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Courtly Love and the Tale of Florie in the Middle English *Melusine*

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It is a commonplace of feminist criticism that medieval romance is a discourse which privileges masculine values, and positions women as either supporters of, or distracters from, the main goals of chivalric life. To find a space for a feminine subjectivity within such a discourse is a complicated task. Such a space is sometimes found through the machinations of the marvellous;¹ fairy women are powerful in knowledge and action, and often have considerable agency in negotiating relationships with mortals, particularly men.² The mortal woman of this period, however, in both historical reality and literary representation, has few tools with which to carve out her own subjective space, particularly in the face of the powerful cultural forces which act to arrange her life. This paper discusses one such human figure: Florie in the Middle English *Melusine*.³

The tale of Melusine was written in France in 1394 by a French cleric, Jean d'Arras. Another version, in verse, with rival political patronage, was written in the early 1400s by Coudrette. The tale, in both versions, enjoyed considerable success in the following centuries. The number of extant manuscripts of both versions is considerable. D'Arras's version was repeatedly reproduced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in both manuscript form and as printed editions, particularly in France. However, it was Coudrette's version which was the major source of the tale in northern Europe, where it was translated and widely disseminated. Over the next couple of centuries translations of Coudrette's version appeared in German, Polish, Russian, Czech, Danish and Swedish. D'Arras's version was also translated in Europe, but only into Dutch and Spanish.⁴ While both versions of the tale were translated into English in the early sixteenth century, there is only one extant manuscript of each.⁵ The French texts have attracted a certain amount of critical attention, particularly d'Arras's version;

however, the English tales have received little and the marriage tales even less.⁶ It is hoped that this paper will go some way to redressing this comparative neglect.

The Melusine of the title is a knowledgeable, forceful, and powerful fairy woman. She marries a mortal, builds cities and founds a great lineage. Melusine and Raimondin have many sons, four of whom go out into the world and marry heiresses of kingdoms or duchies, stretching the family's influence across Europe. In three of the four marriage tales the young women have, in varying degrees, the same qualities of independence of thought and action found in the figure of Melusine herself. In one case these qualities do not emerge. The tale of the marriage between Florie and Guyon begins with a delightful picture of Florie frolicking with her maidens. By the end of the tale she has disappeared from the text. While this tale appears to depict a romantic and courtly ideal, in this paper I argue that Florie is eradicated by the operation of courtly love, while Guyon, her suitor, uses courtly conventions to gain the crown.

In the tale of *Melusine* relations between the sexes are construed as processes which require participation from both parties in order to be sustained. The central relationship of the tale, that of Melusine and Raimondin, is based upon a pact: she will protect his honour and increase his prosperity as long as he protects her privacy on Saturdays. If the pact is broken his honour and prosperity will dissipate and his lineage will decline, and she will move to a half-life existence—unable to live in the human world, and yet unable to achieve a human death—which will be sustained until judgement day. The marriage of Melusine's parents is also based on a pact: the fairy Pressine marries Elynas on the condition that he will not visit her in childbed. If the pact is broken she will leave him, taking their children with her. Human marriages are similarly characterised by negotiation and exchange. While patriarchal figures dominate in pre-marital negotiations, the prospective brides are not silent. They speak sometimes publicly and sometimes privately, challenging patriarchal determinations, and their prospective husbands give support and show deference to them. Indeed even private words have great public effect when the Duchess Christine privately refuses the King of Anssay's hand, and war results. Further, agreement does not guarantee lasting success; after marriage some betrayals inevitably occur. The logic of the tale suggests that a successful relation between the sexes is an ongoing process which can only be sustained through the reciprocity of exchange between active participants.

Reciprocity is sustained in Melusine and Raimondin's relationship for more than twenty years. At the height of its prosperity their sons go out into the world

to help beleaguered neighbours. Melusine's advice to her sons before they leave on quests (pp. 110-113) includes directives on appropriate behaviour towards women. Melusine advises her sons to 'help', 'counseylle', 'nourysshe', 'worship', 'gyue ayde' and 'comforte' women, especially those 'that men wol haue dysherytid vnlawfully' (p. 111, ll. 7-11). Even Geffray, her most violent son, heeds her advice. In his relations with men Geffray is inclined to attack, kill and ask questions later, yet he negotiates peaceably with women. Geffray kills a dragon and even burns down an abbey full of monks in a fit of rage. Pursuing traitors he has no mercy, killing indiscriminately. Indeed Geffray often behaves, towards men at least, excessively, and by any reasonable measure 'vnlawfully'. When Geffray seeks out the alleged traitor Gueryn of Valbruyant he unexpectedly meets the Lady of Valbruyant. Geffray greets her courteously and the lady successfully negotiates a fair hearing for her husband. This outcome would not have been achievable without the change in register from martial combat to courtly negotiation necessarily brought about by deference to the lady as protagonist (pp. 257-261).

While Melusine's sons act on her advice, Melusine herself is on the brink of ruin through betrayal. After the success of her sons, just at the height of the family's influence, Raimondin is brought to doubt Melusine by the urgings his brother. '[A]ll esprysed with yre & Jalousy' (p. 296, ll. 12-13) he goes to her chamber, makes a hole in the door with his sword, and spies on her.

[He] sawe melusyne within the bathe vnto her nauell, in fourme of a woman kymbyng her heere, and fro the nauel downward in lyknes of a gret serpent, the tayll as grete & thykk as a barell, and so long it was that she made it to touche oftymes, while that raymondyn beheld her, the rouf of the chambre that was ryght hye. (p. 297, ll. 2-7)

Raimondin's reaction is not horror at the sight of Melusine in such a form, but horror at what he has done by looking into her private chamber. He has betrayed her: 'My swete loue, now haue I betrayed you, & haue falsed my couenaunt [. . .] and haue forsworne myself toward you' (p. 297, ll. 10-13). Raimondin is so distressed by his betrayal that he laments for the next two pages, and exiles his brother from the court under threat of death.

This betrayal, although long in coming, is no surprise. There is a certain narrative inevitability to the revelation of Melusine's fairy secret. And yet, the

suffering of Pressine and Elynas in their separation after the breaking of their pact—which occurs early in the tale and to which Melusine bears witness—gives a glint of hope that if the pact between Melusine and Raimondin is broken Melusine will not follow through on her threat to leave. Indeed she does forgive him once. But the tale of Florie acts as a warning of the consequences to the feminine of a lack of reciprocity in relations between the sexes. The disappearance of Florie shows us the fate of she who makes no conditions, who draws no boundaries. She offers herself completely. Melusine makes no such mistake.

Courtly love has been described as nothing more than masculine sexual desire.⁷ Whether, as Lacan would have it, it is a textual fantasy, representing the reverse of a complete absence of consummation in the real world,⁸ or, as Duby would have it, it is a textual sublimation of impossible consummation,⁹ it nevertheless sustains the goal—even if a fantastical one—of physical consummation.¹⁰ Masculine sexual desire is clear for all to see; it has, apparently, a certain honesty about its purpose. Moreover, it is supposedly spontaneous, requiring, indeed having, no justification.¹¹

Feminine desire, on the other hand, is problematic in the extreme. It is a medieval commonplace that women are governed by the material body, and are therefore emotional and lustful beings.¹² As such they need to be carefully controlled by their menfolk who are governed by the higher faculty of reason.¹³ 'Good' women also control themselves; they betray no desire, no agency and no will in the face of their masculine masters.¹⁴ While feminine desire is not absent¹⁵ in courtly romance, it is largely unspeakable and unpursuable:¹⁶ indeed, it is irrelevant.¹⁷ Moreover, since the courtly woman cannot legitimately express desire, her refusal of masculine advances comes to mean nothing:

For you should know that woman is so noble and gentle that she is too ashamed to say to her lover: do with me what you will. And since she cannot bring herself to utter this abomination, the man should thus conquer his companion by force.¹⁸

Indeed, the issue is not whether or not she loves him, but whether he considers himself worthy of being loved, and, as Andreas Capellanus points out in his Rule XVIII of the Rules of Love: 'good character alone makes any man worthy of

love'.¹⁹ Therefore, while masculine desire achieves a legitimate field of play in the model of courtly love, feminine desire has no legitimate space. Feminine desire is denied legitimate expression: it is literally forced underground, which is consistent with its status as a mysterious and unpredictable power.

It has been argued that medieval conceptions of desire can be understood in terms of the dichotomous binarisms clear/veiled, open/secretive, known/unknown, spontaneous/contrived, innocent/guilty, male/female.²⁰ However, if we reflect upon the conception of courtly love as mentioned above, we quickly realise one (at least) internal inconsistency. If masculine sexual desire is characterised by transparency, and feminine sexual desire by secrecy and unknowability, then how can the ultimate goal ever be achieved (otherwise than through the rape which Andreas Capellanus recommends)? The answer can only be that feminine modesty and reserve must be, ultimately, conquered; the veil of contrivance must be torn away, secrets must be revealed and unknowability must become knowable.²¹ The assumptions of sexual difference within this model are therefore based upon the masculine as knower, as agent or subject of knowledge, and the feminine as becoming knowable, as object of knowledge. In other words courtly love becomes the process of coming to know. It is this objectification, this knowability of the feminine, which disallows Florie's existence as a subject and leads to her annihilation.

This process of the inevitable revelation of the feminine as annihilating can be explored through Luce Irigaray's theorisation of the love relation as an 'amorous exchange' between two.²² The operation of such a relation is described as a two-way movement 'establishing a chiasmus or a double loop in which each can go toward the other and come back to itself'.²³ This movement has a number of effects, including the creation of a 'third term' which has variously been described as an energy or 'work', a 'shared outpouring', and a 'loss of boundaries', which operates as both a separate entity and as a mediator between the one and the other, causing each to return to him or herself altered:

Of pleasure's neither mine nor thine, pleasure transcendent and immanent to one and to the other, and which gives birth to a third, a mediator between us thanks to which we return to ourselves other than we were.²⁴

Another effect of the chiasmus is the 'remainder': that energy not contained momentarily within the third term and not required in the maintenance of the third

term. This excess or overflowing cannot be identified or traced, for in Irigaray's system there is no keeping account, no measuring of equal and opposite, only '[e]xchanges without identifiable terms, without accounts, without end [. . .] [w]ithout additions and accumulations'.²⁵

This two-way movement through space and time creates a space within which the various effects of the amorous exchange can be realised. This space is necessary not only for movement but for separateness, to ensure for each a return to the self, and most importantly a return 'to herself as the place where something positive can be elaborated'.²⁶ To maintain the separateness of the two subjects of desire it is necessary for each to have her or his own 'proper place' to come back to: that part of the self which remains untapped, which is not offered for consummation or assimilation within the love relation; it is that part of the self which remains unknown.

If this proper or private place is not maintained, then the one inevitably consumes the other: 'often the one and the other destroy the place of the other, believing in this way to have the whole; but they possess or construct only an illusory whole and destroy the meeting and the interval (of attraction) between the two'.²⁷ If the other is contained in this way, all movement is stilled and energy dissipated, disallowing the movement necessary to the amorous exchange. To maintain one's own private place is particularly important for the feminine, who, within Western culture at least, has been that which is contained and consumed by, and assimilated into, masculine desire. To maintain one's private place is nothing less than a condition of subjectivity.

If courtly love is a process of the masculine coming to know and the feminine becoming knowable—of unveiling the veiled, revealing the secret and unravelling the contrived—then it can be understood as a containment, consumption and finally an assimilation of the private place of the feminine by her masculine knower. This process necessarily collapses the space between the masculine and the feminine, disallowing movement and exchange, and nullifying her separateness (he still can maintain his separateness, as the revelation of his private place is not part of the process described here). They are no longer two, but consolidated into the oneness of masculine subjectivity.

Of course intimacy is not the limit case for desire, and courtly love has been explored as a veiled representation of, or a feint to deflect attention from, other kinds of exchange, most particularly economic and political.²⁸ Duby notes that the lady, if she is the wife (rather than the daughter) of the lord of the manor,²⁹ is not without some influence, and could prove to be a well-connected

friend to a young knight in pursuit of advancement.³⁰ Laurie Finke³¹ takes this notion further by suggesting that a client-patron relationship exists between a lover and his lady. She argues that the language of feudal servitude so often found in the troubadour lyric could well be literal:

It may be that economics is simply being evoked as a metaphor for love, but it is just as likely that courtly love is a highly codified way of talking about economic exchanges and the investment of symbolic capital (Finke, p. 47).

If the language of love is a highly codified, 'euphemerised' discourse of economic exchange, then the lady becomes the medium through which wealth and status can be negotiated by the lover for his performances, whether poetic or martial.³² If the lady is a marriageable daughter of the lord, then she may also be useful as the sign of economic exchange. While Florie is thoroughly occupied with the courtly ideal of love, Guyon has his eye on more tangible and long lasting rewards. Courtly manoeuvres, and the implied masculine sexual desire which needs no justification, have the effect of sanitising Guyon's political ambitions.

Guyon plays the part of the courtly suitor. After a pleasant evening of 'honeste & gracyous talkyng' of 'grete solace & joye', Guyon and Florie's intimacy increases until he is on the verge of 'dyscouer[ing] his thoughte to her', but he is called away just before he comes to the point. Accordingly, he 'humbly' offers himself as her champion, and later, sends her the spoils of his victory (p. 163-164). Guyon has behaved perfectly but revealed nothing of himself. While he has the potential, and apparently the intention, to do so, he does not. It is implied, therefore, that Guyon has a transparency to his character which resists the operation of subterfuge and secrecy. There is an implied honesty, a frankness, that the appropriate level of intimacy will inevitably reveal. But it is no more than a semblance; whatever 'his thoughte' might have been is never revealed. Guyon behaves properly, in a contained and controlled manner, but the text makes no further mention of his thoughts or feelings. The word 'love' is not used once in relation to Guyon.³³

Florie, on the other hand, is a more animated figure. She is delightfully happy and gay. She is 'ryght glad & joyous' and 'full glad & joyous' in the space of thirteen lines. On hearing of the coming of the strangers she and her maidens rush off to dress lavishly for the occasion. It is twice noted how happy she is at the prospect of visitors—she is 'ryght glad & joyous of the commyng of the

strangers', and she 'moch desyred theire commyng'—even before she knows who they might be. When her father instructs her to take special care of Guyon she is ready and willing: she is 'full glad & joyous' and 'toke hym by the hand swetly' (p. 163, ll. 7-8). Moreover, the text does not hold back in describing Florie's feelings after she has spent the evening with Guyon:³⁴

Florye thanne knowyng for certayn his soudayn departyng, her herte was fylled with dueyl & sorowe / how wel she kept contenance in the best manere that she coude / and louyngly beheld guyon [. . .] There thenne entred guyon in to his ship [. . .] and wete that Florye was mounted vp vnto the vppermost wyndowe of an hye tour, and neuer departed thens tyl she lost the sight of guyons vessel, prayeng god to preserue hym from al daunger. (p. 164, ll. 1-13)

Florie's semblance of control and restraint is like Guyon's semblance of transparency: it is a public performance which she cannot maintain for long. When Guyon sends the spoils of his victorious battle to Florie and her father, the text makes no mention of any restraint on her part. Instead it bursts forth with three instances of the word 'joye' in the space of three lines:

And the pucelle was so joyous of these nouuelles that she had neuer in her naturel lyf so grete joye. For know ye wel she loued so entierly guyon þat all her joye was of hym. (p. 166, ll. 25-28)

Moreover, the text uses the word 'love' twice in describing Florie's feelings for Guyon: 'she [. . .] louyngly beheld guyon', 'she loued so entierly guyon'.³⁵ Florie's desire for Guyon remains unspoken by her, but it is in effect an open secret. Her attempts to hide her feelings are perfunctory and short-lived, and her love has the innocence of both spontaneity and disinterestedness.

According to this reading, while Guyon professes devotion, it is Florie who experiences desire. Florie's desire is artless. Her father is present when she experiences the greatest joy of her life; when Guyon's messenger arrives, with good news and gifts. Soon after, her father, ailing and close to death, enters into negotiations with Urian to secure Guyon as Florie's husband. As far as it goes, fortune (in the form of her father) seems to be operating in Florie's favour: she gets what she apparently wants without even having to speak it. The French text

then goes on smoothly. Guyon accepts the offer of her hand graciously and returns to Cruly where Florie welcomes him back, and her words of thanks for his war booty draw the audience back to that moment in the text when she is described as being in love.³⁶ In d'Arras's version the conversations between Guyon and Florie are characterised as exchanges of direct speech three times (pp. 126, 127, 144).

The treatment of this episode in the Middle English *Melusine* text is somewhat different. After so successful a beginning, in which a relation based upon passionate predisposition is suggested, Guyon returns to Cruly to marry Florie but the meeting and conversation depicted in the French text is not reproduced in the Middle English text. Florie is not seen to welcome him back, and there is no renewal of their conversation. She appears once in the text at this point as Guyon's silent bride and is disposed of in one line: 'There was guyon wedded with Florye' (p. 181, l. 1). This diminution in the representation of Florie is also evident in her speech, which becomes less direct as the tale progresses. On their initial meeting Guyon and Florie exchange courtly greetings in direct speech when Florie welcomes Guyon to her father's realm (p. 163, ll. 8-10) and there follow 'many honeste & gracyous talkyng' (ll. 13-14), but when Guyon is called away he alone speaks and she is silent (p. 163, l. 33 - p. 164, l. 1). Her words are not recorded in direct speech again. Her words are described in indirect speech, and her love is presented in the third person. She recedes from the text.

Any lessening of feminine activity and/or speech in an English translation of a French text is contrary to expectation. While feminine agency remains prevalent in French literature into the twelfth century—the 'wooing woman' was an attractive and virile figure in the French *chanson de geste*—the emergence of romance and the ideals of courtliness marginalise feminine agency, particularly in terms of relations between the sexes.³⁷ The English tradition, however, did not adopt the conventions of courtliness as wholeheartedly as the French. Love and the female beloved are not idealised to the same degree in the English tradition,³⁸ and it is excessive idealisation that leads to abstraction.³⁹ The English tradition, therefore, leaves the path open for a more active participation by women in narratives of love.⁴⁰ However, the English translator of this tale—the tale of *Melusine*, a most active and powerful woman—chooses to annihilate Florie. This ending is quite a radical reading of the love relation which was apparently developing in Guyon's first visit to Cruly. Moreover, as a point of departure in the tale it marks itself out as a moment of significant meaning.

Does the operation of the love relation cause the eradication of Florie? The tale of Florie hints at a private place beneath Guyon's courtly exterior that intimacy might at least partly reveal. The figure of Florie, on the other hand, cannot sustain the semblance of a private place. Florie is not the ice-maiden of earlier courtly narratives, but she is trapped in a courtly model of compliant femininity nevertheless. She is happy and gay, she takes pleasure in visitors, and she is ready for any worthy knight who comes along. Florie makes no conditions: she is fully available as a malleable object of knowledge and conquest.

Moreover, Florie draws no boundaries around herself which could betray the existence of a private place. There is no moment of crisis or drama for Florie which could be construed as a point of rupture, or even of resistance. There is no point at which she must exercise agency. She does not even have to voice her desire for Guyon. Florie is what she appears to be: she is completely revealed and nothing remains. In keeping with R. Howard Bloch's conception of the paradox of love—that love only exists to the degree that it is secret; that secret love only exists to the degree that it is revealed; and revealed, it is no longer love⁴¹—Florie is both objectified and abstracted by the operation of courtly love and by the actualisation of her own love. Love disappears upon being revealed; Florie disappears upon revealing herself. She does not reveal *their* love, nor a secret pact, nor does she break a promise: what she reveals is herself. Florie is annihilated because there is nothing of herself that is sustained: she is entirely consumed by the love relation.

Florie's consumption by the courtly love relation is further naturalised by the negotiations regarding her marriage. Historians have conclusively shown that, despite the rhetoric of theology, consent to marriage in this period did not reside with the young people in question, and most particularly not with a young woman in Florie's political position.⁴² However, feminine agency in marriage is a recurring theme throughout the romance of *Melusine*, including the other three marriage tales. While each of the young women in these tales is happy with the man presented to her as a prospective husband, each has something to say about the manner of her marriage: Ermynee (p. 156), Christine (p. 213) and Eglantyne (p. 237-238) are each engaged in discussions about the prospect of marriage and each gives her consent, although under varying degrees of coercion. The question of marriage is not raised with Florie; her consent is not sought, nor is it given. Even in the French text, from which an implied consent perhaps could be extracted, the question is never stated and the consent is not given. This departure from the thematic of feminine agency is veiled by Florie's love. In both d'Arras's

version and the Middle English *Melusine* Florie's passionate love for Guyon cannot be in doubt; however, after the harrowing tale of Ermynee, in which she is brow-beaten into submitting to an untimely marriage, there can be no assumption of consent on the basis of love alone.⁴³ In contrast, Guyon is asked for his consent, and space is made for his possible refusal by Urian, who offers to step into the role of war lord of Armenia in that event. Guyon does not refuse, indeed he does not even hesitate (p. 180).

Florie's agency in her relation with Guyon is further elided by his act of crowning himself:

There was guyon wedded with Floryc / and after the feste all the
barons of the land came to Cruly & made theyre homage to
guyon, whiche crowned himself king & regned honourably. (p.
181, ll. 1-4)⁴⁴

It is a commonplace that the crown is a signifier of possession of, and power over, the realm. Within patrilineage the princess as heiress is similarly imbricated with such signification and it is this imbrication which the other marriage tales in this text work to overcome. Indeed they often succeed. Urian's action of placing the crown in Ermynee's lap and promising to help her keep it returns to her the status of actor (as possessor), differentiating her from the crown as that which is acted upon (as possessed).

Thenne enclnyed Uryan byfore the kyng wher he laye, and toke
the crowne and putte it in Ermynes lap, sayeng 'Damoyselle, it is
your, and sith it hath fortunod thus with me, I shall you helpe to
kepe it my lyf naturel, yf it playse god ayenst al them that wold
vsurpe it or putte it in subgecion (p. 156, ll. 5-11).

The implicit transfer of feminine submission from father to husband, which is encoded in the dying king's act of crowning Urian, has already been undercut by Urian's previously negotiated conditional consent (in which he does not accept submission). Further, in the tale of Eglantyne the signifiatory separation of princess from realm is reiterated by both Anthony and Regnauld. In the tale of Eglantyne, Anthony positions Eglantyne as actor in the kingmaking, separating her from the crown: he says, 'come hither Regnauld brother, receyue this pucelle to your lady, For *she maketh you* kynge of behayne' (my emphasis, p. 239, ll. 25-

26). Moreover, Regnauld explicitly accepts Eglantyne for herself alone, not her lands: 'For yf thys noble pucelle had not one foot of land, yet wold I not reffuse her loue to haue her to my lady, after the lawes of god requyren' (p. 239, ll. 30-32).⁴⁵

The cumulative effect of the actions and words of Urian, Anthony and Regnauld is a suggestion that the Lusignan brethren do not expect, nor even desire, submission. They seek a mutuality of exchange with their spouses, acknowledging their capacity to operate as protagonists in the economy of amorous exchange. The actions of Guyon, on the other hand, displace Florie from protagonist to the position of interval between himself and the object of his desire: the crown. Her consumption is therefore the price of achieving his desire.

The dénouement of the tale of Florie describes the deadly effect on the feminine of courtly notions of love. While Florie and her maidens delineate a domestic space, offering sustenance and recreation to the glamorous and victorious knights, this material sustenance provided by the feminine to the masculine is reconfigured, in true courtly fashion, as the inspiration of the face of the muse. Thus inspired, Guyon leaves this space to perform deeds of significant prowess. The economy of material exchange—the obligation which has already been incurred—is veiled by a rhetoric of devotion. And yet, despite his promises—'your vassall & seruaunt shal I euer be vnder the standart of your gouernance' (p. 163, l. 36 - p. 164, l. 1)—Guyon is never required to act upon this apparent status of submission. Regardless of what she might actually provide, the feminine is always as a fact of her sex positioned not as the giver, but as the receptacle which is the receiver of gifts. Moreover, to occupy such a position, even for a moment, regardless of what she might otherwise do, is to be construed as compliant with, and by extension complicit to, the coercive order which has structured that position. The narrative can therefore, without compunction, be taken to its logical conclusion, and Florie disappears.

In the tale of Melusine the three other young women of the marriage tales are depicted with varying degrees of agency. One thing they all do at some point is rupture the bounds of courtly passivity through speech. Ermynee incurs the wrath of her father by speaking publicly to the court of her wishes, Eglantyne challenges her uncle's advice (in private), and Christine causes a war by refusing an offer of marriage. In each of these instances the young women reveal the existence of a private place, a place which harbours independent thoughts and

desires, a place of potential rebellion, a place of personal replenishment. The depiction of Florie suggests no such place. Indeed the only words we hear her speak are of welcome. The text positions as expendable this young woman who has no existence separate from the love relation. Within the logic of this text, for a woman to exist she must maintain a private place, a place which is preserved from consumption by the love relation. In other words, for a woman to exist, she must exist outside the love relation.

Maintaining this space of feminine subjectivity in a culture which privileges the masculine is not easy. Each of the three young women who sustain such a place do so in resistance to patriarchal figures, but ultimately need the support of their husbands to sustain it. Guyon offers no such support and Florie does not seek it. Florie seems readily to accept her fate. But what if she did not? The tale of Florie offers no such possibility, but the tale of one of Florie's and Guyon's descendants does. With a similar hero-takes-all attitude to Guyon, a later king of Armenia takes on a lady who resists. In the episode of the Sparrowhawk castle (pp. 362-368), one of the three conclusions of *Melusine*, the hero who succeeds in the test will be granted any prize he desires by the lady of the castle except herself. Guyon's exploitative practices are amplified in the behaviour of this young man who strikes the final blow to the Lusignan lineage through his own attempted *raptus* of Melior, the lady of the castle, powerful fairy-woman, and Melusine's sister. He repeatedly insists, despite angry warnings, that he will have Melior as his prize. After four refusals he attempts to take her 'by manere of vyolens and by force' (p. 367, ll. 17-18) but she vanishes. He does not accept that Melior is a participant in the economy of the game, rather than an object to be transacted within it. As a result he is beaten by unseen assailants, thrown out of the castle, and he and his lineage for nine generations are cursed. As noted above, Florie's annihilation is the effect of her complicity to a consuming love relation. Similarly, explicit physical violence is the effect of resistance to it, and total separation is the logical conclusion of Melior's rejection of it.

The consumption of Florie through the operation of the love relation also gestures towards that moment central to the narrative of the text, that moment which deals the very first blow to the Lusignan lineage rather than the last, when Raimondin disallows Melusine's private place. Melusine has a great secret which is the source of her tenure in the human world. In order for Melusine to live in the human world she must find a husband who will not seek to know her secret and who will not speak of the existence of her secret to anyone. In other words, she must find a man who will not objectify her through the process of coming to

know (her), nor through the actualisation of her secret through revelation. In the event of the breach of the first condition Melusine turns the knowledge economy on its head. By not acknowledging the breach she leads Raimondin mistakenly to believe that she does not know of his act. This reveals his knowledge of her as partial, and they continue to live as before. His second betrayal, however, cannot be so easily reconfigured. In a fit of rage Raimondin accuses Melusine publicly, in the presence of the court, of being a 'fals serpent' and a 'fantosme' (p. 314, ll. 26, 28). Public exposure irretrievably and intolerably breaches not only Melusine's secret, but also the secret of their relationship, the secret of their pact. The breaking of the pact is the beginning of the end for the House of Lusignan. Raimondin goes into self-imposed exile and the lineage goes slowly into a decline which is reinforced by the behaviour of Guyon's descendant in the episode of Sparrowhawk Castle. The Lusignan lineage goes into decay as a direct result of masculine challenges to the legitimacy of a feminine private place.

The tale of Florie is quietly expressed, but it acts as a warning, a harbinger of trouble to come. Melusine's three other sons act generously, supporting their wives in achieving some semblance of that feminine subjectivity so evident in Melusine herself. They are their mother's sons. Guyon does none of this. Amidst these tales of hope for the future of the love relation, the tale of Florie plants the seed of doubt. It gestures forward to the first and last blows to the Lusignan lineage, blows which manifest themselves in betrayal of the feminine. The appropriation of the private place of the feminine is a central issue in the tale of *Melusine*, and it is foreshadowed by the tale of Florie, that hairline crack from which all things fall to ruin.

NOTES

¹ See Geraldine Heng, 'Enchanted Ground: The Feminine Subtext in Malory', in *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, ed. by Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 283-300. See also Geraldine Heng, 'Feminine Knots and the Other: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *PMLA*, 106 (1991), 500-514.

² Laurence Harf-Lancner delineates two main categories of fairy according to their relationships with their human menfolk. There is the conqueror, who subjugates her lover to the laws of her own desire, carrying him off to another world: for example the malevolent Morgan, the gentle fairy-lover of Lanval, the lascivious Lorelei, or the deadly siren. Then there is the conquered, who is subjugated by love, and who bends to the human law of her beloved. Harf-Lancner positions Melusine in this place of the conquered. Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine: La naissance des fées* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984), p. 434.

³ This paper considers the Middle English version of d'Arras' tale as found in *Melusine, Compiled (1382-1394 A.D.) by Jean d'Arras, Englished about 1500*, ed. by A. K. Donald, EETS o.s. 68 (London: Trübner, 1895), cited throughout as *Melusine*. For a discussion of textual differences and similarities between the English and French versions of d'Arras's tale see Robert Joseph Nolan, *An Introduction to the English Version of 'Melusine': A Medieval Prose Romance* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1971), and for Coudrette's version see Donald Marshall Shull, *The Effect of the Theory of Translation Expressed in The Anonymous "Romans of Partenay" (T.C.C. MS R.3.17) Upon the Language of the Poem* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1984).

⁴ Roberta Kay Rigsby, *In Fourme of a Serpent fro the Nuel Downward: The Literary Function of the Animna in 'Melusine'* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1979), pp. 62-66. W. W. Skeat also notes the existence of an Icelandic manuscript fragment in the British Museum: *The Romans of Partenay, or of Lusignen: otherwise known as The Tale of Melusine: Translated from the French of La Coudrette (about 1500-1520 A.D.)*, ed. by W. W. Skeat, EETS o.s. 22 (London: Trübner, 1866), p. v.

⁵ The English version of d'Arras is British Library, MS Royal 18 B ii; of Coudrette: Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.3.17.

⁶ To my knowledge the only article which examines the young women in the marriage tales is Brenda M. Hosington, 'Mélusines de France et d'Outremanche: Portraits of Women in Jean d'Arras, Coudrette and Their Middle English Translators', in *A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck*, ed. by Juliette Dor (Liège: Département d'anglais, Université de Liège, 1992), pp. 199-208. Other aspects of these tales have been discussed in Jane H. M. Taylor, 'Melusine's Progeny: Patterns and Perplexities', in *Melusine of Lusignan: Founding*

Fiction in Late Medieval France, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 165-184, and in the same volume in Emmanuèle Baumgartner, 'Fiction and History: The Cypriot Episode in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*', pp. 185-200.

⁷ 'For there is no doubt about it: what these works called 'love,' whether in Latin or in various dialects of the vernacular, was quite simply desire, the desire of men, and men's sexual exploits. This is true even of the tales of so-called courtly love': Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. by Barbara Bray (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 221.

⁸ '[Courtly love] is an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it. It is truly the most staggering thing that has ever been tried. . . . For the man, whose lady was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject, courtly love is the only way of coming off elegantly from the absence of the sexual relation': Jacques Lacan, cited in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. by Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1985), p. 141.

⁹ Georges Duby, 'The Courtly Model', in *A History of Women II: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 250-266.

¹⁰ 'Love *par amour*, or passionate love, is the type most love poets are inspired by: its moving force, physical attraction, is of an emotive character, and its aim—however stimulating the conversations between the suitor and his lady may be—is the physical union with the beloved': Erik Kooper, 'Love and Marriage in the Middle English Romances', in *Companion to Middle English Romance*, ed. by Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), p. 174. This comment accords with Duby, 'The Courtly Model'.

¹¹ This love, according to Duby, 'was violent, sudden "love", which, like a flame, once kindled was irresistible': Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, p. 221.

¹² Carolyn Larrington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 51. For a summary of the theological interests in the frailties of women see Jacques Dalarun, 'The Clerical Gaze', in *A History of Women II*, ed. by Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 15-42. See also the first two chapters of R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), which focus on the writings of the early Church Fathers and later interpretations of their work. For a summary of the theological/medical view (largely unimpeded by anatomical observation) see Claude Thomasset, 'The Nature of Woman', in *A History of Women II*, ed. by Klapisch-Zuber, pp. 43-69. For a discussion of Henri de Mondeville's fourteenth-century treatise on surgery, see Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

¹³ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 30.

¹⁴ Bloch argues that the Christian church of the Middle Ages positions woman, simultaneously, at both extremities of the moral/religious spectrum: she occupies both the place of seducer and redeemer, of Eve and Mary. This bi-polar position proves impossible to negotiate. Firstly, '[p]oised between contradictory abstractions implicated in each other, women are idealised, subtilised, frozen into a passivity that cannot be resolved', and secondly, the feminine is abstracted to such a degree that 'woman (not women) can only be conceived as an idea rather than a human being': Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 90.

¹⁵ See Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 149-162; Flora Alexander, 'Women as Lovers in early English romance', in *Women and Literature in Britain: 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp 24-40. See also Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

¹⁶ In reference to the courtly lady, Laurie Finke notes that '[t]he woman's sex precluded the expression of her own desire': Laurie Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 48. Indeed the courtly lady is traditionally depicted as an ice-queen. 'The lady's desire seems [. . .] to be non-existent [. . .] she seems cold and distant, passion-less': Toril Moi, 'Desire in Language: Andreas Capellanus and the Controversy of Courtly Love', in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. by David Aers (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 22, 24, cited by Weiss, 'Wooing Woman', p. 160.

¹⁷ '[H]er desire is beside the point precisely because it is in the withholding of her favors, in her silence, that she exercises her power [. . .] she remains a silent and passive object, represented as a thing (*res*), the object of the poet's desire': Finke, *Feminist Theory*, p. 48.

¹⁸ *La Poissance d'amours dell Pseudo-Riche de Fournival*, ed. by Gina Battista Speroni, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1975), p. 68, as cited by Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 57.

¹⁹ Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. by John Jay Parry (New York: Norton, 1969).

²⁰ Pouchelle, discussing anatomy alone, notes: 'Outside-inside, masculine-feminine: two pairs of oppositions which are developed through anatomy (indirectly) by Mondeville, then by Chauliac, and finally [. . .] by Ambroise Paré. [. . .] Here we see again the connotations of 'hidden', and thus of secrecy, attaching to the *secreta mulierum*, and [. . .] it would almost be possible to invent a paradigmatic series making 'interior', 'hidden', 'closed' and 'feminine' into equivalents': Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery*, pp. 135-136.

²¹ Despite being apparently unknowable, women's 'secrets' were 'known' and discussed at length in both medical and theological writings, most famously in Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *De secretis mulierum*, ed. by Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Also see Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery*.

²² Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), pp. 7-10.

²³ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 9.

²⁴ Luce Irigaray, 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: on the divinity of love', in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 178-189 (pp. 180-181).

²⁵ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 196.

²⁶ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 9.

²⁷ Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 54.

²⁸ For a summary of the historical development of the view that this relation is in fact an affair between men see E. Jane Burns, 'Speculum of the courtly lady: Women, love, and clothes', in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 29 (Spring, 1999), p. 253-292.

²⁹ In the late twelfth century courtly love shifted from the exclusively extra-marital (and therefore impossible) to include pre-marital practice. Duby, 'The Courtly Model' (p. 263).

³⁰ Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*, pp. 219-226.

³¹ The Rhetoric of Desire in the Courtly Lyric', in Finke, *Feminist Theory*, pp. 29-74.

³² See particularly Finke, *Feminist Theory*, pp. 33-48.

³³ This is also the case in the French version by Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine: Roman du XIV^e siècle par Jean d'Arras*, ed. by Louis Stouff (Dijon: Berniguad, 1932), pp. 126-130, 141-144.

³⁴ Interestingly, Donald chooses to head the page with 'Guion falls in love with Flory', interpreting Guyon's formulaic courtly behaviour as love, but he ignores Florie's love which is clearly explicated in the text. Donald does, however, acknowledge Ermynee's love for the unseen and unmet Urian, heading p. 135 with 'Ermine in Love'.

³⁵ In d'Arras's version this occurs only once: 'Et saichiaz qu'elle amoit tant Guyon qu'elle pouvoit plus': d'Arras, *Mélusine*, p. 130.

³⁶ d'Arras, *Mélusine*, pp. 143-144.

³⁷ Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman', pp. 149-150.

³⁸ Susan Crane provides a history of the English reactions to and adoption of courtliness in *Insular Romance*. See particularly chapters 4, 'Measuring Conventions of Courtliness', and 5, 'Adapting Conventions of Courtliness'.

³⁹ This is one of the themes which permeates Bloch's work. See Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, especially pp. 143-156.

⁴⁰ The equality of lovers is shown to be a common characteristic of early English romance in Alexander, 'Women as lovers', pp. 24-40. This characteristic was also noted by Gervase Mathew, and interpreted by him as 'completely un-courtois': Mathew, 'Marriage and *Amour Courtois* in Late Fourteenth-Century England', in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 129, as cited in Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 136. Helen Cooper similarly finds that women's participation in love is more marked in Middle English and Anglo-Norman romances. Cooper argues that feminine desire which is constructed positively in romance is often socially and/or politically stabilising, and therefore supportive of the existing order: Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See particularly Chapter 5, 'Desirable Desire: "I am wholly given over unto thee"', pp. 218-268. Perhaps the most famous example of the difference between the English and French traditions is the different treatment of Lancelot and Guenivere by Chrétien and Malory. While Chrétien allows Guenivere love, hers is not comparable to Lancelot's: 'if he was very dear to her, his love for her was a hundred thousand times as great': *Chrétien de Troyes: Arthurian Romances*, trans. by D. D. R. Owen (London: Dent, 1987), p. 247. Malory makes no such distinction. Indeed he makes the point that: 'whyle she lyved she was a trew lover, and therefor she had a good ende'. *Malory: Works*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 649.

⁴¹ Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 123.

⁴² Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Duby, *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*; Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix, 1995). For a contrary view see Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1997).

⁴³ Ermynee admires Urian from afar. He has brought an army from Lusignan to help her father, the King of Cyprus, defend the city against the Saracens. Ermynee thinks of him constantly, and these thoughts keep her awake at night (pp. 134-135). She is also greatly distressed by the injuries her father has sustained in battle. Despite the comforting words of the barons she knows he is dying. Ermynee suffers under an emotional tumult throughout this time, including occasional physical collapses (pp. 150, 154). As a result of this, she consents to the marriage but she states that they must wait until after her father's illness is over. This stipulation draws a tirade of verbal abuse from her father. Most reluctantly, she finally submits to his wishes for a speedy marriage (p.156).

⁴⁴ In d'Arras's version this moment of crowning is not described and the implicit agent of Guyon's transformation is the marriage itself. The parallel section in d'Arras's version reads: 'Lors furent fianciez et le lendemain furent espousez a grant solennité, et fu la feste grant et noble et dura xv. jours. Et avant que la feste departist, tous les barons firent hommage au roy Guyon': d'Arras, *Mélusine*, p. 144.

⁴⁵ Anthony does not have the opportunity to separate the crown from the woman in the tale of Christine for two reasons. Firstly, Christine is a duchess and therefore no crown is involved. Second, Christine is a sovereign: she has no father or other male relative to assume the role of patriarch, and she refuses to submit to anyone who tries to install himself as such. When asked if he will consent to marriage with Christine, he defers to her: 'lete now the pucelle be sent for, For yf she be playсед therwith I consent me þerto' (p. 213, ll. 9-11).