

**METAMORPHOSES OF SNAKE WOMEN, MELUSINE AND MADAM
WHITE**

by

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Abstract

By comparing the European literary character Melusine with her Chinese counterpart Madam White, my thesis aims to demonstrate that the metamorphosis of females into snakes is presented in both myths as the literary reproduction of the social and historical process whereby men's power oppressed women's. The serpentine metamorphosis will be argued to have a mechanism, which consists of three key elements, namely a specific date, religious context, and forced metamorphosis. To do this, first, I will explore the symbolism of snakes in central European and far eastern Asian traditions. Second, in a close reading, I will analyze and compare the negative impact of serpentine metamorphoses of Melusine and Madam White in their stories. Finally, by addressing the connection to real-life contexts (social, cultural and religious) in the development of these characters, I will provide new insights into the role and status of women in China and German-speaking Europe since early modern times as well as the possible roots of their image as *femmes fatales* in modern literature.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Zifeng Zhao.

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Dedication

To my parents

I. Introduction

“Of bodies changed to other forms I tell; You Gods, who have yourselves wrought every change, inspire my enterprise and lead my lay. In one continuous song from nature’s first. Remote beginnings to our modern times” (Ovid, 1).

Metamorphosis, a commonly used term in biology, indicates the developmental change in the form or structure of an animal after its birth or hatching. In literature and art, it may also refer to the Ovidian metamorphosis, namely the transformation from human to non-human being or vice versa. As Irving Massey has observed, despite its unclassifiable variety, literary metamorphoses always serve certain purposes. “It may point [to] a moral, assist in structural differentiation, illustrate a theory of transmigration, or simply provide escape” (Massey, 17). For instance, Northrop Frye offers two models of metamorphoses based on his analysis of the Christian “mythological universe.” This universe consists of four levels: The highest is heaven, “the world of sun, moon, and stars” certainly and of God; the second one is an “earthly paradise or Garden of Eden,” where humans were supposed to live; the third level is for humans, animals and plants; whereas the fourth level represents hell, the place for all demonic beings (98). Frye categorizes stories about a protagonist’s reaching the higher level as having “ascent themes” (129) and those about falling into lower levels as having “descent themes” (99). In addition,

he also points out that since humans were intended to live in the second level, stories about humans living in the current world can be considered as belonging to the latter group (99-100). The two models of metamorphosis are thus divided into “ascent metamorphosis” and “descent metamorphosis.” The former transforms inferiority into superiority or helps characters to grow “identity through the casting of whatever conceals or frustrates it,” whereas the latter turns “something human and conscious into an animal or plant or inanimate object” (140). Frye’s models shed light on one kind of mechanism of literary metamorphoses. It forces protagonists to go on an adventure in an unknown world by changing their mental and/or physical identities. It also suggests designated endings for each model.

Although many literary works such as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* demonstrate that neither ascent nor descent metamorphosis ensures a good or bad outcome, Frye’s two models do offer a valid suggestion that any type of metamorphosis certainly brings positivity or negativity to the one who receives it. Notably, however, these works also show that the creature into which someone transforms often decides the outcome. Some of the most frequent metamorphoses presented in Ovid’s work are avian metamorphoses, among which the swan metamorphoses often result in good, or at least unharmed consequences. For example, in the episode of Cycnus, son of Apollo, fighting with Achilles the bravest warrior of Greece, Cycnus is saved by a metamorphosis, which is cast by Neptune, that turns him into a swan (Gallagher, 231). Moreover, in the episode of Zeus and Leda, Zeus seduces and impregnates Leda after turning himself into a swan. However, neither Ovid nor later works on this theme such as in Anna Luise Karsch’s “An

die Leda” or Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Leda” show any sign of punishment of or negative outcome for Zeus (Gallagher, 231-232). These transformations of humans into swans either help protagonists escape from a dangerous situation or achieve a personal goal without paying for their actions. Notably, these beneficial outcomes of swan metamorphosis are attributed to male characters.

Another popular type of metamorphosis in literature is the serpentine metamorphosis. As one can imagine, this kind of metamorphosis rarely brings a happy ending to heroes or heroines because of its association with the negative symbolism of snakes in many cultures. However, Gallagher points out that the consequences of serpentine metamorphosis are mostly dependent on sex (274-275). As Gallagher has observed, similar to the swan metamorphosis of Cynus, Cadmus’s metamorphosis in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which gradually turns him into a serpent, is “a means of escaping the crisis he finds himself in.” Nevertheless, Serpentina in Hoffmann’s *Der goldne Topf*, who constantly transforms between forms of a beautiful woman and a snake, shows sexual temptation and indicates a negative image (277-283). These two serpentine metamorphoses propose a potential mechanism of literary metamorphoses, whereby a character’s sex plays a significant role in deciding his destiny rather than the type of creature into which he transforms. This is especially true in the case of serpentine metamorphoses.

As Gallagher has argued, serpentine metamorphoses of women are often found in adverse situations in literature worldwide. European Melusine and her Chinese counterpart Madam White, two of the most significant and popular figures in the literature and art of their cultures,

are perfect examples. The stories of both snake women have tremendously changed from their prototypes in folklore into numerous literary versions over time. Early modern works of Melusine in French by Jean d'Arras and in German by Thüring von Ringoltingen present her as a supportive wife and thoughtful mother despite her tragic ending. Melusine's serpentine nature continues to contribute to her tragedy in Jakob Ayrer's drama *Von der schönen Melusina* (1598), while modern works like Goethe's *Die Neue Melusine* completely alter her concealed snake appearance. By comparison, in the early Chinese work "The Legend of the Three Pagodas of West Lake (1550)," Madam White's image is closely connected with promiscuity and cannibalism. By contrast, in later adaptations such as "Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda (1624)," she is portrayed as a loyal wife. In the early modern novel *Leifengta chuanqi* (The Legend of Leifeng Pagoda, Chinese: 雷峰塔奇传) of the Qing Dynasty, Lady White Snake even has a baby with a human and is offered a chance to change her fate.

What makes serpentine metamorphoses of women of both European and Chinese literature possess such fluid transformability between ambiguous dichotomies, such as between monstrosity and humanity, transgression and benevolence, evil and good? What role have male authors of these two stories and the medieval societies played in the mechanism of snake women's metamorphoses? These two research questions will be discussed throughout this work. By comparing Melusine with Madam White, this paper aims to demonstrate that serpentine metamorphosis of women functions as a mechanism for educating and civilizing women in pre-modern times. This work will explore the ambiguity of female power and patriarchal

constraint, which increases over time under the pressure of both philosophical and religious ideologies.

II. The Dichotomy of Humanity and Monstrosity of Melusine

A. Serpentine Supernatural Beings in European Culture

As serpentine metamorphosis offers snake women features of both human and snake, it introduces ambiguities into the depiction of such women. Authors utilize these ambiguities to suggest that Melusine and Madam White are endowed with convoluted personalities and exhibit paradoxical behaviours. Depicting confrontations between men and women, demons and humans, these stories illustrate how serpentine metamorphosis is utilized to depict the imposition of a patriarchal constraint of female power in their texts. This process is not merely portrayed in the texts but is also presented in the historical development of serpentine characters in mythology and folklore.

Thus, before getting into the discussion of the dichotomy of Melusine's monstrosity and humanity, which mainly represents the conflict between evil and good, it is necessary to discover when and how European serpentine supernatural beings, such as Melusine herself, became linked with women and monsters instead of men and deities. Moreover, aside from their sexes, since normally deities also suggest goodness, monstrosity becomes decisive to the legitimization of Melusine's dichotomous character, which is the basis of her character and serpentine metamorphosis. Therefore, the following section will trace early associations of snake and woman in ancient Greek mythology and explore its development over time, in order to see how Melusine has inherited monstrosity from ophidian creatures.

a. The Degradation of Female Serpentine Deities.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* gives multiple references to the image of serpentine beings in ancient Greek myth and folklore. However, different from the ambiguous image of serpentine characters in his work, gods and goddesses who are associated with snakes received worship in ancient Greek society. It is believed that this worship of serpents or serpentine deities was mostly based on a fear of snake's dangerous nature. Those of male sex were believed to be entities where souls of dead warriors dwelt. Ancient people also built temples for serpentine "gods of Arts and Mythology" (Aravaanan, 40) and protected and served real snakes that lived in them. In addition, ancient Greeks believed that male serpentine gods, would "protect their families, tree creepers and towns" (Aravaanan, 39-40), in cases of war and disaster.

Ophidian goddesses were widely worshiped as earth mothers in European culture before the appearance of Eve and the Eden serpent in Genesis. To some extent, the impact of serpentine goddesses surpassed that of serpentine gods because their power was associated with female fertility. Balaji Mundkur believes that both phallic and vaginal symbolism was attributed to snakes and that serpentine goddesses for the most part, were worshiped for their representation of maternity, fertility and childbirth (206-208). He argues that "women are more prone to ophidiophobia than men and have contributed significantly to ophiolatry through the cult of fertility" (208). The cults of Cybele and Demeter in ancient Greece, both of whom are associated with serpents, are two good examples of ancient worship of serpentine earth goddesses. The surpassing worship of female ophidian divinities not only showcases the positive image of

serpents in ancient Greek culture but also suggests women's respected status in matriarchal Greece. On one hand, the match of snakes' sexual symbol and women's fertile power ensured the positive impact of serpentine goddesses; on the other hand, the ophidian goddesses tightly linked snakes with women.

Since female serpentine divinities were closely associated with women, the change of the status of both exerted a mutual influence on each other. While serpentine goddesses were gradually degraded, women's social status was also degraded due to the increasing domination of masculinity in ancient Greek society. However, the image of the snake remained positive as well as influential and became linked with male deities. Some ophidian divinities' sex was even changed, in order to ensure that the serpent's image would not be affected by the degradation of femininity. For instance, Kolbinger Menon has also observed that although divinities of both sexes have appeared in Greek mythology, the earliest versions of these myths tend to link "a female snake with a goddess" (228). Many serpentine deities in Greek mythology such as Python, who originally was feminine, later altered into the male sex (Menon, 228). By this time, the association of woman and snake had diminished but did not appear to be negative.

The perception of snakes, however, gradually grew negative, and devolved from its divinity in ancient Greek and Roman mythology to the monsters of medieval times under the growing influence of biblical works. Eventually, it became associated with pure evil under the influence of a dominant Christianity. James Charlesworth has also observed this change. He brings a chronological insight to the serpentine iconography while tracing the development of the

serpent's image in the Old Testament of the Bible. Charlesworth believes that Greeks and Romans following "Egyptian ophidian symbolism" continued to connect snakes with divinities in art and culture (125). He has explored numerous anguine figures and characters associated with snakes, such as Hermes (Mercury), Agathodaemon, Typhon, and Serapis in the artwork and literature of cultures from Minoan Crete to Epidaurus at Asclepius. Through this research, Charlesworth comes to a conclusion similar to that of Aravaanan and Mundkur, that as "the most complex and pervasive symbol in antiquity," serpentine iconography, regardless of male or female sex, predominately projected a positive image in ancient world (125-185). He thinks the negative perception of serpents was only brought up after Christianity had become greatly influential: "When Christianity became the dominant political force, beginning in the early fourth century CE, it was empowered to relegate other religions. Then, many former positive symbols were demoted to a negative connotation and denotation" (185). Charlesworth's argument showcases that it was Christianity that eventually destroyed the positive image of snakes, after it had been saved by ancient male deities' divinity. Therefore, the two key factors of serpentine goddesses, namely the female sex and divinity, were completely diminished by this point.

So far, it is clear that female ophidian supernatural beings have experienced a great degradation from deities of cults to evil demons and monsters. They were once worshiped as goddesses for their powerful symbol of maternity and fertility in matriarchal societies, but were gradually enfeebled in patriarchy by first taking away their sexual identities in divinities and then

associating them with betrayal and evil. This process suggests a transformation from female empowerment to patriarchal constraint, which will be explicitly discussed in later chapters. In order to analyze this change and its reflection in the Melusine story, the next section will continue exploring why female bodies are utilized to hybridize with serpentine monstrosity and how this may have affected the origin of Melusine.

b. Hybrid of Human and Monster

The “negative connotation and denotation” (Charlesworth, 185), to which Christianity degraded the serpent’s positive symbolism, was progressively developed into monstrous representations over time. Serpentine monsters such as Melusine became the medieval evil doppelgangers of ancient European serpentine goddesses. These ophidian creatures, like many other medieval monsters, possessed mixed features of human and animal in their appearance and were hybrids of human (especially women) and snake. This hybridity enabled snake women to present dichotomies of personality and behaviour, as well as of humanity and monstrosity. Monstrosity, as this chapter intends to demonstrate, is the key factor in Melusine’s serpentine metamorphosis. Therefore, since the previous section has shown the process by which serpentine goddesses were demoted under the increasing power of patriarchy, it is now important to see how the consequence of this degradation, namely, monstrosity, contributed to the creation of Melusine.

Hybrid zoomorphic human beings, like serpentine monsters, were prevalent in medieval art and literature, especially within a biblical context. They appeared to have various animal features, such as a lion’s or bull’s body and limbs or an eagle’s wings and claws. Moreover, they

were often illustrated as cannibalistic or inauspicious creatures hiding in a sea or forest. Werner Wunderlich has observed that medieval people considered supernatural creatures to be real, and religion seldom differentiated between fantasy creatures (*Phantasiegeschöpfe*) and natural beings (*Naturgeschöpfe*) (16). Taking Bernhard of Clairvaux's *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem* as an example, he argues that human-animal hybrids were utilized in medieval times to link their monstrosity to humans' sin (17-18). He further adds that the hybrids, which are associated with animals such as snakes or dragons in biblical works by, for example, Ambrosius and Augustin, are depicted as pagan gods who bring fear and horror to human beings (21-22). Wunderlich's argument points out one significant element of these hybrid creatures: religious representation. This element plays an important role in Melusine's story and her serpentine metamorphosis. As a later chapter will explore, Melusine's metamorphosis is a result of her transgressing against religious rules. In addition, her ways of getting rid of her monstrosity are based on her contribution to Christianity. Therefore, this hybrid monstrosity may have been one part of the creation of Melusine's origin.

As previously mentioned, another decisive element of Melusine's metamorphosis is her female sex. Sarah Miller posits that medieval biblical art and literature tended to depict a human-monster as pagan or non-religious. In addition, she also points out that women were the major targets of this type of mixture. "Those (hybrid) bodies marked monstrous by medieval discursive authorities belonged to demons, non-Christians, the so-called monstrous races, freaks of nature, deformed infants, miscarried fetuses, and ... women" (1). Miller's argument suggests

that monstrosity was mostly associated with women, when it came to non-religious behaviours.

Akin to the development of the image of serpentine deities in a society transforming from matriarchy to patriarchy, Miller's observation also indicates how the sexes were associated with divinity and monstrosity. As previously discussed, some ophidian goddesses' sexual identities were altered. Male sex was the means for saving divinities from being affected by the social abasement of femininity. By contrast, female sex was associated with monstrosity and associated with degenerate pagan or non-religious images. Thus, the female and the monstrous come together at the core of serpentine metamorphosis: Melusine, the snake woman, is a representative incarnation of this racialized and gendered hybridity. Now that these two basic elements of Melusine's serpentine metamorphosis have been pointed out, in the following section, it will show how this motive has been developed in different literary genres over time and came to be a method for constraining women.

c. Melusine's Origin and Her Development

Although the origin of Melusine is obscure, it likely can be traced back to ancient European mythology and folklore. Some scholars go so far to argue that Melusine originates from a primeval serpentine goddess in Vedic Indian culture, who is considered the prototype of hybrid human-snake divinity appearing "in the religious pantheons of Vedic India, Mesopotamia, the Near East, and early Mediterranean civilizations including the Minoans and Greeks" (Alban in Urban, 59; Kohler, 1-10). Interestingly, scholars of Asian Studies have also found the Indian snake goddess's silhouette in Nü Wa and Madam White (Ting, 145-147). While acknowledging

that Melusine of Jean d'Arras's romance, a tribute to the Lusignan family, is the archetype of her pre-modern and modern adaptations, scholars believe that this story was inspired by two other early texts from 12th-century story collections, namely Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* and Gervasius of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*. Both stories depict a nameless Melusine-like character who marries a noble knight and one day turns into a serpentine monster that vanishes into thin air after her husband found her bathing naked (Nolan, 195-196; Pafenberg, 267). This serpentine motif also appears in Couldrette's French verse novel *Melusine* (ca. 1400) and its edited German translation by Thüring von Ringoltingen. Pre-modern playwrights Hans Sachs and Jakob Ayrer later dramatized the story of the snake woman in 1556 and 1596, respectively. To be sure, there are still more sources to be discovered especially between the 17th and 18th centuries (Steinkämper, 12).

The mysterious serpentine being regained her popularity among authors and artists in the 18th century. Notably, because of Melusine's association with water, many modern artworks and literary works portray her as a monstrous woman with a fish tail. However, in the aforementioned works, she only possesses snake or dragon features. Steinkämper has observed that Melusine's mermaid or siren image in literature is not developed until the late 18th century (12). "Sie war, wie die meisten Feen jener Zeit, gezwungen, gewisse Tage des Monats Fischgestalt anzunehmen [Like most of the fairies of that time, she was forced to take on a form of a fish on certain days of a month]" (Steinkämper, 13). For instance, Franz Grillparzer's libretto *Melusina* (1823) presents this supernatural woman more as a mermaid- or siren-like

water spirit (*Nixe*) than as a snake woman (Steinkämper, 297-337). Moreover, Melusine is also a prominent figure in a 19th-century *Volksbuch* (or chapbook, a type of printed short-length booklet of folk literature). Authors such as Ludwig Tieck and Gustav Schwab published chapbooks such as *Romantische Dichtungen* and *Die Deutschen Volksbücher*, which include revisions regarding this water spirit (Steinkämper, 260-276). However, there are literary works such as *Die Neue Melusine* and *Der Stechlin*, created by Goethe and Theodor Fontane respectively, that eliminate Melusine's snake woman or siren image and focus on the complex relationship between men and women (Steinkämper, 343-423).

Even though Melusine has been portrayed and recreated in different literary works over time, the character of this snake woman remained grounded in her female sex and monstrosity. It was also these two factors that were utilized in a patriarchal society to abase the image of serpentine goddesses. Female sex and monstrosity underlay this degradation, whereby masculinity suppressed and even distorted the female power of matriarchy. As part of this patriarchal power, Christianity also played a considerable role in the female serpentine beings' transformation from goddesses to hybrid monsters. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on Melusine's female sex and monstrosity as well as her embrace of Christianity. It will explore how in the various versions, these three elements related to Melusine's serpentine metamorphosis are portrayed as dichotomous and ambiguous, with the effect that they reproduce the sociocultural process of masculinity surpassing femininity, both in society and in literature.

B. *Melusine's Metamorphosis*

Table I Plot Comparison of *Roman de Mélusine* and *Melusine*

Name/Plot	<i>Roman de Mélusine</i> Jean d' Arras (1382-1394)	<i>Melusine</i> Thüring von Ringoltingen (1456)
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Melusine along with her mother and sisters in exile. 2. Melusine is cursed to turn into a hybrid serpentine monster for locking up her father. 3. Melusine marries Reymundt under the condition of not seeing her on Saturdays. 4. Melusine helps her husband build the land of Lusignan and gives birth to ten sons, the first eight are born with abnormality. 5. Melusine turns into a giant dragon after Reymundt breaks his promise. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Melusine marries Reymundt under the condition of not seeing her on Saturdays. 2. Melusine helps her husband build the land of Lusignan and gives birth to ten sons, the first eight are born with abnormalities. 3. Melusine turns into a flying serpent after Reymundt breaks his promise. 4. The truth that about Melusine and her mother is revealed. Melusine was cursed to turn into a hybrid serpentine monster for locking up her father.

This thesis mainly focuses on pre-modern versions of the Melusine myth, especially Thüring von Ringoltingen's German *Melusine*, which relates to Jean d'Arras's French *Roman de Mélusine*, both of which emphasize her snake nature. Even though there is a time gap of almost a century between these two texts written in different languages, the German text is based in large part on the narrative framework of the French. Both depict the development of the Lusignan family and have similar endings for most characters. One of the differences as shown in Table I, is the

arrangement of the time when the truth about Melusine's curse is revealed. In addition, Jean's text focuses more on the whole process of the establishment of the Lusignan family. The plot begins with the story of Melusine's parents, continuing to the end of Lusignan family. However, Thüring's novel concentrates more on retelling the story of the mysterious Melusine. Unlike Jean's story, it ends soon after the death of Reymundt. Another nuance, which will be further discussed, is the different forms of Melusine's ultimate metamorphosis. In the former story, she turns herself into a dragon, whereas in the latter she becomes a flying serpent. The following analysis will mainly be based on Thüring's *Melusine*, but will draw support from the French text and the comparison with it.

Neither Jean's nor Thüring's text portrays Melusine as a purely evil creature. In addition to her monstrous nature, she is also one of the founders of Lusignan, a loyal wife, and a caring mother. As many scholars have discussed, it is more specifically her Christian maternity and monstrosity that render her character paradoxical and ambiguous. This maternity, which combines the roles of mother and wife, humanizes her. However, as Tania Colwell points out, scholars tend to use one of these features dominantly over the other in order to demonstrate whether Melusine is a sinful serpentine monster or a Christian human mother who unconditionally supports her husband and sons with her firm faith in God (181). On the one hand, Christian maternity and humanity furnish Melusine with virtues and benevolence; on the other, her serpentine monstrosity serves as a reminder of her evil and sinful nature. One can easily argue for one of these characteristics as her true identity, as both fall at opposing ends of a

spectrum that runs from good and evil. Either one can be subordinated to the other in order to demonstrate that Melusine's identity is that of a good woman or a consistently vicious monster. However, neither her monstrosity nor her humanity can be said to be purely evil or purely good. For instance, Melusine uses her magic power, which comes from her monstrous nature, to help build the land of Lusignan (Ringoltingen, 31-32). In this scenario, her monstrosity does not merely represent her depravity, but also shows its bright side.

That Melusine possesses divergent physical and symbolic features demonstrates the mutability and ambiguity of her character, and this character becomes the basis of her serpentine metamorphosis. Most importantly, her heterogeneous metamorphosis recapitulates the social and historical process whereby men's power oppressed women's in literature. In order to show this ambiguity of Melusine's character, scholars either criminalize her humanity or decriminalize her monstrosity. For example, the decriminalization of the monstrosity can be detected in Pafenberg's interpretation. She introduces Augustine's thoughts on the judgment of the evilness of creatures, which can be categorized into two types: physical and moral evilness (268). She intends to utilize these criteria to support her argument that "um die objektive Bosheit eines Wesens, eines Menschen zu beurteilen, müssen wir also nicht ihre äußerliche 'Natur' bewerten, sondern ihren 'Willen' ergründen [in order to impartially judge a creature's or a human's evil, we must not evaluate their external nature, but rather fathom their 'intentions']" (270). Pafenberg argues that instead of her monstrosity, it is the humanity of Melusine, embodied in Reymundt and their sons that causes the tragedy of Lusignan and destroys the happiness of their

family (271-275). Pafenberg's point further suggests that it is Melusine's humanity, which is normally seen as representing her benevolence, that can also be seen as a negative feature. But, akin to other unidirectional interpretations, Pafenberg's analysis isolates Melusine's two features from each other. In analyses such as these, the monstrosity and humanity of Melusine do not interact and thus cannot demonstrate the mutability and ambiguity of the serpentine metamorphosis.

For this reason, merely analyzing these two features independently is far from adequate, regardless of what each one of them may represent. To do this overshadows authorial intentions behind the creation of Melusine's multifariousness. Therefore, an interpretation that is concerned not only with the heterogeneity of her monstrous and human natures but also their mutual functioning is necessary. A good example of combining her two features can be found in Spiegel's theory of Melusine's "twinship," which is triggered by his review of Aristotle's thoughts on the natural evilness of twins (103). Gabrielle Spiegel claims that the "doubling" of Melusine's maternity and monstrosity functions as "the erasure of cultural/(social) categorical boundaries" (105) in the story. He believes that the monstrosity, which is reflected in her ability to transform, showcases not only "the mutability of character, fortune, and fate" but also "the arbitrary nature, of social categorization" (118), which she can only experience while remaining a mother in a human form. Spiegel's argument suggests that Melusine's maternity and monstrosity do not serve to prove her good or evil personality, but rather work mutually to reflect the sociocultural background of the story.

a. Melusine's Christian Image: The Eden Serpent

The ambiguity of Melusine's character, as well as the blurred line between the mutually functional monstrosity and humanity, enable the snake woman to traverse between different physical forms as well as possess multiple characteristics. Authors of both texts utilize this peculiarity to express their intention of suppressing and educating women. This section will elaborate on how the authors have used the interaction between Melusine's Christianity and her human and monstrous features by analyzing the image of the Eden serpent.

As a serpentine monster, Melusine appears to have much in common with the Eden serpent. The most similar feature is the curse she receives for betraying her father, which turns her lower body into a serpent tail every Saturday. This curse deprives Melusine of the ability to walk. God also took away the Eden serpent's ability to walk as punishment (Ansgar Kelly, 304). This inevitably provokes a discussion about whether Jean's and Thüring's Melusines are also embodiments of the biblical serpent.

As Ansgar Kelly observes, the Eden serpent was mostly gendered as male until 1170, when Petrus Comestor or Manducator created an image of "the maiden-faced serpent in the Garden of Eden" in *Historia scholastica*, "a paraphrase of the Bible" (308). The feminization of the serpent also appears in Beatus's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, which depicts it as a creature that "has only the tail of a serpent, with the body and wings of a bird and a vulturelike neck topped by the tiny head of a woman" (317). Notably, the addition of wings to the serpent can be associated with the scene in Thüring's *Melusine*, where Melusine transforms into a giant

flying serpent soaring over Lusignan after her secret was revealed by Reymundt publicly (92). In the same scene of Jean's *Roman de Mélusine*, Melusine originally turns herself into a dragon (194). The transformation from serpent to dragon also started by applying wings to the serpent in early biblical works. For example, Isidore of Seville proposes in his *Etymologies* that dragons are "the largest of the serpents" (Ansgar Kelly, 304-305). Interestingly, the Middle High German word "wurm" (86; 92), which Thüring uses in the text, also suggests the close connection between serpents and dragons. In Middle High German, "wurm" mostly refers to snakes, such as in the compound "wurmgarte" [Schlangengarten], and it sometimes can also mean dragon (Lexer, 329). But in most cases, a dragon-like creature that has short legs and tiny or no wings is referred as "lintwurm" (Kluge, 806). It is clear that the Eden serpent does share some physical and symbolic similarities with Melusine. Therefore, her serpentine monstrosity seems to represent her sinful state, for which she must be punished.

The monstrosity appears to be passed down to some of her children. In both Jean's and Thüring's versions, Melusine has ten sons and the first eight of them all display some physical 'abnormalities.' They either have an identical aberrant appearance, for example, three eyes or a big tooth, or else they have strange birthmarks like a lion's paw on the back or a spot on the nose covered by wolf's fur (Ringoltingen, 32-33). Some of them are also endowed with abnormal mental problems. For instance, Goffroy kills one hundred monks, including his own brother, and burns down an abbey without hesitation after his fury is easily triggered by his father's letter (Ringoltingen, 80-82). Moreover, his little brother Horibel, who has already killed two nurses by

the age of two, is also depicted as born evil. Melusine even asks Reymundt to put him to death at the age of four, as she prophesies that their son will bring catastrophe to their family and land (Ringoltingen, 93). Many scholars have noticed this abnormality of Melusine's sons. Keller argues that the aberrance does not indicate the negativity of their monstrosity but rather demonstrate something positive. She believes,

die räumliche und zeitliche Verbindung – die permanenten Zeichen der Söhne sind nach oben gewandert im Gegensatz zum temporär verwandelten Unterleib der Mutter – deute ich als Indiz dafür, dass die Integration der Feenabkömmlinge in die adlige Menschenwelt zu glücken schein

[The spacial and temporal connection, – in contrast to their mother's temporarily transformed lower body, the permanent marks of sons have moved upwards – I interpret as a sign that the integration of the offspring of fairies in the noble human world appear to be successful] (202-203).

Holding an opposite opinion, scholars like Maddox and Sturm-Maddox have observed that, “medieval writers sometimes construed physical deformities as signs either of a diabolical presence or of the mother's misconduct” (6). Since only the latter argument appears to account for the outrageous acts caused by Goffroy and Horibel in their demented state, it further suggests that due to her transgression, Melusine's cursed monstrosity inevitably brings misfortune to her and her sons.

b. Melusine's Christian Image: 'Kippfigur' of Mary and Eve

The previous section demonstrates that the first eight sons' 'abnormalities' are the results of the inherited ill-fated monstrosity from Melusine. Nevertheless, it is evident that her last two sons are both mentally and physically 'normal.' Here, this normality refers to being like a human, the truly human. It is contrary to the monstrous aberrance of the snake woman and her first eight sons. This contrast brings the analysis to the question of what causes this difference between Melusine's children, some of who have only human features while the others have also acquired monstrosity from their mother.

To examine this issue, it is necessary to analyze the origin of Melusine's hybridity, namely the curse. Both Jean's and Thüring's stories have a similar description of the curse. Here only gives Thüring's version:

Melusina der jüngsten / die gar weiß und wol erfahren war / das sie sol werden
 alle Sambstag / von dem Nabel hinab / eine Schlang oder Wurm / und welcher sie
 zu eim Weib nemmen würd / der ihr füglich wer / ir da schweren und geloben solt
 / das er an keinem Sambstag sie nimmer ersuchen / noch ir nachfragen / sondern
 sie unbekümmert / und denselbigen tag gantz frey lassen sol / und sie auch auff
 diesen tag nit sehen / noch diese geheyme niemandt sagen solt / und ob er also
 thete und hielt / daß sie denn lebt alle ir tag / und zu letzt stürbe / als ein ander
 tödtlicher Mensch

[Melusine, the youngest (daughter), who is aware of what she has done, will (be

punished to) turn her lower body into a serpent every Saturday. The man who may take her as a wife, needs to swear that on Saturdays, he will never try to find her or ask her (where she is). Instead, he should leave her alone and set her free for the day. On this day, she should neither see anyone nor tell anyone about this secret. If he can keep his promise, she can then live until the last moment as a mortal] (106).

According to this passage, the consequence of the curse is the monstrosity of Melusine. Not only must she keep in secret her physical condition, but the curse also can only be undone by a man who is willing to marry her. The outcome of such undoing will enable Melusine to die as a mortal, which means returning to her pure humanity. However, in the text Melusine never shows any sign of approaching to the point where she reacquires full humanity, as she is constantly made aware of by her regular transformation. Therefore, only her last two newborn sons' normality can signify that the monstrous feature is gradually being purified. The question that then arises is, what makes this purification possible?

This brings the analysis back to the contrast between normality and abnormality of Melusine, namely between humanity and monstrosity. It suggests a Christian 'Kippfigur,' an ambiguous image of Mary and Eve. Scholars believe that women in medieval literature by male authors are mostly portrayed from the images of Mary and Eve, who stand for very contrary characteristics (Bovenschen et al., 24-27). For instance, Hubrath argues that Eve is presented as "Gegenfigur zu Maria," which represents the negative side of the dual femininity. "Attraktiv und

sexuell verführerisch und zugleich verführbar, ungehorsam und sündig, wird Eva die Verantwortung für das Vorhandensein von Tod und Leid in der Welt übertragen [Because of her being attractive and sexually seductive as well as seducible, disobedient and sinful, Eve is responsible for the existence of death and suffering in the world.]” (243). Hubrath’s interpretation of Eve shows a clear association with Melusine. Eve, the first woman, is driven out of Eden because of her sin, committed at the instigation of a serpent. She is punished because she betrayed God, the father figure who created her. This similar plot can also be found in Melusine’s story, as she is cursed for betraying her father. That she, her mother and her sisters are in exile betrays an even closer similarity with the biblical story.

Melusine’s image of a perfect Christian wife and mother triggers an immediate association with the Virgin Mary, who is considered in “western European cultures” to be “the embodiment of medieval ideal motherhood and wifedom” (Colwell, 184). Colwell apotheosizes Melusine by comparing her with the Virgin Mary. Her analysis sheds light on the argument that Mary’s “roles as nurse, teacher, sufferer, and intercessor or comforter/healer of others,” which perfectly demonstrates “Christian humanity,” can also be seen in Melusine’s character (184-192). By affiliating Melusine with Marian characteristics, Colwell’s interpretation appears to be legitimate, as there is no doubt that both Jean and Thüring have portrayed Melusine as a supportive, loyal Christian mother, who guides and teaches her husband and sons with Christian doctrines and thoughts. In addition to her spiritual guidance of her loved ones, she also has built numerous churches and chapels in their land in appreciation of God (Ringoltingen, 43).

Thus, the dichotomy of Melusine's character enables her to incarnate the 'Kippfigur' of Mary and Eve. This peculiarity may help explain the purification of her offspring's aberrance. Stica has observed that Mary is the opposite of or "parallel" to Eve: the latter "brought death to the human race" through her disobedience, whereas the former "brought salvation" by obedience. He points out that Irenaeus's works promoted "the ethical aspects of man's redemption" via the manifestation that Eve guides man into a sinful state, whereas Mary emancipates him from it (4). Stica's argument suggests that Marian benefaction is able to redeem Eve's wrongdoing. This accords perfectly with the analysis given so far. Akin to Eve, Melusine's transgression caused abnormality to her male offspring, but she eventually saved her last two sons from it. In order to achieve this final salvation, it appears that Melusine has taken Marian acts as a path to redemption.

As previously noted, Colwell observes that Mary represents a perfect maternity and wifeliness that requires a woman to perform multiple auxiliary or subservient roles such as nurse, teacher, and comforter in addition to an obedient helpmeet. These roles have been played to perfection by Melusine in both Jean's and Thüring's texts. Regarding the role of a perfect wife, Melusine uses her magic to help her husband Reymundt rapidly build and expand the land of Lusignan. In addition to the ever-increasing construction of churches and chapels, she also guides him to the achievement of a Christian spiritual state by constantly reminding him of Christian doctrines and faith in God, and she also never disobeys him. Melusine never fails to endeavor to be a comforter for her husband and sons. For example, when Reymundt is twice

upset by Melusine's monstrous secret, she returns home immediately from her business as soon as she becomes aware of his abnormal mental condition. According to the text, her consolation is always presented as soft and gentle, intended to relax and calm her husband rather than dissuade him. She even tries to console him at their last moment together, when she sees Reymundt still saddened and infuriated by Goffroy's atrocity to Freymund and the other monks: "daß Goffroy das Kloster und die Múnche verbrennet und verderbet hat / solt ihr wissen / daß GOtt also uber die Múnche verhengt hat / von irer grewlichen grossen Sünd wegen / unangesehen also / denn sie ir Regel und Observantz nicht halten haben [You should know that the reason why Goffroy has burned these monks is because God was mad at them for committing horrible sins. It is because they did not follow God's rule and observance.]"(88).

However, Melusine's role as a comforting wife did not exert a direct influence on her sons' normality. Instead, it is another important role Melusine played that helps her abnormal sons most immediately: that of an educator. In both texts, it is clearly depicted that Melusine often teaches her sons Christian moral ethics and reminds them of the imperative to follow God's will. In Jean's *Roman de Mélusine*, her indoctrination of Christianity appears even more often. All episodes with respect to her sons' performance on battlefields or departure for administration start with her calling them before her and preaching Christian thoughts. Here is one of the dialogues with Uriens and Goyt (in English translation): "My Children, wherever you may be, you are to attend mass every day before you do anything else, and call on your Creator for help in all your endeavors. Serve him diligently and love Him and fear Him as your God" (74).

Evidently, Melusine's preaching to her sons seems to help them find cure or compensation for their monstrosity. Despite their physical or mental aberrance, all of them are welcomed by the nobility and the folk owing to their firm faith in God as well as their brave and triumphant performance in battles against pagans. Also, most of them end up acquiring titles of nobility and marrying courtly ladies. For instance, firstborn Uriens becomes the King of Cyprus; the second son Goyt is now the King of Armenia; their younger brothers Anthoni and Reinhart turn out to be the Count of Luxembourg and the King of Bohemia respectively. In addition to helping her abnormal sons, Melusine also manages to help her last two sons avoid inheriting monstrous features from her. Thus, it can be said that Melusine did redeem her Eve-like wrongdoings and emancipated her male progeny from the negative results of her monstrous serpentine nature by undertaking benevolent actions of Marian salvation or redemption.

c. Melusine and Medieval Christianity

The first two sections of this chapter have examined how Christianity plays a major part in the creation of Melusine's ambiguous and multifarious character. As the embodiment of Mary, Eve, and the Eden serpent she demonstrates the interrelationship among three aforementioned elements, namely, Christianity, Melusine's female sex and monstrosity. The final section will now discuss what roles male authors and the sociocultural background have played in the emergence of this relationship.

Although Melusine's representation of the Eden serpent, as well as the 'Kippfigur' of Mary and Eve, is shown to be legitimate due to the similarities, there are some noticeable

nuances. For example, in the biblical story, it is God, the father figure, who casts the curse over the serpent, whereas Melusine and her sisters are punished by their mother. This difference brings to the fore another necessary discussion of women's position in the mother-child relationship at that time. Some scholars believe that it reflects the education of the time. As Murray has pointed out, the Bible and related biblical works were the major sources for people to find ideal "models of familial behaviour" in medieval times (416). Although most of these books concentrate on Christian marriage, some of them deal with children's enlightenment. For example, in the *Book of Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach)*, there is an entire chapter that teaches children to respect their parents (Murray, 416-417). In *Life of St. Anselm*, Eadmer showcases how a perfect child should behave by introducing the childhood of St. Anselm. Moreover, the relationship between children and the church is also mentioned (Murray, 436-441). Caesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogue on Miracles* utilizes some collected stories to warn readers about the conflict between parents and children, as well as siblings and the consequences of such conflict (Murray, 442-444). In terms of education of girls, both St. Jerome in *To Letitia* and Bartholomaeus Anglicus in *De Proprietatibus Rerum* give some extremely misogynistic advice, which aims to remind readers that girls are born to be inferior to boys. In addition to pointing out that chastity and virginity are the most cherished virtues of girls, they also suggest that girls be separated from boys from their early education, as they may have negative influence on boys (Murray, 418-424; 447-449). Nikki Stiller has also noticed this phenomenon of educational separation and argues in *Eve's Orphans: Mother and Daughters in Medieval Literature* that

since girls' education is isolated and mostly given by mothers, who possessed positions secondary to men, they could only learn "passivity and subordination" from their mothers (Hirsch, 217).

As these books have shown, most of the biblical works, from which medieval parents have learned the method of educating children separately, put women in a subordinate position to men from an early age. This may have affected women's role in teaching their children. According to Colwell, children of both sexes received most "moral education" from their mothers, although the education of boys and girls was separated and "fathers, tutors, and members of other courts were generally entrusted with the military and pragmatic training of their sons" (190). In addition to biblical works, manuals like Raymond Lull's *Doctrina d'enfant* were used in medieval Europe to guide women on how to teach their children moral standards. This explains why it is Melusine's mother who casts the curse on her three daughters, as it is mother's responsibility to teach children, especially girls, how to behave morally and to correct their misbehaviours by administering punishment. Moreover, Melusine similarly provides the moral education of her ten sons.

The argument here also brings the analysis to the discussion about Melusine's position in her marriage with Reymundt. Initially, it is necessary to illustrate her situation after the curse. At the point where Melusine meets Reymundt, she is already cursed for her transgression. As previously argued, her transgression against her father and the punishment she receives enable Melusine to symbolize both Eve and the Eden serpent. Another point that hints at this

combination can also be observed in the half-serpent and half-woman creature she turns into every Saturday. This constant transformation serves as a reminder of Melusine's sinful nature underlying her monstrosity, which is also what Eve and the serpent represent. Thus, Melusine carries a sinful body into her marriage to Reymundt. She properly raises ten sons for him by preaching Christianity and saves them from the negative consequences of the monstrosity.

Although it appears that she does not show any sign of approaching pure humanity, scholars such as Maddox and Sturm-Maddox (7) as well as Douglas Kelly (44) do believe that Dieterich and Raymond's normal physiognomy indicates that Melusine is gradually progressing to her "fully human state" or "real humanity" until the time when Reymundt breaks his oath, which happens after they were born.

Although the text does not reveal whether Melusine is progressing to her fully human state, it is clear that she eventually fails to achieve it, since she finally becomes a flying serpent or dragon vanishing in the air. The condition of her everlasting disability to return to a human form sheds light on the fact that instead of acquiring real humanity she only ends up embracing pure monstrosity. However, this should not hinder the analysis from further discussing the hybridity of her two features, as the balance between them, namely Eve causing misfortune and the Virgin Mary bringing salvation, also illustrates authors' perspectives towards her fate. By taking benevolent actions, she manages to redeem her husband and sons and herself from her Eve-like wrongdoings. It seems that these two authors intend to give Melusine a second opportunity to compensate for her evildoing and do acknowledge her Marian acts of redemption, which allow

her to stay in human form by maintaining a balance between her monstrosity and humanity. Nonetheless, all of this only serves to postpone the intention of completely destroying Melusine's dream of living as a normal human being. This harmony is easily broken by her husband's explosive accusation: "O du böse Schlang unnd schendtlicher Wurm / der Samen noch all dein Geschlecht thut nimmer gut / sihe /was schönen anfang dein Son Goffroy mit dem Zan hat gethan [Oh, you evil serpent! Your seed and all of your offspring have done nothing good. Take a good look at what your son Goffroy with the (big) tooth has done]" (Ringoltingen, 86).

The way this scene is designed illustrates that the male authors have never decided to set Melusine free from her monstrous feature, but rather wanted to seal her pathetic fate with eternal lamentation. The following analysis will further adumbrate this intention. Although the balance allowing her to keep human form is outrageously upset when Reymundt breaks his promise of not visiting Melusine on Saturdays, it is Melusine who suffers the most immediate consequence of his action. That also means that Reymundt's oath-breaking completes Melusine's monstrosity and terminates her chance to achieve full humanity. Similar situations happened to Melusine's mother as well. Melusine's father, the King of Albanie, was asked to keep himself from seeing his wife at childbed. After he had failed to keep his promise, the mother banished her three daughters and herself instead. Williams and Schwarz point out that these two similar episodes showcase two Christian misogynistic concepts concerning women. First, they have observed that Christianity at that time required wives to keep silent about any thing or event that might lead to their husband's interdict, such as being at childbed and staying with women; Second, they also

believed that the requirement of not seeing Melusine every Saturday indicates the Christian doctrine of sexual abstinence, which aims to warn men about women's natural sexual seductiveness (43-44). This argument perfectly explains the intention of punishing Melusine for her man's fault.

Melusine, in both Thüring's and Jean's stories, receives a punishment that hybridizes her humanity with monstrosity after she transgresses against her father. As it has been demonstrated, the punishment shows close references to Eve and the Eden serpent, which leaves her in a negative position by imposing a crime on her from the beginning of the story. She is given the opportunity to redeem herself and acquire pure humanity at her mortal death by acting like the Virgin Mary, who embodies the perfect maternity and wifeliness. However, she is not able to achieve salvation on her own. Even by putting herself into a subservient position to her husband and helping him as well as his sons accomplish success, she can only keep herself from losing her humanity. Nevertheless, her remaining humanity, hanging by a thread, is easily eliminated by her husband's fault. By this point, it is clear that these two authors hold very negative perspectives, not only towards Melusine but also towards many female characters in their stories. These female characters are depicted either as women who ought to be obedient, secondary and naturally sinful, or as those who disobey men and are punished, to be put on the road of purgatory to redeem themselves from their imposed sins. By presenting stories, which depict Melusine's life from her acquiring monstrosity to completely losing her humanity, Jean and Thüring present a process of oppressing female power. They even portrayed this female power as

monstrous, as if it is necessary to suppress it. Moreover, it is important to point out that the force that enables these two authors to achieve their oppression is the sociocultural situation of Christianity at that time, which is well illustrated in the texts and has been analyzed in this chapter.

III. Madam White and Her Imprisonment

Madam White is a figure of a snake woman originating from Chinese folklore, who gradually evolves into one of the most popular and significant characters in Chinese culture through multiple adaptations in different genres of Chinese literature, such as *zhiguai xiaoshuo* (*tales of the miraculous*), *chuanqi* (*transmission of the strange*), *huaben* (*novella*) and regional operas. In most literary versions, Madam White is depicted as a beautiful widow dressed in white who is transformed from a powerful snake spirit. This supernatural creature often appears in Chinese mythology and folklore and is able to turn itself into a captivating woman. Similar to Melusine, she also marries an innocent and common man and desires to live as a human. However, Madam White is eventually defeated by a dominating male monk and imprisoned under a pagoda, after reverting to her original form: a white serpent.

Although the core of the plot, which will be referred to as a prototypical plot in this thesis, stays almost unaltered, different personalities of Madam White and authors' divergent perspectives on her are juxtaposed in literature from different time periods. As the story of Madam White has existed in and through oral tradition long before the appearance of its written versions, scholars generally believe that "Li Huang" a *zhiguai* narrative of *Boyizhi* (*Vast Records of the Strange*; ca. 827AD/Tang Dynasty) is considered the inspiration behind Madam White's story. "The Legend of the Three Pagodas of West Lake," a story included in *Qingpingshantang huaben* (*The Tales of the Serene Mountain*; 1550), is nevertheless the most developed archetypal story of later literary adaptations. In early versions such as these two, Madam White is often

associated with evil. She is portrayed as a femme fatale who seduces innocent men and eats them alive without hesitation. Although appearing in human form, this snake spirit possesses absolutely no humanity. However, this demerit is progressively compensated by the omission of her ferocity and the addition of benevolence as well as the true affection for her husband in later versions such as “Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda” of *Jingshitongyan* (*Stories to Caution the World*; 1624). This compensation does not mirror authors’ positive perspectives towards Madam White but rather the reconciliation to the writing style of new literary genres. Only in the eighteenth century do authors and readers start to have sympathy for Madam White’s characters in plays such as Huang Tubi’s *Thunder Peak Pagoda* (1738) and Fang Chengpei’s *The Legend of Thunder Peak Pagoda* (1771). Nonetheless, the original plot of imprisonment under the pagoda after her transformation stays intact.

Thus, the metamorphosis of Madam White as the key element of the prototypical plot becomes the unique method that authors utilize to showcase the nuances or changes in their adaptations. The following analysis of the story of Madam White will mainly be based on two pre-modern versions and one additional modern story, respectively: “The Legend of the Three Pagodas of West Lake,” “Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda” and *The Legend of Thunder Peak Pagoda*. This chapter will explain the mechanism of the metamorphosis in the Chinese texts. It will be argued that the different versions of Madam White’s unique characteristics are associated with the sociocultural background of the Chinese women of different pre-modern periods. Most importantly, it will be demonstrated that the male

authors of Madam White's story have taken advantage of the sociocultural constraint of femininity in order to achieve the intention of using their texts to civilize women.

A. Snakes in Chinese Culture

Akin to the history of snakes and serpentine goddesses' image in Europe, the symbols of serpents and serpentine divinities have also experienced substantial change in Chinese culture. Similarly, it is patriarchy and religions that have exerted the greatest influence on this transformation. This section will illustrate the development of the serpentine image in China. It will discuss how concepts of masculinity and religions including Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism have taken part in this process.

Similar to the European culture, serpents were primarily associated with divinities in the ancient time of China. As Chamberlain points out, Chinese historians categorize its history based on "philosophical precepts." However, when "the facts are inconsistent with the image of the past, they are interpreted into submission" (Chamberlain, 23), namely through the process of euhemerization, the interpretation of myths as historical events. The so-called ancient Chinese era of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (2852 - 2070 BC) is the result of this interpretation. According to Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, this era is the time when Chinese history begins under the reigns of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. Three Sovereigns, whose time is prior to the age of Five Emperors, are referenced as Fu Xi, Nü Wa and Shen Nong, according to Sima Zhen's addition to Sima Qian's historical records (17). As the earliest leaders, Fu Xi who taught Chinese people survival skills like hunting, fishing and tending

flocks and his sister Nü Wa who sacrificed herself to save them from natural disasters were worshiped as gods who have human heads and snake bodies (17). The image of ophidian gods is also found in the depiction of Huang Di, the leader of Five Emperors, who, as Chamberlain describes, “led the people out of darkness of caves into the light ” (23). Therefore, Chinese divinity had endowed serpents with a great reputation and high status.

Like ancient Greece, ancient China was a matriarchal society that widely worshipped female fertility and maternity. Thus, goddesses such as Nü Wa, who show strong connections with these feminine characteristics, were idolized in multiple cults. Nü Wa is possibly the earliest combination of woman and snake in Chinese literature. As previously argued, during this time period, serpentine deities had a positive and even savior-like image among Chinese. A later description of Nü Wa in Ying Shao’s *Fengsu tongyi* (*Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Habits*), which is quoted in *Taiping yulan* (*Imperial Readings of the Taiping Era*), further proves this point:

俗说天地开辟，未有人民。女娲抟黄土作人。剧务，力不暇供，乃引绳于絙泥中，举以为人。故富贵者，黄土人也；贫贱凡庸者，絙人也。 [As the saying goes, there were no human being after the creation of world. Nü Wa brought life to humans by making them out of clay. The work was exhausting, but she could not create enough people even though she tried her utmost. So she took a rope to dip in the clay and whipped it in the air. Drops of the clay became humans. Thus, it is said that the rich ones are descendants of handmade clay figures, whereas the

poor ones are of clay drops.] (Li Fang, 672)

The snake goddess is portrayed as the mother of mankind, who not only vitalizes the earth but is also put on a pedestal. Despite the disbelief triggered by the hardship of finding and reconciling Nü Wa's true identity (Schafer, 29), she and snakes remained significant figures in Han and pre-Han cults owing to "the new 'Confucian' insistence on euhemerization" (Schafer, 29). Nevertheless, this worship and the positive image of snakes were gradually enfeebled "due to the contempt of some eminent and educated men for animalian gods" and "the increasing domination of masculinity in elite social doctrine" (Schafer, 29). This was the result of the transformation from matriarchal to the patriarchal society in ancient China.

Once the status of Nü Wa was degraded during this social transformation, women received seriously unequal treatment. Some have masculinized the influential goddesses' sexual identity, in order to save their divinity from the impact of the worsening image of women. In this regard, Schafer also discusses the loss of the femininity of goddesses in Chinese literature.

Their [goddesses'] feminine personalities, which were certainly familiar to the highly literate administrative class, were never allowed to intrude into the language of official documents and officially sanctioned rites. There they were nameless and asexual, or at best were endowed with a certain pallid masculinity by the nature of the lordly or kingly titles sometimes bestowed on them (46).

Schafer's observation reminds that the degradation of goddesses and femininity in China shares another similarity with the European, as they both have taken away female deities' sexual

identity. It seems that both cultures have followed the same routine regarding marginalizing the femininity of matriarchy. The following analysis, which tackles the roles of religions in this degradation, will further prove this point.

In addition to the demotion from its positivity, the image of snakes and women gained negative impressions with the emerging practice of Taoism. As opposed to the strict dogmas of Confucianism, Taoism, which advocates freedom and fluidity, became the strongest and most influential opponent (Gernet, 206). The ultimate goal of practicing Taoism is to reach Tao, the state where Taoists can live as immortals in the world, which is divided into three elements: Heaven, Earth, and Man. Those who have reached Tao are called *zhenren*, or True Men. To reach this state, they need to practice magic and interact with nature, where, according to Taoist beliefs, plants and animals can turn themselves into humans. These supernatural beings are called *yao*, namely demons, who need to be eliminated, because they sap vitality from humans to keep themselves in human form and cause illness and adversity (Gernet, 206-210; Lagerwey, 59-60; Yang, 149-151; Wu, 140). Thus the snake, which “due to its position in the Ten Celestial Stems as the Heraldic Animal of the North” represents “disasters and all sorts of evil” (Hean-Tatt, 90-91), was naturally demonized in Taoism as well as Chinese mythology and became the most dreadful creature. At this point, the snake’s image was completely cut off from its positive connection with Nü Wa; Pei-yi Wu suggests that she is the reversed prototype of Madam White, the evil snake woman (155).

This section has shown that the Chinese serpentine goddess was demoted by the

masculinity. Religions, especially Taoism, has played a crucial role in this movement. It indicates that the patriarchal power and religions exerted the considerable influence on culture and society that time. The following analysis will further examine how this sociocultural background of women is reflected in Madam White's stories. It will also point out the male authors' roles in creating this reflection.

B. The Legend of the Three Pagodas of West Lake

The appearance of a Taoist in the earliest version of the story of Madam White, "The Legend of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake" in *Qingpingshantang huaben* (hereafter "Three Pagodas") further demonstrates point. Its plot can be summarized as follows:

Together with his mother, a young man named Xi Xuanzan visits West Lake at the Qingming Festival. Being around twenty, Xi is keen on leisure and traveling but keeps himself away from debauchery. Wandering alone by the lake and coming to a bridge called Duanqiao (Broken Bridge), he meets a girl who has lost her way and takes her home. After some days, an elder lady dressed in black claiming to be the girl's grandmother comes to him and wants to take her home. After the girl's explanation, the elder lady invites Xi to her home for a banquet to express her gratitude.

She leads him to a celestial palace near the lake, where Xi meets the girl's mother, a beautiful woman dressed in white, Madam White. After a couple of glasses of wine at the banquet, Xi is sexually aroused by Madam White's beauty. But at that moment, White suddenly asks her guards to bring a young man into the hall and take his liver and heart out for her and the elder lady to eat. Despite his fear, Xi cannot deny his desire and accepts Madam White's invitation to have sexual relations with her.

After a couple of days, Xi becomes emaciated and begs to go home. While Xi is asking for her permission, a new spirited young man comes to visit White's palace. So, she decides to set a banquet for the man and prepares to take Xi's liver and heart out as part of it. After the girl appeals for mercy, White agrees to keep him alive but on the condition that Xi marry her. Out of her gratitude for Xi having saved her life, the little girl saves him and sends him back home.

At next year's Qingming Festival, Xi spots a raven, which later turns into the elder lady in black and captures him. After being brought back to Madam White's palace, he is forced to

be her husband. Luckily, Xi is again saved by the little girl and sent back home. One day, a Taoist who is an acquaintance of Xi's mother comes to visit and notices that Xi is haunted by evil demons. After listening to Xi's story, he asks him to take him to Madam White's palace. Threatened by the Taoist's power, the demons revert to their original forms: the little girl is a crow; the elder lady is an otter and Madam White is a white serpent. Finally, the Taoist captures them in three iron jars and put them at the bottom of West Lake. Three pagodas are built upon these jars to imprison the demons permanently.

a. Madam White's Cannibalism

A peculiar factor in "Three Pagodas," which is omitted in later versions of Madam White's story, is cannibalism, ritual cannibalism in particular, which threatens the male character's life or even kills them. It is important to note that "cannibalism is one of the most deeply felt fantasies universal to all men (and) can be seen from its frequent occurrence in myths and fairy tales" (Wu, 46). It is, from Freud's perspective, a reflection of adults' primitive anxiety and also a symbol of their "earliest feared punishment" (46, quoted in *The White Snake: The Evolution of A Myth in China*). According to Wu's conjecture, the cannibalism in "Three Pagodas" is either the "reminiscent of a primordial custom" of ancient Chinese cults or reflective of a "crime" (47-48). However, whether this fear of Madam White's ritual cannibalism is indebted to a reverence for a goddess-like figure in a cult or a fear of the devilry of a serpentine female monster needs to be further discussed. Three elements: cannibalism, rituality and its purpose remain to be adduced.

According to Frye, "the image of cannibalism usually includes, not only images of torture and mutilation, but of what is technically known as sparagmos or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body, an image found in the myths of Osiris, Orpheus, and Pentheus" (46, quoted in Wu). Such cannibalism is showcased in the sacrifice scenario of the "Three Pagodas," where Xi

is invited to partake of the fresh human heart and liver ripped out of a young man's body with Madam White, while drinking wine at the banquet specifically set for him. Thus, the human-eating action serves not to indicate murderous intent but rather a method of cannibalism. It is then necessary to argue whether the cannibalism depicted in this text is ritual or not, as rituality differentiates such actions from survival cannibalism. As John MacCulloch points out, ritual cannibalism, where humans were sacrificed, was a tribute to gods or "Earth-goddess[es]" and was practiced by priests of different early cults and religions (302-303). Thus, the rituality of the cannibalism in "Three Pagodas" is indicated by the relationship among characters in the cannibalism scene. The innocent young man who is eventually eaten plays the role of the victim and sacrificial offering. Guards, who killed him and offered his organs as an oblation, function as priests, while Madam White becomes the worshipped superior zoomorphic deity.

In addition to ancient Greece and China, this type of degradation happened worldwide in the history of religions, especially with respect on cannibalism. For instance, MacCulloch has observed that priestesses of Earth-goddesses who practiced cannibalism in rituals were persecuted by Christianity as witches who stole and ate children. Baba Yaga of the Slavic folklore, whose origins can be traced to the South German goddess Berchta, is also portrayed as a cannibal monster, even in her own culture (303). MacCulloch believes that cannibalism is used by a race or a certain group to showcase that another race that still practices it is of "a lower civilization" whose action brings horror (300-302). Akin to the situation of disgracing Nü Wa, he also agrees that the degradation of a goddess was decelerated "when wom[e]n had a high place"

and priestesses were “held in high honour” (303) and accelerated when masculinity was in the ascent. Therefore, for Taoists, who were predominantly men, the snake woman, Madam White would be the perfect demonization of the serpentine goddess, Nü Wa. Thus, there is no doubt that the cannibalism in “Three Pagodas” is utilized to represent White’s ferociousness and transgression rather than varnish her with divinity, especially given the fact that she is eventually defeated and imprisoned by a powerful Taoist.

b. Madam White’s Promiscuity

Although at first it appears that Madam White’s cannibalism represents her female power over masculinity, this action eventually turns out to demonstrate her evil character. It is also one of the factors that male authors utilize to justify imprisoning her. Another element of this function is sex, which is closely connected to cannibalism in the plot. This section will discuss how it serves to help suppress Madam White.

It is peculiarly distinctive that Xi is sexually aroused by Madam White’s beauty right before she eats her innocent victim’s organs. Moreover, the cannibalism is also immediately followed by White’s inviting Xi to her bed. These two elements seem to be forced to interrelate. Indeed, after proving the negative function of the cannibalism, this compelled connection can be perceived as a way to exacerbate the demeaning of the serpentine woman. Liyan Li believes that as in other cultures, Chinese culture put mothers and women on a pedestal in the early time of their history, when fertility was widely worshiped. However, with the development of patriarchy at the court and in society starting with the Zhou Dynasty, women were gradually marginalized

(30-32). This process was also accompanied with the degradation of goddesses like Nü Wa. In patriarchal China, women held an insignificant position both domestically and socially. They were treated as inferiors who were supposed to serve seniors and give birth to their husbands' children. As marriage in ancient China was only polygamous for men, men could have sex with different women and marry multiple wives, whereas women needed to be absolutely dutiful and chaste (Yinhe Li, 232-236). In the Song Dynasty, the time in which the story of Madam White is set, the demands for women's chastity became even more outrageous. Women who had sex or even intimate interaction with other men before or after their marriage would be sentenced to banishment or even to death (Dalin Liu, 119; Liyan Li, 247-248).

Therefore, in accordance with given arguments, Madam White, who keeps inviting other men to her bed while she is Xi's wife, is intentionally portrayed as a licentious and cannibalistic femme fatale. The interlocking of lasciviousness and cannibalism in the text aggravates the evildoing of White, the reversed prototype of the serpentine goddess, Nü Wa. The social and cultural perceptions at that time of women's behaviours enabled the male author's intent of oppressing the snake woman's female power to appear to be legitimate.

C. Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda

In "Three Pagodas," the sinful figure of Madam White, the demonized ophidian supernatural personage of Nü Wa, may have been depicted as a negative example warning women to behave and stay chaste. To discuss the male authors' intent of creating Madam White, this section will analyze the text of "Thunder Peak Pagoda," a later version of Madam White's story, and

compare it with “Three Pagodas (See Table II regarding the comparison of their plots).” The analysis will focus on the wrongdoing, specifically the transgressions Madam White commits, since it is the key element that tarnishes her image. It will examine how the transgression has been associated with religions and Madam White’s female sex. In this regard, this section will also investigate the sociocultural background at that time.

Table II Plot Comparison of “Three Pagodas” and “Thunder Peak Pagoda”

Name/Plot (Regarding Madam White)	“The Legend of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake” Hong Pian (Around 1550, Ming Dynasty)	“Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda” Feng Menglong (1624, late Ming Dynasty)
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On the Qingming Festival, Xu saves a little girl and is invited to a banquet. 2. Xu meets Madam White, who soon kills a young man and eats his liver and heart in the presence of Xu. 3. Madam White invites Xu to her bed and to marry her. 4. After a couple of days, Xu becomes emaciated and begs to leave. Madam White invites another young man to her bed and threatens to eat Xu alive. 5. Madam White is defeated by a Taoist and is 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On the Qingming Festival, Xu meets a beautiful woman named Madam White, who soon asks him to marry her. 2. Madam White gives Xu some silver as a dowry and asks him to use it for their wedding. 3. Xu is put in prison twice because the things he received from Madam White are stolen properties 4. Xu is warned by a Taoist that his wife is a monster. However, the Taoist is easily defeated by Madam White. 5. Madam White is finally defeated by a Buddhist abbot and is permanently imprisoned in a pagoda

Name/Plot (Regarding Madam White)	“The Legend of the Three Pagodas of the West Lake” Hong Pian (Around 1550, Ming Dynasty)	“Madam White Is Kept Forever under the Thunder Peak Pagoda” Feng Menglong (1624, late Ming Dynasty)
	permanently imprisoned in a pagoda after she was forced to turn to her original form of a white serpent.	after she was forced to turn to her original form of a white serpent.

a. Buddhism and the Omission of Madam White’s Brutality

Although both versions are categorized as belonging to the genre of demon stories (志怪小说), the plot of “Thunder Peak Pagoda” has been considerably expanded and varied compared to “Three Pagodas.” In addition to the added episodes, the story appears to be much less violent and more humanized. Patrick Hanan believes that this change is influenced by the development of vernacular short stories that happened between 1550 and the 1620s in China. He argues that the brutal and “harsh” plots of the stories in *Sanyan* (the abbreviation of three collections of vernacular stories: respectively, *Stories to Enlighten the World*, *Stories to Caution the World* and *Stories to Awaken the World*) originating from *Qingpingshantang huaben* are distinctively softened (197). Wu further points out that, in the case of Madam White, a “more sympathetic treatment of the heroine” has been adopted. He notices that White is transformed from a cannibal and licentious monster into a woman, “whose only fault is her attraction to the young man who is perhaps unworthy of her love” (37). Indeed, as shown in Table II, the aforementioned changes can be easily observed. Nevertheless, another minor but conspicuous change to one episode also indicates a likely influence on these changes.

As seen in “Thunder Peak Pagoda,” Madam White is at the end imprisoned by a Buddhist monk, instead of being defeated by a Taoist as in “Three Pagodas.” It is necessary first to introduce the history of the introduction of Buddhism and its acclimatization in China, as this will help the reader to better understand its function in the story. According to Gernet, Buddhism penetrated China in the Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) after centuries of development influenced by Indian, Iranian and Hellenistic cultures (211). It was soon accepted as well as supported by the court and then gradually practiced more widely by commoners. Buddhism reached its climax in the Northern Zhou (557-581 AD) and early Tang Dynasties (618-690 AD; 705-907 AD) and was gradually declined at court since the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). However, after centuries of acclimatization under the influence of Taoism and Confucianism, Buddhist contributions to Chinese culture, especially literature, are indelible. By the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 AD), when “Thunder Peak Pagoda” was written, Buddhism appeared to have absorbed Taoist and Confucian ideas and advocated kindness, softness, peace as well as abstinence (Ch’en, 436; Gernet, 439). This development within Buddhism can be linked to the rationale for the omission of cannibalism and licentiousness in “Thunder Peak Pagoda.”

In literature during this time period, “antagonism toward Taoist priests” was frequently showed in fiction according to C. T. Hsia (quoted in Wu, 63), whereas Buddhism was well embraced. This phenomenon can also be found in “Thunder Peak Pagoda” where the Taoist is not completely omitted, but is rather portrayed as being overpowered by White, who in turn is defeated by Fahai the Buddhist abbot. Another factor that showcases how Buddhist ideas have

influenced changes to the plot is the poems at the end of the story. One of them is written as the grand finale by the protagonist, Xu, who eventually embraces Buddhism and becomes a monk:

祖师度我出红尘，铁树开花始见春，化化轮回重化化，生生转变再生生。欲
知有色还无色，须识无形却有形，色即使空空即是色，空空色色要分明。

[The abbot delivered me from the mortal world;

The iron tree burst into spring blossoms.

The wheel of life and death goes round and round;

Reincarnation occurs life after life.

The phenomenal world is elusive,

The formless, in fact, is not lacking in form.

The Form is the Void; the Void is the Form;

Yet the two should be clearly set apart.] (Feng, 445; Trans. Shuihui Yang and

Yunqin Yang, 505)

This poem sheds light exactly on the given characteristics of Chinese Buddhism: put everything, either merits or demerits from the mortal world, aside.

b. Madam White's Transgression

Thanks to the widely accepted Buddhism in Ming novels, Madam White in “Thunder Peak Pagoda” is not portrayed as a monster that devours innocent people anymore. In addition, she shows true affection for Xu and keeps herself loyal and chaste to her husband. However, this behaviour, which is considered as the attribute of a good wife in traditional Chinese culture, does

not save her from stigmatization and final imprisonment. This section will discuss which transgressions Madam White commits in “Thunder Peak Pagoda” that cause her imprisonment under the pagoda.

As previously discussed, Madam White’s crimes, which determine her negative image, are much diminished from the lust of concupiscence and cannibalism to mere theft due to the influence of Buddhism. Although the thefts that White commits are rooted in her intention to attract and abet her love Xu, they are also one of the reasons why the Taoist and the Buddhist decide to punish her. Nevertheless, since the theft was a crime according to the law and is not directly attributable to her serpentine nature, it can be argued that it is only a subordinate factor introduced to emphasize her heinousness. The true reason to punish Madam White needs to be further explored.

Akin to “Three Pagodas,” the major *raison d’être* for “Thunder Peak Pagoda” is to blame Madam White for her defiance of societal demands on women. These demands can be found in books prescribing women’s behaviour. They had been constantly published and well accepted by civilians since the Han Dynasty. In the late Ming Dynasty, which is also the time when “Thunder Peak Pagoda” was published, Wang Xiang edited a book called *Nü sishu* (*The Four Books for Women*), which is based on four earlier books of conduct literature for women. This popular book’s main idea is to educate women to serve and obey their husbands unconditionally and stay loyal and chaste. Another book dating from Qing Dynasty (1644-1912 AD) named *Guimen baoxun* (*Indoctrination of Married Women*) points out:

纵然是，你才能，高夫十倍，岂可以，将夫压，阳错阴升。从古道，好人家，
 妇随夫唱，你偏要，管外事，牝鸡司晨，倘若是，不知改，终无好处，家之
 索，在眼前，惹出灾星。

[Even if you are ten times better than your husband. You shall by no means
 surpass him and let femininity outshine masculinity. Since ancient times, there is
 a saying that a wife is her husband's echo (indicating women should follow who
 they married). If you insist on interfering with your husband's business and letting
 hens crow like roosters (indicating women usurping men's power), but are still
 ignorant of repentance, there will be consequences. The family will be on the
 edge of being broken up and disaster will strike.] (quoted in Dalin Liu, 136-137)

As shown in the quotation, these books all impose onerous social requirements on women,
 including absolute obedience to their husbands. Then, how has the male author taken advantage
 of this sociocultural background in the texts?

Madam White in "Thunder Peak Pagoda" acts in a manner very contrary to these demands.
 Although her husband Xu is depicted as a mediocre law-abiding but somehow a submissive and
 cowardly person, he is perceived as a respectable civilian from the other characters' perspective.
 Madam White, on the other hand, is portrayed as a beautiful, smart and resourceful woman who
 never bothers to hide her cleverness and power. Xu's ordinariness thus naturally triggers White's
 motive to help him become a better and more successful man by giving advice, or more
 accurately, by speaking and prompting him. Nevertheless, this action is interpreted by the author

as her way of manipulating her husband and her smartness accordingly is distorted into craftiness. Every time that she tries to convince Xu of something or influence him it results in something bad coming after White or her husband. For example, Xu is imprisoned in jail after White talks him into marrying her. A Taoist who is later defeated by Madam White and a monk who finally imprisons her come to her after she tries to dissuade Xu from visiting Buddha. Xu, for his part, avoids confronting his employer after being informed that he has spied on his wife and every time he encounters difficulties he chooses to seek help or shelter from a superior figure such as Madam White, his sister or the monk Fahai. Xu seems to be deficient when it comes to being a protective husband. In addition, after being told by the monk that his wife is a monster and ignoring all her generosity and affection for him, he immediately denies their marriage and cites the monk's poem defaming Madam White in self-defense:

本是妖精变妇人，西湖岸上卖娇声；

汝因不识遭他人计，有难湖南见老僧。

[An evil spirit in the shape of a woman,

Her voice rings sweet by West Lake.

Unsuspecting, you fell into her trap;

When in distress, come to me south of the lake.] (Feng, 439; Trans. Shuihui Yang and Yunqin Yang, 498)

However, from the author's perspective Xu is still a victim of the serpentine monster. The cowardliness and ruthlessness of the inadequate husband are easily varnished by the author's

shifting the emphasis from Xu's incapability to Madam White's lies and manipulation. For example, instead of calling attention to Xu's irresponsibility for not questioning his boss's sexual harassment of his wife, the author focuses instead on describing how White lies to her husband and manoeuvres him into doing what she wants.

As discussed in the former analysis, although Madam White in "Thunder Peak Pagoda" is less violent and sexually predatory, she is still portrayed as possessing characteristics of an evil monster that deserves eternal imprisonment. Similar to the function of cannibalism in the earlier vernacular version, theft is a crime introduced to worsen White's image, whereas the major evil is presented in her action that goes completely against what the conduct books for women like *Nü sishu* and *Guimen baoxun* require. Since the author's emphasis on White's promiscuity in "Three Pagodas" is used to warn women to keep chaste, it can be suggested that her disobedience to her husband in "Thunder Peak Pagoda" is introduced to caution women to suppress their talents and be absolutely submissive to their husbands. Women who do not follow the rules of the patriarchal society would end up imprisoned like Madam White. In later versions of this story, White continues to appear as a snake woman who is imprisoned by a monk at some point because of her inborn sin of being a monster, even though she is benevolent and never kills.

Nonetheless, later versions such as Fang Chengpei's *The Legend of Thunder Peak Pagoda* and Qingyutang Zhuren's *The Tale of Thunder Peak Pagoda*, which are considered to be the continuations of Feng Menglong's "Thunder Peak Pagoda" give Madam White a chance to

redeem herself. White is released and finally reunites with her family after practicing Buddhism during her long imprisonment beneath Thunder Peak Pagoda. Another important reason for her release is that her son comes out first in the palace examination, which guarantees him a high position at court. Wu believes that this opportunity of redemption gives the credit to the religious syncretism in China. He thinks all factors of Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism in the story enable White to show her “personal endeavor” of being as moral as a normal human being and they also trigger the realization of her redemption. Firstly, despite her deficiency, Madam White is able to be partly moralized in a human form only after a millennium spent practicing Taoism. Secondly, her last vestiges of evil, which come from her snake woman origins, are purified by the Buddhist regimen. What finally sets her free is the education of her successful son. This action is highly praised in the Confucian tradition. As Wu concludes, for Madam White’s redemption,

The lofty other-worldliness of Buddhism is acknowledged, but it must be softened by the Confucian allowance for the expressions of proper human feelings. Thus, the mother’s passionate attachments and the father’s renunciation of all family and social ties, each too excessive to be entirely right in the light of syncretism, are mediated by the son’s filial sentiments, which are sanctioned by the traditional Chinese morality (136).

Nevertheless, Madam White’s finally deserved happy ending cannot cloud the fact that the last key factor that ensures the achievement of her redemption is still based on the requirement from

the patriarchal society on women, which is to educate their sons well and help them to be successful men. This type of demand can also be found along with the requirement to be obedient to men in books like *Nü sishu*:

女子者，顺男子之教而长其理者也，是故无专制之义，所以为教不出闺门，以训其子者也。

[Women are those who follow and advocate men's instructions and ideas, so they should not have their opinions and act on their own. Thus, women should be taught to stay in their own rooms, in order to educate their own children.] (Zhong ed. , 170)

IV. Multi-Functionalism of the Serpentine Metamorphosis

Melusine and Madam White, snake women embraced by two different cultures, are connected not only by their possible origins in an Indian serpentine goddess but also by misogynistic factors imposed on their literary avatars. Both good wives intend to live a normal mortal life with their beloved human husbands and end up being lustrated by the desired humanity. Although, in these stories, it is their husbands who trigger their transformation to a full monstrosity, authors in the two traditions played the decisive role in bringing about their unfortunate destiny. The characteristics of their female bodies enabled male authors to create serpentine metamorphoses, the goal of which was to suppress their femininity. Miller suggests that “the ubiquity and necessity of female bodies require intimate engagement with” not only sexuality and reproduction but also monstrosity. “The (corporeal) seepages of the monstrous female body thus erode not only the boundaries of the discursive ideologies endowed with the task of translating monstrous signs, but also the very boundaries that shape individual bodies and subjectivity itself” (136-137). Therefore, metamorphoses that allow serpentine female bodies to fluidly traverse between humanity and monstrosity, sexuality and imposed transgressions of moral and religious standards, are the perfect means by which to camouflage and promote male authors’ misogynistic intentions. The following analysis will showcase mechanism of serpentine metamorphosis common to these stories.

Gervasius of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* and “Li Huang” of *Boyizhi* (ca. 827AD/Tang Dynasty) are considered the earliest written versions of Melusine and Madam White,

respectively. Both the western and eastern myths have underlying ancient roots. It is important to look at both of them in-depth to understand the conformities and deviations between them.

Interestingly, in both texts, three significant elements of the early modern versions regarding the serpentine metamorphosis are missing: a specific time frame, religious context, and forced metamorphosis. These elements are closely connected with the female sex, since religion and monstrosity have been demonstrated in previous chapters to showcase the male authors' goal of oppressing femininity. Thus, examining these three elements may help to uncover the mechanism of the serpentine metamorphosis in Melusine's and Madam White's stories.

It is necessary first to explain the plots of two original stories. Tilbury's text can be summarized as follows:

One day, Reymundt, the Lord of Roussel, rides along the river Lar. He meets an exceptionally beautiful woman, who is able to call him by name. She talks him into marrying her and promises him a rich and happy life. But Reymundt is told that he cannot see her nudity, or misfortune will strike. After their wedding, his life and reputation grow increasingly better. Reymundt's wife gives birth to the most beautiful sons and daughters for him. After many years, one day, after returning from hunting, he comes up with the idea to see his bathing wife's nudity. He has forgotten about the warning and steps into her bathroom. The moment he sees his wife's naked body, she immediately transforms into a serpent and disappears. Reymundt then loses all his fortune (Roloff, 159).

"Li Huang" can be summarized as follows:

One day, a young man named Li Huang catches a glimpse of a beautiful woman in white sitting in a wagon passing by. Upon inquiry, he learns that she is newly widowed. So he asks her servant whether she can marry another man; Li is then invited to her mansion. Later that day, he is led by an elderly lady in green to have a superb banquet with Madam White, who dresses like a goddess. After a joyful three-day stay, Li is reminded by Madam White of his unsettled business. As Li is mounting a horse, his servant smells a foul odor emanating from his body. After returning home, Li feels extremely exhausted and falls asleep quickly. The next day, his wife comes to wake him up, only to find Li's head remaining; the rest of his

body has turned into water. The family sends out people to the place of Madam White's mansion. However, they find only an empty garden full of dozens of snakes. Neighbours tell them that a giant white serpent used to dwell there.

Table III Key Elements of Serpentine Metamorphoses

Name/ Special Elements	Otia Imperialia (1209-1214)	<i>Roman de Mélusine</i> (1382-1394)	<i>Melusine</i> (1456)	“Li Huang” (Around 827)	“Three Pagodas” (Around 1550)	“Thunder Peak Pagoda” (1624)
Specific date	N/A	Saturday	Saturday	N/A	The Qingming Festival	The Qingming Festival
Religious Context	N/A	Christianity	Christianity	N/A	Taoism	Taoism; Buddhisim
Forced Metamorphoses	N/A	1.waist above woman, half below serpent, every Saturday;	1.waist above woman, half below serpent, every Saturday;	N/A	Into a white serpent	Into a white serpent
Transgression (clearly stated)	N/A	Betrayal against father	Betrayal against father	N/A	Cannibalism ; Promiscuity	Theft

Based on these two summaries and Table III, the three additional elements are identical.

First, in *Otia Imperialia*, Melusine does not transform into a snake according to a specific time, whereas both Jean d'Arras's and Thüring von Ringoltingen's versions set her serpentine

metamorphosis on every Saturday. The addition of a specific date also happens in “Three Pagodas” and “Thunder Peak Pagoda,” where the protagonist Xu encounters Madam White on the Qingming Festival. Notably, Saturday, the original biblical Sabbath day and the Qingming Festival, the day when people honour the deceased, both have close connections with religion. Therefore, the second element refers to religious contexts. In both *Roman de Mélusine* and *Melusine*, the heroine and her family are clearly portrayed as devout Christians: building churches and chapels, teaching Christian doctrines as well as fighting pagans. These two stories are entirely rooted in Christian beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, Tilbury’s story never gives any details about their religion, nor does his version show any direct connection to Christianity. Similarly, the Taoist and the Buddhist abbot who imprison Madam White in later versions are nowhere to be found in the earliest extant version. The third factor missing in the early texts is “forced metamorphosis.” Here, “forced metamorphosis” refers to a situation where the heroines are transformed into serpentine beings against their will by external powers, such as a curse or magic. In the two later adaptations, it is clearly stated that Melusine’s metamorphosis is the result of her mother’s punitive curse, whereas the original text only introduces her as a transformable being. In “Three Pagodas” and “Thunder Peak Pagoda,” Madam White is also forced to turn into a white serpent by Taoist or Buddhist magic before she is imprisoned in a Pagoda. Interestingly, in the text “Li Huang,” her metamorphosis is not only intended but also simply implied. Thus, the original texts do not make a negative connection between Melusine’s and Madam White’s monstrosity and their female sex. The following paragraphs will explore

how serpentine metamorphosis is utilized by the authors to make a misogynistic association by means of the aforementioned three elements.

Both stories are enriched with religious elements. In “Three Pagodas” and “Thunder Peak Pagoda,” the Taoist and the Buddhist both subdued the snake woman, as she has incarnated her evil snake nature in her human form. However, as previously discussed, snakes were rarely linked with evil in early Chinese history. In the ancient Chinese era of Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, two serpentine deities, Nü Wa and Fu Xi, were widely worshiped in cults. Nevertheless, Nü Wa, the most respected goddess in matriarchal China and the earliest combination of woman and snake, was gradually degraded with the advent of male domination in society and the transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy. Taoism played a significant role in this degradation by demonizing the image of the snake as a dreadful creature, which brings “disasters and all sorts of evil” (Hean-Tatt, 90-91). Transgressions imposed on Madam White, such as cannibalism in “Three Pagodas” and theft in “Thunder Peak Pagoda,” can be seen as one of these methods of degrading her character. In order to further exterminate any lingering influence of the matriarchy, the patriarchal society used conduct books for women such as *Nüshu* to educate women to their proper role as wives and daughters. These books were most exclusively influenced by Confucianism and indirectly from Taoism and Buddhism. Women who did not conform would be disgraced. In both adaptations Madam White is endowed with various disobedient behaviours and thus belongs to the morally abhorrent group. In “Three Pagodas,” she is clearly portrayed as a cannibal, promiscuous and unchaste wife, whereas in

“Thunder Peak Pagoda,” she is benevolent and loyal despite her thievery. However, instead of supporting her husband blindly, Madam White has strong opinions and consistently attempts to manipulate her husband.

Unlike the two Madam White stories, whose hints of religious influences are obscure, in both Melusine texts the influence of Christian doctrine is predominant. As discussed above, some scholars go so far as to draw connections between Melusine and biblical characters. For instance, Colwell argues that Melusine’s role as a supportive, comforting wife and maternal pedagogue matches the image of the Virgin Mary, who is considered “the embodiment of medieval ideal motherhood and wifedom” (184). Since her virtues suggest a connection with Mary, this thesis thus naturally associates her wrongdoings with evil figures in the Bible. The image of Eve and the Eden serpent is easily reflected in this Christian snake woman. In particular, Melusine commits the same sin of betraying a father figure and receives a punishment similar to that of the Eden serpent, of having her legs removed and being unable to walk. The proposed “parallel” between the Virgin Mary and her antagonist Eve further establishes this biblical connection: Eve “brought death to the human race” by her disobedience and Mary, on the contrary, “brought salvation” by her obedience. Eve guides man into a sinful state, whereas Mary sets him free. The paradoxical combining of Mary and Eve as well as the Eden serpent in Melusine’s character not only perfectly juxtaposes the dichotomy of her humanity and monstrosity, but it also encapsulates the development of her character. With her betrayal of her father, Melusine is cursed to become a hybrid monster and to pass down her monstrosity to her

male offspring, most of whom are born with physical or mental abnormalities. However, by guiding and instructing her husband and sons with Christian doctrines and paying homage to Christianity by building churches and chapels, she achieves the salvation of humanity for her sons and husband. Despite their abnormalities, most of the sons end up acquiring high ranked titles of nobility and marrying courtly ladies. The last two even avoid inheriting the monstrosity of their mother and appear normal. However, despite her selfless work, the devotion of this snake woman who desires to become human is easily rendered futile not by her but by a man's mistake. This permanently isolates Melusine from humanity. These actions and results draw a perfect picture, wherein Melusine is reduced to being a supportive and subordinate figure whose men can and do facilely tarnish her contribution to their welfare. In addition, the undoing of Melusine's salvation, brought about by Reymundt's mistake, also showcases two Christian misogynistic concepts: promotion of sexual abstinence and wifely obedience.

Last but not least, it appears that forced metamorphoses of snake women are the results of their transgressive actions. In Jean's and Thuring's texts, Melusine's first forced metamorphosis, into a serpentine monster and hybrid who is both human and monstrous, was imposed on her for her betrayal of her father. Likewise, the second forced metamorphosis occurred as a punishment that transformed her into a full monster. In a similar fashion, forced metamorphosis also functions as a punishment for Madam White because she disobeys moral and religious rules. She eventually is forced to turn into a white serpent before being imprisoned forever. In both cases these imposed wrongdoings are embedded in the respective author's patriarchal conceptions

concerning women's behaviour. They are all linked more or less with acts of betrayal or being disobedience.

Thus, in Melusine's and Madam White's stories, the metamorphoses of snake women are utilized to warn women about the potential consequences of their behaviour. The serpentine metamorphosis, which starts on a specific religious date such as Saturdays (the Old Testament Sabbath) or the Qingming Festival, introduces a religious context embedded into the stories. The religious context not only promotes the development of the characters and plots but also popularizes religious thoughts through the interactions of characters of both sexes. The final forced metamorphosis, which transforms heroines into pure monsters, is punishment for their imposed transgressions and also a warning for the audience. Because of its fluid nature, the metamorphosis of the snake woman, brought about by the male authors, and her transformation from woman to a serpent (or vice versa), not only changed forms but also fates. Nevertheless, what has remained intact in their stories is a misogynistic prejudice that itself eventually metamorphosed into an obsolete vestige of patriarchy in recent times.

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