

Melusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth. Edited by Misty Urban, Deva F. Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes. Leiden: Brill, 2017. Pp. xiv + 437; 5 color + 2 b/w illustrations. ISBN: 9789004315082.

This collection of essays addresses the marks Melusine, a woman-snake hybrid of notable medieval popularity, has left upon a variety of countries, centuries, and disciplines. In so doing, it provides a solid body of English-language scholarship on a text that has, with a few notable exceptions, previously been left largely to French and German academic enquiry. Since the subject of study is by virtue of her constitutive components and hybridity inescapably tied to questions of women and gender, the entire collection speaks to the concerns of *Medieval Feminist Forum*.

The first five articles, by Frederika Bain, Ana Pairet, Caroline Prud'homme, Albrecht Classen, and Melissa Ridley Elmes, in a section entitled "Bodies and Texts: Mapping Melusine in Art and Print," concentrate on Melusine in static media. These readings primarily focus on Melusine's impact within the ink-based fields of her original portrayal. Bain assesses the variability of Melusine's animal half in both text and image in terms of accessibility—that is, in the melusinian figure's Otherness and relatability—concluding that "present-day melusinian mermaids . . . retain . . . only enough difference to titillate but not enough to threaten" (35). Bain's elision of the differences between siren and melusine are contestable, but the question of perceived threat that she raises is a legitimate one. Pairet attempts to elucidate the impact of the moment of Melusine's transformation, "transformation as process" (43), on our understanding of Melusine's corporeality. Her argument against readers' and scholars' preference to fix Melusine's "metaphorical, exemplary, [and] allegorical meanings" (51) is intriguing, but ultimately relies on positioning itself against that fixity rather than explicitly articulating how transformation as a process deepens our understanding of medieval gender-related anxieties. Prud'homme's analysis of authors' adaptations of Melusine to fit an ever-changing audience across the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries is eminently convincing, offering an excellent example of cultural context informing literary reading. On the contrary, Classen's overview of Melusine in the early modern German tradition is informative, but would have been substantially clearer to the reader if accompanied by more illustrations. Closing the section on a high note, Ridley Elmes guides us through Melusine's role in the pseudo- and actually scientific aspects of early modern alchemy while also, in tracing Paracelsus's influence beyond the Renaissance, reinforcing the links tying present to past and gesturing toward the articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century adaptations that end the volume.

The second section, “Mother, Muse: Melusine and Political Identity,” widens the geographic scope to encompass all of western Europe. In Anna Casas Aguilar’s interdisciplinary examination of architecture in the Castilian *Melusine* and on the Iberian Peninsula, she argues that modifications to the Castilian translation of Melusine reflect anxieties about Queen Isabel I’s (gendered) rule. It is followed by Lydia Zeldenrust’s meditation on the Dutch translation’s own hybrid nature and how that hybridity is central to Melusine’s cultural identity in the Netherlands. Jennifer Alberghini’s reflections on the relationship between the *Roman de Parthenay* and the idea of a “mother tongue” not only offer insight into the status of French in England in the early sixteenth century, but also engage the “vernacularity debate” (159) as a question of national, rather than gendered, identity. Finally, Pit Péporté’s analysis of Melusine’s integration into the urban space of Luxembourg, as well as into Luxembourg’s nineteenth-century mythology, argues that her tale acts as a “medium of dynastic memory” (169) precisely because of her hybrid nature, which allows for appropriation and identification by many different demographic groups.

“Theoretical Transformations: Readings and Reconfigurations” offers a number of theoretical approaches to Melusine. Stacey L. Hahn turns to Jean d’Arras’s text for details on medieval ideas of youth, although due to Melusine’s lack of daughters, it is primarily an analysis of male youth. Simone Pflieger’s reading of Thüring von Ringoltingen’s *Melusine* is intensely theoretical yet pleasantly accessible. Her application of Sara Ahmed’s theory of (un)happiness is well-grounded in close reading of the text, while her consequent argument for Melusine’s queerness reveals a modern-day bias for reading heteronormative couple-ness as happiness (and why scholars should at least acknowledge, if not push back against, that bias). Angela Jane Weisl’s assessment of the intersections between monstrosity and romance in the Middle English, with its reiteration of the links between monstrosity and the anxieties engendered by the feminine mystique, unfortunately adds little that is new. Chera A. Cole’s analysis of Christianity in Melusine’s tale, on the other hand, offers a fresh reading that centers on “the primacy of the human race in medieval Christian cosmology” (243), meant to comfort the Christian audience, rather than on Melusine’s Christianity as an element of the story applicable only to Melusine herself. Zoë Enstone’s article on purgatorial punishment is as much about the fay in Arthurian romances as it is about Melusine, but offers an intriguing array of evidence for gender- and species-specific punishment in High and Late Medieval romances. Closing the section by bridging East and West in a manner that offers much food for thought, Zifeng Zhao presents a comparative analysis of Melusine and Madame

White, a female-serpent hybrid figure from sixteenth-century Chinese literature, that demonstrates convergent gendered social anxieties and their influence on literary figures' evolution across the centuries.

The final group of articles, "Melusines Medieval to Modern," concludes, appropriately, with a focus on later adaptations of Melusine in literature (Renata Schellenberg, Deva F. Kemmis), text and image (Misty Urban), text and film (Anna-Lisa Baumeister), and as the subject of scholarly investigation (Tania M. Colwell). Schellenberg's investigation into Goethe's modifications to the medieval "original" reaches out to Goethe's numerous fields of interest, including biology and optics, in search of answers to an adaptation which, in the end, "speaks to . . . a more inclusive consideration than conventional literature can perhaps offer" (323). Kemmis proceeds along a similar line, in that, in her examination of Ingeborg Bachman's "Undine Geht" and its status as a modern iteration of the Melusine tale, Kemmis focuses on a field normally ignored in traditional scholarly interactions with words on a page—namely, sound. Baumeister's assessment of melusinian refigurations in twentieth-century literature and film is provocative, channeling as the modern-day retellings do the most negative aspects of the tale—Melusine's animality, her constriction by the patriarchal structures in which she lives—into the abjection and bestialization of women. Urban's tracing of the disappearance of Melusine's humanity from Anglophone consciousness seems, instead, to argue that Melusine's identity is not less human, but less constant as the centuries wear on. The afterword by Colwell reviews the ideas presented in the volume, and offers a number of questions for scholars to pursue—a fitting end to a volume that situates itself as continuing in a grand melusinian tradition.

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