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Melusine and Purgatorial Punishment:

The Changing Nature of Fays

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ABSTRACT

Fairies have frequently been interpreted as Other within medieval romances, moving between the human and otherworld, between shifting notions of morality and power and sometimes demonstrating a complex relationship to Christian ideals. Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* marks the beginning of a development in the power of fairies within romance in which some magical women's actions become more clearly integrated into a Christian model of sin and punishment. They begin to deliver punishments that accord more directly with the nature of the crime committed and which are often enacted with specific reference to God and sin. This chapter examines Presine from Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*, Morgan le Fay and Nymue from Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur,* and Tryamour from *Sir Launfal* by Thomas Chestre as examples of these reimagined fairies, comparing these figures with their sources to establish the specific authorial changes made in the light of a broader reconsideration of the role of fairies within romance.

KEYWORDS: Literature – Prose, Literature – Verse, British Isles, France (with Switzerland), 15 th century; Romance, Fairy, Christianity

Laurence Harf-Lancner divided medieval romances involving fairies into two distinct categories: *conte mélusinien* and *conte morganien,* based on the two eponymous fairies Morgan le Fay and Melusine.[1] Michael Twomey notes that the main difference between these two types of romance is in the attitude of the fairy towards her human love interest: "in 'Melusinian' narratives the fay's desire for a human male is beneficent, whereas in the 'Morganien' narratives the fay's desire is dangerous and destructive."[2] However, these terms belie the inconsistency of the two fays themselves within the various works in which

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[1] Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine ou la naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984).

[2] Michael W. Twomey, "Morgain la Fée in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: From Troy to Camelot," in *Text and Intertext in Medieval Arthurian Literature*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 103.

they appear and an exploration of these two fairy types, and of magical women within romance more broadly, shows that this division is complicated, as an assumption of consistency of character and motivation is not necessarily applicable to these complex figures. Magical women in romance tend to defy such a straightforward categorization; a distinction between characters based on a single attribute blurs the impacts that particular authors, periods, and literary developments have on their presentation. The same characters can appear differently depending on the context; characters shift and develop across time, languages and texts.. Furthermore, they can be considered in terms other than that of their attitudes to lovers; their fairy natures exist in conjunction with roles such as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and rulers. Their motivations are more complicated and diverse than a binary in terms of romantic relationships would suggest; indeed, in a number of later romances, fairy women sometimes function as agents of punishment within a Christian context, thus acting with a motivation separate from (although potentially related to) their romantic relationships. These punishments are not generally directed at their male lovers and would therefore indicate additional nuances within the representation of these characters not explained by Harf-Lancner's division.

Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* heralds a change in depictions of the nature of fairy women, with Presine assuming the role of punisher in relation to her daughters' sins. However, the framing of the role of fairies within a Christian context seems the result of a more gradual Christian appropriation of fairy women within the romances over time. Earlier romances were often content to imagine the power of the fairies as merely Other in nature; as James Wade notes they are, "beings neither angelic nor demonic, fairies constitute the ambiguous supernatural," and Helen Cooper remarks, "Although they were sometimes given a place in

the divinely created order of beings, fairies sit very uneasily with a Christian context, and tend to be made the subject of works whose ideologies are oblique to orthodox piety."[3] Thus these figures are not contained within a straightforward Christian conception of good and evil, at least in earlier iterations.

Indeed, their role and nature is questionable and in earlier works these fairies are often less amenable to Christian explication. For example, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* of c.1150, Morgan le Fay is portrayed as a mysterious goddess-like figure, the head of a group of sisters who inhabit an island:

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.

[The one who is first among them has greater skill in healing, as her beauty

surpasses that of her 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].[4]

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[3] James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1; Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173.

[4] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin: Vita Merlini*, trans. Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), 100-1.

Similarly, in the *Draco Normannicus* of Étienne de Rouen, written between 1167 and 1170, the author states that

>   Saucius Arturus petit herbas inde sororis;
>
>   Avallonis eas insula sacra tenet.
>
>   Suscipit hic fratrem Morganis nympha perhennis,
>
>   Curat, alit, refovet, perpetuumque facit.

>   [the wounded Arthur seeks after the herbs of his sister; these the sacred isle of Avallon contains. Here the immortal fay Morgan receives her brother, attends, nourishes, restores, and renders him eternal].[5]

These early iterations of Morgan le Fay depict a figure who is immortal and inhabits a space that is separate to the world of the mortal characters of the text. In these examples fairies are associated with healing, but also shapeshift; their powers do not seem to accord specifically with a Christian framework and they do not appear in the role of punishers at this juncture. The immortal aspect of Avalon seems to be unrelated to Christian ideas of heaven, hell and eternity, perhaps instead drawing on   Celtic myth, as several critics have

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[5] Roger Sherman Loomis, "King Arthur and the Antipodes," *Modern Philology* 38 (1941): 290, n.7. Cf. Étienne de Rouen, *Le Dragon Normand et autres poèmes d'Étienne de Rouen*, ed. M.H. Ormot (Rouen: Société de l'histoire de Normandie, 1884), 112, ll.1161-4.

commented, Maureen Fries, for instance, stating that it is a "typical Celtic Otherworld."[6] Fairy power is not Christian power at this point, and where fairies do take action to help or punish mortals, this appears to be as a result of their own inclination rather than as part of a divine plan.

However, later romances sought to incorporate fairies more clearly within a Christian context and therefore approach their Otherness more skeptically. The author of the thirteenth century French *Lancelot*, part of the Vulgate Cycle, notes that it is fools who refer to Morgan le Fay as "la dieuesse" [the goddess].[7] As Cooper notes, "although fairies might perhaps exist, goddesses, in a Christian world, do not."[8] The author of the *Lancelot* is dismissive of the earlier power attributed to fairies and gives his magical characters distinct origins for their abilities. Indeed, the two principal magical women of the Vulgate Cycle, Morgan le Fay and the Lady of the Lake, have both acquired their magic from the same source: their relationship with Merlin.[9]

Merlin's powers are placed in a specifically Christian context in this work which then means that the women's powers can ascribed to a Christian source. Although he is

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[6] Maureen Fries, "Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition," in *Popular Arthurian Traditions*, ed. Sally K. Slocum (Madison, WI: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1992), 5-17, at 13. Cf. Ferdinand Lot, "Nouvelles études sur le cycle Arthurien: Une source de la *Vita Merlini*, les *Etymologiae* d'Isidore de Séville," *Romania* 45 (1919) 1-22, at p. 14; Gertrud Schoepperle Loomis, "Arthur in Avalon and the Banshee," in *Vassar Mediaeval Studies,* ed. Christabel Forsyth Fiske (New Haven, 1923), 3-25.

[7] Alexandre Micha, ed., *Lancelot: Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siècle*, vol. 1 (Geneva: Droz, 1978-83), 275. Samuel N. Rosenberg, trans., "Lancelot, part III," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 2 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 305.

[8] Cooper, *English Romance in Time,* 186.

[9] Micha, *Lancelot*, I, 301; Rosenberg, "Lancelot, part III," 311..

described as the son of an incubus in earlier works such as the *Historia regum Brittaniae* of c.1155,[10] the Vulgate Cycle is based on Robert de Boron's *Merlin,* which "drew upon Christian tradition by making the sire a devil in hell, motivated not merely by sexual desire but by a complicated plot to circumvent the mother's natural goodness and piety to create the Antichrist."[11] The plan is undermined by Merlin's baptism, but his powers are still ascribed to his demonic parentage (and the power of God). The magical women of the Vulgate Cycle therefore possess arcane knowledge and magical powers that derive from a Christian rather than otherworldly source. Thus, the process of reconsideration of the nature of fairy and an explanation of their otherworldly power is already underway before the creation of the *Melusine* texts. With a Christian basis for their power, their actions are included within a Christian morality much like the human characters, rather than being part of a separate order of magic and morality.

As Christian figures enacting punishment on behalf of God, these fairy women become part of a Christian scheme of salvation. However, establishing what the authors of romances may have drawn from contemporary Christian ideas of hell and purgatory is complicated by the diverse nature of the works. As Helen Cooper has noted, "the romances themselves display a multiplicity of angles on Christianity. It is indeed misleading to speak of 'Christianity' as a single entity in this context ... because the various texts connect with it

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[10] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of the De gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae)*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 137-8.

[11] Peter H. Goodrich, "The Erotic Merlin," *Arthuriana* 10 (2000): 97.

in so many different ways."[12] Indeed, notions of hell and purgatory[13] developed across the

medieval period and were hugely influential on literature and art, generating various

works on visions of hell and some specific descriptions of the punishments that might

await.[14] Jacques le Goff's exploration of the development of the idea of purgatory in the

twelfth and thirteenth centuries, noted that it "was an elaboration of the Christian belief

that certain sins could under certain conditions be redeemed after death" and that "each

soul must spend a greater or lesser time in Purgatory depending on the gravity of the sins

that must be expiated".[15] Katherine Clarke suggested that "earlier medieval conceptions of

'purgatorial punishments' and 'purgatorial fire' matured into a sense of a fixed location for

purgatory as the *limus* of heaven, where elect souls resided between physical death and the

day of the Last Judgment. In the schools and in popular tales and sermons, clerics

developed and disseminated ideas about a tangible, spatial purgatory that took hold in the

medieval imagination."[16] This tangible purgatory with its fiery punishments as well as hell

and the tortures inflicted there resonate with the notion of sin and punishment in the

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[12] Helen Cooper, "Introduction," in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Rosalind Field, Phillipa Hardman, and Michelle Sweeney (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), xiii-xxi, xv.

[13] Helen Phillips notes that purgatory could be seen as a period of time spent in hell, or part of hell rather than as a separate space. "Introduction," in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*, ed. Helen Philips (Lancaster Modern Spelling Texts, 1988), 1-21, 4.

[14] See Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Medieval Bibliographies, 1993).

[15] Jacques le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 67, 70.

[16] Katherine Clarke, "Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 15.2 (2007): 169-203, at 177.

works discussed in this chapter. There are specific points of correspondence between the imagery used in the punishment of particular sins, especially *luxuria*, but also in the way that some of the punishments are tied very directly to a specific sin or to a specific duration of time, suggesting an atonement for the sin identified.

Further to the more general incorporation of fairies into a Christian reconception of magic as part of a wider gift from God, the nature of fairies' power is developed further in the French *Melusine* texts and later English romancesas the fays in these works are able to use their powers to identify and punish sin. These punishments include a Christianized purgatorial language relating to punishments or make use of imagery that draws on punishments for sin. This change is particularly apparent through the modifications that the authors make to their sources, which function as intentional developments in the roles of these fairy women. In particular, Malory's *Morte Darthur* reframes both Morgan le Fay and Nymue within this role as agents of punishment, in a development of their roles in the sources, and Tryamour in *Sir Laufal* by Thomas Chestre similarly develops from her earlier incarnations.

In terms of the progression and influence of these works, the legend of Melusine was "Known from folklore"[17] as Jean-Jacques Vincensini notes, but became more widely popular after d'Arras and Couldrette's versions were produced in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. These romances were evidently read in England, as an English translation of the text was written in about 1500,[18] and there is, therefore, the prospect

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[17] Jean-Jacques Vincensini, foreword to *A Bilingual Edition of Jean D'Arras's Mélusine or L'Histoire De Lusignan*, *by Jean d'Arras*, trans. Matthew W. Morris (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), xiii. Hereafter, Morris.

[18] A. K. Donald, ed., *Melusine*, EETS ES 68 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895).

that *Melusine* had an impact on the development of fairies in later English romances. Given

that Melusine cannot be proven as a direct source of the romances discussed, Christine

Rauer's concept of analogues is particularly useful in discussion of this nature as the works

do "present parallels,"[19]. *Sir Launfal* was written in the late fourteenth to early fifteenth

century, surviving in a fifteenth-century manuscript, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.

ii, but was based on Marie De France's *Lanval* of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century

and the middle English *Sir Landevale* from the fourteenth century.[20] Sir Thomas Malory's

Le Morte Darthur was composed in the mid to late fifteenth century and exists in a printed

edition produced in 1485 by William Caxton and the Winchester Manuscript (London,

British Library, Ms Additional 59678); Malory drew on a range of sources to produce his

work, including a number of French romances. According to Croft, Malory may have had

access to a "single-volume compilation," given his repeated references to a mysterious

"Freynshe booke" when speaking of his sources.[21] However, as Terence McCarthy has

pointed out, often "he claims to be borrowing when he is being original" in order to add

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[19] Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), 10. According to Rauer, a source is a text which "presents distinctive parallels with the target text's phraseology and/or imagery," "demonstrably predates the target text," and "demonstrably circulated in the same historical and literary context as the target text." An analogue "presents parallels with the target text's phraseology and/or imagery," "cannot be shown to predate the target text; it is determined by a late or undetermined date of composition," and "cannot be shown to have circulated in the same historical and literary context as the target text; it is characterized by a different or undetermined historical and literary background."

[20] Both works available in: A. J. Bliss, ed., *Sir Launfal* (London: Nelson, 1960).

[21] Thomas H. Crofts, *Malory's Contemporary Audience: The Social Reading of Romance in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 17.

auctoritas to his narrative.[22] Thus these English texts are part of wider textual tradition and network of source texts, but are notable, in their divergence from the source material in relation to the changes made in the roles of the fairy women. These alterations present a consistent development from the incorporation of fairy power into a Christian structure seen in the French romances, but does also suggest a broader change in fairies, stemming from d'Arras' *Mélusine*.

Despite this reconfiguration of the nature of fairies, Jean d'Arras clearly also sought to position his characters within ongoing traditions of romance fairies. He followed works such as the *Vita Merlini* and Vulgate Cycle in his reference to Avalon as the natural environment of his fays; Presine takes her three daughters to Avalon, a magical island, "also called the Lost Isle, because none could ever find their way back to it, no matter how many times they'd been there, except by chance," when she can no longer live with her husband, [23] Morgan le Fay's early appearance in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* depicts her as one of eight sisters who rule over Avalon, and her accompaniment of a dying Arthur to Avalon is one of the points of consistency across works in an otherwise multifaceted figure. The other fairy figures discussed in this chapter are similarly incorporated into this wider fairy tradition through their links to Avalon. In the *Morte Darthur*, Nymue is one of the women who goes to Avalon with Morgan le Fay and Arthur at the end of the text, and although *Sir Launfal* gives Olyran as Tryamour's kingdom, a "jolif

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[22] Terence McCarthy, "Malory and his Sources," in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1996), 78.

[23] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 67.

ile,"[24] other versions of the Lanval story give Avalon as the source and destination of the fay.[25] These references to Avalon demonstrate the Otherness exemplified by the fairies and the level of their power. Corinne Saunders has noted that "This parallel world [is] neither demonic nor divine," and that while theologians explained fairies as "demons, fallen angels who now inhabited the space between heaven and earth, with the power to tempt and harm," the romances were "more ambivalent about the powers of such creatures."[26] Thus the mentions of Avalon across the works under discussion do not align the characters with a particular moral inclination, but these references do serve to remind the reader of the literary nexus within which these figures have evolved and act as a reminder of the potential power of fairies.

As d'Arras' text develops, his intended positioning of the actions of his fays becomes clearer. The Christian framing of the punishment by fairies is initially demonstrated in the way in which Melusine's punishment by Presine is described. Melusine has imprisoned her father in retribution for his broken promise and her mother's suffering as a result of this betrayal. As a punishment for Melusine's actions, Presine decrees that Melusine will become a serpent below the waist each Saturday:

Mais se tu treuves homme qui te veuille prendre a espouse, que il te

convenance que jamais le samedy ne te verra, non qu'il te descuevre, ne ne le

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[24] Thomas Chestre, "Sir Launfal," in *Middle English Romances*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 217, l. 1022. Hereafter, Shepherd.

[25] Shepherd, "Sir Launfal" in *Middle English Romances,* 198, n.7.

[26] Corinne Saunders, "Magic and Christianity," in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, 84-101, at 86.

die a personne, tu vivras cours naturel comme femme naturelle, et mourras

naturelment . . . Et se tu es dessevree de ton mary, saiches que retourneras

ou tourment de devant, sans fin, tant que le Hault Juge tendra son siege.

[But if you can find a man who will be willing to take you for his wife and will

promise to never look upon you on Saturday - or if he should come upon you

on that day and say nothing about it to anyone - you will live out the course

of a normal life like a mortal woman and will die a natural death . . . And you

may be certain that if your husband fails you, you will return to your

previous torment without respite until that day that the Great Arbiter comes

to sit in judgement.] [27]

The language of this description, including the specific idea that this "torment" will only

continue until Judgement Day, indicates that Presine is working within the limitations of

Christian punishment. Presine gives Melusine specific details about the length of her

punishment and its conclusion, indicating the purgatorial nature of her intentions. At the

end of Melusine's life she will have expiated her sin; however, this punishment may be

extended to Judgement Day, the traditional end of purgatorial torment. D'Arras is careful to

contextualise the power of the fairies within a specific Christian framework, noting "L'en

treuve tant des merveilles, selon commune estimacion, et si nouvelles que humain

entendement est contraint de dire que les jugemens de Dieu sont abisme sans fons et sans

rive, et sont ses choses merveilleuses" [And in fact, so many things are found that are

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[27] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 70-1.

commonly considered extraordinary and astonishing that the human mind is forced to

admit that the judgements of God are indeed unfathomable abysses.][28] He additionally

refers to the religious context suggested in similar stories by Gervase of Tilbury: "Et dit le

dit Gervaise qu'il creoit que ce soit par aucuns meffaiz miseres que nulz n'en a

congnoissance fors lui" [That same Gervais says also that he believes it was because of

some misdeeds unknown to the world which displeased God that He secretly punished

them with these afflictions, such that none have knowledge of it but He.][29] Thus Presine's

punishment of Melusine is contained within the broader sense of a punishment from God ;

God is here presented as all-knowing and his agent, Presine, is able to formulate a fitting

punishment for Melusine, such as the "unfathomable" nature of punishment from God

allows.

The punishment itself is also suffused with Christian connotations. Melusine's

partial submersion in a bathtub at the point of the discovery by Raymondin and the split of

her human and serpent halves resonates with a similar punishment enacted by Morgan le

Fay in an episode in Malory's *Morte Darthur.* In both instances, a woman appears in a split

form, punished below the waist by a fairy. Both works could be drawing on a well-

developed tradition of sinners being partially immersed in water, to a specific point

depending on the nature of the transgression, as a penance, drawing on Christian works

describing hell and purgatory. Although the water itself does not form part of the

punishment in d'Arras's *Melusine*, Melusine's discovery by Raymondin within a bath is the

key image of Melusine that represents her Saturday punishment. There are clear

[28] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 52-3.

[29] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 55-6.

correlations here between this immersion in water, the idea of baptism, and the fiery

immersion that forms part of purgatory. As Helen Phillips has noted, "[p]urgatory, like

baptism, cleansed the soul and helped it to escape Satan and his demons (Matt. 3.11 speaks

of a baptism of water and a baptism of fire)."[30]

In Malory's *Morte Darthur,* this correspondence is all the more resonant given that

Malory makes changes to his source material at this juncture. The narrative describes "a

dolorous lady" imprisoned in a tower "that hath bene there in paynes many wyntyrs and

dayes, for ever she boyleth in scaldyng watir."[31] Lancelot discovers that she has been

placed there by Morgan le Fay and her confederate, the Queen of North Galys, "bycause she

was called the fayryst lady of that contrey."[32] As Molly Martin has noted, the woman

becomes "an image not of threateningly superior beauty, but of vulnerability and inactivity.

Though still a spectacle, the boiling woman highlights her captors' relative power and

apparently does not diminish their beauty as she had previously."[33] This power indicates

the fairies' and the woman's relative statuses within the text in terms of the nature of the

punishment; the woman is punished through both the pain inflicted, but also through her

removal from the chivalric world. This alternate space of punishment would also seem to

resonate with the spatial and time-specific nature of purgatory.

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[30] Philips, "Introduction," 4.

[31] Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P.J.C. Field, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 791.

[32] Malory, *Works,* 792.

[33] Molly Martin, *Vision and Gender in Malory's* Morte Darthur (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 157.

There are two similar instances that Malory may have drawn upon from his French

sources. The Prose *Tristan* gives this account in the same context, drawing on its source in

the Vulgate *Lancelot*, but Morgan is not involved in this punishment in this version; it is, in

fact, God who subjects the woman to "agony and torment" from which she is not permitted

to escape, "il ne s'est pas encore vengiés d'un grant pechié que je fis ja" [for He has not yet

avenged himself of a great sin I committed.][34] The second instance in the *Lancelot* occurs in

an entirely different section of the text, in which Morgan subjects a woman who is her rival

in love to a brutal punishment: "ele le mist en une tant felenesse chartre que il li estoit avis

de jor et de nuit qu'ele fust en glace des les pies jusqu'a la çainture, en amont sambloit

qu'ele fust en feu ardant" [she put her into a harsh prison, where she had the feeling day

and night that she was standing in ice from the waist down and in a blazing fire above.][35]

Malory may have combined these two instances, but it is also possible that he was

influenced by the wider iconographic significance of this scene, potentially drawing on

Christian depictions of punishments in hell.

Although Myra Olstead has noted that the imprisonment of the woman in scalding

water is "a motif that folklorists and Arthurian scholars recognize as unusual, if not, in fact,

unique",[36] both Olstead and Lucy Paton have noted another instance of Morgan le Fay

enacting a similar punishment which suggests that Malory's episode is notthe only

[34] Micha, *Lancelot: Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siècle*, II, p. 374; Roberta L. Krueger, trans., "Lancelot, part IV," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 3 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 99.

[35] Micha, *Lancelot: Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siècle*, vol. I, 276; Samuel N. Rosenberg, trans. "Lancelot, part III," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 2 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 305.

[36] Myra Olstead, "Lancelot at the Grail Castle," *Folklore* 76.1 (1965): 48.

occurrence. In the Italian *Pulzella Gaia* [Merry Maiden] dating from the middle of the fourteenth century, Gawain fights against a serpent who defeats him and then transforms into a beautiful woman and becomes his lover. He is warned not to reveal their relationship and when he does, breaking his promise, the maiden has to return to her mother, Morgan le Fay, who imprisons her in a dungeon, "up to her waist in water"[37] in a partial fish-like state. Although the *Pulzella Gaia* predates d'Arras' version of *Mélusine* (while potentially sharing the tale's source in oral tradition), it is possible that both d'Arras and the Italian author were drawing on a similar iconographic tradition when developing these episodes within their respective texts, a tradition which commonly depicts punishments in hell through the division at the waist and use of serpents.

There is a well-established background to the use of heat or water as a means of punishment, including the tenth-century *Fis Adamnáin,* or *Vision of Adamnan*, preserved in *Lebor na hUidre*, the oldest surviving compilation of early Irish vernacular literature. This work features a "river of fire, its surface an ever-burning flame" which lies before one of the portals to heaven:

> Abersetus dan anim aingil ingaire in t-srotha sin derbas ocus niges anmand na næm din chutrumma chinad nos lenand, corroichet comglaine ocus comsoillse frietrochta rétland.

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[37] Edmund G. Gardner, *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930), 244.

[Abersetus is the angel's name who keeps watch over that river, and purges the souls of the righteous, and washes them in the stream, according to the amount of guilt that cleaves to them, until they become pure and shining as the radiance of the stars.][38]

The number of ablutions is related to the level of sin that needs to be purged. This theme of the punishment being proportional to the crime, but also developing to encompass specific body parts for specific sins was common, stemming from the third-century Greek *Apocalypse of Paul* (extant in Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Ethiopic) and its fifth or sixth-century Latin translation, the *Visio Sancti Pauli,* which was well-known during the Insular period. The *Visio* influenced a number of Old and Middle English texts and is also preserved in an Old French version. As Theodore Silverstein notes, the *Visio* "became one of the chief formative elements in the later legends of heaven and hell."[39] While visiting hell, St. Paul sees a "fiery stream" in which sinners are punished to different levels according to their sins, "some up to their knees, some up to their navels, others to their necks, others still, up to their eyebrows." The archangel Michael, who acts as Paul's psychopomp, tells him that "Those in pain to their navels were adulterers who did not repent until the time of death."[40]

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[38] Ernst Windisch, ed., *Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, 4 vols, vol. 1. (Leipzig: Hirzal, 1880), 180-1. C.S. Boswell, *An Irish Precursor of Dante: A Study on the Vision of Heaven and Hell Ascribed to the Eighth-century Irish Saint Adamnán, with Translation of the Irish Text* (London: David Nutt, 1908), 36; cf. R.I. Best and Osborn Bergin, eds., *Lebor na hUidre* (Dublin and London: Royal Irish Academy, 1929), 71.

[39] Theodore Silverstein, ed., *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together with Nine Texts* (London: Christophers, 1935), 3.

[40] Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli*, 12-3.

A similar punishment is meted out to the lustful in *Visio Tnugdali*, or Vision of

Tnugdal of 1149, which was extremely popular throughout the later Middle Ages.[41] Cormac

Mac Cartaig, king of Desmond and Munster, is immersed to the waist in fire as an "expiation

of a breach of his marriage vow."[42] The tropological significance of this demarcation at the

navel is emphasized in John Mirk's *Festial* of the early fifteenth century, in which he

describes an abbess who was "a clene woman of hyr body as for dede of lechery," but "had

gret lust to talke þerof" and is therefore punished above the waist while her lower half

"schon as þe sonne."[43] A similar sentiment is expressed in King Lear's summation of

women, which reflects the late medieval homiletic commonplace that *superbia* and *luxuria*

are especially characteristic of the frailty of women:[44]

      Down from the waist

      They're centaurs, though women all above.

      But to the girdle do the gods inherit;

      Beneath is all the fiend's.[45]

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[41] Cf. Thomas Kren, ed., *Margaret of York, Simon Marmion, and the Visions of Tondal* (Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992).

[42] Boswell, *Irish Precursor of Dante*, 222.

[43] John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS es 96, vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, 1905), 96-7.

[44] Mireille Vincent-Cassy, "Péchés de femmes à la fin du Moyen Age" in *La condición de la mujer en la Edad Media. Actas del Coloquio Celebrado en la Casa de Velázquez, del 5 al 7 de noviembre de 1984. Madrid*, ed. Y.-R. Fonquerne and A. Esteban (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1986), 501-17.

[45] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998),

Thus, a division at the waist appears relatively common in the depiction of punishments, especially for the sins of lust and lechery, particularly when the punishment is directed at women. There are, therefore, potential links between the notion of a physically divided punishment in religious works, especially in terms of a partial immersion in heat or water and the use of this depiction in the romances, despite Olstead's claims of scarcity. It is possible that Malory's sources are making direct reference to this association, especially given that the punishment is delivered directly by God.

In relation to this instance in Malory's *Morte Darthur,* Malory's deviation from his source text in transferring responsibility for this torture from God to fairies is unusual. Malory's sources do not reveal the nature of the sin that the woman has committed to be punished in this manner by God; she claims that "l'achoisons por quoi g'i sui mise ne savrois vos ja ne vos ne autres par moi, devant que cil sera venus qui de ci me getera" [neither you nor anyone else will ever find out why I am here until the knight comes who will release me,] [46] although in fact, no further information is forthcoming when Lancelot succeeds in this task. However, it seems likely that, in being immersed only to her waist, Malory's sources imply that her "great sin" is a sexual transgression. The reallocation of responsibility for the punishment to Morgan and the Queen of North Galys and the specific motivation of jealousy of her appearance would thus be a logical progression; Morgan's

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IV.5.121-4. See also Frederika Bain's use of this passage in "Hybridity, Mutability, and the Accessible Other," p.xx.

[46] Krueger, "Lancelot, part IV," 99; Micha, *Lancelot: Roman en Prose du XIIIe Siècle*, II, 374.

sexual advances to knights, her lust, is being enacted through her repression of a potential rival.

The link between the fairy women and lust is explained through an ongoing assumption of women's frailty in relation to sexuality. Ruth Mazzo Karras notes that by the later Middle Ages "lust was considered the woman's sin par excellence",[47] while Anke Bernau observes, "The trope of the extreme 'sexual sinner' is decidedly gendered, in keeping with beliefs surrounding female sexuality and carnality."[48] Ferrante describes the specific association of women with *luxuria* in terms of a putative physiological rationale: "woman was held to be more given to lust than man because she was thought to be, in her humors, more cold and wet."[49] Indeed, *Luxuria* was generally a feminine personification, often intertwined with a serpent, as in the carving of *Luxuria* in the Chapter House Vestibule of Salisbury Cathedral (*c.* 1260-80). The serpent or dragon is traditionally associated with the devil: "et proiectus est draco ille magnus serpens antiquus qui vocatur Diabolus et Satanas qui seducit universum orbem proiectus est in terram et angeli eius cum illo missi sunt" [And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world; and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels

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[47] Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England", *Signs* 14 (1989): 400. Cf. Richard Kieckhefer, "Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe," in *Sex in the Middle Ages,* ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York and London: Garland, 1991), 30.

[48] Anke Bernau, "Gender and Sexuality," in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography,* ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 112.

[49] Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 6.

were thrown down with him.][50] In addition to this, serpents, "dragons and other monsters seem frequently to have exhibited an association with untrammelled sexuality within medieval written and visual culture."[51] In this context, the scene in Herrad of Hohenburg's *Hortus Deliciarum* (1186-*c.* 1196, Alsace), in which the lustful are punished in hell by both flames and serpents is also notable.[52]

This serpentine imagery is used in the appearance of Gaynour's (Guinevere's) mother in the late fourteenth century *Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne,* in which the ghost of Gaynour's mother appears in grisly form to provide a warning of the dangers of sin and the potential punishments that await. She is described as "Serkeled with serpents [that sate] to the sides / To tell the todes theron my tonge wer full tere" [Circled with serpents that sat to the sides: / My tongue would be hard pressed to count the toads on it.][53] The role of the mother in this instance is not to impose the punishment, but to warn against the sin, through the use of herself as an example of the repercussions of sins of this nature, as Barbara A. Goodman notes the use of "strong sexual implications; indeed,

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[50] *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, ed. R. Weber et al., 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, 1983); Richard Challoner, trans. *The Holy Bible: translated from the Latin Vulgate* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1989); Revelation 12.9.

[51] Samantha J.E. Riches, "Virtue and Violence: Saints, Monsters and Sexuality in Medieval Culture," in *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, ed. April Harper and Caroline Proctor (London: Routledge, 2008), 60.

[52] Cf. Herrad of Hohenbourg, *Hortus deliciarum*, ed. Rosalie Green et al., 2 vols (London and Leiden: Warburg Institue, 1979), I, 220, fol. 255r (pl. 146).

[53] Shepherd, ed., "The Awntyrs Off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne," in *Middle English Romances*, 223, ll.120-1. Helen Phillips, ed. *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* (Lancaster: Lancaster Modern Spelling Texts, 1988).

according to her own report, her form is due to her sexual misconduct when alive."[54] This

example demonstrates the transition between common depictions of punishments in hell

or purgatory and the use of these punishments and images within the context of the

romances, especially given the specific use of the serpents within this description.

Thus, the combination of partial immersion in water and transformation into a

serpent or dragon from the waist down would have resonated with the punishment for sin

for medieval readers, and more specifically with lust and sexuality, particularly in its focus

on the division of the female form. This division of the body at this point into half a fish or

serpent can also be considered in relation to mermaids, and their overt sexuality. As

Christina Weising notes: "Mermaids are sexual creatures. They symbolize the sinning

woman descending from original sin and are the incarnation of temptation since antiquity

and Homer's Odyssey."[55] Much has been written on the link of Melusine to the notion of the

mermaid; as succinctly noted by Sophia Kingshill, "she is clearly a water spirit".[56] Thus the

idea of a partial immersion in water or partial transformation from the waist down would

have had a wider significance to authors of the romances discussed. This iconographic

[54] Barbara A. Goodman, "Women's Wounds in Middle English Romances: An Exploration of Defilement, Disfigurement, and a Society in Disrepair," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture,* ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 565.

[55] Christina Weising, "Vision of 'Sexuality,' 'Obscenity,' or 'Nudity'? Differences Between Regions on the Example of Corbels," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 337.

[56] Sophia Kingshill, *Mermaids* (Dorchester: Little Toller Books, 2015), 105. For a full discussion of the analogues of Melusine in art and myth, see Misty Urban, *Monstrous Women in Middle English Romance* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 59-68. Sabine Baring-Gould confidently classifies Melusine as a mermaid in *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (London: Rivingtons, 1876); see also Bain's contribution to this volume for a discussion of Melusine/mermaid parallels.

resonance of Melusine as a partial dragon or serpent has particular import when considering the punitive connection of Melusine's split serpentine form. The Christian connections between both the serpentine aspect and the partial immersion is apparent in d'Arras' text through the notion of the purgatorial immersion reflecting the purification of baptismal water, and hinted at with Malory's replacement of God with Morgan and the Queen of North Galys. The serpent's association with sin and punishment is evident, linking Melusine through this split form with a range of meanings and connections associating her particularly with the devil and mermaids, and suggesting a sexual link to Melusine's punishment in terms of the imagery as well as the use of Presine as an agent of punishment on behalf of God.

Although neither Melusine nor the woman in Malory's *Morte Darthur* are being punished directly for lust, the symbolic division of the upper and lower half of their bodies serve a similar function in both instances. In each text, the punishment functions to render the woman temporarily unattractive or unobtainable to a love interest. In relation to Melusine, Kevin Brownlee has noted that her transformation and Raymondin's discovery of her form draws on contemporary literary traditions: "the voyeur gazing through a secret perforation in the door leading to a lady's bath is a stylized generic convention within the context of the late fourteenth-century French romance narrative."[57] Expectations of this convention are undermined, however, by the description of her portrayal as "a somewhat comical monster.."[58] Thus Melusine is rendered as unattractive through the form that she

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[57] Kevin Brownlee, "Melusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis," in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France* ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 80.

[58] Brownlee, "Melusine's Hybrid Body," 82.

takes in the gaze of Raymondin and becomes potentially less desirable as a wife, mother, and ruler. Although his initial concerns after his discovery are with the implications of his broken promise, Raymondin's later accusations do seem to reflect on her undesirable form: "Hee, tres false serpent" [Ah! Sordid serpent!].[59] Presine succeeds in punishing Melusine through the physical agony that she will endure as a serpent in her final transformation, but it is this initial emotional barrier that perhaps is most damaging to Melusine. Her first lament when Raymondin reveals her serpentine state is in relation to the impact on their relationship: "Las! Mon amy, or sont noz amours tornees en hayne, noz doulceurs en durté, noz soulaz et noz jjoyes en larnes et en plours, nostre bon eur en tres dure et infortuneuse pestilence" [Alas, my love! Now our love has changed to hatred, our gentleness to harshness, our comfort and joy to tears and weeping, our happiness to great misfortune and tribulation.][60] It is notable that although Melusine does not see Raymondin again while in her human form, the texts do note that she returns to care for her children. The transformation is thus specifically aimed at the destruction of her relationship with Raymondin.

In this punishment of division through enchanted water or serpent transformation, the fays are really directing their punishment to achieve maximum impact on a specific aspect of life: the women's relationships with men. In Malory's *Morte Darthur* it is the sexual potential of Morgan's rival through Morgan's assessment of her beauty that is being addressed; Morgan is ensuring that she will not be able to act as competition for the affection of knights. It is only Lancelot, with his status as the best knight, who is finally able

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[59] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 596-7.

[60] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 598-9.

to rescue her after five years. And in the *Pulzella Gaia,* Morgan is rendering her daughter,

who has already escaped a fully serpent form once, unavailable to her lover through the

dual punishment of imprisonment and transformation.

The shared punitive intention of the fays in these examples is perhaps also

indicative of the changing role of the fairy, for the terms of the punishments they inflict,

being purgatorial in nature, are thus part of a sanctified process of divine punishment. Sara

Sturm-Maddox notes that "It would appear that God's secret judgements, hidden from

mortals, are at least partially accessible to fairies, for Melusine is fully aware of her own

fate."[61] As these texts are rooted within a Christian framework, the actions of the fays must

be seen as ultimately subject to the will of God, especially given the purgatorial nature of

the torture inflicted. Indeed, after her concern about the impact on their relationship, much

of Melusine's distress at Raymondin's revelation of her Saturday form is caused by the

implications that this has for her future, the "penance obscure" [dark penance]"[62] that she

sadly informs Raymondin she is now unavoidable claiming: "Et les joyes que je y souloye

avoir me seront peines, tribulacions et griefs penitences et pestilences" [And the joys I had

here, will henceforth be naught for me but pain and suffering, great penance and

affliction]"[63] as well as specifically stating "puis qu'il plaist a Cellui qui tout puet faire et

deffaire" ['tis the will of Him who has the power to do and undo all things]."[64] Thus

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[61] Sara Sturm-Maddox, "Crossed Destinies: Narrative Programs in the *Roman de Mélusine,*" in *Melusine of Lusignan*, 27.

[62] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 598-9.

[63] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 606-7.

[64] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 604-5.

Melusine and Presine her mother, who has inflicted this punishment upon her, have a unique understanding of the nature of Melusine's condition. Their fairy or half-fairy nature allows them an insight into the disposition of their own souls that is not available to the humans of the text. In terms of Melusine this nature is not necessarily depicted positively, as Presine indicates that Melusine should have aspired to the potential human, rather than fairy, nature that her father might have offered her—perhaps indicating that fairies' inclusion within a Christian framework and as enactors of God's will is not the same as being part of humanity. This insight and almost god-like ability to inflict purgatorial torment may have suggested the replacement of God with Morgan and the Queen of North Galys in the section of the *Morte Darthur* involving Lancelot's rescue of the maiden. God's punishment of an unspecified sin in the source text gives way to amore petty jealousy, but retains the burning purgatorial punishment of the original.

Although Melusine is the recipient of a punishment, she is also the agent of punishment within the text in a role that resonates with an instance in the *Morte Darthur* involving Nymue. Melusine leads her sisters in the imprisonment of their father "en la merveilleuse montaigne de Norhonbelande nommee Brumbloremllion, et de la n'ystra de toute sa vie" [in the enchanted mountain of Northumberland called Brumborenlion from which he will never emerge,]"[65] particularly noting the "dolour" [misery][66] that he will suffer, as retribution for breaking the promise that he would not see Melusine's mother while she was in childbed.[67] The montain imprisonment is not unique to this work as a

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[65] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 68-9.

[66] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 70-1.

[67] Morris, *A Bilingual Edition of Mélusine*, 65.

fairy punishment, as some Arthurian texts include Arthur's imprisonment in a mountain by Morgan le Fay as an alternative to his removal to Avalon.[68] However, this direct link between the perception of his sin and Melusine's role as a fairy agent of punishment suggests similarities to Merlin's imprisonment by Nymue in Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

Nymue and Merlin are linked through their relationship in a number of works, but in Malory's version an unwilling Nymue is sexually pursued by Merlin and tolerates him only long enough to learn his magic before enacting an imprisonment as punishment. Malory makes substantial changes to this incident when compared to his potential source texts for this aspect of the *Morte Darthur,* the *Merlin*, the *Lancelot,* and the *Suite du Merlin*.[69] The French works are careful to explain the reasons for the imprisonment. In the *Merlin,* Nymue is described as being genuinely in love with Merlin and imprisons him out of a fear of losing him, whereas in the *Lancelot* or *Suite du Merlin*, she is described as being more calculated in her use of Merlin for education and cruel in her final imprisonment.

In the *Morte Darthur,* Nymue's actions are carefully established within the context of Merlin's motivation and pursuit of her, which is described as sinful: "allwayes he lay aboute to have hir maydynhode, and she was ever passynge wery of hym for cause he was a devils son."[70] By showing how much Nymue is harassed and also noting that Merlin has

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[68] R. S. Loomis, "The Legend of Arthur's Survival" in: *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages,* ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 64–5

[69] Rupert T. Pickens, trans., "Merlin," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 1 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 281-3; Martha Asher, trans., "Suite du Merlin Part 1," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 4 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 245-8; Samuel N. Rosenberg, trans. "Lancelot Part 1", in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 2 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 12.

[70] Malory, *Works,* 126.

prior connections to evil through his parentage, Malory makes Merlin's imprisonment seem justified, as Hodges notes: "Malory takes care to make Nyneve's innocence clear . . . He persistently tries to seduce her against her will, clearly violating the code of chivalry Arthur has just announced."[71] Malory is also careful in the way that he describes how Merlin feels. He never claims that Merlin loves Nymue; therefore, as Holbrook maintains, "the traditional fatal love has diminished into patent lechery."[72] Merlin no longer falls into the category of a *fins'amor* lover, tested by his mistress with the expectation of a reward and then cruelly betrayed, as he appears in some of the French sources, but is a lecherous stalker who deserves his punishment. Nymue imprisons Merlin, but does not harm him as in, for instance, the *Suite du Merlin* where her heartless nature is made explicit, as although she claims to not want to kill him, she actually devises a much crueler death for him to "avenge myself better."[73] The purgatorial aspect of this imprisonment in the *Morte Darthur*, the implication of suffering for a period of time until Merlin is judged to have atoned for his sins, is emphasized through the discovery of Merlin later in the text as his imprisonment is ongoing: Bademagus "herde hym make a grete dole" and Merlin reveals that "he might never be holpyn but by her that put hym there."[74] Nymue retains control of Merlin's imprisonment for an indefinite amount of time and thus seems to act as an agent

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[71] Kenneth Hodges, "Swords and Sorceresses: the Chivalry of Malory's Nyneve," *Arthuriana* 12 (2002): 83.

[72] S.E. Holbrook, "Nymue, the Chief Lady of the Lake in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*." *Speculum* 53 (1978): 770.

[73] Asher, "Suite du Merlin Part 1," 260.

[74] Malory, *Works,* 132.

of God's punishment, albeit retaining some of the incomprehensible nature of God's wisdom that d'Arras noted.

The potentially subversive action of Nymue in permanently removing an integral member of Arthur's court, and also permanently removing the magical support that Merlin offers to Arthur in the development of his empire, is justified within the framework that Arthur and Merlin have developed. Nymue is, in fact, supporting the ideals and structure to which Arthur has bound his subjects. If Nymue is considered as a religious agent, this action is also justified, as she enacts a punishment that is warranted in a Christian context. This role alters the sense of this imprisonment compared to Malory's sources, but is part of a broader reconsideration of Nymue, and is supported through the changes that Malory makes to Nymue in a later episode in the *Morte Darthur* that also presents Nymue as a righteous agent of Christian punishment.

Nymue is instrumental in the retributive treatment of a lady called Ettarde as a result of her sins. Ettarde's rejection of the love of a knight called Pelleas demonstrates the sin of pride: she "was so proude that she had scorne of hym and seyde she wolde never love hym thoughe he wolde dye for hir."[75] The text emphasizes the humiliation that Ettarde causes Pelleas in order to prevent him from pursuing her, as well as her cruel dismissal of him, despite his status as "a passynge good knyght of his body"[76]: "she rebukyth me in the fowlyst maner . . . she woll nat suffir me to ete nother drynke. And allwayes I offer me to be her prisoner, but that woll she nat suffir me."[77] Ettarde is clearly censored within the work

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[75] Malory, *Works,* 166.

[76] Malory, *Works,* 169.

[77] Malory, *Works,* 168.

for this demonstration of of pride "all ladyes and jantyllwomen had scorne of hir that she was so prowde."[78] Thus Nymue's intervention has a substantive basis in terms of her implementation of a Christian sense of morality, but also th expectations of the court and society.

This focus on Ettarde's sinful rejection of Pelleas is in contradiction to Malory's source, the *Suite du Merlin*, in whichthe lady, Arcade, does not love Pelleas as a result of of his inferior lineage—"he was not of such birth that she should love him"[79]—but instead falls in love with Gawain. Arcade does not seem to be considered sinful in the way that Ettarde does, and it is Gawain's guilt at his actions that causes him to relinquish Arcade and convince her to marry Pelleas. Malory thus alters his version through the punishment that Nymue perpetrates, enchanting Ettarde so that she loves Pelleas "well nyghe she was nere oute of hir mynde."[80] Although the text clearly states that it is Nymue who has used magic to change Ettarde's feelings, she tells Ettarde that it is "the ryghteuouse jugemente of God."[81] The text does not specifically state that Nymue uses her magic to make Pelleas hate Ettarde rather than loving her, but when Pelleas claims "suche grace God hath sente me that I hate hir as much as I have loved hir," Nymue replies "thanke me therefore."[82] The language that Malory uses in this instance clearly develops the link between the punitive

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[78] Malory, *Works,* 166.

[79] Martha Asher, trans., "Suite du Merlin Part 2," in *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, ed. Norris J. Lacy, vol. 5 (Oxford: Garland, 1993-6), 6.

[80] Malory, *Works,* 172.

[81] Malory, *Works,* 172.

[82] Malory, *Works,* 172.

actions of fays and Christian punishment, as Nymue's actions not only serve to punish the sin of pride but also advance her own interests, as the text notes that Nymue becomes Pelleas' lover herself, and they "loved togedyrs duryng their lyfe."[83].

Malory's *Morte Darthur* is not the only later medieval romance that makes these alterations and developments; a punishment associated with a specific sin and enacted by a fairy woman is also an integral component of *Sir Launfal* by Thomas Chestre. This work makes distinct alterations to its sources, Marie de France's *Lanval* and the Middle English *Sir Landevale,* to add the punishing fairy role.. In *Sir Launfal*, Gwennere (Guinevere) makes advances to Sir Launfal, and when rejected accuses him of trying to seduce her as well as offending her through his unfavourable comparison of her to his lady. Sir Launfal is tried and required to produce his lady, with Gwennere suggesting that she should be blinded if he is able to do this. When the lady Tryamour appears at the court to exonerate Launfal, she enacts this punishment on the queen: "Wyth that, Dame Tryamour to the Quene geth / And blew on her swych a breth / That never eft might sche se."[84]

As with Malory's depiction of Ettarde, the sinful nature of the victim of the punishment is made clear and, as Dinah Hazell observes, the punishment is appropriate to Gwennere's actions, "[a]n obvious physical manifestation of Gwennere's moral and spiritual blindness."[85] This punishment is an addition to the sources, and again shows the

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[83] Malory, *Works,* 172.

[84] Chestre, "Sir Launfal", 217, ll. 1006-8.

[85] Dinah Hazell, "The blinding of Gwennere: Thomas Chestre as social critic," *Arthurian Literature* XX (2003): 138.

fairy lady in a punitive role. The sin of Gwennere is made clear throughout the text; the

initial description depicts her in stark contrast to the worthy Sir Launfal:

> But Syr Launfal lykede her noght-
>
> Ne other knyghtes that wer hende.
>
> For the lady bar los of swych word
>
> That sche hadde lemmannys under her lord,
>
> So fele ther nas noon ende.[86]

Her promiscuity is identified before she is more broadly described as "fel" [wicked][87] and

the full range of her anger at the rejection by Launfal explored, "Therefore the Quene was

swythe wroghth . . . For wrethe syk sche hyr bredde."[88] Peter Lucas notes that "the queen's

anger receives greater emphasis than in *Landevale*,"[89] while Eve Salisbury comments that

"Guenevere exhibits a threatening female libido that challenges not only the legal

parameters of marriage but the entire social order."[90] Thus the fairy Tryamour's actions,

much like the other fairies discussed, are justified within the Christian context of the work,

as Lucas notes, "Only supernatural power can prevail against this evil human initiative."[91]

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[86] Chestre, "Sir Launfal", 191, ll. 44-8.

[87] Chestre, "Sir Launfal", 195, l. 156.

[88] Chestre, "Sir Launfal", 209, ll. 700, 704.

[89] Peter J. Lucas, "Towards an Interpretation of 'Sir Launfal' with particular reference to Line 683," *Medium Aevum* 39 (1970): 291.

[90] Eve Salisbury, "Chaucer's 'Wife,' the Law and the Middle English Breton Lays", in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts,* ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 86.

[91] Lucas, "Towards an Interpretation", 293.

Tryamour therefore works in a similar way to the other fairy ladies through her knowledge of the sin committed and the exacting of a suitable punishment. Gwennere, much like the lady in boiling water in Malory's *Morte Darthur,* will act as a visible reminder of the consequences of sin and will endure an ongoing punishment.

Through a consideration of the later medieval texts involving these fairy figures, it is evident that there is a change in terms of the way that fairy women are portrayed in relation to the punishments that they enact on other characters and the Christian justification for these punishments. The actions of Melusine and Presine in Jean d'Arras' *Mélusine* precipitate a change in the nature of fays and a reworking of the source texts to include this revised role. There are particular resonances between the punishment of Melusine by Presine and Morgan le Fay and the Queen of North Galys' punishment of a beautiful woman in the *Morte Darthur*. These texts are connected by an iconographic significance in terms of the link of the punishments that the fairies inflict to the depiction of punishment in hell or purgatory. There are further associations between the changes made to Nymue in the *Morte Darthur* and Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* that give them the power to punish sin, especially Merlin's imprisonment for lust and Ettarde's broken heart for pride inflicted by Nymue and Gwennere's lust and anger punished through blinding by Tryamour. Thus, Harf-Lancner's division of romances according to the attitude of the fay to her lover does not accommodate the changing role of fairy women in relation to the development of a religious punishing role. Although *Mélusine* cannot be considered as a definite source or direct influence on later English romances, it would seem to exemplify a change in the nature of fairy women, one that emerges in the alterations that Malory and Chestre make to their source texts in the development of the actions of Morgan, Nymue,

and Tryamor in reworking the Otherness of these figures to promote a more obviously Christian version of these events. A consideration of the changing nature of fairies thus reveals much about attitudes to the conflict between magic and religion that these authors attempted to negotiate in their works. The *Melusine* texts provide a crucial turning point in the way in which this conflict is examined that continues through the later romances.