123-44.

⁷⁴ D. E. Faris, 'The Art of Adventure in the Middle English Romance: *Ywain and Gawain*, *Eger and Grime*', *Studia Neophilologica* 53 (1981), 91-100.

⁷⁵ Deanna Delmar Evans, 'Scott's *Redgauntlet* and the late Medieval Romance of Friendship, *Eger and Grime*', *Studies in Scottish Literature* 31 (1999), 31-45.

⁷⁶ Michael Cichon, '"As ye have brewd, so shal ye drink": the Proverbial Context of *Eger and Grime*', in Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (eds.), *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 35-46.

⁷⁷ Sergi Mainer, 'Eger and Grime and the Boundaries of Courtly Romance', in Sarah Carpenter and Sarah M. Dunnigan (eds.), 'Joyous sweit imaginatioun': essays on Scottish literature in honour of R. D. S. Jack (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 77-95.

⁷⁸ Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, pp. 205-06.

⁷⁹ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 87-91.

The romance of *Eger and Grime* concerns two knights and two ladies: Winglayne, the daughter of an earl, who will only marry a man who is undefeated in battle; Sir Eger, the knight who becomes a hero in the process of wooing her; his brother-at-arms, Sir Grime; and the enigmatic, helpful Loosepaine (I will use the Percy Folio version of their names throughout). Although he has already won Winglayne's love, Sir Eger rides out to meet Sir Graysteel, a knight known to rule over a forbidden land. Eger is defeated and, severely wounded, staggers away from the battle until he reaches a fair bower. There the lady Loosepaine tends his wounds with a magic potion. She implores him to stay, but he does not; when he is only two miles from his home all of his wounds burst open. Sir Grime finds him and cares for him. Winglayne, eavesdropping by the window, hears that Eger has been defeated in battle and scorns him. The two knights and Palyas, Sir Grime's brother, hatch a plan: Sir Grime will ride to meet Graysteel again in Eger's stead, while Eger stays at home, pretending to be Grime taken ill. Loosepaine immediately recognises Grime as an impostor, but she tells him the secret to defeating Sir Graysteel. With Loosepaine's advice, Sir Grime defeats Sir Graysteel the next day, bringing back both the slain knight's severed hand and his steed. (In HL, Lillias does not have such special knowledge of Graysteel's weaknesses, and Sir Graham defeats him entirely on his own.) Loosepaine and Grime are engaged, Eger and Winglayne are reconciled, and, after the heroes defeat the rest of Graysteel's court, Graysteel's daughter sues for peace and is married to Palyas. The romance ends happily, with three weddings and each union producing many children.⁸⁰

For the first half of this romance both Loosepaine and Sir Graysteel are presented as fairy-like characters, especially in the Percy version. Little information is given about them, and this deliberate initial ambiguity about their origins invites an otherworldly

⁸⁰ The ending of the HL version is very different: after this happy ending, Grime later dies and Eger confesses that it was Grime who had defeated Graysteel, and eventually Eger marries Grime's widow.

reading of both characters.⁸¹ Sir Graysteel is the lord of a land ambiguously called the 'forbidden country' (P line 102, HL line 128), who challenges trespassers as soon as they have entered his land, and who mutilates his victims by chopping off a little finger.⁸² The romance makes use of Otherworld motifs in both Eger and Grime's journeys to the forbidden land, particularly with the inclusion of a water boundary (P lines 103-06; HL lines 885-900). Anthony J. Hasler describes the transition into Graysteel's land as a 'borderlands', where 'clear-cut distinctions fade', though Hasler makes this observation in terms of the permeability of masculine identity.⁸³ The ambiguous quality of the terrain, however, also points to the ambiguity between the real world and the Otherworld, being neither here nor there.

Meanwhile, Loosepaine appears to Eger in a beautiful arbour, still in that forbidden country, and heals his wounds with a magic potion. The setting and scene in which we are introduced to Loosepaine leads Gray to describe her as 'similar to a fairy mistress'⁸⁴ and for Wade to include her in his discussion of 'rationalised fairies'.⁸⁵ Van Duzee links Loosepaine with *la dame de l'espine*, or 'the lady of the thorn' and the motif of fairies being associated with thorn trees.⁸⁶ The mysterious circumstances certainly encourage the audience to read Loosepaine as a fairy.

Eger first meets Loosepaine after his defeat by Graysteel:

[...] a lady came forth of a fresh Arbor;
 shee came forth of that garden greene,
 & in that bower faine wold haue beene;

shee was clad in scarlett redd,

⁸¹ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 87.

⁸² Graysteel's penchant for mutilating his victims echoes the Fairy King's gallery of bodies in *Sir Orfeo* (discussed further in Chapter Four). The connection between male fairies and excessive violence, discussed in the previous chapter, allows for an initial reading of Graysteel as a male fairy.

⁸³ Hasler, 'Romance and Its Discontents in *Eger and Grime*', in Putter and Gilbert (eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, p. 214.

⁸⁴ Douglas Gray, *Later Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 525.

⁸⁵ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ Mabel Van Duzee, *A Medieval Romance of Friendship: Eger and Grime* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), pp. 53-60.

& all of fresh gold shone her heade,
 her rud was red as rose in raine,
 a fairer creature was neuer seene.
 (P lines 212-218)⁸⁷

Aside from a physical description, the lady is known only by her words and actions; the narrator gives no details regarding her origins or even her name at this point. She sees that Eger is hurt and offers to help him; at his request, she helps him in secret. She and her maidservants tend his wounds and sit beside him all night long, weeping and singing from a psalter (P lines 234-276) – thus passing the 'Christianity test'.⁸⁸ In the morning, Eger tells how

the drinke she gaue me was grasse greene;
 soone in my wounds it was seene;
 the blood was away, the drinke was there,
 & all was soft that erst was sore
 (P lines 291-294)⁸⁹

In fact, he feels so well that he thinks he could immediately ride to battle. Despite the lady's counsel to tarry a day or so in the forbidden land, he leaves, and her cure is undone. The narrator leaves the reason for this breakdown of magical healing unclear: is it because Eger has left the boundary of a magic land, meaning that the magic only worked while he was in the forbidden country? Or, for a more mundane reason, is it because he simply needed more time to convalesce? Both Saunders and Wade conjecture that the rules that govern the Otherworld-like forbidden land are different from those of the real world.⁹⁰ Loospaine's prediction of the reopening of Eger's wounds indicates that she might have some control over the efficacy of the healing magic: she charges Eger to

⁸⁷ Line numbers from *Eger and Grime* come from James Ralston Caldwell (ed.), *Eger and Grime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933). The quotation comes from the Percy Folio version. The corresponding passage in the HL version is found in lines 238-56. Further corresponding passages will be noted in footnotes.

⁸⁸ Refer to the 'Eucharist test', Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Corresponding passage: HL 367-70.

⁹⁰ 'The forbidden country resembles the world of faery in that its processes do not endure in the real world', Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, p. 206; Eger's wounds reopening when he nears home '[suggests] the extent to which the rules of Loospaine's world appear to be different from those of Eger's', Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 24.

have his lady tend his wounds as she has done, and then he will be healed (P lines 325-28). Like Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, the ambiguity surrounding her healing powers, paired with the mysteriousness of the forbidden land and Sir Graysteel, lends her a supernatural air.

Also like Melior, Loosepaine becomes 'contextualised' half-way through the romance, as do the forbidden country and its lord. Sir Grime learns from a squire that the castle he seeks is home to Earl Gares, whose son and son-in-law were both killed by Sir Graysteel. The lady who helped Sir Eger in the first half of the poem now has a father, a brother, and husband: she is now defined by her male relations.

[...] Sir Attelston, a hardye Knight,
 marryed that Lady fayre & bright;
 for he gaue battell, that wott I weele,
 vpon a day to Sir Graystele:
 [...]
 but Graystele killed Sir Attelstone,
 a bolder Knight was neuer non.
 Erle Gares sonne & his heyre, --
 In all the world was none more goodlyere, --
 He was soe sorry Attelstone was dead,
 He thought to quit Graystele his meede;
 [...]
 & there the both ended att this bane
 as many another Knight hath done;
 (P lines 735-750)⁹¹

The fairy-like lady is revealed to be a human woman once she is given a social context: male relatives, a family history, their earldom threatened by a tyrant. Hasler observes that Loosepaine's rationalisation, which he calls 'demystification',⁹² 'inserts her into a male order in which she is named as sister and widow, a bearer of heredity rather than strange and subversive magical powers'.⁹³

⁹¹ Corresponding passage: HL 1149-60.

⁹² Hasler, 'Romance and Its Discontents in *Eger and Grime*', in Putter and Gilbert (eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, p. 214.

⁹³ Hasler, 'Romance and Its Discontents in *Eger and Grime*', in Putter and Gilbert (eds.), *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, p. 216. Although Hasler makes his observation on the basis of Loosepaine's response to Grime's presentation of Graysteel's severed hand (in P, Loosepaine's face flushes

Though she is not yet given a name in the Percy Folio version, the Huntingdon-Laing version names her at this point, removing any trace of mystery as to her identity.

The yeoman in HL answers Sir Graham, saying:

They do call him, Earl Gorius,
And hath none heir but Lillias.
Is she a widow? then said he [Sir Graham].
She is a maiden certainlie.
(HL lines 1149-52)

Here also the poet emphasises that though Lillias had been betrothed, that marriage was never consummated and she is still a virgin. Once again the reputation of the woman plays a part in the romance by grounding the woman in a human social context, as it did with Melior in *Partonope of Blois*, and highlights the difference between the moral codes governing human women and fairies.

Whereas Lillias is named in HL at this point, in P she is not named until she has married Sir Grime (P lines 1405-6). The delay in naming P's Loosepaine gives her an element of mystery even as her male relations are revealed; and because she retains this air of mystery we are less surprised that she knows of Graysteel's weakness: if she appears to be a fairy, then no explanation is necessary for her knowledge. This is her last demonstration of special knowledge or power, however. From then on she no longer performs any miraculous cures. The potential Loosepaine has for wielding power diminishes when her true identity is known. Delaying the revelation of Loosepaine's name until her marriage to Grime in P serves to ground her further in the human sphere: once married, she is under the authority of her husband and no longer a mysterious 'fairy-like' character. Lillias, on the other hand, becomes fully rationalised as soon as she is named: she has no special advice to give, and her wish to marry Sir Graham has to be

red when she recognises the hand as Graysteel's (lines 1180-81), and in HL, Lillias goes pale at the sight of the hand (lines 1852-53).

affirmed by not only her father, but her mother as well (HL lines 2107-16).⁹⁴ Loosepaine may have been 'performing fairy' earlier when she was nameless and endowed with special powers, but the active agency she might have had by 'performing fairy' is lost once she is given a human context and is defined by her male relations.

The character of Winglayne serves as a reminder of what a standard, human romance heroine looks like. She wields some limited power by stating what kind of man she wants to marry, but ultimately her demands are ignored and she is married anyway. The fate of Winglayne reinforces the motif that empowered human women in romance are reconciled with gender orthodoxy by the end of the romance. Or, as Archibald comments, 'When a woman does manipulate the plot, either she returns immediately to passivity or else she is not the heroine'.⁹⁵ Both Winglayne and Loosepaine/Lillias are heroines, and they are both returned to passivity. In this way they are like Melior of *Partonope of Blois*, and are clearly unlike fully fairy women such as Dame Tryamour and the Fairy Queen.

When human women in medieval romances have sufficient agency they end up 'performing fairy', because like fairy women, they thereby display both feminine and masculine behaviours. Ultimately, this performance of fairy is unsustainable: the human women who 'perform fairy' lose both their power and their agency over the course of the romance. Once these fairy-like women are given a human context, the power, dominance, and agency they exercised in the first part of the poem fades to reveal a passive romance heroine. With the introduction of their human context, defined by male relations, Melior

⁹⁴ Likewise, Graysteel is also rationalised in the second half of the romance: he relies on servants to inform him that a knight has trespassed on his lands and to arm him for battle. In the Percy Folio version, he is also pictured as a father.

⁹⁵ Archibald, 'Women and Romance', in Aertsen and MacDonald (eds.), *Companion to Middle English Romance*, p. 158.

and Loosepaine become like Winglayne, whose fate is determined by the men in her life. The end result ultimately echoes Melusine's inability to 'pass' as human as discussed in Chapter One – just as Melusine's fairy blood prevents her from fully acquiring human characteristics, so are humans unable to become 'fully fairy' through performance.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIFTH ROAD TO FAERIE

When the Fairy Queen shows Thomas the paths to the various Otherworlds beyond Middle Earth, she points out four roads: one to Heaven, another to Paradise, and others still to Purgatory and Hell. Then she points out a fifth place, a fair castle where the King of Faerie lives (201-22).¹ This scene from *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* illustrates the theme of this chapter on Faerie as an Otherworld in Middle English romance. In this text, Faerie exists alongside traditional Christian Otherworlds, located in the same geography as Heaven, Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell. In an examination of this romance, as well as others, this chapter is about how Faerie functions as an imaginative ‘Otherworld’ in Middle English romance and as a fictional alternative to more traditional Christian Otherworlds. This chapter looks at how medieval authors used the concept of ‘fairy’ and the literary motif of ‘Faerie’ to examine the permanence of death and the role of the Otherworld.

In its most basic sense ‘the Otherworld’ refers to some world or reality other than our own. Of the first and oldest usage of the term ‘otherworld’, the OED offers the definition: ‘A world inhabited by spirits, esp. of the dead; “the next world”, “the world to come”; heaven and hell. Hence, more generally: the world of the supernatural’. This definition reflects the tendency in medieval scholarship to use the term ‘Otherworld’ mostly in reference to the afterlife, particularly to the Christian Otherworlds of Heaven, Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell. These Christian Otherworlds were envisioned either to exist physically in the real world or as spiritual locations where the soul, but not the

¹ Line numbers come from Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, following the Thornton manuscript.

corporeal body, dwells after death. Purgatory, especially, began its development as a state of being, rather than as a location, after death. As Purgatory became further ingrained in the medieval imagination and in doctrine, Purgatory was increasingly imagined to be a physical place, accessible through portals at Mount Etna in Sicily or Lough Derg in Ireland.² In medieval romance, however, another kind of Otherworld exists: a place of magic and enchantment, that of the Fairy Otherworld. This chapter will consider the Fairy Otherworld and its place in the medieval imagination. I will particularly examine where the Fairy Otherworld fits in relation to the other Otherworlds already present in the medieval mind. Although Aisling Byrne has recently challenged the idea that the medieval descriptions of the Christian and secular Otherworlds resulted as imaginings of similar experiences,³ I argue that there was indeed an exchange of influences between medieval literary depictions of the Otherworld. Both Christian and secular Otherworlds, including Faerie, draw from the same well of motifs. We can explore how Faerie was used in medieval romance as an alternative Otherworld by examining how these motifs were used variously in different settings.

It is important to note that even though medieval authors and readers would have perceived the Christian Otherworlds as theologically 'real' places, even having physical locations as in the cases of Purgatory and Paradise, these Christian Otherworlds can still be considered alongside the fictional Fairy Otherworld. This is because both Faerie and the Christian Otherworlds are 'constructed' worlds – no one has been to Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory except for in a dream or in a vision; as a result, the Christian Otherworlds are just as 'constructed' as the imaginative Fairy Otherworld in medieval romance. Therefore it is possible to compare Christian Otherworlds as they are described in medieval

² For an in depth discussion of this shift in the perception of Purgatory, see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer (trans.) (London: Scholar Press, 1984), a summary of which is offered below.

³ Aisling Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature* (unpublished doctoral thesis, St. John's College, University of Cambridge, UK, 2011), pp. 67-8.

literature with Faerie. Like Byrne, I conduct this study with the definition of the ‘Otherworld’ being ‘an imaginative field, based on the motifs and thematic material shared by depictions of these realms’.⁴ Such a definition allows for greater freedom and flexibility when interpreting the parallels between the depictions of the Christian Otherworlds and Faerie. A shared motif does not have to have the same meaning, though it might; we are allowed the option to recognise similar motifs and allow the context to suggest a meaning more relevant to the text in question.

A brief note on terminology before I continue: Paradise was sometimes broken down into two sub-categories: Celestial Paradise – or Heaven – and Terrestrial Paradise, the anteroom to Heaven. For clarity’s sake, I shall refer to the Celestial Paradise as Heaven, allowing ‘Paradise’ to refer to the Terrestrial Paradise. I will also refer to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, as they exist in medieval theology, as ‘Christian Otherworlds’. As mentioned in the Introduction, when I speak of the Fairy Otherworld, the purely fictional Otherworld which exists in medieval romance, I shall use the term ‘Faerie’.⁵

Studies of the Otherworld in medieval literature: 1950 - present

The earliest critical studies of the Otherworld have largely been anthropological in their approach to the Otherworld, such as Howard Patch’s 1950 study, *The Other World according to descriptions in medieval literature*.⁶ Patch is interested in the origins of what he observes are recurring motifs in descriptions of various Otherworlds in medieval

⁴ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 70.

⁵ As discussed in the Introduction, I shall use ‘Faerie’ to refer to the Otherworld belonging to fairies and thus avoid confusion with the concept of ‘fairy’ also discussed in this thesis. This term and particular spelling of ‘faerie’ comes from Old French, referring to the country or land belonging to such beings as fairies.

⁶ Howard R. Patch, *The Other World according to descriptions in medieval literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950).

literature, such as singing birds in Paradise, narrow bridges, fiery or noisome rivers, and the Otherworld as a mountain. The majority of Patch's medieval texts are Latin accounts of visions and out-of-body journeys to these other realms, such as the various incarnations of *The Vision of St Paul*. The earliest extant text of *The Vision of St Paul* dates from the third century but was highly popular in the centuries following, and was translated into several vernacular languages by the twelfth century.⁷ In his study, Patch in particular traces the development of what became the characteristics of the Christian Otherworlds in medieval literature, finding the origins of motifs associated with Heaven, Hell, Paradise, and Purgatory in Near Eastern, Classical, Germanic, and Celtic sources, drawing on such texts as *Gilgamesh*, the *Upanishads*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, Irish imram tales such as *The Voyage of Bran*, and various Old Norse Eddic poetry such as the *Völuspá* and *Grímnismál* as sources for these recurring characteristics in medieval literature. Although texts by Homer and from the Middle East were not directly known in the Middle Ages, Patch's argument is that motifs introduced by these texts entered the cultural consciousness of Western civilization, and, once having entered remained and filtered down through the centuries in literature. Patch is more interested in finding the origins of different motifs characteristic of medieval descriptions of the Christian Otherworlds, and less interested in the ways in which these motifs were used in medieval literature and what we can learn from them. This methodological approach was adopted by later critics, such as D. D. R. Owen and Jacques Le Goff.

D. D. R. Owen in *The Vision of Hell: Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature* (1970) also traces the development of medieval imaginings of Purgatory and Hell from Classical, Irish, and Near Eastern sources. Unlike Patch, however, Owen does pay attention to how the Christian Otherworlds are represented in medieval French

⁷ D. D. R. Owen, *The Vision of Hell: Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature* (London: Scottish Academic Press, 1970), pp. 3, 52, 85.

literature and what this meant within the medieval historical, imaginative context. Owen's sources include Latin visionary texts such as *The Vision of St Paul*, *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, *The Vision of Tundal*, *The Vision of Charles the Fat*, and many others, but he also considers the Anglo-Norman and French translations of these and the ways these texts influenced romances, *chansons de geste*, satire, and drama. In this thorough study of infernal material in medieval French literature, Owen observes that descriptions of infernal journeys were stock-in-trade material for both religious and secular writers. Such descriptions came to be essential for any adventure story, for it increased the danger and risk for the hero by pitting him against not only an increasing number of human foes, but also the supernatural.⁸ Owen demonstrates this claim with French secular literature such as *Histoire de Charles Martel* from the mid-fifteenth century. As a result, since infernal descriptions of the Otherworld already existed in secular literature, such descriptions will have also influenced stories featuring journeys into Faerie.

Jacques Le Goff's seminal *The Birth of Purgatory* was first published in French in 1981 and translated into English in 1984. Le Goff offers the first thorough examination of the development of the doctrine of Purgatory in the Middle Ages. He argues that although ideas of a cleansing or purgatorial fire after death existed before the twelfth century, the concept of Purgatory as a location distinct from Heaven or Hell did not come about until the creation of the noun *purgatorium*, which Le Goff claims must have been introduced in 1170-80, according to the usage of the neologism by Peter Lombard.⁹ Le Goff's insistence that the concept of Purgatory as a place did not exist before the noun is controversial; even so, he does provide an extensive account of the shifts in theological attitudes from the Patristic to the early medieval period that allowed for the development

⁸ Owen, *The Vision of Hell*, pp. 195, 262, 272.

⁹ Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, p. 157.

of a doctrine of Purgatory.¹⁰ Le Goff consequently focuses on the early medieval period up to the thirteenth century; his concern is the development of the doctrine of Purgatory, not the effects of this doctrine once it has already been established in medieval theology. This chapter will consider some of those effects by examining the influence Purgatory had on medieval romances, particularly in the role of Faerie in these texts. If Purgatory allowed for a more relaxed view of the afterlife, allowing for the possibility of penance after death, then this lessening of anxiety towards death and what happens afterward may also be reflected in ways Faerie is presented and used in romance literature.

George R. Keiser responds to Le Goff's *The Birth of Purgatory* in 'The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature' (1987), observing that because Le Goff concentrates on the development of the concept of Purgatory, he does not consider the propagation of Purgatory in the later medieval period.¹¹ Le Goff relies on twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts, and occasionally some fourteenth-century Latin texts; he is less interested in the continued dissemination of Purgatory, and thus pays less attention to texts from later centuries, especially those in the vernacular.¹² Keiser seeks to continue Le Goff's study by examining the progress of Purgatory in late medieval England. He uses as case studies the two texts *The Gast of Gy* and *A Reuelacyone schewed to ane holy woman now one late tyme*, observing that during the fifteenth century the concept of Purgatory moved from being a more spiritual, ethereal place such as the one described in *The Gast of Gy* in 1323, to being a more palpable and physical place as in *A Reuelacyone* in 1422. Keiser also argues that a natural relation exists between religious and didactic texts and medieval romances, namely, the narrative of a journey to an Otherworld, citing *Sir Orfeo* and *The Awntyrs of Arthure* as examples

¹⁰ George R. Keiser, 'The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature', *Analecta Cartusiana: Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, 117. 3 (1987), 75.

¹¹ Keiser, 'The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature', 72-100.

¹² Keiser, 'The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature', 75.

of how ideas of Purgatory have infiltrated romance.¹³ The concept of Purgatory as an imaginative Otherworld appealed to medieval audiences both for religious reasons and narrative ones. This affinity for stories about journeys into the Otherworld, be it a Christian Otherworld or some fictional, enchanted land such as Faerie, allows for the crossover of characteristics between the Christian Otherworlds and the Fairy Otherworld.

In *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (1987), Carol Zaleski compares the similarities of Christian Otherworld visions in medieval texts and modern near-death experiences.¹⁴ Zaleski focuses on early medieval vision narratives of the soul's journey to Hell, Purgatory, or Paradise, using the *Vision of St Paul*, *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*, *Vision of Drythelm*, and *St Patrick's Purgatory*. One of Zaleski's goals in this work was to identify the points of similarity of medieval and modern visions of the afterlife, suggesting a universality in this kind of experience, particularly the recurring motifs of the luminous Otherworldly Guide, a tunnel or underground journey of some type leading to a paradisiacal realm of light, and the sensation of the soul's out-of-body experience. Zaleski's study is useful for identifying common elements in visions of the Christian Otherworlds, and to have done so in a way to demonstrate that these elements are not merely derived from earlier cultures and literatures.

Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook edited by Eileen Gardiner surveys the Christian visionary accounts of heaven and hell from western Europe during the Middle Ages that were known at the time of publication in 1993.¹⁵ Her sourcebook includes accounts of visions from the sixth to fourteenth centuries from various languages and countries. Gardiner distinguishes visionary accounts from the specific genre of dream

¹³ Keiser, 'The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature', 90-91.

¹⁴ Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Eileen Gardiner, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993).

literature, excluding the latter from her study for being a literary genre. For example, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Pearl*, and *Book of the Duchess* are different in tone and purpose from *The Vision of St Paul* and *The Vision of Tundal*. She also differentiates visions of Heaven and Hell from apocalyptic literature by noting that the former do not necessarily define the ages of history, nor are they about the individual's struggle toward a deified life. These distinctions in genre are less important to my study on the Fairy Otherworld. Stock descriptions of gardens filled with orderly kept orchards, fountains, and singing birds are shared by both religious and secular literature.¹⁶ As mentioned above, Owen observed that infernal descriptions feature in both religious and secular literature; both genres borrowed from and influenced the other.¹⁷ A beautiful garden can demonstrate order and beauty in either genre, but its context determines whether the garden indicates a spiritual Paradise or rather a secular, metaphorical one for the lovers in romance. Both religious and secular visionary texts both employ the same motifs of the Otherworld, thus providing evidence of what motifs were associated with the Otherworld, Christian or Faerie, in the medieval imagination.

Takami Matsuda focuses on Middle English didactic and homiletic writings on death, especially short religious poems, in her 1997 study *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry*.¹⁸ According to Matsuda, the primary function of most medieval writings on death is to encourage spiritual readiness for death: such texts 'teach a spiritual prudence which entails contempt for worldly things and an unwavering trust in divine mercy'.¹⁹ Matsuda provides a helpful survey of medieval English texts that describe the topography and geography of Purgatory, such as the entry for All Souls Day in the *South English Legendary*, Book Four of *The Pricke of Conscience*, *Handlyng Synne*, *Dives and*

¹⁶ P. M. Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 89-90.

¹⁷ Owen, *The Vision of Hell*, pp. 194-5.

¹⁸ Takami Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

¹⁹ Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry*, p. 2.

Pauper, among others.²⁰ Matsuda claims that there is no doctrinal confusion between Purgatory and Hell after the thirteenth century, which is sometimes thought to be the case with the continued infernalization of Purgatory. An infernal vision of Purgatory holds a specific, spiritually educational purpose and it is mostly didactic texts which focus on an infernal manifestation of Purgatory and the necessity of intercessions. As a result, the infernalization of the Otherworld – whether it is a Christian Otherworld or Faerie – could also indicate a didactic purpose for these texts, and it is possible that texts which include infernal descriptions of Faerie may have been written for education as well as for entertainment.

James E. Doan also surveys Otherworld journeys in early texts, such as *Gilgamesh*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and the *Divine Comedy* in ‘The Otherworld Journey: A Celtic and Universal Theme’ (1998).²¹ Doan claims that all of these tales associate the Otherworld with the Land of the Dead or the Underworld, a theme that continues in medieval romance literature. The Land of the Dead or Underworld might be Hades in Classical literature, or the Isles of the Blessed in Irish literature: generally, a non-Christianized afterworld to which souls go after death. He also notes the Celtic influence on English texts, highlighting the introduction of the abduction theme from Irish literature into the Otherworld journey. Doan then discusses how this is the case in *Sir Orfeo*, drawing a connection between the description of the Fairy Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo* with descriptions of the Otherworld in Irish romances.

According to Ad Putter in ‘The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances’ (2007), vision literature of the Christian Otherworlds was mainstream material and descriptions and motifs from such literature were readily

²⁰ Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry*, pp. 80, 82, 91.

²¹ James E. Doan, ‘The Otherworld Journey: A Celtic and Universal Theme’, in Bruce Stewart (ed.), *That Other World: The Supernatural and the Fantastic in Irish Literature and its Contexts*, Vol. 1 (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1998), pp. 49-65.

available to romance writers, a point made earlier both by Patch and by Owen.²² In his consideration of *Sir Orfeo* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, Putter observes how religious writings on the Christian Otherworlds influenced secular romances by drawing comparisons between descriptions of the Heavenly city, in texts such as the various translations of *St Patrick's Purgatory*, including the Middle English *Owayne Miles*, and of castles in romances that medieval authors wanted to give an otherworldly quality.²³ To make a story more interesting, or to raise the stakes by making the conflict more dangerous or uncertain, medieval authors cast these settings in an otherworldly light by making the setting exceedingly beautiful or exceedingly dangerous. Putter continues his examination in Chrétien's *Chevalier de la charrete* and *Cligés*, drawing parallels between the 'Land of No Return' with the Land of the Dead/Underworld/Hell, the Sword Bridge with the bridge which frequently visitors to the Christian Otherworlds have to cross in order to reach Paradise or Heaven, and so on. However, Putter also claims that 'it is doubtful whether medieval writers made any clear conceptual distinction between romances and otherworld visions'; I would argue that this statement requires a great degree of scepticism on the part of medieval writers towards visions of the Christian Otherworld.²⁴ Medieval romance, though sometimes including a didactic element, was always clearly imaginative; whereas the genre of Christian Otherworld visions claims some degree of authenticity. Medieval authors borrowed motifs, themes, and elements from visions of the Christian Otherworld, consciously or unconsciously, but there is still a distinction between accounts of the Christian Otherworld and descriptions of a fictional and enchanted land in medieval romance. The

²² Ad Putter, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 237-251.

²³ Putter, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in Muessig and Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, pp. 237-8.

²⁴ Putter, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in Muessig and Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, p. 238.

latter, though its themes and motifs may reflect the light from the Heavenly city or the fires of Hell, still exists in the realm of analogy and metaphor, may be manipulated and refracted to other purposes entirely.

The most recent complete work on ‘the medieval otherworld’ is *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature* by Aisling Byrne (2011).²⁵ This study examines the various ‘otherworlds’ in the medieval literatures of Britain and Ireland. Byrne challenges Patch’s ‘anthropological approach’ towards medieval otherworlds, particularly his tendency to view literary depictions of imaginative otherworlds as passive reflections of historical beliefs or realities. Instead, Byrne claims that the way literary otherworlds are represented shows an engagement with the historical and political issues of the day. Byrne suggests that the use of the term ‘otherworld’ is a potentially anachronistic term for studying medieval literature, arguing that the ‘otherworld’ is not defined on semantic or ontological grounds, but rather by the rich imagery and motifs that are used in medieval literature when describing Otherworlds. Byrne contends that focusing more on the imagery used in Otherworld narratives allows for a more productive comparison of religious and secular narratives, because these similar elements are thematic and imaginative rather than ideological.

Following recent investigations into the Otherworld in medieval romance, I will focus my study on Faerie in Middle English romance and its relation to Christian Otherworlds in the medieval imagination. Thus far critics have noted that Faerie often shares characteristics with the Christian Otherworlds, but without fully exploring why these religious Otherworlds and the secular, fictional Faerie might have similarities. It is not enough to say that medieval authors used similar descriptions to Paradise or Hell when writing about Faerie in medieval romance; one must examine why medieval authors

²⁵ Aisling Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature* (unpublished doctoral thesis, St. John’s College, University of Cambridge, UK, 2011).

thought to use similar descriptions in the first place. In my study of Faerie as a fictional Otherworld, I will look at *why* Faerie and Christian Otherworlds use similar motifs, and also what we can learn about the medieval imagination by *how* these motifs were used when describing Faerie.

This is not to say, however, that there is only one universal concept of how Faerie should appear in romance narratives. Instead, I will examine three depictions of Faerie from *Sir Orfeo*, *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, and *Reinbrun*. The authors of these texts arrange their Otherworldly furniture in different ways, and the ways they do so will enlighten us about the purpose Faerie holds in each of these texts.

Sir Orfeo is a prime text to use for examining the use of Faerie because the realm of fairies is integral to the plot. *Sir Orfeo*, an anonymous early fourteenth-century romance, is extant in three manuscripts, National Library of Scotland Advocates MS 19.2.1 (Auchinleck), British Library MS Harley 3810, and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61, with the earliest being the Auchinleck MS copied ca. 1331-1344.²⁶ This chapter will draw on the romance as it is found in the Auchinleck MS. In this unique adaptation of the Orpheus myth, the serpent that bites Eurydice and Pluto are conflated as the King of Fairy and Hades itself is transformed into Faerie. Though this adaptation of the myth is often referred to as the Celticization of the myth,²⁷ I argue that Faerie serves a specific purpose in this romance, more than just providing a 'Celtic flavour' to a well-

²⁶ *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, David Burnley and Alison Wiggins (eds.), National Library of Scotland, V. 1.1 (5 July 2003) <http://auchinleck.nls.uk/editorial/history.html>. Consulted on 18 November 2012; Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn., pp. ix-xii; Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, p. 135; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, p. 195.

²⁷ Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, p. 136; Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, pp. 197-8; John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 178; Doan, 'The Otherworld Journey: A Celtic and Universal Theme', in Stewart (ed.), *That Other World*, Vol. 1, p. 53. Additionally, in his discussion on the possible sources for *Sir Orfeo*, Bliss claims that one of these sources was an anecdote recounted by Walter Map (*De Nugis Curialium*, Dist. iv, cap viii), an episode which Bliss refers to as 'a Celtic tale which had *already* been contaminated with the classical legend of Orpheus' (p. xxxiii, emphasis in the original). The idea implied by Bliss's comment is that there was cross 'contamination' going on, the result being that fairies provide a Celtic element to the otherwise Classical Orpheus myth.

known myth. This chapter will study the way in which this myth has been reinterpreted to use fairies and Faerie instead of Classical gods and setting and how this reveals medieval attitudes towards the Otherworld, Christian or otherwise.

The earliest extant copy of *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* is found in the Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, or the 'Thornton MS' of the second quarter of the fifteenth century.²⁸ Other copies of the text can be found in the Cambridge University Library MS Ff. 5. 48; the BL MS Cotton Vitellius E. x.; and the BL MS Lansdowne 762/45. The prophecies without the prefatory romance can also be found in the BL Sloane MS. 1802.²⁹ A summary of this romance has already been given in Chapter Three: 'Fairies, Gender, and Power'; suffice it to say, this romance is especially relevant for the scene already mentioned above: that of the five roads to the Otherworlds, among them Faerie. *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* provides a fascinating study of the syncretisation of Faerie and the Christian Otherworlds and the relationship between fairy and hell.

This chapter will also examine an episode from *Reinbrun* from *Guy of Warwick*. *Guy of Warwick* was translated from the mid-thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman romance and exists in three manuscripts and two fragments, resulting in five different redactions of the tale.³⁰ *Reinbrun*, recounting the adventures of Guy's son Reinbrun, exists as a separate romance in only one manuscript, the NLS Adv MS 19.2.1 (Auchinleck).³¹ In this manuscript, Guy's story is presented in three discrete sections: I. Guy before marriage; II.

²⁸ Murray (ed.), 'Introduction: Description of the MSS', in Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, p. lvi.

²⁹ Murray (ed.), 'Introduction: Description of the MSS', in Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, p. lvi; BL Sloane 1802, entry from the British Library Manuscripts Catalogue at http://searcharchives.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=IAMS_VU2&afterPDS=true&intitutation=BL&docId=IAMS040-002114156. Consulted on 1 December 2013.

³⁰ Alison Wiggins, 'The Manuscripts and Texts of the Middle English *Guy of Warwick*', in Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (eds.), *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 61-5.

³¹ Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England*, pp. 128, 140.

Guy after marriage; and III. Guy's son Reinbrun.³² The third romance, *Reinbrun*, corresponds to lines 8975-9392 and 11657-12926 in the Anglo-Norman version from BL MS Additional 38662 and to lines 11291-11598 in the Middle English *Guy of Warwick* found in the Cambridge University MS Ff.2.38.³³ The episode relevant to this chapter is that in which Reinbrun rescues Amis from a fairy castle (stanzas 70-95): in this episode, Reinbrun learns from a noblewoman that her lover has been kidnapped by a fairy knight; because the knight, Amis, was a friend of his father Guy, Reinbrun vows to rescue him. The episode describes Reinbrun's journey into Faerie, his release of Amis, and his battle with the fairy knight. It is particularly interesting precisely because it is but one episode out of a longer romance. Unlike in the Orpheus romances or *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, Reinbrun's journey and return from Faerie is not integral to the plot of the romance. This chapter will consider the implications of the seeming insignificance of the sojourn into Faerie in this romance.

Thus far, Faerie has been largely overlooked in studies of the medieval Otherworld. This may be because Faerie is portrayed in secular texts that are not often considered when thinking of Christian Otherworlds. Since Faerie is not one of the Christian Otherworlds, nor does it have as rich a body of texts such as vision literature of Heaven, Hell, Paradise, or Purgatory, it is easy to simply overlook the question of Faerie. This chapter will fill this gap in medieval scholarship. How Faerie is portrayed in fiction can inform us, in the twenty-first century, about ways in which the medieval mind wrestled with the concepts of death, the afterlife, and what other worlds might exist alongside this one. Faerie is an imaginative alternative to the Christian Otherworld, or to

³² Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, pp. 27-8.

³³ For the CUL version of *Guy of Warwick*, see Julius Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: The second or 15th-century Version* (London: N. Trübner & Co., EETS.ES.25-26, 1875-6). For details on corresponding line numbers between the different versions of the texts, see Alison Wiggins, *Guy of Warwick: Study and Transcription* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, UK, 2000), pp. 10-11.

death itself; this chapter will demonstrate *how* Faerie is used as an imaginative Otherworld and explore the anxieties medieval audiences had towards death. The introduction to this thesis has previously discussed the connection between fairy and death; this chapter will expand on that discussion by examining in depth the role Faerie plays in the medieval imagination.

The Journey into Faerie

In some ways the journey into Faerie is similar to journeys to the Christian Otherworld in other texts. If we consider the list of motifs in medieval vision literature which Carol Zaleski finds are similar to modern Near Death Experiences, we will find that these motifs can also be found in romances which feature a journey to Faerie. One such motif is that of the 'out-of-body experience'. In such an experience, the soul purportedly leaves the body behind in order to go on its visionary quest. According to Zaleski, the medieval traveller must first 'shed their mortal clothing' before they can take their visionary journey, an idea that Patch claims was modelled upon the first-century account of the vision of Thespesius in Plutarch's *Moralia* in the essay *Concerning Such Whom God is Slow to Punish*.³⁴ Thespesius, injured by a fall and thought to be dead, revives so that he can tell of his experiences when his soul had left his body. The motif of the person in question being thought dead, only to revive a short while later, recurs in *The Vision of St Salvius*, *The Vision of Drythelm* in Bede, *The Vision of Tundale*, among others.³⁵

³⁴ See John Philips (trans.), 'Concerning Such Whom God is Slow to Punish', in W. W. Goodwin (ed.), *Plutarch's Morals*, Vol. 4 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1871), pp. 140-88, particularly pp. 177-88 for the account of Thespesius. See also Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, p. 45 and Patch, *The Other World*, p. 81.

³⁵ For the 'Vision of St Salvius', see Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, Lewis Thorpe (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 386-8. For 'The Vision of Drythelm', see Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Judith McClure, Roger Collins, Bertram Colgrave (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), V.xii, pp. 253-8. See also 'The Vision of Tundale', in Edward E. Foster (ed.), *Three Purgatory Poems* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), pp. 191-254. For summaries

According to Patch's survey of visionary texts, however, it is evident that an out-of-body experience was not considered a necessary element at first, even if it was a common one. Perhaps the most popular vision text was *The Vision of St Paul*, transmitted throughout the centuries first in Greek, then Latin, then in various vernaculars, which recounts Paul's journey to the Christian Otherworlds. This apocryphal vision of St Paul was inspired by a statement made by Paul in 1 Corinthians: 'I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (*whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;*) such an one caught up to the third heaven' (2 Cor. 12.2, my emphasis). With these examples in mind, it should come as no surprise that the reader's first encounter with fairies in *Sir Orfeo* comes in the form of a vision. Heurodis falls asleep in an orchard and has her own 'out-of-body experience' (lines 133-74).³⁶

For such an 'out-of-body experience' to exist is possible due to the development of the idea of the 'disincarnation of the soul', according to Peter M. De Wilde.³⁷ The idea of the separation of the soul from the body went hand in hand with the development of Purgatory; the disincarnation of the soul helped solve the temporal question of what happened to the soul during the time between death and the Last Judgement, especially as the Last Judgement was considered to be farther and farther off in the future.³⁸ Also during the twelfth century, the accuracy and validity of visions of the Christian Otherworld met with some scepticism by theologians, especially when these visions

of these visions and others, see pp. 91-133 in Patch, *The Other World*. Robert Easting notes that the usual pattern for visions of the Otherworld includes bodily collapse and apparent death, followed by the subsequent recall of 'a hallucination during a cataleptic trance', *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 6-7.

³⁶ Ellen M. Caldwell also suggests that Heurodis has an out-of-body experience during her 'dream', speculating that Heurodis's soul was 'loosened' by a demonic figure – in this case the Fairy King – and after a while returns to reanimate her body. Caldwell, 'The heroism of Heurodis: self-mutilation and restoration in *Sir Orfeo*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 43.3 (2007), note 6.

³⁷ Peter M. De Wilde, 'Between Life & Death: the Journey in the Otherworld', in Edelgard E. DuBruck and Barbara I. Gusick (eds.), *Death and Dying in the Middle Ages* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999), pp. 178-9.

³⁸ Manuele Gagnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. xi, 55.

included increasing amounts of imagery. On the whole, people in the Middle Ages were encouraged not to assume that dreams were visions: Gregory the Great's six-part classification of dreams continued to be used as to warn that, for the most part, dreams were deceptive and unreliable. Gregory identifies the six types of dreams by their origins, whether they are generated by (1) a full stomach; (2) an empty stomach; (3) illusions; (4) our thoughts combined with illusions; (5) revelations; (6) our thoughts combined with revelations.³⁹ Although Gregory does allow for good and true revelatory dreams, these types of dreams can be interfered with by the dreamer's own thoughts, and thus it would be difficult to untangle what is revelatory from the dreamer's imaginings. So it was that visions of the Christian Otherworlds began to lose credibility when recounted as dreams.⁴⁰ By allowing the soul to exist independently from the body, medieval theologians/writers aimed to add more credibility to visions of the Christian Otherworld, places which had ambiguous ties to the corporeal world. The disincarnation of the soul allowed visionaries to take an external journey to the Christian Otherworlds – no longer was the visionary trapped in the dreams in his or her own head.

However, Heurodis does say she was *asleep* in the orchard (line 134). Heurodis claims that she has seen a hundred fairy knights and hundred fairy ladies, that the Fairy King took her away to see his realm, and then threatened her bodily harm if she does not come away with him when he next comes for her – is this a vision, an out-of-body experience, or is it a dream? If it is a dream, how reliable is Heurodis's witness? Dorena

³⁹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, Odo John Zimmerman (trans.) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002), pp. 261-2. See also Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 45.

⁴⁰ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 83-4. Concerned medieval theologians included Thomas of Froidmont, *Liber de modo bene vivendi*, PL 184, col. 1301; Alain de Lille, *Liber sententiarum*, PL 210, col. 256, and Richard Rolle, 'The Form of Living', in S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson (ed.), *Richard Rolle: prose and verse edited from MS Longleat 29 and related manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, EETS.OS.293, 1988), lines 161-81. Byrne also notes that the wide range of reactions to the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, 'suggests a distinction was made between physical journeys to afterlife locations and visionary experiences of the same realms, and that the former were considered more redolent of secular otherworld accounts than the latter', *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 84.

Allen also observes that Heurodis's journey to Faerie is presented as an 'objective event'⁴¹, meaning that the event actually happened within the world of this particular romance and is not subjective only to Heurodis's experience. Because Orfeo takes Heurodis seriously enough to ride out with ten hundred knights to protect her and yet she vanishes from their sight the very next day, Heurodis's dream or vision is treated as a true one in the romance (lines 179-93). The Fairy King's threat of physical abduction recounted by Heurodis to Orfeo and his court comes about, just as she said it would. Despite being presented as a 'dream', both the characters within the poem and the poet's audience 'know that there really *is* such a place' as Faerie.⁴² Within the narrative of *Sir Orfeo*, Heurodis has an out-of-body experience when she firsts visits Faerie.

Another characteristic of visions of the Christian Otherworld is that the visionary often has a psychopomp, or an Otherworldly Guide.⁴³ Zaleski identifies three roles in medieval otherworldly guides: instructor, protector, and soul-taker, sometimes separate beings but also occasionally combined into a single guide.⁴⁴ If we are going to consider the vision of Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo* as being an out-of-body experience in which her soul temporarily leaves her body, the Fairy King certainly counts as a soul-taker according to these distinctions. Zaleski only really discusses the first two types of guide, also observing that '[t]hroughout medieval vision literature, the guide is consistently portrayed as shining, splendid, dressed in dazzling white robes',⁴⁵ and this accords with the descriptions in *Sir Orfeo*. Heurodis sees a host of two hundred fairies, all on snow white horses and wearing white clothing (lines 143-6). The Fairy King wears a crown made of precious stones so bright that it shone like the sun (lines 149-52). However, the Fairy

⁴¹ Dorena Allen, 'Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken', *Medium Ævum* (1964), 102.

⁴² A. M. Kinghorn, 'Human Interest in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*', *Neophilologus* (1966), 365, emphasis in the original.

⁴³ Patch, *The Other World*, p. 128; Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, p. 53.

⁴⁵ Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, p. 53.

King seems to be a mixture of two different ‘kinds’ of psychopomp: both the shining, dazzling guide and the soul-taker. The Fairy King’s beauty and courtesy, especially when Orfeo arrives incognito as a minstrel in the Fairy King’s court, has led Bruce Mitchell to interpret him as a benevolent character in the romance,⁴⁶ but to do so ignores the Fairy King’s double abduction of Heurodis and his threats of bodily harm. While the fairies may not necessarily be a ‘hostile, sinister race’ as George Kane describes them,⁴⁷ neither are they harmless. Heurodis’s first encounter with the fairies leaves her so mentally distressed that she inflicts self-harm, and the Fairy King threatens to tear her limb from limb if she does not obey his commands (lines 169-74).⁴⁸ If anything, Heurodis’s terror is a precursor to the frightening courtyard scene, which has been convincingly argued to be a macabre gallery of the ‘taken’, human bodies collected on the Fairy King’s midday raids.⁴⁹

The abduction, both of Heurodis’s soul during her out-of-body experience and then of her corporeal person, the threat of physical harm, and the gallery of tortured bodies in suspended animation which are ‘þouȝt ded, & nare nouȝt’ (line 390), all indicate the malevolent characteristic of ‘soul taker’-type of Otherworldly Guides, the demons who threaten or attempt to throw the visitor into a hellmouth.⁵⁰ However, keeping in mind the fairies’ beauty and the schema of beauty = good/monstrosity = evil, previously

⁴⁶ Bruce Mitchell, ‘The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*’, *Neophilologus* (1964), 156.

⁴⁷ George Kane, *Middle English Literature: a critical study of the romances, the religious lyrics, “Piers Plowman”* (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 82.

⁴⁸ Ellen M. Caldwell also attributes Heurodis’s self-mutilation to the fairies: Heurodis might not have been physically harmed by the Fairy King, but he can be held culpable for her actions. See ‘The heroism of Heurodis: self-mutilation and restoration in *Sir Orfeo*’, 291-310.

⁴⁹ Allen, ‘Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the *Taken*’; John Block Friedman, ‘Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-day Demon’, *Speculum* (1966), 22-29; Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, pp. 175-194; Anne Marie D’Arcy, ‘The Faerie King’s *Kunstammer*: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*’, *The Review of English Studies*, NS 58.233 (2007), 10-33.

⁵⁰ Refer to Easting (ed.), *Visions of the Other World in Middle English for St Patrick’s Purgatory*, pp. 42-69, and *The Vision of Tundale*, pp. 70-80. See also stanzas 105-112, ‘Owain Miles’ of the Auchinleck MS in Robert Easting (ed.), *St Patrick’s Purgatory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, EETS.OS.298, 1991).

discussed in Chapter One regarding the physical deformities of Melusine's sons,⁵¹ as well as the courtesy the fairy host does initially show Heurodis and the welcome Orfeo receives when he arrives in Faerie, the Fairy King and his court cannot be simplistically equated with the demons who attempt to claim souls for hell. The Fairy King is also of the 'instructor' type of Otherworldly Guide, or at least a travel-guide of sorts, showing Heurodis around Faerie before returning her to her sleeping body in the orchard. The Fairy King is thus a blend of 'types' of Otherworldly Guide, both of the malevolent and benevolent sorts. The Fairy King, and by association Faerie itself, is neither good nor evil, but *amoral*, a characteristic in keeping with the conclusions made in Chapter One, and therefore very difficult to fit into a Christian schema.

The Fairy Queen in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, however, is presented in a more benevolent light. Criticism on the Fairy Queen has mainly focused on her physical transformation in lines 129-40, analysing the Loathly Lady motif and finding in the Fairy Queen an inverse form of the *cailleach* in Irish literature.⁵² The *cailleach* is a sovereignty figure in Irish mythology, often appearing in the form of an ugly hag whom the hero must be willing to lie with, and as soon as he does so she is transformed into a beautiful maiden and gives him sovereignty over the land

⁵¹ For an introduction to medieval aesthetics and attitudes towards beauty, see Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Hugh Bredin (trans.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986). The second chapter, 'Transcendental Beauty' discusses the relationship between 'goodness' and beauty. Beauty was characterized by order: to say something was beautiful was to say that it was well-ordered, well-proportioned, and the closer to perfection the thing or person was the more beautiful they were. The only truly perfect thing in the universe, of course, was God himself – therefore, the more beautiful something or someone was, the closer they were in likeness to God, and thus 'Good'. Refer back to Chapter One for the inverse discussion of the relationship between ugliness and monstrosity with evil, in the case of Melusine's sons.

⁵² William P. Albrecht makes the Fairy Queen and her transformation the principle study in his *The Loathly Lady in "Thomas of Erceldoune"* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954); see also Josephine M. Burnham, 'A Study of Thomas of Erceldoune', *PMLA* 23.3 (1908), 398-9; J. A. MacCulloch, *Medieval faith and fable* (London: Harrap, 1932), p. 49; Ingeborg Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, Vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Engelsk Institut, 1983), pp. 27-9; Ellen M. Caldwell, 'Brains or Beauty: Limited Sovereignty in the Loathly Lady Tales "The Wife of Bath's Tale," "Thomas of Erceldoune," and "The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle"', in S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (eds.), *The English 'Loathly Lady' Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 235-57.

which she represents.⁵³ Although she coerces Thomas to go with her into the Otherworld, he had agreed to do so in return for having sex with the beautiful Fairy Queen (lines 97-124). Like the Fairy King and the descriptions of benevolent Otherworldly Guides, the Fairy Queen is dazzling in her beauty, so much so that Thomas first mistakes her for being the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven (lines 35-88). Despite the ambiguity created by the Fairy Queen's physical transformation from beauty to ugliness and back again, the Fairy Queen fills both the protector and the instructor types found in visionary texts. As a guide, she leads the way from the Eildon tree into the Otherworld (lines 169-84), and then teaches Thomas the ways into the different destinations in the Otherworld, pointing out the roads to each (lines 202-22). When Thomas, famished from the three-day long journey, goes to pick a fruit in the fair arbour, the Fairy Queen stops him (lines 185-92). To eat from those trees would consign his soul to hell; a fate from which the Fairy Queen saves Thomas not once, but twice. The second time is after Thomas has already been in Faerie for three days. Though Thomas protests, the Fairy Queen explains that, 'To Morne, of helle þe foulle fende. / Amange this folke will feche his fee', and she fears that he will choose Thomas (lines 289-92). Similar to the angels who rescue visionary travellers from being thrown into hell, the Fairy Queen prevents Thomas from being chosen as the devil's 'teind', or tithe that fairies pay to Hell.

Throughout the romance, the Fairy Queen expresses her concern for Thomas's welfare, a characteristic that clearly argues in favour of her benevolence. However, her physical transformation to ugliness and the tribute that Faerie pays to Hell complicate the claim that the Fairy Queen is entirely benevolent. As James Wade observes, Thomas mistakenly refers to the Fairy Queen as both Queen of Heaven and as a devil, and though

⁵³ 'Cailleach Bhéirre' in James MacKillop (ed.), *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

she is neither, she shares qualities with both Heavenly and Hellish beings.⁵⁴ Like the Fairy King and Faerie in *Sir Orfeo*, Faerie and its inhabitants in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* are amoral, or at least have ambiguous morality.

Just as Orfeo finds the way into Faerie by following the fairy women through a rock (lines 347-8), Thomas also follows the Fairy Queen through a rock to get into the Otherworld; however, he has a longer and more detailed description of his journey:

[The Fairy Queen] ledde hym jn at Eldone hill,
 Vndir-nethe a derne lee;
 Whare it was dirke als mydnyght myrke,
 And euer þe water till his knee.
 The montenans of dayes three,
 He herd bot swoghyng of þe flode;
 At þe laste, he sayde, 'full wa es mee!
 Almaste j dye, for fawte of fode.'
 Scho lede hym in-till a faire herbere,
 Whare frwte was growand gret plentee;
 Pere and appill, bothe ryppe þay were,
 The date, and als the damasee;
 Þe fygge and als so þe wyneberye;
 The nyghtgales byggande on þair neste;
 Þe papioyes faste abowte gane flye;
 And throstylls sange wolde hafe no reste.
 (lines 169-84)

From the arbour, the Fairy Queen shows Thomas the roads to the various Otherworlds. The road that goes over a high mountain leads to Heaven (lines 202-3). Nearby goes the road to Paradise, where souls go to after spending time in Purgatory (lines 204-8). A third road going through a green plain leads to Purgatory (lines 209-12), and a fourth road, going through a deep dell, goes to the 'birnande fyre of helle' (lines 213-16). After pointing out the roads to the four Christian Otherworlds, the Fairy Queen then points out the Faerie castle on a far hill (lines 217-22).

The representation of the Otherworlds in this romance is unique in several ways. Firstly, it presents Faerie as being simply another option alongside the Christian

⁵⁴ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 85.

Otherworlds. Furthermore, Josephine M. Burnham also observes that ‘no distinction is made between Christian and popular or pagan conceptions’ in that Faerie and the Christian Otherworlds are placed side by side; the position of Faerie at the same crossroads as the roads to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise implies that Faerie is on the same footing as the Christian Otherworlds.⁵⁵ Secondly, the fair arbour and the crossroads are a neutral Otherworld. Having passed through the rock and the flood, the Fairy Queen and Thomas come out to a place that, at first glance, looks like Paradise because of the beautifully kept orchard and abundance of birds.⁵⁶ E. B. Lyle claims that the fair arbour is in fact the Terrestrial Paradise, but this is problematic when one considers the roads that lead from it.⁵⁷ Lyle even observes that she has ‘found no instance elsewhere of ways running from the earthly paradise’.⁵⁸ If two of the roads lead to Paradise and to Heaven – that is, the Terrestrial Paradise and Celestial Paradise respectively – then the fair arbour cannot also be the Terrestrial Paradise. Lyle’s insistence that the arbour is Paradise is understandable: the fair arbour is not a new motif, and can be expected in a journey to an Otherworld, but its location outside of the usual destinations of ‘Otherworld’ is noteworthy. The existence of the arbour and crossroads implies, again, that all destinations are possible. This is still the case even with Ingeborg Nixon’s observation that the arbour and crossroads serve ‘the purpose of locating the site of fairyland as close to, but distinct from, the Christian otherworlds’.⁵⁹ Faerie is distinct from the four Christian Otherworlds, partly because the Fairy Queen does not point out a road going to Faerie (though one could be implied as the castle is accessible from the

⁵⁵ Burnham, ‘A Study of Thomas of Erceldoune’, 406.

⁵⁶ See Patch, *The Other World*, pp. 3, 30, 39-40, 113, 117, 185, 187, 190, 192-3, 240-1, 324 for multiple examples of this motif; Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁷ E. B. Lyle, ‘The Visions in *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, *Thomas the Rhymer* and *The Dæmon Lover*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 72 (1971), 716.

⁵⁸ Lyle, ‘The Visions in *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, *Thomas the Rhymer* and *The Dæmon Lover*’, 718.

⁵⁹ Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, p. 30.

crossroads), but also because, as Ad Putter claims, Faerie is 'geographically intermediate' between the real world and the four Otherworlds of the afterlife.⁶⁰

If the geography of the Otherworld and the placement of Faerie are important in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, then we must consider the geographical descriptions given to each of the five destinations. The four roads to the Christian Otherworlds are introduced in descending order, from highest to lowest, from Heaven to Hell. The road to Heaven is highest of all, going over a high mountain, creating the hierarchy in which 'highest' is 'best'. Likewise, the road to Hell is 'lowest' of all, going into a pit. The roads to Paradise and Purgatory lie somewhere in between both in elevation and as a desirable destination. So, then, if Heaven is best and is at the highest elevation, with each of the Christian Otherworlds falling into place below it, what does it mean that Faerie is described as being on 'þone heghe hill' (line 218)? Of course, the text does not provide details of exact elevations, but we can assume the hill where Faerie is found is higher in elevation than both the pit of Hell and the plain of Purgatory, though it may not be as high as Paradise. That the hierarchy of Otherworlds would seem to be Heaven – Paradise – Faerie – Purgatory – Hell is very interesting indeed: it implies that Faerie is either morally better than Purgatory and Hell, or, because of its central position in the hierarchy, morally ambiguous. Faerie as a morally unstable location also fits with its other associations. As Burnham points out, Faerie has a moral association with Hell because of the teind, and yet Faerie also has in common with Paradise its depiction as a place of pleasure and beauty.⁶¹ Faerie's affinities with both Paradise and Hell, good and evil, as well as its physical location in the hierarchy, make it a morally ambiguous Otherworld.

⁶⁰ Putter, 'The influence of visions of the otherworld on some medieval romances', in Muessig and Putter (eds.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, p. 242.

⁶¹ Burnham, 'A Study of Thomas of Erceldoune', 406.

Guy of Warwick is one of the most popular romances in the English Middle Ages, though this popularity has not always met with critical acclaim, the poem being dismissed as formulaic or as ‘genre fiction’.⁶² Though largely speaking of *Guy of Warwick*, Field’s defence of the authors’ stylistic and structural design of the narrative indicates a particular kind of relationship between the author and the audience. The length and structure of the romance shows that the intended audience is one that would be around to hear successive performances, and the episodes, mostly self-sufficient and self-explanatory, mean that backstory does not need to be repeated at each performance and allows listeners/readers to dip in and out of the romance.⁶³ Thus, when backstory is given, it is relevant to the particular episode, as is the case in the episode in which Reinbrun rescues his father’s friend Amis from Faerie.⁶⁴

The episode with the fairy castle is the first episode after Reinbrun’s reunion with Heraud. Amis’s lady gives the backstory: she and Amis were compelled to flee to Great Ardene as a result of Berard’s treachery, and there Amis first encountered the fairy knight. They fought, but Amis could not defeat or wound him. Later, Amis went missing while out hunting, and his lady believes he has been taken prisoner by the fairy knight. Heraud then says Reinbrun must help the lady and Amis because of Amis’s friendship with Guy. Reinbrun then rides out the next day. Riding until noon (stanza 77/11)⁶⁵ he passes through a gate set in a hillside, which closes immediately behind him (stanza 78/1-3). He rides for half a mile in darkness and then comes to a river (stanzas 78/7-79/3). On

⁶² Rosalind Field, ‘From *Gui* to *Guy*: The Fashioning of Popular Romance’, in Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field (eds.), *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 44-5.

⁶³ Field, ‘From *Gui* to *Guy*: The Fashioning of Popular Romance’, in Wiggins and Field (eds.), *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, p. 52.

⁶⁴ The episode described here is as it is found in *Reinbrun* in the Auchinleck MS. The same episode exists much the same in the CUL Ff.2.38 *Guy of Warwick*, though in this version Sir Gayer is consistently referred to as an elvish knight and not as a fairy. Interestingly, Amis’s lady refers to Ardene as a country ‘full of eluys’ (11315) in CUL Ff.2.38, whereas Sir Gayer appears to be the only elf/fairy in the Auchinleck version. However, I have chosen to concentrate on the story of Reinbrun as it is found in the Auchinleck MS because this manuscript contains the earliest versions of both *Guy of Warwick/Reinbrun* and *Sir Orfeo*.

⁶⁵ Numbers refer to stanza number and line number and come from ‘Reinbrun, Gij sone of Warwike’, in Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*.

the other bank is a castle with shining crystal walls and ivory roof, cypress rafters and coral supports, jasper posts, surrounded by a marble wall and crowned with an enormous carbuncle (stanzas 79/5-81/3). Reinbrun fords the river, though deep and wide, and avoids drowning by thinking of Christ and because of the trustiness of his horse (stanzas 82-83/4). The river being the only obstacle Reinbrun encounters, he then easily enters the palace, which is empty save for a knight he finds in a chamber. The knight, it so happens, is none other than the imprisoned Amis (stanzas 83/7-84/3). Amis expresses surprise that Reinbrun found the castle and entered of his own accord (stanzas 86/7-87/12). He tells Reinbrun of an enchanted sword with which he can defeat Sir Gayer, the fairy knight, and which is hanging conveniently in that very room (stanza 89/7-10). The two ride off in possession of the magic sword, only to run into Sir Gayer himself. Reinbrun fights the fairy knight and defeats him with the enchanted sword, and spares him only because the fairy knight promises to release his other prisoners, three hundred knights in all (stanzas 90/1-94/12). Having successfully delivered Amis and the other prisoners from the fairy knight, Reinbrun and Amis return to Amis's lady and Heraud, and all are reunited (stanzas 95/8-96/6).

Overall, it is a rather straightforward episode and a simple rescue mission: Reinbrun rides off into Faerie, rescues Amis, and rides out again. The rescue of a mortal from the Otherworld (usually Faerie-like) is a common enough theme to be recognised or even expected by audiences.⁶⁶ Amis's surprise at Reinbrun's appearance in Faerie falls flat in the absence of any real difficulty Reinbrun faces on his journey there: Reinbrun happens to find the gate into Faerie, and though he is afraid of the dark, it lasts for only a half-mile. The broad and deep river is the only real obstacle, which Reinbrun crosses

⁶⁶ E. B. Lyle, 'Sir Orfeo and the Recovery of Amis from the Otherworld in *Guy of Warwick*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 80 (1979), 65. The 'rescue of a mortal from the Otherworld' theme can also be found in *Sir Orfeo*, and the anecdote found in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* Dist. ii, cap. 13 and Dist. iv, cap. 8 of a Breton knight who reclaims his dead wife from a ring of dancing fairies, as well as the general Orpheus myths (also F81.1 in the Stith Thompson Motif-Index).

within the space of a stanza. The episode, as it is, seems to be written in order to fulfil the ‘supernatural element’ of the romance. Field comments that in response to Guy’s lack of responsibility and the atypical stability of his life – he had an unremarkable childhood, never at war with his king or his neighbours, his lands nor his wife are never at risk, etc. – ‘some of these missing motifs reappear in the career of Reinbroun, in a somewhat mechanical fashion, spiced with the supernatural, in such a way as to suggest a response to audience expectation or demand’.⁶⁷ Guy never encounters anything particularly magical in his adventures, a lack made up for in the story of Reinbrun with this jaunt into Faerie to rescue Amis.

Unlike the journeys into Faerie in *Sir Orfeo* or *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, Reinbrun’s experiences are not integral to the overall narrative. One gets the sense that this episode into Faerie could easily have been substituted by some other adventure: perhaps still a rescue, but from a giant or evil knight instead. The voyage into Faerie and back is the main movement of *Sir Orfeo*; there would not be a story in *Sir Orfeo* if not for the conflict provided by the encounters with the Fairy King, his host, and his realm. Similarly, it is Thomas’s liaison with the Fairy Queen and subsequent sojourn in Faerie that lends him credibility as a prophet.⁶⁸ In *Guy of Warwick*, at least, Faerie is more like a neighbouring kingdom than a secular alternative to the Christian afterlife.

⁶⁷ Field, ‘From *Gui* to *Guy*: The Fashioning of Popular Romance’, in Wiggins and Field (eds.), *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, p. 32; Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare*, pp. 175, 188-9, 191-3. See also Lyle, ‘Thomas of Erceldoune: the Prophet and the Prophesied’, *Folklore* 78 (1968), 111-21 and Cooper, ‘Thomas of Erceldoune: Romance as Prophecy’, in Saunders (ed.), *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, pp. 171-187.

The Topography of Faerie

Many critics have identified the motif of a subterranean entrance into the Otherworld in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, mentioning it without further comment because this motif is common in depictions of entrances to the Otherworld.⁶⁹ The underground passage is also present in the journey into Faerie in *Reinbrun*. Rather than simply commenting that Faerie shares this subterranean motif with other Otherworld narratives, I would like to make one particular observation: depictions of Purgatory and Hell tend to be subterranean, but Paradise and Heaven never are. What, then, does it mean that Faerie shares this characteristic with some Otherworlds but not others?

The most notable example of a subterranean Purgatory is found in *St Patrick's Purgatory*, which was translated into Middle English verse as *Owain Miles*. The anonymous *Owain Miles* survives in two versions, OM1, two copies of which are found in NLS Advocates MS 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) and in Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet. D.208, and OM2, found in BL MS Cotton Caligula A ii (OM2 Cotton; C) and Yale University Library MS 365 (formerly MS Hamilton), the latter two dating from the late fourteenth to the early fifteenth century.⁷⁰ This text provides a topography of Purgatory with which we can compare Faerie. According to *St Patrick's Purgatory* and tradition, St Patrick prayed that God would create an entrance to Purgatory in order to prove to the unbelieving Irish that Purgatory (and therefore sin), Christ, and the rest of the tenets of Christianity existed. God answered St Patrick's prayer and opened an entrance to

⁶⁹ For examples of *Sir Orfeo* criticism: Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn., p. xxxix; Lyle, 'Sir Orfeo and the Recovery of Amis from the Otherworld in *Guy of Warwick*', 65; Patch, *The Other World*, p. 243; MacCulloch, *Medieval faith and fable*, p. 32; Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages*, 191; Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*, p. 203. For examples of criticism on *Thomas of Erceldoune*: Burnham, 'A Study of Thomas of Erceldoune', 388 (also n. 2); Patch, *The Other World*, pp. 262-3; Nixon, *Thomas of Erceldoune*, pp. 28-9. Neither of these lists is exhaustive.

⁷⁰ Easting, ed., *St Patrick's Purgatory*, pp. xi-xxxii, 1-75; and Robert Easting, 'St Patrick's Purgatory: fragments of a second copy of the Middle English stanzaic *Owayne Miles*', *Medium Ævum* 75.1 (2006), 84-102.

Purgatory at Lough Derg. With permission from the bishop and abbot, a brave or penitent individual could be locked in the cave overnight and travel through Purgatory while living in order to not have to do so after death. The knight Sir Owain was one such penitent reported to have done just that and *Owain Miles* recounts his experiences.

Important to this discussion is the location of the entrance into Purgatory: in a cave underground. Just as Sir Orfeo, Thomas, and Reinbrun all have to pass through a rock – or cave – to enter Faerie, so too does Sir Owain to enter Purgatory. No such subterranean passage is necessary in journeys to Paradise or Heaven: for example, the Dreamer in *Pearl* instead falls asleep and finds himself in the Terrestrial Paradise. Visionary accounts of going to Heaven speak of ascent, not descent underground, and this is the case even in journeys to Paradise in secular literature, such as Alexander's flight on the griffin in Sir Gilbert Hay's *The Buik of King Alexander*, dating from 1460.⁷¹ This could imply that Faerie occupied a similar (imaginary) geographical location in the medieval imagination as Purgatory and Hell. One could read the subterranean passage into Faerie as an indication that Faerie is infernal in nature, but evidence presented above and below proves that such simple associations cannot be trusted at first glance. More likely the similarities between Purgatory and Faerie are due to the fact that all four narratives feature entrance to and, most importantly, return *from* an Otherworld. The Christian Otherworlds, particularly Heaven and Hell are very much 'afterworlds' in the sense that these are places one can go only after death (evidenced by the prohibition against Owain when he wishes to enter Heaven in *Owain Miles*).⁷²

And yet in every instance of a mortal visit to Faerie in Middle English Romance, however, examples abound in which there is the possibility of return to the mortal world: Orfeo and Heurodis in *Sir Orfeo*, Thomas in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of*

⁷¹ Gilbert Hay, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour*, 2 vols, John Cartwright (ed.) (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, STS.4.16, 18, 1986-1990).

⁷² 'Owain Miles', in Robert Easting (ed.), *St Patrick's Purgatory*, stanzas 186-7.

Erceldoune, Reinbrun and the captured knights in *Guy of Warwick*, or even Sir Launfal in *Sir Launfal*, who returns from Avalon every year to joust with Arthur's knights. If Faerie is presented alongside the Christian Otherworlds as a viable option for an afterlife, as it seems to be suggested in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, then Faerie is not a permanent afterlife. Faerie seems to occupy a place in the imagination as a way to catch a glimpse of a world outside or beyond the mortal realm without having to die first to gain entry there. The authors of medieval romance can use Faerie also as a way to cheat death, as is suggested by the treatment of the mutilated bodies in *Sir Orfeo* (discussed in greater detail below) or in Arthur's removal to Avalon after his final battle (discussed in the next chapter).

To continue our exploration of the topography of Faerie, another curious characteristic of Faerie is the source of light. From the descriptions of Faerie given in these romances, Faerie is also a twilight land, or at least, the source of light in Faerie is neither sun nor moon. In *Sir Orfeo*, the part of Faerie seen by Orfeo is illuminated by the crystal walls of the fairy castle itself:

Al þat lond was euer liȝt,
 For when it schuld be þerk & niȝt
 Þe riche stones liȝt gonne
 As briȝt as doȝ at none þe sonne.
 (lines 369-72)

Similarly, the bright carbuncle on the palace in *Reinbrun* shines out over the surroundings:

On þe front stod a charbokel ston:
 Ouer al þe contre it schon
 (stanza 80/7-8)

In her comparison of these two passages from *Sir Orfeo* and *Reinbrun*, Lyle comments that though precious stones as light-sources are common motifs in Otherworld adventures, these light-giving gems are more often to light a chamber, not the

countryside.⁷³ Lyle claims that the similarity between the two texts indicates that *Sir Orfeo* borrowed the idea of light-giving castle walls as a source of light for Faerie from *Guy of Warwick*; however, the lack of celestial light sources in Faerie is not unique to these two texts. We can deduce that this is the case for the Otherworld also as it is found in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, when the Fairy Queen says, ‘Thomas, take leue at sonne’ (line 157), and the other three versions of the romance tell him to take leave of both sun *and* moon.⁷⁴ When we consider other accounts of Faerie, albeit not found in romances, we find that the absence of sun and moon in Faerie has a longer tradition, such as ‘St. Martin’s Land’, the home of the Green Children of Woolpit in Ralph Coggeshall’s *Chronicum Anglicanum* and William of Newburgh’s *Historia rerum Anglicarum* from the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries respectively.⁷⁵ Both chronicles recount the strange tale of two children found near the village of Woolpit. These children, a boy and a girl, dressed in strange clothing and speaking a different language, had green skin. They referred to where they had come from as ‘St Martin’s Land’, describing it as a place that was always in twilight, and that the inhabitants there were Christians.⁷⁶

It would come as no surprise that the sunless Faerie has its origins in the sunless Heaven, especially when one considers that Orfeo’s initial reaction to seeing the Fairy King’s castle is to wonder if he has arrived at the ‘proude court of Paradis’ (line 376).⁷⁷ Following the description set out in Revelation, the New Jerusalem is said to have no need for sun or moon, because the Lamb of God is its light (Revelation 21.23). The

⁷³ Lyle, ‘*Sir Orfeo* and the Recovery of Amis from the Otherworld in *Guy of Warwick*’, 66.

⁷⁴ Also found in line 157 of the Cotton, Landsdowne, and Cambridge manuscripts as presented in in Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*.

⁷⁵ For the account of the Green Children, see Chapters 27-8 in William of Newburgh, *The history of English affairs, Book I*, P. G. Walsh & M. J. Kennedy (eds. and trans.) (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988). See also the entry ‘The Green Children’ in Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (eds.), *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Thomas Keightley, *The fairy mythology*, pp. 281-3; Briggs, *The Fairies in tradition and literature*, p. 9; and Patch, *The Other World*, pp. 237-8.

⁷⁶ ‘The Green Children’ in Simpson and Roud (eds.), *A Dictionary of English Folklore*.

⁷⁷ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 82.

anonymous dream vision *Pearl*, found in the British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x of ca. 1400, echoes this verse from Revelation when the Dreamer notices that:

Of sunne ne mone had thay no nede;
The selfe God was her lambe-lyght,
The Lombe her lantyrne, wythouten drede.
(lines 1045-47)⁷⁸

Paradise in Sir Gilbert Hay's depiction of Alexander's visit there is also perpetually bright, but without sun or moon (lines 16221-2). *Sir Orfeo* is an early fourteenth-century text, *Pearl* is found in a MS from ca. 1400, and *The Buik of King Alexander* was written in Scotland sixty years after *Pearl*; the range in dates of these texts is an indication that the idea of an Otherworld without sun or moon was a common motif. A sunless Otherworld already existed in the medieval imagination, found in descriptions of Paradise and Heaven.⁷⁹

By the same token, Hell and sometimes Purgatory are depicted as dark places.⁸⁰ The dark journey through Purgatory to then arrive at a light, albeit sunless, Paradise has its parallels in the journeys to Faerie in the romances considered in this chapter. Both Thomas and Reinbrun experience a dark passage before arriving in bright Faerie:

Scho ledde hym jn at Eldone hill,
Vndir-nethe a derne lee;
Whare it was dirke als mydnyght myrke,
(*TE*, lines 169-71)

Half a mile a rod, ywisse:
þe wai was þerk and dim.
(*Reinbrun*, stanza 78/8-9)

The contrast between dark journeys and bright destinations results in a stronger similarity between Paradise and Faerie than Hell and Faerie. It would seem, then, that Faerie

⁷⁸ Lines for *Pearl* come from Sarah Stanbury (ed.), *Pearl* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001).

⁷⁹ Briggs, *The Fairies in tradition and literature*, pp. 7, 9, 14.

⁸⁰ For examples see 'The Vision of Fursa' in Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 139-42; 'The Vision of Tundale', in Foster (ed.), *Three Purgatory Poems*, pp. 191-254; and 'The Vision of Tundale', 'St Patrick's Purgatory', and 'Owain Miles' in Easting (ed.), *Visions of the Other World in Middle English*. For further discussion, see Patch, *The Other World*, pp. 80-133.

occupies a more positive place in the medieval imagination than Hell or even Purgatory does.

And yet, when we consider our previous observation that Faerie is accessed through a rock or otherwise subterranean passage, as is Hell or Purgatory but *not* Heaven or Paradise, we are faced with a paradox. In terms of topography and geography, Faerie shares characteristics with both good and evil Christian Otherworlds. Once again, it is clear that Faerie occupies a morally ambiguous realm in the medieval imagination. Faerie, and indeed fairies themselves in literature, are defined by this moral ambivalence.

The Kingdom of Faerie

Now that we have considered the literary depictions of the journey into Faerie and its topography, we can look at what happens in Faerie itself. The characteristics of Faerie, like those of the Christian Otherworlds, can be determined by what characters experience while they are there. Heaven, for example, is depicted not only as a beautiful place, but one also where the people there are filled with joy and exist in harmony. Purgatory and Hell, on the other hand, are places where characters experience torment and suffering, as well as being dark, inhospitable places. What characters in these romances experience in Faerie will also illuminate more the purpose and role Faerie plays in the medieval imagination.

To begin with *Sir Orfeo*, the human characters who go to Faerie are Heurodis, Orfeo, and the individuals that make up the gallery of mutilated bodies.⁸¹ Heurodis is

⁸¹ Like Alan J. Fletcher and Anne Marie D'Arcy, I refer to the display of mutilated human bodies in the forecourt of the Fairy King's castle in lines 387-408 of the Auchinleck MS as a 'gallery' in order to emphasize that they seem to have been collected as pieces of art to be put on display. See Alan J. Fletcher, 'Sir Orfeo and the Flight from the Enchanters', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000), 141-177, specifically 142, n. 2, and D'Arcy, 'The Faerie King's *Kunstammer*: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*', 10-33.

treated as a guest on her first visit to Faerie (lines 157-63) and then, after her physical abduction, she is seen hunting in the real world with a host of fairy women (lines 303-30). When Orfeo next sees her in Faerie itself, she is once again asleep beneath an *ympe*-tree, just another figure in the gallery of bodies (lines 405-8). Heurodis's experiences with the fairies, then, are mixed: they threaten her with physical harm, but she is otherwise treated as a guest, or as merely another piece of statuary. The romance gives no indication whether Heurodis dreams while she sleeps beneath the *ympe*-tree, or whether she experiences anything at all when she is sleeping; for lack of evidence we cannot give much weight to her experience of being asleep in Faerie, other than to speculate whether her physical body is always in the gallery, and wonder whether it was her spirit Orfeo saw hunting with the fairies. I will discuss the latter possibility in further detail below.

Other than the abduction of his wife, Orfeo also experiences courtesy in Faerie, particularly in the Fairy King's court (lines 443-53). Though the Fairy King teases Orfeo for his ugly appearance, he still allows Orfeo to claim Heurodis as his reward for harping (lines 457-71).⁸² With the exception of the abduction of Heurodis, both Orfeo and Heurodis have otherwise pleasant experiences in Faerie – that is, if one discounts the psychological distress caused by Heurodis's kidnapping. This cannot be said to be the case of the rest of the bodies which make up the gallery in the Fairy King's court. They are described thus:

Sum stode wiþ-outen hade,
 & sum non armes nade,
 & sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,
 & sum lay wode, y-bounde,
 & sum armed on hors sete,
 & sum astrangled as þai ete;
 & sum were in water adreynt,
 & sum wiþ fire al for-schreynt.
 Wiues þer lay on child-bedde,

⁸² To continue with the metaphor of the 'gallery' of which Heurodis is a part, one wonders whether the Fairy King parts with her as he would any other object in his 'collection'.

Sum ded & sume awedde,
 & wonder fele þer lay bisides:
 Riȝt as þai slepe her vnder-tides
 Eche was þus in þis world y-nome
 Wiþ fairi þider y-come.
 (lines 391-404)

These are people who ‘were þider y-brouȝt, / & þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt (lines 389-90).

Dorena Allen has already argued convincingly that these individuals are in a form of suspended animation: *taken*, not dead.⁸³ When discussing the Fairy King is a representation of the ‘noon-day demon’, Friedman persuasively argues that when the Fairy King goes out hunting in the mortal world at noon, his prey is people.⁸⁴ We can then create the picture that this gallery of the *taken* is a display of the Fairy King’s uncanny or macabre aesthetics, collected during his noontime hunting parties in the mortal world.

Fletcher has already given a detailed account of how these individuals represent a variety of execution styles in the mid-fourteenth century, and Caldwell also points out that these people represent different walks of life and social class.⁸⁵ These people may be those who otherwise would not be allowed burial within the churchyard walls; instead, they are found on display within the walls of the Fairy King’s castle. That the Fairy King chooses people who are caught in the throes of sudden or unexpected death – people who do not have time to prepare for their deaths and may not have time to confess or otherwise prepare their souls for a ‘good’ death – again puts the Fairy King in the role of a devil collecting damned souls of people who are rejected by the Church for the manner of their deaths. Alan Foley attempts to reread Faerie as Purgatory, noting that Orfeo is able to ‘intercede’ for the dead (Heurodis) and by drawing parallels between the ‘parade

⁸³ Allen, ‘Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the *Taken*’, 102-111.

⁸⁴ Friedman, ‘Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-day Demon’, 29.

⁸⁵ See Fletcher for a survey of the different types of execution techniques in ‘*Sir Orfeo* and the Flight from the Enchanters’, 146-54; Caldwell, ‘The heroism of Heurodis: self-mutilation and restoration in *Sir Orfeo*’, p. 301.

of death' in *Sir Orfeo* with a similar account in *Owain Miles*, also found in the Auchinleck MS (stanzas 65-71).⁸⁶ However, it would seem that – to the individuals that make up the Fairy King's gallery, at least – Faerie has less in common with Purgatory than it does with Hell: there seems to be no intercessor or rescuer for them, instead, they are trapped in their mutilated forms, caught in the throes of death. Faerie, though beautiful, is also a dark and disturbing place. Foley might argue that because there is the possibility of escape from Faerie it is a place of hope like Purgatory is, but there does not seem to be hope for the other individuals that are on display in the Fairy King's court. Only Heurodis has someone come to 'intercede' for her. We are given no indication that the other *taken* individuals will someday be released after 'spending their time', so to speak, as a soul would eventually leave Purgatory even if no one in the living world assisted them through alms or prayers.

Unless, that is, Orfeo's witness of Heurodis hunting with the fairy women is evidence that Heurodis has yet another out-of-body experience. She is in two places at once: both able to go hunting and part of the gallery of bodies in the castle court. If Heurodis's spirit can leave her body, allowing her a dual existence in Faerie, it is possible that the other victims in the Fairy King's collection can leave their bodies also. If these bodies are kept on display but their *spirits* are allowed freedom of movement within Faerie, we must revisit the idea that Faerie is a viable afterlife. Faerie becomes a place where people who have not properly prepared for a Christian death go after death: they are outside the walls of the church but within the walls of Faerie, with their spirits allowed the freedom of a paradise that is not quite as perfect as Heaven is, but still pleasurable.

⁸⁶ Alan Foley presented 'Paradis Terestri Regained: Intercession for the Dead in the Auchinleck *Sir Orfeo*' at the XII Biennial Conference in Medieval Romance, University College Cork, 12 April 2010.

For Thomas in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, Faerie is very much a secular Paradise.⁸⁷ He is afraid during the journey (lines 171-76), but once Thomas reaches Faerie he enjoys himself. The delights of Faerie are many: for twenty lines Thomas describes the beauty of its inhabitants, the richness of their food, and the pleasures spent hunting and playing and listening to music (lines 252-72). He enjoys himself so much, in fact, that he protests when the Fairy Queen informs him that it is time for him to go (lines 277-84). With the exception of the Fairy Queen's concern that the devil would choose Thomas as payment for the fairies' tithe, there is no moral association given to Thomas's experiences in Faerie. It is simply a secular paradise that he is sorry to leave.

In contrast to the previous two romances, Reinbrun does not experience any form of hospitality in land of Faerie in *Reinbrun*. Save for the birds singing in the garden, Faerie is empty when Reinbrun first arrives. The only person he meets in the fairy castle is Amis, the very person he had come to find. Having conveniently found Amis, Reinbrun leaves with him, only then encountering Sir Gayer on their departure. Reinbrun fights Sir Gayer, a vicious battle that Reinbrun wins only by virtue of using an enchanted sword (stanzas 92/3-94/3). Except for the magical or otherworldly setting, it is a scene that could just as easily be found in the real world. We can draw little moral interpretation from Reinbrun's experience in Faerie.

Why Faerie?

From this study on the Fairy Otherworld and its relationship to Christian Otherworlds, it has become evident that each 'Otherworld' serves a different purpose. Heaven is the place

⁸⁷ Burnham, 'A Study of Thomas of Erceldoune', 393, 406.

of bliss and reward for faithful Christians. Paradise is a form of 'waiting room', where souls who have passed through Purgatory wait until they can gain admittance to Heaven (*Owain Miles*, stanzas 159-62). Purgatory is a place of cleansing: although a place of pain and torture, it is ultimately a place of hope because the end result is the eventual goal of Heaven. Hell is the place of the damned; a place of torture like Purgatory, but lacking hope. Faerie, however, has no specific spiritual purpose. Its inhabitants are beautiful; it is a realm of pleasure: music, hunting, transcending beauty, characteristics which give Faerie affinities with Heaven or Paradise. And yet the threats given by the Fairy King and the macabre gallery of mutilated bodies in *Sir Orfeo* and the tribute Faerie must pay to Hell in *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* casts a more infernal gleam over Faerie. At the same time, as suggested by Heurodis's out-of-body experiences both outside and within Faerie, and the possibility that the same ability might be experienced by the other bodies captured by the Fairy King, and the types of death the gallery of bodies represents, Faerie could also act as an alternate, middle-ground afterlife. Faerie is, as demonstrated in this chapter, a morally ambiguous Otherworld in literature. It is an imaginary secular paradise to which authors can send characters and create situations that could not otherwise occur in the human world with its rules of reality.

What this chapter has demonstrated is that Faerie occupies a unique place in the medieval imagination. Although it shares motifs and characteristics with the Christian Otherworlds of Heaven, Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell, Faerie in literature is distinct from all four. Fairies might serve as Otherworldly Guides, a motif recurrent in vision literature of the Christian Otherworlds, but these guides are neither wholly evil nor wholly good: the fairies are, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, morally ambiguous. The topographical description of Faerie also sheds little light on the 'allegiances' of Faerie. We reach the same conclusion when we analyse the experiences characters have in these

romances that have them journey into Faerie: their experiences are both pleasant and disturbing. Faerie, it seems, is an ambiguous utopia.

CHAPTER V

FAIRIES IN AVALON

In the previous chapter's discussion of Faerie and Otherworlds, one famous otherworld was missing, that is, the Isle of Avalon.

One theme in romances featuring visits to the Faerie is that of return: unlike passing into the Otherworlds of Heaven or Hell, mortals can return to Earth from Faerie, as seen in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*. This idea of 'cheating death' by going to an alternative Otherworld is seen also in some texts recounting Arthur's departure from this world: the once and future king does not die but goes to Avalon, perhaps to return. With its habitual associations with Morgan le Fay, one could think of Avalon as a type of Fairy Otherworld. This chapter will determine the validity of such an interpretation of Avalon by comparing the descriptions and narrative functions of Faerie as determined in Chapter Four with Avalon as it developed in the English tradition. In doing so, this chapter will ascertain the extent to which Avalon and Faerie occupy the same space in the medieval English imagination, and what has influenced us as modern readers to consider Avalon as Faerie.

Avalon in the chronicles

Arthur and Avalon are first mentioned in chronicles long before the birth of Arthurian romance, and both continue to be described in the chronicle tradition once the romance tradition is well established. Some fifty-five chronicles from the ninth to fifteenth

centuries include Arthur specifically.¹ The first chronicle to mention Arthur by name is the ninth-century text the *Historia brittonum*,² which replaces the Ambrosius Aurelianus mentioned by Bede³ and Gildas⁴ with Arthur as the victor at the battle of Badon Hill. Although subsequent chroniclers mention Arthur as a hero of the British past,⁵ it is not until Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, completed in 1138, that a full account of Arthur's exploits and conquests is introduced into the literary tradition.⁶ Not only does Geoffrey first introduce the details of Arthur's life, he also first introduces Avalon and the ambiguity of Arthur's end. In the lengthy section devoted to Arthur, Geoffrey mentions Avalon twice. First, Avalon is identified as the location where Arthur's sword Excalibur was forged.⁷ The second use of Avalon introduces the longest-lasting motif associated with Avalon: that after being wounded at the Battle of Camlann, Arthur was taken to Avalon for healing. Geoffrey writes simply:

Sed et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus Constantino cognato suo et filio Cadoris ducis Cornubiae diadema Britanniae concessit anno ab incarnatione Domini.dxlīi..⁸

[The illustrious king Arthur too was mortally wounded; he was taken away to the island of Avallon to have his wounds tended and, in the year of Our Lord 542,

¹ The fifty-five chronicles in this survey are those chronicles written in Latin and English in Britain from 540 (Gildas's *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*) to 1504 (Robert Fabyan's *The New Chronicles of England and France*) which treat Arthurian material and that are available in printed editions.

² John Morris (ed. and trans.), *Nennius: British History and The Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore, 1980), pp. 35-26 (English), p. 76 (Latin). Although this text is commonly attributed to Nennius, many scholars now consider this to be incorrect. David E. Thornton, 'Nennius (fl. c.770–c.810)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2007 at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19892>. Consulted on 2 April 2014

³ Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁴ Michael Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and other works* (London: Phillimore, 1978).

⁵ Such as William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum: The history of the English kings*, Vol. 1, R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) and Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English people*, Diana Greenway (ed. and trans.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Michael D. Reeve (ed.) and Neil Wright (trans.) (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 192-253.

⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Reeve (ed.) and Wright (trans.), pp. 198-99.

⁸ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Reeve (ed.) and Wright (trans.), p. 253 (Latin).

handed over Britain's crown to his relative Constantinus, son of Cador duke of Cornwall.]⁹

This actually does not say much about Avalon. From this quotation we can infer only that Avalon is a place of healing and that there was the possibility Arthur could return after being healed of his wounds. There is no mention of fairies or even anything magical. Not even Morgan le Fay is mentioned in this first account of Avalon. But of the forty-eight chronicles that include Arthurian material that are compiled over the following three centuries, twenty-seven¹⁰ of them follow Geoffrey's formula: Arthur was wounded, and Arthur was taken to Avalon for the healing of his wounds.

⁹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Reeve (ed.) and Wright (trans.), p. 252 (English translation).

¹⁰ Ralph of Diceto, 'Abbreviationes Chronicorum' and Opuscula', in William Stubbs (ed.), *Radulphi de Diceto Decani Landoniensis opera historica = The historical works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London*, 2 Vols. (London: Longman, RS.68.1-2, 1876); Henry Richards Luard (ed.), 'Annales monasterii de Wintonia', *Annales monastici*, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, RS.36.2, 1864); Gervase of Canterbury, 'Gesta Regum Britanniae', in William Stubbs (ed.), *The historical works of Gervase of Canterbury*, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, RS.73.2, 1880); Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, chronica majora*, Vols. 1-2 (London: Longman and Trübner, RS.57.1-2, 1872); Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Flores historiarum*, Vols. 1-2 (London: H.M.S.O., RS.95.1-2, 1890); Luard (ed.), 'Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia', *Annales monastici*, Vol. 3; S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Neil Wright (ed.), *Gesta Regum Britannie, The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, Vol. 5 (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991); Michael Lapidge, 'The *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri*: a New Edition', in James P. Carley (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), pp. 115-42; Luard (ed.), 'Annales monasterii de Waverleia', *Annales monastici*, Vol. 2; William Stubbs (ed.), *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria = The historical collections of Walter of Coventry*, Vol. 1 (London: Longman, RS.58.1, 1872); W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (eds.), *Layamon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon's Brut* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001); William Aldis Wright (ed.), *The metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (London: H.M.S.O., RS.86, 1887); Luard (ed.), 'Annales prioratus de Wigornia', *Annales monastici*, Vol. 4; Caroline D. Eckhardt (ed.), *Castleford's Chronicle, or, The Boke of Brut*, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, EETS.OS.305-306, 1996); Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, Idelle Sullens (ed.) (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton University, 1996); Joseph Rawson Lumby (ed.), *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, monachi Cestrensis: together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century* (London: Longman, RS.41, 1874); Thomas of Malmesbury, *Eulogium (historiarum sive temporis)*, Frank Scott Haydon (ed.) (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, RS.9, 1863); Friedrich W. D. Brie (ed.), *The Brut: The Chronicles of England* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.131, 1906); F. J. Amours (ed.), *The original chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, STS.1.54, 1906); Henry Bergen (ed.), *Lydgate's Fall of Princes, Part III, Books VI-IX* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1923); Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon, Vol. II, Books III-IV*, D. E. R. Watt, John MacQueen, Winifred MacQueen (eds.) (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Press, 1989); Andrew Dowdell (Lan) Lipscomb, *A fifteenth century prose paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester's "Chronicle"* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1990); John Capgrave, *The chronicle of England [Electronic book]*, Francis Charles Hingeston (ed.) (Burlington: TannerRitchie Publishing in collaboration with the Library and Information Services of the University of St Andrews, 2007); John Brompton, 'Chronicon', in Roger Twysden (ed.), *Historiae anglicanae scriptores X* (London: Typis Jacobi Flesher, sumptibus Cornelii Bee, 1652), Cols. 725-1284.

For a fuller description of how Geoffrey of Monmouth imagined Avalon, we must turn to his *Vita Merlini*, written a decade or so later. This text imagines a conversation between Merlin and Taliesin, another Welsh prophet. Taliesin gives this description of the Fortunate Island when discussing the islands of the world, mostly based on Isidore's list of islands.¹¹

'Insula pomorum que Fortunata vocatur
ex re nomen habet quia per se singula profert.
Non opus est illi sulcantibus arva colonis,
omnis abest cultus nisi quem natura ministrat.
Utro fecundas segetes producit et uvas
nataque poma suis pretonso gramine silvis.
Omnia gignit humus vice graminis ultro redundans,
annis centenis aut ultra vivitur illic.
Illic jura novem geniali lege sorores
dant his qui veniunt nostris ex partibus ad se,
quarum que prior est fit doctior arte medendi
exceditque suas forma prestante sorores.
Morgen ei nomen didicitque quid utilitatis
gramina cuncta ferant ut languida corpora curet.
Ars quoque nota sibi qua scit mutare figuram
et resecare novis quasi Dedalus aera pennis.
Cum vult, est Bristi Carnoti sive Papie,
cum vult, in vestris ex aere labitur horis.
[...]
Illuc post bellum Camblani vulnere lesum
duximus Arcturum nos conducente Barintho,
equora cui fuerant et celi sydera nota.
Hoc rectore ratis cum principe venimus illuc,
et nos quo decuit Morgen suscepit honore,
inque suis talamis posuit super aurea regem
fulcra manuque sibi detexit vulnus honesta
inspexitque diu, tandemque redire salutem
posse sibi dixit, si seum tempore longo
esset et ipsius vellet medicamine fungi.
Gaudentes igitur regem commisimus illi
et dedimus ventis redeundo vela secundis.'

(lines 908-40)¹²

[The Island of Apples gets its name "The Fortunate Island" from the fact that it produces all manner of plants spontaneously. It needs no farmers to plough the fields. There is no cultivation of the land at all beyond that which is Nature's

¹¹ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (eds. and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Book XIV.vi.8.

¹² Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, Basil Clarke (trans. and ed.) (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), pp. 100-102.

work. It produces crops in abundance and grapes without help; and apple trees spring up from the short grass in its woods. All plants, not merely grass alone, grow[s] spontaneously; and men live a hundred years or more.

That is the place where nine sisters exercise a kindly rule over those who come to them from our land. The one who is first among them has greater skill in healing, as her beauty surpasses that of his sisters. Her name is Morgen, and she has learned the uses of all plants in curing the ills of the body. She knows, too, the art of changing her shape, of flying through the air, like Daedalus, on strange wings. At will, she is now at Brest, now at Chartres, now at Pavia; and at will she glides down from the sky on to your shores. [...]

It was there we took Arthur after the battle of Camlan, where he had been wounded. Barinthus was the steersman because of his knowledge of the seas and the stars of heaven. With him at the tiller of the ship, we arrived there with the prince; and Morgen received us with due honour. She put the king in her chamber on a golden bed, uncovered his wound with her noble hand and looked long at it. At length she said he could be cured if only he stayed with her a long while and accepted her treatment. We therefore happily committed the king to her care and spread our sails to favourable winds on our return journey.¹³

Although this passage does not explicitly name the *Insula Pomorum* as Avalon, we can deduce that this island is Avalon since it is also described as the location where Arthur went after the Battle of Camlann. As Geoffrey's account in the *History* does not say it was Morgan who took Arthur to Avalon, we can readily accept Taliesin's claim that it was he and some others of Arthur's men who took Arthur to Avalon.

In this passage Avalon is identified as both a place of healing, thanks to Morgan's healing arts, and also as an agricultural paradise. But as Lucy Paton observes, despite the fact that Avalon here shares the qualities of beauty and deathlessness frequently attributed also to Faerie, the island of Avalon has more in common with the Fortunate Isles than with Faerie. Just because Avalon seems to be like Paradise, and Faerie also seems to be like Paradise, it does not necessarily follow that Avalon is Faerie. Although J. S. P. Tatlock¹⁴ has argued that the *Vita Merlini* was widely circulated and thus had a significant impact on the development of Avalon, Siân Echard¹⁵ claims that Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*

¹³ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, pp. 101-103.

¹⁴ J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*', *Speculum* 18.3 (1943), 274-75.

¹⁵ Siân Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 218; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, Clarke (trans. and ed.), pp. 43-44.

most likely had only a limited circulation. I also have found that only four chronicles¹⁶ of the forty-eight which follow after Geoffrey of Monmouth associate Morgan with Arthur's departure or death. The lack of the inclusion of Morgan in chronicles may be yet another indication of how limited the circulation of the *Vita Merlini* was, and as a result this description of Avalon may not have had much impact on the development of Avalon after all.

The next flurry of literary activity regarding Avalon comes after the so-called discovery of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury in 1191. With the discovery of Arthur's tomb, Avalon is mentioned not only in association with Arthur, but is identified with Glastonbury. The interpolations in William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesiae* say that Avalon – used by William as an alternate name for Glastonbury – is the location of Arthur's grave.¹⁷ Early scholarship on 'Avalon' often begins with the etymology given in William of Malmesbury's *De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesiae*. The interpolations in *De Antiquitate* (probably added in around 1190-1)¹⁸ give three different names for the island of Glastonbury: Yniswitrin, Glastonbury, and Avalon.¹⁹ The interpolator claims that Glastonbury is either the English translation of the Celtic name Yniswitrin, or after someone named Glaestig. He derives the name 'Avalon' from the British word '*avalla*', the word for apple, for the abundance of apples in that place, or that the island derives its name from a man named Avalloc. However, William Wells Newell

¹⁶ Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'De instructione principum', in Lewis Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 283; Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'Speculum Ecclesiae', in Lewis Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, p. 286; Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia*, Book II.17, p. 429; James P. Carley (ed.), *The Chronicle of Glastonbury Abbey: An Edition, Translation and Study of John of Glastonbury's Cronica sive Antiquitates Glastoniensis Ecclesiae* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1985), pp. 80-81.

¹⁷ William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation and Study of William of Malmesbury's De Antiquitate Glastonie Ecclesiae*, John Scott (ed. and trans.) (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981), pp. 82-85.

¹⁸ Chapter 5 in William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, John Scott (ed. and trans.), p. 34.

¹⁹ William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, Scott (ed. and trans.), pp. 52-53.

claims that no Avallo exists in Welsh genealogies,²⁰ and thus the name Avalon is more likely named after its produce of apples. C. H. Slover²¹ supports this theory by tracing the name 'Avalon' from the word for 'apple' in Old Celtic, Welsh, Breton and Cornish, and Old Irish.²²

On the other hand, scholars such as John Rhys argue that Avallo, or Avalloc or Avallach, was a Celtic deity.²³ A. H. Krappe also takes an interest in the mythological origin of the island's name. Krappe's study draws comparisons with Classical mythology: the Greek god Apollo is associated with both glass, by stories of him crying tears of amber (which Krappe claims was also referred to as glass), and with apples, through his connection to the Hesperides and the golden apples found there.²⁴ Some mental gymnastics are required in order to follow Krappe's discussion on the etymological and mythological connections between glass, apples, and islands, eventually to be summarized in the one island of Glastonbury/Avalon; even so, Krappe's study demonstrates the extent to which early scholars tried to make sense of the differing etymologies given for the names Avalon and Glastonbury. Mary A. Berkeley makes similar efforts to synthesize the origins of the name for Avalon:

May we not conjecture that Avalon, Avallon, or Afalon was a sacred name given to the Island by the priests, and that the other name Ynyswytrin, was the one used by the ordinary inhabitants of the place who were outside the knowledge of the mysteries? Avallach would, of course, be the god of such a locality, and this is perhaps slightly confirmed by the use of "Avalon" as one of the many names for the Celtic Other Country.²⁵

Approaching the Classical connection from a different angle, John J. H. Savage discusses the possibility that William of Malmesbury was drawing on the *Aeneid* when writing the

²⁰ William Wells Newell, 'William of Malmesbury on the Antiquity of Glastonbury', *PMLA* 18.4 (1903), 477.

²¹ C. H. Slover, 'Avalon', *Modern Philology* 25.4 (1931): 395-99.

²² Slover's source for these words are Alfred Holder's *Alt-celtischer Sprachschatz*, Vol. 1 (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1961-1962).

²³ John Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 336.

²⁴ A. H. Krappe, 'Avallion', *Speculum* 18.3 (1943), 305-7.

²⁵ Mary A. Berkeley, 'Glastonbury and the Grail Legend', *Folklore* 31.4 (1920), 307-8.

origin myth for Avalon/Glastonbury. Savage notes the similarities between the miraculous sign in both *De Antiquitate* and the *Aeneid*: in the *Aeneid*, the discovery of a sow suckling her young under a tree was a sign for Aeneas and his companions to cease their travels; and in *De Antiquitate*,²⁶ Glaestig names the island *Avallonie* upon finding his sow under an apple tree near the church at Glastonbury.²⁷ Savage also observes that the places named after the respective discovery of the sow have similar names: the Campanian town of Abella (identified also as Alba Longa or Lavinium), and Avalon.²⁸

In addition to providing the ontology of Avalon, the discovery of Arthur's tomb at Glastonbury inextricably connected Avalon with the abbey. In ca. 1193, Giraldus Cambrensis gives what is considered to be a first person account of the 'discovery' and exhumation of Arthur's and Guinevere's graves in Glastonbury. Included in Giraldus's account is the detail of a tress of blonde hair, presumably Guinevere's, turning to ash as soon as one of the monks snatched it into his hands.

Hujus autem corpus, quod quasi phantasticum in fine, et tanquam per spiritus ad longinqua translatus, neque morti obnoxium fabulæ confinxerant, his nostris diebus apud Glastoniam inter lapideas pyramides duas, in cœmiterio sacro quondam erectas, profundius in terra quercu concava reconditum, et signatum miris indiciis et quasi miraculosis, est inventum, et in ecclesiam cum honore translatus marmoreoque decenter tumulo commendatum.

[...]

Quæ nunc autem Glastonia dicitur, antiquitus insula Avallonia dicebatur. Est enim quasi insula tota paludibus obsita, unde dicta est Britannice Inis Avallon, id est, *insula pomifera*. Pomis enim, quæ *aval* Britannica lingua dicuntur, locus ille quondam abundabat. Unde et Morganis, nobilis matrona et partium illarum dominatrix atque patrona, necnon et Arthura regi sanguine propinqua, post bellum de Kemelen Arthurum ad sanadum ejusdem vulnera in insulam quæ nunc Glastonia dicitur deportavit.²⁹

[In our own lifetime Arthur's body was discovered at Glastonbury, although the legends had always encouraged us to believe that there was something otherworldly about his ending, that he had resisted death and had been spirited

²⁶ John J. H. Savage, 'Insula Avallonia', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 73 (1942), 407.

²⁷ William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, Scott (ed. and trans.), pp. 52-53.

²⁸ Savage, 'Insula Avallonia', 407-8.

²⁹ Giraldus Cambrensis, 'De instructione principum', in George F. Warner (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. 8 (London: H.M.S.O., RS.21.8, 1891), Distinction 1, Chapter 20, pp. 127-29.

away to some far-distant spot. The body was hidden deep in the earth in a hollowed-out oak-bole and between two stone pyramids which had been set up long ago in the churchyard there. They carried it into the church with every mark of honour and buried it decently there in a marble tomb.

[Then follows a description of the remains inside the tomb.]

What is now known as Glastonbury used in ancient times to be called the Isle of Avalon. It is virtually an island, for it is completely surrounded by marshlands. In Welsh it is called 'Ynys Avallon', which means the Island of Apples. 'Aval' is the Welsh word for apple, and this fruit used to grow there in great abundance. After the Battle of Camlann, a noblewoman called Morgan, who was the ruler and patroness of these parts as well as being a close blood relation of King Arthur, carried him off to the island now known as Glastonbury, so that his wounds could be cared for.³⁰

Giraldus Cambrensis gives another version some twenty-five years later in *Speculum ecclesiae* (ca. 1216).³¹ Modern historians generally believe that the discovery of Arthur's burial place was a well-timed forgery that had the desired result of bringing pilgrims (and patronage) to Glastonbury Abbey, as the abbey had experienced a devastating fire in 1184,³² or as political propaganda played by King Henry II during his campaigns against the Welsh to prove that the Welsh messianic hero was dead.³³ And yet, the discovery of the location of Arthur's tomb also solved a problem that had vexed medieval historians for years: what had happened to Arthur, and what to do with stories of his eventual

³⁰ Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'De instructione principum' in Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, pp. 281-83.

³¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'Speculum ecclesiae', in Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, p. 284, note 682; for the passage about Arthur's tomb in *Speculum ecclesiae* in Latin, see 'Speculum ecclesiae', in J. S. Brewer (ed.), *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, Vol. 4 (London: Longman & Co., Trübner & Col., RS.21.4, 1873), Chapters VIII-X, pp. 47-51; Aelred Watkin, 'The Glastonbury Legends', in James P. Carley (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 16.

³² William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, Scott (ed. and trans.), p. 34; Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition*, p. 72; R. W. Barber, *Arthur of Albion* (London: Barrie and Rockliff with Pall Mall Press, 1961), p. 60; Antonia Gransden, 'The Growth of the Glastonbury Traditions and Legends in the Twelfth Century', in Carley (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 43; James P. Carley, 'Arthur in English History', in W. R. J. Barron (ed.), *The Arthur of the English* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 48; 'Giraldus Cambrensis', in Frank D. Reno (ed.), *Arthurian Figures of History and Legend* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2011), p. 128.

³³ Robert Huntington Fletcher, *The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles: Especially Those of Great Britain and France* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1958), p. 191; Roger Sherman Loomis, 'The Legend of Arthur's Survival', in Roger Sherman Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 66; Mary Williams, 'King Arthur in History and Legend', *Folklore* 73.2 (1962), 84; Carley, 'Arthur in English History', in Barron (ed.), *The Arthur of the English*, p. 48; Edward Donald Kennedy, 'Glastonbury', in Siân Echard (ed.), *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 112.

return? As Kennedy comments, the discovery of Arthur's body was a 'godsend' for chroniclers.³⁴ From this point forward, many of the chroniclers which include Geoffrey's formula of Arthur's departure to Avalon now add some variation of 'and there Arthur died and was buried at Avalon, now called Glastonbury', many of them also citing Giraldus Cambrensis as their source.³⁵ Some chroniclers, such as Robert Mannyng, still include reports of the Breton hope of Arthur's return, but claim that these myths are disproved by the evidence of Arthur's tomb. A number of chronicles omit accounts of Arthur's exploits entirely because they are not intended to be histories of the world or do not contain any legendary material, but do cover events in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and thus include entries for the discovery of Arthur's tomb in 1191,³⁶ or of Edward I's exhumation and reinternment of Arthur's bones in 1288.³⁷ By including accounts about Arthur's tomb, these chronicles insist on the fact that Arthur is dead, and the Breton hope of his return is false.

³⁴ Kennedy, 'Glastonbury', in Echard (ed.), *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, p. 113.

³⁵ Gervase of Canterbury, 'Gesta Regum Britanniae', in Stubbs (ed.), *The historical works of Gervase of Canterbury*, Vol. 2; Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'Speculum Ecclesiae', in Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*; Eckhardt (ed.), *Castleford's Chronicle, or, The Boke of Brut*; Carley (ed.), *The Chronicle of Glastonbury Abbey: An Edition, Translation and Study of John of Glastonbury's Cronica sive Antiquitates Glastoniensis Ecclesiae*; both Higden's *Polychronicon* and Trevisa's translation of Higden in Lumby (ed.), *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, monachi Cestrensis: together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*; John Brompton, 'Chronicon', in Twysden (ed.), *Historiae anglicanae scriptores X*; Bower, *Scotichronicon*, in Watt, MacQueen, MacQueen (eds.); Lipscomb, *A fifteenth century prose paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester's "Chronicle"*.

³⁶ Giraldus Cambrensis, Appendix 3: 'De instructione principum' and 'Speculum Ecclesiae', in Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*; the interpolations in William of Malmesbury, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, Scott (ed. and trans.); Joseph Stevenson (ed.), *Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum* (London: Longman, RS.66, 1875); 'Annales de Margan', in Henry Richards Luard (ed.), *Annales monastici*, Vol. 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, Rolls Series 36.1, 1864); Adam of Domesday, 'Historia de Rebus gestis Glastoniensis', in H. F. Scott Stokes (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey during the Crusades: extracts from Adam of Domesday* (Felinfach, Lampeter: Llanerch, 1992); Henry Thomas Riley (ed.), *Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani, et quorundam anonymorum, chronica et annales, regnantibus Henrico Tertio et Edwardo Primo, A.D. 1259-1307* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, RS.28.2, 1865); Joseph Rawson Lumby (ed.), *Chronicon Henrici Knighton, vel, Cnithon, monachi Leycestrensis*, Vol. 1 (London: H.M.S.O., RS.92.1, 1889).

³⁷ 'Annales monasterii de Waverleia', in Luard (ed.), *Annales monastici*, Vol. 2; the entry for year 1298 in Thomas of Elmham, *Historia Monasterii S. Augustini Cantuariensis*, Charles Hardwick (ed.) (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, RS.8, 1858).

But Avalon's connection with Glastonbury may have populated Avalon with fairies after all. We have already seen how Glastonbury and Avalon came to be identified as the same location. One text which links Glastonbury with fairies is the Welsh *Buchedd Collen*, or, *The Life of St Collen*, found in a manuscript dating from 1536.³⁸ St Collen, although appointed abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, chooses first to preach to the people and then retires as a hermit and makes his cell at the base of Glastonbury Tor. The *Life* tells how one day Collen overheard some peasants talking about fairies. Collen rebuked them, only to later receive an invitation to the Fairy Court. Collen refused the first and second invitations, then, when threatened with bodily harm, accepted the third invitation, though not without first arming himself with holy water. He entered Faerie at the top of Glastonbury Tor, and inside saw a magnificent palace. There he talked with Gwyn ab Nudd, the King of Fairies about the dress and manners of the fairy court. Collen sprinkled holy water on the fairies and they disappeared.³⁹ Despite the fact that this text does not mention Avalon at all, that Glastonbury is later identified as Avalon might have resulted Glastonbury's association with fairies to be transferred onto Avalon.

Even so, only two texts mention elves or fairies in association with Avalon of the fifty-five chronicles included in this survey: Layamon's *Brut*, dating from the late twelfth to early thirteenth century, and Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes*, dating from the mid-fifteenth century. Although twelve texts refer to the 'Breton hope' that Arthur is not dead but waiting to return in Britain's time of need,⁴⁰ the fact that only two texts explicitly link

³⁸ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Ynys Wydrin to Glasynbri: Glastonbury in Welsh Vernacular Tradition', in Carley (ed.), *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 172.

³⁹ Ashe, *King Arthur's Avalon*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, iii.287, p. 520-21; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 578-81; William of Newburgh, *The history of English affairs, Book I*, Eds. and trans. P. G. Walsh & M. J. Kennedy (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), p. 33; Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia*, Book II.17, p. 429; Giraldus Cambrensis, 'Speculum Ecclesiae', in Thorpe (trans.), *The Journey through Wales and The Description of Wales*, p. 286; Wright (ed.), *The metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, p. 324; Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, p. 428; Bergen (ed.), *Lydgate's Fall of Princes, Part III, Books VI-IX*, p. 909; Bower, *Scotichronicon*, in Watt, MacQueen,

Arthur's passing to Avalon with fairies and elves demonstrates that, for the most part, Avalon was not associated with fairies in the English historical tradition. And yet, what do Layamon and Lydgate have to say about Avalon?

Layamon's *Brut* is the first text in English to mention Avalon. Both Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* and Wace's *Roman de Brut* are counted among Layamon's sources for the Arthurian material. Just before his departure to Avalon, Arthur says to his companions:

'And ich wulle uaren to Aualun, to uairest alre maidene,
to Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone;
and heo scal mine wunden makien alle isunde,
al hal me makien mid haleweize drenchen.'
(lines 14277-80)⁴¹

Barron and Weinberg translate *aluen swiðe sceone* as 'fairest of all fairy women'.

However, as discussed in the Introduction, the words 'fairy' and 'elf' did not come to be interchangeable until the mid-fourteenth century, and the earliest use of 'fairy' in English is not until the early fourteenth century, in *Sir Orfeo*, or possibly the Reinbrun section of *Guy of Warwick*. Because of this, I agree with Eugene Mason's⁴² interpretation of this passage: we are better off considering that Argante is the 'fairest of all *elf* women'. Even so, we find in the presence of Layamon's elves the beginnings of the confluence of 'elves' and 'fairies' in the English imagination. Strictly speaking, Layamon's elves may not be 'fairies', but they are certainly the precursors to the fairies in later English Arthurian texts. Whereas Layamon's sources do not mention elves, or fairies, at all in relation to Avalon, Layamon does. Elves also feature earlier in the *Brut* at Arthur's birth,

MacQueen (eds.), Book III, Ch. 26, p. 69; John Capgrave, *The chronicle of England*, p. 87; Lipscomb, *A fifteenth century prose paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester's "Chronicle"*, p. 51; Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, Henry Ellis (ed.) (London: F. C. and J. Rivington; T. Payne; Wilkie and Robinson; Longman, Hutst, Rees, Orme and Co.; Cadell and Davies; J. Mawman; and J. Johnson and Co., 1811), p. 81.

⁴¹ Line numbers refer to W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg, eds. *Layamon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon's Brut* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001).

⁴² Eugene Mason (trans.), *Arthurian chronicles: Wace and Layamon* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1996).

where they give him gifts to be a mighty and courteous king. It fits nicely in the narrative that the king who was blessed by elves at birth should be cared for by elves at the end of his life. Elves, or at least supernatural women, present at the birth of the hero is not a new thing, as Cyril Edwards points out in his article on Layamon's elves.⁴³ Layamon could have drawn from any of the Germanic and Classical analogues of the 'fairy godmother' motif. What *is* new is the introduction of elves into the Arthurian story.

The next mention of fairies in Avalon is found three centuries later in John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. Lydgate was commissioned by Duke Humfrey of Gloucester to translate into English Boccaccio's *De casibus illustrium virorum*, a text which chronicles the fates of the powerful from Adam and Eve to King John of France.⁴⁴ However, instead of using Boccaccio's text, Lydgate relied on the early-fifteenth-century French translation, *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes*, by Laurent de Premierfait.⁴⁵ Laurent's translation had already amplified the Latin original, a process that Lydgate continued in *The Fall of Princes*. In the section featuring Arthur, Lydgate writes:

Afftir the bataile Arthour for a while
To staunche his woundis & hurtis to recure,
Born in a liteer cam into an Ile
Callid Aualoun; and ther of auenture,
As seid Gaufrid recordeth be scripture,
How kyng Arthour, flour of cheualrie,
Rit with his knihtis & lyueth in Fairye.

Thus of Breteyne translatid was þe sunne
Vp to the riche sterri briht dongoun, –
Astronomeeres weel reherse kunne, –
Callid Arthuris constellacioun,
Wher he sit crownid in the heuenly mansioun
Amyd the paleis of stonis cristallyne,

⁴³ Cyril Edwards, 'Layamon's Elves', in Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Roberts (eds.), *Layamon: Contexts, Language, and Interpretation* (London: King's College London, Centre for Late Antique & Medieval Studies, 2002), pp. 79-95.

⁴⁴ Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 223; Robert J. Meyer-Lee, 'Lydgate's Major Poems', in Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (eds.), *A Companion to Fifteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), p. 62.

⁴⁵ Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 230; Meyer-Lee, 'Lydgate's Major Poems', in Boffey and Edwards (eds.), *A Companion to Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, p. 66.

Told among Cristen first of þe worthi nyne.

This errour yit abyt among Bretouns,
Which foundid is vpon the prophecie
Of olde Merlyn, lik ther oppynyouns:
He as a kyng is crownid in Fairie,
With sceptre and suerd, & with his regalie
Shal resorte as lord and souereyne
Out of Fairye & regne in Breteyne,

And repaire ageyn the Rounde Table;
Be prophecie Merlyn set the date,
Amonges princis kyng incomparable,
His seete ageyn to Carlioun translate.
The Parchas sustren sponne so his fate;
His epitaphie recordeth so certeyn:
Heer lith kyng Arthour, which shal regne ageyn.
(Book VIII, lines 3095-122)⁴⁶

Lydgate begins by following the formula provided by Geoffrey of Monmouth, but then he adds that Arthur now lives in Faerie. Although Lydgate does not describe Faerie itself, his comment that Arthur rides with his knights is reminiscent of folktales about the 'Wild Hunt', a mysterious hunting troop that hunts at noon or after nightfall, sometimes led by King Herla,⁴⁷ sometimes by the devil,⁴⁸ and sometimes by Arthur himself. As Gervase of Tilbury writes in the *Otia Imperialia*:

Sed et in siluis Britannie maioris aut minoris consimilia contigisse referuntur, narrantibus nemorum custodibus (quos *foristarios* quasi indaginum ac uiuariorum ferinorum aut regionum nemorum uulgus nominat) se alternis diebus circa horam meridianam et in primo noctium conticinio sub plenilunio luna lucente sepiissime uidere militum copiam uenantium et canum et cornuum strepitum, qui sciscitantibus se de societate et familia Arcturi esse affirmant.⁴⁹

[Moreover, similar things are reported to have happened in the forests of Great Britain or Brittany. The keepers of the woods (whom the people call foresters, that is, keepers of the parks and game preserves or royal woodlands) recount that, some days, at about noon, and other days soon after nightfall when a full moon is

⁴⁶ Line numbers come from Henry Bergen (ed.), *Lydgate's Fall of Princes, Part III, Books VI-IX* (Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1923).

⁴⁷ Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium = Courtiers' Trifles*, M. R. James (trans.), C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), i.11 and iv.13.

⁴⁸ Claude Luttrell, 'Folk Legend as Source for Arthurian Romance: The Wild Hunt', in Kenneth Varty (ed.), *An Arthurian Tapestry: Essays in Memory of Lewis Thorpe* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1981) pp. 83, 93.

⁴⁹ Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia*, pp. 336.

shining, they very often see a band of knights out hunting, accompanied by the din of dogs and horns. If they are questioned, these knights claim to be of the company and household of Arthur.]⁵⁰

In this way Arthur is portrayed as similar to the Fairy King from *Sir Orfeo*, another king of Faerie who hunts at noon. That Lydgate associates Arthur with Faerie, and indeed, making him into a Fairy King, suggests that Lydgate might have been aware of Etienne de Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*, a twelfth-century text which also seems to link Arthur and Morgan with fairies.⁵¹ This text was a fictional epistolary exchange between King Henry II and King Arthur about Henry's invasion of Brittany from 1167-69.⁵² In his letter to Henry, Arthur claims to be the king of the Antipodes and to have been made immortal by his sister, Morgan.

Saucius Arturus petit herbas inde sororis,
 Avallonis eas insula sacra tenet.
 Suscipit hic fratrem Morganis nympha perennis,
 Curat, alit, refovet, perpetuumque facit.
 Traditur antipodum sibi jus; fatatus, inermis,
 Belliger assistit, proelia nulla timet.
 Sic hemispherium regit inferius, nitet armis,
 Altera pars mundi dimidiata sibi.
 Hoc nec Alexandri potuit, nec Cæsaris ardor,
 Ut superum tellus sic sua jura ferat.
 Antipodes hujus fatalia jura tremiscunt;
 Inferior mundus subditus extat ei.
 Evolat ad superos, quandoque recurrit ad ima;
 Ut sua jura petunt, degit ubique potens.
 (lines 1161-74)⁵³

[Arthur, gravely wounded, sought the herbs of his sister,
 who held the holy isle of Avalon.
 Morganis, the everliving nymph, received her brother here,
 cured him, nourished him, revived him, and made him immortal.
 He was presented the Antipodes as his kingdom. The fairy folk being unarmed,
 the war leader comes to their aid: he fears no battle.

⁵⁰ Banks and Binns (ed. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia*, pp. 337.

⁵¹ Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition*, pp. 85-88; Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 52.

⁵² Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition*, p. 85; Jill M. Herbert, *Morgan Le Fay, Shapeshifter* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 30; Michael Twomey, "'Morgan le Fay, Empress of the Wilderness': A Newly Recovered Arthurian Text in London, BL Roywal 12.C.IX", in Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (eds.), *Arthurian Literature XXV* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2008), p. 74.

⁵³ Line numbers come from Etienne de Rouen, 'Draco Normannicus', in Richard Howlett (ed.), *Chronicles of the reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, RS.82.2, 1889).

Thus he reigns in the lower hemisphere;
 he is brilliant in arms, the other half of the world is his.
 This neither the effort of Alexander or of Caesar accomplished,
 for only the upper earth thus bore their rule.
 The Antipodes tremble at his faerie authority;
 the underworld subdued is his.
 He ascended to the upper one, and because he returns to the lower,
 for those who seek his justice, the powerful one awaits in both worlds.]⁵⁴

We cannot be certain whether *fatatus* and *fatalia* in this passage refer specifically to fairies. While Mildred Leake Day translates *fatatus* in this text as 'fairy folk', Echard points out that Latham's earliest recorded use of the root *fat-* to refer to fairies was ca. 1190, some sixty years after *Draco Normannicus*.⁵⁵ Either way, Arthur is made into the immortal king of an otherworldly realm; the Antipodes were considered to be a fantastical place, sometimes associated with the infernal regions.⁵⁶ As was seen in the previous chapter, Faerie displays some ambiguous affinity to Hell, and so there is not much surprise at this blurring of boundaries that allows for Arthur to become the king of the Antipodes in *Draco Normannicus*, to later become king of Faerie in *The Fall of Princes*.

But how much did Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* affect the literary tradition about Avalon and fairies? If one may infer the popularity of a section by how often it was adopted by later writers, it is telling that none of the remaining six chronicles⁵⁷ of this survey written after Lydgate depict Avalon as Faerie, nor mention fairies at all. From this we may conjecture that Lydgate's inclusion of fairies in Avalon did not greatly influence the English tradition about Avalon – at least, not in the historical tradition.

⁵⁴ Etienne de Rouen, 'Letter from King Arthur to Henry, King of the English,' in Mildred Leake Day (ed.), *Latin Arthurian Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), p. 249.

⁵⁵ Echard, *Arthurian narrative in the Latin tradition*, p. 87, note 49.

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the different perceptions of the Antipodes, see J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey and King Arthur in "Normannicus Draco"', *Modern Philology* 31.1 (1933), 1-18.

⁵⁷ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, in Watt, MacQueen, MacQueen (eds.); Thomas Rudborne, 'Historia Major Wintoniensis', in Henry Wharton (ed.), *Anglia sacra, sive, Collectio historiarum partim antiquitus, partim recenter scriptarum, de archiepiscopis & episcopis Angliae, a prima fidei Christianae susceptione ad annum MDXL* (London: Impensis Richardi Chiswel, 1691), pp. 179-286; John Capgrave, *The chronicle of England*; Lipscomb, *A fifteenth century prose paraphrase of Robert of Gloucester's "Chronicle"*; John Hardyng, *The chronicle of Ihon Hardyng* (London: In officina Richardi Graftoni, 1543); Robert Fabyan, *The New Chronicles of England and France*, in Ellis (ed.).

Avalon in Middle English romance

In the romance tradition, we find fairies in the fourteenth-century English versions of Marie de France's lai *Lanval*. Whereas the mistress is never called a fairy in the French *Lanval*, both English versions explicitly label her thus. In Marie's version, the mistress says only that she comes from far away (line 112 'De luinz'),⁵⁸ like Lanval himself. The 'Avalon' she goes to at the end is simply a beautiful island, not necessarily magical: lines 641-3 'Od li s'en vait en Aualun...En un isle que mut est beaus' – 'he goes with her to Avalun ... to a very beautiful island'. However, as the mistress is made into a fairy in *Sir Landevale* and *Sir Launfal*, Avalon is renamed to the less recognizable 'Amylion' or 'Olyroun'. For instance, when Landevale first meets the fairy mistress:

He founde yn that pavilion
The kyngys doughter of Amylion;
That ys an ile of the fayré.
(lines 91-93)⁵⁹

And when Landevale departs with his mistress from Arthur's court, he goes to 'With his fere, into a joly yle / That is clepyd Amylyon' (lines 532-33). Likewise, in Thomas Chestre's *Sir Launfal*, the lady's father is called the 'kyng of Fayrye' (line 280).⁶⁰ Although Chestre's name for the enchanted isle is 'Olyroun' (lines 278, 1023), Chestre leaves no doubt where Launfal and his lady went when they left Arthur's court: Launfal 'Was take ynto Fayrye' (line 1035) – that is, to Faerie, which here is described as an island. But since the action in all of these tales takes place in the 'real world' of Arthur's court, we are not given descriptions of the island itself.

Whether these fairies can be considered to live in Avalon is complicated by the fact that 'Amylion' and 'Olyroun' are unique spellings. These islands are identified with

⁵⁸ Lines for *Lanval* come from Appendix in A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1960).

⁵⁹ Lines for *Sir Landevale* come from the Appendix in Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal*.

⁶⁰ Line numbers comes from Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal*.

Avalon because that is the name of the island in *Lanval*. As modern readers, we have the benefit of hindsight: we can read *Sir Landevale* and *Sir Launfal* alongside their source text, *Lanval*. Would the audiences of *Sir Landevale* and *Sir Launfal* have also been aware of the French *Lanval*? Would they have also interpreted 'Amylion' or 'Olyroun' as Avalon? It may be that the medieval audiences of these Middle English texts did not interpret Amylion or Olyroun as Avalon, and that the authors of these texts deliberately changed the name of the island in order to avoid confusion with Avalon. For instance, Kittredge claims that 'Amylion' is a corruption of Avalon – which is possible when one considers how minor confusion commonly resulted in scribal error – but he also says that Thomas Chestre intentionally used the name 'Olyroun' to name his island after the real island of Oléron.⁶¹ Aisling Byrne agrees with Kittredge's premise, but suggests that *both* Middle English redactors intentionally changed the name of the island in *Lanval* in order to avoid the conflicting roles between Avalon in *Lanval* and the more popular Galfridian tradition.⁶² Instead of the real-world island Oléron, Byrne notes that 'Olyroun' echoes 'Île de Ore', the home of the supernatural lady in *Le Bel Inconnu* and its English adaptation *Lybaeus Desconus*,⁶³ and may also be reminiscent of Melior's city, 'Chyffe De Oyre' in *Partonope of Blois* (line 2158).⁶⁴ In fact, Avalon is eliminated entirely from *Sir Launfal*, further suggesting that Middle English authors did not consider Avalon as an appropriate place to associate with Faerie. If 'Amylion' and 'Olyroun' were intentionally substituted to be reminiscent of other, more generic magical places, rather than specifically Avalon, then neither *Sir Landevale* nor *Sir Launfal* can serve as evidence for associating fairies with Avalon in the English tradition.

⁶¹ George Lyman Kittredge, 'Launfal', *The American Journal of Philology* 10.1 (1889), 13-14.

⁶² Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, pp. 40-41.

⁶³ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 41.

⁶⁴ Line numbers come from Bødtker (ed.), *The Middle-English Versions of Partonope of Blois*.

and burial of Arthur at Glastonbury. The verse romance *Arthur* written in the fourteenth century follows a similar vein. In this text, Arthur

‘Was browȝt to Auelon,
þat was a place fayr & Mury;
Now hyt hooteþ Glastyngbury.
Ther Arthour þat worthy kyng
Maked hys lyes ending;
[...]
þey made Artoures toumbe þere’
(lines 612-22)⁶⁹

Like the chroniclers who added Arthur’s death and burial to their accounting of Arthur’s reign, these romances eliminate completely the chance of magical intervention and Arthur’s eventual return.

Thus far it would seem that the majority of Avalon texts in the English tradition do not associate Avalon with fairies. The historical, or quasi-historical, texts discussed here do not identify Avalon as a type of Faerie, and one has to read Avalon into the names ‘Amylion’ and ‘Olyroun’ in *Sir Landevale* and *Sir Launfal* to associate Avalon with fairies there. To continue this investigation, let us compare the descriptions of Avalon with texts which explicitly mention Faerie. Faerie is described in greater detail in *Sir Orfeo*, *Guy of Warwick*, and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* than any of the texts which describe Avalon, save Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini*.

These romances suggest that Faerie is subterranean in that all three describe passing through the rock and journeying for a while in darkness to reach it. In both *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* and *Reinbrun* the characters must also cross a river. Before they reach Faerie, Thomas and the Fairy Queen stop in a fair arbour filled with singing birds and various fruit trees, including apple, pear, date, figs and damsons. From the arbour, the Fairy Queen points out the five roads to the Otherworlds

⁶⁹ Line numbers come from F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Arthur* (London: Trübner & Co., EETS.OS.2, 1864).

(lines 202-22).⁷⁰ Thus far the only shared theme found in tales of Avalon and *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* is the presence of fruit trees, particularly apple trees; however, in this text, the apple trees are found at the crossroads to the various Otherworlds, and not in Faerie itself. The Fairy Queen prevents Thomas from eating of the fruit at the crossroads (lines 187-92), demonstrating that, unlike the orchards on Avalon, this arbour is not a wholesome place: here, the fruit would condemn Thomas's soul to hell.

Faerie is also bright, but illuminated by light coming from the castle, not from sun or moon. It has a broad, green plain with a richly adorned crystal castle, so incredible that Orfeo wondered if he was in paradise (*Sir Orfeo*, lines 347-76).⁷¹ Faerie in *Guy of Warwick* also features a beautiful crystal castle adorned with precious stones (stanzas 79/5-81/3).⁷² Here Faerie is not an island but is described as a broad plain. Although this Faerie could be confused with paradise at first, when we consider the Fairy King's gallery of mutilated bodies (*Sir Orfeo*, lines 387-404), Faerie is brought into stark contrast with Avalon's reputation as a place of healing. The fairy knight in *Guy of Warwick* also holds hundreds of knights prisoner (stanzas 90/1-94/12), which is disparate from the benign rule of Morgan and her sisters in Avalon.

These three texts all describe the topography of Faerie, and none of these texts identifies it as Avalon. Avalon is often described as an island; but although some characters must cross water in order to enter Faerie (such as Reinbrun or Thomas), Faerie is not an island. Far from being a safe paradise and place of healing, Faerie is depicted as both beautiful and dangerous. Its denizens kidnap humans to take into their world, sometimes with tortuous results (as with the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo*). Thomas, though his

⁷⁰ Line numbers refer to Murray (ed.), *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, following the Thornton manuscript.

⁷¹ Line numbers refer to Bliss (ed.), *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd edn.

⁷² Numbers refer to stanza number and line number as found in 'Reinbrun, Gij sone of Warwike', in Zupitza (ed.), *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*.

fairy partner is far kinder than in the other two romances discussed, is also placed in peril for his soul, and must be removed from Faerie before the devil can claim him (lines 287-96). Enchanting as Faerie might be, these three romances make it clear that Faerie was not exactly considered a desirable destination. It does not sound like a place where medieval English authors would want to send their greatest British hero.

And yet, Avalon and Faerie do have some affinity. The previous chapter found that Faerie, if considered alongside the Christian Otherworlds as an option for the afterlife, is not a permanent afterlife: every mortal visit to Faerie in these romances holds the possibility of return to the mortal world. If Avalon and Faerie share nothing else, they are both considered places where characters can 'cheat death', as is suggested by Orfeo's rescue of Heurodis, or in Arthur's removal to Avalon after his final battle. The previous chapter also considered the ways Faerie and Purgatory were similar: both accessed through subterranean passages, both temporary afterworlds, both a place of suffering, albeit for different purposes. Avalon, too, shares an affinity with Purgatory from the texts which locate Avalon with Mt Etna in Sicily.⁷³ Gervase of Tilbury includes an account of a groom chasing his master's horse into a cave on Mt Etna, only to find inside King Arthur resting on a golden bed.⁷⁴ Although initially unclear whether Gervase identifies Mt Etna as Avalon, Byrne outlines the reasons Gervase might have wanted to do so: locating Arthur in Sicily would have given strength to Gervase's half-English patron's, Otto IV, claim to Sicily when King William II of Sicily died without an heir.⁷⁵ Neither is Gervase alone in locating Avalon in the Mediterranean: the author of the mid-thirteenth-century

⁷³ E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1927), p. 221; Loomis, 'The Legend of Arthur's Survival', in Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, pp. 67-68; Alexandre Micha, 'Miscellaneous French Romances in Verse', in Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, p. 371; Mary Williams, 'King Arthur in History and Legend', 85; Ashe, 'Avalon', in Norris J. Lacy (ed.), *The New Arthurian Encyclopedia* (London: St James Press, 1991), p. 25.

⁷⁴ S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (eds. and trans.), *Gervase of Tilbury: Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, pp. 334-37.

⁷⁵ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 129.

romance *Floriant et Florete* also maps Avalon onto Sicily, with Mt Etna as Morgan le Fay's fortress.⁷⁶ The link between Avalon and Sicily is further reinforced by the *fata Morgana* often seen in the Strait of Messina, a type of mirage in which there appears to be a floating palace or island on the horizon which was thought to be the result of Morgan le Fay's enchantments.⁷⁷ By sharing the same physical space in a few specific accounts, Avalon can sometimes be identified with Purgatory. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the types of experiences characters have in Faerie and Purgatory differentiates the former from the latter; whereas the purpose of suffering in Purgatory is to cleanse the soul, the torment suffered in Faerie seems to be only for the fairies' enjoyment. In this way, Faerie and Avalon share affinity with Purgatory insofar as all three are temporary Otherworlds.

The Middle English romances discussed thus far all date from the fourteenth century, but Avalon also features in the fifteenth-century *Le Morte Darthur* by Thomas Malory.⁷⁸ Although Malory does mention Avalon as the place where Arthur is taken after the Battle of Camlann, the scene in which the four queens take Arthur away is not the first mention of Avalon. In fact, the Isle of Avalon features in two previous episodes. The first episode is found in 'The Tale of Balyn and Balan'.⁷⁹ A maiden sent from the Lady Lyle of Avilion⁸⁰ goes to Arthur's court to be freed from a rather strange predicament: she wears a sword and sheath that only the most chivalrous man can

⁷⁶ Harry F. Williams (ed.), *Floriant et Florete* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947), lines 566-70.

⁷⁷ Roger Sherman Loomis, 'Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses', *Speculum* 20.2 (1945), 183.

⁷⁸ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, in Shepherd (ed.).

⁷⁹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, Shepherd (ed.), pp. 40-61.

⁸⁰ Malory uses various spellings for Avalon – i.e., Avylion, Avylon, Avylyon, Avilion. The variations of the spelling of 'Avalon' in *Le Morte Darthur* may also be due to scribal error. Malory uses multiple forms of other place names in his text, e.g. Canterbury can be found as Canterburye, Caunterbury, Caunterburye, Caunterbery, Caunterbyry, and Caunterbiry and Logres is presented variously as Logrys, Logris, Logres, Logrus, Logurs, and Logyrs. These are just three examples of how Malory uses variant spellings to refer to the same person or place. That 'Avilion' in the 'Tale of Balyn and Balan' episode refers to Avalon is supported by the fact that Malory's source for this tale, *Suite du Merlin*, also refers to Avalon in its Balin and Balan episode: M. Dominica Legge (ed.), *Le roman de Balain: a prose romance of the thirteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1942), pp. 4, 16.

unsheathe. She had heard that there were many 'passing good knights' at Arthur's court and came to see if any of Arthur's knights could free her from always carrying this sword. None of Arthur's knights can pull out the sword, save a prisoner Arthur had kept for several months. Despite the fact that Balyn had been imprisoned for killing one of Arthur's cousins, Balyn can unsheathe the sword. This episode serves as an introduction for the knight Balyn, who then kills the Lady of the Lake with that same sword.

Merlin reveals what is really going on with this unusual sword: the maiden's plight is a ruse to revenge her lover's death. Her brother had killed her lover, and so to get revenge against him, she went to Lady Lyle of Avilion for help. Lady Lyle gave her the enchanted sword, which she took to Arthur's court. It is unclear how this serves the maiden's purpose of revenge, as once Balyn has her sword she is never mentioned again. And yet when Balyn refuses to return the sword to the maiden, she curses him with the fate that he will kill his own brother with the sword. This comes to pass, for in 'The Tale of Balyn and Balan', the two brothers fight each other, both disguised, and slay the other, finding out the other's identity too late. Despite the confusion regarding the maiden's motives, and the fact that Lady Lyle of Avilion does not make a personal appearance in this episode, we find that the Lady of Avilion does possess magical items. However, here the arts of Avilion are turned to revenge and violence rather than healing.

The second episode takes readers to the Isle of Avalon.⁸¹ In this adventure, Sir Gareth rescues Lyonesse from the Red Knight who has kept her prisoner in her brother's castle. Gryngamour's castle is situated on the Isle of Avylon. In an elaborate ruse to continue to conceal Gareth's identity from the rest of the court, Lyonesse arranges for a tournament to be held in Avalon in her honour, during which Gareth will fight *incognito*. In this account of Avalon Malory acknowledges Avalon's role as a place of healing when

⁸¹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, in Shepherd (ed.), p. 212.

Lyonesse heals Gareth with a special ointment so that he can fight in the tournament against his brothers. Additionally, Malory may have been attributed Avalon to Gryngamour because, in other texts, Gryngamour, or Guiomar, is mentioned as one of Morgan le Fay's lovers,⁸² such as in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec and Enide*.⁸³

The third instance of Avalon in Malory is when Morgan and the other queens take Arthur away to Avalon. Strangely, here Avalon is referred to as a 'vale' instead of an island, unlike the previous times Avalon has featured in Malory. Here, at the end of the romance, Avalon does take on an air of mystery, especially since of the four women who take him away, three have been involved in magic earlier in the text (Morgan, Nynyve, and the Queen of North Galis – who often appears as Morgan's partner-in-crime). Malory is ambiguous about whether Arthur died and was buried in Glastonbury, or whether he passed on into another otherworldly realm. In this way, Malory holds in tension the two ways of approaching Avalon that we have already identified: the historical approach which associates Avalon with a real place, maybe Glastonbury, and the more imaginative approach which identifies Avalon as a realm of enchantment.

A non-Arthurian English romance which mentions Avalon is the English version of the romance of *Melusine*,⁸⁴ translated sometime in the late fifteenth century. Here Avalon is mentioned as the home of Pressyne, the fairy woman who married King Elynas of Albany. She had imposed a taboo which prohibited him from seeing her in childbed, which he, of course, later forgets. After he breaks his promise at the birth of her three daughters, she takes them to Avalon, where her sister lived (p. 12). Here Avalon is called 'the isle lost' because men could only find their way to it by great adventure, even if they had been to it before (p. 12-13). However, when we consider that the text as a whole is a

⁸² Lucy Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, 2nd edn (New York: Brut Franklin, 1960), pp. 60-73.

⁸³ Chrétien de Troyes, 'Erec and Enide', in Carleton W. Carroll (trans.) and William W. Kibler (ed.), *Arthurian Romances* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 61.

⁸⁴ Page numbers come from Donald (ed.), *Melusine*.

faithful translation of the French romance and that this reference to Avalon is also in its French source,⁸⁵ we can infer that the association between fairies and Avalon in *Melusine* comes from its French source rather than from the broader English tradition.

Morgan... the Fairy?

Thus far this chapter has considered only the island of Avalon itself. What about its most famous citizen, the Lady of Avalon herself? Morgan le Fay is the character in Arthurian material most often associated with Avalon besides Arthur himself.

Morgan's first literary appearance is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*,⁸⁶ discussed above. In this text Morgan is a healer, an educated enchantress who rules benignly over her island. It is not until she appears again in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* that she acquires her first lover, Guiomar.⁸⁷ Morgan's status as sister to Arthur and enmity with him is introduced in the thirteenth-century *Prose Lancelot*,⁸⁸ which is the version of Morgan that Malory later inherits.⁸⁹ Morgan as depicted in *Le Morte Darthur* has reached the height of her animosity towards the Round Table. Scholarship has tended to focus on Morgan's supposedly 'Celtic' origins or on Morgan's transformation from a beautiful healer to a woman bent on the destruction of Camelot. The first theme often compares the Morgan of Arthurian romances with Morrigan and Macha of Irish

⁸⁵ Morris (ed.), *A Bilingual Edition of Jean d'Arras's Mélusine or L'Histoire de Lusignan*, pp. 66-67.

⁸⁶ Loomis, 'Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses', p. 183; Maureen Fries, 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance', *Arthuriana* 4.1 (1994), 1.

⁸⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, 'Erec and Enide', in Carroll (trans.) and Kibler (ed.), *Arthurian Romances*, p. 61; Maureen Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition', in Thelma S. Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook* (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), p. 69.

⁸⁸ Fries, 'Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter Heroes', in Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, p. 69.

⁸⁹ Raymond H. Thompson, 'The First and Last Love: Morgan le Fay and Arthur', in Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, p. 332.

mythology and Modron of Welsh mythology,⁹⁰ or, alternatively, identifying unnamed maidens as Morgan based on shared characteristics.⁹¹ While some modern scholars also link Morgan with Modron,⁹² others are more sceptical of her links with Celtic mythology.⁹³

The development and transformation of Morgan's character requires less speculation than tracing ancient mythological origins. Maureen Fries⁹⁴ and Margaret Jennings⁹⁵ both chart the changes to Morgan's character across texts, demonstrating how different authors' additions accrued to create a vindictive, sexually voracious character whose plans to bring shame to the Round Table always fail. Cast as the villain, Morgan's plots not only fail, but backfire, instead increasing the honour of the Round Table knights as they outwit, withstand, or otherwise thwart her plans. The transformation of Morgan's character from 'good' to 'evil' occurs even within the narrative of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* itself;⁹⁶ her malice increases in intensity with each episode in which she appears, apart from the last. Instead of discussing Morgan's metamorphosis in terms of degeneration,⁹⁷ James Wade claims that Morgan's 'vacillation' between being a fairy in

⁹⁰ Loomis, 'Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses', *Speculum* 20.2 (1945), 183-203; Roger Sherman Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), p. 192; Loomis, 'The Legend of Arthur's Survival', in Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, pp. 65-66.

⁹¹ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Breuddwyd Rhonabwy and Later Arthurian Literature', in Rachel Bromwich, A. O. H. Jarman, Brynley F. Roberts (eds.), *The Arthur of the Welsh: the Arthurian legend in medieval Welsh literature* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 183-208.

⁹² Idris Llewelyn Foster, 'Culwch and Olwen and Rhonabwy's Dream', in Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, p. 42; Rachel Bromwich, 'The Welsh Triads', in Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, p. 49.

⁹³ Yoko Hemmi, 'Morgain la Fée's water connection', *Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature: The Japan Society for Medieval English Studies* 6 (1991), 19-36; Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 52 and 166, n. 43.

⁹⁴ Fries, 'From the Lady to the Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance', 1-18.

⁹⁵ Margaret Jennings, "'Heavens defend me from that Welsh Fairy!'" (*Merry Wives of Windsor*, V, v, 85) The Metamorphosis of Morgain La Fee in the Romances', in Glyn S. Burgess (ed.), *Court and Poet: Selected Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (Liverpool 1980)* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1981), pp. 197-205.

⁹⁶ Myra Olstead, 'Morgan le Fay in Malory's "Morte Darthur"', *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society* 19 (1967), 133-36.

⁹⁷ Thompson, 'The First and Last Love: Morgan le Fay and Arthur', in Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, pp. 331-44.

one text or a human in another is a product of *poiesis*,⁹⁸ in which Morgan's character shifts according to the needs of the author for that particular text. Wade uses Morgan as a case study in his exploration of what he calls the 'rationalization' of fairies: the literary practice of recasting fairy characters as human, but having obtained their supernatural powers through study or nigromancy, rather than having innate magical abilities.⁹⁹ By humanizing Morgan, medieval authors were able to further integrate her into the fictional Arthurian court and thus increase her role in Arthurian narratives, whereas as a purely otherworldly figure she features only in the periphery at Arthur's end.

Morgan is frequently referred to as 'le Fay', but is Morgan a fairy? Whether she is a fairy or human enchantress depends on the text and its tradition. The Middle English texts which explicitly include Morgan are *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (lines 2445-70),¹⁰⁰ *Le Morte Darthur*,¹⁰¹ and *Ywain and Gawain* (lines 1747-53),¹⁰² and, though she is unnamed in the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur*, it can be inferred that the woman depicted as Arthur's sister who takes him away to Avalon is Morgan (lines 3500-17).¹⁰³ In these texts Morgan is known for her healing arts (*Ywain and Gawain*), her magic (*SGGK*),¹⁰⁴ and her association with Avalon (*Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and *Le Morte Darthur*), but though Malory calls her 'le Faye' and the Gawain-poet calls her a 'goddes', Morgan is not actually a fairy. Both texts describe how she acquired her magical skills:

'And the third syster, Morgan le Fey, was put to scole in a nunnery, and ther she lerned so moche that she was a grete clerke of nygromancye'

⁹⁸ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 21.

⁹⁹ Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', in Andrew Malcolm and Ronald Waldron (eds.), *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), pp. 207-300.

¹⁰¹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, in Shepherd (ed.), pp. 5-6, 32, 51-52, 82, 84-96, 154-55, 268-69, 274, 307, 311, 334, 357, 364, 372, 384-85, 463, 467, 688-89.

¹⁰² Mary Flowers Braswell (ed.), *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

¹⁰³ Benson, ed., 'Stanzaic Morte Arthur', in Benson (ed.), *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan's hatred for Guinevere is also revealed at the end of 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', in Malcolm and Waldron (eds.), *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, lines 2459-62.

(*Le Morte Darthur*, pp. 5-6)

purȝ myȝt of Morgne la Faye, þat in my hous lenges,
 And koyntyse of clergie, bi craftes wel lerned –
 Þe maystrés of Merlyn mony ho hatz taken,
 For ho hatz dalt drwry ful dere sumtyme
 With þat conable klerk...

(SGGK, lines 2446-50)

Morgan learned her magic from others; in these texts, at least, Morgan is not inherently a fairy but is called 'le fay' in the sense that she is 'like a fairy' due to her success in her studies in both the liberal arts and in magic.¹⁰⁵ In Malory especially, Morgan's human context is extensive: not only is she Arthur's half-sister, but her parents are the Duke of Tyntagil and Igrayne; she has two sisters who are married (Morgause to King Lot, Elayne to King Nentres); a husband, Uryens; a son, Uwayne; and a lover, Accolon.¹⁰⁶ Just like Melior in *Partonope of Blois* and Loosepaine/Lillias in *Eger and Grime* discussed in Chapter Three, once the fairy-like woman is given a human context, she is no longer a fairy.

This is further emphasised by the fact that Morgan never appears without Arthur in the English tradition. In contrast, the French texts *Ogier le Dannois* and *Floriant et Florete* are non-Arthurian texts which both depict Morgan as a fairy. Morgan le Fay plays a much more active role in French romances, often appearing as a fairy mistress to characters such as Ogier the Dane, Guiomar, Renoart, and others.¹⁰⁷ But in the English tradition, in which she is always related to Arthur and sometimes a member of his court, Morgan is a human enchantress. Like Avalon, whether Morgan is depicted as a fairy or not depends on which tradition is using her: in the English tradition, she is not a fairy because neither is Avalon home to fairies nor is her human brother Arthur a fairy; but in

¹⁰⁵ Laurence Harf-Lancner, 'Fairy Godmothers and Fairy Lovers', in Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, pp. 143-44.

¹⁰⁶ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, in Shepherd (ed.), pp. 5-6, 32, 51-52, 82, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance*, pp. 49-80; Patch, 261-62; Wade, *Fairies in medieval romance*, pp. 19, 21.

the French tradition, both Avalon and Morgan are given poetic license to become associated with fairies, or not, as the author chooses.

This chapter has examined the development of Avalon in England, starting with its earliest recorded appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, surveying both chronicles and romances until reaching the late fifteenth-century romances *Le Morte Darthur* and *Melusine*. Having surveyed these texts, we can now answer the question: Has Avalon *always* been associated with fairies?

This examination demonstrates that Avalon, for the most part, was not associated with fairies in the English tradition. Avalon was too much identified with a real, Christian site (which had its fairies driven away by St Collen) and too entangled in politics to be a home of fairies. Henry II sponsored the 'discovery' of Arthur's tomb to dismiss the myths that Arthur was sojourning in a far off, quasi-fairy land: Arthur was dead, Avalon was Glastonbury, and Arthur would not be coming back. Morgan 'le Fay' is also less 'fairy' and more human in the English tradition: as romance redefines her as half-sister to Arthur through their mother Igrayne it also humanizes her, placing her in a human context. There may have been room for fairies in the Arthurian romances, such as Launfal's fairy mistress, but political and religious appropriations of the Arthurian myth moved Avalon and Morgan in the English tradition far beyond the reach of Fairy.

CONCLUSION

One observation in the previous chapter was that Avalon is continually populated with fairies in secondary criticism of medieval texts, even though it is only rarely cast as Faerie in medieval English texts themselves. This is partly due to the tendency to assume any Celtic Otherworld is Faerie. Byrne criticises the trend in scholarship that implies a singularity of otherworld realms when it treats Otherworld narratives, and especially the use of ‘Celtic’ as a catch-all term for anything supernatural.¹ This appears to be the case with scholarship on Avalon,² as well as with fairies in general. We are left with the assumption that Faerie and Avalon are the same simply because both are sometimes portrayed as a Celtic paradise. Such reasoning overlooks the fact that there are ‘Otherworlds’ in Celtic literature that are neither Faerie nor Avalon, such as the various islands visited in the *Immram Brain* (The Voyage of Bran),³ including the Island of Women,⁴ similar to the island otherworld in *Echtrae Chonnlai*.⁵ It is thus possible for Avalon and Faerie to exist as independent locations both in literature and in the medieval imagination. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, enough differences exist between Avalon and Faerie – namely, the general absence of fairies in Avalon – to show that they are not one and the same.

¹ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, pp. 12-13; Patrick Sims-Williams, ‘The Visionary Celt: The Construction of an Ethnic Preconception’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 11 (1986), 71-96.

² Roger Sherman Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927). 190; Ashe, “‘A Certain Very Ancient Book’: Traces of an Arthurian Source in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History*”, *Speculum* 56.2 (1981), 315; Fries, ‘Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter Heroes’, in Fenster (ed.), *Arthurian Women: A Casebook*, p. 69.

³ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, pp. 36-38, 47-48; Séamus Mac Mathúna (ed.), *Immram Brain: Bran’s Journey to the Land of Women* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985).

⁴ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, p. 56.

⁵ Byrne, *The Otherworlds of Medieval Insular Literature*, pp. 48-49; Kim McCone (ed.), *Echtrae Chonnlai and the beginnings of vernacular narrative writing in Ireland: a critical edition with introduction, notes, bibliography, and vocabulary* (Maynooth: Department of Old and Middle Irish, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2000), pp. 121-23.

The 'myth-hunting' approach that supposes Avalon to be Faerie and identifies Morgan le Fay, or fairies generally, with Welsh or Irish goddesses neglects how medieval authors used 'Celtic' or otherwise supernatural material in their texts to serve the narrative at hand. As Ian Lovecy⁶ points out, the trend in scholarship that seeks to identify mythological motifs and themes in medieval romance often obscures the allure the supernatural had for medieval authors in the first place, and it also often diminishes the creativity with which they created new stories from old tales. As my thesis demonstrates, Avalon, Faerie, and fairies are used in a multitude of ways in Middle English literature. Far from being a motif that has a consistent meaning across texts, fairy was used to explore questions of society and faith ranging from the prerequisites for salvation, to the limits of gender orthodoxy, to fears about the permanence of death, and more.

When writing about medieval Celtic literature, Lovecy notes that the supernatural often 'performs the same function that bug-eyed monsters, Daleks, warp motion and curiously-inhabited planets perform in the fantasies of the modern age': 'fairy' can likewise be seen to do for medieval audiences some of the things that science-fiction literature does for modern ones.⁷ It serves as an imaginative arena in which to play out 'thought-experiments'⁸ that explore anxieties and uncomfortable concepts at a safe remove from reality. Not only does the fantastic make for a good story, but the supernatural, particularly 'fairy', is *different* enough from reality that authors and audiences can ask questions and create situations that might cause discomfort in a more realistic narrative. At the same time, the fairies in these texts are *similar* enough to humans that they can interact with human society. By using fairy to explore the unknowns of faith, gender, and death, medieval authors and audiences were able to

⁶ Ian Lovecy, 'Exploding the myth of the Celtic myth: a new appraisal of the Celtic background of Arthurian Romance', *Reading Medieval Studies* 7 (1981), 14.

⁷ Lovecy, 'Exploding the myth of the Celtic myth: a new appraisal of the Celtic background of Arthurian Romance', 8.

⁸ Ursula K. Le Guin, 'Introduction', in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1979), p. xii.

describe the concerns of their present reality. The concept of ‘fairy’ provided a morally ambiguous supernatural with which English writers and audiences could test their uncertainties, and, maybe, find some answers.

One such uncertainty was the relationship – if any – that fairies had with demons. The first chapter of this thesis demonstrated that enough fundamental differences exist between demons and the fairies in *Melusine* that the categories remained distinct in the medieval imagination. Instead of being portrayed as demonic, I found that the traits fairies share with humans have been emphasised in the text. The fairies in *Melusine* have permanent physical, albeit supernatural, bodies – rather than the temporary bodies of air that medieval theologians believed demons and angels could assume. Melusine desires and works for spiritual rewards from the Church and this desire alone is a remarkable contrast to that of demons who were believed to be too prideful to ask for God’s mercy.

The great lengths with which the narrator takes to humanize Melusine – highlighting her human paternity, demonstrating her amiable relationship with the Christian church, casting her in courtly and human terms – show that Melusine is intended to be an ambiguous character. In the medieval imagination, fairies, like humans, are neither wholly good nor wholly evil. Humans sin and make mistakes; they also can repent and lead holy lives, as other romances about full-blooded humans, such as *Guy of Warwick* and *Sir Isumbras*, demonstrate. And so the fairies in *Melusine* prefer this ‘accident- and error-prone humanity’⁹ to society among their own kind. Though Lewis describes medieval fairies as being liberated from the ‘responsibilities, shames, scruples, and melancholy of Man’,¹⁰ that the fairies Pressyne and Melusine so desired to remain in human society, lamenting their estrangement from it, suggests that such responsibilities, shames, scruples, and melancholy are better than fairy society, despite whatever promises

⁹ Kelly, ‘The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances’, 41.

¹⁰ Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, p. 134.

of wealth and immortality fairy has to offer. For humanity, in its flawed and fallen state, also has the opportunity for grace and reconciliation.

It is because of this human mortality that Melusine desires to join human society. The qualities of the human soul discussed in this chapter reveal that although the human soul is eternal, mortality is essential for salvation. In a Christian worldview, the soul's salvation is most important of all, and this perspective is made evident in the romance *Melusine*. As attractive as immortality, supernatural abilities, unending wealth, and unsurpassed beauty might be – attributes highly valued in the romance genre – concern for the soul overrides all material and earthly desires. This Christian perspective is underscored in *Melusine* as Melusine endeavours to achieve salvation through assimilation into human, and mortal, society. Despite Nolan's conclusion that 'any attempts in the romance to "humanize" Mélusine are thus subverted by powerful religious and folk traditions which fear and abhor such demonic creatures',¹¹ I have shown that the inverse is true. Far from being demonic, Melusine is half-human, half-fairy, her fairy nature being something quite different from the idea of the medieval demon, not least because she longs someday to become fully human.

Medieval authors and audiences also tested their uncertainties about gender roles by using fairies in romances. This thesis has examined the ways that fairies use control, demonstrating that although fairies do, for the most part, still exercise 'gendered' control (men wield control through physical force and activity; women exert control through manipulation), they do so in an exaggerated manner. Although female fairies exercise more control than mortal women, they are still depicted as 'feminine' in human terms. But by initiating sex, becoming patrons, and silencing their human partners, female fairies

¹¹ Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of Melusine*, p. 166.

create an imbalanced relationship with their human lovers that gives fairies the dominant role.

An alternative use of fairy was to have human characters act in ways that see them 'perform fairy': particularly human female characters who exercise magic and personal agency in ways that make them appear to be fairies. That female fairy characters retain their dominance over their human lovers while the human female characters who merely 'perform' fairy do not demonstrates the different roles that these characters play in medieval literature. If pulling the curtain on their 'fairy performance' returns human women to gender orthodoxy, then fairy women who retain their agency and mastery might not allay male readers' fears about the danger of empowered women. As suggested in Chapter Two, authors use female fairy characters to address male anxieties about patronage and sexuality, but female fairies are not as easily dismissed and returned to gender orthodoxy as their human female counterparts.

The questions Schultz asks in his study on courtly literature can also be applied to the motivations behind medieval authors' use of fairy. Schultz asks why noblemen would put up with and support a literature in which men are subordinate to women,¹² with the male lover held in thrall to the beloved. Schultz suggests that the main consolation for male audiences is found in the very fact that these texts are works of fiction.¹³ By appealing to the supernatural when creating their female characters, medieval authors could create powerful, magical women who retain their dominance through the simple virtue of being fairies.¹⁴ Medieval authors used female fairies such as Dame Tryamour and the Fairy Queen to explore questions of gender roles even further than is possible with fairy-like characters, such as Melior or Loosepaine/Lillias. Both Partonope and

¹² Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, pp. 173-88.

¹³ Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, pp. 184.

¹⁴ Roberta L. Krueger, 'Questions of gender in Old French courtly romance', in Krueger (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, p. 143.

Grime eventually assume mastery over their female partners, and yet neither Launfal nor Thomas ever achieves a position of dominance over his fairy mistress. With fairy mistresses authors can ask, 'What happens when a woman does *not* return to gender orthodoxy?' without appearing to support such gender reversal, while simultaneously appealing to the women in the audience¹⁵ who probably appreciated the depiction of a powerful woman, even if she were a fairy.

Similarly, using Faerie in romance allowed medieval authors and audiences to address anxieties about death and the afterlife. By investigating Faerie alongside Christian Otherworlds, I show that each 'Otherworld' serves a different purpose, even the fictional Faerie. Though Faerie shares qualities with all four of the Christian Otherworlds – beauty and bliss with Heaven and Paradise, torment and danger with Hell, transition and temporariness with Purgatory – Faerie in Middle English romance is a secular, not spiritual, paradise, which occupies a liminal space in the medieval imagination. Faerie is a place where humans can go and return again, so it is not an afterlife, but it is also adjacent to the Christian Otherworlds, which are only accessible after death. The vagueness and indefinableness of Faerie provide writers with opportunities to create situations in which they can explore anxieties about death – about what happens to people who die suddenly without time to prepare for their deaths, what the afterlife is like, how one gets there, and so on – while still creating a text that is entertaining and exciting to a secular audience.

This study has shown what we can uncover about the medieval English imagination through its use of fairy in Middle English texts. Using fairy enabled medieval English authors and audiences to perform various 'thought-experiments' to test different norms in their society. By examining how fairy was used in Middle English romance, we

¹⁵ Judith Weiss and Flora Alexander convincingly argue that male authors were mindful also of their female audience: see, Weiss, 'The power and the weakness of women in Anglo-Norman Romance', in Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, p. 19; and Alexander, 'Women as lovers in early English romance', in Meale (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, pp. 37-38.

can discover what anxieties were on the medieval mind and the textual means by which authors and audiences dealt with material concerns about faith, gender, power, and death. As mentioned in the introduction, Wade's broad survey of fairies in medieval European literature has left room for other 'localized' studies of fairy in medieval romance. Fairies in medieval French literature have been more extensively studied,¹⁶ though few of these studies are available in English. There is more research to be done on fairy in medieval Iberian romance, or German, or Italian. The ways fairy is used in the medieval literatures of other countries and languages outside of Britain would supplement Wade's general survey and this thesis on the medieval English fairy in romance.

¹⁶ Notably Laurence Harf-Lancner's works : *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Melusine: la naissance des fées* (Genève: Slatkine, 1984) and *Le monde des fées dans l'occident médiéval* (Paris: Hachette littératures, 2003).

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