The Fairy Supernatural of *Sir Orfeo*

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The term 'supernatural' typically summons up images of ghosts, spirits, demons, and other creatures of a fantastic or otherworldly nature, beings who despite being often invisible nevertheless make their presence felt, negotiating an uneasy and uncomfortable co-existence with the world of human mortals. Although the supernatural has been an enduring element of the human cultural imagination and although there is usually a tacit acknowledgement and understanding of what constitutes the broader denotative field, it is remarkably difficult to offer a coherent and comprehensive definition of the supernatural, one which can encompass the multiple and frequently shifting modes of representation latent in the category. Gradations of differences separate distinct sub-categories of the supernatural. For instance, a ghost is not the same as a poltergeist, which in turn is very different from a demon. Even individual supernatural figures are not ontologically fixed creations—a demon need not necessarily be the Devil of the Christian imagination but can also include the terrifying purveyors of the monstrous hellscapes of pre-Christian classical mythology as well as function as a metonym for the diabolical as a generic field. The supernatural is a particularly fluid field of signification, but this polyvalence is neither a modern condition, nor has it only been perceived by modern audiences. The ways of conceptualising the supernatural have always been diverse, but it can be argued that it was in the Middle Ages that the protean nature of this field was first properly recognised and subjected to detailed classificatory treatments. Medieval thinkers endlessly debated and theorised how the contours of the supernatural were drawn, and the Middle Ages witnessed an unprecedented profusion in the types

of figures included under the category of the 'supernatural.' Fairies were also included in this process of ontological augmentation, a fact which may seem surprising to us today, accustomed as we are to fairies as gossamer-winged, star-tipped wand-wielding figures of wish-fulfilment. However, it is important to bear in mind that this happy picture of shimmering magical beings was a consequence of the Victorian refashioning of fairies. Medieval fairies were very different from their modern counterparts, owing much more to their pagan forebears—classical demons, underworld gods, and deities of fate—and were frequently deployed as a specific species of the ambiguous supernatural. This paper will try to situate the fairies within the ambit of medieval beliefs about the supernatural before proceeding to a discussion of their use as devices of thematic structuring and plot-construction in the literary works of the Middle Ages, particularly the genre of the medieval romance. An analysis of the Middle English romance of *Sir Orfeo* will help to illustrate these points, demonstrating that the medieval supernatural was not a monolith but a dynamic cultural category capable of taking on a variety of meanings.

The medieval world inherited a welter of ideas about the supernatural from the classical pagan period through the conduit of Late Antique culture. In the case of medieval England, these pre-Christian ideas were not only reshaped in the light of the new scriptural dispensation established by the dominant religious system of Christianity but also dovetailed with insular folk belief as well as motifs which can be traced back to Germanic tradition. It is, however, important to note that the majority of surviving ideas about the medieval supernatural are derived from the writings of theologians, chroniclers, and schoolmen who communicated almost exclusively in Latin which was the language of both learned and ecclesiastical culture in the Middle Ages.[1] To the medieval mind, the category of the supernatural comprised such elements as miracles, signs, and demons. The belief in miracles (and their articulation by means

of signs or *signa* and portents or *portenta*) was posited against the burgeoning belief in nature as a regular, autonomously organised unit which operated in contradistinction to divine design. Miracles and signs were commonly interpreted either as a manifestation of magical mechanisms or as a demonstration of divine will, anomalous events which erupted in the ordinary course of things in order to enforce a moral or for purely didactic purposes. Demonology had a deeper history whereby the church fathers had over successive generations stressed the essentially evil nature of demons as well as conjectured about their physical forms (aerial, animal, disguised as human, or a grotesque admixture of these) and dwelling places (typically the lower air). Between the miraculous and the demonic, however, existed an interstitial, liminal space inhabited by supernatural beings which resisted easy and reductive classification into watertight compartments.[2] These ambiguous spirits were seen as the denizens of a mysterious, parallel realm which stood out in stark opposition not only to established theological truths but also against a nature that in the twelfth century was increasingly seen as patterned and regular. This liminality was endlessly fascinating for medieval writers and consequently the ambiguous supernatural made repeated appearances in twelfth-century textual culture under such elastic terms as *monstrum* (wonders, frequently monstrous, which revealed or portended something typically undefined), *prodigium* (prodigy), and *mirum/mirabilium* (marvels and the marvellous).[3] However, even as this ambiguity intrigued, it also bred an indeterminacy that was as linguistic as it was conceptual. These intermediate beings were variously described as demons, *portuni, effigies* or phantoms, fauns, and fairies or 'Fates,' thereby suggesting that the Latin language did not contain within its arsenal of spirit-names enough terms which could be appropriately applied to these abstruse productions of vernacular culture.[4] Although etymologically the word "fairy" derived from the Latin *fatum* meaning 'thing said' and was subsequently mis-identified with pagan female goddesses of fate through a process of

linguistic confusion (the neuter plural *fata* was misinterpreted as the feminine singular), the semantic field of the term broadened over time to encapsulate a cluster of associations related not only to the state of enchantment (the substantive *faierie*), the dwelling-place or abode (Fairyland), as well as liminal supernatural beings (fairies) themselves, but also such conceptual ideas as fate and the notion of 'fatedness,' death and the afterlife, ritual practices of burial and interment, and supernatural power or a principle of divine selection.[5] The associative link between fairies and the supernatural was underscored through the semiotics of magic which could be simultaneously viewed as both illicit and dangerous (and therefore in some sense diabolical) as well as an organic extension of a cosmos and nature that had an ineluctable lawful unity.[6] As the purveyors and practitioners of magic *par excellence*, fairies thus came to constitute a particular subset of the ambiguous supernatural.[7] The fictive universe of *Sir Orfeo* is embellished with a supernatural otherworld that is built upon this ontology of 'fairy', and it is to a discussion of this romance that I now turn.[8]

A medievalisation of the classical myth of Orpheus, *Sir Orfeo* is a Middle English romance conjecturally believed to have been composed around the beginning of the fourteenth century.[9] Orfeo is introduced as the king of England, possessed of a semi-divine lineage and governing an impressive kingdom from his capital at Thrace (which is explicitly identified with Winchester). On a balmy May morning, Orfeo's beloved wife Heurodis goes to the orchard with her train of ladies-in-waiting to enjoy the pleasant sunshine and falls asleep under a grafted tree. However, she awakes with a scream a little past noon and promptly falls into a paroxysm of agitation, tearing at her hair and clothes and scratching her face. She is taken to her bedchamber and shortly afterwards the king is summoned. Upon his concerned enquiry, the queen reveals that she had been visited by the King of the Fairies who had forcibly taken her to his kingdom, showing her the riches contained therein. The tour of his splendid

kingdom concluded, the Fairy King had returned Heurodis to the orchard, leaving her with the command that she was to be ready to be taken by the fairies the following morning, warning that her refusal to comply would be met with violence before her subsequent (and inevitable) removal to Fairyland. Orfeo is naturally alarmed by Heurodis' report and decides to employ the full strength of his army to protect the queen. His military fortification is, however, proved to be useless when the queen disappears from the midst of a heavily armed regiment the following day. Heartbroken and inconsolable at the loss of his wife, Orfeo resolves to forever quit the company of men and women, isolating himself from society by exiling himself to the woods. For ten years, Orfeo lives in a state of penurious contrition, scrounging off wild fruits and berries, his harp as his only companion. One day, however, Orfeo comes across a group of hunting ladies and, upon following them, is stunned to find Heurodis a part of the company. As the queen is whisked away by the hunting company, Orfeo resolves to follow them in an attempt to discover the whereabouts of his kidnapped wife. He follows the ladies through a rocky passage and comes out into a beautiful plain land dappled with light. In the middle of the land is a castle made of crystal, decorated with rich metalwork and studded with precious gemstones. Orfeo has entered Fairyland and the castle he espies is the palace of the Fairy King. Upon knocking at the gate, he is answered by a porter to whom he introduces himself as a minstrel. Orfeo is admitted into the palace and upon entering beholds a grisly exhibition of human beings in suspended animation, bodies contorted in various states of violence, seemingly entrapped in an endless cycle of agony and pain. He silently proceeds to the king's chamber and offers to regale the emperor with the music of his harp as a minstrel was wont to do. When the Fairy King, well-pleased with Orfeo's musical entertainment, asks him what he would like as a reward, Orfeo requests that he be allowed to take Heurodis back with him. Initially the Fairy King is reluctant to grant Orfeo's

wish, claiming that it was unbecoming of a lady so beautiful and regal as Heurodis to be in the company of a pilgrim so haggard and careworn as Orfeo. However, when Orfeo reminds him that it would be a greater shame for a king of his stature to renege on his promise, the Fairy King agrees to set Heurodis free. Reunited at last, the royal couple make their way back to Winchester where, following a test of the steward's fidelity (a test which he passes with flying colours), Orfeo is reinstated on his throne and the romance concludes on a celebratory note as his subjects rejoice at the return of their rightful king.

The first appearance of the Fairy King in *Sir Orfeo* is in the context of Heurodis' first abduction during her noontime siesta under the tree in the palace orchard. Although the reader's only impression of him at this point in the narrative is necessarily coloured by Heurodis' subjective report of an experience that has understandably been traumatic for her, the *Orfeo*-poet provides subtle clues to assist the reader in the task of interpretation. These include details of setting—the time of day at which Heurodis is abducted, the location in an orchard, and the specific placement beneath an "ympe-tre"—as well as Heurodis' subsequent hysteria. Heurodis' abduction takes place at "vndrentide," a time of day which is usually glossed to mean noon. In the scriptural commentaries of the scholiasts and patristic writers of the Middle Ages, noon was the time of day most closely associated with diabolical activity, a line of thinking harking back to the reference to the *daemonio meridiano* ('noon-day demon') of Psalm 90 and St. Jerome's subsequent interpretation of this figure as a reference to Satan. This identification of the Fairy King with Christian devils in general and Satan in particular was also sustained by medieval commentaries on, and manuscript illustrations of, the Orpheus myth. In the wake of Boethius' philosophical reformulation of the Orpheus episode in *The Consolation of Philosophy,* patristic exegesis usually interpreted the figure of Eurydice as a symbol of concupiscence and therefore as fair prey for Satan. Building upon the

tradition of viewing the snake responsible for the death of Eurydice in the Virgilian and Ovidian versions of the Orpheus story as a symbolic representation of Satan's temptation of Eve, manuscript illustrations of the myth frequently depicted Eurydice being kidnapped by winged dragons and serpents, artistic equivalents of the popular conception of Satan as the draconopede (man-headed dragon).[10] The Fairy King's appearance at noon would thus seem to ally him with Satan when judged from the viewpoint of medieval Christian discourse. An interesting dimension is also added by the fact of Heurodis' abduction from beneath an "ympe-tre." Curtis R. H. Jirsa notes that the term *ympe* (whose French equivalent is *ente*) referred to a grafted tree of any species and thereby denoted an arboricultural category. He also argues that the implications of Heurodis' decision to sleep in the shadow of the "ympe-tre" can only be appreciated by taking recourse to classical and medieval arboreal lore which often detailed the malevolent properties of trees and the fatal effects of tree shadows.[11] Abduction by supernatural beings from beneath grafted trees was, however, a well-established motif in medieval romances written in both French and English, and it is this association that medieval audiences would probably have been most responsive to.[12] The *topos* of the orchard together with its historical and cultural associations adds further significance to these readings. In the Middle Ages, orchards in royal palaces were typically walled, enclosed spaces intended for the delectation and amusement of the queen and her female consorts. Orchards, however, also had a Biblical resonance. The cultivated space of the orchard where horticultural practices were intended to domesticate nature could also be evocative of Paradise, the idyllic gardens of the Song of Songs, as well as a pre-lapsarian Eden.[13] When viewed within these contexts, it becomes clear that the Fairy King is meant to evoke and sustain multiple modes of identification—there is sufficient scriptural precedent to encourage the reader/audience to view him as diabolical and the act of his

abduction as a specific reference to the Temptation and the Fall even as his activities are entirely in keeping with the intractable behaviour of supernatural beings, particularly fairies, in contemporary insular literature.

Heurodis' report paints an impressive picture of the Fairy King, offering a glimpse into both his wealth and largesse as well as his military might. For the full impact of the visual spectacle of Fairyland, however, we have to wait for Orfeo's personal visit to the realm:

> He com in-to a fair cuntray,
> As bri3t so sonne on somers day,
> Smoþe & plain & al grene
> — Hille no dale nas þer non y-sene.
> Amidde þe lond a castel he si3e,
> Riche & real & wonder hei3e:
> Al þe vt-mast wal
> Was clere & schine as cristal;
> An hundred tours þer were about,
> Degiselich & bataild stout;
> Þe butras com out of þe diche
> Of rede gold y-arched riche;
> Þe vousour was auowed al
> Of ich maner diuers aumal.
> Wiþ-in þer wer wide wones,
> Al of precious stones;
> Þe werst piler on to biholde
> Was al of burnist gold.
> Al þat lond was euer li3t,
> For when it schuld be þerk & ni3t
> Þe riche stones li3t gonne
> As bri3t as doþ at none þe sonne.
> No man may telle, no þenche in þou3t,

> Þe riche werk þat þer was wrouȝt:
> Bi al þing him þink þat it is
> Þe proude court of Paradis.

> [Orfeo] came in to a fair country which was as bright as the sun on a summer's day. The land was smooth and covered in green, rolling plains—no hill or dale interrupted the undulation of the land. In the middle of the land he saw a castle, richly bedecked and wonderful to behold. The outermost wall was transparent and shone like crystal. Circling the façade were a hundred towers, stoutly built. The buttress protruded out of the moat, arched with red-hued gold. The vaulting was adorned with diverse kinds of enamelwork. The dwelling-places of the interior were all constructed out of precious stones; indeed, even the worst-looking pillar was made out of burnished gold. The land was perennially enveloped in light, since even when it should be dark during night-time, the irradiance of the gemstones would make the land sparkle as brightly as though it were lit up by the midday sun. No man could describe or even conceive in thought all the riches that were wrought in the fairy palace; in fact, for all intents and purposes, he might think that he was standing at the threshold of Paradise.[14]

There is a superabundance of riches in the fairy palace which combine to give the impression of a visually stunning edifice. The aesthetics of the topography with its presentation of a castle on plain land seem to suggest an allegorical landscape, evoking simultaneous echoes of the round of medieval morality plays, classical temples dedicated to such goddesses as Fortuna or Venus, as well as the indeterminacy of Dante's Limbo.[15] However, the *Orfeo*-poet has embellished his account of the exterior of the fairy palace with details which can be better appreciated by keeping in mind the material culture of the Middle Ages. Seth

Lerer has pointed out how the description of Fairyland borrows from the technical vocabulary of both thirteenth and fourteenth-century English painting as well as contemporary architecture. In particular, the precious enamelwork of the palace would have suggested the latest in decorative technique to medieval readers and audiences.[16] Indeed, as Dominique Battles has demonstrated, the architectural details of the fairy palace—such as the moat, the crystal walls, the well-fortified towers, and the buttresses—appear to contain references to Norman castle architecture in post-Conquest England.[17] Technicalities of construction notwithstanding, there is reason to believe that medieval audiences would have more readily responded to another line of association more self-evident and obvious than architectural theory—the connection between the fairy palace and Biblical imagery. Aisling Byrne has demonstrated that the details of the exterior of the Fairy King's palace are heavily reliant on descriptions of New Jerusalem found in the Book of Revelation, an observation that gains greater salience when we bear in mind that the poet himself writes that the palace's appearance reminded Orfeo of "þe proude court of Paradis."[18] Thus, the external appearance of the fairy palace seems to convey a plethora of impressions—while the sumptuousness of the structure's decoration and adornment serves as a spectacle of superlative excess which could hint at the artificiality of the realm (an observation complemented by the fact that the kingdom never sees darkness on account of the perennially twinkling lights), specific details also seem to carry a distinctively scriptural import, thereby suggesting that the domain is also, in certain respects, closer to heavenly topography. The reader/audience is encouraged to view the Fairy King not only as a powerful overlord who wishes to make an emphatic statement of his material and symbolic status, but also as an artist and curator who has consciously fashioned his residence to resemble the divine court of Paradise. The (relatively) benign expectations set up by the palace exterior are, however, radically overturned when Orfeo steps into the courtyard of the palace.

Of all the scenes in *Sir Orfeo*, the gallery of victims exhibited in the courtyard of the fairy palace has attracted the most scholarly attention, a fact unsurprising in view of not only the macabre violence of the scene but also on account of the absolutely unwarranted nature of such cruelty. Just when both Orfeo's and the reader's/audience's view of the Fairy King had begun to settle down into a sort of grudging (if somewhat uncomfortable) admiration of the gorgeous artistry and the quasi-divine echoes of the palace exterior, the presentation of a grisly exhibit of mortals entrapped in seemingly endless cycles of torture, mutilation, and horrific punishments in the courtyard of the palace produces a markedly disturbing effect. As with the abduction of Heurodis, no cause or reason is proffered to help the reader/audience make sense of what is being witnessed. The appearance of this mute gallery of helpless souls immediately after the description of the pristine landscape and the architectural marvels of the palace's construction serves to thoroughly subvert whatever expectations may have been built regarding the Fairy King's aesthetic sensibilities and his creative temperament. The brutality of the privations suffered by the victims together with the uncertainty about their ontological status (are they alive or dead?) sharply magnifies the uncanniness of Fairyland:

> Þan he gan bihold about al
> & seiȝe liggeand wiþ-in þe wal
> Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt,
> & þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt.
> Sum stode wiþ-outen hade,
> & sum non armes nade,
> & sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,
> & sum lay wode, y-bounde,
> & sum armed on hors sete,
> & sum astrangled as þai ete;
> & sum were in water adreynt,

> & sum wiþ fire al for-schreynt.
> Wiues þer lay on child-bedde,
> Sum ded & sum awedde,
> & wonder fele þer lay bisides:
> Riȝt as þai slepe her vnder-tides
> Eche was þus in þis warld y-nome,
> Wiþ fairi þider y-come. (ll. 387–404)

> Then he [Orfeo] looked around him and saw lying within the palace walls folk that had been brought there and were thought to be dead, although they were not. Some stood without heads, some had no arms, some had wounds through the body, some lay bound in the throes of insanity, some sat armed on horseback, some were being strangled as they ate, some were being drowned in water, while still others were being withered by fire. There were wives in travail (lit. 'on childbed'), some dead and some who had been driven to madness. There were many others who lay there right as they had been sleeping at noon. Each was thus taken into this world by the fairies.

Multiple interpretations have been offered to explain the precise meaning of this passage. The gallery of victims in the poem has been subjected to traditionalist approaches which have viewed this passage as an interpolation and the details as reminiscent of either classical descriptions of the Underworld, insular (particularly Irish) beliefs about the dead, and ideas about the macabre and the horrific. There have been more recent critical reappraisals through the lens of medieval wonder theory, Roman imperial architectural practices, and even queer theory.[19] Critical opinion has been unable to reach a consensus about the true nature, import, and meaning of Fairyland. That is, however, precisely the point. I would like to argue that the inability of readers/audiences (and scholars) to adopt one dominant strand of interpretation in trying to make hermeneutic

sense of Fairyland is the result of a conscious and deliberate artistic choice made by the *Orfeo*-poet in order to highlight the liminality of Fairyland as a supernatural space and its potential to produce profound moral, theological, and ontological discomfort. As an accomplished craftsman responding to contemporary literary and cultural expectations about fairies, the *Orfeo*-poet has couched his presentation of Fairyland within the context of multiple, not always or even necessarily compatible, discourses and traditions. As an obvious medievalisation of a classical myth, the poem has retained many of its 'pagan' qualities by which Fairyland becomes the medieval equivalent of the Underworld and the Fairy King the romance equivalent of Dis/Pluto. In transposing classical material to a medieval milieu, the poet also borrowed details from the supernatural apparatus of insular folklore, thereby synthesising native superstitions about death, burial practices, the afterlife, and their intrinsic connection with fairies. This confluence of Graeco-Roman and insular elements was also undoubtedly informed by attitudes conditioned by the dominant religious discourse of Christianity. The *Orfeo*-poet must have been aware not only of the association between fairies and diabolical agents made predominantly by the church fathers, but also of concurrent Christian interpretations of the Orpheus legend by exegetes and patristic writers. Thus, the Fairy King also seems to evoke medieval conceptions of Satan while Fairyland is suggestive at various points (perhaps most clearly in the gallery) of the architectonics and the sufferings of Hell. The *Orfeo*-poet does not, however, permit either of these wider discourses to take the upper hand, preferring instead to exploit the creative possibilities inherent in the dynamic interplay of the three (that is, Graeco-Roman, insular, and Christian). Just as contemporary (non-clerical) opinion on fairies and the supernatural was marked by ambivalence, the poet creates a Fairyland whose internal mechanics are complicated by external appearance.

The fairy supernatural of *Sir Orfeo* is constructed within a matrix of diverse and distinct traditions. The Fairy King is not only the

medieval equivalent of the pagan Dis/Pluto but also bears similarities with certain aspects of figures culled from indigenous folk literature and exhibits features reminiscent of contemporary clerical writings about the Devil and other diabolical creatures. However, even though he recalls a multitude of traditions, he does not definitively belong to any one. In fact, in this ontological to-and-fro between discrete conventional and generic frameworks, the Fairy King is characterised by an ambivalence and indeterminacy that allies him above all with the tribe of the fairies, liminal beings who functioned in the popular imagination of the Middle Ages as intermediaries between the human and the supernatural worlds. His ambiguity is a direct consequence of his inassimilable nature, and his actions are inscrutable because he operates outside the realm of human judgment.[20] His kingdom of Fairyland is a picture of puzzling contradictions in which received expectations are subverted and destabilised at every step. Although the landscape is pleasing and the exterior of the palace presents a profusion of riches, the interior contains a gruesome spectacle of torture and punishment and no rationale is provided within the narrative of the poem to explicitly justify its presence. Indeed, the superabundance of material wealth is indicative of an unnecessary excess and generates an uncanny effect which is concomitant with the suppositional horror of the unknown.[21] The presentation of the gallery reinforces the status of *Orfeo*'s Fairyland—like fairy otherworlds in general—as a locus of chaotic signification, one whose disorienting impact is analogous to an experience of moral and cognitive entropy.[22] However, the *Orfeo*-poet refuses to let the final verdict settle in favour of the absolutely wicked and the monstrous. Just when cognitive expectations of the nefariousness of Fairyland have begun to solidify, the poet presents a picture of a hall whose construction is reminiscent of Biblical architecture and whose patron behaves not only like a connoisseur of beauty (although his aesthetics are, in many respects, questionable from the standpoint of a human observer) but also acts in accordance with his word. This constant oscillation of both the

Fairy King and Fairyland between divergent modes is, in my reading, not only a direct consequence of cultural attitudes about supernatural creatures in general and fairies in particular, but also a conscious artistic flourish on the part of a consummate craftsman, one who was alert to the greater attractiveness of texts which resisted closed, monolithic explanations in favour of letting readers and audiences choose which interpretative pathways to take.

NOTES

1 Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 13.
2 Accessible overviews of clerical opinion on supernatural beings and how they dovetailed with such figures as the fairies and such notions as the 'diabolical' and the 'demonic' can be found in Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) and Coree Newman, "The Good, the Bad and the Unholy: Ambivalent Angels in the Middle Ages," in *Fairies, Demons, and Nature Spirits: 'Small Gods' at the Margins of Christendom,* ed. Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 103-122.
3 Detailed discussions of these complicated and frequently conflicting ideas can be found in Carl Watkins' *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
4 Watkins points out that although the term *'supernaturalis'* was available in the twelfth century, it acquired close definition and widespread use only in the later thirteenth, due in large part to the efforts of Thomas Aquinas.
5 Noel Williams, "The Semantics of the Word Fairy: Making Meaning Out of Thin Air," in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 462-472 and Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les fées au Moyen Âge: Morgane et Mélusine; La naissance des fées* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1984).
6 Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, 5.
7 The view of fairies as users of magic was a particular characteristic of the literary fairy. For more on this textual representation, see James Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8 "Ontology of fairy" is a term used by Matthew Woodcock in his monograph *Fairy in* The Faerie Queene: *Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). For a detailed explanation of the term, see Chapter 1 ("Reading Fairies in Early Modern Texts") of the same work.

9 The most authoritative discussion of the romance's provenance and textual history is A. J. Bliss' introduction in Bliss, ed., *Sir Orfeo*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), ix-li.

10 John Block Friedman, "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-Day Demon," *Speculum* 41, no. 1 (1966): 22-29.

11 Curtis R. H. Jirsa, "In the Shadow of the Ympe-Tre: Arboreal Folklore in *Sir Orfeo*," *English Studies* 89, no. 2 (2008): 141-151.

12 Although the references to grafted trees in medieval romances are too numerous to note, some particularly memorable incidents of kidnapping of mortals by supernatural creatures (albeit in pointedly erotic contexts) occur in *Sir Gowther, Tydorel, Lancelot, Thomas of Erceldoune,* and *Launfal*. Trees with magical, otherworldly properties also abounded in Irish literature.

13 The point about the orchard as a locus of the Fall is made in David Lyle Jeffrey, "The Exiled King: Sir Orfeo's Harp and the Second Death of Eurydice," *Mosaic* 9, no. 2 (1976): 45-60 and the similarities between Orfeo's orchard and the luscious gardens of the Song of Songs are noted by Robert M. Longsworth, "*Sir Orfeo*, The Minstrel, and the Minstrel's Art," *Studies in Philology* 79, no. 1 (1982): 1-11.

14 Bliss, *Sir Orfeo*, 31-33, ll. 351-376. All subsequent references are to this edition by line number. All quoted excerpts are from the Auchinleck version of the poem. All translations of quoted passages are my own. They are loose translations since I have aimed at capturing the essence of the words rather than producing an exact prose equivalent.

15 E. C. Ronquist, "The Powers of Poetry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Philological Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1985): 103.

16 Seth Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 60, no. 1 (1985): 98-101.

17 Dominique Battles, "*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity," *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 2 (2010): 186-196.

18 Aisling Byrne, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91-96. Byrne points out that the *Orfeo*-poet has adopted not only specific details—the size of the castle, the crystal walls, the use of precious stones as building materials, and the everlasting brightness of the land—but also the precise order of their presentation in the account of Revelation 21.

19 For illustrations of each approach, see Bruce Mitchell, "The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*," *Neophilologus* 48, no. 2 (1964): 155-159, Constance Davies, "Classical

Threads in 'Orfeo'," *Modern Language Review* 56, no. 2 (1961): 161–166, Dorena Allen, "Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken," *Medium Aevum* 33, no. 1 (1964): 102-111, Felicity Riddy, "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo," Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976): 5-15, Tara Williams, "Fairy Magic, Wonder, and Morality in *Sir Orfeo," Philological Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (2012): 537-568, Anne Marie D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's *Kunstkammer*: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*," *Review of English Studies* 58, no. 233 (2007): 10-33, and Amy Morgan, "Fairies, Monsters and the Queer Otherworld: Otherness in Sir *Orfeo*," in *On the Fringes: Outsiders and Otherness in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds,* eds. Natalie Goodison and Alexander J. Wilson, Proceedings of the 2014 MEMSA Student Conference (Durham: Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2015), 45-66.

20 Mary Hynes-Berry, "Cohesion in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum* 50, no. 4 (1975): 655.

21 Rosalind Clark, "Sir Orfeo: The Otherworld vs. Faithful Human Love," *Enarratio,* 2 (1993): 72.

22 Neil Cartlidge, "Sir Orfeo in the Otherworld: Courting Chaos?" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 26 (2004): 200.