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NEW MASCULINITIES AND SNAKE LADIES IN VERNON LEE'S "PRINCE ALBERIC AND THE SNAKE LADY"[1]

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Abstract: The tale "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" by Vernon Lee is a rich text in so far as how it utilizes the symbol of the snake and its significance within pagan culture and spirituality. Prior to the cementing of Christianity, the snake was not associated with evil, but rather the opposite; with the arrival of the faith, it was demonized as were women, so much so that they were fused into a hybrid. Lee's tale employs this cultural significance and deconstructs it, drawing from other folktales that also employed the figures of snake-women, such as the Melusine myth. The paper argues that through the tale's main characters, Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady Oriana, Lee reveals the patriarchy as a construct; as something that does not inherently exist within the world, but as a set of patterns and behaviours that are learned. In "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" Lee dismantles the system and proposes new behaviours and new gender roles for the members of society.
Keywords: Folk tales; Vernon Lee; snake-ladies; patriarchy; gender roles

NUEVAS MASCULINIDADES Y LAS DAMAS SERPIENTE EN "EL PRÍNCIPE ALBÉRICO Y LA DAMA SERPIENTE" DE VERNON LEE

Resumen: El cuento «El Príncipe Alberico y la Dama Serpiente», de Vernon Lee, es un texto rico en cuanto al uso del símbolo de la serpiente y su significado dentro de la cultura y la espiritualidad paganas. Antes de la consolidación del cristianismo, la serpiente no se asociaba con el mal, sino más bien con lo contrario; con la llegada de la fe, fue demonizada al igual que las mujeres, hasta tal punto que se fusionaron en un híbrido. El cuento de Lee emplea este significado cultural y lo deconstruye, inspirándose en otros cuentos populares que también empleaban las figuras de las mujeres serpiente, como el mito de Melusina. El artículo sostiene que, a través de los personajes principales del cuento, el príncipe Alberico y la mujer serpiente Oriana, Lee revela el patriarcado como

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una construcción, como algo que no existe de forma inherente en el mundo, sino como un conjunto de patrones y comportamientos que se aprenden. En «El Príncipe Alberico y la Dama Serpiente», Lee desmantela el sistema y propone nuevos comportamientos y nuevos roles de género para los miembros de la sociedad.
Palabras clave: Cuentos populares; Vernon Lee; mujeres serpiente; patriarcado; roles de género

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a symbol used time and time again in storytelling and mythology for different purposes: the serpent woman. In Vernon Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1904), the ancient myth of the serpent woman is reimagined to interrogate roles and expectations of gender and power within patriarchal society. Drawing from previous snake-centred mythology and folklore, Lee challenges traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, suggesting the possibility of a more fluid, egalitarian model of identity through both main characters – Oriana and Alberic. This paper examines how Lee's narrative reclaims mythic hybridity as a means of resistance against patriarchal ideology and articulates a vision of new masculinities at the fin de siècle.

The following sections will explore the significance of serpents, women and their hybridity throughout time and how the connotations morphed with the arrival of Christianity. An analysis of the figure of Melusine follows: one, if not the most, relevant snake woman in folklore, with particular consideration as to how she was characterised in Jean D'Arras's late-14th-century myth. Lastly, Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" will be examined, particularly through its main characters, the prince and the snake lady. In the tale, Lee portrays the struggle against traditional patriarchal systems through the figures of Oriana, the Snake Lady, a representation of the original Goddess and original femininity now demonised by society, and Prince Alberic, who embodies the possibilities of new masculinities and is underestimated in his capabilities to inherit the throne.

The tale illustrates the difficult struggle against patriarchy and misogyny, which oppress anything or anyone considered 'Other' –men included– yet it remains optimistic the possible modes of existence within society. As Emma H. Zhang states, "the snake woman represents matrifocal sensibility in contrast to and in conflict with patriarchal order" (104); a statement can be also extended to both, Prince Alberic and Lady Oriana.

2. FOLKLORE, MYTH AND CHIVALRY: SERPENT WOMEN AND THE MELUSINE MYTH

Despite their current meaning, snakes and snake women did not always echo such evil. As critics Condren (8) and Campbell (83-84, 178) pointed out, due to their ability to shed skin, hibernate and reawaken in spring, serpents have been linked to rejuvenation, regeneration and immortality. It is of special importance that many of these pagan religions were, if not matriarchal with a main female divinity, polytheistic with goddesses holding a relevant position in the religion. In fact, in the essay, "The Taming of the White Snake: The Oppression of Female Sexuality in the Legend of the White Snake,"[2] Zhang establishes a link between these pagan religions, their matrilineal societies, and their respect for snakes.

And yet, Christianity would forever link snakes and women as evil in the eyes of men. Indeed, as Zhang points out, the universal condemnation of women and snakes certainly points to an intention to relegate the importance of women to favour a more patriarchal system (105). The Judeo-Christian tradition points to both women and snakes as evil and the reason for the fall from Eden. What is more, the snake acts as the personification of the devil. But it is the conflation of both, snakes and women, during the Medieval-Renaissance period that cemented their relation.[3] Interestingly enough, the identification of women and snakes with the devil would end up forming the representation of a mermaid-like snake: a human upper half and a lower half in the shape of a snake tail. I refer here to Angela Giallongo's passage on Hieronymus Bosch's 1482 depiction of the Last Judgement:

> Before this phase in iconography, the snake had merely appeared as itself, or lent its reptilian characteristics to a male devil. However, in this seminal work, while the snake's tail and lizard's feet of his beguiling envoy hint at the bestial undercurrent of the creature, it is the combination of these features with the female bust that betray the new Late Medieval/Renaissance trend—the representation of original sin as a woman. (162)

[2] For more information on goddess-centred religions see: Campbell; Gimbutas; and Condren.
[3] "Our modern-day vision of the snake-woman, on the other hand, has first and foremost been shaped by Judeo-Christian influences; after being identified with the diabolical dragon, the serpent came to personify Satan himself, who was represented in female form from the thirteenth century onwards. From that time, the snake was used to allude to evil, sin, paganism, chaos and death in various contexts" (Giallongo 233).

From then on, woman and serpent were indistinguishable, and snake-ladies were therefore a physical representation of sin and all that was evil; they were a threat to man, tempting men to fall from grace once again. Thus, snake-women become in folklore that which threatens, a danger, a monster; they stand from then on, in opposition to the patriarchal system (Zhang 104). As Marcus Hensel and Asa Simon Mittman remark, "monsters do perform important work for us as individuals and communities, policing our boundaries, defining our norms and mores through their inversions and transgressions. Through their bodies, words, and deeds, monsters show us ourselves" (x). In other words, monsters and the like reveal the subconscious; they materialise that which wishes to disrupt the order.

Inheriting characteristics from other beings, such as fairies, mermaids, naiads and other worldly creatures (Urban, Misty & Deva F. Kemmis 1), Jean D'Arras' Melusine is perhaps the most famous out of all European water-fairies. The *Roman de Mélusine* was written by the author Jean D'Arras, about whom very little is known to this day; the text was written at the request of John, duke of Berry, and dedicated to Marie of Valois, Duchess of Bar. The manuscript was published circa 1392-94. The tale keeps to some established patterns from myths and folktales that, as James Wright Harrison explains, follow "elemental spirits appearing to and sometimes marrying humans and then suddenly vanishing. It also shares several features with the mermaid saga. All these myths may be seen as allegorical expressions of man's relationship to nature" (i). However, Melusine differs from other sprites as a consequence of her belief in Christianity; her desire to be good, her abilities as a leader and mother allow for more complex readings of her being. Urban and Kemmis explain how Melusine's character bridges the gap between pagan folklore and Christian faith:

> The notion of a civilization or house founded by a monstrous woman is not unique to Jean d'Arras . . . But, unlike other fairies of the romance tradition who frequently have malevolent intentions, or who are exiled from their human marriages when their true origins are revealed, Melusine's European authors and translators cast her as a respected medieval matriarch . . . She came to embody a visual metaphor for any number of complexities: the supposed duality of women's nature; a metacritique of the values of chivalry, aristocracy, or medieval romance; and a warning of the ever-permeable boundaries between the perceived world and the world unseen. (3-7)

Her complexity of character certainly attracted attention and interest, for D'Arras' text served as inspiration for many other authors who translated his work directly or wrote their own interpretations of the Melusine myth.[4]

The Melusine myth shows what was believed to be the duplicitous nature of women only to subvert it. The pact that protects Melusine's hybridity exemplifies women's perceived evil traits: duplicity, schemes, and lack of control (animal-like instincts). Yet, as Bain comments, the myth humanises Melusine and appears to have the intention of recuperating the snake symbol from the evil connotations Christianity had placed on it (29-31). In the end, when all is laid out in the open and Melusine is forced to fly away from Raymond and her family, her legacy is not damaged by her snake hybridity and the evil connotations it carries; her deeds are still recognised by those who knew her.

It is interesting to note that, despite Melusine's portrayal as a good Christian matriarch due to her serpent hybridity, she still receives the monster treatment and fate; as Zhao points out, "snake women are prone to unhappy endings" (282). Despite her dedication to building a better society and her faithful devotion to the Christian faith, Melusine is not rewarded, but rather punished. Raymond is the one who breaches the pact, and it is still Melusine –the do-gooder– that needs to flee due to her supernatural nature. She never gets to achieve full humanity; the snake woman is, doomed: "Although Melusine is given opportunities to conduct benevolence to redeem her transgression, it is evident that the authors have decided never to set Melusine free from her monstrous feature, but rather want to seal her pathetic fate with eternal lamentation" (Zhao 290). It seems that this tragic fate extends to snake-women in the nineteenth century, too.

3. "PRINCE ALBERIC AND THE SNAKE LADY"

"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" was first published in July 1896 in an issue of the famous journal, *The Yellow Book*, and it was later republished in Vernon Lee's short story collection *Pope Jacynth and Other Fantastic Tales* in 1904. The story narrates the life of Prince Alberic the Third of the Duchy of Luna. The prince grows up isolated

[4] Jean D'Arras' *Mélusine* or *La noble histoire de Lusignan* (circa 1393); among the most popular translations we find Coudrette's *Roman de Parthenay* (1401); Thüring von Ringoltingen's *Melusine* (1456); Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat *La historia de la linda Melosina* (1489).

from everyone, never leaving the Red Palace, the residence of his grandfather, Duke Balthasar Maria. Lee writes of the prince's fascination with a tapestry depicting his ancestor Alberic the Blond and the Snake Lady Oriana. When the tapestry is removed from his rooms and replaced with another, Prince Alberic rips the new one to shreds. The loss of the old tapestry makes him newly aware of his loneliness and isolation, and he develops a deep resentment toward his grandfather. As a punishment for the destruction of the new hanging, the duke exiles him to the Castle of Sparkling Waters. Unbeknownst to him, the snake he encounters one day in the castle well is his godmother, who is educating him in his princely duties. Their meetings must remain hidden, or she will disappear. Still curious about the tapestry, Alberic asks an old man about the legend of Alberic the Blond and the Snake Lady.

The legend narrates how, across generations, every Alberic has encountered the fairy Oriana and failed to break her enchantment by remaining loyal to her for ten years, dooming her to inhabiting a snake's body, unable to exist as fully human but for an hour every day. Knowing this, Alberic seeks out the snake from the well and kisses it, restoring Oriana to human form, and discovering she is his godmother. Alberic vows to remain loyal and to break Oriana's curse. However, Duke Balthasar, in need of money, urges Alberic to marry, but he refuses to comply, no matter how harsh the punishment. The tale concludes when the duke enters Alberic's prison, discovers his snake sleeping mistakes it for a demon, and his lackeys beat it to death. In despair, Prince Alberic kills himself.

While the characterisation of Lee's Snake Lady Oriana owes much to the complexities of Melusine's own portrayal, the tale itself takes inspiration from the Venusberg legend as written by Baring Gould in his 1866 compilation *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* as Aaron Worth explains in his edition of the tale. In this version of the legend, a snake lady is found by the hero, and she asks him to kiss her three times. He does so twice, but he cannot bear the sight of her tail, so he runs away—only to yearn for her company once more, though he is never able to find her again. This triple kissing motif certainly seems to have influenced Lee, who adapted the ritual for her own story.

3.1. SNAKE LADY ORIANA

Oriana's debt to previous serpent women is clear, not only in her shape, but in her humanised portrayal, her pact with the legend's heroes and the inevitable doom that a woman in serpent form incurs. Like Melusine and Raymond, when Oriana meets Alberic

it seems they are being pulled together by some force: Alberic suddenly feels thirsty feels the urgent need to quench it. He then finds a well, and in it, Oriana in the form of a snake. The well is significant, not just because of its ties back to aquatic sprites of old legends but because, as Knapp points out:

> [to be] associated with a fountain located in the heart of a forest, suggests a capacity . . . to alter, cleanse, heal, and regenerate an ailing psyche. The ever-renewing waters from a fountain, emerging from the depths of the earth (the unconscious), rising into the air (consciousness), may indicate a timeless as well as a restless and continuously mobile quality. (Knapp 41)

This encounter is also of great significance because both characters need to find each other, contrary to the original legend of Lady Oriana and Alberic the Blond, where Alberic the Blond had to rescue a trapped Oriana. This time, both characters have to come together and are therefore equals in their relationship; there is not a subservient being that needs a favour from the other, both complement each other's needs and only united, it seems, can they build a prosperous future for both of them. Shaw draws this same conclusion when commenting on the myth of Melusine and Raymond:

> Raimondin is drawn toward it, but that is not enough. Melusine must go out to meet him . . . Thus, the relation between Melusine and Raimondin is effected by a coming together; each must come some way to meet with the other, and what they create between them is considerably more enabling for both of them than their prospects for the future if they remain apart . . . Their relation begins as an exchange, each offering the other that which the other needs. (Shaw 77-78)

Furthermore, Oriana follows in Melusine's footsteps: she takes the lead in the relationship between her and Alberic. A dynamic that challenges traditional gender roles of an "authoritative male subject and thus undermines the internal stability of the binary opposition man/woman" (Delyfer 6). As his godmother Oriana teaches Alberic all about his princely duties, but she also serves an emotional purpose, hearing and empathising with the young prince: "his dear Godmother, to whom he had learned to open his heart about all things, and who has taught him all that he knew" (Lee 228). As Martorell points out (42), this educational role as godmother very much ties the Christian element into the story: following Christian doctrine, as a godparent, Oriana's role is to look after Alberic and educate him on his place in the world. Alberic's inexperience and youth do allow for these roles within the relationship between both heroes of the story, but the relationship also allows Oriana a real chance at overcoming her curse. Martorell posits that Oriana's

inability to fully trust the men of the House of Luna leads her to using men as a tool to try and break free (40), and while there is some truth to Oriana's reluctance to completely commit to Alberic, I would argue that her role as godmother presents an opportunity to build an equal partnership unlike the ones she had with other men. Both are in need in of one another if they are to thrive and so, their relationship seems to break the roles of the *status quo*, "the focus is less on gender opposition than on the possibility of a dynamic process of exchange from one subject to another. Lee's short story is an attempt at thinking beyond or outside the binary man/woman . . . the intense . . . collaboration may be construed as representing an attempt at working the in-between, exploring the dependency of . . . man/woman" (Delyfer 7).

Indeed, it seems that the House of Luna is well aware of Oriana's curse and presence, and its members were doing their best at ignoring her. For when the Duke's lackeys –the Jesuit, the Dward and the Jester– visit the prince, suspicion arises at finding such a well-rounded prince; the Jester wonders at how this can be:

> He must have been away – or – some one must have come. He had not been living in solitude. But when – how – and above all, who? . . . It must be –it could be no other– it evidently could only be –. "Ah! . . . if only one could believe in magic!" And it suddenly struck him, with terror and mingled relief, "Was it magic?" But the Jester, like the Dwarf and the Jesuit, and the Duke of Luna himself, was altogether superior to such foolish beliefs. (Lee 227)

There seems to be an extensive knowledge of the legend of the Snake Lady within the Duchy of Luna, and yet all male characters (except young Alberic) seem reluctant to be open to the possibility that this could be true; they are fixed in their rationality.

3.2. PRINCE ALBERIC

Prince Alberic is what makes Lee's tale different from the traditional folktales. Since his birth, he has been isolated from the world and other people –very much like princesses in traditional folktales. This childhood has left him unaware of the patriarchal system or its prejudices against what it deems "Other"; as Martorell points out "he has never been in contact with the social order, or, when he has been in contact with it, he has only been subject to the orders of his tyrannical grandfather" (45).

His isolation allows him to think for himself and construct his own ideology of the beautiful, as well as of the truth. His first contact with the possibilities of the outside

world is through the Alberic the Blond and the Snake Lady Oriana tapestry in his room. Lee describes how Alberic learns about animals and plants through those depicted in the tapestry and how he grows to love the tapestry itself; Alberic can also formulate his own aesthetic and moral principles through his observing of the artwork, as Kathy Alexis Psomiades points out: "We become the beautiful through perceiving the beautiful, and perhaps even more importantly, we become healthy" (33). It is also through this tapestry that Alberic first learns about Oriana, and after growing to love her, her secret snake tail is revealed (after moving a piece of furniture); it is of some relevance to notice that Oriana's tail is the brightest thing depicted in the tapestry due to the chest and crucifix[5] covering her lower half – "a big snake's tail, with scales of still most vivid (the tapestry not having faded there) green and gold" (Lee 215). Alberic's connection and love for Oriana seems to intensify after this discovery: "Very strange it was, but he loved the beautiful lady with the thread of gold hair only the more because she ended off in the long twisting body of a snake. And that, no doubt, was why the knight was so very good to her" (Lee 215). This assumption by Alberic is once again where he differs from his predecessors, who lack his devotion to Oriana. In fact, when he finds the truth of Oriana's treatment by the men in his family tree, he is deeply saddened and angered:

> tell me whether or not there exists a certain tradition in my family, of the loves of my ancestor, Alberic the Blond, with a certain Snake Lady, and how he was unfaithful to her, and failed to disenchant her, and how a second Alberic, also my ancestor, loved this same Snake Lady, but failed before the ten years of fidelity were over and became a monk. (Lee 235)

Alberic's view on the events is once again significant, for it differs from those of other men who know of the story. The priest with whom Alberic shares the thoughts quoted above refers to Oriana as a "demon . . . a fairy – or witch, malefica or stryx . . . who had turned into a snake for her sins" (Lee 235); she is characterised as a temptress who lures the Alberics away from their duties and marriages for her own gain, and thus, both Alberics are posited as victims and then as heroes who come to their senses and reject the Snake Lady, who is then punished by bearing her eternal curse.

[5] The fact that the artifacts covering the serpent tail are of Christian affiliations seems to be deliberate, as this certainly hints at the religious and patriarchal desire to hide any trace of paganism and ties to previous goddesses and sprites.

Through Alberic's character, Lee clearly exposes patriarchy and masculinity as a construct passed on through time and environments, as something that is taught.[6] Alberic, in his isolation, does not learn condescension and hatred; thus, a new masculinity is proposed, aligned with that of nineteenth-century aesthetes. This masculinity is one that shares traits with femininity, such as an appreciation for aesthetics, discretion, gentleness and compassion, but also traditional masculine traits such as pride or bravery (Martorell 50-51).

As Stetz points out, Lee borrows from her cultural present, establishing a dialogue between the tale and nineteenth-century events, such as the concerns with aestheticism and decadence (116). Alberic's interests and sensibilities are therefore inspired by the decadent aesthetic movement, which proposed "to reject 'all that was natural and biological in favour of the inner life of art, artifice, sensation and imagination,' as manifested in Oscar Wilde's emphatic valuing of 'cultural exquisiteness' and Walter Pater's 'art for art's sake' treatise." (Showalter and Hamilton quoted in Ehman 1). Alberic stands opposed to other male characters in his innate sense for the arts and his depth of sensation and imagination (Ehman 2); especially his grandfather Balthasar Maria; Alberic is described as "unspeakably shy and rustic" (Lee 211) in his childhood, and then kind, brave and sweet in his youth (Lee 218). The Duke, on the other hand, is incredibly vain, only focusing on retaining his youth and pursuing external beauty with no concern for its moral value. For Ehman this portrayal can be interpreted as Lee depicting the false and

> feared hedonism of decadence . . . The Duke falls into this societal stereotype as he strives through deception, extravagance, and narcissism to obsessively pursue the youth and beauty which Alberic obtains artlessly . . . The appreciation of art with no concern for an underlying moral message can be misinterpreted as the endless pursuit of beauty and pleasure, and the Duke mindlessly pursues this through artifice and sensation. (Ehman 2)

During and after his time in Sparkling Waters, it seems Alberic assumes the form of a Prince like the ones in fairytales: "Never, in his most genuine youth, had Balthasar Maria, the ever young and handsome, been one-quarter as beautiful in person or as delicate in apparel as his grandson in exile . . . Never had the Jesuit seen a better-appointed study

[6] Showalter reflects on how these ideas were coming under scrutiny during the *fin-de-siècle* period in her book *Sexual Anarchy*: "It is important to keep in mind that masculinity is no more neutral, transparent, and unproblematic than 'femininity.' It, too, is a socially constructed role, defined within particular cultural and historical circumstances, and the fin de siècle also marked a crisis of identity for men" (8).

nor a more precocious young scholar" (Lee 224-225); "he was every inch of him a Prince" (Lee 227). His instincts and sense have now been cultivated, nurtured and allowed to flourish under the tutelage of his godmother, who has presently become the most important person in his life.

His dedication to Oriana plays a key part in his life, as well as his hatred for his grandfather. The removal of Oriana's tapestry from his room prompts him to destroy the new one his grandfather commissioned, and for that he is exiled; but this also marks the moment of revelation for Alberic: "after the loss of the tapestry (...) Alberic became aware that he had always hated both his grandfather and the Red Palace" (Lee 215). Moreover, after he is made aware of Oriana's curse, he decides to lift the curse himself and he seeks her out, kisses her and initiates the ten years long intended fidelity. His refusal to marry any of the women his grandfather proposes and his loyalty to Oriana sentences him in jail, and after Oriana is killed by his grandfather and his cohort, he decides to end his own life. After his death, he is made out to be crazy to the rest of society, but still, some people doubt:

> Prince Alberic of Luna, who should have been third of his name, died . . . it was stated, insane. But those who approached him maintained that he had been in perfect possession of his faculties; and that if he refused all nourishment during his second imprisonment, it was from set purpose. He was removed at night from his apartments . . . and hastily buried under a slab, which remained without any name or date. (Lee 250)

Alberic's final moments and posthumous treatments are a harsh reminder that patriarchy is not unkind to all of those who are not men, but to all of those who refuse to adhere to its conventions – including men. "Why would she make Prince Alberic's fate demonstrate so plainly the cruelty and injustice of imprisonment, especially for one whose only crime was loyalty to his beloved?" (Stetz 117) – the harshness of Alberic's treatment uncovers the violence embedded within the system. A system that crumbles under its own weighted corruption as Eheman so precisely points out: "The demise of the House of Luna occurs in 1701, implying that it is not Alberic's fault that the Duchy meets its end, but the corrupt Machiavellian nature of the court, perhaps with a pointed jab at how the decadents had become scapegoats for the nation's degeneration" (5). Alberic is brushed aside, intended to be forgotten in time, like a stain on the family tree, his personhood is handled in the same way Oriana's is, demonised, fictionalised and ultimately, erased; and a society that does that with its most gentle beings cannot survive for long.

4. Conclusion: The Struggle against Patriarchy

Alberic and Oriana build a partnership outside the patriarchal rules that not only exist within the Duchy of Luna but throughout the world. Alberic's distance from society's functioning exposes how concepts such as masculinity or the patriarchy itself are sustained: at the expense of those considered other. This is illustrated by Duke Balthasar Maria's death following both Oriana and Alberic's deaths; upon the death of the snake, symbol of immortality and youthfulness, the man responsible for her death dies only a few months later.

Lee's tale criticises society's excessive use of rationality, aligned with the patriarchy and masculine in its concerns. This stops its members from connecting to a freer, non-binary, unconscious, which would, in turn, allow for more openness and possibilities. The characterisation and narrative roles of both Oriana and Alberic present an opportunity to dismantle the chivalrous romantic conventions while operating from inside of it. Oriana and Alberic's understanding of their genders allow for the foregoing to the rigid binary imposed by the patriarchal order.

It could be argued, that in their gruesome deaths, the Snake Lady and Prince Alberic fail to destabilise the patriarchal order.[7] However, it would be a mistake to understand the tale's message as one of hopelessness. Alberic is a clear example of how the patriarchal system is not a fixed one and misogyny is not naturally within everyone, instead, it is taught. Oriana is imprisoned within her curse for centuries after the betrayal of several men, but she is still affectionate and gentle towards Alberic despite having no reason to be, given her past experiences. She refuses to be as harsh as the world, she remains optimistic and defiant; extending kindness with no certainty of receiving it back, and in doing so, she stands opposite of the rigid and bleak Duchy of Luna. Defiant in their gentleness, Alberic and Oriana construct an equal partnership, and both grow together and have bright hopes for the future. While the tale remains a tragedy, their example persists and is a clear representation of the limitless existence outside of the rigid gender binary that can be brought about with the dismantling of the current patriarchal system.

[7] As Martorell suggests "Oriana is dismembered, her pain is diffused: there is a fragmentation by means of which her personality is dismantled" (40); Zhang adds to this sentiment, saying "The crushing of the serpent marks the triumph and domination of authoritarian patriarchy over the egalitarian goddess religions" (8).

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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