



The Mélusine Romance *in* Medieval Europe

TRANSLATION, CIRCULATION, AND MATERIAL CONTEXTS

LYDIA ZELDENRUST



The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe

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The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe

Translation, Circulation, and Material Contexts

LYDIA ZELDENRUST

D. S. BREWER

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Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Note on Orthography and Translations	xii
Introduction: Mutations of Mélusine	1
Chapter 1 The French <i>Mélusine</i> and <i>Roman de Parthenay</i>	17
<i>Textual Witnesses: Audience, Variance, Selected Corpus</i>	22
<i>Mélusine: God's Marvellous Monster</i>	26
<i>Careful Plotting: Revealing Mélusine's Curse and Fairy Nature</i>	33
<i>From Half-Serpent to Serpent: Hybridity and Transformation</i>	39
<i>Inheriting Monstrosity: Mélusine's Sons</i>	52
Chapter 2 The German <i>Melusine</i>	64
<i>From Manuscript to Print: Audiences, Images, and Textual Stability</i>	68
<i>Melusine the Ideal Christian Fairy</i>	76
<i>Serpent or Half-Serpent?</i>	81
<i>Melusine the Monstrous Mother</i>	92
Chapter 3 The Castilian <i>Melosina</i>	102
<i>The 1489 Edition by Parix and Cleblat</i>	105
<i>The 1526 Edition by the Crombergers</i>	111
<i>Key Transformations in Style and Paratext</i>	115
<i>Melosina: More Fairy than Human?</i>	118
<i>A Catholic Wedding</i>	124
<i>Duality Versus Animality</i>	131
<i>Depicting/Recycling the Monstrous Body: Melosina's Sons</i>	134
Chapter 4 The Dutch <i>Meluzine</i>	146
<i>The 1491 Edition by Gheraert Leeu</i>	150
<i>The 1510 Edition by Henrick Eckert van Homberch</i>	154

Contents

<i>The 1602 Edition by Hieronymus I Verdussen</i>	156
<i>A Hybrid Translation: How, Why, and Which Source?</i>	159
<i>More Human than Fairy</i>	165
<i>Becoming the Animal</i>	171
<i>Increased Focus on Hybridity</i>	175
Chapter 5 The English <i>Melusine</i> and <i>Partenay</i>	183
<i>The Prose Melusine</i>	185
<i>The Printed Melusine Fragments</i>	187
<i>The Verse Partenay</i>	192
<i>Why Translations of Both Versions?</i>	194
<i>Translation Strategies: Content Versus Form</i>	199
‘ryght as the frenshe wil yiff me evidence’: <i>Invisibility and Close Translation</i>	206
<i>Melusine and Her Part-Monstrous Sons</i>	211
Conclusion Mélusine’s European Dimensions	221
Appendix Manuscripts and Printed Editions of the Various <i>Mélusine</i> Versions (up to c. 1600)	234
Bibliography	248
Index	262

Illustrations

Fig. 1	Coudrette, <i>RP</i> , Paris, BnF, ms. fr. 24383, fol. 19r	41
Fig. 2	Coudrette, <i>RP</i> , Cambridge University Library, L1.2.5, fol. 1r. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library	42
Fig. 3	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> (Geneva: Adam Steinschaber, 1478), Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Lm 2° 17, fol. CXXXXI	43
Fig. 4	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> , London, BL, ms. Harley 4418, fol. 214v © The British Library Board	45
Fig. 5	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Basel: Bernhard Richel, 1473–4), Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. St. Peter pap. 23, fol. 65v	47
Fig. 6	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> (Paris: Alain Lotrian and Denis Janot, c. 1533–4), London, BL, C.97.bb.30, fol. A1r © The British Library Board	48
Fig. 7	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> , Paris, BnF, Arsenal, ms. 3353, fol. 4v	56
Fig. 8	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> (Geneva: Steinschaber, 1478), Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Lm 2° 17, fol. CI	58
Fig. 9	Jean d'Arras, <i>HM</i> (Geneva: Steinschaber, 1478), Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel: Lm 2° 17, fol. CLVII	59
Fig. 10	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Augsburg: Johann Bämle, 1480), St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Ink. 999 (FF links I 18), fol. A1v	82
Fig. 11	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> , Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Hs 4028, fol. 50r © Germanisches Nationalmuseum	86
Fig. 12	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> , Basel University Library, O I 18, fol. 35r	87
Fig. 13	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Basel: Bernhard Richel, 1473–4), Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. St. Peter pap. 23, fol. 51r	88
Fig. 14	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Augsburg: Bämle, 1474), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, 2 Inc.c.a. 295, fol. 52r	89

Illustrations

Fig. 15	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> , Basel University Library, O I 18, fol. 50v	91
Fig. 16	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Augsburg: Bämmler, 1474), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, 2 Inc.c.a. 295, fol. 66v	91
Fig. 17	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> , Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Hs 4028, fol. 23r © Germanisches Nationalmuseum	94
Fig. 18	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Basel: Bernhard Richel, 1473–4), Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. St. Peter pap. 23, fol. 22v	96
Fig. 19	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Augsburg: Michael Manger, 1574), University Library Eichstaett-Ingolstadt, 824, fol. C6v	97
Fig. 20	Jean d’Arras, <i>HM</i> (Lyon: Guillaume le Roy, c. 1487), The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Douce 182, Inc. J-094, fol. D2r	127
Fig. 21	<i>La historia de la linda Melosina</i> (Toulouse: Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat, 1489), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B840, fol. R3v © Royal Library of Belgium	137
Fig. 22	<i>La historia de la linda Melosina</i> (Toulouse: Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat, 1489), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B840, fol. T1v © Royal Library of Belgium	139
Fig. 23	<i>La historia de la linda Melosina</i> (Toulouse: Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat, 1489), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B840, fol. D1r © Royal Library of Belgium	140
Fig. 24	<i>La historia de la linda Melosina</i> (Toulouse: Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat, 1489), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B840, fol. F3v © Royal Library of Belgium	141
Fig. 25	<i>Meluzine</i> (Antwerp: Gheraert Leeu, 1491), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B 1.369, fol. Z2v © Royal Library of Belgium	163
Fig. 26	Thüring von Ringoltingen, <i>Melusine</i> (Basel: Bernhard Richel, 1473–4), Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. St. Peter pap. 23, fol. 91v	164
Fig. 27	<i>Meluzine</i> (Antwerp: Gheraert Leeu, 1491), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B 1.369, fol. S2r © Royal Library of Belgium	169
Fig. 28	<i>Meluzine</i> (Antwerp: Gheraert Leeu, 1491), Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, INC B 1.369, fol. T5v © Royal Library of Belgium	177

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
CUP	Cambridge University Press
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue
GW	Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke
<i>HM</i>	Jean d'Arras, <i>Histoire de Mélusine</i>
ISTC	Incunabula Short Title Catalogue
KBR	Royal Library of Belgium, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>RP</i>	Coudrette, <i>Roman de Parthenay</i>
USTC	Universal Short Title Catalogue

Note on Orthography and Translations

The spelling of the names of characters mentioned in the various *Mélusine* versions follows that of the particular version under discussion. For instance, when discussing the Castilian translation, Mélusine is referred to as ‘Melosina’ and Raymondin as ‘Remondín’. When referring to a specific source or translation, I use its (abbreviated) title (*HM*, *RP*, *Melosina*, etc.), but the overall tradition is referred to with the general term *Mélusine*. Quotations from manuscript and early printed sources modernize capitalization of proper nouns and use modern punctuation. Abbreviations are expanded silently; ‘u’ and ‘v’, ‘i’ and ‘j’, and long ‘s’ have been regularized; and diacritics have been added in accordance with standard editorial practice. Quotations from modern editions follow the spelling conventions of that particular edition. All translations into modern English are my own.

Introduction

Mutations of Mélusine

And what was she, the Fairy Melusine?
Men say, at night, around the castle-keep
The black air ruffles neath the outstretched vans
Of a long flying worm, whose sinewy tail
And leather pinions beat the parted sky
Scudding with puddered clouds and black as soot,
And ever and again a shuddering cry
Mounts on the wind, a cry of pain and loss,
And whirls in the wind's screaming and is gone.

[...] And what was she, the Fairy Melusine?
Were these her kin, Echidna's gruesome brood,
Scaly devourers, or were those her kind
More kind, those rapid wanderers of the dark
Who in dreamlight, or twilight, or no light
Are lovely Mysteries and promise gifts [...]¹

In her poem 'The Fairy Melusine', the fictional Victorian poet Christabel LaMotte – one of the central characters of A. S. Byatt's *Possession* – retells the medieval romance of Mélusine, emphasizing the beautiful fairy's seemingly paradoxical dual nature, made manifest in her weekly transformation into a half-serpent. What fascinates Christabel most about Mélusine is the richness of her character, as she is both 'an Unnatural Monster – and a most proud and loving and handy woman', or 'a combination of the orderly and humane with the unnatural and the Wild'.² Christabel is not the only one captivated by this medieval legend of a noble woman cursed to become an animal-human hybrid every Saturday – most of Byatt's characters are similarly entranced by Mélusine's ambiguous, multifaceted nature.

In this, the novel follows in a long tradition of artistic and scholarly fascination for the puzzling figure who is Mélusine. Indeed, there has been much

¹ A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), pp. 289, 292.

² Byatt, *Possession*, pp. 191, 196.

critical debate on her true nature: some scholars see Mélusine as a benevolent fairy lover, some categorize her as a foundational ancestor or mother goddess figure, whilst others argue that her serpentine nature links her with demons, the Eden serpent or the monstrous races of sirens, undines, and succubi.³ However, Mélusine's character is so remarkably ambiguous and multifaceted that it is misleading to attempt to define her by one particular characteristic alone. Just as Mélusine's body continually changes – from human to hybrid and eventually to animal – so does her character, allowing for a multitude of possible readings. Undoubtedly, it is this flexibility and open-endedness which lies at the root of the ongoing fascination with the Mélusine story and with her hybrid body. Nowadays, Mélusine's monstrous figure not only appears in a postmodern novel such as *Possession* but is also found in video games, fantasy literature, graphic novels, gothic metal songs, and the logo of a well-known coffee chain.

From the beginning, the story of Mélusine has been a popular read. The earliest text to give this half-serpent lady the name 'Mélusine' was Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* or *La noble histoire de Lusignan* (*HM*), created around 1393.⁴ Less than a decade later – in 1401 – Jean's prose romance was rewritten as a poem entitled the *Roman de Parthenay* (*RP*) by Coudrette. If the dates and number of surviving manuscripts are anything to go by – fifteen manuscripts and fragments for the *HM*, twenty for the *RP* – both versions had a continuing appeal with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century audiences. However, Mélusine's popularity did not limit itself to the French versions alone, as the romance was also translated into several other languages.

Thüring von Ringoltingen finished his Middle High German prose translation of the *RP* in 1456. The German translation also survives in a large number of manuscripts, and it was the first *Mélusine* version to appear in print. The

³ On Mélusine's fairy nature, see James Wade, *Faeries in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 122–8; Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 188–92. On Mélusine's role as mother goddess and foundational ancestor, see Léo Desaiivre, *Le mythe de la mère Lusine: Étude critique et bibliographique* (Saint-Maixent: Reversé, 1883); Jacques Le Goff and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'Mélusine maternelle et défricheuse', *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 26.3–4 (1971), 587–622. Interpretations of Mélusine as a demon include: Jonathan F. Krell, 'Between Demon and Divinity: Mélusine Revisited', *Mythosphere* 2.4 (2000), 375–96; Stephen G. Nichols, 'Melusine between Myth and History: Profile of a Female Demon', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1996), pp. 137–64.

⁴ The surviving manuscripts of this prose romance feature different titles, including *La tres noble hystoire de Lusignen* and *Livre de Melusine en prose*. The title became more standardized in the printed editions as *Histoire de la belle Melusine* or *L'histoire de Melusine*. Since most titles include the word 'histoire', Jean's version is referred to as *Histoire de Mélusine* or *HM* throughout this study.

early German editions proved so successful that before the end of the sixteenth century this translation had seen more than thirty editions. The popularity of the German editions also led to the printing of the *editio princeps* of Jean's *HM* in 1478. This French edition likewise appears to have been successful, as the romance was printed twenty more times before 1600, and it even generated a spin-off featuring Mélusine's most famous son, Geoffroy. The Mélusine story's relatively early transfer to print contributed greatly to its international spread, and it was further translated into medieval Castilian, Middle Dutch, and Middle English. Most translations survive in multiple copies – another sign that the *Mélusine* romance was of great interest to a broad readership, not just in but certainly also outside French-speaking territories.

However, despite the Mélusine story's pan-European appeal, previous scholarship has largely considered the French versions alone, neglecting the translations. Though Thüring's German translation has recently received increasing scholarly attention – largely brought on by its 550-year anniversary – the German version's status as a translation is not always acknowledged. The *Mélusine* translations in Castilian, Dutch, and English remain relatively unexplored, especially when compared to the vast amount of scholarship on the 'original' French romances. This is rather strange when we consider that the Mélusine story would probably not be so well known today were it not for the impact of these translations. One may wonder, for instance, whether Jean's version would have appeared in print if the editions of the German translation had not proved to be so popular. The romance's appearance and popularity across Europe prompt a need for a transregional perspective.

This book examines the various translations of the romance of *Mélusine* written or printed in western Europe between circa 1400 and 1600, when this story was at the height of its popularity. It fills a significant gap in scholarship on the *Mélusine* tradition, not only by examining these largely unexplored translations in detail, but also by addressing questions concerning the exact relationship between the translations and their French sources, and how this can help to trace how the romance moved around western Europe. In other words, this study examines the cross-cultural transmission and diffusion of the *Mélusine* romance. In opening up the *Mélusine* tradition to a broader view that also incorporates the non-French branches of its multilingual legacy, this research moves away from traditional nation-based scholarly approaches. Instead, this study contributes to growing efforts to conceptualize, map, and examine medieval literature from a European perspective, shedding light on what it means to call this highly popular romance an early European bestseller.

My examination of the *Mélusine* translations focuses especially on the transmission of the character of Mélusine herself, as I analyse how her complicated part-fairy, part-human, and part-animal figure transforms across languages, in multiple manuscript and printed text traditions. Special attention is paid to what happens to those moments in the narrative which highlight

Mélusine's shapeshifting nature and her monstrous animal-human hybrid form. The discussions also look at the role played by Mélusine's sons, as most of them are born with a monstrous attribute which links them to their mother's supernatural nature and monstrous curse. I examine not just how Mélusine and her sons are treated in the texts, but also how the images accompanying the different versions further 'translate' their characters from a written to a visual representation.

This study not only looks across multiple vernacular languages and literary traditions, but also combines philological and literary analysis with book-historical approaches. This means I often pay as much attention to people as I do to texts, uncovering how different agents – translators, scribes, printers, illuminators, woodcutters, patrons, booksellers, and book owners – played a role in the transregional spread of this romance and influenced how Mélusine's multifaceted character was transmitted across multiple languages. One key thread that runs throughout this book is the impact of the story's gradual move from being found primarily in a manuscript context to becoming one of the more popular romances of the early print market. In essence, this book is a study of translation in its broadest sense, covering not just changes to the romance's content but also to its form, material presentation, and paratextual features – which include images – as well as the geographical movement or 'translation' of physical texts. Scholarship often considers such factors in isolation, but I am interested in seeing how and where these intersect, shaping the romance's spread across Europe.

The story of Mélusine is rich in interesting themes and characters: both the *HM* and the *RP* include episodes featuring monsters, giants, conquering knights, pagan armies, burning monks, helpless but also assertive women, and visits to the pope in Rome. This makes it difficult to summarize the French versions succinctly without leaving out a host of important details, but the main narrative of both redactions – though they occasionally differ – can be said to focus on the relationship between the half-fairy Mélusine and the human knight Raymondin, and the later adventures of their sons.

Raymondin first meets Mélusine after making the unfortunate mistake of accidentally killing his lord during a boar hunt. He flees the scene and is so distraught that he does not notice that his horse takes him to three women standing beside a fountain. The most beautiful of these women, Mélusine, knows all about Raymondin's misfortune and offers him her help to escape punishment, on condition that he promises to marry her. Not quite believing his luck, Raymondin consents but Mélusine tells him there is more to the promise: Raymondin must swear never to look for Mélusine on a Saturday and, if he were to see her on that day, never to reveal what he sees to anyone. Raymondin is not at all alarmed by this rather precise condition and agrees, but the reader knows that Mélusine asks for his secrecy because she has been

cursed to become a half-serpent every Saturday. She and her two sisters received this curse from their own mother, as punishment for enclosing their father in a mountain.⁵

For years Mélusine and Raymondin enjoy a happy marriage, during which time Mélusine brings her husband great prosperity and gives birth to no fewer than ten sons. Most sons are born with a monstrous deformity, either an excess of features – such as Horrible’s three eyes – a lack – such as Regnault’s one eye – or the inclusion of animal elements, which remind us of Mélusine’s weekly metamorphosis.⁶ Geoffroy, for instance, is born with a large boar-like tooth protruding upwards from his bottom lip, and Anthoine is born with a lion’s claw – complete with hair and nails – on his cheek. Mélusine founds several towns and churches each time one of her sons is born. Her largest building project is Castle Lusignan, which she names after herself.

The narrative then turns to the adventures of several of Mélusine’s sons – now adult – as they travel abroad to help besieged kings and princesses in their fights against pagan armies. Urien, Guyon, Anthoine, and Regnault each marry a beautiful princess, who in each case just happens to be the only heir to vast territories in Europe and the Mediterranean regions. Geoffroy also sets out for adventure: he defeats two giants and sets into motion the story’s tragic ending by locking his brother Fromont and a hundred other monks inside the abbey of Maillezais and setting it on fire, burning them alive.

Not entirely unexpectedly, Raymondin eventually breaks his vow to Mélusine. One Saturday, urged on by the count of Forez’s talk of supposed rumours of adultery, Raymondin spies on his wife and sees her bathing in the form of a half-serpent. At this point, Raymondin is not so much shocked by the monstrosity of Mélusine’s hybrid body as he is angry with himself – and the count – for breaking his vow. After receiving news of Fromont’s death at the hands of Geoffroy, however, Raymondin begins to question Mélusine’s capacity as a mother and her status as a human. If so many of Mélusine’s sons are born with deformities, and if at least one of them is capable of great cruelty, is Mélusine then not a monster, more serpent than woman? Raymondin’s blind rage leads him finally to reveal Mélusine’s secret in front of several witnesses. The scene is a pivotal moment, as Raymondin’s betrayal forces Mélusine to depart the human world. She jumps out of a castle window and transforms into a serpent, which flies off in a state of great distress. Because Raymondin did not see his wife’s human side, Mélusine is fated to embody the animal until the end of days.

⁵ The *HM* begins with an episode explaining the background to Mélusine’s curse, but in the *RP* this explanation does not appear until much later in the narrative.

⁶ Compare Dana M. Oswald’s observations that there are three types of monstrous humans in medieval literature: ‘monsters of excess, monsters of lack, and hybrid monsters’: *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), p. 6.

Although both Raymondin and Geoffroy are given the chance to atone for their sins, Mélusine's punishment is never-ending. She returns only occasionally – still in serpent form – to announce the death of one of her descendants, or a change in ownership of Castle Lusignan. The French versions differ most towards the end of the narrative. Whereas Jean's version ends by relating an episode of Mélusine's sister Melior and the trial of the Sparrowhawk Castle, Coudrette adds an extra episode describing the fate of the third cursed sister, Palestine. Another important difference is that Jean's narrator describes several sightings of Mélusine in serpent form, whilst in Coudrette's version she all but disappears after her final transformation.

What both French versions have in common, however, is that Mélusine is an ambiguous figure throughout the narrative: she is at the same time a noble woman, a daughter of the fairy race, a Catholic Christian who is accepted into human society, a loving mother of part-monstrous sons, the founder of the Lusignan dynasty, the protector of her family and heirs, and a monstrous half-serpent. As we shall see in the first chapter, although each version presents Mélusine's character slightly differently, within the world created in the French *Mélusine* romances it is perfectly possible, for instance, for Mélusine to take on an unnatural hybrid form once a week and still be a devout Christian.

The way this ambiguity plays out in the translations of the two French redactions is the topic of this study. How do the translators treat Mélusine's multifaceted character, and especially her hybrid nature? Are some of Mélusine's aspects highlighted more than others? Can we determine if a translator's cultural and literary surroundings had an influence on the reworking of Mélusine's character? What impact does the romance's gradual transition from manuscript to print have on the way we encounter Mélusine's ambiguous figure, especially in terms of the iconographical depictions? What happens to the descriptions and depictions of Mélusine's sons, and how does this reflect on their monstrous mother? Are there any differences in the way the sons' monstrous natures are treated compared to that of their mother? Finally, what difference does it make to look at the different *Mélusine* versions together, and to consider both text and image, and manuscript and early printed sources?

As the word 'mutations' in the title of this introduction suggests, this book is about changes and transformations. My examination of the romance's overall transformation from a local French legend to a multilingual, pan-European tradition is not intended as a linear narrative of progress. Rather than viewing the different versions as part of an ongoing evolution of the figure of Mélusine, the translations discussed here make up a case study of the varied approaches of late medieval and early modern translators to the task of translating popular, secular literature originally written in the vernacular. The differing approaches to translating Mélusine's ambiguous character represent individual attempts to engage with the story and reshape it in such a way that it might appeal to a

readership that may be far removed from that of the French exemplars. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to discern some general trends among the various translations. This is where the concept of ‘mutations’ is key, as it reflects the interplay between sporadic departures from the two French parent texts and transformations which occur on a larger scale within one or more translations, often a result of greater influences such as a change in medium, different literary fashions, or shifts in the contemporary cultural, social, and religious landscapes. My use of this term is not intended to imply that any changes made to the romance are somehow wrong, but I use ‘mutation’ in a more neutral sense to reflect both large-scale and minor changes.

Since the term ‘mutation’ refers more to a middle stage than a transformation that should be considered complete, it is also a fitting concept for this study’s recurring focus on various kinds of hybridity.⁷ The discussion of how Mélusine’s multifaceted character is translated into multiple linguistic and cultural contexts pays special attention to the way her animal–human hybrid form is treated, as this hybridity is a physical manifestation of her complicated ambiguity. Mélusine’s hybrid body questions the boundaries between human and animal, thereby providing a challenge to the normative distinctions commonly found in medieval chivalric literature. For instance, knights know that they should rescue or marry beautiful women and kill dangerous serpents, but what happens when you discover that your wife is a combination of both? However, Mélusine’s hybridity is not limited to the question of human or animal alone: because she is the daughter of a fairy mother and a human father, there is a continued tension between her supernatural and human – and, by extension, Christian – origins. In other words, this research considers the mutations of a character who is already a kind of mutant, and whose constantly shifting nature – human or animal, fairy or Christian – challenges ideas of bodily stability and static identities.

There has recently been a noticeable increase in critical works examining Mélusine’s identity as a monstrous and hybrid figure, many of which pay particular attention to how the romance reflects ideas about the female body as inherently monstrous.⁸ Most such studies focus on the French versions and

⁷ I use the terms ‘hybridity’ and ‘hybrid’ mainly to refer to the mixing of elements that are normally considered to belong to different categories. On the complex history of these terms in modern scholarship, which includes their biological roots and their use in postcolonial theory and cultural studies, see Deborah A. Kapchan and Pauline Turner Strong, ‘Theorizing the Hybrid’, *Journal of American Folklore* 112.445 (1999), 239–53.

⁸ Recent publications on Mélusine’s hybridity and monstrosity include: the chapter ‘Sex and the Serpent’ in Miranda Griffin, *Transforming Tales: Rewriting Metamorphosis in Medieval French Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 137–75, Joanna Pavlevski, ‘Une esthétique originale du motif de la femme serpent: Recherches ontologiques et picturales sur Mélusine au XVe siècle’, in *L’humain et l’animal dans la France médiévale (XIIe–XVe s.)*, ed. Irène Fabry-Tehranchi and Anna Russakoff (Rodopi: Amsterdam,

there have been but few examinations of how this plays out in the various translations.⁹ I argue that this is a missed opportunity, not only because the translations deserve more attention, but also because Mélusine's monstrous and mutable figure in fact offers a useful way to think about the international dimensions of this romance. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, 'the monstrous body is pure culture', it is a 'construct and a projection', which reveals the anxieties and desires of those who created it.¹⁰ Translating such a meaningful body brings with it the traces and imprints of the culture that first spawned it, but also opens up the possibility for creating new layers of meaning. As is often noted, the process of translation is in itself always hermeneutic, an act of interpretation which reveals more about the translator – their literary background, socio-cultural identity, and what they thought were the expectations of their audience – than about the text that is translated.¹¹ Like the monster, a translation is a reflection or mirror-image of those who created it. This makes Mélusine's monstrous body – which so clearly invites interpretation – the perfect site for reading how different cultures engage with her story.

Moreover, Mélusine's status as a shapeshifter offers an even greater opportunity to consider how her figure changes or mutates not just within but also beyond the boundaries of the French romances. Miranda Griffin has highlighted how physical transformation is a useful way to think about translation, adaptation, and 'the essential mutability of the medieval text'.¹² Although Griffin's study of the rewriting of stories about metamorphosis focuses on a French-language context, her argument applies to a comparative and multilingual perspective too. Mélusine's bodily mutability is an interesting metaphor for how the romance itself also moves and transforms across borders. Just as Mélusine's character is constantly in flux and she cannot be defined by one

2014), pp. 73–94, E. Jane Burns, 'A Snake-Tailed Woman: Hybridity and Dynasty in the *Roman de Mélusine*', in *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*, ed. Burns and Peggy McCracken (Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), pp. 185–220.

⁹ The most detailed examination of how Mélusine's monstrosity appears in one of the translation is Misty Urban's *Monstrous Women in Middle English Romance: Representations of Mysterious Female Power* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25 (p. 4).

¹¹ See, for instance, Jane H. M. Taylor's introduction to *Rewriting Arthurian Romance in Renaissance France: From Manuscript to Printed Book* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 1–10, where she argues that translation 'is always a hermeneutic enterprise, a process of reception and appropriation, however little this is expressed and however little conscious it is' (p. 6). See also Anne E. B. Coldiron, *English Printing, Verse Translation, and the Battle of the Sexes, 1476–1557* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2009), pp. 4–6.

¹² Griffin, *Transforming Tales*, p. 1.

characteristic alone, so her story constantly changes too; when we look only at the French versions we do not see the full picture.

This study's focus on the period when we see an explosion of *Mélusine* translations means that my research transgresses the traditional boundaries between the Middle Ages and the early modern or Renaissance period. The reason for this is simple: although originally a late medieval romance, the story of *Mélusine* did not cease to interest its readers at that point in time which literary history traditionally views as the border between the medieval and the early modern. Like most texts, the *Mélusine* translations do not keep to rigid period boundaries, even if scholars often do.

However, the most crucial artificial boundary in *Mélusine* scholarship is not that between the medieval and Renaissance period, but between the romance's manuscript and printed contexts. Most *Mélusine* scholars tend to focus exclusively on the manuscript tradition, so that the romance's appearance in print takes on a secondary role. As a result, the story's continued importance well into the sixteenth century is often overlooked. Conversely, on those rarer occasions when the printed editions do receive scholarly attention, the earlier manuscript versions are typically not taken into account. This rigid divide between manuscript and print is, of course, largely an artificial construct. The transition from manuscript to print was a gradual process and not a sudden shift where one medium was promptly replaced by the other.¹³ We see this reflected in those *Mélusine* manuscripts that contain folios from a printed edition and in cases of cross-media influences, such as the English prose translation – found in a manuscript but based on the text of a printed edition – or the Trento manuscript of the German translation, which is a transcription of a printed source.

However, these are not the only illustrations of the coexistence between manuscript and printed sources. For instance, manuscripts of the *HM* and *RP* were still being created at a time when the *HM* was already circulating in print. Similarly, several manuscripts of the German translation post-date the early incunabula. Clearly, the availability of a French or German printed edition did not quell the demand for new *Mélusine* manuscripts. That Margaret of Austria owned both a manuscript and a printed *Mélusine* version further suggests that contemporary readers did not necessarily make such a clear distinction between these types of media as scholars might do today. Since manuscript and printed sources existed side by side for some time – and since

¹³ Although the invention of printing by moveable type would transform the nature and spread of early books, most scholars now regard this as a gradual process rather than an immediate 'revolution', as first suggested in: Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1979). For an overview of this debate, see Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham, 'Introduction: Script, Print and History', in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700*, ed. Crick and Walsham (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 1–26.

the arrival of printed editions played a crucial role in the increased production and spread of the *Mélusine* translations – my discussion is not limited to the manuscript versions alone.¹⁴

Interestingly, some of the printed *Mélusine* translations are hybrids in their own right. For example, the earliest Castilian edition is a translation of a French exemplar, but it is accompanied by woodcuts originally designed to illustrate the German translation. Ideas of hybridity also return in the Dutch translation, which is the only *Mélusine* version to feature episodes from both French redactions. Moreover, it is possible that the episodes translated from the *RP* are based not on a French but a German exemplar, and the images in the Dutch editions are likely modelled after those of a German model, too. Such examples illustrate that, just as we would be mistaken to think there was a strict split between manuscript and printed sources, so it would also be wrong to think that there are no mutual influences among the various *Mélusine* translations. In other words, viewing each translation in isolation does not give us the complete story; it is only when the various versions are put together that we discover both what they share and what might be distinctive.

My study of the *Mélusine* translations ties in with recent developments acknowledging that modern ideas of national and linguistic borders inaccurately represent the reality of Europe around 1400–1600. One of the most important findings of scholarship that has begun to interrogate the limitations of nation- and language-based medieval literary histories – a process which is still in its early stages – is that medieval cultures were connected in more ways than previously acknowledged.¹⁵ People often belonged to various networks and communities – real or imagined – which facilitated cultural connections not necessarily bound by conventional borders. Such dynamic, transcultural interactions are reflected in the production and use of medieval texts. A number of recent projects have highlighted how medieval people and their texts moved across different cultural, linguistic, social, and political borders.¹⁶ For

¹⁴ On the importance of early print culture in the spread of translations, see Sara K. Barker and Brenda Hosington, eds., *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads: Translation, Print and Culture in Britain, 1473–1640* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Anne E. B. Coldiron, *Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

¹⁵ See especially David Wallace, ed., *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418* (Oxford: OUP, 2016). On ideas of *mouvance*, mobilities, and networks, see Martin B. Schichtman, Laurie A. Finke and Kathleen Coyne Kelly, “‘The world is my home when I’m mobile’: Medieval Mobilities”, *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 4 (2013), 125–35.

¹⁶ These include the projects ‘Arthurian Fiction: A Pan-European Approach’, which ran from 2004 to early 2009; ‘Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside France’, which ran from April 2011 to early 2015 <<http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk>>; ‘Transcultural Critical Editing: Vernacular Poetry in the Burgundian Netherlands, 1450–1530’, which ran from January 2012 to July 2016; and ‘Crossing Borders in the

instance, manuscripts could travel with their aristocratic owners as the courts of Europe moved from one region to the next, and many printed texts were published in one place and then exported to another. The study of translations can offer valuable insights into such movements. By examining, for instance, how a *Mélusine* translator obtained his exemplar, or how *Mélusine* illustrators from different regions may have influenced each other, it is possible to retrace some of the earliest steps in the romance's gradual transformation into a European bestseller.

In recent decades there have been some pioneering studies that examine medieval romances from a cross-cultural perspective.¹⁷ This book follows on from such innovative approaches, but it also pushes the transcultural framework further. Whereas existing discussions focus on either the transregional mobility and transformation of content or the circulation of physical copies across borders, this study considers how and where such factors meet. This means that the analyses provide insight not only into the multilingual legacy of this romance, but also into other, much larger areas, including the various artistic and artisanal networks that shaped late medieval and early modern literary production and exchange. In particular, this study offers clear evidence of the transcultural nature of the early print market. Other aspects covered include changing literary trends and the malleability of the romance genre itself. As we shall see, a romance written in France around 1400 is not the same beast as a romance translated in late fifteenth-century Germany or early sixteenth-century England, and shifts in focus on, for instance, this romance's genealogical aspects or its chivalric elements also impact the way *Mélusine*'s story is presented to the reader on the page.¹⁸

InsularMiddleAges', which started in 2016 <<https://insularmiddleages.wordpress.com>>. An important forerunner in this area is the Centre for Medieval Literature, jointly based at the University of Southern Denmark and the University of York <<http://cml.sdu.dk>> [all accessed 15 Apr. 2019].

¹⁷ For instance, Louise Wilson, 'The Publication of Iberian Romance in Early Modern Europe', in *Translation and the Book Trade in Early Modern Europe*, ed. José María Pérez Fernández and Edward Wilson-Lee (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), pp. 201–16; Sif Ríkhardsdóttir, *Medieval Translations and Cultural Discourse: The Movement of Texts in England, France and Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012); Patricia E. Grieve, '*Floire and Blancheflor*' and the European Romance (Cambridge: CUP, 1997). Note that such studies focus on either manuscript or printed sources – scholars rarely consider both.

¹⁸ Kevin Brownlee has highlighted how *Mélusine*'s mixed and mutating body can be read as a metaphor for how this romance combines various different discourses, including '*conte du fée*, courtly romance, crusade-epic, political historiography, travelogue/pilgrimage, popular theology, Hundred-Years War propaganda'. Brownlee, 'Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis', *Yale French Studies* 86 (1994), 18–38 (p. 38). This may also explain why the romance was considered so appealing, as there seems to be something there for everyone, and so each translator may choose to focus on some elements more than others.

When research crosses various cultural and linguistic boundaries, one inevitably encounters problems with modern terminology. In my designation of the various *Mélusine* versions as French, German, Castilian, Dutch or English, I use such terms in their linguistic – rather than geographical or political – sense. This is because modern correlations between language and nation often do not represent the reality of the medieval and early modern landscape. For instance, the German translation was written by an author from a city which is now in Switzerland, and many of the surviving manuscripts and printed copies of this translation were similarly created in areas outside modern-day Germany – including Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. To give another example, contrary to what one might expect, the Dutch translation was printed not in the Netherlands – a kingdom which was not formed until the nineteenth century – or in any of the late medieval provinces of Holland, but in an area of the Burgundian Low Countries that is part of modern-day Belgium. However, even when used in their linguistic sense, terms such as ‘the German translation’ can be misleading, as for some linguistic corpora it is perhaps more accurate to speak of a range of coexisting dialectal variants than of one specific language. For the sake of simplicity, I use larger umbrella terms such as ‘German’ or ‘Dutch’, but in order to do justice to the contemporary linguistic reality I shall point out dialectal variants when relevant.

Finally, this research looks at not only the textual mutations of *Mélusine* and her part-monstrous sons, but also their iconographical transformations. Considering that a large number of manuscripts and virtually all printed *Mélusine* editions were illustrated – which tells us that the images were considered a worthwhile expense – it is only right that the interplay between text and image be given due attention. Françoise Clier-Colombani has shown that the illustrations played an important role in the reception of the *Mélusine* legend.¹⁹ Just as translators function as mediators of the textual side of the *Mélusine* tradition, so miniaturists and woodcutters act as intermediaries in interpreting the story and translating it into visual depictions. In turning the pages of a manuscript or printed book, the reader’s eye is often drawn first to the images, whose depictions would have undoubtedly influenced the reading of the text.

One could imagine that illustrations of the monstrous features of *Mélusine* and her sons would have been especially interesting, as they offer the reader spectacular portrayals of figures who were supposed to be the ancestors of

¹⁹ Françoise Clier-Colombani, *La fée Mélusine au Moyen Âge: Images, mythes et symboles* (Paris: Le Léopard d’Or, 1991); Clier-Colombani, ‘Die Darstellung des Wunderbaren: Zur Ikonographie der Illustrationen in den französischen und deutschen Handschriften und Wiegendruckten des “Melusine”-Romans’, in *Zeichensprachen des literarischen Buchs in der frühen Neuzeit: Die ‘Melusine’ des Thüring von Ringoltingen*, ed. Ursula Rautenberg et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 321–46.

some of Europe's most famous noble houses.²⁰ Furthermore, Clier-Colombani points out that the iconographic *Mélusine* tradition of the French and German versions gradually developed into an almost autonomous discourse, as some images were influenced more by earlier pictorial analogues than by the text they illustrate.²¹ However, Clier-Colombani does not incorporate the iconographies of the other translations, which means that there is much left to discover. We may wonder, for instance, whether the iconographies of other linguistic corpora were part of this autonomous discourse too, or if they represent any departure from the main iconographic tradition.

This study focuses on a period which saw an explosion of translations and adaptations of the *Mélusine* romance. Although the French and German versions remained in print after the sixteenth century – albeit in the form of chapbooks – and there was even a brief resurgence in the nineteenth century, the degree of growth and spread of the legend in the period 1400–1600 remains unrivalled.²² In other regions, the romance's popularity faded after the sixteenth century. For instance, there is no evidence of any English translations after 1510, and the latest known Castilian edition was printed in 1526. This book therefore concentrates on the period of the romance's greatest popularity, spanning the years between the creation of the earliest French redaction and the appearance of the last early modern translations. It is important to emphasize that my focus lies on the translations of the two French versions by Jean and Coudrette, which means that the later translations in Czech, Polish, Danish, Swedish, and Russian, which are all derived – directly or indirectly – from the German translation, fall outside the scope of this study.²³ Though

²⁰ Those claiming descent from Mélusine included the Lusignan kings of Cyprus, the La Rochefoucauld family, and the counts of Saint Pol, one of the branches of the House of Luxembourg.

²¹ Clier-Colombani, 'Die Darstellung des Wunderbaren'.

²² On the seventeenth-century *Bibliothèque bleue* editions of the *HM*, see part 2 of Hélène Bouquin, 'Éditions et adaptations de 'L'histoire de Mélusine' de Jean d'Arras (XV^e–XIX^e siècle): Les aventures d'un roman medieval' (unpublished doctoral thesis, École nationale des chartes, 2000); Lise Andries, 'Mélusine et Orson: Deux réécritures de la bibliothèque bleue', in *La Bibliothèque bleue et les littératures de colportage*, ed. Thierry Delcourt and Élisabeth Parinet (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2000), pp. 78–92. On the German *Melusine* as an eighteenth-century *Volksbuch*, and on Goethe's 'Die Neue Melusine', see Leander Petzoldt, 'Melusinen in der populären Tradition', in *550 Jahre deutsche Melusine – Coudrette und Thüring von Ringoltingen. Beiträge der wissenschaftlichen Tagung der Universitäten Bern und Lausanne vom August 2006. 550 ans de Mélusine allemande – Coudrette et Thüring von Ringoltingen. Actes du colloque organisé par les Universités de Berne et Lausanne en août 2006*, ed. André Schnyder and Jean-Claude Mühlethaler (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 305–25.

²³ On the Danish and Swedish translations: Anna Katharina Richter, *Transmissionsgeschichten: Untersuchungen zur dänischen und schwedischen Erzählprosa in der frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2009), pp. 188–213; Anne-Hélène Delavigne, 'L'adaptation danoise de la *Mélusine* de Thüring de Ringoltingen', in *Mélusines*

these northern and central European translations are a further testament to the continuing vitality of the *Mélusine* legend, my focus is on the first generation of translations, and not the versions they generated in turn.²⁴

The chapters of this book are organized from a chronological perspective. The first chapter sets up the basis for the study by examining the earliest, French versions: Jean's prose *HM* and Coudrette's verse *RP*. Although these versions often overlap, they represent two distinct redactions. The chapter maps out key similarities and differences in their characterization of Mélusine and her sons, so that the different lines of influence can be traced in later chapters. Since the French versions have already attracted a great deal of critical attention, the discussion focuses on where it can add to existing scholarship. The analysis examines material seldom brought together, considering visual depictions alongside written descriptions and manuscripts alongside printed editions – including a group of rarely examined editions which split the *HM* into two separate romances. The chapter shows that Mélusine is an ambiguous character with a great capacity for shapeshifting right from the start, since the earliest versions – written within less than a decade of each other and originating from the same region – already present us with two very different Mélusines.

Chapter 2 examines the earliest of the various *Mélusine* translations: Thüring von Ringoltingen's Middle High German *Melusine*, which is dated to 1456 and based on the *RP*. Although this translation survives in no fewer than seventeen manuscripts, it was its early transfer to print – the *editio princeps* was published by Bernhard Richel possibly as early as 1473 – that made it such a popular romance. The chapter maps out not only how the German translation's characterization of Melusine and her part-monstrous sons might differ from that of the *RP*, but also what transformations and mutations are found within the German tradition itself, in particular as the romance moved from manuscript to print. The analysis reveals that, however ambiguous Mélusine might be in the French versions, in the German version she becomes an even more multifaceted and problematic character.

continentales et insulaires: Actes du colloque international tenu les 27 et 28 mars 1997 à l'Université Paris XII et au Collège des Irlandais, ed. Jeanne-Marie Boivin and Proinsias MacCana (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999), pp. 27–41. On the Czech translation: Jindra Černá, 'Das Volksbuch über Melusine', *Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice*, ser. C, 10 (2004), 39–50. On the Russian and Polish translations of the Czech version: Eliza Matek, *Histoire de Mélusine (1671): Fortune d'un roman chevaleresque en Pologne et en Russie*, trans. Krystyna Anthowiak (Paris: University of Paris-Sorbonne Press, 2002).

²⁴ The German translation was also adapted into plays by Hans Sachs in 1556, and by Jakob Ayryer in 1598. These dramatic adaptations also fall outside the scope of this study.

Chapter 3 looks at the Castilian *La historia de la linda Melosina*. The earliest known witness to this anonymous Castilian translation is the incunable printed by Juan Parix and Estevan Cleblat in Toulouse in 1489, the text of which is most likely based on an *HM* incunable printed in Lyon. Another edition was printed by Juan and Jacobo Cromberger in Seville in 1526, which is a reworking of the earlier edition. Because the Castilian versions have received little scholarly attention, this chapter begins with a detailed look at the two editions and their process of production. The analysis then turns to the portrayal of Melosina and her sons, to examine the differences both between the French source and its translation, and between the two Castilian editions themselves, as their authors each take a notably different approach.

Chapter 4 presents the first detailed scholarly discussion of the Middle Dutch *Meluzine*. The Dutch version is particularly fascinating because it is the only translation that incorporates episodes from both French romances – an aspect which has not previously been recognized. Just like Meluzine herself, the Dutch translation is a hybrid. The earliest witness to this translation is the incunable printed by Gheraert Leeu in Antwerp in 1491. Leeu's text and his woodcuts were later copied in the editions printed by Hendrick Eckert van Homberch in 1510 and by Hieronymus Verdussen in 1602. In examining the translator's treatment of Meluzine and her sons, the chapter considers not only how the Dutch translation – and the editions' iconographies – may differ from its sources, but also the effect of the inclusion of episodes from both the *HM* and the *RP* on the overall narrative.

Chapter 5 considers the two Middle English translations, created around 1500, which form an interesting exception to some of the patterns that emerge in earlier chapters. This is the only branch of the multilingual tradition to feature separate translations of the two French redactions: the prose *Melusine* is a translation of a printed *HM* edition, and the verse *Romans de Partenay* is a translation of a manuscript of the *RP*. The English versions are unique in that, though there are some printed fragments, they survive predominantly in a manuscript context, at a time when *Mélusine* translations on the Continent were appearing mainly in print. Most of all, though, the English versions stand out because the translators stay very close to their sources, introducing strikingly few interventions in the characterization of Melusine in particular. Nonetheless, the romance undergoes some significant modifications, so that the Melusine of the English versions is not quite the same figure as the *Mélusine* of the *HM* or *RP*.

Each of the translations is studied on a case-by-case basis, so that they can be considered in their respective cultural, literary, and linguistic contexts. Nevertheless, the various chapters will also highlight larger, overarching themes and commonalities. My intention is to put these versions in productive dialogue with each other, without forgetting that each reincarnation of the *Mélusine* story is also a version in its own right. The chapters therefore

distinguish between idiosyncratic variations specific to one text, changes particular to a version's cultural and literary context, and recurrent features that characterize the tradition as a whole. Though each chapter could be read on its own, the true value of this study lies in its pan-European approach, as it is only when the different versions of this romance are examined together that one can see both what they have in common and what is unique about each branch of the multilingual *Mélusine* tradition. In my conclusion, I weave together the various strands covered in the main chapters, setting out what this study reveals about *Mélusine*'s European dimensions.

The different linguistic corpora are of varying sizes. The French and German versions each survive in a large number of manuscript and printed sources, whilst there are fewer surviving copies of the Castilian, Dutch, and English translations. In practical terms, this means I devote more space to discussing the individual characteristics of each of the surviving copies of the Castilian, Dutch, and English translations than I do the French and German copies. This is fitting, since these versions have hitherto generated the least amount of scholarly interest. Also, in some chapters the iconographical side of the *Mélusine* tradition plays a larger role than in others, as not every linguistic branch has been illustrated equally heavily. Finally, this book features an appendix which gives an overview of the known manuscripts, incunabula, and printed editions of the various *Mélusine* versions, up to circa 1600. It lists the current location of each surviving copy and gives a list of modern editions, where available. This is the first overview to bring together data about all the western European *Mélusine* versions, and it is my aim that both this study and the appendix will provide a useful resource for future scholarship.